



AP[®] English Language 1999 Sample Student Responses

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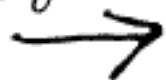
The famous Gordian Knot is a key feature of Greek writing. The idea is that two opposing absolutes can not be resolved, the knot can not be untied. In the Greek plays, the downfall of the protagonist is always his excessive pride or hubris. Because of pride the hapless main characters fail to realize that the two opposing forces can not be taken as absolutes or they will never be reconciled. This pride and consequences have been the downfall of literary characters throughout the ages, from Hamlet to Nethe of Tony Morrison's Beloved.

An idea could not be so prevalent throughout cultures and history if it were not true in the real world. Indeed, pride does lead to downfall. Pride clogs the process of rational thought, preventing a man from realizing his failures and that inherent danger until beyond the precipice of disaster. Pride is powerful and pernicious, refusing to allow a strong man to yield in the face of overwhelming odds. It is amazing that an enemy of success and happiness which is so well understood can still create problems today.

Bill Clinton may not have been impeached, had he not been too proud to admit to the American people that he was truly sorry. Across the political spectrum, Newt Gingrich may not have had to resign had he not been too proud to admit that his political tactics were wrong.

As Sophocles wrote, evil can be repaired but the crime lies in pride.

Pride and its consequences are not only limited to individuals, but can in fact encompass entire nations. The refusal of top German officials and much of



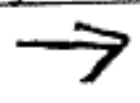
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the German army to admit defeat near the end of WWII led to the annihilation of much of Germany at the end of the war. The German people were too proud to give up. Similarly, pride prevented American leaders and officials from admitting error in Viet Nam and making repairs. That led to the final, ultimate disgrace of the flight from Saigon as it fell.

It is no wonder our heroes are far from overly proud. The humble Marko Markovic and unassuming Sammy Sosa captured the minds and hearts of America with their unbelievable performance and continual humility. The humble Michael Jordan is always revered while the flashy and proud Dennis Rodman often goes unrecognized for his amazing skills. People recognize a strength and desirable trait in the humble individual.

At the same time many complain that a large problem in the world today is the prevalence of excessive pride. Japan is still too proud to accept blame for bringing America into WWII. Such pride always hinders the healing process, old wounds are left open. It is impossible to forgive someone who is too proud to admit guilt. The problems are never really solved when pride gets in the way.

The examples are many, yet it is easy to look at them and miss the point. Pride prevents the solutions to problems from being found. Pride makes forgiveness and healing hard. Pride puts too much focus on one side, and in any type of conflict, it is compromise and shared views which will be the final solutions to the problems.



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It seems that if the many writers over the ages were attempting to teach us all a lesson, too many failed to understand it. Sophocles, Shakespeare, and the many modern writers all attempted to give examples of how pride hurts, and even with many modern historical examples, it seems there is still too much excessive pride in the world. Pride is a part of human nature, but we must learn its dangers. As Teiresias goes on to say later in Antigone, the willow survives where the proud oak does not because when the wind gets too strong, the willow bends while the oak breaks.

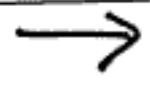
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Men are fallible beings, consistently prone to mistakes and errors. But ~~and~~, amidst these constant mistakes, what separates those who survive and learn from these mistakes from those who witness a downfall? The blind prophet Tiresias in Sophocles' play Antigone provides a concise explanation: pride. According to the prophet, pride separates the foolish from the wise, the good from the evil, the successful from the dambroder. From ^{the} early times of the Greeks and the Romans to our contemporary age, the theme of pride can be found in ~~both~~ literature and ~~and~~ ^{history} as it relates to a character's eventual downfall or ^{historical} tragedy.

In ~~the second episode of the Oedipus trilogy~~, Oedipus Rex, the second episode of the Oedipus Trilogy (Antigone, the third), the main character Oedipus provides for his own downfall through his one character flaw: pride. Amidst the warnings from oracles and prophets (including the blind prophet Tiresias), Oedipus continues to deny ~~the~~ the truth. Unbeknownst to him at the time, Oedipus is in fact the murderer of the previous king. But his pride and ~~misillusionment~~ ^{misillusionment} lead to a sudden, harsh revelation; And he faced the truth and ~~and~~ gracefully stepped down as king, Oedipus possibly could have avoided his own disgraceful exile. In the end, Oedipus blinded himself and left his kingdom, never to return.

In ~~the Shakespearean~~ Elizabethan times, the theme of pride continued to flourish. In the Shakespearean tragedy Romeo and Juliet, the constant feud between the Montagues and the Capulets results in the death of a man outside both families -- Mercutio. After a biting duel that begins as playful dialogue, Mercutio curses both families only seconds before



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dying, yet the feud rages on. Both families, unwilling to reach a compromise, ~~instead~~ indirectly caused the death of an outsider. Kurt Vonnegut, a contemporary author, writes "if there really was a Mercurio, and there really is a Paradise, he'd be up there discussing with the Vietnam casualties on the subject of what it's like to die for other people's foolishness and pride." Vonnegut relates the Mercurio tragedy to a contemporary example of a tragic result of pride: the Vietnam War. Caught between the proud U.S. and Communist government, soldiers lost their lives.

Even today, ~~the~~ ~~tragedy~~ ~~has~~ ~~on~~ ~~this~~ ~~day~~, at this very hour, wars over matters of pride rage on. Will the Kosovo crisis or the fighting in Northern Ireland result in ~~tragedy~~ tragedy? Most likely. If ~~it~~ ^{it} is in the world's interest to ~~prevent~~ prevent tragedy, ~~but~~ it must heed Terresias' warning to "know when the course is wrong and repair the evil."