Carefully read P. K. Page’s 1943 poem “The Landlady.” Then, in a well-organized essay, analyze the speaker’s complex portrayal of the landlady. You may wish to consider such elements as imagery, selection of detail, and tone.

The Landlady

Through sepia air the boarders* come and go, impersonal as trains. Pass silently the craving silence swallowing her speech; click doors like shutters on her camera eye.

Because of her their lives become exact: their entrances and exits are designed; phone calls are cryptic. Oh, her ticklish ears advance and fall back stunned.

Nothing is unprepared. They hold the walls about them as they weep or laugh. Each face is dialled to zero publicly. She peers stippled with curious flesh;

pads on the patient landing like a pulse, unlocks their keyholes with the wire of sight, searches their rooms for clues when they are out, pricks when they come home late.

Wonders when they are quiet, jumps when they move, dreams that they dope or drink, trembles to know the traffic of their brains, jaywalks their street in clumsy shoes.

Yet knows them better than their closest friends: their cupboards and the secrets of their drawers, their books, their private mail, their photographs are theirs and hers.

Knows when they wash, how frequently their clothes go to the cleaners, what they like to eat, their curvature of health, but even so is not content.

And like a lover must know all, all.

Prays she may catch them unprepared at last and palm the dreadful riddle of their skulls—hoping the worst.

*boarders: people who rent rooms in a private home

Question 2

(Suggested time—40 minutes. This question counts as one-third of the total essay section score.)

Carefully read the following excerpt from William Dean Howells’ novel *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885). Then, in a well-constructed essay, analyze how the author portrays the complex experience of two sisters, Penelope and Irene, within their family and society. You may wish to consider such literary elements as style, tone, and selection of detail.

They were not girls who embroidered or abandoned themselves to needle-work. Irene spent her abundant leisure in shopping for herself and her mother, of whom both daughters made a kind of idol, buying her caps and laces out of their pin-money,1 and getting her dresses far beyond her capacity to wear. Irene dressed herself very stylishly, and spent hours on her toilet2 every day. Her sister had a simpler taste, and, if she had done altogether as she liked, might even have slighted dress. They all three took long naps every day, and sat hours together minutely discussing what they saw out of the window. In her self-guided search for self-improvement, the elder sister went to many church lectures on a vast variety of secular subjects, and usually came home with a comic account of them, and that made more matter of talk for the whole family. She could make fun of nearly everything; Irene complained that she scared away the young men whom they got acquainted with at the dancing-school sociables. They were, perhaps, not the wisest young men. The girls had learned to dance at Papanti’s;3 but they had not belonged to the private classes. They did not even know of them, and a great gulf divided them from those who did. Their father did not like company, except such as came informally in their way; and their mother had remained too rustic to know how to attract it in the sophisticated city fashion. None of them had grasped the idea of European travel; but they had gone about to mountain and sea-side resorts, the mother and the two girls, where they witnessed the spectacle which such resorts present throughout New England, of multitudes of girls, lovely, accomplished, exquisitely dressed, humbly glad of the presence of any sort of young man; but the Laphams had no skill or courage to make themselves noticed, far less courted by the solitary invalid, or clergyman, or artist. They lurked helplessly about in the hotel parlors, looking on and not knowing how to put themselves forward. Perhaps they did not care a great deal to do so. They had not a conceit of themselves, but a sort of content in their own ways that one may notice in certain families. The very strength of their mutual affection was a barrier to worldly knowledge; they dressed for one another; they equipped their house for their own satisfaction; they lived richly to themselves, not because they were selfish, but because they did not know how to do otherwise. The elder daughter did not care for society, apparently. The younger, who was but three years younger, was not yet quite old enough to be ambitious of it. With all her wonderful beauty, she had an innocence almost vegetable. When her beauty, which in its immaturity was crude and harsh, suddenly ripened, she bloomed and glowed with the unconsciousness of a flower; she not merely did not feel herself admired, but hardly knew herself discovered. If she dressed well, perhaps too well, it was because she had the instinct of dress; but till she met this young man who was so nice to her at Baie St. Joan,4 she had scarcely lived a detached, individual life, so wholly had she depended on her mother and her sister for her opinions, almost her sensations. She took account of everything he did and said, pondering it, and trying to make out exactly what he meant, to the inflection of a syllable, the slightest movement or gesture. In this way she began for the first time to form ideas which she had not derived from her family, and they were none the less her own because they were often mistaken.

1 pin-money: money used for small expenses and incidentals
2 toilet: dressing and grooming
3 Papanti’s: a fashionable social dance school in nineteenth-century Boston
4 Baie St. Joan: a Canadian resort

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Question 3

(Suggested time—40 minutes. This question counts as one-third of the total essay section score.)

In his 2004 novel Magic Seeds, V. S. Naipaul writes: “It is wrong to have an ideal view of the world. That’s where the mischief starts. That’s where everything starts unravelling.”

Select a novel, play, or epic poem in which a character holds an “ideal view of the world.” Then write an essay in which you analyze the character’s idealism and its positive or negative consequences. Explain how the author’s portrayal of this idealism illuminates the meaning of the work as a whole.

You may choose a work from the list below or one of comparable literary merit. Do not merely summarize the plot.

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textit{The Alchemist}
  \item Antigone
  \item The Awakening
  \item The Bluest Eye
  \item Brave New World
  \item Brideshead Revisited
  \item The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao
  \item Candide
  \item The Catcher in the Rye
  \item Death of a Salesman
  \item Don Quixote
  \item A Gesture Life
  \item Great Expectations
  \item The Great Gatsby
  \item The Handmaid’s Tale
  \item The House of Mirth
  \item The Importance of Being Earnest
  \item Invisible Man
  \item King Lear
  \item Lolita
  \item The Mill on the Floss
  \item My Ántonia
  \item Native Son
  \item Odyssey
  \item The Portrait of a Lady
  \item A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man
  \item The Sound and the Fury
  \item The Sun Also Rises
  \item The Tempest
  \item To Kill a Mockingbird
  \item When the Emperor Was Divine
\end{itemize}