

2018 AP® ENGLISH LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION FREE-RESPONSE QUESTIONS

ENGLISH LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION

SECTION II

Total time—2 hours

Question 1

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

Carefully read Olive Senior’s 2005 poem “Plants.” Then, in a well-organized essay, analyze how the poet portrays the complex relationships among the speaker, the implied audience, and plant life. You may wish to consider the author’s use of such literary techniques as syntax, diction, and figurative language.

Plants

Plants are deceptive. You see them there
looking as if once rooted they know
their places; not like animals, like us
always running around, leaving traces.

Line

5 Yet from the way they breed (excuse me!)
and twine, from their exhibitionist
and rather prolific nature, we must infer
a sinister not to say imperialistic

grand design. Perhaps you’ve regarded,
10 as beneath your notice, armies of mangrove
on the march, roots in the air, clinging
tendrils anchoring themselves everywhere?

The world is full of shoots bent on conquest,
invasive seedlings seeking wide open spaces,
15 matériel gathered for explosive dispersal
in capsules and seed cases.

Maybe you haven’t quite taken in the
colonizing ambitions of hitchhiking
burrs on your sweater, surf-riding nuts
20 bobbing on ocean, parachuting seeds and other

airborne traffic dropping in. And what
about those special agents called flowers?
Dressed, perfumed, and made-up for romancing
insects, bats, birds, bees, even you—

25 —don’t deny it, my dear, I’ve seen you
sniff and exclaim. Believe me, Innocent,
that sweet fruit, that berry, is nothing
more than ovary, the instrument to seduce

you into scattering plant progeny. Part of
30 a vast cosmic program that once set
in motion cannot be undone though we
become plant food and earth wind down.

They’ll outlast us, they were always there
one step ahead of us: plants gone to seed,
35 generating the original profligate,
extravagant, reckless, improvident, weed.

Originally published in *Gardening in the Tropics* by
Olive Senior; published by Insomniac Press.

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Question 2

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

The following interchange, excerpted from an 1852 novel by Nathaniel Hawthorne, occurs when two characters who have been living on the Blithedale farm—a community designed to promote an ideal of equality achieved through communal rural living—are about to part ways. Read the passage carefully. In a well-written essay, analyze how Hawthorne portrays the narrator's attitude towards Zenobia through the use of literary techniques.

Line Her manner bewildered me. Literally, moreover,
5 I was dazzled by the brilliancy of the room. A
chandelier hung down in the centre, glowing with I
know not how many lights; there were separate lamps,
10 also, on two or three tables, and on marble brackets,
adding their white radiance to that of the chandelier.
The furniture was exceedingly rich. Fresh from our
old farm-house, with its homely board and benches in
15 the dining-room, and a few wicker chairs in the best
parlor, it struck me that here was the fulfillment of
every fantasy of an imagination, revelling in various
methods of costly self-indulgence and splendid ease.
Pictures, marbles, vases; in brief, more shapes of
20 luxury than there could be any object in enumerating,
except for an auctioneer's advertisement—and the
whole repeated and doubled by the reflection of a
great mirror, which showed me Zenobia's proud
figure, likewise, and my own. It cost me, I
25 acknowledge, a bitter sense of shame, to perceive in
myself a positive effort to bear up against the effect
which Zenobia sought to impose on me. I reasoned
against her, in my secret mind, and strove so to keep
my footing. In the gorgeousness with which she had
30 surrounded herself—in the redundancy of personal
ornament, which the largeness of her physical nature
and the rich type of her beauty caused to seem so
suitable—I malevolently beheld the true character of
the woman, passionate, luxurious, lacking simplicity,
35 not deeply refined, incapable of pure and perfect taste.

But, the next instant, she was too powerful for all
my opposing struggles. I saw how fit it was that she
should make herself as gorgeous as she pleased, and
should do a thousand things that would have been
ridiculous in the poor, thin, weakly characters of other
40 women. To this day, however, I hardly know whether
I then beheld Zenobia in her truest attitude, or
whether that were the truer one in which she had
presented herself at Blithedale. In both, there was
something like the illusion which a great actress flings
45 around her.

“Have you given up Blithedale forever?” I
inquired.

“Why should you think so?” asked she.

“I cannot tell,” answered I; “except that it appears
45 all like a dream that we were ever there together.”

“It is not so to me,” said Zenobia. “I should think it

a poor and meagre nature, that is capable of but one
set of forms, and must convert all the past into a
dream, merely because the present happens to be

50 unlike it. Why should we be content with our homely
life of a few months past, to the exclusion of all other
modes? It was good; but there are other lives as good
or better. Not, you will understand, that I condemn
55 those who give themselves up to it more entirely than
I, for myself, should deem it wise to do.”

It irritated me, this self-complacent,
condescending, qualified approval and criticism of a
system to which many individuals—perhaps as
highly endowed as our gorgeous Zenobia—had
60 contributed their all of earthly endeavor, and their
loftiest aspirations. I determined to make proof if
there were any spell that would exorcise her out of the
part which she seemed to be acting. She should be
65 compelled to give me a glimpse of something true;
some nature, some passion, no matter whether right or
wrong, provided it were real.

“Your allusion to that class of circumscribed
characters, who can live in only one mode of life,”
remarked I, coolly, “reminds me of our poor friend
70 Hollingsworth.* Possibly, he was in your thoughts,
when you spoke thus. Poor fellow! It is a pity that, by
the fault of a narrow education, he should have so
completely immolated himself to that one idea of his;
especially as the slightest modicum of common-sense
75 would teach him its utter impracticability. Now that I
have returned into the world, and can look at his
project from a distance, it requires quite all my real
regard for this respectable and well-intentioned man
to prevent me laughing at him—as, I find, society at
80 large does!”

Zenobia's eyes darted lightning; her cheeks
flushed; the vividness of her expression was like the
effect of a powerful light, flaming up suddenly within
her. My experiment had fully succeeded. She had
85 shown me the true flesh and blood of her heart, by
thus involuntarily resenting my slight, pitying, half-
kind, half-scornful mention of the man who was all in
all with her. She herself, probably, felt this; for it was
hardly a moment before she tranquillized her uneven
90 breath, and seemed as proud and self-possessed as
ever.

* a charismatic member of the Blithedale community who assumes a leadership position

AP® ENGLISH LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION

2018 SCORING GUIDELINES

Question 1: Olive Senior, “Plants”

The score should reflect the quality of the essay as a whole — its content, style, and mechanics. **Reward the students for what they do well.** The score for an exceptionally well-written essay may be raised by 1 point above the otherwise appropriate score. In no case may a poorly written essay be scored higher than a 3.

9–8 These essays offer a persuasive analysis of how the poet portrays the complex relationships among the speaker, the implied audience, and plant life. Using apt and specific textual support, they demonstrate consistent and effective control over the elements of composition in language appropriate to the discussion of poetry. Although these well-focused essays may not be error-free, they are perceptive in their analysis and demonstrate writing that is clear and effectively organized. Essays scored a 9 have especially convincing analysis and effective control of language.

7–6 These essays offer a reasonable analysis of how the poet portrays the complex relationships among the speaker, the implied audience, and plant life. Using textual support, they are organized and demonstrate control over the elements of composition in language appropriate to the discussion of poetry. These focused essays show insight in their analysis, and they offer clear and controlled analysis and writing. Essays scored a 7 have solidly developed analysis and consistent control of organization and language.

5 These essays respond to the assigned task with a plausible discussion of how the poet portrays the complex relationships among the speaker, the implied audience, and plant life, but the analysis may be superficial and thinly developed. They often rely on paraphrase or general textual support that includes some analysis, implicit or explicit. Their analysis and discussion may be vague, formulaic, or minimally supported. These essays demonstrate some control of language, but they may be marred by surface errors. These essays have difficulty presenting a cohesive idea, clear organization, or sustained development of analysis.

4–3 These lower-half essays fail to offer an adequate analysis of the poem. The analysis of how the poet portrays the complex relationships among the speaker, the implied audience, and plant life may be partial, unconvincing, oversimplified, or irrelevant. Evidence from the poem may be slight or misconstrued, or the essays may rely on paraphrase only. The essays often demonstrate a lack of control over the conventions of composition: inadequate development of ideas, accumulation of errors, or a focus that is unclear, inconsistent, or repetitive. Essays scored a 3 may contain significant misreading and/or demonstrate inept writing.

2–1 These essays compound several writing weaknesses. Although these essays make some attempt to respond to the prompt, they are often unacceptably brief or incoherent in presenting their ideas. The essays may be poorly written on several counts; they may contain pervasive errors that interfere with understanding. The ideas may be presented with little clarity, organization, or supporting evidence. Essays scored a 1 contain little coherent discussion of the text.

0 These essays give a response that is completely off topic or inadequate; there may be some mark or a drawing or a brief reference to the task.

— These essays are entirely blank.