



## Student Performance Q&A: 2013 AP® Art History Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2013 free-response questions for AP® Art History were written by the Chief Reader, Robert Nauman of the University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado. They give an overview of each free-response question and of how students performed on the question, including typical student errors. General comments regarding the skills and content that students frequently have the most problems with are included. Some suggestions for improving student performance in these areas are also provided. Teachers are encouraged to attend a College Board workshop to learn strategies for improving student performance in specific areas.

### Question 1

#### ***What was the intent of this question?***

This 30-minute question asked students to identify two sites of religious pilgrimage, at least one of which was from a culture beyond the European tradition. Students then had to analyze how specific features of each site or structure shape the intended experience of the pilgrims. The intent of the question was to measure the students' ability to analyze how characteristics of a site or structure are used to shape an intended experience.

#### ***How well did students perform on this question?***

Students found this question difficult. The mean score was 2.91 out of a possible 9 points, which is slightly below the mean for the question dealing with art beyond the European tradition in recent years. The content addressed in this question is one that is covered in art history surveys and applies to many religious structures around the world. On a more positive note, the varied selection of student choices from beyond the European tradition was encouraging, indicating that teachers are covering a much broader range of material in this area than before. Good examples from beyond the European tradition included the Dome of the Rock, the Kaaba, the Great Stupa at Sanchi, and Borobodur.

#### ***What were common student errors or omissions?***

To perform well on this question, students needed to be able to differentiate between sites that are specific to religious pilgrimage versus sites that are more generally sacred. Weaker responses to this question sometimes struggled with the definition of pilgrimage and instead responded with generic discussions of sacred spaces, assuming (incorrectly) that any sacred space is or has been a site of religious pilgrimage. As such, the examples selected for discussion in these weaker responses were often problematic, particularly as the question also asked students to analyze how architectural features of the site or structure shaped the intended experience of the pilgrims. For example, some of these weaker responses used Hagia Sophia as an example and described its interior space, but these responses could not analyze Hagia Sophia as a pilgrimage structure nor explain how the architecture shaped pilgrims' intended

experience. In addition, a recurrent problem in weaker responses was a certain lack of familiarity with cultures beyond the European tradition. Many weaker students seemed to be familiar only with art from Ancient Egypt and the Ancient Near East. Yet responses that used examples from Ancient Egypt or the Ancient Near East scored poorly on this question because they could not adequately address the issue of pilgrimage. Other weaker responses seemed to rely on examples of architecture that appeared in the multiple-choice section of the exam but were not specifically related to religious pilgrimage, such as the Taj Mahal.

***Based on your experience of student responses at the AP® Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?***

The best responses came from students who were interested and engaged in examining other cultures actively. These students were able to answer the question easily. These students' teachers are teaching at least one culture beyond the European tradition in depth and with great skill. Students who tried to "pass" the question by falling back on Ancient Egyptian or Ancient Near Eastern examples or who clearly had not studied a culture beyond the Western canon of art history could not address the question. Art beyond the European tradition needs to be studied and addressed in a substantial manner by students, who should be taught to examine various cultures in all their richness. In addition, reading a question, considering what tasks are involved in answering it, and sketching out possible strategies for a response (including the selection of appropriate works) would help students greatly. The two long questions provide space in the exam booklet for outlining answers and time for doing so, yet few students take advantage of this opportunity and too many responses show evidence of insufficient thought. (These notes and outlines they make outside of the essay itself are not considered in scoring the response but could help students to improve their responses.) Weaker responses also indicate that students may have prepared for a different topic (in this case, "sacred space") and simply tried to "cut and paste" that information into their answers. Instead, students need to read the question carefully, identify its component parts, and specifically address the question in their responses. Combining the standard chronological approach to art history with a thematic approach—considering, for example, how architecture is designed to shape space and experience—would help students develop the necessary flexibility to apply what they know to broad-based contextual questions like this one.

## **Question 2**

***What was the intent of this question?***

This 30-minute question asked students to identify two works of art that use narrative to communicate social, political, or religious meaning. One of the works had to date before 1800 C.E. and one had to date after 1800 C.E. Works could be drawn from a variety of cultures, periods, and media. Students then had to identify the content of each work's narrative and analyze how each work uses narrative to communicate social, political, or religious meaning. The intent of this question was to have students demonstrate understanding of how art uses narrative to convey a range of meanings that are often determined by historical and cultural contexts.

***How well did students perform on this question?***

Students found this question moderately difficult. The mean score was 3.43 out of a possible 9 points. Students choose from a variety of media (painting, drawing, printmaking, photography, sculpture, and installation), and students were not limited to works from the European tradition. Many responses used works from beyond the European tradition, and many of those responses were quite strong and scored well.

### ***What were common student errors or omissions?***

Weaker responses sometimes confused works created prior to 1800 C.E. to those created after 1800 C.E. In cases in which both examples dated before 1800 C.E. or after 1800 C.E., only the better analysis was scored. The highest score a student could earn in this scenario was 5 out of 9 possible points. Also, responses that focused only on description or superficial storytelling received lower scores. In some cases, weaker responses confused symbolism and narrative, identifying symbolic elements within the works without relating them to the larger question of narrative. Similarly, some weaker responses focused on formal analysis without linking the discussion to narrative. An inability to focus on relevant aspects of the work that communicate social, political, or religious meaning was also a problem in some of the weaker responses. Overall, weaker responses described works but did not analyze meaning. As with Question 1, many students seem to have had answers prepared based upon previous exams and then tried to use those responses to answer the question, with dubious results.

### ***Based on your experience of student responses at the AP® Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?***

To answer this question successfully, students were required to think critically about artistic intent. They had to think not only about why artists would use narrative, but also how that use of narrative communicates specific meaning. It was up to students to make interpretive connections by considering the form, function, content, and/or context of the works of art they selected. In many of the stronger responses, students clearly took time to outline their approaches in the blank space provided before they began to write. (Notes written in this blank space are not scored.) The apparent correlation between such planning and higher scores indicates that students who think through their responses prior to beginning to write score higher than those students who do not. Remind students that these are 30-minute questions and that they have time to think about and outline their responses prior to writing. Study exercises that would help students to identify good choices to answer this type of question would also be valuable. An example might be to give students five minutes to think of examples to address specific topics for sample long questions, and then discuss with students why their choices might be strong or weak. Students also really need to exercise caution in using examples from past exams. Although a good teaching mechanism is to look at past exams and to use questions from those exams to help students prepare, teachers should warn students that using those particular examples for any new question that they are given may be problematic. Teachers should also devise new examples of their own to supplement this approach so that students are prepared for a variety of possible topics. Students also need to be encouraged to develop critical analysis skills, and, importantly, to distinguish between description and analysis. In their descriptions of works, they need to consider why they are discussing specific aspects of the work, and how that discussion relates to the question as a whole.

## **Question 3**

### ***What was the intent of this question?***

This 10-minute question asked students to discuss the intended meaning of the Arch of Constantine and then to discuss how that meaning was created. Specifically, students were asked how the reuse of sculptural fragments from other Roman works of art (*spolia*) was used to assert a particular political agenda by associating Constantine with “good” emperors from Rome’s illustrious imperial past. The intent of this question was to prompt students to draw upon their knowledge of the Arch of Constantine’s form, function, content, and context in order to address how the arch references Rome’s imperial past to assert the legitimacy of Constantine’s imperial rule.

### ***How well did students perform on this question?***

Students found this question difficult. The mean score was 1.35 out of a possible 4 points. While students were given the title of the work, they had to address its intended meaning in order to be able to earn an upper-level score. In fact, the trend in recent exams of giving students the titles and/or artists in the prompts is precisely so that students can devote more effort to displaying skills of critical analysis—examining the content and meaning of the works—rather than spending time on identification, which is easily tested with multiple choice.

### ***What were common student errors or omissions?***

This monument is illustrated in all the major texts, so many students knew it. Nonetheless, weaker responses seemed to reflect a lack of familiarity with the work, often merely describing what they saw and vaguely linking it to Roman architecture. Those weaker responses failed to analyze the propagandistic intent of the monument and how it relates to Roman imperial ideology. Weaker responses also failed to explain specifically how propaganda operates in this work. Some did not understand that this monument was created to spread ideology through the reuse of sculptural fragments from other Roman works of art. This is a monument that legitimizes Constantine's imperial rule, and the reasons why specific fragments were incorporated into this monument is central to its interpretation. Other weaker responses attempted to frame the monument within a context of Christian ideology (such as the Edict of Milan), often in a very vague and incorrect manner (associating, for example, the three arches with the Christian Trinity). Weaker responses also sometimes tried to conflate discussion of the monument with other imperial arches by simply stating that it symbolized or depicted Roman military conquests. This was insufficient.

### ***Based on your experience of student responses at the AP<sup>®</sup> Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?***

Teachers should continue to emphasize the major themes in art. This is a good example of a “power and authority” type of question. The background information provided in the rubric for this question could be used as an example to open discussion of other works of a similar nature. Furthermore, students need to be aware of who the intended audience is for works such as these, and they should examine concepts of propaganda, perhaps relating propaganda to issues of propagation, the idea of spreading ideas to a larger area. Monuments or works of art such as the Arch of Constantine also provide an opportunity to discuss the continuum of art history with students. This work from late antiquity is a transitional work and may be discussed within an overall framework of continuity and change. Students should be encouraged to investigate aspects of both continuity and change in their analysis. Moreover, since this work is usually discussed toward the beginning of the survey course, students should be reminded to review earlier content and context before taking the exam. Students should also be reminded to carefully read each question to determine exactly what their tasks are. They need to answer the questions directly and in the space provided for that specific essay question. Answers or continuations of answers that appear in subsequent pages devoted to other essay questions will not be scored.

## **Question 4**

### ***What was the intent of this question?***

This 10-minute question asked students to analyze how both the subject matter and the style of *The School of Athens* by Raphael reflect the humanist interests of the High Renaissance. The intent of this question was to prompt students to use skills of both formal and contextual analysis to situate the work within its art-historical period.

### ***How well did students perform on this question?***

Students scored exactly in the mid-range on this question. The mean score was 2.00 out of a possible 4 points. The work and the artist were identified for them, and the work is discussed at length in all the major survey texts.

### ***What were common student errors or omissions?***

The most common problem with the weaker responses was that students did not understand the concept of humanism, which is one of the central themes in art history. Some weaker responses also engaged in an incomplete “who’s who,” identifying the people in the work as portraits of Renaissance artists without relating them to Classical personages, suggesting that they misunderstood the dual identity of the figures and therefore the intent of the patron of the work. Other weaker responses misinterpreted the work as a critique of paganism, in which Christianity was contrasted with Classicism. In terms of stylistic analysis, the most common problem encountered with the weaker responses was that students did not tie stylistic characteristics of the High Renaissance to humanistic concerns. As a result, those responses tended to list formal characteristics, such as one-point perspective, without providing any analysis connecting the stylistic characteristics to humanist interests during the High Renaissance.

### ***Based on your experience of student responses at the AP® Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?***

Students need to be familiarized with the basic social and cultural context of iconic works of art. They should know how and why works such as *The School of Athens* represent various major artistic and philosophical concerns of the periods with which they are associated. For this question, if students were unable to identify at least implicitly what humanistic interests were during the High Renaissance, they could not score well. Stronger responses demonstrated an understanding of the patronage issues that inform this work. Such responses stated that *The School of Athens* was commissioned by a humanist pope, Julius II. They discussed why the fresco was commissioned and, in some cases, how it related to the larger fresco cycle in the library where it is located. The work could then be discussed as part of an artistic program that identified the intellectual and philosophical concerns of the exemplary humanist individual during the High Renaissance. Such responses earned high scores on this question.

## **Question 5**

### ***What was the intent of this question?***

This 10-minute question asked students to provide a correct attribution of a painting (*The Meeting at the Golden Gate*) to the artist Giotto. Students were then asked to justify their attribution by discussing specific characteristics of the painting commonly associated with the work of Giotto. The intent of this question was to have students apply their knowledge of visual characteristics of an artist’s work to their discussion of a presumably unknown work.

### ***How well did students perform on this question?***

Students found this question difficult. The mean score was 1.08 out of a possible 4 points, in spite of the fact that even if the students misattributed the work, they could earn points through a cogent discussion of stylistic characteristics that plausibly overlap with the work of another artist. The adjusted mean of the score (those scores that did not receive a score of zero points) was revealing, in that it was near 2.0. That means that an inordinate number of students earned a score of zero points on this question. This indicates that students not only attributed the work to the wrong artist, but also that they had nothing correct to express regarding the artist that they selected *vis à vis* the work shown.

### ***What were common student errors or omissions?***

Many students failed to identify the artist correctly. Duccio was a common misattribution, but Duccio could at least be defended and receive partial credit as a choice. By contrast, the many students who chose the Limbourg Brothers often justified their misattribution simply based on the use of blue paint in the work. As a result, this misattribution typically received no credit, nor of course did responses that attributed the work to incorrect artists and then discussed stylistic concerns of those incorrect artists that were not in fact visually present in *The Meeting at the Golden Gate*. The highest score students could receive for an incorrect attribution was 2 points. If students did not identify an artist at all, they obviously could not justify their attributions, and therefore did not earn any points on this question. This question required an attribution to a specific artist, not to an art-historical period or movement, and mere description of the work was not an adequate substitute as a justification for an attribution to an artist.

### ***Based on your experience of student responses at the AP® Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?***

Attribution skills are a kind of applied formal analysis, and a basic tool of the art historian. As such, responses to attribution questions must be grounded in the specific visual details of the work shown. Students should be reminded to discuss visual characteristics that they observe in the work shown, and not simply fabricate an attribution based on characteristics that the work does not in fact possess. For example, some students attributed this work to Manet and then discussed characteristics specific to Manet that were obviously not visually present in *The Meeting at the Golden Gate*. Moreover, the plethora of weaker responses that attributed this work to the Limbourg Brothers would seem to indicate that students prepared for this exam by looking at past exams, but that they did not then carefully look at this specific image when writing their responses. Students also need to be reminded that if they are presented with an attribution question, they must name an artist to receive any credit. Students could imply an attribution (by stating, for example, that the artist was the same artist who painted the *The Lamentation*) and earn a lower-level score, but if they made no attempt at attribution at all, they earned a score of zero points. Students attempt to attribute the work to an artist whose work they can justify in terms of stylistic characteristics as they relate to the image shown. Students also need to learn correct terminology in describing characteristics of a work. In some stronger responses, for example, students cited innovations in perspectival space, as well as naturalism and temporality to describe Giotto's approach. Such responses typically scored high. Again, remind students to read all parts of the question carefully.

## **Question 6**

### ***What was the intent of this question?***

This 10-minute question asked students to analyze two contrasting views of the 19th-century artistic movement called Realism through an analysis of two Realist paintings, one by Gustave Courbet and one by Jean-François Millet. The intent of this question was to prompt students to consider that artistic styles, in this case Realism, can have multiple interpretations even by artists who consciously associate themselves with that style.

### ***How well did students perform on this question?***

Students found this question moderately difficult. The mean score was 1.58 out of a possible 4 points. Students were asked to contrast two images from the same artistic movement, represented by artists who appear in all of the major survey texts. Students were not required to specifically identify either artist, although many students did so.

### ***What were common student errors or omissions?***

This particular question emphasized difference rather than similarity in artistic approach. Weaker responses either failed to address those differences, or dealt with only one of the two works. Students also had to define, at least implicitly, what is meant by Realism in order to address the question successfully. Weaker responses sometimes assumed (incorrectly) that the movement Realism literally equates to “realistic.” It was difficult for these responses to score well. Other weaker responses conflated what they knew about other works by the same artists to these works: for example, discussing Courbet’s *Burial at Ornans* in terms of poverty and peasants, as if it were *The Stonebreakers*. Some weaker responses also read social issues into the paintings that are not actually present—assuming that *Burial at Ornans* is a depiction of class antagonism between aristocracy and the clergy, or, in the case of *The Gleaners*, that the painting critiques slavery in the United States. Weaker responses also attempted to address issues of style by simply providing superficial formal analysis instead of discussing such pertinent issues as application of paint or the idealization of the figures. Other weaker responses simply described without purpose, writing at length and not actually answering the question.

### ***Based on your experience of student responses at the AP® Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?***

Teachers should continue to examine the major artistic styles, but they should also discuss the complexities and contradictions implicit in grouping artists together under stylistic headings. Increasingly, comparative questions are also an important part of the exam, and teachers should practice “compare and contrast” exercises with their students, examining not only why various works are categorized within a specific style or movement, but also how and why the work of the various artists associated with those styles or movements express themselves individually. In other words, individual artistic intent must be taken into account. In practicing for these questions, students should be reminded that merely describing a work is insufficient. Analysis and relevant discussion must be the basis for response.

## **Question 7**

### ***What was the intent of this question?***

This 10-minute question dealt with the Great Mosque of Djenné in present-day Mali. Students had to identify specific features in the building that are distinctive to mosque architecture. Students were then asked to analyze how mosque architecture relates to the practices of Islam. The question assumes a measure of unity and continuity in mosque architecture, implying that certain features necessary to the correct practice of Islam will appear in all mosques, regardless of time or location. The intent of this question was to prompt students to apply their knowledge of mosque architecture to a specific structure that may be less familiar to them.

### ***How well did students perform on this question?***

Students found this question moderately difficult. The mean score was 1.74 out of a possible 4 points. That said, teachers in general seem to be doing a nice job teaching Islamic architecture, and many students did quite well on this question.

### ***What were common student errors or omissions?***

Students were asked to identify specific features in this building distinctive to mosque architecture, including the *qibla* wall and the *mihrab*, the prayer hall, and the enclosed courtyard. Some students were very familiar with this work, and also discussed the use of the timber *toran* in this mosque, used as both structure and ornamentation, although this information was not necessary to earn a higher score. Weaker responses demonstrated unfamiliarity with this architectural vocabulary, which was needed to answer the

question successfully. Students also were also asked to analyze how architecture relates to the practices of Islam. Stronger responses discussed the importance of Islamic religious architecture to Muslim prayer, while weaker responses often omitted this analysis. A minor mistake was that some responses identified mudbrick as a common material in mosque construction, when it is actually specific to this region.

***Based on your experience of student responses at the AP® Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?***

Students need to be familiarized not only with formal characteristics of religious structures, but also with the specific practices of the major global religions so that they can analyze how religious architecture relates to religious practice. They should be familiar with the core vocabulary, including architectural terminology, that applies to each of these types of religious structures. This is a skill that combines formal and contextual analysis, applying what they know about architectural types in general to specific structures and to specific practices.

## **Question 8**

***What was the intent of this question?***

This 10-minute text-based question required students to select and clearly identify one work of art created after 1960 C.E that addresses the relationship between technology and how people experience the world. Students then needed to relate the chosen work to two brief quotations by video artist Nam June Paik. To answer the question successfully, students were required to think critically about Paik’s words and how they relate to contemporary art. The intent of this question was to prompt students to analyze how statements made by an artist are visually expressed in work created during the same period. This 10-minute text-based question required students to select and clearly identify one work of art created after 1960 C.E that addresses the relationship between technology and how people experience the world. Students then needed to relate the chosen work to two brief quotations by video artist Nam June Paik. To answer the question successfully, students were required to think critically about Paik’s words and how they relate to contemporary art. The intent of this question was to prompt students to analyze how statements made by an artist are visually expressed in work created during the same period.

***How well did students perform on this question?***

Students found this question moderately difficult. The mean score was 1.56 out of a possible 4 points. The range of works from which students could select their examples was extensive, including video, photography, and installation, as well as work in any other medium.

***What were common student errors or omissions?***

In these text-based questions, students must make specific reference both to the text and to the work of art. Weaker responses did not do this, often omitting any reference to the words of Nam June Paik. The highest score a response could earn if it did not address both text and image was 2 points out a possible 4 points. That said, many students engaged with this question and addressed it with very thoughtful analysis. Selecting a work that was created after 1960 C.E. was crucial to this analysis. Students who chose earlier works—for example, by Italian Futurists or Russian Constructivists—could only earn a score of 1 point at best on this question. Students also wrote stronger responses when addressing works that appear to have been taught in class because then they could analyze the example rather than relying on mere conjecture or self-reflection (as they did, for example, in responses concerning how they personally use Facebook). The strongest responses specifically analyzed how the artist they chose used the work to address people’s relationship to technology, as opposed to responses that simply discussed how the artist used technology in the creation of the work. Student responses indicate that contemporary work is getting



more coverage in the classroom, and that students are engaging with those works, which is encouraging.

***Based on your experience of student responses at the AP<sup>®</sup> Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?***

Teachers should give their students practice with text-based questions in the classroom and as take-home exercises. Various sourcebooks of quotations exist, and teachers can draw sample quotations from those books and relate them to images that appear in the students' survey texts. Teachers should also encourage students not simply to write everything they know about an artist, but to use this exercise to hone their skills of observation and analysis, relating a specific quotation to a specific work. Study exercises that would help students identify good choices for a variety of hypothetical essay topics would be valuable, as would exercises in planning out responses before beginning to write. It also helps to remind students to use quotation marks in citing the artist's words so that the relationship between the quotation and their examples is clear. Again, as with the longer questions, choosing an appropriate example to answer this question was key to writing a successful response.