

2. Raquel Vasquez Gilliland is a Mexican American poet, novelist, and painter whose works focus on myths, folklore, motherhood, and plants. In 2023 she published an opinion article in *The New York Times* titled “Go Outside, Sink Your Feet Into the Dirt and Engage With the World.” The following is an excerpt from that opinion article. Read the passage carefully. Write an essay that analyzes the rhetorical choices Vasquez Gilliland makes to develop her argument about the value of engaging with nature.

In your response you should do the following:

- Respond to the prompt with a thesis that analyzes the writer’s rhetorical choices.
- Select and use evidence to support your line of reasoning.
- Explain how the evidence supports your line of reasoning.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the rhetorical situation.
- Use appropriate grammar and punctuation in communicating your argument.

Par.

- 1 My grandmother and mother also taught me that the natural world around us has stories to tell if you listen closely. After all, language is not unique to humans. One of my earliest memories is sitting on my grandmother’s cracked concrete porch, watching one of the many doves she had nursed back to health land in her raised hand after she called out to it. When dark storm clouds gathered over the half-finished roof, my mother would take a steak knife from the kitchen to the sky to cut the rain away. My friends thought it was magical how nature seemed to bend to their will.
- 2 It makes sense, then, that I became an author, that my life is built around stories—that the idea of my first novel came tumbling to me when I was out on a walk, as if a piece of the sky had been cut over me. And whenever I am overwhelmed or anxious or stuck in my work, my mother’s advice to me is always the same: Go outside. Be in nature.
- 3 Our busy schedules can make it hard to find time to spend in nature, and it may seem especially hard in urban areas. But at a time when so many Americans are struggling with loneliness and isolation, spending a few moments outdoors can help us feel more connected.
- 4 Fortunately, there are several easy things you can do to get out in nature, no matter where you live. You can start by sinking your bare feet in a patch of dirt and consider the ways by which the soil nourishes the plants and animals that in turn nourish us. Maybe you can find a tree to befriend, be it a pine, mango or tulip tree. Use all your senses to engage with it—observe its leaves, feel the smooth wrinkles of its bark.
- 5 When I lived in New York and Los Angeles, I’d have to hike very far to find a piece of nature to be in—the rare tree in downtown Los Angeles, the canopy of ginkgoes near Inwood Hill Park in New York City. Now, in East Tennessee, I walk a few steps past my porch, into my garden—two small strips of land that flank my two-story white and turquoise farmhouse.

- 6 When I first moved here, nonnative European grass blanketed the thirsty clay, red as dried blood. I bought a shovel and set about digging up eight garden beds in the middle of that grass, filling them with plants native to my region: coneflowers and aromatic aster, bee balm and Virginia blue bells. I tried growing squash, peppers, yellow watermelon and white eggplant, but the plants languished and many didn't yield any fruit at all. My land seems to want nothing but flowers. So I am trying my hand at breeding zinnias, cosmos and dahlias instead. Each bloom, as rich as a jewel, now attracts butterflies and hover flies and bees to feast where there was once nothing but a wasteland.
- 7 If I am creatively blocked, I walk barefoot on the earth, no matter the season, allowing stories to feed the roots of my entire body. If I have a plot hole I need to fix, I visit my lemon and lime basil, staining my fingers with their citrus scents. If I need to make my writing more lyrical, I sit with the dahlias, imagining that their vast genetic possibilities fill me when I speak with them.
- 8 When the summer gives way to cooler nights, my focus moves from leaves and blooms to the change in the angle of the sunlight. I think about how many times it has shifted over the entire lineage of humans, signaling to the trees to change from green to citrine, smoky topaz and shades of ruby. I reminisce about how I sat in that same autumnal light as a child, listening to the stories of my elders.
- 9 You, too, can listen to my mother's advice and see what the land has to say to you—be it a wide hillside of bluestem grass or a single window box filled with petunias. If the practice of listening to the earth and the beings that inhabit it feels inauthentic, consider that humans have long been in dialogue with the natural world. Indeed their survival depended on their connection with the land and discerning what it had to say. When they died, what was left of them in turn nurtured it, too.
- 10 It could be that newly sprouted blooms or subtle shifts in sunlight signaled the changing of seasons—giving them instructions. Perhaps your ancestors, as mine most likely did, believed that the world around them was populated with sentient beings that communicated with them. I like to think that the stories my grandmother still tells when I sit at her table have inklings of those the animals, trees and rivers shared with our ancestors. Paying attention to what the land has to say is how I honor this legacy.

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3. Amanda Gorman is the first National Youth Poet Laureate of the United States, an honor given to a young person for exceptional artistic expression, civic engagement, and social impact. In a 2021 interview in *Time* magazine, when asked how to maintain optimism¹ in challenging times, Gorman stated: “Optimism shouldn’t be seen as opposed to pessimism,² but in conversation with it. Your optimism will never be as powerful as it is in that exact moment when you want to give it up.”

1: a tendency to view things in a positive light

2: a tendency to view things in a negative light

Write an essay that argues your position on the extent to which Gorman’s claim about the relationship between optimism and pessimism is valid.

In your response you should do the following:

- Respond to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible position.
- Provide evidence to support your line of reasoning.
- Explain how the evidence supports your line of reasoning.
- Use appropriate grammar and punctuation in communicating your argument.

STOP
END OF EXAM

| Reporting Category | Scoring Criteria | |
|--|--|--|
| Row C Sophistication (0–1 points) | 0 points Does not meet the criteria for one point. | 1 point Demonstrates sophistication of thought and/or a complex understanding of the rhetorical situation. |
| | Decision Rules and Scoring Notes | |
| | Responses that do not earn this point: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attempt to contextualize their argument, but such attempts consist predominantly of sweeping generalizations (“<i>In a world where ...</i>” OR “<i>Since the beginning of time ...</i>”). Only hint at or suggest other arguments (“<i>While some may argue that ...</i>” OR “<i>Some people say ...</i>”). Use complicated or complex sentences or language that is ineffective because it does not enhance the argument. | Responses that earn this point may demonstrate sophistication of thought and/or a complex understanding of the rhetorical situation by doing any of the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Crafting a nuanced argument by consistently identifying and exploring complexities or tensions across the sources. Articulating the implications or limitations of an argument (either the student’s argument or arguments conveyed in the sources) by situating it within a broader context. Making effective rhetorical choices that consistently strengthen the force and impact of the student’s argument throughout the response. Employing a style that is consistently vivid and persuasive. |
| | Additional Note: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This point should be awarded only if the sophistication of thought or complex understanding is part of the student’s argument, not merely a phrase or reference. | |

Rhetorical Analysis**6 points**

Raquel Vasquez Gilliland is a Mexican American poet, novelist, and painter whose works focus on myths, folklore, motherhood, and plants. In 2023 she published an opinion article in *The New York Times* titled “Go Outside, Sink Your Feet Into the Dirt and Engage With the World.” The following is an excerpt from that opinion article. Read the passage carefully. Write an essay that analyzes the rhetorical choices Vasquez Gilliland makes to develop her argument about the value of engaging with nature.

In your response you should do the following:

- Respond to the prompt with a thesis that analyzes the writer’s rhetorical choices.
- Select and use evidence to support your line of reasoning.
- Explain how the evidence supports your line of reasoning.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the rhetorical situation.
- Use appropriate grammar and punctuation in communicating your argument.

| Reporting Category | Scoring Criteria | |
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| Row A Thesis (0–1 points) | 0 points For any of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is no defensible thesis. The intended thesis only restates the prompt. The intended thesis provides a summary of the issue with no apparent or coherent claim. There is a thesis, but it does not respond to the prompt. | 1 point Responds to the prompt with a defensible thesis that analyzes the writer’s rhetorical choices. |
| | Decision Rules and Scoring Notes | |
| | Responses that do not earn this point: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only restate the prompt. Fail to address the rhetorical choices the writer of the passage makes. Describe or repeat the passage rather than making a claim that requires a defense. | Responses that earn this point: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Respond to the prompt rather than restating or rephrasing the prompt <u>and</u> clearly articulate a defensible thesis about the rhetorical choices Vasquez Gilliland makes to develop her argument about the value of engaging with nature. |
| | Examples that do not earn this point: Restate the prompt <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>“In her op-ed ‘Go Outside, Sink Your Feet Into the Dirt and Engage With the World,’ Vasquez Gilliland shows that there is value in connecting to the land.”</i> Make a claim but do not address the writer’s rhetorical choices <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>“In the passage, Vasquez Gilliland says she gets inspiration from nature to help her with her writing.”</i> Repeat provided information from the passage <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>“Vasquez Gilliland became interested in nature at a young age when she first saw a dove land on her grandmother’s hand after she had called out to it.”</i> | Examples that earn this point: Present a defensible thesis that analyzes the writer’s rhetorical choices <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>“Raquel Vasquez Gilliland argues for the value of engaging with nature by relying extensively on imagery.”</i> <i>“Vasquez Gilliland uses many moving personal anecdotes to show the benefits of spending time with nature. This is especially true today when we are often isolated and obsessed with social media.”</i> <i>“By relating to the audience and describing her relationship with nature, Vasquez Gilliland suggests that the land has the power to ground people and help them solve sometimes practical, sometimes philosophical problems.”</i> |
| Additional Notes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The thesis may be more than one sentence, provided the sentences are in close proximity. The thesis may be anywhere within the response. For a thesis to be defensible, the passage must include at least minimal evidence that <i>could</i> be used to support that thesis; however, the student need not cite that evidence to earn the thesis point. The thesis <i>may</i> establish a line of reasoning that structures the essay, but it needn’t do so to earn the thesis point. A thesis that meets the criteria can be awarded the point whether or not the rest of the response successfully supports that line of reasoning. | | |

| Reporting Category | Scoring Criteria | | | | |
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| Row B Evidence AND Commentary (0–4 points) | 0 points Simply restates thesis (if present), repeats provided information, or offers information irrelevant to the prompt. | 1 point EVIDENCE: Provides evidence that is mostly general. AND COMMENTARY: Summarizes the evidence but does not explain how the evidence supports the student’s argument. | 2 points EVIDENCE: Provides some specific, relevant evidence. AND COMMENTARY: Explains how some of the evidence relates to the student’s argument, but no line of reasoning is established, or the line of reasoning is faulty. | 3 points EVIDENCE: Provides specific evidence to support all claims in a line of reasoning. AND COMMENTARY: Explains how some of the evidence supports a line of reasoning. AND Explains how at least one rhetorical choice in the passage contributes to the writer’s argument, purpose, or message. | 4 points EVIDENCE: Provides specific evidence to support all claims in a line of reasoning. AND COMMENTARY: Consistently explains how the evidence supports a line of reasoning. AND Explains how multiple rhetorical choices in the passage contribute to the writer’s argument, purpose, or message. |
| | Decision Rules and Scoring Notes | | | | |
| | Typical responses that earn 0 points: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are incoherent or do not address the prompt. May be just opinion with no textual references or references that are irrelevant. | Typical responses that earn 1 point: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tend to focus on summary or description of a passage rather than specific details or techniques. Mention rhetorical choices with little or no explanation. | Typical responses that earn 2 points: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consist of a mix of specific evidence and broad generalities. May contain some simplistic, inaccurate, or repetitive explanations that don’t strengthen the argument. May make one point well but either do not make multiple supporting claims or do not adequately support more than one claim. Do not explain the connections or progression between the student’s claims, so a line of reasoning is not clearly established. | Typical responses that earn 3 points: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uniformly offer evidence to support claims. Focus on the importance of specific words and details from the passage to build an argument. Organize an argument as a line of reasoning composed of multiple supporting claims. Commentary may fail to integrate some evidence or fail to support a key claim. | Typical responses that earn 4 points: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uniformly offer evidence to support claims. Focus on the importance of specific words and details from the passage to build an argument. Organize and support an argument as a line of reasoning composed of multiple supporting claims, each with adequate evidence that is clearly explained. Explain how the writer’s use of rhetorical choices contributes to the student’s interpretation of the passage. |
| Additional Notes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Writing that suffers from grammatical and/or mechanical errors that interfere with communication cannot earn the fourth point in this row. To earn the fourth point in this row, the response may observe multiple instances of the same rhetorical choice if each instance further contributes to the argument, purpose, or message of the passage. | | | | | |

| Reporting Category | Scoring Criteria | |
|---|---|--|
| Row C Sophistication (0–1 points) | 0 points Does not meet the criteria for one point. | 1 point Demonstrates sophistication of thought and/or a complex understanding of the rhetorical situation. |
| | Decision Rules and Scoring Notes | |
| | Responses that do not earn this point: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attempt to contextualize the text, but such attempts consist predominantly of sweeping generalizations (“<i>In a world where ...</i>” OR “<i>Since the beginning of time ...</i>”). Only hint at or suggest other arguments (“<i>While some may argue that ...</i>” OR “<i>Some people say ...</i>”). Examine individual rhetorical choices but do not examine the relationships among different choices throughout the text. Oversimplify complexities in the text. Use complicated or complex sentences or language that is ineffective because it does not enhance their analysis. | Responses that earn this point may demonstrate sophistication of thought and/or a complex understanding of the rhetorical situation by doing any of the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Explaining the significance or relevance of the writer’s rhetorical choices (given the rhetorical situation). Explaining a purpose or function of the passage’s complexities or tensions. Employing a style that is consistently vivid and persuasive. |
| | Additional Note: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This point should be awarded only if the sophistication of thought or complex understanding is part of the student’s argument, not merely a phrase or reference. | |