

AP English Literature and Composition: Study Guide



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Key Exam Details

While there is some degree of latitude for how your specific exam will be arranged, every AP English Literature and Composition exam will include three sections:

- Short Fiction (45–50% of the total)
- Poetry (35–45% of the total)
- Long Fiction or Drama (15–20% of the total)

The AP examination will take 3 hours: 1 hour for the multiple-choice section and 2 hours for the free response section, divided into three 40-minute sections. There are 55 multiple choice questions, which will count for 45% of your grade. The Free Response writing component, which will count for 55% of your grade, will require you to write essays on poetry, prose fiction, and literary argument. The Free Response (or “Essay” component) will take 2 hours, divided into the three sections of 40 minutes per section.

The course skills tested on your exam will require an assessment and explanation of the following:

- The function of character: 15–20 % of the questions
- The psychological condition of the narrator or speaker: 20–25%
- The design of the plot or narrative structure: 15–20%
- The employment of a distinctive language, as it affects imagery, symbols, and other linguistic signatures: 10–15%
- And encompassing all of these skills, an ability to draw a comparison between works, authors and genres: 10–15 %

The free response portion of the exam will test all these skills, while asking for a thesis statement supported by an argument that is substantiated by evidence and a logical arrangement of the salient points. This section tests an ability to think critically, construct a solid argument, see many sides of an issue and, of course, write clearly, correctly, and with a consistent focus on the subject.

Selecting a subject for each essay is crucial. Only those works you are thoroughly familiar with, and which you have a strong sense of what the author's purpose is should be the subject of the essay. Those works you particularly like and which you can express your enthusiasm for are likely to result in a positive reader response.

The Advanced Placement examination is not an easy test, but a passing grade is a realistic expectation and an achievable goal. If an engagement with literature has been important for you throughout your high school years, and if your written responses to the texts you studied have developed through practice, revision and refinement, then the prospect for enrollment in courses beyond the preliminary requirements of the university you chose to attend is within reach.

The exam, in its most basic sense, tests the capability to read alertly, analyze with insight, and write about imaginative literature with style and clarity. This corresponds to the AP course curriculum, which is designed to deepen an understanding of how writers use language to provide meaning and to evoke the pleasures of an engagement with the text.

About this Guide

The goal of this guide is not to teach you the entirety of a literature and composition course—that would be impossible. Rather, it is designed to reacquaint you with the literature you have examined and explored, and to point toward analysis methods you can use while prepping for your exam.

This guide might be seen as an outline and overview of the larger purposes of the exam, and as a roadmap through its divisions. We will walk you through a few key pieces of literature and then show you how they might be tested on the AP exam. We'll then provide detailed answer explanations so you can see the thought process that goes into answering AP questions.

Let's begin!

Introduction to English Literature

From the earliest moments of the nation state, survival literally depended on the force of arms summoned by warlords from every part of the population. The most powerful of these warriors became the heroes of the tales that recounted their feats of bravery and valor. Achilles, Beowulf, and Gilgamesh were celebrated in oral accounts that were transposed into the national epics that formed the first enduring literary efforts of these proto-nations. The familiarity of these folk tales, shaped into literature, drew the attention of leading public intellectuals like Aristotle, whose commentaries became the first versions of the literary essays, which have been inextricably linked to the works that constituted a national heritage.

The heroes of these epics would have been lost to history without the creators of their memorable stories. Aristotle emphasized the primacy of place for literature at the apex of Grecian civilization in 335 BC, when, in his *Poetics*, he composed a commentary on the most accomplished literature of his time. He was establishing a tradition that has been continued to the present—the composition of an analytical text that endeavored to explain and interpret the intentions of the author.

The Aristotelian model has been replicated by scholars throughout history, becoming a distinct genre with the formation of a middle class in Europe. Samuel Johnson continued this tradition at the end of the eighteenth century in his *Lives of the Poets*, composing essays that combined literary scholarship and biographical information. Now, when attention is diverted from books by numerous electronic devices, Zadie Smith in an essay in 2019 writes “In Defense of Fiction,” declaring, “I believe in a sentence of balance, care, rigor, and integrity,” because that “sort of sentence—against all empirical evidence to the contrary—that what I am reading is, fictionally speaking, true.”

This guide will utilize Aristotle’s conception of literary excellence to assist in the preparation for an examination that measures the ability to write with an appreciative understanding—as Aristotle did—of the literature of any era. Although the AP exam is not limited in scope, it will include a higher number of twentieth century and contemporary texts than those published prior to the twentieth century, and while focusing on works written in the English language, will include translations of works recognized as masterpieces of world literature.

The specific focus of the *Poetics* are the dramatic presentations that were at the core of Grecian culture: the plays of Euripides, Sophocles, Aristophanes, and Aeschylus. Aristotle’s instructional “text” was designed to establish some basic terminology to encourage an appreciative engagement with literature. He identified some of the key elements of the *poetic* as plot, character, diction, thought, and song—terms that have a complementary equivalent in contemporary literary language.

For **plot**, we might now also say *narrative* or *story*; **character** will stand sufficient unto itself—a central concept; **diction** is the power of *language*—words and how they work; **thought** conveys the necessity for a moral or ethical position, linked with **theme**, which could be understood as the central concern or main focus of the work; **song** (from *melos*, as melody) encompasses the full range of aurality affecting the mood or tone of a work, as pertinent now as it was when oral exchange was the primary mode of transmission prior to the invention of a printing device with moveable type.

The continuing relevance of the Aristotelian conception of literature is apparent in Charles Johnson’s response to an interviewer’s inquiry about the factors that “move you most in a work of literature.” Johnson, the author of *Middle Passage* (1990), a novel imagining the transportation of Africans into slavery on the American Continent, replied:

“I want a story original in its theme, with logically plotted sequences, characters we experience as real people with real problems, sensuous description or a complete imaginative world to which a reader can respond, a strong narrative voice, brutal emotional honesty, poetry or musically in the prose, and a spirited engagement with ideas that matter.”

The frequent introduction of illuminating observations like Johnson’s inform the coverage of the topics and subtopics that make up the AP curriculum.

This guide has been designed to assist you in your preparation for the exam by reconnecting you with how to read and respond to literature. It will enable you to renew and enhance your grasp of the material as a student, reader, writer, and scholar while you continue to deepen your connections to the works that comprise the AP curriculum. Through insertion of observations like Johnson’s, we will illustrate the ways in which literature has been discussed by writers and critics who have composed essays to reflect their insights about the works that mattered to them.

As the American poet William Carlos Williams insisted in his poem “Asphodel, That Greeny Flower:”

It is difficult
to get the news from poems
yet men die miserably everyday
for lack
of what is found there.

And while Williams’s caution registers the depth of his heartfelt commitment to his craft, an equally intense and more specifically detailed brief for poetry is Haki Madhubuti’s:

“Poetry is the well-spring of tradition, the leading connector to yesterdays and the free passport to futures. Poems bind people to language, link generations to each other and introduce cultures to cultures. Poetry, if given the eye and ear, can bring memories, issue in laughter, reign in beauty, and cure ignorance.”

A succinct summary of the claims for poetry—and ultimately, for literature itself—resonates in Dylan Thomas’s concluding strophe in “Poem in October:

O may my heart’s truth
Still be song
On this high hill in a year’s turning.

Understanding and Using the Language of the Discipline

Every discipline or field of inquiry has its own discourse, an accumulation of terms that reveal the origins of its formation and the special slang employed in conversation and in critical considerations. For instance, the word **strophe** is not part of most people’s vocabulary; it exists as evidence of the influence of Aristotle’s critical commentaries, also evident in the Greek roots of **onomatopoeia** or **hyperbole**. The Latinate roots of **hexameter** or **exegesis** illustrate the ways in which Greek origins were altered by the scholars of Medieval Europe as they contributed to a conversation about literature. In addition to the fascination inherent in some basic knowledge of the roots of language, familiarity with fundamental terminology will encourage a kind of comfort with the vocabulary utilized in writing an essay as a form of Literary Argument.

Here is a collection of just some of the terms you should familiarize yourself with for the AP exam:

Allegory: 1 dual-track narration, juxtaposing realistic details with a sequence of more abstract elements, which inform and enlarge the focus of the story. A basic motif is the road or river of life, as in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s “Celestial Railroad” or John Cheever’s Lucinda River in “The Swimmer.”

Alliteration: the repetition of a strong accent on the first syllable of a word, which can produce a rhythmic surge which propels a poem, as in this line from Dylan Thomas’s “Fern Hill:”

And wake to the farm forever fled from the childless land.

Allusion: a reference to a person, cultural moment, place or even another work. It can create a resonating interaction between the elements of a poem.

Connotation: a meaning beyond the strict definition of a word, suggesting an overlay of additional information.

Elegy: a reflective poem in praise of a person, often suitable after the completion of an obligation, or a person's passing.

Envoi (or envoy): a brief stanza summarizing the mood or meaning of a poem; from the French "sending forth."

Epigraph: a quotation preceding the main body of a work, often designed to establish a mood or introduce an attitude toward the subject.

Foot: the unit of measurement (in terms of sound) that describes the metrical pattern of certain poems.

Genre: the type or category that a particular literary work belongs to. In the *Poetics*, Aristotle delineated a division of works by genre (poem, play) and by character type.

In medias res: beginning a work in the midst of the action. Sammy's narration in John Updike's "A & P" is an example of this technique.

Lyric: originally from "song" (*lyre*), now also suggesting a deep emotional approach to a subject by a poet.

Metaphor: the establishment of a figurative or imaginative connection of objects, subjects or implements. (See also *simile*, which directly compares unlike objects implying a similarity which expands the essence of each). As in Elvis Costello's song "The element within her," which is:

Something under her skin

That is shining out through the face of the girl

Two sapphires and a couple of rows of pearls.

Ode: a poem designed to commemorate or celebrate a person, special occasion, or extraordinary object, as John Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn."

Persona: the creation of a speaker who is not specifically the author of the work, nor necessarily one of its characters.

Prosody: an exploration of the metrical and rhythmic structures within a poem or a poetic passage in a prosaic work.

Rhetoric: an accepted definition is “The art of eloquence and persuasion.” Based on Aristotle’s divisions: *logos*, the logical content of an argument; *ethos*, the ethical character of a speaker; *pathos*, the emotional power of an oration.

Scansion: identifying and measuring the rhythmic patterns of poetic discourse. For poems with a distinct meter, this is a method for discussing the structure of the poem.

Symbol: a character, location, object—or almost anything—that has an implication that resonates beyond its immediate appearance. For instance, “the green light at the end of Daisy’s dock” in *The Great Gatsby*.

Outside Reading

While preparing for the AP examination in Literature and Composition, a volume that defines the basic terminology of critical commentary is essential. We would recommend one of the more traditional editions, M. H. Abrams’s *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, published in 1957 by Harcourt, Rinehart and Winston, and updated regularly, or *Handbook of Literary Terms: Literature, Language, Theory*, Pearson, 2013, compiled by X. J. Kennedy, Dana Gioia and Mark Bauerlein. The terms that are defined in these glossaries are a key component of the vocabulary that is fundamental for multiple-choice questions, and even reading at random through these editions can be helpful in making these terms a familiar part of a literary conversation.

Short Fiction

About 42-49% of the multiple-choice questions on your AP exam will cover analysis of Short Fiction.

Let’s talk about the origins of the short story, which will help you understand how they are formed, even today, and how to approach AP questions testing the genre.

A definition of *homo sapiens* could succinctly state: *the storytelling species*. As an account of an adventure, a description of a task accomplished, or an assertion of identity even prior to the first written records, a robust oral tradition carried the stories of early humans from as far back as the late Paleolithic.

Robert Louis Stevenson's poem "Requiem" conveys this powerful prerogative in its concluding lines:

Home is the sailor, home from the sea,
And the hunter home from the hill.

To an eager audience, stories of the sea and wild landscapes enabled the listener at home to experience the outward escapades of the explorer. In addition to the perils of the unknown, descriptions of wonders afar could expand the boundaries of the known (and unknown) regions of the planet. The separate books of *The Odyssey* were compiled by the Homer poet (or poets) from individual tales and imaginative projections, anticipating the contemporary mode of linked short stories like Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*. Samuel Taylor Coleridge caught the spirit of inquiry and curiosity with his title *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, which took its readers to "fairy-lands forlorn" far from the mundane world of most people's lives.

Among early versions of stories designed to "instruct and delight," Aesop's "Beast Fables," circa 600–560 BC, were developed to teach moral lessons. The religious parables included in *The Bible* and other doctrinal documents were constructed to also teach a moral lesson. Collections like the *Satyricon* of Petronius in the first century AD and the *Metamorphosis* of Apuleius in the second century AD included relatively brief tales interwoven in the larger structure of the narrative.

In the medieval period in Europe, the Anglo-Saxon alliterative verse form was, in effect, a poetic description of a battle as a blend of genres. Short prose tales with a focus on social and civic matters were gathered by Giovanni Boccaccio in the fourteenth century, anticipating Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, a recognizable precursor of the modern short story. The invention of moveable type, which made it feasible to produce multiple copies of a periodical, opened the field for professional writers, who begin to compose stories with the intention of reaching an emerging middle class.

One of the most powerful pleas in all of literature is Hamlet's injunction to Horatio in Act 5, Scene 2 of Shakespeare's play. Hamlet charges Horatio:

If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart
Absent thee from felicity awhile,
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain,
To tell my story.

This is not only an expression of a fundamental human impulse, but also an acknowledgement of the burden that writers bear as they bring all of the components of their craft and art to an account of an individual's life, with all of its unique and universal elements.

The First Nations Canadian singer/songwriter Robbie Robertson has a chorus in his anthem “Making a Noise in This Land” which asserts the crucial importance of a story:

Everybody has a story,
Everybody has a song;
That’s how we know who we are,
That’s how we know we belong.

Robertson is reaffirming one of the fundamental precepts of the human condition—the necessity to record and express experience via personal narrative, another strand in the tapestry of the universal human story. One of the most plaintive comments about the absence of a recognizable narrative has been the lament that “my story” does not appear in any of the books we were required to read. Whether it might be allegiance to a family, community, team, tribe, combat unit, religion, or an expression of individual identity, the narrative that connects and affirms is and has been an instrumental necessity throughout human history.

As Leslie Marmon Silko stated:

“Stories are always binging us together, keeping us whole together, keeping this family together, keeping this clan together...In the storytelling, then, we see this process of bringing people together, and it works not only on the family level, but also on the level of the individual.”

As James E. Miller, Jr., and Bernice Slotte stated in their influential anthology *The Dimensions of the Short Story: A Critical Anthology* (1964), “The modern short story began long before we recognized it,” referring to accounts of hunting expeditions beyond a settlement, or perilous adventures in a harsh environment. Ann Charters, in her wide-ranging anthology *The Story and Its Writers* (7th edition, 2007), comments, “People have told stories to each other since before the dawn of history.”

The kind of story that most resembles the contemporary conception can be traced to Edgar Allan Poe’s compositions for the magazines in the early decades of the nineteenth century. The market for Poe’s work, and for the work of Washington Irving and Nathaniel Hawthorne, was partly the desire for a story about a New World that did not have a recorded history; but it was these writers’ unique individual voices and psychological perspectives that were the main attraction. Poe’s and Hawthorne’s stories drew an expanding readership, which led to the founding of more magazines designed for the “common reader”; these foremost practitioners of the genre offered some observations about the new form. Like any pioneer, they wanted to map the dimensions of their discoveries, a validation and an explanation of their explorations in the realm of fiction.

Poe said in 1842 that the most important aspect of a “prose tale” was its “unity of effect,” which he also called “unity of impression.” He was trying to measure magnitude, with the novel

as an index, and suggested that this “short prose narrative” required “from a half-hour to one or two hours for its perusal.” Poe was arguing for a different kind of reading experience, anticipating Henry James’s idea (in 1909) that to “get it right” he would have to “keep accretions compressed.” Ever practical, James observed in 1891 that “in pursuance of my plan of writing some very short tales...” he would aim for something within the range of 7,000-10,000 words.

William Faulkner, who had a far too subtle and profound grasp of fictional form to depend on numbers, responded to a question about “exactitude” by drawing some comparisons between literary genres: “In a short story, that’s next to a poem, almost every word has got to be almost exactly right. In the novel you can be careless, but in the short story, you can’t...it’s because it demands a nearer absolute exactitude.”

For Faulkner, that meant an “exactitude” in all of the elements of short fiction that Miller and Slotkin refer to under the heading “Some Individual Measurements”:

- Point of View
- Character
- Setting or Location
- Form or Structure
- Atmosphere or Mood
- Language or Voice
- Theme or Purpose

If these terms look familiar, they should—they are just as applicable for long fiction. But what distinguishes short fiction is the intensity generated by locating the entire story within the ongoing immediate present tense narrative of the protagonist, or, if from the perspective of an omniscient author, a single event that encompasses and epitomizes the life of the characters. While each of these “measurements” may be discussed as individual entities, they cannot be completely separated in terms of the ways that they are intermingled in a story.

For an omniscient or third person narrative point of view, there may be some distance between the perspective of a character and that of the author, as in the time tested “Once upon a time, there was a ...” In a short story where the present is projected by the voice of the protagonist, character and point of view are often intertwined. For example, we see this in John Updike’s “A & P,” in Raymond Carver’s “Cathedral,” and here in Toni Cade Bambara’s “The Lesson.”

Character as Point of View

Flannery O’Connor has commented that “In most good stories, it is the character’s personality that creates the action of the story.” Let’s now consider Bambara’s “The Lesson.” Bambara’s

story is about a trip from Harlem to midtown Manhattan to visit the F. A. O. Schwartz toy store. The actual distance is about three miles, but the psychological distance is equivalent to the vast space between two edges of a galaxy. Sylvia, the protagonist, is a young African-American girl in late adolescence, street-smart and very self-confident. Her attitude toward the expedition is apparent from the first sentence:

Back in the days when everyone was old and stupid or young and foolish and me and Sugar were the only one just right, this lady moved on our block with nappy hair and proper speech and no makeup.

A community activist has planned the trip to bring Sylvia and several of her friends from their neighborhood to a totally different environment. As Sylvia describes Miss Moore, “The only woman on the block with no first name. And she was black as hell, cept for her feet, which were fish-white and spooky,” the journey of self-discovery has been located so completely within Sylvia’s psychological perspective that her reactions are the determinants of the purpose and results of Miss Moore’s goals for young people in need of instruction about the world they inhabit.

Many memorable works of fiction will have at least one character who is so striking that the character’s name becomes another reference point, i.e., “The Lesson” could be called “Sylvia’s story.” The theme of the story will be inextricably tied to the character, whose actions and psychological foundations will reveal the author’s purpose in the story’s creation.

When you read passages on the AP exam, understanding the author’s attitude toward the character will help you grasp the story’s themes. Lee Smith’s response to an interviewer’s query about her relationship to the characters—“The are all me at various ages and stages of my life...all the characters are always you and not you”—indicates the intricate relationship between author and character, which is illuminated by the point of view that the author choses for the narration.

Atmosphere as Setting

Let’s return to Bambara’s story to discuss the role of atmosphere in short stories.

Home ground for Sylvia is a block that families from the rural South migrated to seeking economic opportunity, an inner-city setting where life is affected by “...the winos who cluttered up our parks and pissed on our handball walls and stank up our hallways and stairs so you couldn’t play hide-and-seek without a gas mask.” The tone of Sylvia’s description conveys the psychological mood that she maintains as a mental shield. As Sylvia’s self-confidence is undermined by the confrontation with a different environment, the way she hesitates when entering the store reveals the change in her psychic foundation:

“...but when we get there I kinda hang back. Not that I’m scared, what’s there to be afraid of, just a toy store. But I feel funny, shame. But what I got to be shamed about? Got as much right to go in as anybody. But somehow I can’t seem to get hold of the door.”

When approaching Atmosphere and Setting questions on your AP exam, make note of the location and how it speaks to the greater theme of a story. A familiar term in discussions of a work of literature is “the spirit of place.” The description of a location may correspond to the psychological mood of a character, and the meteorological information of a scene may be a parallel to the emotional condition of a character. In John Cheever’s story “The Swimmer,” the seasonal transition from Summer to Winter is a metaphorical equivalent for the stages of life that the protagonist is experiencing.

Language as Theme

Once again, let’s return to Bambara to explore Language and Theme questions.

As the narrative continues, the increasingly reflective tone of Sylvia’s previously brash pronouncements indicates the ways in which she is assimilating and internalizing Miss Moore’s lessons. After the return to Harlem at the story’s conclusion, Sylvia understands that she has been deeply affected. The lesson that Miss Moore planned has an economic component, but the deeper lesson is about self-awareness and the necessity for going beyond familiar tactics when immersed in the unfamiliar: “And somethin weird is going on,” Sylvia says, “I can feel it in my chest.” Her speech which has been a mix of slang, inventive syntax and conventional grammar suited to the mood of the moment, reveals her determination as she assesses herself at the story’s conclusion with a conscious employment of a triple-negative for extra emphasis: “But ain’t nobody gonna beat me at nuthin.”

Her language is her reality, and Sylvia is an embodiment of Bambara’s declaration of her goals as a writer: “The natural response to stress and crisis is not breakdown and capitulation, but transformation and renewal.

When approaching Language and Theme questions on your AP exam, understand that the style of a character’s is a primary method of character development. Both the consistency and authenticity of the character’s distinctive vocal patterns are crucial for the success of the story. By identifying prominent features of a character’s particular language, a tangible, even visceral sense of the character can be projected.

Raymond Carver described his path toward short fiction in an essay “On Writing” in 1981 by commenting that “Back in the mid-1960s, I found I was having trouble concentrating my attention on long narrative fiction...I no longer had the patience to try to write novels.” He quotes the British writer V. S. Pritchett’s definition of a short story: “Something glimpsed from

the corner of the eye, in passing” For Carver, the glimpse was a concentration of attention, a kind of sustained intensity maintained throughout the story. This might be the single most significant feature central to an understanding of the genre.

Multiple-Choice Questions—Short Fiction

For the multiple-choice section, there is no penalty for an incorrect answer, so fill in every bubble. An educated guess is always a good method, and a “shot in the dark” will suffice for those questions for which you might have no real inclination toward any of the choices.

Let’s take a look at a sample Short Fiction question set that look like one you will see on test day.

Use the following to answer questions that follow

*Excerpt from **Bartleby the Scrivener**, By Herman Melville*

(1) It was on the third day, I think, of his being with me, and before any necessity had arisen for having his own writing examined, that, being much hurried to complete a small affair I had in hand, I abruptly called to Bartleby. In my haste and natural expectancy of instant compliance, I sat with my head bent over the original on my desk, and my right hand sideways, and **(5)** somewhat nervously extended with the copy, so that immediately upon emerging from his retreat, Bartleby might snatch it and proceed to business without the least delay.

In this very attitude did I sit when I called to him, rapidly stating what it was I wanted him to do—namely, to examine a small paper with me. Imagine my surprise, nay, my consternation, when without moving from his privacy, Bartleby in a singularly mild, firm voice, replied, “I **(10)** would prefer not to.”

I sat awhile in perfect silence, rallying my stunned faculties. Immediately it occurred to me that my ears had deceived me, or Bartleby had entirely misunderstood my meaning. I repeated my request in the clearest tone I could assume. But in quite as clear a one came the previous reply,

"I would prefer not to." "Prefer not to," echoed I, rising in high excitement, and crossing the (15) room with a stride. "What do you mean? Are you moon-struck? I want you to help me compare this sheet here—take it," and I thrust it towards him.

"I would prefer not to," said he.

I looked at him steadfastly. His face was leanly composed; his gray eye dimly calm. Not a wrinkle of agitation rippled him. Had there been the least uneasiness, anger, impatience or (20) impertinence in his manner; in other words, had there been any thing ordinarily human about him, doubtless I should have violently dismissed him from the premises. But as it was, I should have as soon thought of turning my pale plaster-of-paris bust of Cicero out of doors. I stood gazing at him awhile, as he went on with his own writing, and then reseated myself at my desk. This is very strange, thought I. What had one best do? But my business hurried me. I (25) concluded to forget the matter for the present, reserving it for my future leisure. So calling Nippers from the other room, the paper was speedily examined.

A few days after this, Bartleby concluded four lengthy documents, being quadruplicates of a week's testimony taken before me in my High Court of Chancery. It became necessary to examine them. It was an important suit, and great accuracy was imperative. Having all things (30) arranged I called Turkey, Nippers and Ginger Nut from the next room, meaning to place the four copies in the hands of my four clerks, while I should read from the original. Accordingly Turkey, Nippers and Ginger Nut had taken their seats in a row, each with his document in hand, when I called to Bartleby to join this interesting group.

"Bartleby! quick, I am waiting."

(35) I heard a slow scrape of his chair legs on the uncarpeted floor, and soon he appeared standing at the entrance of his hermitage.

"What is wanted?" said he mildly.

"The copies, the copies," said I hurriedly. "We are going to examine them. There"—and I held towards him the fourth quadruplicate.

(40) "I would prefer not to," he said, and gently disappeared behind the screen.

For a few moments I was turned into a pillar of salt, standing at the head of my seated column of clerks. Recovering myself, I advanced towards the screen, and demanded the reason for such extraordinary conduct.

"Why do you refuse?"

(45) "I would prefer not to."

With any other man I should have flown outright into a dreadful passion, scorned all further words, and thrust him ignominiously from my presence. But there was something about Bartleby that not only strangely disarmed me, but in a wonderful manner touched and disconcerted me.

From the line "I would prefer not to," one can infer which of the following about Bartleby's philosophical ideas?

- A. Bartleby believes in military revolution.
- B. Bartleby believes in passive resistance.
- C. Bartleby believes in complete conformity.
- D. Bartleby believes existence is futile.
- E. Bartleby believes it is impossible to enact change.

The correct answer is B. By saying "I would prefer not to," Bartleby is making a stand, refusing to do something he does not want to do without resorting to violence—he is not willing to conform. This defines passive resistance. Military revolution indicates bringing about change by violent military action; Bartleby may be trying to bring about a change, but he is not doing so by militaristic or violent means. If he truly believed it is impossible to enact change, he would simply continue doing his job as he always did in the past.

In lines 18–19, the narrator says "Not a wrinkle of agitation rippled him," which draws attention to Bartleby's

- A. extreme exhaustion.
- B. supreme intelligence.
- C. insubordinate tendencies.
- D. agitated demeanor.
- E. complete composure.

The correct answer is E. When the narrator says that "Not a wrinkle of agitation rippled" Bartleby, he means that Bartleby was composed and in control of his emotions. That Bartleby was not agitated does not necessarily mean that he was exhausted, and while he may be

supremely intelligent, have insubordinate tendencies, this is certainly not indicated by these lines.

It can be inferred that the three people (Turkey, Nippers, and Ginger Nut) mentioned in line 30 were

- A. fascinated with Bartleby's curious personality.
- B. angered by Bartleby's refusal to do his work.
- C. as stubborn as Bartleby.
- D. more obedient than Bartleby.
- E. too easily distracted to do their jobs.

The correct answer is D. When the narrator calls Turkey, Nippers, and Ginger Nut into his office, they all follow his request obediently, which is the opposite of what Bartleby does.

By commenting in line 11 that he "sat awhile in perfect silence, rallying my stunned faculties," the narrator emphasizes that

- A. nonconformity is completely foreign to him.
- B. silence can be just as expressive as speech.
- C. refusing to perform one's job is the deepest insult.
- D. anger can affect a person on a physical level.
- E. mundane tasks are unworthy of acknowledgment.

The correct answer is A. When Bartley refuses to conform to the narrator's wishes, the narrator overreacts, "stunned" by Bartleby's statement, "I would prefer not to." That the narrator reacts so adversely to such a polite statement indicates that the slightest act of nonconformity is completely foreign to him.

Walking Through a Free Response Essay—Literary Argument

Let's now look at how you might discuss a short story when faced with your Literary Argument free response question. This question will provide you with a list of works to choose from in response to a given prompt.

Many works of literature feature a family that has some fundamental disagreements about the things that constitute their most basic beliefs and convictions. Select a story that introduces a family that has to come to terms with internal conflicts and the possibilities for resolution. In a well-organized and intelligently argued essay, using evidence to support insights, compose an analysis that shows how the dynamics of the family contribute to an interpretation of the work as a whole.

A typical prompt for the Free Response essay might be something like this:

Let's choose Alice Walker's short story *Everyday Use* (1973) for our consideration.

The core components of the Free Response essay should cover what the College Board calls literature's Big Ideas:

- Character
- Setting
- Structure
- Narration
- Figurative Language
- Literary Argument

We will explore these items in specific detail in the later section on Long Fiction. For an essay focused on Literary Argument, the emphasis should be on the use of evidence to illustrate and support insights. Knowing and referring to these Big Ideas will give your essay purpose and direction.

If using *Everyday Use* as the topic of a free response essay, we first would gather our thoughts about the work and reiterate themes that work well with the given prompt.

Alice Walker dedicates *Everyday Use* "For your grandmama," a sentiment that expresses her determination to rescue black women from the historical oblivion to which they have been relegated and her desire to celebrate the strength that enabled African-American families to

struggle and survive the long history of enslavement and subjugation. Consequently, she introduces three characters who are exemplars of generational change through the era of the Civil Rights movement and the emergence of Black Power and Black Pride in the 1960s.

The narrative consciousness of the story is Mrs. Johnson, born in the rural deep south around 1920, a single mother who has raised two daughters, Maggie and Dee, through the strength of her body and spirit and the assistance of the community and the congregation that helped her raise the money to send Dee to school in Augusta. Mrs. Johnson's narration shifts between omniscience and self-consciousness, beginning as reflection and then morphing into an ongoing immediate present-tense pattern.

The central focus of the story is what constitutes heritage—how to honor it, understand it, appreciate it and keep it relevant. Mrs. Johnson is the arbiter and conservator of the family's historical record, and her daughters Maggie and Dee will be its reanimators and preservers into the future. The story is character controlled and character driven, and Maggie and Dee are understood through Mrs. Johnson's vision. A Literary Argument based on the story would explore the ways in which Walker wants the reader to agree or disagree with Mrs. Johnson's choices about who should have the family heirlooms.

The two daughters represent diametrically opposite versions of black life. Maggie is shy, modest and uncomfortable in social situations beyond the familiar. She has been scarred by a fire, and the marks are like emblems of her uncertainty. Dee, always striving, ambitious, stylish and determined to rise above the limits of her home ground, has returned with a man who may be her spouse, and an attitude toward the family that is a mix of condescension, dismissal and a patronizing kind of beneficence. In the opening paragraphs, Walker "compresses time...without losing richness of concrete detail" as she "sets up her characters and traits with an extended exposition passage before the main action starts." This is the structural framework that anchors the action in the place that is central to the family's history which unfolds as Dee arrives for a reunion that includes a request for some objects that have been in Mrs. Johnson's home for generations.

Following her grand entrance, Dee and Mrs. Johnson's conversation is like a continuance of their previous dialogues. Dee introduces herself as "Wangero," her male friend as Hakim. She has taken a name that expresses her alliance with the African continent, as Hakim has chosen a doctrine that has its origins in a Koranic context. Her sense of her identity reflects the fascination for a Pan-African culture that was inherent in the energizing ideology of the sixties.

Mrs. Johnson's interrogative conversation with Dee (Wangero) leads to a revealing recital of a naming chain that reaches back to pre-Civil War times, a catalogue of generations that demonstrates a strategy for survival built on the historical record that forms the foundation of a legacy. An analysis of the dialogue—a version of a Call and Response central to the African-American oral tradition—reveals the attitudes of Mrs. Johnson and her daughter, and can function as a fulcrum for the opposing views that the two main characters express.

So now that we've done our initial analysis, let's talk about how to transfer this into a top-scoring essay you can write in the allotted time.

Alice Walker's story offers many possibilities for an essay. One specific approach might develop a thesis from Walker's exploration of what Adrienne Rich called "the will to change." This powerful force in human affairs can be seen as an opportunity or a threat, depending on the ways in which people regard their heritage. The three main characters in the story would be explored with respect to their actions and convictions, the setting and history of the family providing a cultural context, and as a conclusion, Walker's perspective beyond the individual characters as an assessment of the ways in which trends in African-American life were changing the nation in mid-twentieth century America.

Long Fiction and Drama

Around 15–18% of the questions on your exam will ask you to analyze and answer questions about excerpts from long fiction or dramatic works.

Long Fiction

While the folk tale is as ancient as time, the organization of folk tales into longer narratives formed the basic structure of *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad*, assembled by the "Homer poet" from a conflation of oral sources. Linking separate stories about the adventures of an epic hero created a kind of "franchise" that permitted the protagonist to become a part of a nation's collective memory. Prior to the invention of moveable type, these stories were a part of the oral tradition, but as the production of books became cheaper and the rate of literacy rose, a reading public from a growing middle class emerged.

With time to read and a curiosity about their social cohort, notable early versions of the novel were published in Europe in the eighteenth century. Jonathan Swift (*Gulliver's Travels*), Henry Fielding (*Tom Jones*), and Samuel Richardson (*Clarissa*) used an exchange of letters (**epistles**—thus the epistolary novel) as an ordering device. Books of considerable heft, which suggested stability and density, were a reflection of a society that saw itself as substantial and varied.

Depending on publishing practices, *Gulliver's Travels* is about 350 pages, *Tom Jones* has more than 950, and *Clarissa* has 1,500. By the middle of the next century, Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (1869) was 1,250 pages, Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880) 850 pages, and by the twentieth century, Marcel Proust's *A Remembrance of Lost Time* (1913) exceeded 4,000 pages. *Karamazov* was published serially, as were some of Charles Dickens's novels, and Proust's was divided into seven separate volumes. In the United States, *Moby Dick* (1851) was 550 pages, although *Huckleberry Finn* (1880) only 350, and *The Great Gatsby* in

1925, 115 in the original edition. Perhaps a newer nation had not yet accumulated the lengthy historical experience to justify the lengthy exposition of the European masterpiece.

Anthony Burgess, in his illuminating study of James Joyce (*ReJoyce*, 1965), begins his commentary on *Ulysses* (1922), 933 pages in the 1960 Bodley Head edition, with a fundamental question, “Why did Joyce write the book at all?” with the answer, “It’s bigness is one answer,” and then with characteristic bravado, explains:

Every novelist wishes to prove to himself and to others that he can tackle a large canvas. The great novels of the past—Don Quixote, Tom Jones, War and Peace, for example—have all been very long, and it is only in great length that novelists can fulfill their blasphemous urge to rival God. To create a few human beings in a segmentary context of life is well enough for the minor artist, but the major writer wants a whole cosmos and the whole of mankind. He cannot really have it all...but he can at least create a big human community which is a sort of reduced image of the cosmos.

Burgess acknowledges that even the most massive books with “epic length” are not sociological documents with “no human detail” left out. The solution is to make the crucial details resonate beyond their moment in the narrative. The technique, pioneered by Joyce and Virginia Woolf, was to develop an interior monologue, a “stream of consciousness,” that revealed the processes of cognition as the characters encountered “all the data thrown at them by life.”

With sufficient space for an inclusive depiction of several locations, a narrative structure that organizes events into a coherent pattern, and an overview of an historical epoch that shows how the sweep of time affects human affairs, the novel can provide the larger canvas that approximates the “reduced image of the cosmos.” At the center of the narrative is a protagonist, whose complicated psychological foundation has been developed through a series of events that reveal the range of emotions that mark the most memorable characters in literature.

The great tragic dramas that inspired Aristotle were also attempts to create a “whole cosmos,” and the challenges that playwrights from the Greeks to contemporary times have assumed, and then rendered successfully, demonstrate how the dramatic arts can, in the duration of a play like *Hamlet’s* four hour running time, give the audience “the whole of mankind.”

Writing the Free Response Essay—Long Fiction

This essay will be *written*, and if your experience with “Writing” is primarily a keyboard exercise, it would be a good idea to be accustomed to using a pen, and to write with an attention to penmanship so that the score is not influenced by a reader’s displeasure with the appearance of the page.

The basic prompt for the essay will state, with the sections in italics varying according to the question:

In a well-written essay, analyze how *author* uses literary elements and techniques to *convey/portray/develop* a *thematic/topical/structural* aspect of the passage that is complex and specific to the passage provided. The excerpt from the work will be 500-700 words.

As we previously discussed, the core components of the Free Response essay are what have been labeled Big Ideas:

- Character
- Setting
- Structure
- Narration
- Figurative Language
- Literary Argument

Not all of the Big Ideas may be equally applicable, depending on the passage selected and your familiarity with the author and the work. We will go over some of the ways Toni Morrison’s novel *Song of Solomon*, published in 1977, could be approached in terms of each of the Big Ideas.

Character

Let’s first explore the concept of character by looking at *Song of Solomon*

There is a long, disturbing history of the distortion of the names of African Americans, a dismal trend resisted and reversed by black artist and activists like Muhammed Ali (né Cassius Clay), Malcolm X (né Malcolm Little) and Amiri Baraka (né LeRoi Jones). Toni Morrison, born Chloe

Wofford, places the grotesque name of one of the novel's protagonists, Macon Dead III, known as "Milkman," at the center of a matrix of revealing appellations.

As Morrison recalls, "I never knew the names of my father's friends. Still don't. They used other names." For Morrison, the names of her characters reveal something essential about their identities. Milkman, bizarrely misnamed in a post-civil incident of casual racist dismissal, is spiritually dead, and according to Morrison, "had to learn the meaning of his own name and the names of things." Milkman's soul brother is Guitar ("Guitar is *my* name. Baines is the slave-master name.") Baines, "the golden-eyed boy," has a "nice wildness" and is "fearless and comfortable with his fearlessness" in contrast to black men whose names have been determined by an outside agency. Milkman's aunt Pilate, who directs, supports, and energizes Milkman's vision quest, is a protean figure of archetypal proportions whose name is both a play on a "pilot" and a biblical reference.

Morrison said that she used biblical names to show the impact of the Bible on the lives of black people: "their awe and respect for it couples with their ability to distort it for their own purposes." Ruth, First Corinthians, Magdalena, and Hagar demonstrate the effects of cultural restraints on women, "displayed then splayed." As they gather strength through the novel, their transformations represent the futility of vanity and the limits of the "lock-step" life.

The significance of the selection of Biblical names is epitomized by Pilate, a name with an accretion of so much historical freight that it cannot be reduced to a single meaning in the context of its occurrence. Pilate has the power to elevate the "ordinary" to the "extraordinary," and her name carries connotations of salvation and redemption, which is what she offers to the other women. An essay on *Song of Solomon* could concentrate on this aspect of Pilate's life.

Setting

Next we'll move to the role of setting and its influence on and placement within a story.

The course of Milkman's travels is from the city—his father's territory—and toward a small community located in a rural semi-wilderness. As he enters it and becomes more comfortable with the natural world, he has moved back in time to an isolated and uncorrupted society which nourishes individual achievement in the context of a collective caring and concern.

The literal geography of the journey is based on Morrison's own experiences in rural Ohio and the shores of the Great Lakes. The female-centered "pariah community" she describes exists as an extension of the unspoiled world of nature. Practical with a purpose, Pilate selects a profession (bootlegging) that allows her the greatest amount of freedom with the fewest economic restraints, and it permits her to thrive without a dependence on indoor plumbing, electricity, or the accoutrements of wealth. Milkman's journey is rooted in the geophysical details of the terrain, which correspond to the fundamental features of his psychic cartography. As Morrison describes it, he "has to walk into the earth—in the womb—in that cave," and then

through the other elements of the ancient world: water, air and fire. Guitar Baines is a man of the city, which means that he is accustomed to its “mean streets” and hard choices, but at the conclusion of the novel, he is able to join Milkman and take flight into psychic freedom.

Setting is an anchor in a novel with the magnitude of *Song of Solomon* since “the meaning must be played out over a passage of time,” and the richness of the material can create at least an initial confusion for the reader. Therefore, by emphasizing the contrast between the nourishing features of the natural world and the destructive tendencies of the urban environment, the argument of the essay can be substantiated.

Structure

Let’s now look at how an author uses structure to give meaning to a story

Structure means a pattern of organization, and the title of the novel, the elusive and mysterious “Song of Solomon,” heard in tantalizing fragments, is the fundamental structuring device for the novel. A search for the song’s meanings guides and controls the searches for identity that inspire the character’s journeys. As the words of the song are gradually uncovered, the places where they have been discovered become markers on the map of the quest that the characters are undergoing. The grid of connecting lines between locations is like a map drawn on the tracks that the narrative is forging, paths toward a destination. The route that is described runs from the southern rim of the Great Lakes southward along the Blue Ridge into Virginia as Milkman is getting closer to his point of origin. By tracing Milkman’s journey back to his actual birthplace, Morrison shows how he is ready to be reborn as the man he could still become.

The full scope of the novel requires patterns that recur so that the reader can recognize by repetition important elements that contribute to the novel’s themes or central concerns. The titular “song” is both literal and emblematic in that the search for its meaning corresponds to the ongoing revelations about the lives of the characters. By noting and discussing some of the features of the “song,” the ways Morrison places these moments in the narration will show how structure gives the novel an inner coherence through links and connections of separate items.

Narration

The novel’s narration is composed as a multi-track linear progression, with some significant reversals to recapitulate events from the past. There is an overlapping or blending of *structure* and *narration* as separate narrative tracks follow the journeys of Milkman, his father Macon Dead II, Guitar and Pilate, with some side tracks including Corry and Henry Porter. The tracks overlap and intermix, but each one has its distinctive stylistics, primarily the manner of speaking of the character at the center of the track.

Morrison's narrative perspective is a classic omniscience, an ongoing present unfolding through the book, drawing closer and even into the consciousness of the main characters at moments of particular intensity. The linguistic styles of each character anchor the narrative through a process of the growth of the character's perceptual awareness.

By selecting several examples of the ways the author's point-of-view shifts towards and away from a particular character, Morrison's methods for showing the character's reactions to the phenomena they encounter will demonstrate the effectiveness of Morrison's interweaving of the separate narrative threads.

Figurative Language

Finally, let's take a look at figurative language, and how one author uses it to inform.

Morrison has stressed the importance of reclaiming the history of black people in the United States, and a crucial part of this history is contained in the authenticity of the language which Morrison has fashioned from three sources. It draws its force from the black tradition of signifying and street rapping; its eloquence from formal, classical English, merged with echoes from Biblical verses; and its emotion from the rhythms of black music: ballads, blues, chants, and spirituals. This is the vocal range of the narrative conscious of the novel, fashioned by Morrison in the fullness of her capabilities as a writer. Within its vocal spectrum, the primary characters of the novel each have a voice that is a part of the portrayal of their personality. Morrison establishes this in the opening chapters by giving each character a recognizable linguistic pattern.

Macon Dead II's mode of speech is clinical, cold, calculating and controlling. His denial of Guitar's grandmother's request for assistance with her rent is a chilling exposition of his self-centered orientation to people and the world. It reveals how he is cut off from any cultural richness in his pursuit of monetary accumulation.

Guitar's speech is original, inventive and captivating, an expression of his awareness of the will to change. He can be the self-assured man of the city, an inquisitive explorer in an unfamiliar situation, and the searching supporter of his closest friend. Morrison has given him the tongue of the 1960s exemplar of black power and black pride. Morrison has not published any collections of poems, but Guitar has the gift of poetic speech sometimes verging on song—thus his name.

Milkman, is cautious, careful, hesitant and uncertain in spite of his privileged condition. Modest and self-effacing or aggressive and overbearing, he uses words as a shield to keep his massive inner insecurity hidden. The ways in which he develops a voice that is a genuine expression of his truest self is central to the main themes of the novel.

Pilate is Morrison's character closest to herself. "She represents some hope in all of us." Pilate's life is a kind of crusade against any kind of limitation, a challenge by example to anyone who has accepted any version of slavery. Her awareness and inner confidence have been developed through immediate, palpable contact with elemental life. Consequently, her speech is unadorned, direct, vivid and built on metaphors drawn from the natural world. In a sense, it is archaic and primitive—that is, archetypal and primary—an uncorrupted expression of a natural woman operating in an unnatural world.

The evidence that supports and illustrates these ideas about Figurative Language would be the references to specific passages in the shaping of the argument for an essay submitted as a response to a question on Literary Argument based on *Song of Solomon*. An approximation of a quote would be useful here, but unless the work is very familiar, that may be difficult to achieve, so references will have to be summative for the most part. Perhaps a few references to the emotional mood projected by an individual character in a dramatic confrontation could be employed here to illustrate Morrison's distinctive vocal inventions.

Drama

Let's now turn our attention to how dramatic writing will be presented on your AP exam. We'll walk you through one piece and the question types typically paired with a dramatic work on the test.

William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* has been a part of the world's dramatic arts experience for more than four centuries, and its power to hold an audience is renewed and revived as interpretations continue to find ways to connect with and engage theater-goers from Elizabethan London's Globe Theater to the rest of the globe. The four soliloquies that reveal the inner turmoil of Hamlet's determination to "set things right" are moments when the entire focus of the play's narrative course narrows to Hamlet's mind and heart as the stage is his alone. The intensity of the moment is emphasized by Hamlet's determination to confront the conflicting impulses that are driving his actions.

The following soliloquy from Act II, Scene 2, begins as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern leave the stage, and Hamlet declares, "Now I am alone:"

O What a rogue and peasant-slave am I
Is it not monstrous that this player here,
But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
Could force his soul so to his own conceit

That from her working all his visage wann'd,
Tears in his eyes, distraction in's aspect,
A broken voice, and his whole function suiting
With forms to his own conceit? and all for nothing!
For Hecuba!
What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba,
That he should weep for her?

Hamlet's self-description as a "rogue and peasant slave" mean that in his eyes he is

- A. a thief and a serf.
- B. an adventurer and a commoner.
- C. a rebel and an indentured servant.
- D. self-serving and ignoble.
- E. A and B.

The correct answer is D. Hamlet is berating himself throughout the soliloquy, and the terminology develops a portrait that builds upon the accumulation of linked images. "Peasant slave" is his caustic self-accusation for resorting to behavior beneath his dignity. His query in the "To be or not to be" soliloquy about whether it is "nobler in the mind" is at the core of his sense of himself. He is not a "commoner," and his rebellion must be carried out as the son of a king. He is using the term "rogue" to indicate a misdirected sense of how to properly proceed

The player he refers to is

- A. a part of his team.
- B. a courtier.
- C. an actor.
- D. a playwright.
- E. a stagehand.

The correct answer is C. Hamlet has been inspired by the “passion” of the player, and there is a double meaning in his use of this term. He is directly referring to the actor in the play (“this player here”), and is also envisioning himself as a player in the ongoing drama of his revenge for his father’s murder.

The relationship between “soul” and “his own conceit” is

- A. conviction and rhetorical contrivance.
- B. inner essence and outward expression.
- C. impulse and instinct.
- D. the ethereal and the practical.
- E. Both A and B

The correct answer is E. This is a very difficult question, since there has been considerable debate among scholars about the philosophical implications of both Shakespeare’s meaning by soul, and the employment of a term that originally meant an image and was often used in a derogatory sense. As used by John Donne and other metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century, the term was explained by Samuel Johnson as “the most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together.” Both choices A and B are plausible interpretations. “Impulse” is too shallow for soul; and “ethereal” might be acceptable, but the tone of the soliloquy is much too passionate to be classified as practical.

The soliloquy continues:

That he should weep for her? What would he do,
Had he the motive and the cue for passion
That I have? He would drown the stage with tears
And cleave the general ear with horrid speech,
Make mad the guilty and appall the free,
Confound the ignorant and awake indeed
The very faculties of eyes and ears.

As a demonstration of the power that passionate speech contains, Hamlet registers its potential effect by describing the responses of “the guilty” “the free,” and “the ignorant.” This collective audience represents

- A. the conscience-stricken, the open-minded, and the oblivious.
- B. the criminal, the noble man, and the dunce.
- C. humankind, divinity and animals
- D. swindlers, actors, and fools.
- E. teachers, intellectuals, and scientists.

The correct answer is A. All of the terms had a connotation in Elizabethan England that is comparable but not equal to its current denotations. Hamlet does not mean criminal by “the guilty,” since he is talking about a matter of conscience, not law. “Ignorant” is literally those who are unaware of the tragic dimensions of the drama, who are, in a sense “free” of moral obligations. The term “fool” is particularly important since Shakespeare uses the character of the Fool in multiple ways throughout his work, notably to suggest a kind of wisdom beyond the standard measure of insight and rational thinking.

When Hamlet uses the words “drown,” “cleave,” and “awake,” the rhetorical mode he employs is

- A. hyperbole.
- B. metaphor.
- C. symbolism.
- D. personification.
- E. synecdoche.

The correct answer is D. Hamlet is attempting to use the stage as a figure for the focus of his speech. Both symbol and metaphor are plausible choices, but a symbol is like an expansion rather than a tightening; Similarly, a metaphor implies a wider range of meaning. Hyperbole could also be applied, since Hamlet is amplifying the effect of the player's speech, but personification is the more precise choice since the setting for the speech is given human

attributes. Synecdoche is a figure of speech in which a significant part of a thing represents the entirety.

As the soliloquy continues, Hamlet both chastises himself and vilifies his uncle, the King:

Yet I,
A dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak,
Like a John-a-dreams, unpregnant of my cause,
And can say nothing, no, not for a king
Upon whose property and most dear life
A damn'd defeat was made. Am I a coward?
Who calls me villain? Breaks my pate across?
Plucks off my beard and blows it in my face?
Tweaks me by the nose? Give me the lie i' the throat,
As deep as the lungs?

The physicality of the language Shakespeare uses likens Hamlet to

- A. a sterile woman.
- B. an impotent man.
- C. an allergy-ridden person.
- D. a psycho-somatic exaggerator.
- E. a distracted dreamer.

The correct answer is E. The key phrase is which depends on “a dull and muddy-mettled rascal,” which implies a lack of alertness, sharpness, a failure to think clearly. All of the terms are wreathed in ambiguity, because Hamlet has worked himself up to an approximation of the “passion” expressed by the player. “Unpregnant” suggests that his cause is growing within him awaiting gestation; “coward” suggests a lack of strength, not uncertainty; “Allergy-ridden” does

not identify the “Who” Hamlet abstractly accuses, and Hamlet’s unease may be linked to his mental deliberations but “psycho-somatic” is a reduction and a diminution.

The mood of the soliloquy shifts as Hamlet decides on a course of action:

About, my brain! I have heard
Guilty creatures sitting at a play
Have by the very cunning of the scene
Been struck so to the soul that presently
They have proclaimed their malefactions.

Hamlet, shifting toward a moment of contemplation after the vivid outpouring of emotion, recalls from his education at the university of Wittenberg, that there is a theory that a powerful drama can strike to the core of a person’s conscience. These lines are based on the presumption that:

- A. evil can extinguish the conscience.
- B. artistic ingenuity can reveal the concealed.
- C. the soul is adorned with theatrical trappings.
- D. the guilty will rise out of their seats.
- E. proclaiming malefactions will clear the conscience.

The correct answer is B. Part of Hamlet’s core conviction about human nature is that the “conscience” is a part of what is noble about humanity. Even the worst villainy (the conspiratorial murder of Hamlet’s father) won’t entirely obliterate “the conscience.” The entire concept of “the soul” is a part of Shakespeare’s complex conception of the universe, much more than a dramaturgical device. The idea that a guilty party will rise and confess is laughable; even in his most passionate pronouncement, Hamlet knows this is unlikely. The idea that confession will somehow ease a troubled mind is like the superficial statements Polonius makes, a rote answer to a perplexing problem.

At the conclusion of the soliloquy, Hamlet declares:

The spirit that I have seen
May be the devil: and the devil hath power
To assume a pleasing shape; yea, and perhaps
Out of my weakness and my melancholy,
As he is very potent with such spirit,
Abuses me to damn me.

Hamlet's concern in these lines is that

- A. his melancholy mood will render him actionless
- B. the devil is driving his choices
- C. the devil is like an actor in costume
- D. his apparition of his father's ghost may be an evil spirit
- E. he will be damned if he is not justified in his actions.

The correct answer is E. Hamlet has been superficially described as "The melancholy Dane," a shallow reduction. Shakespeare does not use "the devil" as an actual figure, either in dramatic or literal terms. The vision of his father's ghost is purposefully kept uncertain for the audience. All of the terms are a part of the deeper mystery that plagues Hamlet, and damnation is never meant to be taken literally.

The approaches to the Free Response essay in the sections on Poetry, Short Fiction and Long Fiction will be applicable for Drama. However, unless you are quite familiar with a play, perhaps even with actual productions on film or in the theater, it would not be advisable to use a play for the essay.

Poetry

Finally, 36–45% of the questions on your exam will cover your ability to analyze poetry.

so much depends

upon

a red wheel

barrow

glazed with rain

water

beside the white

chickens

—William Carlos Williams

William Faulkner, comparing the demands of composing a short story and a poem, said that short fiction has to be tight, while poetry has to be totally locked in. This is a recognition of the fundamental nature of poetry itself—preceding print, perhaps even a prototype of a primal version of expression prior to the syntactical conventions that have shaped the storytelling impulse universal to the human race.

The sonic capabilities of human beings were manifest in the chants, growls, screams and other vocal expressions that were organized into the earliest songs/poems expressing an emotional and psychological imperative; then organized into an account of an event reported to the community or tribe. As William Carlos Williams insisted in his “The Red Wheelbarrow,” the “minute particulars” of the poem are crucial. The triple image that Williams conceives is a demonstration of the ways that poetry appeals to a visual, sensual apprehension of a tangible reality, which continues to resonate as the individual components of the poem linger and deepen due to the accumulative effects of color, shape, and texture.

It is necessary to recognize the two paths that Anglo-American poetry has followed. The earliest poems in Anglo-Saxon or Old English—the predecessors of the English language—include *Beowulf*, the originating epic of the nascent nation state that became England (superbly rendered in Nobel Laureate Seamus Heaney’s translation), and the alliterative verses that were early versions of embedded journalism recounting the combat that shaped the nation: *The Battle of Maldon* and *The Battle of Brunaberg*. These poems, available to most readers only as translations, are a part of the global voices that enlarge a reader’s sense of literary possibility, and the vital importance of the translator is another facet of the trans-national reach of literature.

However, the influence and excellence of the poetry of the British Isles was so powerful that Walt Whitman, in a very American personal manifesto, declared with characteristic bravado in a letter to Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Old forms, old poems, majestic and proper in their own lands here in this land are exiles.” Carrying along Whitman’s concerns, Carlos Williams (in the appropriately titled collection *In the American Grain*), remarked somewhat plaintively that T. S. Eliot’s poem *The Wasteland* “is a catastrophe for American letters,” an acknowledgment of its ruling majesty, as well as its implicit rejection of the kind of poem that was central to American speech. Henry David Thoreau, in accordance with his injunction to “Simplify, simplify,” argued in his journal that “Good poetry seems so simple and natural a thing that when we meet it we wonder that all men are not always poets. Poetry is nothing but healthy speech.”

Let’s explore a series of questions that could be utilized when thinking and writing about poetry. The ordering of these queries is not absolute, nor are all the items necessarily relevant. They are offered as an overview, to be applied to a poem in accord with the taste, insight and individual preference of the reader/responder.

Who Is the Speaker?

Even with a detailed understanding of the poet’s life (for instance Sylvia Plath and her relationship with her father), how much can the poem be read as an expression of the poet’s own persona? And along these lines, can we determine the speaker’s age, gender, psychological perspective, individual values, and other pertinent aspects of the *voice* alive in the moment of the poem’s existence.

Is the Speaker Addressing Anyone in Particular?

If not, then who might the intended audience consist of? When Dickinson says “There is no frigate like a book/To take us land’s away....,” her address is to anyone whose imagination could take them beyond the confines of their location.

What Is the Setting for the Poem?

This might involve time (of day or night), place (geographic or geologic constituents), meteorological phenomena and other details that depict a unique environment. Robert Frost's very-well known poem "The road not taken" begins "Two roads diverged in a yellow wood," and while the poem is purposely not specific about where the traveler might be, the "yellow wood" is sufficient to set the season, and the period in a person's life.

How Does the Title Inform the Poem?

For Dylan Thomas, the title was, in effect, the first line, as in his poem "The force that through the green fuse drives the flower, which is extended by the second line "Drives my green age." For Allen Ginsberg, the title of his landmark poem "Howl" was an outburst of constricted energy being released; for Adrienne Rich, "Diving Into the Wreck" was an overview of a social imperative now actuated in a personal and communal expression of exploration.

How Does the Tone of the Poem Express the Psychological Condition of the Speaker?

In her poem "Comparisons II: We Women, Still!" the Ghanaian poet Ama Ata Aidoo is emphatically insisting on the presence of women in every social occasion. John Updike's "Golfers" asserts his contempt for the up-scale, status-driven country-clubbing player with his first line, "We dread them," which is followed by a series of images ("Bulls with the pics of their pars still in them,") that create a devastating portrait of arrogance and vulgarity.

Robert Frost used the phrase "the sound of sense" to emphasize the unique blend of meaning and method that is the essence of the poetic process. Among the numerous technical devices available, those that depend on the intricate interplay of sounds include alliteration, consonance, assonance, onomatopoeia, and dominantly for traditional verse forms, rhyme. Even contemporary poet like Robert Creeley would sometimes employ "an unexpected end rhyme" to "lock it up, so to speak, when it can be locked up." Similarly, the familiar metrical arrangements developed through centuries have survived due to their control of sonic patterns that are crucial for emphasis and tone, especially for the popularity of songs in which the words and music are inextricably linked. The Nobel Prize awarded to Bob Dylan confirms this.

How Does the Full Range of Figurative Language

Enhance the Meaning or Purpose of a Poem?

When a poem is a projection of the styles of a cultural community that does not always embrace the so-called “standard” or conventional “rules” of grammar and syntax, how does the inventive and creative effort affect the audience?

Poetry Multiple-Choice Questions

Let’s now walk through a poem and look at the question types you might see on your AP exam.

Read the following poem carefully and choose answers to the questions that follow.

Emily Dickinson, “A narrow Fellow in the Grass,” 1865

A narrow Fellow in the Grass

Occasionally rides –

You may have met him – did you not

His notice sudden is –

The grass divides as with a Comb –

A spotted Shaft is scene –

And then it closes at our feet

And opens further on –

He likes a Boggy Acre

A floor too cool for Corn –

Yet when a Boy and Barefoot –

I more than once at Noon

Have passed I thought, a Whip lash

Unbraiding in the Sun

When stopping to secure it

It wrinkled and was gone –

Several of Nature's People

I know, and they know me –

I feel them from a transport

Of cordiality –

But never met this Fellow

Attended or alone

Without a tighter breathing

And Zero at the Bone –

Which of these terms most accurately describe the type of poem?

- A. A eulogy
- B. An elegy
- C. A parable
- D. An ode
- E. An apostrophe

The correct answer is E. In this case, a single term only approximates the form of the poem. A eulogy is a poem of praise; an elegy is a poem of remembrance; a poetic parable contains an implicit moral meaning; an ode is a longer form of praise; an apostrophe is a poem addressed to someone or something.

In the first line, the word “Fellow” is an example of

- A. symbolism.
- B. metaphor.
- C. personification.
- D. anachronism.
- E. periphrasis.

The correct answer is C. The creature is likened to a member of the human species. As is often the case with a poem of multiple dimensions, other terms might apply, but the primary one in this stanza is personification. Whether the snake is also a symbol, or operates as a metaphor would be a part of an interpretive analysis.

The rhyme scheme that is established in the first stanza, and then continued for the remainder of the poem until the last stanza is

- A. terza rima.
- B. eye rhyme.
- C. internal rhyme.
- D. slant rhyme.
- E. feminine rhyme.

The correct answer is D. Terza rima is a series of rhyming triplets; eye rhyme has the appearance of rhyme but the sounds are not similar; internal rhyme involves words within a line; feminine rhyme is a two-syllable rhyme, followed by a single syllable rhyme. For slant rhyme, the final consonant sounds are the same, the preceding vowel sounds are different.

In stanza three, the speaker recalls a time “when a Boy and Barefoot” to imply

- A. ignorance.
- B. innocence.
- C. poverty.
- D. gender selection.
- E. agriculture.

The correct answer is B. William Blake’s *Songs of Innocence and Experience* draws a distinction between the natural innocence of youth and the darkening forces of adulthood, and Dickinson is operating in a similar cosmos.

In stanza 5, the phrase “a transport/Of Cordiality –” is meant to suggest

- A. relocating the snake from “The Grass” to the “Boggy Acre.”
- B. trying to move like a snake through the field.
- C. attempting to communicate with the snake.
- D. a sense of belonging to the natural world.
- E. continuing a cordial relationship with the snake.

The correct answer is D. The “transport” that Dickinson describes is like Blake’s depiction of a “mental traveler.” The motion is cerebral as much as mechanical, and the “cordiality” that Dickinson envisions is a relationship dependent on imagination as much as observation.

The metrical form of the poem is

- A. dactylic hexameter.
- B. trochaic trimeter.
- C. iambic pentameter.
- D. anapestic tetrameter.
- E. enjambement.

The correct answer is C. This is the most prevalent metrical arrangement in Anglo-American poetics, a light syllable followed by a stressed syllable. The modifying terms before the *meter* indicates the number of stresses in the line. A dactyl is a stressed syllable followed by two light syllables; a trochee is a stressed syllable followed by a light syllable; an anapest is two light syllables followed by a stressed syllable. Enjambement (striding-over) carries the image or thought beyond the line break, as in line 3 to 4 of stanza 1.

The tone of the poem, which registers the psychological perspective of the speaker shifts dramatically after the first five stanzas. The two variants could be categorized as

- A. trepidation and exhausted emptiness.
- B. attentive expectancy and a delicious shivering.
- C. skeptical inquiry and shortness of breath.
- D. individualism and empathy.
- E. fretful concern and precise measurement.

The correct answer is B. This is a poem that defies easy categorization throughout, which is one of the strengths of Dickinson's oeuvre. Both "Zero" and "Bone" have connotations beyond their literal definitions. The nuances of language make the "correct" answer less precise than a scientific analysis would provide, which means that it is advisable to not spend too much time when the answer seems uncertain. A judicious guess and a move to the next item would be a sensible strategy.

Writing the Poetry Free Response Essay

In your essay, as with all essays on the AP exam, you should do the following (as a basis for the argument):

- Respond to the prompt with a thesis statement that presents a defensible interpretation.
- Select and use evidence to support your line of reasoning.
- Explain how the evidence supports your line of reasoning.
- Use correct grammar and punctuation in communicating your argument.

The following features might be included in an essay on a poem.

- The function of character, in terms of the fundamental psychological perspective

- The possibilities of change or resistance to change
- The degree of empathy or identification that the poet evokes
- The cultural community that is the speaker's home ground.
- The function of setting in terms of Time, Season, geographical features
- Cultural assumptions in terms of the speaker's background and present circumstances
- The development of tone, as an aspect of the psychological perspective of the speaker
- The structure or shape of the poem, with respect to metrical or other devices, including rhyme, rhythm and typographical invention
- The particular uses of language as dialect, including diction, vernacular and neologisms
- The uses of figurative language for denotation and connotation, and for the deployment of metaphorical or allusive constructions
- The creation of a central image, especially in terms of an appeal to the senses

Let's take a close look at a poem and how to analyze it in order to write a compelling and high-scoring essay.

In the following poem by Robert Frost, "Mending Wall," published in 1914, the speaker portrays the relationship between two neighbors who are depicted in their annual practice of repairing the boundary between their properties. Read the poem carefully. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze the ways in which Frost uses poetic elements and techniques to develop the complex relationship between the two men.

Mending Wall (published in *North of Boston* in the United Kingdom)

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
 That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,
 And spills the upper boulders in the sun;
 And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.
 The work of hunters is another thing:
 I have come upon them and made repair
 Where they have left not one stone on a stone,
 But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,
 To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean,
 No one has seen them made or heard them made,

But at spring mending-time we find them there.

I let my neighbor know beyond the hill;

And one a day we meet to walk the line

And set the wall between us once again.

We keep the wall between us as we go.

To each the boulders that have fallen to each.

And some are loaves and some so nearly balls

We have to use a spell to make them balance:

'Stay where you are until our backs are turned!'

We wear our fingers rough with handling them.

Oh, just another kind of out-door game,

One on a side. It comes to little more;

There where it is we do not need the wall;

He is all pine and I am apple orchard.

My apple trees will never get across

And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.

He only says, 'Good fences make good neighbours.'

Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder

If I could a notion in his head:

'*Why* do they make good neighbours? Isn't it

Where there are cows? But there are no coes.

Before I built a wall I'd ask to know

What I was walling in or walling out,

And to whom I was like to give offence.

Something there is that doesn't love a wall.' I could say 'Elves' to him,

But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather

He said it for himself. I see him there

Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top
In each hand like an old-stone savage armed.
He moves in darkness as it seems to me,
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.
He will not go beyond his father's saying,
And he likes having thought of it so well
He says again, 'Good fences make good neighbours.'

One of the reasons that people might become disaffected with the entire enterprise of poetry is the foolish insistence by an "authority" that there is *only one* correct interpretation of a poem's meaning. This sort of reductionist thinking can shut off the kind of response that, at a minimum, enhances and intensifies a poem's power, as well as closing the possibilities for any future engagement with poems and poets.

In "Mending Wall," while a reader might argue that the poem's title and closing line, "Good fences make good neighbors," is an admonition that serves all of us well, another reader might say that the line "I wondered if I could a notion in his head" is at the core of the speaker's account. Or, perhaps there isn't a complete contradiction in the two theses.

The opening line is both an observation and a query. "Something there is that doesn't love a wall" immediately establishes an aura of curiosity and speculation, which contributes to the idea that a single interpretive statement might not be sufficient for a discussion of the poem's purposes. The description of what "something" has done immediately locates the reader (or listener) in rural terrain *North of Boston*, the title of Frost's second published volume, which places this poem first. The long New England winters, freezing, thawing and refreezing, undermine the work of men suggesting the natural forces that humans are subject to and must try to understand to be secure in their endeavors.

The philosophical ruminations of the first lines is blended with an image of the more comprehensible actions of hunters pursuing a quarry, bringing the poem to the personal, with the speaker not vexed with those neighbors driven by an understandable goal. He is ready to "repair" the damage. The title, though, uses the word "mending," a more intimate action akin to sewing than the broader repairing, which advances the poem to its central activity as the speaker sets out on an annual ritual, taking the initiative by letting his neighbor know that it is "spring-mending time."

The reflective mood of the first dozen lines shifts to an ongoing present, with the pace of the poem propelled by the repeated "And," and the single-sentence, full-step syntax of the next

three lines. The jovial aspect of the task, as well as the unfathomable essence of the unseen force contra to walls, is expressed by the whimsical admonition "Stay where you are," both a recognition of desire and an admission of futility. This leads to the speaker's comment about the fundamental separation between the two men, both geophysical and philosophic, as conveyed by the personifying "apple" and "pine." Unwilling or unable to fathom what the speaker is implying, the neighbor responds with his slogan-like mantra, an example of a closed mind limiting a person to a reliance on rote and habit.

At this point, the poem is charged by the striking assertion, "I wonder/If I could put a notion in his head." The local vernacular, "notion," establishes a linguistic matrix which solidifies the deeply personal part of the speaker's involvement. The series of questions addressed to the neighbor and to the poem's prospective audience, is designed to inspire the knowledge-seeking cast of mind that for Frost might be one of the most admirable human traits. There are many of his poems that carry the same sentiment, such as "Love and a Question," the well-known "The Road Not Taken," and the once-even-better known "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" ("Whose woods these are I think I know..."). The speaker wants to make a personal connection, posing provocative, mind-opening but not threatening ideas for consideration. There is a touch of criticism, though, when he says: "I'd ask to know/What I was walling in or walling out,," and then more sharply, "And to whom I was like to give offence," both playing on the word "fence" and recalling a local ethic about respect for another's opinions.

The depth of the speaker's desire is captured by his "I'd rather he said it for himself," but the unlikelihood of this happening, something apparent from the annual repetition of the activity, leads to his strongest critique. The vivid image of the neighbor as an "old-stone savage," is a throwback to a less civilized time, when arms carried weapons for destruction rather than repair. His disdain for men who "moved in darkness" that was as much an inner consciousness as a meteorological phenomenon epitomizes his disappointment.

When the neighbor repeats his "father's saying," the context suggests that what he regards as "wisdom" is not built on the analytical, inquisitive perspective that the speaker wants to promote. However, that may not completely disqualify it as a worthwhile observation. It could be argued that the largest point of the poem is not to reject something because its source is compromised. In conclusion, it could be said that a recognition of difference ("...not walling in or walling out;") is, if not a message, a proposal and an article of faith for the poet.

Frost's poem is a powerful example of Faulkner's contention that in a poem everything matters. For a Free Writing essay, the order of the introduction of key elements will give the essay a form that will focus the argument on the main points to be covered. First, the setting should be established, the location in New England and the features of the terrain, including the seasonal circumstances, described. Then, the characters introduced, with the point-of-view of the speaker explained and the distinctive patterns of speech that are often a signature of Frost's "voice" touched on in terms of figurative language. The tonal qualities of the poem are central here. The details of the speaker's account become prominent as the actual argument between

the two men proceeds. Toward the conclusion of the essay, the thematic concerns of the poem would be clarified, analyzed and perhaps placed in the larger context of Frost's poetry.s

Your AP Journey

Joseph Campbell's *Hero With a Thousand Faces* identifies a "monomyth" applicable to all the people of the planet as a journey of discovery, in which the "hero" is on a quest for something of value. As intrepid as the hero may be, when the hero's quest is through an unfamiliar realm, a reliable guide can be an important asset.

For the student enmeshed in the Advanced Placement curriculum, guidance may be a crucial component for success. The instructor for AP courses initiates the journey; this guide is designed as a companion on the journey; the next step will be the exam, flying solo toward a successful completion of the journey. Good luck on this final step—an advance—toward your goal.

Outside Reading

The Norton Anthology of Literature

The individual volumes of the *Norton Anthology of English Literature* and *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, in addition to representative selections of the writers likely to appear on the exam, have chapter headings which designate so-called literary movements or "schools" (a group of writers with similar aspirations, affinities and sensibilities). *The Norton Anthology of English Literature, Sixth Edition, Volume 2*, for instance, is divided by The Romantic Period (1785-1830, The Victorian Age (1830-1901), The Nineties, The Twentieth Century, Poetry of World War II, and then an untitled section with more recent poetry.

Books and Authors Appearing on Recent Exams

While the individual syllabus for an AP course is determined by the instructor for each class, there are some authors and books that have frequently been placed in the curriculum. During the 21st Century, these would include:

Poets

W. H. Auden, Elizabeth Bishop, William Blake, Gwendolyn Brooks, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, H. D. (Hilda Doolittle), Emily Dickinson, John Donne, T. S. Eliot, Robert Frost, Seamus Heaney,

George Herbert, Langston Hughes, John Keats, Robert Lowell, Andrew Marvell, Marianne Moore, Sylvia Plath, Alexander Pope, Adrienne Rich, Anne Sexton, Percy Shelley, Walt Whitman, William Carlos Williams, William Wordsworth, W. B. Yeats

Playwrights

Aeschylus, Edward Albee, Samuel Beckett, Anton Chekhov, Athol Fugard, Lorraine Hansberry, David Henry Hwang, Henrik Ibsen, Ben Jonson, Lin-Manuel Miranda, Arthur Miller, Molière, Marsha Norman, Sean O’Casey, Eugene O’Neill, Harold Pinter, Luigi Pirandello, William Shakespeare, George Bernard Shaw, Sam Shepard, Sophocles Tom Stoppard, Oscar Wilde, Tennessee Williams, August Wilson

Prose Fiction

Chinua Achebe, Sherman Alexie, Isabel Allende, Margaret Atwood, Jane Austen, James Baldwin, Saul Bellow, Charlotte Bronte, Emily Bronte, Raymond Carver, Willa Cather, John Cheever, Kate Chopin, Sandra Cisneros, Joseph Conrad, Edwidge Danticat, Daniel Defoe, Anita Desai, Charles Dickens, Fyodor Dostoevsky, George Eliot, Ralph Ellison, Louise Erdrich, William Faulkner, Henry Fielding, F. Scott Fitzgerald, E. M. Foster, Thomas Hardy, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Ernest Hemingway, Zora Neale Hurston, Kazuo Ishiguro, Henry James, Ha Jin, Edward P. Jones, James Joyce, Maxine Hong Kingston, Jhumpa Lahiri, D. H. Lawrence, Chang-rae Lee, Bernard Malamud, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Cormac McCarthy, Ian McEwan, Herman Melville, Toni Morrison, Vladimir Nabokov, Flannery O’Connor, Katherine Anne Porter, Jonathan Swift, Mark Twain, John Updike, Alice Walker, Eudora Welty, Edith Wharton, John Edgar Wideman, Virginia Woolf, Richard Wright.

This list is representative, not definitive, and will always be in a condition of evolution and reappraisal. A version of the list is available from: <https://apstudent-collegeboard.org/apcourse/ap-english-literature-and-composition>.