
AP[®] English Literature and Composition

Sample Student Responses and Scoring Commentary

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Question 1: Poetry Analysis

6 points

In Ai’s poem “The Man with the Saxophone,” published in 1985, the speaker encounters a man playing a saxophone. Read the poem carefully. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how Ai uses literary elements and techniques to convey the complexity of the speaker’s encounter with the saxophone player at that particular time and place.

In your response you should do the following:

- Respond to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible interpretation.
- Select and use evidence to support your line of reasoning.
- Explain how the evidence supports your line of reasoning.
- Use appropriate grammar and punctuation in communicating your argument.

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria	
<p>Row A Thesis (0-1 points)</p>	<p>0 points For any of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no defensible thesis. • The intended thesis only restates the prompt. • The intended thesis provides a summary of the issue with no apparent or coherent claim. • There is a thesis, but it does not respond to the prompt. 	<p>1 point Responds to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible interpretation of the poem.</p>
Decision Rules and Scoring Notes		
<p>Responses that do not earn this point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only restate the prompt. • Make a generalized comment about the poem that doesn't respond to the prompt. • Describe the poem or features of the poem rather than making a claim that requires a defense. 		<p>Responses that earn this point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a defensible interpretation of the speaker's complex encounter with the saxophone player.
<p>Examples that do not earn this point:</p> <p>Restate the prompt</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"The poet employs various literary techniques to convey the speaker's encounter with a saxophone player."</i> • <i>"In the poem 'The Man with the Saxophone,' the speaker has a complex encounter with a man playing the saxophone on the street."</i> <p>Do not relate to the prompt</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"Early morning is a magical time when anything can happen."</i> <p>Describe the poem or features of the poem</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"Over the course of the poem, the speaker describes walking through the city until he finds the saxophonist. Then, instead of just listening to him play, the speaker pulls out his own saxophone and plays with him."</i> 		<p>Examples that earn this point:</p> <p>Provide a defensible interpretation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"Ai employs literary techniques like varying line lengths and specific diction to convey the speaker's encounter with the saxophone player as one of joyful union with a stranger."</i> • <i>"The poet's decision to set the speaker's encounter with the saxophonist on the empty streets of New York City at five in the morning lends a feeling of otherworldliness and magic to their connection."</i> • <i>"In 'The Man with the Saxophone,' Ai presents a speaker who is on a quest, searching through the deserted streets of a city. When the speaker comes upon the saxophone player, we see him as the speaker sees him—as an almost supernatural being bringing music to the city."</i>
<p>Additional Notes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The thesis may be more than one sentence, provided the sentences are in close proximity. • The thesis may be anywhere within the response. • For a thesis to be defensible, the poem must include at least minimal evidence that <i>could</i> be used to support that thesis; however, the student need not cite that evidence to earn the thesis point. • The thesis <i>may</i> establish a line of reasoning that structures the essay, but it needn't do so to earn the thesis point. • A thesis that meets the criteria can be awarded the point whether or not the rest of the response successfully supports that line of reasoning. 		

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria				
<p>Row B Evidence AND Commentary (0-4 points)</p>	<p>0 points Simply restates thesis (if present), repeats provided information, or offers information irrelevant to the prompt.</p>	<p>1 point EVIDENCE: Provides evidence that is mostly general. AND COMMENTARY: Summarizes the evidence but does not explain how the evidence supports the student’s argument.</p>	<p>2 points EVIDENCE: Provides some specific, relevant evidence. AND COMMENTARY: Explains how some of the evidence relates to the student’s argument, but no line of reasoning is established, or the line of reasoning is faulty.</p>	<p>3 points EVIDENCE: Provides specific evidence to support all claims in a line of reasoning. AND COMMENTARY: Explains how some of the evidence supports a line of reasoning. AND Explains how at least one literary element or technique in the poem contributes to its meaning.</p>	<p>4 points EVIDENCE: Provides specific evidence to support all claims in a line of reasoning. AND COMMENTARY: Consistently explains how the evidence supports a line of reasoning. AND Explains how multiple literary elements or techniques in the poem contribute to its meaning.</p>
Decision Rules and Scoring Notes					
<p>Typical responses that earn 0 points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are incoherent or do not address the prompt. • May be just opinion with no textual references or references that are irrelevant. 	<p>Typical responses that earn 1 point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tend to focus on summary or description of the poem rather than specific details or techniques. • Mention literary elements, devices, or techniques with little or no explanation. 	<p>Typical responses that earn 2 points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consist of a mix of specific evidence and broad generalities. • May contain some simplistic, inaccurate, or repetitive explanations that don’t strengthen the argument. • May make one point well but either do not make multiple supporting claims or do not adequately support more than one claim. • Do not explain the connections or progression between the student’s claims, so a line of reasoning is not clearly established. 	<p>Typical responses that earn 3 points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uniformly offer evidence to support claims. • Focus on the importance of specific words and details from the poem to build an interpretation. • Organize an argument as a line of reasoning composed of multiple supporting claims. • Commentary may fail to integrate some evidence or fail to support a key claim. 	<p>Typical responses that earn 4 points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uniformly offer evidence to support claims. • Focus on the importance of specific words and details from the poem to build an interpretation. • Organize and support an argument as a line of reasoning composed of multiple supporting claims, each with adequate evidence that is clearly explained. • Explain how the writer’s use of multiple literary techniques contributes to the student’s interpretation of the poem. 	
<p>Additional Notes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing that suffers from grammatical and/or mechanical errors that interfere with communication cannot earn the fourth point in this row. • To earn the fourth point in this row, the response may observe multiple instances of the same literary element or technique if each instance further contributes to the meaning of the poem. 					

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria	
Row C Sophistication (0-1 points)	0 points Does not meet the criteria for one point.	1 point Demonstrates sophistication of thought and/or develops a complex literary argument.
	Decision Rules and Scoring Notes	
	Responses that do not earn this point: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attempt to contextualize their interpretation, but such attempts consist predominantly of sweeping generalizations (“<i>Human experiences always include...</i>” OR “<i>In a world where...</i>” OR “<i>Since the beginning of time...</i>”). • Only hint at or suggest other possible interpretations (“<i>While another reader may see...</i>” OR “<i>Though the poem could be said to...</i>”). • Make a single statement about how an interpretation of the poem comments on something thematic without consistently maintaining that thematic interpretation. • Oversimplify complexities in the poem. • Use complicated or complex sentences or language that is ineffective because it does not enhance the student’s argument. 	Responses that earn this point may demonstrate sophistication of thought or develop a complex literary argument by doing any of the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identifying and exploring complexities or tensions within the poem. 2. Illuminating the student’s interpretation by situating it within a broader context. 3. Accounting for alternative interpretations of the poem. 4. Employing a style that is consistently vivid and persuasive.
Additional Notes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This point should be awarded only if the sophistication of thought or complex understanding is part of the student’s argument, not merely a phrase or reference. 		

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

Joy is often found in the presence of others, particularly in unexpected places, as evidenced by Ai's "The Man with the Saxophone." Through the use of colloquial diction, first person narration, and vivid descriptions, ~~captured with context~~ Ai conveys the instantaneous transition from bleakness and desolation to comfort and release that comes about as a result of the man playing the saxophone. Illuminating the inherent need not only for appreciation of the little things, but of humans for one another, "The Man with the Saxophone" demonstrates the affect of external events on internal emotions.

In "Hawley," the speaker's experience is characterized as 'empty' (2), indicative, as a descriptor of the side walk, that the narrator himself feels empty. The only thing notable about the surroundings to the speaker is the 'steam/pouring from the manhole covers' (3,4), which is the only thing exciting about the man's life, so much so that the inanimate steam 'seems alive' (5). The speaker 'ambles' from window to window, 'sometimes stopping to stare, sometimes not' (6). The diction here, as incredibly passive and basic as it may be, serves to illuminate the reader further ~~regards~~ the man's utter ~~ambivalence~~ ambivalence with regard to his surroundings. Even the things that this man once considered beautiful are now incredibly

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mediocre to him as a result of his apparent disinterest in ~~largely~~ everything, as evidenced by the observation that 'last week's snow is brittle now?' and unrecognizable as the 'Satt, white hair / that bearded the face of the city' (7, 8, 9).

The city, here, through the description seems to be fading into a bleak underwhelming state, just as the man is - demonstrating a mirroring sort of effect. While the man continues to walk down the street, he notes that his 'mind [is] empty' (12), however, when he notes that this is a feat long revered by the 'Buddhists' (13), he does not seem impressed with himself, as he is unimpressed with the landscape.

The man's feelings immediately shift upon sight of the saxophone player from bleak mediocrity to freedom and joyfulness. The diction used to bring about the initial appearance of the saxophone player is initially somewhat boring, as he is simply described as 'the man with the saxophone' (28), nothing more, nothing less. However, the detailed description of the player's 'fingerless gloves caked with grime' and 'the layers of clothes welded to his skin' (29, 31) are the first instance in which the speaker's point of view does not appear utterly uninterested, disdainful, or repelled by the description he gives. As such,

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the man ~~the first~~ with the saxophone is the first instance of something that has truly touched the speaker's heart. In the same way that the matter-of-fact, ~~the~~ colloquial diction had served to display the man's disinterest for his general surroundings previously, the simple way of describing the man with the saxophone, rather than with the disgust at his appearance that likely would have been the reaction of the majority showed the genuine appreciation for the man on the speaker's behalf. Furthermore, while the desolate town's description was cold and unforgiving, the presence of the saxophone man was quite the opposite, as shown when 'he steps backwards / to let me know I'm welcome' (34, 35). The comparative differences between the things that the narrator notices ~~is~~ about both the town and the saxophone player don't stop there, though. The silence of the streets were brutal, however he stands in silence with the saxophone player for a few minutes, and feels that the silence is 'so complete' (36), demonstrating the effects of a person on another, even in silence - showcasing that it is not even inherently the actions of others that spark one's joy, but rather the mere presence.

The action of the man playing the saxophone, though, is certainly the icing on the speaker's formerly

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

barren cake, though. Working in tangent with the saxophone player, demonstrating more than simply a passing moment, but a ~~lot~~ much deeper bond, when the ~~sax~~ player 'puts the sax to his lips' (39), the speaker 'suck(s) up the air from [his] diaphragm' (41) in tangent with the player, showing the power of connection to make two strangers act as one. Then, after 'waiting for the notes to come' (43), the speaker hears them played and 'for that one moment... [was] the unencumbered bird of [his] imagination' (46). The descriptive metaphorical usage of the bird serves to show how constrained the man had been feeling previously, and how in the moment of these notes, just as the notes danced through the air, so too did his spirit, as a bird, once again deeply connecting him in that moment to the saxophone player. The rejuvenation of the man's soul and spirit, evidenced by the 'black flower[s] / opening... into the unforgiving new clay' (49-51) shows through detailed description of the peace the man has found through the saxophone man's presence, as well as the release from his mundane existence that the music allowed him to feel for that fleeting moment, displaying the power of people ^{and things} to change one another in an instant.

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

In the poem "The Man with the Saxophone", the author uses visceral imagery, complex tone, and metaphor to convey the narrator's seemingly random yet freeing experience with the saxophone player, and how this encounter changes our narrator.

The poem starts with descriptive imagery detailing the setting. "New York. Five A.M. The sidewalks empty. Only the steam pouring from the manhole covers seems alive, as I cudge from shop window to shop window." Immediately, we know that the streets are still, almost deserted, save for our speaker. Not only does this introduce us to the setting, we also perceive what kind of person our narrator is. He is the only one walking about the New York streets at that hour.

This imagery continues to develop the setting throughout the poem. "the city asleep," "in the silence so complete," "on the corner of Thirty-fourth and Fifth." The references to quiet in particular are extremely important to setting up the upcoming juxtaposition present after the saxophonist plays. We also see how imagery is utilized to describe said

saxophonist: "his fingerless gloves caked with grime, his face also, the layers of clothes welded to his skin." Because of this description, it can be assumed that this man is a homeless busker. This develops the idea that this is a chance encounter between the speaker and the saxophonist. The imagery is also used throughout the poem to help build the empty, desolate tone.

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

The poem features a tonal shift around lines 41-45. Before those lines, we are shown a pessimistic protagonist, and a sluggish, negative tone. Our speaker specifically references that, "I'm earthbound and solitude is my companion, ... don't try to tell me otherwise." The speaker clearly states that he is immovable, and cannot be swayed by being told. This builds on the depressed tone, and ~~adds~~ makes the tonal juxtaposition even more jarring. In line 46, the text states "I'm the unencumbered bird of my imagination... opening, mercifully opening into the unforgiving new day." Here we see the tonal shift in which we no longer have a depressed, pessimistic tone. Now, the poem exudes a radiant tone, which helps to portray the freedom now felt by the speaker.

We see this freedom referenced with the metaphor used throughout the poem in which the speaker compares himself to a bird. First seen in lines 15-18, "If only I could turn myself into a bird like the shaman I was meant to be, but I can't." This excerpt demonstrates the speaker's desire to be free by using the bird as a direct comparison. Birds almost always represent freedom, as they are of the few animals capable of exploring the skies and leaving the earth behind. The speaker does not feel free until he uses the metaphor in line 46, only after hearing the saxophonist play. Because of this we see that through the speaker's encounter with

Question 1 Question 2 Question 3



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

The saxophonist is he able to feel truly free in the empty, cold ^(early morning) streets of New York.

By the end of the poem we see a complete tonal shift, and a shift in the speaker's emotions. Through ~~images~~ imagery, development of tone and a consistent metaphor, we see how the narrator's day and possibly life are changed by the freeing encounter they have with the saxophone player.

Question 1 Question 2 Question 3



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

In the poem titled "The Man With the Saxophone," written by Ai, the author uses several literary elements & techniques, such as selection of detail and diction, to help describe the complex encounter between the narrator and the man with the saxophone.

Ai uses ~~selection of detail~~^{diction} throughout the poem to describe the encounter between the two characters in this poem. It is used in the beginning of the poem to help set in stone the setting of the poem. Words such as empty, brittle, solitude, asleep, etc. help to portray an empty, cold feeling of the scene, which is five A.M. in New York City. Diction is also used later in the poem to describe the man with the saxophone. Words such as grime, welded, etc. portray the man with the saxophone as potentially a man of the streets, earning little through donations of passers by.

Selection of detail is also used throughout the poem to describe the encounter between these two characters. The author chooses to focus on how empty the New York streets seem and how the ~~narrator~~^{speaker} also feels empty inside. Ai focuses on how the ~~narrator~~^{speaker},

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

"wishes he could, "turn into a bird / like the shaman I was meant to be." and how the ~~narrator~~ speaker ~~wishes that he~~ feels as though solitude is his ^{only} "companion" and how he ~~never wants~~ is stubborn about believing that it's the best way, saying, "Don't try to tell me otherwise." The author also chooses to focus on the saxophone player that the speaker encounters, highlighting his rough appearance yet welcoming nature. Ai also focuses on how the speaker feels strange as though he's in a different place.

Overall, the author Ai of the poem titled "The Man with the Saxophone," Ai uses several different literary techniques to add to and describe the complex interaction between the speaker and the man with the saxophone. Ai uses diction to both describe how empty and cold the city streets and the speaker feel, using words such as empty, brittle, solitude, asleep, etc. Selection of detail is also used, with Ai focusing on how empty the city streets & the speaker seem, and also on how rough the saxophonist seems, yet is still welcoming to the speaker. This encounter allows the

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

speaker to take a break from his solitude, and be able to play alongside the man with the saxophone. The speaker is described as feeling as if for a moment he has become the bird of his ~~own~~ imagination, feeling free for a short while. Even though he feels this way, he falls back to reality, back to the concrete of the cold, empty, city streets of New York.

Question 1

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

Overview

Responses to this question were expected to demonstrate how students could read and analyze a poem, then use that reading and analysis to construct a response, a “well-written essay,” that showed a complex understanding of the speaker’s encounter with the musician “at that particular time and place.”

Reading the poem, of course, involves more than simply understanding the words and syntax. Students were expected to recognize the text as a poem, understand the various literary elements and techniques familiar to poetry, and then analyze the poem using those techniques. For example, in this particular poem, students might have noticed line length and structure, they might have observed stanza shape and form, they could have compared and contrasted the descriptive language used for both the speaker and the musician, and they could have examined the figurative language in the poem, including the metaphors of birds and flowers. They were also asked to note the setting, “that particular time and place,” highlighted by the poem’s title.

Using those techniques, they could then analyze those pieces of the poetic text and determine what each contributed to the whole of the poem and how. Using that evidence, they could make a defensible claim.

Because this was a timed writing task with a never-before-seen text, most often that thinking process was worked out as the responses were being written. Responses demonstrated the interactions between thinking and writing.

Sample: 1A

Score: 1-4-1

A. Thesis (0–1 points): 1

The thesis presented in the introductory paragraph of this essay offers a defensible interpretation of the poem and presents a complex idea: “Illuminating the inherent need not only for appreciation of the little things, but of humans for one another, ‘The Man with the Saxophone’ demonstrates the affect of external events on internal emotions.” This thesis earned the point in Row A.

B. Evidence and Commentary (0–4 points): 4

The response offers specific evidence from the poem as well as consistent and sustained commentary. The essay is organized by the actions of the speaker, first as he walks through the empty streets where the “steam / pouring from the manhole covers” is “the only thing exciting about the man’s life” to his encounter with the saxophone player, which the essay describes as “the first instance in which the speakers point of view does not appear utterly uninterested, disdainful, or repelled by the description he gives.” Literary devices such as diction (the speaker’s description of the narrator who “ambles’ from window to window” is described as “incredibly passive and basic”) to the shift in the speaker’s attitude “from bleak mediocrity to freedom and joyfulness” are cogently and consistently explained. The evidence and commentary are woven seamlessly together to support the essay’s line of reasoning—“it is not even inherently the actions of others that spark one’s joy, but rather the mere presence.” The comparison of the “silence of the streets” (paragraph 3) to the moment of silence between the speaker and the saxophone player demonstrates the student’s ability to notice the most nuanced of details. The essay offers multiple examples and consistent commentary to explain how the poet’s use of multiple literary techniques contributes to the student’s interpretation of the poem. This essay earned 4 points in Row B.

Question 1 (continued)

C. Sophistication (0–1 points): 1

The response earned the point in Row C by identifying and exploring the complexities of the poem and through its vivid and persuasive style. Sentences such as “The descriptive metaphorical usage of the bird serves to show how constrained the man had been feeling previously, and how in the moment of these notes, just as the notes danced through the air, so did his spirit, as a bird, once again deeply connecting him in that moment to the saxophone player” elevate the argument of the essay.

Sample: 1B

Score: 1-3-0

A. Thesis (0–1 points): 1

This essay earned the point in Row A through the presentation of its thesis in the introductory paragraph: “In the poem ‘The Man with the Saxophone,’ the author uses visceral imagery, complex tone, and metaphor to convey the narrator’s seemingly random yet freeing experience with the saxophone player, and how this encounter changes our narrator.” This sentence presents a defensible interpretation of the poem.

B. Evidence and Commentary (0–4 points): 3

The response provides specific evidence to support the line of reasoning focusing on the speaker’s desire to be free and on its own characterization of the speaker’s encounter with the saxophonist as “freeing.” The student examines imagery in the poem, both as a means of introducing the setting and characterizing the speaker and the saxophonist. The student suggests that the imagery helps “build the empty, desolate tone.” Additionally, the essay focuses on “a tonal shift around lines 41–45.” The commentary argues, “Before those lines, we are shown a pessimistic protagonist, and a sluggish, negative tone,” and the student suggests the speaker’s encounter with the saxophone player changes the tone: “Now, the poem exudes a reverent tone, which helps to portray the freedom now felt by the speaker.” Additionally, the bird referenced in the poem is described as a symbol of freedom: “Birds almost always represent freedom” (paragraph 4). However, the response is inconsistent in its explanation of how the evidence offered supports the line of reasoning. For example, the response does not adequately explain how the portrayal of New York City discussed in paragraph 2 connects to the speaker’s desire for freedom. The essay points out “references to quiet” in the beginning of the poem and suggests they are “important to setting up the upcoming juxtaposition present after the saxophonist plays,” but that point is not discussed further in the essay. This essay earned 3 points in Row B.

C. Sophistication (0–1 points): 0

The essay did not earn the point for sophistication in Row C as it oversimplifies the complexities of the speaker’s desire for escape, largely describing it as a mere desire to fly away like the bird: “This excerpt demonstrates the speakers desire to be free by using the bird as a direct comparison.”

Sample: 1C

Score: 1-1-0

A. Thesis (0–1 points): 1

This essay earned the point in Row A with its thesis: “Ai uses diction to both describe how empty and cold the city streets and the speaker feel, using words such as empty, brittle, solitude, asleep, etc. Selection of detail is also used, with Ai focusing on how empty the city streets & the speaker seem, and also on how rough the saxophonist seems, yet is still welcoming to the speaker.” This thesis is found in the conclusion of the essay.

Question 1 (continued)

B. Evidence and Commentary (0–4 points): 1

In an attempt to defend the thesis, this response looks at diction and selection of detail within the poem. The student notes, “Ai uses diction throughout the poem to describe the encounter” and to “help set in stone the setting of the poem,” then provides a list of words (“empty, brittle, solitude, asleep, etc.”). The commentary notes only that these words “help to portray an empty, cold feeling of the scene.” The student later suggests that Ai “chooses to focus on how empty the New York streets seem and how the speaker also feels empty inside.” The significance of this emptiness is not fully explained, nor is a line of reasoning developed. The evidence provided is mostly general, and the commentary is repetitive and does not explain how the evidence supports the argument. This response earned 1 point in Row B.

C. Sophistication (0–1 points): 0

This response oversimplifies the complexities in the poem, particularly in its discussion of the emptiness captured in the opening of the poem; therefore, it did not earn the point in Row C.