

## 2001 AP® ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION FREE-RESPONSE QUESTIONS

### Question 2

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

Carefully read the following passage from “Owls” by Mary Oliver. Then write an essay in which you analyze how Oliver’s style conveys the complexity of her response to nature.

When the great horned [owl] is in the trees its  
razor-tipped toes rasp the limb, flakes of bark fall  
through the air and land on my shoulders while  
*Line* I look up at it and listen to the heavy, crisp, breathy  
5 snapping of its hooked beak. The screech owl I can  
imagine on my wrist, also the delicate saw-whet that  
flies like a big soft moth down by Great Pond. And  
I can imagine sitting quietly before that luminous  
10 wanderer the snowy owl, and learning, from the white  
gleam of its feathers, something about the Arctic. But  
the great horned I can’t imagine in any such proximity  
—if one of those should touch me, it would be to the  
center of my life, and I must fall. They are the pure  
15 wild hunters of our world. They are swift and  
merciless upon the backs of rabbits, mice, voles,  
snakes, even skunks, even cats sitting in dusky yards,  
thinking peaceful thoughts. I have found the headless  
bodies of rabbits and bluejays, and known it was the  
20 great horned owl that did them in, taking the head  
only, for the owl has an insatiable craving for the taste  
of brains. I have walked with prudent caution down  
paths at twilight when the dogs were puppies. I know  
this bird. If it could, it would eat the whole world.

In the night, when the owl is less than exquisitely  
25 swift and perfect, the scream of the rabbit is terrible.  
But the scream of the owl, which is not of pain and  
hopelessness, and the fear of being plucked out of  
the world, but of the sheer rollicking glory of the  
death-bringer, is more terrible still. When I hear it  
30 resounding through the woods, and then the five black  
pellets of its song dropping like stones into the air,  
I know I am standing at the edge of the mystery, in  
which terror is naturally and abundantly part of life,  
part of even the most becalmed, intelligent, sunny life  
35 —as, for example, my own. The world where the owl

is endlessly hungry and endlessly on the hunt is the  
world in which I live too. There is only one world.

Sometimes, while I have stood listening to the  
owl’s auguring song drifting through the trees, when  
40 it is ten degrees above nothing and life for any small  
creature is hard enough without *that*, I have found  
myself thinking of summer fields. Fields full of  
flowers— poppies or lupines. Or, here, fields where  
the roses hook into the dunes, and their increase is  
45 manyfold. All summer they are red and pink and  
white tents of softness and nectar, which wafts and  
hangs everywhere—a sweetness so palpable and  
excessive that, before it, I’m struck, I’m taken, I’m  
conquered, I’m washed into it, as though it was a  
50 river, full of dreaming and idleness—I drop to the  
sand, I can’t move; I am restless no more; I am  
replete, supine, finished, filled to the last edges with  
an immobilizing happiness. And is this not also  
terrible? Is this not also frightening?

55 Are the roses not also—even as the owl is—  
excessive? Each flower is small and lovely, but in  
their sheer and silent abundance the roses become an  
immutable force, as though the work of the wild roses  
was to make sure that all of us who come wandering  
60 over the sand may be, for a while, struck to the heart  
and saturated with a simple happiness. Let the mind  
be teased by such *stretches* of the imagination, by  
such balance. Now I am cringing at the very sound of  
65 long ago I could do nothing but lounge on the sand  
and stare into the cities of the roses.

Excerpt from “Owls” in BLUE PASTURES, copyright © 1995,  
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## 2001 AP® ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION FREE-RESPONSE QUESTIONS

### Question 3

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

Carefully read the following passage by Susan Sontag. Then write an essay in which you support, refute, or qualify Sontag’s claim that photography limits our understanding of the world. Use appropriate evidence to develop your argument.

Photography implies that we know about the world if we accept it as the camera records it. But this is the opposite of understanding, which starts from *not* accepting the world as it looks. All possibility of understanding is rooted in the ability to say no.  
*Line* Strictly speaking, one never understands anything from a photograph. Of course, photographs fill in blanks in our mental pictures of the present and the past: for example, Jacob Riis’s images of New York squalor in the 1880’s are sharply instructive to those unaware that urban poverty in late-nineteenth-century America was really that Dickensian. Nevertheless, the camera’s rendering of reality must always hide more than it discloses. As Brecht points out, a photograph of the Krupp works\* reveals virtually nothing about that organization. In contrast to the amorous relation, which is based on how something looks, understanding is based on how it functions. And functioning takes place in time and must be explained in time. Only that which narrates can make us understand.  
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The limit of photographic knowledge of the world is that, while it can goad conscience, it can, finally, never be ethical or political knowledge. The knowledge gained through still photographs will always be some kind of sentimentalism, whether cynical or humanist. It will be a knowledge at bargain prices—a semblance of knowledge, a semblance of wisdom. . . . The very muteness of what is, hypothetically, comprehensible in photographs is what constitutes their attraction and provocativeness. The omnipresence of photographs has an incalculable effect on our ethical sensibility. By furnishing this already crowded world with a duplicate one of images, photography makes us feel that the world is more available than it really is.  
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Needing to have reality confirmed and experience enhanced by photographs is an aesthetic consumerism to which everyone is now addicted. Industrial societies turn their citizens into image-junkies; it is the most irresistible form of mental pollution.

*—On Photography, 1977*

\* Krupp: a German weapons manufacturing firm that was instrumental in the Nazi rearmament effort of the 1930’s.

**END OF EXAMINATION**

## 2001 AP® ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION SCORING GUIDELINES

### Question 2

At the AP Reading, faculty consultants were given the following **General Directions**:

- This scoring guide will be useful for most of the essays that you read. If it seems inappropriate for a specific essay, ask your Table Leader for assistance. Always show your Table Leader books that seem to have no response or that contain responses that seem unrelated to the question.
- Your score should reflect your judgment of the essay's quality as a whole. Remember that students had only 40 minutes to read and write. Therefore, the essay is not a finished product and should not be judged by standards that are appropriate for out-of-class writing assignments. Instead, evaluate the essay as a draft, making certain that you reward students for what they do well.
- All essays, even those scored 8 and 9, may contain occasional flaws in analysis, prose style, or mechanics. These lapses should enter into your holistic evaluation of an essay's overall quality. In no case should you score an essay with many distracting errors in grammar and mechanics higher than a 2.

- 9** Essays earning a score of 9 meet the criteria for 8 papers and, in addition, are especially full or apt in their analysis or demonstrate particularly impressive control of language.
- 8** Essays earning a score of 8 effectively analyze how Oliver's style shows the complexity of her response to nature. They refer to the text, explicitly or implicitly, assessing how specific elements of style convey the complexity of her response. Their prose demonstrates an ability to control a wide range of the elements of effective writing but is not flawless.
- 7** Essays earning a score of 7 fit the description of 6 essays but provide a more complete analysis or demonstrate a more mature prose style.
- 6** Essays earning a score of 6 adequately analyze the relationship of Oliver's style to the complexity it conveys, but their discussion is more limited. While the essays refer to the text, explicitly or implicitly, they offer a less convincing explanation of how specific elements of style function. The writing may contain lapses in diction or syntax, but generally the prose is clear.
- 5** Essays earning a score of 5 analyze Oliver's use of style, but they may provide uneven or inconsistent analyses. They may treat her style in a superficial way or demonstrate a limited understanding of the relationship between her style and the complexity of the experience that it conveys. While the writing may contain lapses in diction or syntax, it usually conveys ideas adequately.
- 4** Essays earning a score of 4 respond to the prompt inadequately. They may misrepresent or merely touch on the relationship between Oliver's style and the way in which it conveys complexity or identify techniques without providing adequate discussion of their function. The prose generally conveys the writer's ideas but may suggest immature control of writing.

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SCORING GUIDELINES**

**Question 2 (cont'd.)**

- 3** Essays earning a score of 3 meet the criteria for the score of 4 but are less perceptive about Oliver's style or less consistent in controlling the elements of writing.
- 2** Essays earning a score of 2 demonstrate little success in analyzing how Oliver's style conveys the complexity of her response. These essays may offer vague generalizations, substitute simpler tasks such as summarizing the passage, or simply list techniques. The prose often demonstrates consistent weaknesses in writing.
  - 1** Essays earning a score of 1 meet the criteria for the score of 2 but are undeveloped, especially simplistic in their discussion, or weak in their control of language.
  - 0** Indicates an on-topic response that receives no credit, such as one that merely repeats the prompt.
    - Indicates a blank response or one that is completely off topic.