
AP[®] Art History

Sample Student Responses and Scoring Commentary

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Free Response Question 3

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Question 3: Visual Analysis**5 points**

(A) Accurately describes **ONE** visual characteristic of *Laocoön*. **1 point**

Examples of acceptable responses include the following:

- A large marble statuary group with a large central figure flanked by two smaller figures.
- The figures are connected by the serpentine forms that wrap around each of the bodies.
- The nude figures have highly detailed bodies with an emphasis on anatomical realism and idealism.
- The drapery accompanying each figure is flowing and naturalistic.
- The central figure is clearly a mature, adult male who is larger in size than the two side figures, who are smaller and appear younger.

(B) Accurately describes **ANOTHER** visual characteristic of *Laocoön*. **1 point**

Examples of acceptable responses include the following:

- One from list in A.

(C) Accurately uses specific visual evidence to explain **ONE** way in which the visual characteristics contribute to a sense of drama. **1 point**

Examples of acceptable responses include the following:

- The figures are twisting and contorting in space.
- Expressions on faces feature contorted brows and gaping mouths, showing intense emotional states.
- The poses have dramatic dynamism enhanced by diagonal lines that dominate the composition: from the top of the central figure's upraised arm through his opposite foot, with the tilted heads of the figures, with the central figure's lower arm and the serpent parallel to his left leg, and with the diagonal created by the body of the left figure.
- The bodies of the snakes twist and writhe around the figures, showing an emotional moment in the struggle.
- Tensed muscles, particularly on the central figure, indicate the force of the struggle with the serpents.
- Similarly, the postures of the figures show the extremity of the attack and the figures' efforts to get free.

(D) Accurately uses specific visual evidence to explain **ANOTHER** way in which the visual characteristics contribute to a sense of drama. **1 point**

Examples of acceptable responses include the following:

- One from list in C.
-

(E) Accurately explains how Laocoön departs from earlier Greek sculptural traditions.

1 point

Examples of acceptable responses include the following:

- Laocoön’s complex composition of three struggling figures contrasts greatly with earlier Classical ideas of restraint and physical balance in works such as Polykleitos’s *Doryphoros (Spear Bearer)*.
- The *Laocoön* depicts a range of human expressions in a naturalistic way that differs from the stylized expression found in Archaic and Classical work, such as the Archaic smile.
- The emphasis on diagonal lines and motion, with forms that project out into space, contrast greatly with the simplicity of the restrained contrapposto of earlier Classical works such as the *Doryphoros (Spear Bearer)*, or the even more restrained, rigid upright frontal stance of the Archaic *Kouros*.
- The highly modeled forms of the *Laocoön* create a strong play of light and shadow that contrasts greatly with the more evenly illuminated surfaces of Classical sculpture.
- Whether an original marble work or a copy, the *Laocoön* differs from the Greek Classical tradition of using bronze for major sculptural monuments.

Total for question 3 5 points

Q1

Q2

Q3

Q4

Q5

Q6



Sample 3A

Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

The first visual characteristic is the use of defined muscles, in other words, traditional Greek practices from the geometric style. The second characteristic is the use of defined faces, faces capable of revealing emotions more than the base archaic smile. It also reveals male characters in the nude, a common Greek artistic practice. With ~~heavy~~ heavy diagonal lines throughout ~~the sculpture~~ ~~the~~ ~~sculpture~~ the ~~sculpture~~ sculpture, we get a sense of motion/action which increases the power or dynamic of it, bringing heightened levels of drama. With open negative space and fully carved figures, we can see shadows on the sculptures which brings in the elements of light and dark. This addition increases the intensity and contrast of the ~~artwork~~ artwork, which increases the drama we see. Lacoön departs from earlier Greek sculpture as it features heavily dynamic figures. Instead of simply being standing or in a striding position, Lacoön shows figures shifting their weight (as they do in contrapposto) and are also fully sculpted unlike the figures in the pediments of the Parthenon.

Q1

Q2

Q3

Q4

Q5

Q6

Sample 3B

Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

The work titled Laocöon, is a Hellenistic sculpture created in Rome during the first century C.E. It has a Hellenistic style of sculpture by the idealized proportions of the body and the idealized facial structure. It has a use of dramatic facial expressions and depicts the idealized male body. These characteristics contribute to a sense of drama. The dramatic facial expressions of the sculpture, as well as the event depicted of the snake surrounding the man and biting one of them is dramatic. This contributes a sense of drama by illiciting a response from the viewer to feel overwhelmed or fear, by the snake and the distrust facial expressions. This sculpture departs from earlier Greek sculptural traditions by the use of contrapposto on the human forms and the idealization of the male body.

Q 1



Q 2



Q 3



Q 4



Q 5



Q 6



Sample 3C

Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

Visual characteristics of Laocoön include 3 young men being attacked by a very long snake. The statues are all made from stone, but have been carved with ~~the~~ extreme attention to detail. One way in which the visual characteristics contribute to a sense of drama is the exaggerated facial expressions of the men to show pain, fear, and worry. Another way in which the visual characteristics contribute to a sense of drama is the body language of the men and how they appear to be moving away from the snake, and trying to pull the snake off of themselves. Laocoön departs from earlier Greek ~~style~~ sculptural traditions because they usually depict a hero or Greek gods, but Laocoön shows 3 young men being attacked with no one to save them.

Question 3

Note: Student samples are quoted verbatim and may contain spelling and grammatical errors.

Overview

Responses were supposed to demonstrate primarily the art historical thinking skill of visual analysis, applied to an unknown work of art. To be awarded all five score points, the response needed to successfully accomplish the following tasks:

- Describe visual characteristics of the selected artwork, the *Laocoön*.
- Use visual evidence to explain the way the artwork’s visual form conveys a sense of drama.
- Explain the way the *Laocoön*, as an example of Hellenistic art, differs from earlier Greek sculpture and its sculptural traditions.

Sample: 3A

Score: 5

Task A: Accurately describes ONE visual characteristic of *Laocoön*. (1 point)

The response earned this point for the discussion of defined muscles, which are a visual characteristic.

Task B: Accurately describes ANOTHER visual characteristic of *Laocoön*. (1 point)

The response earned this point through the reference to the tradition of the male nude, which is sufficient because the nude figures are a visual characteristic.

Task C: Accurately uses specific visual evidence to explain ONE way in which the visual characteristics contribute to a sense of drama. (1 point)

The response earned this point for the reference to “heavy diagonal lines” and the resulting “heighted levels of drama.” The reference to diagonals as conveying emotion and action conveys the idea that the forms relate to drama.

Task D: Accurately uses specific visual evidence to explain ANOTHER way in which the visual characteristics contribute to a sense of drama. (1 point)

The response earned this point by noting that the work uses negative space in combination with the resulting light and shadow to increase intensity. In this context, intensity is sufficient as a reference to drama.

Task E: Accurately explains how *Laocoön* departs from earlier Greek sculptural traditions. (1 point)

The response earned this point for the comparison of defined forms that reveal emotions with the less expressive “base archaic smile.” The response also includes an attempt to address this task through the reference to shifting weight and the comparison of these fully sculpted figures with reliefs on the Parthenon. However, the point was not earned for this comparison because shifting weight is traditionally used to describe contrapposto, and the comparison of freestanding sculptures and reliefs is too general.

Question 3 (continued)

Sample: 3B

Score: 3

Task A: Accurately describes ONE visual characteristic of *Laocoön*. (1 point)

The response earned this point for the references to the “idealized proportions of the body and the idealized facial structure” as well as the later reference to the idealized male body.

Task B: Accurately describes ANOTHER visual characteristic of *Laocoön*. (0 points)

The response does not include an attempt to describe another visual characteristic of the work.

Task C: Accurately uses specific visual evidence to explain ONE way in which the visual characteristics contribute to a sense of drama. (1 point)

The response earned this point for the discussion of the figures’ facial expressions and the way in which the expressions and viewers’ fear of the snake cause an emotional reaction. These points are specifically about the way in which the faces support the drama.

Task D: Accurately uses specific visual evidence to explain ANOTHER way in which the visual characteristics contribute to a sense of drama. (1 point)

The response earned this point for the reference to the “the event depicted”—the snake surrounding and biting one of the men—as contributing to the drama. This is relatively weak evidence but sufficient to have earned the point.

Task E: Accurately explains how *Laocoön* departs from earlier Greek sculptural traditions. (0 points)

The response includes an attempt to address this task, but the point was not earned because contrapposto and idealism are part of the classical sculptural tradition.

Sample: 3C

Score: 2

Task A: Accurately describes ONE visual characteristic of *Laocoön*. (0 points)

The response includes an attempt to respond to this task but refers to three young men rather than accurately commenting on the visual differences among the figures.

Task B: Accurately describes ANOTHER visual characteristic of *Laocoön*. (0 points)

The response includes an attempt to respond to this task through the references to stone and “attention to detail” but stone is too general (as opposed to marble), and the response does not comment on which elements are detailed.

Task C: Accurately uses specific visual evidence to explain ONE way in which the visual characteristics contribute to a sense of drama. (1 point)

The response earned this point by noting that the figures’ facial expressions are exaggerated and “show pain, fear, and worry.” The comment about exaggeration, in particular, suggests drama.

Question 3 (continued)

Task D: Accurately uses specific visual evidence to explain ANOTHER way in which the visual characteristics contribute to a sense of drama. (1 point)

The response earned this point by describing how the figures react to the snake, “as they appear to be moving away from the snake, and trying to pull the snake off of themselves.”

Task E: Accurately explains how *Laocoön* departs from earlier Greek sculptural traditions. (0 points)

The response includes an attempt to address this task by contrasting the attacked figures with Greek heroes and gods, but this is more about subject matter than sculptural traditions and did not earn the point.