

2003 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.)

The two passages below, one by John James Audubon and the other by Annie Dillard, describe large flocks of birds in flight. Read the passages carefully. Then write an essay in which you compare and contrast how each writer describes the birds and conveys their effect on the writer as observer.

Passage 1

In the autumn of 1813, I left my house at Henderson, on the banks of the Ohio, on my way to Louisville. In passing over the Barrens a few miles beyond Hardensburgh, I observed the pigeons flying from north-east to south-west, in greater numbers than I thought I had ever seen them before, and feeling an inclination to count the flocks that might pass within the reach of my eye in one hour, I dismounted, seated myself on an eminence, and began to mark with my pencil, making a dot for every flock that passed. In a short time finding the task which I had undertaken impracticable, as the birds poured in in countless multitudes, I rose, and counting the dots then put down, found that 163 had been made in twenty-one minutes. I travelled on, and still met more the farther I proceeded. The air was literally filled with Pigeons; the light of noon-day was obscured as by an eclipse; the dung fell in spots, not unlike melting flakes of snow; and the continued buzz of wings had a tendency to lull my senses to repose.

Whilst waiting for dinner at YOUNG's inn, at the confluence of Salt-River with the Ohio, I saw, at my leisure, immense legions still going by, with a front reaching far beyond the Ohio on the west, and the beech-wood forests directly on the east of me. Not a single bird alighted; for not a nut or acorn was that year to be seen in the neighbourhood. They consequently flew so high, that different trials to reach them with a capital rifle proved ineffectual; nor did the reports disturb them in the least. I cannot describe to you the extreme beauty of their aerial evolutions, when a Hawk chanced to press upon the rear of a flock. At once, like a torrent, and with a noise like thunder, they rushed into a compact mass, pressing upon each other towards the centre. In these almost solid masses, they darted forward in undulating and angular lines, descended and swept close over the earth with inconceivable velocity, mounted perpendicularly so as to resemble a vast column, and, when high, were seen wheeling and twisting within their continued lines, which then resembled the coils of a gigantic serpent.

John James Audubon,
Ornithological Biographies, 1831-1839

Passage 2

Out of the dimming sky a speck appeared, then another, and another. It was the starlings going to roost. They gathered deep in the distance, flock sifting into flock, and strayed towards me, transparent and whirling, like smoke. They seemed to unravel as they flew, lengthening in curves, like a loosened skein.¹ I didn't move; they flew directly over my head for half an hour. The flight extended like a fluttering banner, an unfurled oriflamme², in either direction as far as I could see. Each individual bird bobbed and knitted up and down in the flight at apparent random, for no known reason except that that's how starlings fly, yet all remained perfectly spaced. The flocks each tapered at either end from a rounded middle, like an eye. Over my head I heard a sound of beaten air, like a million shook rugs, a muffled whuff. Into the woods they sifted without shifting a twig, right through the crowns of trees, intricate and rushing, like wind.

After half an hour, the last of the stragglers had vanished into the trees. I stood with difficulty, bashed by the unexpectedness of this beauty, and my spread lungs roared. My eyes pricked from the effort of trying to trace a feathered dot's passage through a weft³ of limbs. Could tiny birds be sifting through me right now, birds winging through the gaps between my cells, touching nothing, but quickening in my tissues, fleet?

Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, 1974

¹ A length of yarn or thread wound in a loose, elongated coil

² An ensign, banner, or standard

³ The horizontal threads in a piece of weaving

END OF EXAMINATION

AP® ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION 2003 SCORING GUIDELINES

Question 3

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. Do not assign a score of 0 or — without this consultation.

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: the essay is not a finished product and should not be judged by standards that are appropriate for out-of-class writing assignments. 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. Such 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, provide an especially full or perceptive comparison and contrast or demonstrate an impressive control of language.

8 Essays earning a score of 8 effectively compare and contrast how John James Audubon and Annie Dillard describe the birds and convey their effect on the authors. These essays refer to the texts, explicitly or implicitly, offering specific details to support their explanations of how the authors describe the birds and convey their effect. 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 are distinguished by a more complete or more purposeful comparison and contrast or a more mature prose style.

6 Essays earning a score of 6 adequately compare and contrast how the authors describe the birds and convey their effect. These essays refer to the texts, explicitly or implicitly, but offer less detailed and/or less convincing explanations. The writing may contain lapses in diction or syntax, but generally the prose is clear.

5 Essays earning a score of 5 compare and contrast how the authors describe the birds and convey their effect, but these essays may provide uneven or inconsistent explanations. They may compare and contrast in a superficial way or demonstrate a limited understanding of how the authors describe the birds and convey their effect. The writing may contain lapses in diction or syntax, but it usually conveys the writer's ideas adequately.

4 Essays earning a score of 4 respond to the prompt inadequately. They may have difficulty comparing and contrasting or explaining how the authors describe the birds and convey their effect. The prose generally conveys the writers' ideas but may suggest immature control of writing.

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Question 3 (cont'd.)

- 3** Essays earning a score of 3 meet the criteria for the score of 4 but demonstrate less success in comparing and contrasting or less control of writing.
- 2** Essays earning a score of 2 demonstrate little success in comparing and contrasting how the authors describe the birds and convey their effect. These essays may offer vague generalizations, substitute simpler tasks such as summarizing, offer no explanation of how the authors describe the birds and convey their effect, or offer descriptions of their own observations of birds. 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 especially simplistic in content or weak in their control of writing.
- 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.