

# Synthesis Prompt

*by* Dean Gladish

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**ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION**

**SECTION II**

**Total time — 2 hours**

**Question 1**

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

Throughout history, there has been much debate regarding the question of the moral character of human beings. This question about the nature of morality, in addition to its philosophical and religious significance, is important because the answer to this question has a large influence on the way in which people govern themselves. Some people believe that humans are inherently good, while others believe that they are inherently evil. Still others believe that people are neither inherently good nor evil and that they instead learn to be good or evil.

Carefully read the following six sources, including the introductory information for each source. Then synthesize information from at least three of the sources and incorporate it into a coherent, well-developed essay that evaluates whether people are inherently good, or bad, or both.

Your argument should be the focus of your essay. Use the sources to develop your argument and explain the reasoning for it. Avoid merely summarizing the sources. Indicate clearly which sources you are drawing from, whether through direct quotation, paraphrase, or summary. You may cite the sources as Source A, Source B, etc., or by using the descriptions in parentheses.

Source A (Douglass)  
Source B (Ascher)  
Source C (McLachlan)  
Source D (Hawthorne)  
Source E (King)  
Source F (Faulkner)

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**Source A**

Douglass, Frederick. "Learning to Read and Write." 50  
*Essays: A Portable Anthology*. Ed. Samuel Cohen.  
Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2011. 100-101. Print.

*The following is an excerpt from the autobiography of Frederick Douglass, an American slave.*

I lived in Master Hugh's family about seven years. During this time, I succeeded in learning to read and write. In accomplishing this, I was compelled to resort to various stratagems. I had no regular teacher. My mistress, who had kindly commenced to instruct me, had, in compliance with the advice and direction of her husband, not only ceased to instruct, but had set her face against my being instructed by any one else. It is due, however, to my mistress to say of her, that she did not adopt this course of treatment immediately. She at first lacked the depravity indispensable to shutting me up in mental darkness. It was at least necessary for her to have some training in the exercise of irresponsible power, to make her equal to the task of treating me as though I were a brute.

My mistress was, as I have said, a kind and tenderhearted woman; and in the simplicity of her soul she commenced, when I first went to live with her, to treat me as she supposed one human being ought to treat another. In entering upon the duties of a slaveholder, she did not seem to perceive that I sustained to her the relation of a mere chattel, and that for her to treat me as a human being was not only wrong, but dangerously so. Slavery proved as injurious to her as it did to me. When I went there, she was a pious, warm, and tender-hearted woman. There was no sorrow or suffering for which she had not a tear. She had bread for the hungry, clothes for the naked, and comfort for every mourner that came within her reach. Slavery soon proved its ability to divest her of these heavenly qualities. Under its influence, the tender heart became stone, and the lamblike disposition gave way to one of tiger-like fierceness. The first step in her downward course was in her ceasing to instruct me. She now commenced to practise her husband's precepts. She finally became even more violent in her opposition than her husband himself. She was not satisfied with simply doing as well as he had commanded; she seemed anxious to do better. Nothing seemed to make her more angry than to see me with a newspaper. She seemed to think that here lay the danger. I have had her rush at me with a face made all up of fury, and snatch from me a newspaper, in a manner that fully revealed her apprehension. She was an apt woman; and a little experience soon demonstrated, to her satisfaction, that education and slavery were incompatible with each other.

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**Source B**

Ascher, Barbara Lazear. "On Compassion." *50 Essays: A Portable Anthology*. Ed. Samuel Cohen. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2004. 37. Print.

*The following is excerpted from an essay by a former New York Times columnist.*

Like other cities, there is much about Manhattan now that resembles Dickensian London. Ladies in high-heeled shoes pick their way through poverty and madness. You hear more cocktail party complaints than usual, "I just can't take New York anymore." Our citizens dream of the open spaces of Wyoming, the manicured exclusivity of Hobe Sound.

And yet, it may be that these are the conditions that finally give birth to empathy, the mother of compassion. We cannot deny the existence of the helpless as their presence grows. It is impossible to insulate ourselves against what is at our very doorstep. I don't believe that one is born compassionate. Compassion is not a character trait like a sunny disposition. It must be learned, and it is learned by having adversity at our windows, coming through the gates of our yards, the walls of our towns, adversity that becomes so familiar that we begin to identify and empathize with it.

For the ancient Greeks, drama taught and reinforced compassion within a society. The object of Greek tragedy was to inspire empathy in the audience so that the common response to the hero's fall was: "There, but for the grace of God, go I." Could it be that this was the response of the mother who offered the dollar, the French woman who gave the food? Could it be that the homeless, like those ancients, are reminding us of our common humanity? Of course, there is a difference. This play doesn't end – and the players can't go home.

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Source C

McLachlan, Ed. “Wait – He That Is Without Sin  
Amongst You, Let Him Cast the First Stone.”  
*Cartoon Stock*, 2006. Print.

*The following is an editorial cartoon.*



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**Source D**

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *The Scarlet Letter*. Ed.  
Kathryn Harrison. 2000 Modern Library Edition.  
New York: Random House Group. 90-91. Print.

*The following passage is excerpted from a novel that is set in seventeenth-century Puritan Boston.*

Another and far more important reason than the delivery of a pair of embroidered gloves impelled Hester, at this time, to seek an interview with a personage of so much power and activity in the affairs of the settlement. It had reached her ears, that there was a design on the part of some of the leading inhabitants, cherishing the more rigid order of principles in religion and government, to deprive her of her child. On the supposition that Pearl, as already hinted, was of demon origin, these good people not unreasonably argued that a Christian interest in the mother's soul required them to remove such a stumbling-block from her path. If the child, on the other hand, were really capable of moral and religious growth, and possessed the elements of ultimate salvation, then, surely, it would enjoy all the fairer prospect of these advantages by being transferred to wiser and better guardianship than Hester Prynne's. Among those who promoted the design, Governor Bellingham was said to be one of the most busy. It may appear singular, and, indeed, not a little ludicrous, that an affair of his kind, which, in later days, would have been referred to no higher jurisdiction than that of the selectmen of the town, should then have been a question publicly discussed, and on which statesmen of eminence took sides. At that epoch of pristine simplicity, however, matters of even slighter public interest, and of far less intrinsic weight than the welfare of Hester and her child, were strangely mixed up with the deliberations of legislators and acts of state. The period was hardly, if at all, earlier than that of our story, when a dispute concerning the right of property in a pig, not only caused a fierce and bitter contest in the legislative body of the colony, but resulted in an important modification of the framework itself of the legislature.

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### Source E

King, Stephen. "Why We Crave Horror Movies." *Models For Writers: Short Essays For Composition*. Ed. Alfred Rosa and Paul Eschholz. New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2012. 472. Print.

*The following is excerpted from an article by a renowned writer of horror fiction.*

The potential lyncher is in almost all of us (excluding saints, past and present; but then, most saints have been crazy in their own ways), and every now and then, he has to be let loose to scream and roll around in the grass. Our emotions and our fears form their own body, and we recognize that it demands its own exercise to maintain proper muscle tone. Certain of these emotional muscles are accepted – even exalted – in civilized society; they are, of course, the emotions that tend to maintain the status quo of civilization itself. Love, friendship, loyalty, kindness – these are all the emotions that we applaud, emotions that have been immortalized in the couplets of Hallmark cards and in the verses (I don't dare call it poetry) of Leonard Nimoy.

When we exhibit these emotions, society showers us with positive reinforcement; we learn this even before we get out of diapers. When, as children, we hug our rotten little puke of a sister and give her a kiss, all the aunts and uncles smile and twit and cry, "Isn't he the sweetest little thing?" Such coveted treats as chocolate-covered graham crackers often follow. But if we deliberately slam the rotten little puke of a sister's fingers in the door, sanctions follow – angry remonstrance from parents, aunts and uncles; instead of a chocolate-covered graham cracker, a spanking.

But anticivilization emotions don't go away, and they demand periodic exercise. We have such "sick" jokes as, "What's the difference between a truckload of bowling balls and a truckload of dead babies?" (You can't unload a truckload of bowling balls with a pitchfork . . . a joke, by the way, that I heard originally from a ten-year-old.) Such a joke may surprise a laugh or a grin out of us even as we recoil, a possibility that confirms the thesis: If we share a brotherhood of man, then we also share an insanity of man. None of which is intended as a defense of either the sick joke or insanity but merely as an explanation of why the best horror films, like the best fairy tales, manage to be reactionary, anarchistic, and revolutionary all at the same time.

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Source F

Faulkner, William. *The Sound and the Fury*. Ed. Malcolm Cowley. First Vintage International Edition. New York: Random House Group, 1990. 96-97. Print.

The following passage is excerpted from a book that focuses on the fall of a southern aristocratic family.

Trampling my shadow's bones into the concrete with hard heels and then I was hearing the watch, and I touched the letters through my coat.

*I will not have my daughter spied on by you or Quentin or anybody no matter what you think she has done*

*At least you agree there is reason for having her watched*

*I wouldn't have I wouldn't have. I know you wouldn't I didn't mean to speak so sharply but women have no respect for each other for themselves*

*But why did she* The chimes began as I stepped on my shadow, but it was the quarter hour. The Deacon wasn't in sight anywhere. *think I would have could have*

*She didn't mean that that's the way women do things it's because she loves Caddy*

*The street lamps would go down the hill then rise toward town* I walked upon the belly of my shadow. I could extend my hand beyond it. *feeling Father behind me beyond the rasping darkness of summer and August the street lamps* Father and I protect women from one another from themselves our women Women are like that they dont acquire knowledge of people we are for that they are just born with a practical fertility of suspicion that makes a crop every so often and usually right they have an affinity for evil for supplying whatever the evil lacks in itself for drawing it about them instinctively as you do bed-clothing in slumber fertilizing the mind for it until the evil has served its purpose whether it ever existed or no He was coming along between a couple of freshmen. He hadn't quite recovered from the parade, for he gave me a salute, a very superior-officerish kind.



# Synthesis Prompt

## GRADEMARK REPORT

FINAL GRADE

/100

GENERAL COMMENTS

Instructor

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EXPOSITION (20%)

0 / 5

The text sets up a story by introducing the event/conflict, characters and setting.

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EXCEPTIONAL (5)	The text creatively engages the reader by setting out a well-developed conflict, situation, or observation. The text establishes one or multiple points of view and introduces a narrator and/or complex characters.
SKILLED (4)	The text engages and orients the reader by setting out a conflict, situation, or observation. It establishes one or multiple points of view and introduces a narrator and/or well-developed characters.
PROFICIENT (3)	The text orients the reader by setting out a conflict, situation, or observation. It establishes one point of view and introduces a narrator and/or developed characters.
DEVELOPING (2)	The text provides a setting with a vague conflict, situation, or observation with an unclear point of view. It introduces a narrator and/or underdeveloped characters.
INADEQUATE (1)	The text provides a setting that is unclear with a vague conflict, situation, or observation. It has an unclear point of view and underdeveloped narrator and/or characters.

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DEVELOPMENT (20%)

0 / 5

The story is developed using dialogue, pacing, description, reflection and multiple plot lines.

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EXCEPTIONAL (5)	The text demonstrates sophisticated narrative techniques, such as engaging dialogue, artistic pacing, vivid description, complex reflection, and multiple plot lines to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.
SKILLED (4)	The text demonstrates deliberate use of narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.
PROFICIENT (3)	The text uses narrative techniques, such as dialogue, description, reflection, that illustrate events and/or characters.
DEVELOPING (2)	The text uses some narrative techniques, such as dialogue or description that merely retells events and/or experiences.
INADEQUATE (1)	The text lacks narrative techniques and merely retells events and/or experiences.

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ORGANIZATION (20%)

0 / 5

The text follows a logical sequence of events.

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EXCEPTIONAL (5)	The text creates a seamless progression of experiences or events using multiple techniques--such as chronology, flashback, foreshadowing, suspense, etc.--to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole.
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SKILLED (4)	The text creates a smooth progression of experiences or events using a variety of techniques--such as chronology, flashback, foreshadowing, suspense, etc.--to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole.
PROFICIENT (3)	The text creates a logical progression of experiences or events using some techniques--such as chronology, flashback, foreshadowing, suspense, etc.--to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole.
DEVELOPING (2)	The text creates a sequence or progression of experiences or events.
INADEQUATE (1)	The text lacks a sequence or progression of experiences or events or presents an illogical sequence of events.

#### STYLE (20%)

0 / 5

The text uses sensory language and details to create a vivid picture of the events, setting, and characters.

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EXCEPTIONAL (5)	The text uses eloquent words and phrases, showing details and rich sensory language and mood to convey a realistic picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.
SKILLED (4)	The text uses precise words and phrases, showing details and controlled sensory language and mood to convey a realistic picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.
PROFICIENT (3)	The text uses words and phrases, telling details and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.
DEVELOPING (2)	The text uses words and phrases and telling details to convey experiences, events, settings, and/or characters.
INADEQUATE (1)	The text merely tells about experiences, events, settings, and/or characters.

#### CONCLUSION (20%)

0 / 5

The text provides a conclusion that follows from the course of the narrative. The conclusion provides a reflection on or resolution of the events.

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EXCEPTIONAL (5)	The text moves to a conclusion that artfully follows from and thoughtfully reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.
SKILLED (4)	The text builds to a conclusion that logically follows from and reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.
PROFICIENT (3)	The text provides a conclusion that follows from and reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.
DEVELOPING (2)	The text provides a conclusion that follows from what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.
INADEQUATE	The text may provide a conclusion to the events of the narrative.

