

AP[®] ART HISTORY

2012 SCORING GUIDELINES

Question 6

Both images shown are from the illuminated manuscript known as the *Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*.

Compare and contrast the two images to analyze how social class is portrayed and how this portrayal relates to the meaning of the manuscript as a whole. (10 minutes)

Background

This question asks students to compare and contrast how social class is portrayed in two manuscript illuminations. Students are then asked to relate this portrayal of social class to the meaning of the manuscript as a whole. The intent of this question is to prompt students to relate two contrasting depictions of social class to issues of patronage and audience. As a private devotional book for the duke, the manuscript was intended to please its patron, reflect his refined tastes, and affirm his privileged position within a feudal social order.

Created primarily between 1413 and 1416, the manuscript known as the *Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry* (*The Very Sumptuous Hours of the Duke of Berry*) is a functional luxury object commissioned by Jean of Valois, the Duke of Berry and also the brother of the king of France. The manuscript is a book of hours — a type of prayer book for laypersons that was used at particular times of the day and also as a calendar for the feast days of saints. The immense material value of the *Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry* may be discerned from its extensive size and the elaborateness of its decorative content. The book contains over 416 pages of fine vellum with more than 131 miniatures and 300 decorated initials, as well as historiated initials and elaborate border decorations. While the illuminations were begun by three court artists — the brothers Jean, Paul, and Herman de Limbourg — the manuscript was left incomplete at their death, possibly by plague, in 1416. As a result, other artists, including Barthélemy van Eyck and Jean Colombe, continued to work on the manuscript for nearly a century.

The best-known and most unusual feature of the *Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry* is the elaborate illustrations of the months. Each month is depicted with a full-page representation of a seasonal 15th-century activity, usually set on one of the duke's personal or familial properties and populated by members of his court or local laborers. Arched diagrams of the zodiac and the month's lunar calendar are found at the top of each page, while the list of feast days appears on the facing folio. The months alternate between scenes depicting nobility and peasantry.

The month of January is shown in the illumination on the left. It features a lavish banquet set inside one of the duke's many residences, possibly the Hôtel Bicêtre near Paris. Dressed in royal blue robes that are embroidered with gold threads, and wearing a fur collar and hat, the duke is seated at the table in profile. He interacts with courtiers, clergymen, and servants who surround him. His *chasseur* (page) stands at his side in elegant red robes to regulate the duke's interactions with food, wine, and people, urging guests to join the duke with the words "*aproche, aproche*" (approach, approach) written in gold above his head. Luxury objects indicate the opulence of the feast. These include the large boat-shaped saltcellar on the table as well as the vessels and bowls stacked on the buffet and circulating in the hands of courtiers. The hanging tapestries decorated with chivalric battle scenes as well as the dais with its alternating striped patterns were luxury features of the Renaissance court and were used particularly in the cold winter months to help insulate palace walls. Additionally, the duke is shown in the optimal place for warmth, seated directly before the fire. His bear and swan symbols are featured on the hearth, as is the Valois *fleur-de-lis*. As a whole, the scene radiates warmth, wealth, and conviviality.

AP® ART HISTORY

2012 SCORING GUIDELINES

Question 6 (continued)

By contrast, the month of February, shown in the illumination on the right, is marked by frigid winter weather as experienced by the peasant laborers on the duke's property. Three figures sit by an open fire in a wooden hut. They raise their robes to warm their feet and ankles, as well as their exposed genitals, while laundry dries above their heads. Outdoors, animals in thatched-roof pens huddle together for warmth. Other figures chop wood for the fire or trek through the snow en route to the town, which is represented in the distant background. Whereas the January page is distinguished by its bright palette and rich depiction of material goods, the February page is muted and somber, presented in delicate grays and browns. The scene is one of simplicity, with the peasants shown in their everyday roles, as opposed to the festal culture and leisurely activities of the duke. Moreover, whereas the behavior of the courtiers in the January scene is marked by the politesse prescribed by court etiquette, the behavior of some of the peasants in the February scene is uncouth.

Jonathan Alexander, in his article "*Labeur and Paresse: Ideological Representations of Medieval Peasant Labor*" (1990), has suggested that such contrasts in the depiction of the duke and his laborers were intended to underscore the duke's perceived dominion over the land and to elevate the duke in social stature through the demeaning imagery of his subjects. More recent scholars, however, have noted that the peasants do not appear particularly deprived or unhappy; and that in context, these images of the peasantry can be interpreted as showcasing the duke's munificence, to emphasize a vision of the duke as a generous master. The peasants' dwellings are tidy, and even the birds have food. Although the figures look cold, as would be expected in a snowy scene, they are not destitute. Rather, they are presented in a manner that would have flattered the duke and celebrated his place within the feudal social order.

Two Tasks for Students

1. Compare and contrast the two manuscript illuminations to analyze how social class is portrayed.
2. Analyze how this portrayal of social class relates to the meaning of the manuscript as a whole.

Points to Remember

This is a compare-and-contrast question. Students must compare and contrast the portrayal of social class in both images shown. A response that discusses only one of the two images is not, by definition, an exercise in compare and contrast.

The meaning of the manuscript as a whole is a critical component of the question. Students must make an attempt to discuss how the two depictions relate to the meaning of the manuscript as a whole, but this meaning can be interpreted broadly. Students are not required to analyze the entire content of the book by citing other calendar pages, prayers, or psalms, but they do need to articulate correctly the relationship between these images and issues of patronage or audience. The highest score a response can earn if it does not relate the portrayal of social class to the meaning of the manuscript as a whole is 2 points.

The images feature representations of individuals; however, the materials and production of the manuscript can serve as important indicators of social class. As such, they are valid topics for discussion. Students may also bring in knowledge of the Duke of Berry and his extensive art patronage (specifically of books) to support general claims about social class, but they are not required to do so.

Students are not required to identify the names of the artists, to provide the dates of the manuscript's creation, nor to identify the particular months represented in these two illuminations — although some students may include such information in their responses. Students are given the title of the illuminated manuscript; the title includes the name of the patron, the Duke of Berry.

AP[®] ART HISTORY

2012 SCORING GUIDELINES

Question 6 (continued)

Scoring Criteria

4 points

Response demonstrates thorough knowledge and understanding of the question.

The response uses specific visual evidence to compare and contrast the two images in order to analyze how social class is portrayed and how this portrayal relates to the meaning of the manuscript as a whole. The response may include minor errors that do not have a meaningful impact on the analysis.

3 points

Response demonstrates sufficient knowledge and understanding of the question.

The response uses visual evidence to compare and contrast the two images in order to analyze how social class is portrayed and how this portrayal relates to the meaning of the manuscript as a whole. However, the response may be somewhat unbalanced, focusing more on one image than on the other, or more on how social class is portrayed than on how this portrayal relates to the meaning of the manuscript as a whole — although all are represented. The response may include minor errors that have some impact on the analysis.

2 points

Response demonstrates some knowledge and understanding of the question.

The response refers to visual evidence to compare and contrast the two images in order to discuss how social class is portrayed and how this portrayal relates to the meaning of the manuscript as a whole, but the discussion of that evidence is less analytical than descriptive. It may be overly general, simplistic, or unbalanced. For example, the discussion of how social class is portrayed in the two images may be mostly accurate, whereas the discussion of how this portrayal relates to the meaning of the manuscript as a whole may be mostly implied or tenuous and/or include errors that impact the response.

OR

The response uses specific visual evidence to compare and contrast the two images in order to analyze how social class is portrayed, but this portrayal is not related to the meaning of the manuscript as a whole.

NOTE: This is the highest score a response can earn if it does not relate the portrayal of social class to the meaning of the manuscript as a whole.

1 point

Response demonstrates little knowledge and understanding of the question.

The response demonstrates general familiarity with the issues raised by the question by attempting to compare and contrast how social class is portrayed in the two images. However, the discussion is weak, overly descriptive, and/or contains significant errors. If the portrayal of social class is related to the meaning of the manuscript as whole, the discussion of the manuscript's meaning may be so weak as to be without merit.

OR

The response uses specific visual evidence to analyze how social class is portrayed in one of the two images, but the response does not relate this portrayal to the meaning of the manuscript as a whole.

0 points

Response demonstrates no discernible knowledge or understanding of the question.

The student attempts to respond, but the response makes only incorrect or irrelevant statements about the *Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*. The score of 0 points includes crossed-out words, personal notes, and drawings.

— This is a blank paper only.

6. Both images shown are from the illuminated manuscript known as the *Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*.

Compare and contrast the two images to analyze how social class is portrayed and how this portrayal relates to the meaning of the manuscript as a whole. (10 minutes)

The calendar shown, created by the Limbourg brothers, depicts both a royal feast and peasant life. The nobility are portrayed living in opulence; there is gold and food throughout, and all of the figures are shown contentedly engaged in their various activities. In the other images, the peasants live on a farm in the middle of winter, but are portrayed with the same contentedly happy expressions as the nobility. This is because the Duc de Berry did not want to see his subjects suffering, and undoubtedly the artists did not want to offend the duke. Consequently, the poor are shown as happy and hard working, which suggests that their ruler was an excellent one. During this time society was still ignorant to the suffering of those who were truly poor, and whenever peasants were portrayed in art they were shown healthy, happy, and diligent. The *Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry* is, essentially, flattery. It shows how well the nobility lived, and then suggests that through their hard work the nobility have provided their subjects with a good life, free from pain and suffering.

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In L, the social class depicted as high society shown through the ornate, vibrant colors, the bounty of food on the table, and the elegant dress the figures wear. Social class in R is shown as peasantry through the use of dull, dim hues, very few possessions, and the ~~males~~ males in the barn expose their genitals showing their ignorance and lack of education. Both images show class through color and the types and amount of objects present. The portrayals of each class relates to the meaning of the manuscript as a whole because they show the wide reaches that the Duke of Berry controls. High society in L shows that he understands how to take care of his own and accomplish the Duke-like tasks that he must but R shows that he never forgets about the peasantry and will always provide protection for them because even though they are clearly poor in R, they don't complain about their position.

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The work on the left is a depiction of a nobleman on an outing, giving food to those at his feast. He commands the steward to tell the people that they can have as much as they want. This nobleman is portrayed as a wealthy, yet generous person who gladly shares his wealth and what he has to offer. The work on the right is a scene in winter. This scene depicts the lower, peasant class rather than a noble class. The three people in the bottom left hand corner are huddled around a fire for warmth while the person on the right hand ~~side~~ toward the bottom blows on her cold fingers as she hurries toward the fire. The two people toward the top middle of the picture are seen working hard, one driving a donkey and the other chopping wood, even in the dead of winter. The ^{lower} ~~poor~~ class is shown to have not many riches or ~~even~~ an abundance of food or clothing, but they seem reasonably content with their necessities. They are also shown to be hard working and not very social with one another, as each goes about their own business, not minding or really seeming to care what the others are doing. The manuscript portrays each labor of the month for the 12 months of the year. The rich are seen to have an excess of lavishness while still being openly generous while the poor seem to live in harsher conditions, but content with their lifestyle.

AP® ART HISTORY

2012 SCORING COMMENTARY

Question 6

Overview

This 10-minute question asked students to compare and contrast how social class is portrayed in two illuminations from a manuscript that was identified for them: the *Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*. The two illuminations shown were from the calendar pages for the months of January and February. Students then had to analyze how the portrayal of social class in these illuminations relates to the meaning of the manuscript as a whole. The intent of the question was to prompt students to connect two contrasting depictions of social class to broader issues of patronage and audience during the period when the illuminations were made.

Sample: 6A

Score: 4

This response uses specific visual evidence to compare and contrast the two images in order to analyze how social class is portrayed. The response effectively observes that the peasants “are portrayed with the same contentedly happy expressions as the nobility,” despite not “living in opulence”[sic]. The response correctly addresses how the two images relate to the meaning of the manuscript as a whole, especially through the thoughtful characterization of the manuscript as a form of flattery toward the duke who had commissioned its production. By depicting the poor “as happy and hardworking,” the Limbourg brothers are able to show “that their ruler was an excellent one.” This portrayal demonstrates that “through their hard work the nobility have provided their subjects with a good life, free from pain and suffering.” Critically, the response notes that the Limbourg brothers presented peasant life in this manner “because the Duc de Berry did not want to see his subjects suffering, and undoubtedly the artists did not want to offend the duke.” This statement demonstrates an understanding of issues of patronage and audience. In this way the response demonstrates thorough knowledge and understanding of the question.

Sample: 6B

Score: 3

This response uses visual evidence to compare and contrast the two images in order to analyze how social class is portrayed. For example, the response contrasts “the bounty of food on the table” of the “high society” with the “very few possessions” of the peasantry. An observation is made regarding how the lower classes “expose their genitals showing their ignorance and lack of education.” The response also relates these two images to the meaning of the manuscript as a whole, but the analysis is somewhat unbalanced, focusing more on how social class is portrayed than on how this portrayal relates to broader meaning. The response states that the duke has a responsibility to “always provide protection” for his laborers, who “don’t complain about their position,” but the response does not expound on how this portrayal might flatter an elite audience. Instead the response implies that the duke should be sympathetic toward his subjects, a minor error that has some impact on the analysis. In this way the response demonstrates sufficient knowledge and understanding of the question.

Sample: 6C

Score: 2

This response refers to visual evidence to compare and contrast the two images to discuss how social class is portrayed, but the visual evidence is less analytical than descriptive. Both classes are described in favorable terms: the “nobleman” is characterized as a “generous person who gladly shares his wealth” and the peasantry is seen as diligently “working hard.” The peasants are “content with their lifestyle.” Yet rather than analyzing how this portrayal relates to the meaning of the manuscript as a whole, the response gets

AP® ART HISTORY
2012 SCORING COMMENTARY

Question 6 (continued)

sidetracked into a more narrative discussion, observing how people “are huddled around a fire for warmth” while another person “hurries toward the fire.” Although the response does identify these scenes as part of a larger scheme depicting “each labor of the month,” little attempt is made to address broader issues of meaning, particularly issues of patronage or audience. The generosity of the duke is mostly implied. In this way the response demonstrates some knowledge and understanding of the question.