

**AP ENGLISH LITERATURE PROSE ESSAY SCORING GUIDELINE**  
**Oscar Wilde's *Lady Windermere's Fan***

General Directions: The score that you assign should reflect your judgment of the quality of the essay as a whole—its content, its style, its mechanics. **Reward the writers for what they do well.** The score for an exceptionally well-written essay may be raised by one point above the otherwise appropriate score. In no case may a poorly written essay be scored higher than a three (3).

- 9-8** These essays offer a persuasive analysis of how the playwright reveals the values of the characters and the nature of their society. The writers make a strong case for their interpretation of character and situation, developing the relationship between language and values. The writers consider literary and dramatic elements such as characterization, diction, and tone, engaging the text through apt and specific references. Although these essays may not be error-free, their perceptive analysis is apparent in writing that is clear, precise, and effectively organized. Generally, essays scored a nine (9) reveal more sophisticated analysis and more effective control of language than do essays scored and eight (8).
- 7-6** These essays offer a reasonable analysis of how the playwright reveals the values of the characters and the nature of their society. The writers provide a sustained, competent reading of the passage, with attention to literary and dramatic elements such as characterization, diction, and tone. Although these essays may not be error-free and may be less perceptive or less convincing than 9-8 essays, the writers present their ideas with clarity and control and refer to the text for support. Generally, essays scored a seven (7) present better-developed analysis and more consistent command of the elements of effective composition than do essays scored a six (6).
- 5** These essays respond to the assigned task with a plausible reading of the passage, but they tend to be superficial or undeveloped in their treatment of how the playwright reveals the values of the characters and nature of their society. While exhibiting some analysis of the passage, implicit or explicit, the discussion of how literary elements contribute to the author's purpose may be slight, and support from the passage may be thin or tend toward paraphrase. While these writers demonstrate adequate control of language, their essays may be marred by surface errors. Generally, essays scored a five (5) lack the more effective organization and the more sustained development characteristics of 7-6 papers.
- 4-3** These essays fail to offer a less than thorough understanding of the task or a less than adequate treatment of how the playwright reveals the values of the characters and the nature of their society. Often relying on summary or paraphrase, the writers may fail to articulate a convincing basis for understanding the relationship between language and the values of the characters and the nature of society. They may misread the passage or may present an unfocused or repetitive reading characterized by an absence of textual support or an accumulation of errors. Generally, essays scored a four (4) exhibit better control over the elements of composition than those scored a three (3).
- 2-1** These essays compound the weaknesses of the papers in the 4-3 range. They may persistently misread the passage or be unacceptably brief. They may contain pervasive errors that interfere with understanding. Although an attempt has been made to respond to the prompt, the writers' ideas are presented with little clarity, organization, or support from the passage. Essays scored a one (1) are especially inept or incoherent.
- 0** These essays make no more than a reference to the task.
- These essays are either left blank or are completely off-topic.

## SAMPLE ESSAYS

### Oscar Wilde's *Lady Windermere's Fan*

#### 0 - ZERO

In the play "Lady Windermere's Fan," by Oscar Wilde the playwright reveals the values of the characters and the nature of their society.

#### 5 - FIVE

In the excerpt from the play Lady Windermere's Fan by Oscar Wilde, three characters are introduced, Duchess of Berwick, Lord Darlington, and Lady Windermere. The values of all three characters and the nature of their society is revealed by their conversation and how they say it.

The Duchess of Berwick is the first character that is introduced in the excerpt. Immediately the reader can tell what type of person she is. She comes to very harsh conclusion of people as seen in the line "I won't let you know my daughter, you are far too wicked." Even though she may know Darlington well, she doesn't allow her daughter to come to her own conclusions. It is prevelant that the Duchess values wealth and status in society with the saying of the lines "I don't know what society is comming to. The most dreadful people seem to go everywhere." The Duchess obviously does not like poorer people and thinks very highly of herself. Lady Windermere is not as self-rightious as the Duchess. Lady Windermere values her friends and isn't as snobby as the Duchess is. Lady Windermere values her friends as seen in the line "I will, Duchess. I will have no one in my house about whom there any scandal." because she is complaiant with the Duchess to make her happy. Lady Windermere also does not think of herself as or put herself on a pedestal as the Duchess does as seen in the lines "Oh, you musn't think it is going to be a ball, Duchess, it is only a dance in honor of my birthday. A small and early." Lady Windermere doesn't value her wealth as much as the Duchess.

Lord Darlington values how he is viewed by others. This is prevelent in the lines "...lots of people who say I have never really done anything wrong in the whole course of my life of course they only say it behind my back." This shows that Lord Darlington is proud of how he is viewed by others for being a wicked man. He values how other people see him to be.

The second half of the excerpt reveals the nature of the three characters society. The women of the society are pushed back while the men are always in the foreground. "But we are positively getting elbowed into the corner." Also, it seems as if they believe that divorce is getting popular by the statement, "—'the wives hold all the honours and invariable lose the old trick.' "The old trick? Is that the husband. Lord Darlington?" It is percieved that the socities women are the ones who cause the divorce.

The excerpt from Lady Windermere's Fan reveals the values of the Duchess, Lay Windermere, and Lord Darlington. The Duchess valued wealth and status because of how she talked about others as well as herself. Lady Windermere valued her friends because of how she agreed with them to make them happy. Lord Darlington valued how others percieved him because he became happy when thought about it. Women being under men and divorce was a big part of the nature of their society. From this excerpt Oscar Wilde reveals the characters' values and the nature of their society.

## 9 - NINE

One of the great ways for authors to reproach their audience while simultaneously keeping them interested and entertained is satire. In Oscar Wilde's 1892 play Lady Windermere's Fan, Wilde successfully portrays the Victorian upper class as completely ridiculous without becoming offensive.

The Duchess of Berwick has the most dominating personality. As a duchess, she is more highly ranked in society than a lord or lady, and clearly takes her role very seriously. She is so conceited she presumes to tell the lord and lady about their companions—both specifically and generally—in society as if they are half-wits and could not draw their own conclusions. The duchess has all of the long lines with Lord Darlington and Lady Windmere only able to fit a word in when she pauses for breath. Perhaps if she did not love to hear herself talk so much, the audience could be introduced to a fourth character in the seen, Agatha. The duchess refers to and addresses her daughter numerous times without ever allowing her a moment to formulate a response. Her snobbery is apparent when she tells not only how her “friend” Lady Markby's tea was “quite undrinkable,” but goes on to banish any thoughts of loyalty by commenting that she wasn't surprised because she disapproves of her supplier. The duchess then goes on to make her class look very elitest and condescending toward the rest of the people when she remarks that there are no more good houses in London and that the society is becoming to common and uncivilized.

If the Duchess of Berwick makes the patronizing upper-class look awful, Lady Windermere does nothing to salvage the picture. Actually taking the duchess's self-important attitudes seriously, she represents the ladies of London as simpering sycophants, ready to do the beck and call of their betters to be approved by and invited among the “right people.” Lady Windermere not only reforms herself to fit the duchess's standards, she ends up imitating her attitude toward men, specifically Lord Darlington, and society. She immediately humbles herself before the duchess, making her ball seem smaller to become a mere dance and vowing that she will only invite the proper company of which the duchess approves. Towards the end she teases Lord Darlington in a similar manner to the duchess's, calling him trivial, and lightly reprimanding him about his “foolish insincerity” in a playful tone.

Lord Darlington is exactly what his name denotes—a darling. He is the character that would be favored by the audience. Obviously more intelligent than any of the present company, the audience would smile in sympathy as both he and they are forced to listen to the duchess's diatribes about the current society. They would laugh, pleased and amused, at his clever remarks when comparing husbands and wives to card games and at his careful flattery of the duchess when informing her the ball would be “very select.” They would thoroughly appreciate his discreet mockery of the women's intelligence with his paradox on the importance of life being too serious for discussion. The audience would also understand why, despite his amused mockery and slight contempt for the women, he appeals to their egos in the end to stay in their and society's good graces.

To conclude, Oscar Wile effectively uses ironic humor and mockery to reproach the Victorian upper-class about their elitest attitudes in his play Lady Windermere's Fan. He manages to make fun of them and entertain them at the same time with his enjoyable wit.