



AP[®] English Literature and Composition 2002 Scoring Commentary Form B

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Question 1

Annie Proulx's *The Shipping News*

Sample V – Score 4

This essay discusses a fair number of examples that do indeed convey Quoyle's character vividly, but it fails to analyze how or why the language is effective in generating that impression. In fact, it offers very little understanding of Quoyle's character. He is said to be "a very indifferent and lonely guy" about whom the author adopts "a negative tone." Each paragraph begins the same way, but there is little coherence and no sustained development of ideas. While often selecting good examples, the writer explains only that they are "vivid" or consist of "great imagery" or reveal Quoyle's "true character" — never explaining what that is. By the fifth paragraph, despite quotation of many fresh examples of visual imagery and metaphor, the writer is still able to say only that Quoyle is portrayed in a "negative manner." The essay is an apparently dutiful attempt to answer the question by focusing attention specifically on aspects of language in the passage, but it consistently fails to provide substantial analysis.

Sample U – Score 7

This essay is less specific and less fully developed than those in the 8-9 range. It offers three central paragraphs of analysis of the visual imagery, syntax, and diction used in the passage to present a vivid description of Quoyle's outcast state. It presents interesting ideas (e.g., "visual hyperbole" as a means of reflecting Quoyle's lack of self-worth, or the metaphor of Quoyle's life as an incomplete sentence), and it remains well focused on its theme — "his lack of self-esteem." The writer's language is resourceful ("telegraphic phrases," "inadequacies and dampened opportunities") despite its tendency toward repetition. The essay is weakened most by its deficiency in specific examples, its tendency toward categorization of ideas that remain undeveloped ("simpleton," "unproductivity"), and its confused distinction between "intelligent language" and "plain and simple truths." The conclusion, although well written, is formulaic in its repetition of assertions already made, suggesting an unwillingness or inability to engage in deeper analysis.

Sample X – Score 8

The strong opening paragraph of this persuasive essay does not follow the list of items in the prompt but offers instead a view of "the evolution of [Quoyle's] character," suggesting that "visual images" and the exposure of Quoyle's "thoughts and feelings" are what generate the vivid impression. Throughout the essay the writer skillfully selects and synthesizes apt phrases, generalizes effectively from specific examples, and maintains a strong sense of paragraph coherence. The conclusion of the second paragraph neatly synthesizes in fresh terms what has been said above, establishing the focus of the whole essay on Quoyle's "alarmingly small amount of self-esteem."

Connecting details of the story with the author's verbal strategies (e.g., the "anaphoric" repetition of Quoyle's failures), the writer keeps the emphasis on the relation between language and meaning. Also effective is the use of parallel sentence structure in the fifth paragraph ("We feel . . . ; we understand . . . ; we can identify with . . .") The writer might have been more specific about what Quoyle's thoughts were, or offered more insight into the climactic Sea Lung image of his confused thoughts and emotions; then too the "lexical field" generalizations are a bit glib. But this is still an impressively coherent, richly detailed essay.

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Question 2

W.H. Auden’s “If I Could Tell You”

Sample UU – Score 5

This response begins with less well-focused generalizations, about both theme and form. The second paragraph continues, still at a general level, making specific reference only to the two lines that alternate and repeat. The paragraph closes with a generalized statement about time and how the poem’s form restricts just as time does. All of these claims are true but they have not been developed or explained in detail. No ideas are offered about the emotional or aesthetic effects of the formal structure. Much of the poem’s meaning (e.g., the ideas in each stanza) and its form (e.g., the effects of its rhyme or meter) are ignored. So the essay remains rather flat, very neutral, and rather reductive about the whole experience. Rightly, the student notes that the answer in the last line of the poem is “no answer at all” but unfortunately leaves it at that. The writing is clearly adequate to the task, but because of its persistent generality and vagueness it remains pedestrian.

Sample ZZ – Score 7

This relatively short essay opens very well, relating meaning and form in concise but still convincing terms. Starting with a brief but clear description of the poem’s form, the writer generalizes persuasively about how the poem’s repetition and rhyme — and thus its “predictability” — dramatize “man’s vulnerability to the will of time.” Observations such as “the only certainty man can have is the inherent uncertainty of the future” suggest how well this writer has understood the poem. But the essay falls short in its failure to go into sufficient detail. It mentions the winds and the roses, but otherwise avoids specificity. No examples of the rhyme scheme’s effects, or the different effects of repetition in each stanza, or of the actual metrical devices used in the poem are given. The final sentences of the essay are impressively well written, but overall it remains deficient in specific analysis and thus not fully persuasive.

Sample YY – Score 9

This extremely poised essay begins with a very effective discussion of Auden’s personification of time, and ends — as the poem does, coming full circle — with a repetition of the idea of time’s inscrutability: “no matter what boundaries are breached,” time will never reveal the secrets of existence. The writer consistently shows how the poem’s formal elements generate ideas, feelings, and meanings — generalizing effectively (“scenes of disorder”) and quoting succinctly. The tonal effects of these devices are suggested as well — the speaker’s “almost angry entreaty” and Time’s “almost mocking” reprimand. Focused attention and specific examples are present in every line, even when the language is not quite so apt (“to satiate his curiosity”) or when the writer does not know that the villanelle *requires* a four-line concluding stanza with exact repetition of the same two lines (originally 1 and 3) used so often already. Yet this misunderstanding hardly matters because the writer has so skillfully related the images of the penultimate stanza (lions, brooks, soldiers) with the climactic assertion that even “breached boundaries” will do nothing to change time’s relentless refusal to reveal its secrets. The final sentence, like so much else in the essay, is interestingly and elegantly written.

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Question 3

Revealing Secrets

Sample DD – Score 4

This essay begins with an accurate but laborious explanation of what the secret is, and goes on to plot summary that does not effectively explain Nora’s motives. It was important for her to keep the secret because otherwise Torvald “would have discovered her.” More plot summary leads to the equally deficient insight that Nora’s secrecy “causes a lot of tension in the play.” The writer emphasizes, correctly enough, that the whole play revolves around this secret and its revelation, with consequences that are briefly mentioned. But the writer depends entirely on a what-happens-next method of demonstrating that the secret is important. The writer’s barely adequate recall of events in the play is characterized by a failure to remember the protagonist’s name.

Sample CC – Score 6

This essay succeeds partly because it chooses such an appropriate text and focuses on a character whose determination to keep her secret has such obvious dramatic effects. It opens with a brief explanation of Hester’s reason for secrecy, her love for Dimmesdale and her desire to protect his reputation, and then goes on to suggest in general terms her resistance to a “rigid Puritan society” that seeks to disgrace and humiliate her. This is clearly adequate but not notably insightful in its interpretation of Hester’s motives. It confines discussion of the consequences of her secrecy to an account of Dimmesdale’s miseries, which is again accurate but limited. The last paragraph makes at least a serious attempt at indicating why Hester’s suffering is significant, but it fails to connect her secrecy directly with that. The writing is clear, and even at times forceful, in its use of declarative sentences and compact summations. But it is weakened by insufficient specificity, repetition without development, and a tendency toward categorization (“horrible sin,” “treated horribly,” “the harshness of the Puritan society”).

Sample BB – Score 9

This very persuasively detailed essay keeps its focus consistently on what Montag’s secrets are and on the consequences of his choosing to keep or reveal them. All of its plot description is exact, nuanced, and relevant to the question. The essay is clearly organized, with each paragraph following a logical development in the protagonist’s understanding, motives, choices, or actions. Topic sentences and transitions are well marked, as in “How is he to reveal the truth?” or “Montag protects the secret of his covert wisdom.” The writer’s language is particularly resourceful, both in syntax and phrasing, making good use of lengthy but well-shaped sentences balanced by very effective subordinate clauses. Phrases such as “intellectual-in-embryo,” “forging a smile,” and “bland consumerist paralysis” also suggest how adept the writing is, despite an occasional lapse into lavishness, as in the phrase “so that beauty may never again throw itself on the atomic phoenix funeral pyre of war.” But such lapses are minor in light of so much concise and well-controlled writing. The student has also been bold enough to choose an unusual work, not a title usually recommended on the exam, and has proved not only its appropriateness for the question but the importance of its larger issues.