

**AP English Literature and Composition
Question 1: Poetry Analysis
2020 Scoring Commentaries
(Applied to 2018 Student Responses)**

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Sample J

Score: 6/6 Points (A1 – B4 – C1)

Row A: 1/1

The response earned the point in Row A because it presents a defensible thesis that offers an interpretation in response to the prompt: “One such poet is Olive Senior, who expresses his view of plant life as toxic in his poem ‘Plants’... Though his comparisons to easily accessible imaging, Senior’s claim becomes more effective to the general audience he seeks” (paragraph 1).

Row B: 4/4

The response earned all four points in Row B because it provides specific evidence, commentary that explains consistently how the evidence supports the line of reasoning, and analysis of Senior’s literary technique. The response notes in paragraph two that “Martial metaphors abound in the poem...heightening the audience’s fear of being conquered” and quotes these metaphors (““armies of mangrove / on the march’ (9-11)”) as well as particular words which extend the “invading army imagery” (““conquest,’ ‘invasive,’ ‘explosive,’ ‘capsules,’ ‘colonizing,’ and parachuting”). Ample support in the form of well-integrated military references, insightful commentary, and the discussion of sexual imagery in paragraphs two and three reinforce the claim that easily accessible images underlie the comparison between plants and humans; the response thereby builds to the conclusion that “as Senior’s fear-inducing phrases such as ‘one step ahead of us’ imply, humans must always be on the alert” against the imperialistic designs of plants” (paragraph 5).

Row C: 1/1

The response earned the point in Row C because it effectively describes the complexities and tensions within the poem, and it uses prose that is vivid and persuasive; e.g., the student notes Senior’s technique of addressing the reader directly and the effect it has on “establish[ing] [a] position of power in a benevolent-seeming way” all while clarifying Senior’s implication of “the moral deficiencies of imperialistic reproduction of the plants, and by extension society” (paragraph 5). In these ways, the response demonstrates sophisticated thought and presents a complex literary argument that accounts for the broader relationships among speaker, plants, and audience.

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Sample I

Score: 6/6 Points (A1 – B4 – C1)

Row A: 1/1

The response earned the point in Row A because it presents a defensible thesis that offers an interpretation in response to the prompt, "the perpetuity of plant life & the relationship it shares with those around it. Senior establishes said relationship with poetic devices such as syntax, diction, figurative language, & more" (paragraph 1).

Row B: 4/ 4

The response earned all four of the points in Row B because the commentary consistently explains how the chosen evidence supports a line of reasoning and analyzes how multiple literary devices, such as rhetorical questions, figurative language, and diction, contribute to the poem's meaning. For example, the student writes, "The author also compels his audience to truly examine the nature surrounding them by inquiring as to whether they've regarded the mechanisms of the plant life around them through the use of a rhetorical question. By soliciting an answer from his audience, Senior implores them to truly take the malevolent nature of nature into consideration" (paragraph 3). The response builds on its thesis through persuasive commentary that engages carefully selected and significant details from throughout the poem and thereby builds to the conclusion that: "Plants are simply (masters of the) devices of seduction & invasion & colonization which go unnoticed by humans, which is why they have managed to outlast us & bear witness to our faults over the centuries" (paragraph 5).

Row C: 1 /1

The response earned the point in Row C because it demonstrates a sophistication of thought and develops a complex literary argument by explaining the significance of its interpretation within a broader context: "Plants have induced the development of a 'cosmic program' that enables them to perpetuate themselves as generations of humans die & become 'plant food', signifying the superiority of flora in relation to humans and our lack of ability to break the cycle in which we are all trapped" (paragraph 3). The expression of ideas through the prose is generally clear and succinct, e.g., "Senior initiates the conversation with an analysis of the true nature of Flora" (paragraph 2), and "Senior concludes the poem by simply referring to plants as 'weed,' finalizing the negative relationship that had previously been established" (paragraph 4).

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Sample H

Score: 5/6 Points (A1 – B4 – C0)

Row A: 1/1

The response earned the point in Row A because it presents a defensible thesis that offers an interpretation in response to the prompt: “The poem contributes to a larger cautionary tale of social upheaval. Through his use of a sinister tone to convey the gravity of the situation and figurative language likening plants to humans, Senior warns the reader to be wary of those that seem harmless” (paragraph 1).

Row B: 4/4

The response earned four points in Row B because the commentary both consistently and explicitly connects many pieces of evidence directly to the thesis, e.g., “The very first sentence of the poem begins with deception, establishing a direct statement about the nature and attitude towards plants from the start” (paragraph 2). The commentary also analyzes how multiple literary elements, such as tone and figurative language, contribute to an interpretation of the poem: e.g., “The dark tone continues even in the most innocent of plant functions, breeding, as the author states, ‘we must infer a sinister not to say imperialistic grand design.’ The ridiculously-serious tone when describing what the reader perceives as harmless serves to make the reader aware of a great message, and to not take the poem literally in its commentary on plants, but rather to search for a greater meaning” (paragraph 2).

Row C: 0 /1

The response did not earn the point in Row C because, while it attempts to provide a context for its interpretation, this takes the form of an overly generalized statement: “Senior alerts the reader to a greater critique on the lack of social awareness prevalent in society” (paragraph 4), but that critique is not consistently referred to, developed, or maintained throughout the response.

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Sample G

Score: 5/6 Points (A1 – B4 – C0)

Row A: 1/1

The response earned the point in Row A because it presents a defensible thesis that offers an interpretation in response to the prompt: “The speaker utilizes direct characterization and descriptive imagery of the plant life to warn his or her loved one not to succumb to the deceiving powers of plants, illustrating the man versus plant life struggle encapsulated in ‘Plants’” (paragraph 1).

Row B: 4/4

The response earned all four points in Row B because it provides ample evidence that is specific and relevant to the thesis, consistently explains through commentary how that evidence supports the line of reasoning, and explains how multiple literary elements contribute to the poem’s meaning: e.g., the “personification of the behavior of plants beyond their normal abilities and roles shows that the speaker is wary of plant life and distrusts their existence” (paragraph 2); “Inclusion of warlike words— ‘colonizing’, ‘explosive’, ‘armies’, and ‘conquest’ further establish the speaker’s distrust of plant life” (paragraph 2); “the speaker utilizes descriptive imagery to warn their audience, supposedly a loved one, of the deceptive nature of plants. The speaker quickly establishes to ‘[his] dear’ that that the inconspicuously ‘dressed, perfumed’ plants are using their sweet appearances to ‘seduce [people]’ into dispersing their seeds and multiplying their population” (paragraph 3).

Row C: 0/1

The response did not earn the point in Row C. It does not consistently maintain its thematic interpretation and the language in which it is expressed is at times unclear, e.g., “Inclusion of the description of seeds as ‘sweet fruit’... ‘made up for romancing’ suggests that the speaker has a very distrustful view of the façade plants put up” (paragraph 3) and “‘Plants’ explores the man versus flora relationship that the speaker seems to have with plants through the speakers hyperbolic personifications of plants and beautiful descriptions of their deceiving looks” (paragraph 4).

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Sample F

Score: 4/6 Points (A1 – B3 – C0)

Row A: 1/1

The response earned the point in Row A because it presents a defensible thesis that offers an interpretation in response to the prompt: “Senior effectively portrays a unique relationship between humans and plants in which plants have formed a hierarchy over mankind. Senior effectively portrays his ideas through a combined use of imagery and metaphor” (paragraph 1).

Row B: 3/4

The response earned three points in Row B because it offers specific evidence and explains how that evidence supports a line of reasoning, while also explaining how two literary techniques, imagery and metaphor, convey the poem’s meaning. For example, the student cites Senior’s description of the plants as “armies of Mangrove on the march, roots in the air, clinging tendrils anchoring themselves everywhere” and explains how “Through this effective use of imagery, Senior is able to introduce the idea that plants are forming, or have had, a superior status to humans” (paragraph 2). Additionally, the student notes that “Senior compares flower to special agents in order to convey the message that they are capable of changing your mood and are used to make one feel romance” (paragraph 3). While the commentary here generally connects back to the line of reasoning, it is not as clear, focused, and developed as it needs to be to earn four points.

Row C: 0/1

The response did not earn the point in Row C. It does not demonstrate sophistication of thought and offers only a single statement about the “hierarchy” plants have formed over mankind. The response oversimplifies the complexities of the poem, e.g., “Through this effective use of imagery, Senior is able to introduce the idea that plants are forming or have had a superior status to humans. Senior conveys the message that plants will continue to grow, and humans can do nothing about it” (paragraph 3).

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Sample E

Score: 3/6 Points (A1 – B2 – C0)

Row A: 1/1

The response earned the point in Row A because it presents a defensible thesis that offers an interpretation in response to the prompt: “By demonstrating many similarities between plants and humans, the speaker demonstrates the deception that is present in everyday life. By using the literary techniques of syntax, diction, and figurative language, the poet intends to connect humans with nature” (paragraph 1).

Row B: 2/4

The response earned two points in Row B because it provides some specific relevant evidence, but the commentary is oversimplified or misinterprets the evidence. As a result, the line of reasoning is faulty. For example, the response attempts to discuss the form and structure of the poem, but the commentary is too general to build toward an accurate interpretation of the poem: “The separation of the stanzas is symbolic of the different stages of life. Just like life, the content of the next stanza is differing from the previous one” (paragraph 2). The commentary also misinterprets cited evidence, such as when the student claims that Senior’s use of personification implies “that humans are never satisfied” (paragraph 4).

Row C: 0/1

The response did not earn the point in Row C. It does not demonstrate sophistication of thought or develop a complex literary argument—it makes sweeping generalizations such as “[j]ust like the speaker, and audience, plants also fulfill a purpose on earth” (paragraph 3) and “[f]lowers present beauty and are often used to express emotion” (paragraph 4), and it oversimplifies the complexities of the poem.

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Sample D

Score: 3/6 Points (A1 – B2 – C0)

Row A: 1/1

The response earned the point in Row A because it presents a defensible thesis that offers an interpretation in response to the prompt: “The speaker believes that the current complex relationship between humans and plants should be changed to prevent plant life from dominating humans” (paragraph 2). The thesis comments on the relationship between plants and humans but does not suggest a line of reasoning for the analysis.

Row B: 2/4

The response earned two points in Row B because it provides some evidence that is relevant to the thesis and offers commentary on that evidence. However, the commentary is mostly comprised of simplistic explanations that do not strengthen the argument, and no clear line of reasoning is established. For example, after quoting lines one and twenty-one from the poem about how “Plants are deceptive” and flowers are like “special agents,” the commentary paraphrases those ideas: “As though they work for a government agency like the CIA, plants are intelligent” (paragraph 2) and does not explain the relationship between the evidence and thesis. The response also contains significant inaccuracies, e.g., “[t]he speaker who is undoubtedly a human, seems as though he is a plant” (paragraph 2).

Row C: 0/1

The response did not earn the point in Row C. It oversimplifies the complexities of the poem, e.g., “[t]he speaker believes that the current complex relationship between humans and plants should be changed to prevent plant life from dominating humans” (paragraph 2), and its language often results in an unclear presentation of ideas: “Senior is addressing plants towards humans and their behavior through the narrator” (paragraph 1).

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Sample C

Score: 1/6 Points (A0 – B1 – C0)

Row A: 0/1

The response did not earn the point in Row A. It does not offer a defensible thesis and instead describes the poem: “In Olive Senior’s poem, ‘Plants,’ he compares plants to many life situations among telling the story about what plants do” (paragraph 1).

Row B: 1/4

The response earned one point in Row B because, though it includes evidence from the poem, it provides little in the way of commentary so the evidence remains only vaguely relevant to the prompt, e.g., “Through the first stanza (lines 1-4) ‘Plants... traces,’ he is comparing plants to humans. Discussing how they can trick you and they may root in one place however like humans that is subject to change” (paragraph 2). The response also mentions literary devices with little explanation as to how they contribute to the poem’s meaning, e.g., “Senior is using personification in this specific scenario” (paragraph 2) and “[r]hyming is another literary element in this passage” (paragraph 3).

Row C: 0/1

The response did not earn the point in Row C.

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Sample B

Score: 0/6 Points (A0 – B0 – C0)

Row A: 0/1

The response did not earn the point in Row A because it does not offer a defensible thesis that presents an interpretation in response to the prompt. Instead, it offers the claims that: “Olive Senior has a distinct way of writing poems. Seniors structure of his poems are not commonly seen in the poetry world and his diction is straight forward” (paragraph 1).

Row B: 0/4

The response did not earn the point in Row B because it provides examples that are irrelevant and that do not address the prompt, e.g., “The beginning of each stanza finishes the previous of the last ones” (paragraph 2) and almost incoherent, e.g., “[t]he authors techniques of setting his poem like the makes it more powerful for the diction” (paragraph 2).

Row C: 0/1

The response did not earn the point in Row C.