

Chapter III

Answers to the 1999 AP English Literature and Composition Examination

- Section I: Multiple Choice
- Section II: Free Response

Section I: Multiple Choice

Listed below are the correct answers to the multiple-choice questions along with the percentage of AP candidates who answered each question correctly.

Section I Answer Key and Percent Answering Correctly

Item No.	Correct Answer	Percent Correct by Grade					Total
		5	4	3	2	1	
1	B	96	93	85	70	55	83
2	B	94	89	81	71	51	80
3	C	98	96	94	88	76	92
4	D	80	66	49	35	27	52
5	B	92	85	75	58	36	72
6	D	72	60	49	43	37	52
7	A	46	37	26	19	12	29
8	C	96	91	82	62	30	77
9	E	70	61	54	44	33	54
10	A	96	91	81	64	46	77
11	E	49	45	40	35	31	41
12	B	88	80	64	46	30	64
13	C	63	52	36	25	18	38
14	D	96	88	80	63	43	77
15	C	98	95	91	79	61	87
16	B	93	86	75	56	36	72
17	A	97	92	88	80	64	86
18	C	96	95	88	77	50	86
19	E	99	97	94	85	59	91
20	E	99	98	96	89	66	94
21	D	70	58	41	32	24	45
22	A	87	79	73	59	42	70
23	A	74	65	55	43	37	55
24	E	66	51	34	19	11	35
25	B	96	90	82	63	29	77
26	C	97	92	78	57	32	74
27	B	95	88	74	55	40	72
28	E	83	70	48	27	15	49
29	D	95	87	71	48	28	68
30	A	68	52	39	24	17	40

Item No.	Correct Answer	Percent Correct by Grade					Total
		5	4	3	2	1	
31	E	66	54	44	29	20	43
32	B	90	82	69	49	25	66
33	E	82	76	67	53	32	65
34	A	86	75	60	44	25	60
35	A	88	78	61	39	23	60
36	C	90	82	76	71	57	76
37	B	99	98	96	88	65	93
38	D	96	93	90	83	64	88
39	E	41	31	23	19	19	25
40	C	96	93	85	72	46	82
41	A	92	87	78	61	34	75
42	C	87	78	67	47	31	65
43	D	90	83	69	52	34	69
44	A	88	81	71	49	30	68
45	A	86	81	76	67	45	74
46	B	76	59	43	27	22	45
47	E	93	86	80	71	49	79
48	C	93	83	69	46	30	66
49	D	83	68	54	35	20	53
50	C	88	82	73	55	32	69
51	E	90	83	75	56	30	73
52	C	72	68	59	53	40	60
53	B	95	92	88	75	49	85
54	E	79	71	61	47	34	60
55	B	88	78	66	41	22	63

Section II: Free Response

On the next several pages, you will find a general analysis of each question, and the students' performance on it, by the Chief Faculty Consultant, Linda Hubert. Following these are the scoring guidelines used by the faculty consultants at the AP Reading. There are also sample student responses for each question, along with commentary indicating why the essay received the score it did. A distribution of student scores on each free-response question appears on page 71.

Question 1 — Overview

This question required students to read the 24-line poem "Blackberry-Picking" by contemporary Irish poet Seamus Heaney, "paying particular attention to the physical intensity of the language." In the well-organized essay they were asked to write, they were charged to explain "how the poet conveys not just a literal description of picking blackberries but a deeper understanding of the whole experience." Students were prompted to include, should they wish, an analysis of any of the following elements: diction, imagery, metaphor, rhyme, rhythm, and form.

This fine poem by a first-rate poet was a pleasing text, apparently, to both the seasoned teachers who scored the essays and to their young charges who wrote them. No one faulted this selection, except perhaps to remark that the AP English Development Committee, with its poem by Eavan Boland last year and with the one this year by Heaney, had suddenly "gone Irish." "Blackberry-Picking" proved more immediately accessible to students than last year's poem by Boland (or indeed many others that we have provided in past exams), and its appeal seemed to transcend nationality, gender, race, and age. Almost all students were able to describe the situation of the poem and to understand at some level the speaker's response to the quickly deteriorating stash of berries. They seemed to enjoy the vividness of the poem's language, even if they overlooked much of its suggestiveness.

There were numerous examples of student achievement on this question: superior students could work effectively with the literal and metaphoric dimensions of the poem without losing sight of their interconnection — without flattening the poem or diminishing its richness. Competent students of poetry recognized the

defining perspective of youth versus adulthood as they took note that the poet works through the memory of the man to reconstruct and assess his boyhood experiences with blackberry picking. Some wrote of the rural ritual of blackberry picking as it patterned the cycles of the seasons; they conveyed with aptly chosen specific detail how the strong, evocative language underscored the speaker's youthful exuberance and greed. Some few saw implicit in the boyhood excess the genesis of the older speaker's disappointment and despair.

However, for many if not most students, the ability to probe the connection between the all but sinister description of the fragility of the berries and the speaker's annual encounter with life's transience was limited. Too few went so far as to link the speaker's deepening recognition of the inevitable decay of the berries with the implied defeat of grasping, greedy youthful optimism. Nor did they develop an extended discussion of the mature speaker's understanding of mortality by building on the language of the first stanza as well as the second.

Regardless of the list of suggestions for analysis, we were disappointed by the capacity of the preponderance of student writers to define and discuss the artistic strategies through which Heaney created and conveyed meaning. The prompt asked for "how," but some students ignored this direction altogether. Many of the dutiful essays that sought to give us the "how" plodded through a discussion of the elements on the accompanying list without shaping a coherent and insightful argument. Indeed the list in the prompt seemed to provoke superficial commentary and even tedious similarities among the essays. The same observations — often in essentially the same order — appeared in essay after essay. However, very few students seemed aware of the technical virtuosity of the poem. Most failed to notice (or to venture to explain) its subtle repetitions of sound and its reliance on consonance, assonance, and off rhyme rather than the conventional masculine rhymes that might have been expected to bring closure to its iambic pentameter couplets.

Although the merits of a list of suggested works remain controversial, teachers often convey their relief that such a list supplies support to students by helping to provoke their own thinking.

Clearly English teachers have their work cut out for them. Students wrenched the poem artificially askew

and failed to underscore the power of the poem's rich language to contain multiple meanings and to resonate with even more. Perhaps the prompt might have *stressed* the inherent relationship between the literal and metaphoric — and avoided the words “deeper understanding” altogether. Unfortunately, the problem goes deeper than the prompt to this one question. Almost despite the careful choice of texts for the poetry question year in and year out, the poetry essay continues to present the most difficulty for students. Certainly, a healthy representation of students dazzles us with their sensitivity and insight. But many more seem for the most part intimidated by poetry: they sometimes strain so hard at “cracking a code” that their essays prove reductive or convoluted. Though unusual this year, total misreadings have not been uncommon in previous years.

As we acknowledge the relatively low scores earned by students from year to year on this essay question (and indeed the occasional inconsistencies of these scores when compared with those on the rest of the test), we try to remember the difficulty of tasking students to read and write about a provocative poem in a limited time period.

It is important to remember that no paper on a poem is without flaws of omission if not commission: imprecisions or infelicities in diction, mistakes in grammar or spelling, an abortive ending, an interpretation that is unpersuasive or even peculiar, or limited development where we might hope for more. To write about poetry, it seems, you have to be a little something of a poet yourself — or at least empowered by fine teaching to tap the poetic spirit that exists at some level within us all. In the 40 minutes available to write their poetry essays, certain students manage only to convey their confusion, their plodding literalness in reading a poem, or even their desultory, unhinged renderings that are not so much creative as unconvincing. The language in the essays of others, of course, takes wings. That our young people do as well as they do within the short length of time they are given to read, study, and write is perhaps no minor miracle.

The three student responses on pages 39-48 are arranged with the strongest first, the next strongest second, and the passable but undistinguished essay third.

Scoring Guidelines for Question 1

General directions for faculty consultants: * This scoring guide will be useful for most of the essays that you read, but in problematic cases, please consult your Table Leader. The score you assign should reflect your judgment of the quality of the essay *as a whole*. Reward the writers for what they do well. The score for an exceptionally well-written essay may be raised by one point from the score otherwise appropriate. In no case may a poorly written essay be scored higher than 3.

9-8 These well-conceived and well-ordered essays provide insightful analysis (implicit as well as explicit) of *how* Heaney creates and conveys his memory of picking blackberries. They appreciate Heaney's physically-intense language for its vivid literal description, but they also understand the meaning of the experience on a profound, metaphoric level. Although the writers of these essays may offer a range of interpretations and/or choose different poetic elements for emphasis, these papers provide convincing readings of the poem and maintain consistent control over the elements of effective composition, including the language unique to the criticism of verse. Their textual references are apt and specific. Though they may not be error-free, they demonstrate the writers' ability to read poetry perceptively and to write with clarity and sophistication.

7-6 These essays reflect a sound grasp of Heaney's poem and the power of its language; but they prove less sensitive than the best essays to the poetic ways that Heaney invests literal experience with strong, metaphoric implications. The interpretations of the poem that they provide may falter in some particulars or they may be less thorough or precise in their discussion of *how* the speaker reveals the experience of “blackberry-picking.” Nonetheless, their dependence on paraphrase, if any, will be in the service of analysis. These essays demonstrate the writers' ability to express ideas clearly, but they do not exhibit the same level of mastery, maturity, and/or control as the very best essays. These essays are likely to be briefer, less incisive, and less well-supported than the 9-8 papers.

*These directions apply to the scoring guidelines for every question.

- 5 These essays are, at best, superficial. They respond to the assigned task yet probably say little beyond the most easily grasped observations. Their analysis of how the experience of blackberry picking is conveyed may be vague, formulaic, or inadequately supported. They may suffer from the cumulative force of many minor misreadings. They tend to rely on paraphrase but nonetheless paraphrase which contains some implicit analysis. Composition skills are at a level sufficient to convey the writer's thoughts, and egregious mechanical errors do not constitute a distraction. These essays are nonetheless not as well-conceived, organized, or developed as upper-half papers.
- 4-3 These lower-half essays reveal an incomplete understanding of the poem and perhaps an insufficient understanding of the prescribed task as well: they may emphasize literal description without discussing the deeper implications of the blackberry-picking experience. The analysis may be partial, unconvincing, or irrelevant — or it may rely essentially on paraphrase. Evidence from the text may be meager or misconstrued. The writing demonstrates uncertain control over the elements of composition, often exhibiting recurrent stylistic flaws and/or inadequate development of ideas. Essays scored 3 may contain significant misreading and/or unusually inept writing.
- 2-1 These essays compound the weaknesses of the papers in the 4-3 range. They may seriously misread the poem. Frequently, they are unacceptably brief. They are poorly written on several counts and may contain many distracting errors in grammar and mechanics. Although some attempt may have been made to respond to the question, the writer's assertions are presented with little clarity, organization, or support from the text of the poem.
- 0 A response with no more than a reference to the task.
- A blank paper or completely off-topic response.

Sample Student Responses for Question 1

Student Response 1 — Excellent

In Seamus Heaney's poem "Blackberry-picking," the use of juicy diction, clear and vivid imagery, slant rhyme and conversational rhythm, along with casual form, illustrate the poet's message that the childhood experience of picking berries holds a deeper metaphor for life; that is, childish hopes continue to exist despite the ^{also} continual slap of reality.

The casual and childish hopefulness in the poem is clearly embodied in the conversational tone, forced by the irregular sentence structure found within the rhythm and the slant rhyme usage throughout the work. By organizing sentences in such a way that perpetuates variance of stressed and unstressed syllables, the narrative tale of berry-picking is seen in a casual light. The additional use of slant rhyme or off rhyme ("sweet/it" 5-6) also adds to the elimination of the sing-song feel that so often causes distraction of the reader in other poems. The poem's form in an AAB... rhyme scheme separated into almost rhyming couplets keeps a sense of organized structure throughout.

The use of descriptive, content-filled diction is as juicy as the blackberries in the story; this description adds

not only to the literal childish experience of berry-picking, but also to the adult acknowledgement of the significance of the experience. The clear imagery of the berries' "flesh" (5) sweetened "like thickened wine" (6) brings vivid images and striking comparisons between the berry flesh and human flesh, filled with "summer's blood" (6). The fact that the memory of the adult, reflecting back upon the childhood experience is so strong as to remember all of the "milk cans, pea tins, [and] jam pots" (9) provides an additional link through repetitive diction to the metaphor that is to come. Imagery is also solidified through such literary elements as consonance "tricked and picked" (12) alliteration "big dark blobs burned" (14), and personification as it is "hunger" (8) that sent the children out to gather all of the berries.

Through the childhood experience of gathering berries, the speaker uses literary elements to show the deeper metaphor for idealistic hope and its survival despite realistic confinements. The structure of the poem, by separating the initial tale of the berry picking into 8 couplets and the reflection upon the fermentation and rot into four couplets indicates the

speaker's belief that the childish, innocent hope for sweetness and goodness continues on. This is paradoxically established further in the speaker's description of "all the lovely canfuls smelt of rot" (13) as the hopes of sweet, lovely blackberries are destroyed by the inevitable natural decay of what was sweet and good in the berries. This grim picture, of the natural decay and destruction of the things we cherish enough to go search after even "where briars scratched (10) and when "our hands were peppered / with thorn pricks" (15-16), presents a depressing image of the world around us. We sacrifice for the "lust for / picking" (7-8) and are yet denied the fruits of our labor. This destruction of what people materialistically search for, however, does offer hope. Although the human possessions do not keep forever, the hope that nature's goodness will continue on is ~~properly~~ mirrored in the childish hope that the berries will keep despite the knowledge that the berries themselves will rot. More important than actually saving the berries then, is the value placed on nature and the triumph in the berry-pick. The fact that the berries were picked every year despite the knowledge that they would spoil is the finishing

touch on the role that hope has in our society.

The ideals of natural preservation, although tainted by inevitable decay of what is worked for, are perpetuated not by the physical salvation of nature's goods, but by the internal value that is placed on nature. In "Blackberry-Picking" the adult reflection upon the childhood innocence of that hope is reflected poignantly by the lush descriptions and imagery of a memory that in some way, ~~is~~ true to us all.

Commentary on Essay

Doubtless there are other essays that convey the poem's meaning in a more compelling fashion than this essay manages — or that supply fuller readings of the rich imagery and diction found in "Blackberry-Picking." However, this is one whale of an essay! So much information is provided by this lengthy piece that it seems perverse to fault the essay because of a vexing omission or dubious assertion ("casual form," for instance?). The expertise as well as the ambition of the writer is apparent from the outset with the sophisticated technical observations about syntax, rhyme, and meter. If these comments do not hold up to scrutiny in their entirety, we forgive the lapses and credit the attempt, amazed at what the writer has accomplished! (Dissection of sound effects simply does not occur in other essays to any appreciable extent.) Similarly, we overlook the several errors in writing: the subject-verb disagreement in the first sentence, for example, or the awkward syntax that results a time or two when the student tries to combine specific examples with commentary.

The student proceeds with a stunning level of analytical command. A commitment to using details to illustrate points is obvious, and the writer has impressive facility with the vocabulary appropriate to literary criticism. Furthermore, the essay reflects an innate sensitivity to the speaker's tone by suggesting the complex tensions between enthusiasm and disappointment, joy and pain, life and death that persist throughout "Blackberry-Picking." The writer notes the separation between the two parts of the poem as a function of form and content — the second segment brings overwhelming confirmation of the appalling futility of the effort to "hoard" the berries. However, he or she understands that the language that describes the boy's eager blackberry-picking experiences in the first section incorporates the seasoned reaction of the adult: disappointment is inherent in the boyish hope the young writer describes with such conviction.

Even when the student lacks precision in an explanation, he or she does not superimpose "higher meanings" upon the literal images and actions of the poem, but renders meaning as integral to the language and various poetic elements that create and convey it. In sum, both the poet and the young critic who writes so ably about Heaney's artistry view with compassion the ongoing nature of the human struggle to stay the unstayable. The student's full embrace of the joy and exuberance conveyed in the blackberry struggle is inspiring evidence of his or her own youthful enthusiasm for life — and for poetry. The mature regard for the natural law of decline and death is similarly impressive. Imagine what he or she might do with a second — or third — draft of this essay!

In Keats's poem "Blackberry-Picking" a deeper ~~and~~ understanding of life's ceaseless cycles is conveyed as the poem shifts from lustful and unsatisfied to disappointed and destitute. The poem was divided into two sections. The first one physically described the fall's harvest of ~~B~~ blackberries while it symbolically described life. The vigor and youthful air given to the poem was inheritant through the poet's diction. The blackberries were vividly described using strong visual, and tactile images such as "glossy purple clot", (3) "red, green, hard as a knot" (4) and "big dark blobs burned" (14). The ~~re~~ repetition of 'b's' in line 14 further emphasizes the importance of the chosen words, it strengthens the language. ~~The poem's lustfulness~~ ~~lustfulness~~ of the poem was portrayed through similes and metaphors. ~~It~~ Phrases such as "its flesh was sweet / Like thickened wine: Summer's blood was in it" (lines 5-6) make references to a physical body. The words 'flesh' and 'blood' in particular. The simile "like thickened wine" draws images of drunkenness, almost an irresistible force creating a "lust for / Picking" (lines 7-8). The tone of the poem remains unsatisfied.

The second section of the poem physically describes the decay of the blackberries, yet symbolically ~~describes~~ stands as an elaboration of death. The ~~second~~ eighteenth line insinuates a surplus, "when the bath was filled". Strong visual descriptions of the decay were used such as "rat-grey fungus" (19) and ~~an~~ olfactory ^{images} with "stinking" (20) and "lovely canfuls smelt of rot" (23). The poet "always felt like crying" (22) and "hoped they'd keep, knew they would not" (24). He was trying to defy life's natural cycles while knowing he was powerless against them. The poem's second half was dissapointing, destitute and full of false hope. The over all contrast between ^{the} life and death of the blackberries, with the poet's powerlessness over natural cycles are what combine to convey a deeper understanding of the whole experience. A powerful, rhyming comparison was drawn through the witty "clot" (3) and "knot" (4) at the end of those lines, and the words "rot" (23) and "not" (24) at the end of the last two

Student Response 2, continued

lines. 'Rot' and 'not' are strong negative influences on the poem, whereas 'clot' and 'knot' are positive influences. A sharp contrast is drawn, further emphasizing and strengthening the overall understanding portrayed in the poem.

Commentary on Essay

This essay is much less multi-dimensional than the very rich one provided by the first young writer, and more is suggested and implied than fully developed in its discussion. The student seems to intuit the strengths of the poem, but fails to describe its artistry with clarity or sustained precision. This student of course deserves no points for spelling, though scorers recognize that in a normal compositional mode, the computer's spell-check would save the writer. Probably we are more forgiving of such errors than we used to be, but unquestionably the essay's virtues must be looked upon to compensate for such apostasy. The compactness of the two-paragraph approach (one paragraph devoted to each segment of the poem) seems less than efficient here. The complex point of view of the poem is ignored in the basic contrast that the essay emphasizes between the living berries and the fermenting product.

Nonetheless, there are strengths. The writer clearly senses the inherent losses built into the doomed effort to sustain the vitality of the blackberry-picking experience or, indeed, the blackberries themselves. Several apt comments focusing on diction and imagery deserve reward. Although many observations lack full development, and the references to the poet's techniques seem arbitrary rather than systematic, the student takes pains to make suggestions about the power of the poem's language, even to honoring its aural effects. Notably, the discussion of the rhyming words (clot, knot, rot, not) provides important support to the student's argument about the essential contrasts between life and death that he or she feels are the poet's preoccupation and concern.

Seamus Heaney's poem "Blackberry Picking" conveys more than just a literal description of the process of harvesting blackberries. Through the form and structure of the poem, and through the author's choice of words and metaphors a ~~more~~ ~~deep~~ deeper explanation of the experience is attained. The process of blackberry harvesting is ~~so psychological~~ ~~process~~ shown as a deep psychological process of love and loss.

The poem is divided into two sections. This division separates the feelings of love in the first part from the feelings of loss in the second part. The poem describes the process of picking the blackberries in the first stanza. This is the longer of the two stanzas, illustrating the long, labor intensive harvest driven by love. The second stanza is about the fermentation of the blackberries soon after picking them. This stanza is short because the berries rot quickly after they have been picked. This poem structure contrasts the long labors of love ~~and~~ and the short time in which all can be lost.

The diction in the poem also contributes to its deeper meaning. While the author describes the picking, he uses certain words and phrases which demonstrate the love of blackberry harvesting. "Like thickened wine: summer's blood was in it/"

Leaving stains upon the tongue and lust for Picking" (lines 6-8). This statement describes the joy and fulfillment the author finds through ~~the~~ the picking, because of the use of the words "lust", and "thickened wine". The diction in the second stanza changes to show the loss felt when the berries ferment. Words such as "glutting" (line 14) and "shriveling" (line 20), and the phrase, "I always felt like crying" (line 22) show this sad tone. The ^{change of the} author's words and phrases between the first and second stanza once again convey a the deeper psychological feelings associated with picking black berries.

Finally, the metaphors of the poem also show the love and loss of the process. The author describes the taste of the first berry as "sweet like thickened wine" (lines 5-6). This metaphor is a clear statement of the love involved through the description of the taste. The loss involved is once again portrayed in the second stanza, through metaphors. The author ~~says~~ compares the moldy blackberries to "rat-grey fungus" (line 19). This comparison ~~now shows~~ shows the once delicious, wonderful berries, have been ruined.

Student Response 3, continued

The poem portrays blackberry-picking as more than just a simple labor. It ~~is~~ is a deeper experience of love and anticipation followed by sadness and a ~~few~~ sense of loss.

Commentary on Essay

This student got the word on the five-paragraph essay and dutifully pulled off a focused piece tracking "love and loss." The essay boasts an introduction that is more than a restatement of the question; three paragraphs highlighting form, diction, and metaphor; and a conclusion that in spite of its brevity serves to reassert the thesis that has been doggedly, if incompletely, developed. However, there is very little analysis in this piece, though enough to push it into the upper half. Several minor errors (such as the misuse of "it's") also blight the effort.

The contrast between love and loss oversimplifies the conflicts and tensions in the poem, but it is not wrong. However, the writer provides justifications for the lengths of the stanzas that are forced; and the assertions made in reference to the phrases that describe "the love of blackberry harvesting" prove all but unconvincing. (Perhaps "love" and "thickened wine" are naturally linked, but the connection is not clear from the remarks here.) Readers of this essay may also be uncomfortable with the cavalier identification of the speaker as "the author."

Although the writer of this essay seemed to respond to the fundamental tension in the poem, his or her understanding and discussion of the poet's artistic strategy is limited to essentially problematic observations. Thus the tidy ordering of this essay cannot compensate for its limited content. Though the writer is competent to sense multiple levels of meaning in this poem and to shape a coherent essay, albeit formulaic, this piece does less than the other two essays to explain the power of the poem.

Question 2 — Overview

This question presented students with a passage from Cormac McCarthy's 1994 novel, *The Crossing*. The novel's narrator describes a beautifully self-contained scene: a boy (or man, as many students labeled him; they had no way of knowing), remote and isolated from humankind in harsh natural surroundings, keeps a night watch over the bloody carcass of his beloved wolf. The external action appears static rather than dramatic. However, dramatic activity occurs within the mind and spirit of the grieving and guilty boy. Internal transformations result from new understandings of life and death that are gained as he comes to terms with the persistent, if elusive, power of nature. Students were asked to write a well-organized essay that demonstrates "how McCarthy's techniques convey the impact of the experience on the main character." This assignment proved to be all but ideal for this text.

The choice of the McCarthy passage for this exam was made over mild protests from some members of the AP English Development Committee. If McCarthy has his enthusiasts, he also has his detractors. But on balance, the committee agreed that regardless of idiosyncratic judgments about McCarthy's ultimate literary merit, this linguistically rich passage held particular promise for the purposes of the AP Exam. General satisfaction with the question confirmed the wisdom of selecting a writer whose exposure on this national test might help promote works that secondary students would henceforth enjoy reading.

The Cormac McCarthy passage posed immediate problems of context, vocabulary, and tone for less talented students. Probably many of these considered the question daunting when they initially confronted it. It provided the same challenges of textual analysis as poetry, compounded with its own complexities of narrative structure. Furthermore, the stem of the question did not suggest appropriate techniques that might be discussed; students, in fact, were provided little guidance for their essays.

Indeed, the one consistent suggestion that was offered by evaluators on this question was the need for additional information in the stem. They were particularly sensitive to the fact that students were left guessing as to the factors that resulted in the death of the wolf. They felt that knowing that the boy played a role in his own loss was important to understanding his state of

mind. Student writers are not held accountable on the exam for expertise on either the specific work chosen for the text or for its author's canon. Nonetheless, it is apparent in retrospect that had they been informed of the protagonist's age and his culpability in the wolf's death, they might have jumped to fewer conclusions which evaluators had to forgive.

Perhaps because no suggested techniques were named in the directions of the questions, some students strove desperately and often all too creatively to come up with strategies to discuss. Some of these, like "pathos building" (a noble effort?), seemed more identified with outcome or intent than with specific technical tactics. Many students focused on familiar concepts such as setting, imagery, character development, diction, and — remarkably but appropriately — syntax; however, others struggled hard with little coherent result or seemed stymied altogether. Numerous options were possible, however, and sophisticated commentary about point of view, tense, pace, and religious and mythical allusions enlivened these essays for readers.

This essay question thus seemed the best on the exam for eliciting strong writing and for student and reader satisfaction. Talented and well-trained students provided extraordinary responses. Even weaker students worked well to extract meaning from contextual clues, even if they did not grasp fully the boy's awe at the wolf's transfiguration from life to larger than life. The question produced an impressive range of scores and proved to be an especially reliable discriminator of student abilities.

Scoring Guidelines for Question 2

9-8 The writers of these well-constructed essays define the dramatic nature of the experience described in Cormac McCarthy's passage and ably demonstrate *how* the author conveys the impact of the experience upon the main character. Having fashioned a convincing thesis about the character's reaction to the death of the wolf, these writers support their assertions by analyzing the use of specific literary techniques (such as point of view, syntax, imagery, or diction) that prove fundamental to their understanding of McCarthy's narrative design. They make appropriate references to the text to illustrate their argument. Although not without flaws, these

essays reflect the writer's ability to control a wide range of the elements of effective writing to provide a keen analysis of a literary text.

- 7-6** Developing a sound thesis, these writers discuss with clarity and conviction both the character's response to the death of the wolf and certain techniques used to convey the impact this experience has upon the main character. These essays may not be entirely responsive to the rich suggestiveness of the passage or as precise in describing the dramatic impact of the event. Although they provide specific references to the text, the analysis is less persuasive and perhaps less sophisticated than papers in the 9-8 range: they seem less insightful or less controlled, they develop fewer techniques, or their discussion of details may be more limited. Nonetheless, they confirm the writer's ability to read literary texts with comprehension and to write with organization and control.
- 5** These essays construct a reasonable if reductive thesis; they attempt to link the author's literary techniques to the reader's understanding of the impact of the experience on the main character. However, the discussion may be superficial, pedestrian, and/or lacking in consistent control. The organization may be ineffective or not fully realized. The analysis is less developed, less precise, and less convincing than that of upper half essays; misinterpretations of particular references or illustrations may detract from the overall effect.
- 4-3** These essays attempt to discuss the impact of this dramatic experience upon the main character — and perhaps mention one or more techniques used by McCarthy to effect this end. The discussion, however, may be inaccurate or undeveloped. These writers may misread the passage in an essential way, rely on paraphrase, or provide only limited attention to technique. Illustrations from the text tend to be misconstrued, inexact, or omitted altogether. The writing may be sufficient to convey ideas, although typically it is characterized by weak diction, syntax, grammar, or organization. Essays scored three are even less able and may not refer to technique at all.
- 2-1** These essays fail to respond adequately to the question. They may demonstrate confused thinking and/or consistent weaknesses in grammar or another basic element of composition. They are often unacceptably brief. Although the writer may have made some attempt to answer the question, the views presented have little clarity or coherence; significant problems with reading comprehension seem evident. Essays that are especially inexact, vacuous, and/or mechanically unsound should be scored 1.
- 0** A response with no more than a reference to the task.
- A blank paper or completely off-topic response.

Sample Student Responses for Question 2

Student Response 1 — Excellent

The passage from The Crossing conveys a sense of awe and mystery, and in doing so, imparts the depths of the man's emotions towards the wolf. The mourning for the wolf is raised to an elegiac level, ~~and~~ ^{as} the man reflects upon the wolf, "at once terrible and of a great beauty." ~~The~~ Several devices are employed to effectively enhance the tone of reverence and loss, ~~and~~ including figurative language, diction, sentence structure, rhythm, and repetition.

The pace of the passage fluctuates, alternating from short, detached sentences, such as "He squatted over the wolf and touched her fur. He touched the cold and perfect teeth," to unusually long sentences which are connected by conjunctions (mostly "and") and which serve to reflect the outpouring of emotions and the blurred response the man is experiencing, as in lines 41-47 ("The eye... before her"). This dichotomy in sentence structure ~~only underline~~ emphasizes the periods where the man is overcome by remembrances and extrapolations.

The figurative language interspersed within the passage is also highly effective, causing an air of mystery, ~~and~~ wonder, and respect. This mood is set when the cries of the coyotes are described, "seemingly to have no origin other than the night itself." The analogy of the sheet steaming ^(lines 21-24) enhances the aura of power and sacredness by diction such as "celebrants of some sacred passion" and "burning scrim." This sense of ~~times~~ ^a religious ~~ness~~ power is again

Student Response 1, continued

by his comparison to a "dozing penitant." A sense of the awing mixture of terror and beauty is evidenced when the narrator compares the wolf's soul to "flowers that feed on flesh," introducing an element of ~~the almost horrifying, yet overall~~ ~~to wonder inspiring into the depiction of the wolf.~~ how "all was fear and marvel" regarding the wolf.

The repetition of certain phrases and words emphasized the ideas behind them. For example, "What we may well believe has power to cut and shape and hollow out of the dark form of the world surely if wind can, if rain can." ~~This~~ The repetition contained within this sentence really clarifies the point that our beliefs shape our perception. Also, the repetition of "and" throughout the passage, as in lines 15-21, brings a rhythm to the passage while providing a sense of the man not really realizing what he is doing, only going through the motions.

The unspecific pronoun "He" actually provides a contrast where the grief of the man becomes more poignant. The passage ~~slowly~~ metamorphasizes from a more detached account about man's treatment of the body to a touching scene where the man reflects upon the wolf and her spirit.

The final ~~paragraph~~ ^{thoughts}, and especially ~~to~~ the last line, is made more important by the reflections of the man. The last line is particularly emphasized by the complete lack of punctuation, ~~and~~ which

Student Response 1, continued

Conveys the magnitude of the man's loss. His utter grief over losing the wolf is fully revealed to the reader in it, ^{especially the last 4 words,} ~~in stating~~ in stating, "But which cannot be held never be held and is no flower but is swift and a huntress and the wind itself is in terror of it and the world cannot lose it."

The importance of the wolf's role in "the possible world ordained by God of which she was one among and not separate from" is made known to the reader by the man's thoughts and actions. In doing so, and in the setting (with the sun beginning to "faintly gray" the east), a mood of respectful reverence and wonderful power is created. The ~~the~~ man is shown to be deeply impacted by his experience.

Commentary on Essay

This ponderous analysis captures and conveys the thematic impulses of the passage as well as its powerful artistry. The devices the essayist discusses are familiar and conventional — "figurative language, diction, sentence structure, rhythm, and repetition" — but the comments as to how they contribute to the atmosphere of mystery and reverence in the passage are astonishingly astute: probing, precise, and illuminating. The student never falls upon paraphrase or recapitulation of plot to provide an organization for these remarks, and he or she sustains the connections between observed details and their overall function in the poem. A few spelling errors and other brief lapses (such fine points as inconsistencies with respect to placement of quotation marks with other punctuation, for instance — hardly a hanging offense) mar an essay that otherwise requires little revision, even if its writer had additional hours to accomplish that task. The student sees with a keen inner eye the situation described by McCarthy — and fully comprehends its significance. What 200-level college literature class would not welcome this student's presence?

The studied approach reflected in this outstanding analysis is effectively contrasted with the imaginative flights of another fine essay (see the next page) that evokes the spirit of McCarthy's piece in its own introduction.

In the dark of the night it runs swiftly along the mountains, up the slopes, past the creek, faster than the winds. What is this "it" that runs so freely after the body is dead and decaying? It is surely the soul that escapes after death and returns to its home. In the passage from McCarthy's "The Crossing" the soul of the dying wolf leaves the body and the man carrying him, to return to his homeland. McCarthy uses imagery and the description of the complete narrative experience to recount the philosophical revelation that the protagonist encounters as he caresses ~~the~~ death in the tranquility of nature.

An outstanding quality about this narrative is the care with which each imagery is told. One ~~imagery~~ repetitive image is that of dark and light. The narrative begins in the dark, though close to dawn. The coyotes call from the "dark shapes of the rimlands", the image giving a clear picture of the grandeur of nature in which the narrator now sits. There is also the image of the weak fire lit in the cold darkness, a symbol ^{perhaps,} for some hope after death. The fire at first dies; the main character must fan it and relight it, until the ~~dawn~~ sky begins to gray.

What the main character experiences at dawn can be called mysticism, a philosophical epiphany, and a new window of understanding. Such a tone of mystery and enigma is created in the final paragraph (lines 40-65) through the change in the style of writing. The narrative here uses long sentences that run continuous as a stream. The sentences begin to lose the ordinary grammatical form that the narrative followed earlier; "What blood and bone are made of but can themselves not make on any altar nor by any wound of war." The narrative ~~stops~~ story leaves its narrative flow, and begins to build on the image of what that is passing by the main character's closed eyes, as the limited or omniscient third person narrator can do. The passage has religious allusions, "ordained by God", as well as personification that breathes life into the mountain. "The flowers feed on flesh", the wind and rain "cut and shape" the sand, and the soul runs wildly through this nation.

Student Response 2, continued

The experience teaches illuminates the power of nature and the strength of the soul to the main character. He, in reaching out "to hold what cannot be held," grasped in the moment the mystery of death and eternity, the enigma that is conveyed through the powerful images in this narrative.

Commentary on Essay

Some readers might resist as indulgent the emotional renderings of this essay; those who disdain McCarthy's passage as melodramatic to a fault would perhaps similarly dislike this student effort. Yet the student's language clearly conveys a sensitive reading of the passage and an ability to grasp the full intensity of both text and subtexts. Enthusiastic response to the tone of the passage and faithful evocation of the high mystery conveyed in the experience that the McCarthy piece describes are underscored with keen analytical commentary.

The discussion of the light and dark imagery of the passage, particularly the extended reference to the fire, points to the relationship between concrete, literal image, and symbol and thus one very important authorial technique. Examples of effective syntax are threaded through a number of other significant observations about imagery — all in the service of capturing and conveying the atmosphere and mood of the transfiguring event.

Perhaps additional development of all these details would have made this essay stronger, but the essay as is demonstrates admirable focus on the contributions of some of the most effective images to the author's emphatic emphasis on "mystery" and "enigma." The integrity of the student essay as it shaped its own design — as well as the student's appreciation for links between sense and spirit — make it worthy of reward.

The techniques employed by McCarthy here create an increasingly panicked and thoughtful recollection of the main character's remorse. The first lines give no indication of any problem until it bluntly says, "His trousers were stiff with blood." This introduces, in a startling way, the main character's dilemma. There are only hints of guilt thus far, however. This is hinted at by the explicit attention to the state of the wolf, for instance, "She was stiff and cold and her fur was bristly..." Also, later there are coyotes howling in a haunting way because "their cries seemed to have no origin other than the night itself."

The second paragraph gets more definite about half-way through it. The sheet was washed of the wolf's blood and then set by the fire on a freestle pole. This is still unconvincing until the work talks about how this scene resembled "a burning scrim standing in a wilderness... some sacred passion... fled in the night at the fear of their own doing." This account seems severely tinted by an attitude of guilt and self-incrimination equal to that of Poe's beating heart and that of Crime and Punishment. However, this is over a wolf, not a human being.

The third paragraph leaves absolutely no room for doubt. It starts with, "He fell asleep... like some dozing penitent." When he awoke he sat by her "and closed his own eyes that he could see her running in the mountains..." Next, there was a virtual role-call of her prey "ordained by God of which she was one among and not separate from."

Student Response 3, continued

This is a further statement of his guilt. Then he "reached to hold what cannot be held," which is the spirit of the wolf. What is left of the passage is mostly spent on elaborating on the concept of that spirit. It was "terrible and of great beauty, like flowers that feed on flesh." As the emotion gets higher, punctuation lessens and what comes out is a Hemingway-like burst of thought. It can shape rock "surely if wind can, if rain can." "But which cannot be held ~~to~~ never held and is no flower but is swift and a huntress and the wind itself is in terror of it and the world cannot lose it." This demonstrates how McCarthy thinks of that spirit, and how the main character realizes these things through his guilt and remorse.* The main character gets increasingly emotional and philosophical as the author relates, ~~without mentioning that~~ Although there are no quotation marks, any tags on the thoughts stating that they are those of the main character, it is obvious through McCarthy's style.

Commentary on Essay

Aware and intrigued by the guilt of the protagonist, the writer of this essay prompts questions about possible familiarity with the novel — or perhaps negates the notion that guilt is less than self-evident within the context of the passage as excerpted. However, tracking the reader's growing awareness of the protagonist's guilt may not be the best way to illuminate the dramatic transformations within this text. Nonetheless, the student writer's observations about the "burning scrim" and "dosing penitent" support his argument well, and this essay is focused and well-directed.

Though allusions to the mission and style of other writers do not always provide effective connections, this student's comparisons of McCarthy's characterizations and prose strategies to those of other authors are not without merit. The Dostoevsky may be reaching, but the reference to Hemingway's style is apt — and represents perhaps another evidence of previous contact with this novel. No matter: the rhythms and syntax compare, and the educated linkage adds to the value of this student's discussion.

This essay provides too little analysis of the passage to rank with the essays above. But the material that the essay does contain is intelligent and cohesive. This essay then makes an upper-half score.

Question 3 — Overview

Students were offered an elegant observation by 18th-century novelist Laurence Sterne: “No body, but he who has felt it, can conceive what a plaguing thing it is to have a man’s mind torn asunder by two projects of equal strength, both obstinately pulling in a contrary direction at the same time.” The question challenged them to select from an appropriate novel or play a “character (not necessarily the protagonist) whose mind is pulled in conflicting directions by two compelling desires, ambitions, obligations, or influences. Then, in a well-organized essay, identify each of the two conflicting forces and explain how this conflict within one character illuminates the meaning of the work as a whole.”

A large number of students chose characters that were contained in novels or plays from a list of suggested texts which followed the prompt. The tormented minds of characters from *Macbeth*, *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Awakening* were exhaustively (and exhaustingly) discussed; readers began to consider essays about Hamlet the “unkindest cut of all.” Indeed, almost any text could be construed to work with this year’s question, so the majority of students were prepared for this task. Even some seemingly unsuitable textual choices nonetheless led to excellent essays from gifted students: one student writer wrote compellingly of deep internalized conflicts that could be glimpsed beneath Ahab’s monomaniacal behavior — not a task many could undertake with impunity. Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* seemed another improbable text for this task, but the student, treating Vladimir and Estragon as a single consciousness managed a passable if not distinguished essay.

The question read more slowly than usual, perhaps because it was easy for the students to have plenty to say. Some critics of the question thought that the prompt should have strongly warded off plot summary. However, the structure of this question did not tempt recapitulation of narrative line as so many questions seem to do. Therefore, plot summary, which is the usual pitfall of students on question 3, was primarily a problem in weaker essays where it is often inevitable. When preparing students for reading and writing about fiction or drama, teachers need to emphasize the distinction between organizing an essay around plot

summary and providing an essay ordered around its writer’s own central argument.

Given the range of titles that appear on this open question every year, we conclude that teachers seem to be expanding the literary canon for students in appropriate ways. The list of suggested works that typically accompanies the open question reflects the intention of the AP English Development Committee to encourage teachers to acknowledge in their curricular choices the diverse voices that have produced worthy works for literary study. Often titles for these lists are gleaned from essays encountered during previous readings; in fact, educators can extract important data about the works to which high school students are exposed — at least those in ambitious programs like AP. Sometimes titles emerge from those newly included in the college courses of members of the AP English Development Committee, or they occur as a consequence of the cross-fertilization of regions and cultures that proves so vital and energizing during our scoring sessions.

However, evaluators of question 3 differ on whether a list of titles should accompany the question. The 1998 AP English Literature and Composition Examination provided an entirely open essay question that suggested no titles at all, and some readers were thrilled with the variety of imaginative selections that seemed provoked by this omission. Most readers, however, continue to underscore the assistance such a list represents for students, if only to stimulate their good thinking. They also acknowledged the guidance and support these lists offer to the AP classroom teacher who may be working against odds to stretch the curriculum to include new and diverse texts.

Question 3, as written, worked as well as any we have provided. It is probably the favorite essay that students write, as well as the favorite essay of many evaluators to read. In this task, students have an opportunity to benefit from the study of particular texts they have mastered during their AP course, and to a larger extent than with the other two free-response questions, they control their fate. It gives us great pleasure to affirm their skills — both for selecting an appropriate text for the question and for providing an ordered and well-illustrated analysis.

Sample Student Responses for Question 3

Student Response 1 — Excellent

Ceremony is Leslie Marmon Silko's coming-of-age novel of ~~and~~ a Native American man who must confront his ethnic heritage in order to mature and discover purpose in life. Tayo, the main character must deal with two conflicting obligations and influences. His first is to his Native American heritage, as his ^{obligation} family members urge him to keep the ceremonies alive. He is also obligated to protect himself from friends, haunting memories, and authorities. The conflict between these obligations in Tayo's life are eventually resolved by his ability to integrate past and present, illuminating the theme that is necessary to draw on one's past to resolve the problems of today. Silko illustrates this meaning through the character of Ts'eh and her actions, through the integration of myths, stories, songs, and poems into the novel, and by emphasizing the Native American ~~idea~~ view of time as circular in nature.

Tayo's character is best described as conflicted. He must cope with flashbacks and nightmares from the Vietnam War, and is hospitalized for his mental problems. For a time he turns to alcohol as a release from his problems, and Silko uses this experience as an opportunity to represent the problems ~~on~~ an Indian Reservation, especially alcoholism.

With help from Josiah and Medicine Men, Tayo begins to learn more about his ethnic heritage and begins to feel the obligation to participate in the Laguna Pueblo Ceremonies. However, Tayo is resistant to commit himself to the influences of the past, and often escapes by drinking and picking up women with his friends. These experiences develop into his other obligation, to protect himself from friends who turned against him. The only influence that Tayo does commit to is Ts'eh, the woman he met after being beaten by white ranch hands. He spends a summer with her, living in a cave and learning important traditions from her. She teaches him about gathering herbs & flowers for ceremonies as well as explaining cliff drawings to him. But she represents more than his obligation to learn about his heritage, because she keeps him safe from the Bureau of Indian Affairs, as well as his enemies. Ts'eh allows Tayo to reach a compromise among the conflicting influences in his life, as she helps him develop as an individual, while still keeping his ethnic heritage in a prominent place in his life. This relates to the novel's meaning as a whole because under Ts'eh guidance, Tayo dealt with conflicting issues while maturing throughout the story.

Silko's use of myths and stories interspersed with traditional discourse illustrates the combination of past and present. These myths are important in the ceremonies Tayo performs, fulfilling obligations to his heritage. But they also function as allegories of the action in the novel. When Emo dies, Tayo's grandmother remarks that although the names change, the stories stay the same. In this way, the use of myths, stories and songs represents Tayo's obligation to the past, but also shows that the present (or traditional discourse) can co-exist with the past (myths).

The conclusion of Ceremony includes references to Los Alamos, the atomic bomb, and uranium. Silko uses these references to illustrate the Native American idea of time as circular because the atomic bomb represents continuing destruction. Through varying time schemes, Silko reveals that the events in Tayo's life are circular, as he must return to the past before he can go on. The use of circular time throughout the novel integrates the past & present influences on Tayo and his ability to connect past & present to solve conflicts.

Student Response 1, continued

Tayo is pulled by different people to fulfill obligations to his heritage and to himself throughout ceremony. In the end, Tayo resolves these conflicting influences by using the lessons of his past to ~~keep him from~~ mature and develop into a happy, healthy, and un-threatened man.

Commentary on Essay

This gifted student writer designed an essay structure that served the illuminating thesis very effectively. In the course of a model introduction — one that offered a commendably specific statement of Tayo's conflict and its thematic implications for the novel — the student mentioned three strategies by which Silko conveys her conviction that it "is necessary to draw on one's past to resolve the problems of today." Including important dimensions of characterization, the role of myth, and the Indian understanding of time as a contributing factor in the architecture of the novel, this selection of artistic strategies provides the basis for an analysis that is as probing as it is productive. The student is able to emphasize each of the three different techniques in consecutive sections of the essay that correspond to stages of Tayo's growth and maturation. Thus he or she moves chronologically through the novel, supplying appropriate context for observations without burdening the reader with labored paraphrase or too much inconsequential plot. Nor does the essay stray or lose focus; the reader never gets lost.

The student displays an overall grasp of the novel that is decidedly impressive, and the sophisticated command of detail is all but astonishing. The essay is entirely responsive to the problem imposed by the question; the very occasional errors in writing are clearly a function of necessary haste. The evaluator can only celebrate this essay by awarding it the highest score.

Student Response 2 — Very Good

In many plays or novels there is a character whose mind is pulled in conflicting directions by ~~two~~ compelling desires, obligations, or influences. This is the case in Toni Morrison's novel Beloved. Paul D, the love of the novel's protagonist Sethe's, life is torn between his ^{need to suppress} past.

experiences ~~that~~ which he keeps tucked away in "the tobacco tin lodged in his heart," and his new found desire to unburden himself, and start a new life with his love, Sethe.

Paul D had spent many years on the Sweet Home plantation in Kentucky as a slave to a brutal master called Schoolteacher. Paul D had longed to feel like a man, instead of a caged up animal. He often longed to be like a rooster named Mister who was a part of life on the plantation. To Paul D, "Mister, he looked so free," the irony that Paul D had to look to an animal ~~as~~ as ^a model ^{of freedom,} and the fact that he wanted to be his own man, soon lead him away from Sweet Home - where he had watched most of his friends and family die right before his eyes. Paul D had spent years in a prison camp in Georgia, and it wasn't until he had escaped, that he had found himself a free man.

He was now a wanderer. No place to call home, no one to love, no one to love him - all he had was his manhood - and

the pain that life had dealt him had
 been stored away "in the black hole where
 his heart should have been". Paul D's
 tobacco tin signified his suppressed emotion
 his lack of stability, his weakened spirit,
 and his fragile sense of manhood. His
 tin had rusted shut and he did not want
 to have to reveal its contents to anyone.
 However, the strength of Paul D's
~~character~~^{character} was tested upon his being
 reunited with another former sweet
 home slave, Sethe. Paul D felt the
 lid of his tobacco tin slowly opening through
 the time that he had been with Sethe. His hard
 past didn't seem to matter to her, and
 hers to him either. She didn't care
 that the "longest he had ever stayed in
 one place was two years - with a
 weaver lady in Delaware." ~~For~~ For
 her he tried to ~~be~~ be a father for
 her reserved daughter Denver, and he
 even put up with their strange house guest,
 Beloved, whom Sethe ~~had~~ developed an
 incredible attachment to. Sethe felt
 that Paul D was the one for her -
 until ~~he~~ he left unexpectedly.

after his temptation got the better of him, and Beloved had "opened the contents of his tobacco tin and exposed his red, red heart".

Paul D separated himself for awhile after finding out some horrifying news from Sethe's past. He felt that he could no longer trust her, that he didn't know who she really was; and that once again he was a lonely, and that once again he was a lonely, shattered man. It wasn't until a talk with an older and wiser man, Stamp Paid, that Paul D could look inside himself and face his two conflicting forces head on: his need to feel like a man, to keep his guard up for everyone, to save himself from pain; and his enduring love and the sense of commitment he felt towards Sethe.

Paul D eventually went back to Sethe's side in her time of need. He ultimately felt that he could be vulnerable enough to be loved, and strong enough to be the man that she needed. Paul D's inner struggle in Beloved, serves to illuminate the meaning of the novel as a whole. Through a difficult past, ~~that he~~ ~~emerged from~~ Paul D rose above his own expectations of himself to

Student Response 2, continued

~~Ultimately~~ ~~place~~ find his own true identity, and to conquer his fear of ^{showing} ~~showing~~ that identity to others. He put love before ~~temptation~~, forgiveness above fear, and demonstrated ~~that out of the~~ Toni Morrison's theme, that out of darkness there comes hope.

Commentary on Essay

This essay is far less intentional than the one on *Ceremony* when it comes to defining techniques that convey the conflict with which the chosen character struggles. But this student writer clearly understands the drama at the heart of Paul D's conflict between his love for Sethe and the burdens of his past. The essay describes the struggle in convincing detail, emphasizing the narrative line that particularly engages Paul D. There seems to be a good bit of plot summary in this essay, but at least it is used with important result: the events that have occurred or that are occurring are fundamental to the discussion of the tension that torments the character of Paul D. Additionally, since Paul D. is not the primary character of the novel, his characterization becomes a technique in itself. His problem provides an important underscoring of the polarized themes of love and loss, hope and fear, identity and dissolution, and freedom and responsibility that are demonstrated in the conflicts of Sethe herself.

This writer manages to use memorized quotations with reasonable effectiveness, particularly the repeated reference to Paul D's tobacco tin. Probably much of this student's essay would have appeared in a response, regardless of what question had been supplied on the exam. However, the writer adapts the material he or she has clearly prepared in advance with a large measure of success, working a way through the tale of Paul D. to reach a crescendo of insight in the final paragraph.

Student Response 3 — Creditable

Although in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* Hester Prynne is the main character of the novel, Arthur Dimmesdale also functions as another primary character. If it were not for his presence, Hester Prynne would not be in such a predicament. Throughout the novel, the reader gains insight into the inner conflict occupying Dimmesdale's mind. He is constantly weighing his conscience up against his desires and in the end his conscience wins.

Dimmesdale, having been a minister and committing^{ed} adultery with Hester, feels a certain responsibility for his

actions. For years he has deceived the people of the town into thinking he is a pure, innocent, blameless man, even though Hester has known the entire time. Having been elected ~~a~~ minister, he wants to maintain the respect and admiration that the ^{town's} people hold for him. He feels ~~as if~~ if he turned back now, they would laugh in his face and deem him a traitor and hypocrite. Which is why he has been deceitful all these years. His ^{innate} human nature to sin as he probably preaches about, has caused him to desire power and recognition even if it costs him self-respect. His ~~on the~~ ^{own} nature wants him to forget the past and his past mistakes and look at what a bright future he has before him.

On the other hand, Dimmesdale wants to mend ~~those~~ his broken past and atone for his sins. No longer does he want to be burdened by the weight of his mistakes. He wants to be set free, even if it costs him his reputation. ~~At~~ One ~~part~~ night Dimmesdale encounters Hester and Pearl at the scaffold. Hester realizes the pain Dimmesdale is suffering from guilt as Dimmesdale attempts to apologize for all the misfortune he has caused her. He realizes here that he no longer wants to live in a world of deception. He wants to come clean of his crime, even if it will bring him to death. The reader begins to understand the consequences of sin.

In the end, the decision made by Dimmesdale to atone for his sins and confess to the townspeople does lead to his demise on election day in front of hundreds, perhaps thousands of ^{town's} people. Dimmesdale confesses his sin. The scaffold scene in which Hester and Dimmesdale meet

Student Response 3, continued

foreshadowed their inevitable death at the scaffold on election day. Dimmesdale's inner conflict could only be resolved by confession and eventual death. The ^{inner} conflict of Dimmesdale is perhaps the most important part of the entire novel. Hester is not the main focus because she is already the one who has been deemed guilty. It is Dimmesdale Hawthorne is concerned about. Dimmesdale's experience proves to the reader that sin can have some very devastating consequences. This is perhaps the main theme of the novel, and it is clearly illustrated by the life of Dimmesdale.

Commentary on Essay

This essay on *The Scarlet Letter* chooses an ideal character for the task at hand from an exceptionally appropriate novel. It may be a challenge to fail the task at hand with Arthur Dimmesdale as one's focus. The essay writer sets up Dimmesdale's predicament effectively and even ties his analysis to a welcome evaluation of Dimmesdale as Hawthorne's primary study of characterization in the work. This observation, mentioned with slight contradiction in the introduction of the essay but reached with conviction at its close, contributes real consequence to this study of the conflicted Dimmesdale.

The clarity with which the student explains the tension between Dimmesdale's obligation to be steadfast and above reproach lest he disillusion his parishioners, and Dimmesdale's opposing need to square himself with his conscience and his God is commendable. Nonetheless, the discussion of the character seems at some distance from the text and relies on rather large generalizations to make its case.

There is perhaps too little about this essay that rings with exciting insight or that freshly illuminates the novel; but nonetheless, the characterization as supplied is competent and faithful to a reasonable reading of Hawthorne's carefully crafted text. The student writes grammatical, even graceful prose — but the essay just does not give us enough in-depth analysis to deserve the very highest scores. The predictable resolution to which the young writer brings Dimmesdale at the conclusion of this essay collapses the ambiguities of Hawthorne's novel. This flattening of the text may communicate the student's susceptibility to a somewhat oversimplified interpretation that has perhaps been extracted from class discussions of the work. (The writer's potential as an English student may be enhanced in the future when he or she enjoys confrontation with life's rich disorder!) Everything here is just a little too pat. The writing is tidy and efficient as it builds the case for first one pressing option, then another, then Dimmesdale's final confession and subsequent death.

The implications that Dimmesdale's struggle has for the overall meaning of the novel are nicely summed up in a theme that sounds rather like a moral: the consequences of sin can be "devastating." True enough. But would that the essay were not quite so reductive in its earnest approach.