

ENGLISH LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION
SECTION II
Total time—2 hours
3 Questions

Question 1

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

In Richard Blanco’s poem “Shaving,” published in 1998, the speaker writes about the act of shaving. Read the poem carefully. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how Blanco uses literary elements and techniques to develop the speaker’s complex associations with the ritual of shaving.

In your response you should do the following:

- Respond to the prompt with a thesis 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 appropriate grammar and punctuation in communicating your argument.

Shaving

I am not shaving, I’m writing about it.
And I conjure the most elaborate idea—
how my beard is a creation of silent labor
Line like ocean steam rising to form clouds,

5 or the bloom of spiderwebs each morning;
the discrete mystery of how whiskers grow,
like the drink roses take from the vase,
or the fall of fresh rain, becoming
a river, and then rain again, so silently.

10 I think of all these slow and silent forces
and how quietly my father’s life passed us by.

I think of those mornings, when I *am* shaving,
and remember him in a masquerade of foam, then,
as if it was his beard I took the blade to,
15 the memory of him in tiny snips of black whiskers
swirling in the drain—dead pieces of the self
from the face that never taught me how to shave.

His legacy of whiskers that grow like black seeds
sown over my cheek and chin, my own flesh.

20 I am not shaving, but I will tell you about the
mornings
with a full beard and the blade in my hand,
when my eyes don’t recognize themselves
in a mirror echoed with a hundred faces
I have washed and shaved—it is in that split second,
25 when perhaps the roses drink and the clouds form,
when perhaps the spider spins and rain transforms,
that I most understand the invisibility of life
and the intensity of vanishing, like steam
at the slick edges of the mirror, without a trace.

“Shaving” from *City of a Hundred Fires* by Richard Blanco, © 1998. All rights are controlled by the University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, PA 15260. Used by permission of the University of Pittsburgh Press.

**Begin your response to this question at the top of a new page in the separate Free Response booklet
and fill in the appropriate circle at the top of each page to indicate the question number.**

Question 2

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

The following excerpt is from Linda Hogan’s novel *People of the Whale*, published in 2008. In this passage, the narrator describes two events that occur in a community: an infant’s birth shortly followed by an octopus’s walking out of the sea. Read the passage carefully. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how the author uses literary elements and techniques to develop a complex characterization of the community.

In your response you should do the following:

- Respond to the prompt with a thesis 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 appropriate grammar and punctuation in communicating your argument.

Line The infant Thomas W. Just was born on July 2, 1947, to much happiness and many pictures of his mother smiling down at him. It was the day just before the octopus left the water, walked on all eight legs across land and into Seal Cave. Sometimes young people made love in that cave. Sometimes boys escaped school and smoked cigarettes there.

But on this day, the day after Thomas was born, the octopus walked out of the sea and they watched it. Every one of these ocean people stood back, amazed to see it walk, the eye of it looking at them, each one seen, as if each one were known in all their past, all their future. Its skin paled at the sight of men smoking cigarettes and women in their cardigans pulled tight, with their dark windblown hair. One child stepped toward it as if to speak before his mother grabbed his arm and pulled him back to her, claiming him as a land dweller and no communicator or friend of any eight-legged sea creature.

None of them, not even the oldest, had ever seen an octopus do this and their people had lived there for thousands of years. It scared them into silence, then they talked about it. They knew it meant something. They didn’t know what. Four fishermen in dirty clothes wanted to kill it and use it for fishing bait. “It’s only practical!” they argued. “It’s the best thing that could happen to us.” They could take it, undigested, out of the stomach of flounder and halibut and use it again. For days they talked about it. They quarreled. They cried about how blessed they were. A few wild-haired men, afraid of its potent meaning, wanted to throw kerosene in the cave and burn it.

But one of the powerful women stepped up. She believed it had a purpose for going into the cave and that the humans, a small group of lives beside a big

ocean, should leave it alone. Others agreed. Its purpose was a mystery. Or perhaps it was sick or going to give birth. It turned a shade of red as it reached the safety of the cave. And so the people thought it was holy and they left gifts outside the entrance to the black rock cave. Some left sage and red cedar. Some offered shining things, glass smoothed by the sea, even their watches. As for the infant Thomas, his mother, whose own infancy was fed on whale and seal fat, was one of those who thought it was a holy creature and its presence at the time of his birth granted to Thomas a special life. She came from Thomas’s birth at the place of the old people and stood before the entrance of the octopus cave and held her kicking baby up to it, to be seen by it. “Here is my son. You knew his grandfather. Watch over him.” They were poor people. She had little to leave but the pearl she inherited from her father, Witka. She rolled it into the cave. She was convinced the octopus would be the spirit-keeper of her son, because she thought like the old people used to think, that such helpers existed and they were benevolent spirits. An older man named Samuel left his silver ring at the entrance to the cave; it was his finest possession. Not to have given something they cared about would have been no gift at all, so, following his example, others left sparkling glasses, pieces of gold, beads, all the shining things the octopus people love in their homes beneath water.

For the time it dwelt there, they brought offerings, even the first flowers of morning. The treasures built up like small middens.¹ Even the children didn’t take the treasures, although they did go look at them and marvel at what they found, until their mothers grabbed them away. The younger children tasted them

Question 1: Poetry Analysis

6 points

In Richard Blanco’s poem “Shaving,” published in 1998, the speaker writes about the act of shaving. Read the poem carefully. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how Blanco uses literary elements and techniques to develop the speaker’s complex associations with the ritual of shaving.

In your response you should do the following:

- Respond to the prompt with a thesis 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 appropriate grammar and punctuation in communicating your argument.

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria	
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 thesis that presents a defensible interpretation of the poem.
Decision Rules and Scoring Notes		
<p>Responses that do not earn this point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only restate the prompt. • Make a generalized comment about the poem that doesn't respond to the prompt. • Describe the poem or features of the poem rather than making a claim that requires a defense. <p>Examples that do not earn this point:</p> <p>Restate the prompt</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The poet develops the complex associations with shaving through the use of several literary techniques.” • “In his poem ‘Shaving,’ published in 1998, Richard Blanco presents a speaker that writes about the act of shaving and his complex relationship with it.” <p>Do not relate to the prompt</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The loss of a parent is a difficult one, something that many people have to deal with as they get older.” <p>Describe the poem or features of the poem</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Blanco’s poem is made up of three stanzas that talk about shaving. He uses figurative language to convey many of his ideas.” 		<p>Responses that earn this point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a defensible interpretation of the speaker’s complex associations with the ritual of shaving. <p>Examples that earn this point:</p> <p>Provide a defensible interpretation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “In the 1998 poem ‘Shaving,’ Richard Blanco employs the literary technique of stream of consciousness to show how the simple act of shaving inspires complex associations with the father he barely knew.” • “The poem links the speaker’s daily ritual of shaving new growth to the cycles of regeneration in nature and then ultimately to his father, whom he starts to see reborn in himself.” • “Blanco uses vivid imagery and the presentation of the narrator’s thoughts to reveal how the act of shaving connects the narrator to his father, who seems to have died young, which then reminds the narrator of his own mortality.”
<p>Additional Notes:</p> <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 poem 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				
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 literary element or technique in the poem contributes to its meaning.	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 literary elements or techniques in the poem contribute to its meaning.
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 the poem rather than specific details or techniques. Mention literary elements, devices, or techniques 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 poem to build an interpretation. 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 poem to build an interpretation. 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 multiple literary techniques contributes to the student's interpretation of the poem. 	
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 literary element or technique if each instance further contributes to the meaning of the poem. 					

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 develops a complex literary argument.
Decision Rules and Scoring Notes		
Responses that do not earn this point: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attempt to contextualize their interpretation, but such attempts consist predominantly of sweeping generalizations (“<i>Human experiences always include ...</i>” OR “<i>In a world where ...</i>” OR “<i>Since the beginning of time ...</i>”). Only hint at or suggest other possible interpretations (“<i>While another reader may see ...</i>” OR “<i>Though the poem could be said to ...</i>”). Make a single statement about how an interpretation of the poem comments on something thematic without consistently maintaining that thematic interpretation. Oversimplify complexities in the poem. Use complicated or complex sentences or language that is ineffective because it does not enhance the student’s argument. 		Responses that earn this point may demonstrate sophistication of thought or develop a complex literary argument by doing any of the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying and exploring complexities or tensions within the poem. Illuminating the student’s interpretation by situating it within a broader context. Accounting for alternative interpretations of the poem. Employing a style that is consistently vivid and persuasive.
Additional Notes: <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. 		