2000 Advanced Placement Program®
Free-Response Questions

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In the following passage from her autobiography, One Writer’s Beginnings, Eudora Welty recalls early experiences of reading and books that had later impact on her craft as a writer of fiction. In a well-organized essay, analyze how Welty’s language conveys the intensity and value of these experiences.

I never knew anyone who’d grown up in Jackson without being afraid of Mrs. Calloway, our librarian. She ran the Library absolutely by herself, from the desk where she sat with her back to the books and facing the stairs, her dragon eye on the front door, where who knew what kind of person might come in from the public? SILENCE in big black letters was on signs tacked up everywhere. She herself spoke in her normally commanding voice; every word could be heard all over the Library above a steady seething sound coming from her electric fan; it was the only fan in the Library and stood on her desk, turned directly onto her streaming face.

As you came in from the bright outside, if you were a girl, she sent her strong eyes down the stairway to test you; if she could see through your skirt she sent you straight back home: you could just put on another petticoat if you wanted a book that badly from the public library. I was willing; I would do anything to read.

My mother was not afraid of Mrs. Calloway. She wished me to have my own library card to check out books for myself. She took me in to introduce me and wished me to have my own library card to check out books as fast as I could go, rushing them home in the basket of my bicycle. From the minute I reached our house, I started to read. Every book I seized on, from Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea to The Man in Lower Ten while my hair got dry enough to unroll from a load of kid curlers trying to make me like my idol, Mary Pickford. A generation later, when my brother Walter was away in the Navy and his two little girls often spent the day in our house, I remember Mother read—just look up at the image that comes with it of falling straight off the piano stool.

Mrs. Calloway made her own rules about books. You could not take back a book to the Library on the same day you’d taken it out; it made no difference to her that you’d read every word in it and needed another to start. You could take out two books at a time and two only; this applied as long as you were a child and also for the rest of your life, to my mother as severely as to me. So two by two, I read library books as fast as I could go, rushing them home in the basket of my bicycle. From the minute I reached our house, I started to read. Every book I seized on, from Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea to The Man in Lower Ten while my hair got dry enough to unroll from a load of kid curlers trying to make me like my idol, Mary Pickford. A generation later, when my brother Walter was away in the Navy and his two little girls often spent the day in our house, I remember Mother reading the new issue of Time magazine while taking the part of the Wolf in a game of “Little Red Riding Hood” with the children. She’d just look up at the right time, long enough to answer—in character—“The better to eat you with, my dear,” and go back to her place in the war news.

(1983)

Elsie Dinsmore was the long-suffering young heroine in a popular series of children’s books written by Martha Finley and first published in 1868.

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In the following passage, George Orwell uses the example of Gandhi to make an argument for choosing human imperfection over “sainthood.” As you read Orwell’s remarks, note his choice of details and his tone. Then write an essay in which you analyze how Orwell criticizes Gandhi’s position and assess how effectively Orwell develops his own position.

Close friendships, Gandhi1 says, are dangerous, because “friends react on one another” and through loyalty to a friend one can be led into wrong-doing. This is unquestionably true. Moreover, if one is to love God, or to love humanity as a whole, one cannot give one’s preference to any individual person. This again is true, and it marks the point at which the humanistic and the religious attitude cease to be reconcilable. To an ordinary human being, love means nothing if it does not mean loving some people more than others. The autobiography2 leaves it uncertain whether Gandhi behaved in an inconsiderate way to his wife and children, but at any rate it makes clear that on three occasions he was willing to let his wife or a child die rather than administer the animal food prescribed by the doctor. It is true that the threatened death never actually occurred, and also that Gandhi—with, one gathers, a good deal of moral pressure in the opposite direction—always gave the patient the choice of staying alive at the price of committing a sin: still, if the decision had been solely his own, he would have forbidden the animal food, whatever the risks might be. There must, he says, be some limit to what we will do in order to remain alive, and the limit is well on this side of chicken broth. This attitude is perhaps a noble one, but, in the sense which—I think—most people would give to the word, it is inhuman. The essence of being human is that one does not seek perfection, that one is sometimes willing to commit sins for the sake of loyalty, that one does not push asceticism to the point where it makes friendly intercourse impossible, and that one is prepared in the end to be defeated and broken up by life, which is the inevitable price of fastening one’s love upon other human individuals. No doubt alcohol, tobacco, and so forth, are things that a saint must avoid, but sainthood is also a thing that human beings must avoid.

(1949)

1 Mohandas Gandhi (1869-1948). Political and spiritual leader in India
2 Gandhi’s autobiography, The Story of My Experiments with Truth
Question 3

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

Through tatter’d clothes small vices do appear;
Robes and furr’d gowns hide all. Plate sin with gold,
And the strong lance of justice hurtless breaks;
Arm it in rags, a pigmy’s straw does pierce it.

Shakespeare, *King Lear*

The lines above are from a speech by King Lear. Write a carefully reasoned essay in which you briefly paraphrase Lear’s statement and then defend, challenge, or qualify his view of the relationship between wealth and justice. Support your argument with specific references to your reading, observation, or experience.