

Chief Reader Report on Student Responses: 2021 AP[®] Art History Free-Response Questions

• Number of Students Scored	20,633			
• Number of Readers	190			
• Score Distribution		Exam Score	N	%At
		5	2,467	12.0
		4	4,043	19.6
		3	4,907	23.8
		2	6,209	30.1
		1	3,007	14.6
• Global Mean	2.84			

The following comments on the 2021 free-response questions for AP[®] Art History were written by the Chief Reader, Dr. Joe Lucchesi, Professor of Art History, St. Mary's College of Maryland. They give an overview of each free-response question and of how students performed on the question, including typical student errors. General comments regarding the skills and content that students frequently have the most problems with are included. Some suggestions for improving student preparation in these areas are also provided. Teachers are encouraged to attend a College Board workshop to learn strategies for improving student performance in specific areas.

Question #1**Task:** Long Essay—
Comparison**Topic:** Architecture and Power**Max. Points:** 8**Mean Score:** 3.66***What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?***

Responses were supposed to demonstrate a number of skills related to art historical thinking, including visual analysis, contextual analysis, comparative analysis, interpretation, and argumentation. To be awarded all eight score points, the response needed to successfully accomplish the following tasks:

- Select and identify a work of architecture whose political context was similar to the Forbidden City.
- Describe visual characteristics of both works.
- Explain and interpret how two separate visual similarities communicated a political context for both sites.
- Explain and argue one way that contextual differences between the sites or the people who made them related to the communication of differing aspects of political power.

How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skills required on this question?

Overall, the responses addressed the course content in the following ways:

- Most responses were able to select and identify another work of architecture whose political context was similar to the Forbidden City, although some issues arose when they chose sites that were not on the list provided.
- Most responses were able to accurately describe visual characteristics of both works.
- Fewer responses were able to explain how two separate visual similarities communicated a political context. Of those that could, a fair number demonstrated only a basic or rudimentary understanding. Many could earn the score points, but the response lacked significant depth.
- Understanding contextual differences between sites seemed to be the most difficult task for most responses. The responses tended to be more general than specific and lacking in enough context to earn score points.

What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?

The most common gaps in knowledge occurred in the following ways:

- Students lacked basic familiarity with the Forbidden City.
- When students selected an architectural site that was off the list provided in the prompt, these choices could result in less successful responses because:
 - The selection was not appropriate to the requirements of the prompt.
 - The discussion was very uneven, since the student has in-depth knowledge of their chosen selection only (which becomes especially evident in Task D, the contextual evidence category).
 - There is not enough information with scholarly consensus regarding function (for example, Nan Madol or even Machu Picchu).
 - The selection was not clear, for example the student named one monument and described another (such as the Pantheon versus the Parthenon).
- Students should understand that the prompt intends discussion on the “original” work, not a later version (unless that is intentionally allowed by the prompt). For example, discussion should not focus on later tourism.
- There was a general lack of understanding of the cultural and contextual issues as they related to Task D score points, in which students must provide supporting evidence for a comparative claim of difference between the two works.

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The Forbidden City is in the capital of China.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The Forbidden City was the political center and home of the emperors in Beijing during their rule.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The Forbidden City plan is more complex and confusing than Angkor Wat.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The Forbidden City contains many tall structures and is completely surrounded by walls.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The Forbidden City can be used for everyday life while Versailles is more of a decorative, historical site.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The Forbidden City is located in an urban city while Versailles is a bit more removed, because the emperor wanted to remind everyday people of his presence, while Louis XIV cared for having his nobles around him all the time.”

Based on your experience at the AP[®] Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer teachers to help them improve the student performance on the exam?

Teachers may want to clarify for students what constitutes contextual evidence from other types of evidence (like visual) and what level of specificity distinguishes basic historical facts and knowledge from information presented to support a particular claim. This could be done as an exercise in which students write what they believe are contextual evidence statements about a work of art and then review them as a group to refine them, by eliminating purely visual information from evidence statements (even if that information is correct), and/or adding details to a general statement until they're satisfied it reaches the level of presenting evidence of something particular.

What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?

AP[®] resources that are relevant to the content and skill(s) addressed in this question:

- Unit 8 in the CED includes content related to art of South, East, and Southeast Asia, 300 B.C.E.–1980 C.E.
- The resources for Unit 8 in AP Classroom include topic questions and formative assessments on this content area.
- AP Daily Videos for Topic 8.1 and 8.2 address skills to help clarify the difference between visual and contextual evidence.
- AP Daily Videos for Topic 8.4 review skills needed to establish and support a defensible claim using visual and/or contextual evidence.

Question #2**Task:** Long Essay—
Visual and Contextual
Analysis**Topic:** Artists' influence from other
cultures**Max. Points:** 6**Mean Score:** 2.28***What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?***

Responses were supposed to demonstrate a number of skills related to art historical thinking, including argumentation, visual and contextual analysis, and historical interpretation. To be awarded all six score points, the response needed to successfully accomplish the following tasks:

- Select and identify an appropriate painting, print, or drawing from Later Europe and the Americas.
- Establish an art historical claim related to why artists were influenced by art from another culture.
- Provide visual and/or contextual evidence to support that claim.
- Explain how the evidence relates to the claim.
- Corroborate or qualify the claim with additional evidence or argumentation.

How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skills required on this question?

Overall, the responses addressed the course content in the following ways:

- Many responses were able to integrate the skill of argumentation with the specific question prompt: artists from Later Europe and Colonial Americas who created a painting, print, or drawing that was influenced by another culture.
- Many responses were able to correctly identify the culture of influence and to articulate a claim supported by evidence related to the prompt. Even when the responses did not fully develop an argument, they were often able to provide relevant visual and contextual evidence for the chosen work. Although only a few responses overall were able to earn the complexity point, those that earned the point showed in-depth knowledge of the subject by bringing additional perspectives, critiques, or nuance to the discussion.

One additional note: there were a number of responses left blank, where students did not attempt the question, suggesting they found it difficult or unfamiliar. Since the Later Europe and Colonial Americas content area is one that students typically find accessible, this may suggest that they found the argumentation type challenging. As this is the first year of this question type on the exam, this is not entirely surprising.

What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?

The most common gaps in knowledge occurred in the following ways:

- Responses were often not able to articulate a specific claim that established a line of reasoning related to the prompt. Responses often made vague or general statements about an artist's interest in a culture rather than a specific claim.
- Responses in some cases made a claim related to influence from another artist or a related artistic tradition, rather than articulating a claim of influence from a different culture.
- Discussion of visual and/or contextual evidence in some responses was insufficiently detailed and specific.
- Responses did not always select an appropriate work. Some responses selected a work that was not in the specified 2D media (e.g., George Washington sculpture). Some responses selected a work from the correct content area but that does not show influence from another culture (e.g., *The Swing*).

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Cassatt was influenced by another culture.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Cassatt’s work shows the influence of Japanese ukiyo-e prints. She was interested in these due to their formal properties and treatment of subject matter.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Picasso was influenced by Cubism.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The visual aspects of the work demonstrate Picasso’s interest in African culture, specifically their masks.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Picasso used abstract forms and bright colors.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Harsh, angular forms make up the woman on the right side of the composition. Angular shapes make up her breasts and the rest of her body.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The world was opening up due to trade.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The recent opening of Japan was due to American Commodore Matthew Perry’s visit in the mid-1800s, which resulted in a flood of Japanese art to Europe.”

Based on your experience at the AP[®] Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer teachers to help them improve the student performance on the exam?

Teachers should have students practice writing claim statements that support art historical arguments and also practice the skill of argumentation to support a claim about a work of art.

What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?

AP[®] resources that are relevant to the content and skill(s) addressed in this question:

- Unit 4 in the CED includes content related to art of Later Europe and the Americas, 1750–1980 C.E.
- The resources for Unit 4 in AP Classroom include topic questions and formative assessments on this content area.
- AP Daily Videos for Topic 4.4 address the skills needed to establish and support a defensible claim using visual and/or contextual evidence.

Question #3**Task:** Visual Analysis**Topic:** *Laocoön* (Hellenistic)**Max. Points:** 5**Mean Score:** 3.54***What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?***

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.

How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skills required on this question?

Overall, the responses addressed the course content in the following ways:

- Most responses were able to earn both visual description points by using language and terminology that was accurate and demonstrated knowledge of visual characteristics.
- Most responses were able to earn at least one of the two visual evidence points by explaining the way in which the sculpture conveyed a sense of drama.
- Some responses were able to explain how the work differed from earlier Greek art by showing that Archaic and Classical art represented earlier sculptural traditions and are period styles within Greek culture.

What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?

The most common gaps in knowledge occurred in the following ways:

- Responses overlooked major visual characteristics as influential on the overall appearance of the artwork, for example, the marble material, the general physical attributes of the figures, or the naturalism of the drapery.
- Responses did not use details of facial expressions or the figures’ poses as visual evidence that contributed to a sense of drama.
- Responses did not always compare the work of art to earlier traditions of Greek sculpture.

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “This is a work of Greek sculpture that shows a man.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “This work shows three men of different sizes twisting to avoid being bitten by a snake.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The work shows drama because there is a lot of movement.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The figures is dramatic because the men seem to be screaming, and they are twisting with their arms and legs, which are pointing in different directions.”

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “This work relates to a lot of other Greek sculpture of the past.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “This work is unlike earlier Greek works of art because it shows lots of emotion instead of using an archaic smile and calm posture.”
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Based on your experience at the AP[®] Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer teachers to help them improve the student performance on the exam?

Teachers should continue reinforcing information provided to students about writing a successful essay, specifically about scaffolding information from basic description through more detailed analysis and/or comparison. They should also give some attention to how basic visual patterns can identify a ‘period style’ and encourage students to develop comparisons of art objects that discuss differences in the techniques employed by artists from different historical periods.

What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?

AP[®] resources that are relevant to the content and skill(s) addressed in this question:

- Unit 2 in the CED includes content related to art of the Ancient Mediterranean, 3500 B.C.E.–300 C.E.
- The resources for Unit 2 in AP Classroom include topic questions and formative assessments on this content area.
- AP Daily Videos 2 and 3 for Topic 5.2 focus on skills 1.B, 5.A, and 5.B used to describe and analyze visual elements of both known and unknown artworks. Although the examples discussed are from the Indigenous Americas, the discussion of these skills is applicable to artwork from all content areas.
- AP Daily Video 2 for Topic 9.1 focuses on skill 5.A to analyze and describe visual elements of unknown artworks. Although the example discussed is from the Pacific Islands, the discussion of the skill is applicable to artwork from all content areas.

Question #4**Task:** Contextual Analysis**Topic:** *The Bayeux Tapestry's* political context**Max. Points:** 5**Mean Score:** 1.94***What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?***

Responses were supposed to demonstrate primarily the art historical thinking skill of contextual analysis, applied to a work from the Course and Exam Description (CED). To be awarded all five score points, the response needed to successfully accomplish the following tasks:

- Describe the materials or techniques used to create the *Bayeux Tapestry*.
- Place the *Bayeux Tapestry* in its historical and political context by describing a historical event depicted in the work and explaining how a political point of view is shown through the depiction of historical events.
- Address the role of patronage in the *Bayeux Tapestry* by explaining how the patron's point of view is reflected in the work.

How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skills required on this question?

Overall, the responses addressed the course content in the following ways:

- Most responses focused narrowly on the two given panels of the work; stronger responses accurately identified the scenes, while many responses ascribed a range of historical (or Biblical) events to the scenes. Few responses acknowledged these were part of a larger, horizontal wall hanging.
- Most responses were able to place the work broadly within a medieval context, since the dates were provided in the prompt; however, many lacked any additional specificity and often conflated the Norman Conquest with other historical events (such as the Crusades).
- Many responses identified a range of materials associated with the *Bayeux Tapestry*; only some accurately recognized the technique of the work as embroidery.
- Some responses were able to explain how the work represented the point of view of William and asserted his legitimacy as King and/or that his half-brother Odo commissioned the work to gain his favor. However, many responses simply asserted that it showed “the victors’ point of view” without enough detail to earn the points.

What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?

The most common gaps in knowledge occurred in the following ways:

- A lack of familiarity with or an inability to differentiate specific terms in regard to the techniques traditionally employed to create textiles. These include embroidery, knitting, weaving, sewing, stitching, and others.
- A lack of familiarity with the sequence of narrative events that appear on the *Bayeux Tapestry*. The most common error in this regard was responses referring to the feast scene as a celebration of victory.
- A lack of understanding not only in regard to the likely identity of the patron but also the explicit point of view expressed by the patron to affirm his support for William's legitimate conquest of England.
- A tendency to write descriptively rather than to adequately analyze the specific historical context of the events depicted in the *Bayeux Tapestry* or of the political situation it addressed.

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The <i>Bayeux Tapestry</i> was a massive project. It required a workshop of many people to weave this work.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Despite the piece being a tapestry, the <i>Bayeux Tapestry</i> is actually embroidery on linen.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “They are having a feast for all the soldiers who survived the war, to celebrate them.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “A political point of view is shown here because the men are being lavished in food, playing a horn before their battle showing that their ruler and country is strong and prosperous in ability to provide their men with the necessary food and care to get them ready to fight.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The <i>Bayeux Tapestry</i> reflects the point of view of the patron the king of Normandy as it shows his ideology of wanting to have his name written in history.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “It’s not known who the patron was (maybe Odo?) but it was likely a Norman who supported William I’s conquest. This is evident through the portrayal of the Norman’s riding into battle valiantly on horseback.”

Based on your experience at the AP[®] Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer teachers to help them improve the student performance on the exam?

Teachers could improve student performance with this artwork by visually demonstrating how the technique of weaving differs from the technique of embroidery and showing more of the work than just the two details provided in the CED so that students have a greater of understanding of what the entire work looks like and how it may have been displayed. They could also compare and/or contrast the work with other depictions of battle to help students understand how images of war can function as works of propaganda.

What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?

AP[®] resources that are relevant to the content and skill(s) addressed in this question:

- Unit 3 in the CED includes content related to art of the Early Europe and Colonial Americas, 200–1750 C.E.
- The resources for Unit 3 in AP Classroom include topic questions and formative assessments on this content area.
- AP Daily Video 1 for Topic 3.3 addresses skills and content related to materials and techniques used in the *Bayeux Tapestry*.
- AP Daily Videos for Topics 3.1 and 3.4 focus on the skills used in contextual analysis of art from this content area.

Question #5**Task:** Attribution**Topic:** Kongo Power Figure**Max. Points:** 5**Mean Score:** 1.69***What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?***

Responses were supposed to demonstrate primarily the art historical thinking skill of attribution of an unknown artwork, as well as argumentation, comparative analysis, and visual and contextual analysis. To be awarded all five score points, the response needed to successfully accomplish the following tasks:

- Attribute the figure to the specific African culture that produced it.
- Provide two pieces of visual evidence that supported the attribution by identifying similar characteristics of other works of art from the appropriate cultural context.
- Use contextual evidence to explain the function of the figure and how that function shaped either the form or the content of this type of figure.

How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skills required on this question?

Overall, the responses addressed the course content in the following ways:

- Most responses were able to identify the work as African; however, many did not narrow the cultural context to identify the Kongo people (or the Democratic Republic of Congo) as the source of the figure.
- Most responses were able to provide visual evidence for an attribution, even if that attribution was incomplete. The nails were the most frequently cited evidence, which also included facial expression, stance, or the abdomen pouch.
- Most responses understood the power of the figure was to mediate disputes or to heal. Some understood the role of the nganga (even if they didn't use this terminology). These stronger responses could also discuss the role of the nails or medicine pouch in relation to this function.
- Responses that connected function most often did that to the figure's form. Specifically, they tended to mention the accrual of nails on the surface and the hollowed-out abdominal container to link form to the figure's longevity, power, or healing properties.

What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?

The most common gaps in knowledge occurred in the following ways:

- Responses could not identify the African cultural context with enough specificity to earn the point.
- Some responses struggled with the difference between providing visual evidence for an attribution versus simple description of visual characteristics.
- Some responses provided the misconception that the figure was used for voodoo.
- Responses were often built around more general ideas around African art, such as ancestor worship. These responses also often conflated this piece with ones from other cultural areas, like the reliquary figure (nlo byeri) or shrine figure (ikenga). Task E was the least frequently earned point (beside attribution), with responses often repeating statements about function without connecting that to impacts on form and/or content.

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “This is similar to another sculpture from Africa.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “This work relates to the Kongo power figure.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “This figure is made out of wood and has many nails hammered into it.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The nkisi nkonde type of figure can be identified through the nails that have been added all over its body and its ‘wide awake’ expression.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Figures like this show the importance of family, lineage, and ancestors in African art.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The figure’s function affected its appearance because the nails hammered into it increased its power and could show how much power the figure contained.”

Based on your experience at the AP[®] Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer teachers to help them improve the student performance on the exam?

Teachers may want to work with students to distinguish between describing the visual characteristics of a work of art and using visual information as evidence specifically to support an attribution or other claim about a work.

What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?

AP[®] resources that are relevant to the content and skill(s) addressed in this question:

- Unit 6 in the CED includes content related to art of the Africa, 1100–1980 C.E.
- The resources for Unit 6 in AP Classroom include topic questions and formative assessments on this content area.
- AP Daily Video 2 for Topic 6.3 focuses on the skills and content used to perform attribution in art history.

Question #6**Task:** Continuity and Change**Topic:** Zaha Hadid, MAXXI**Max. Points:** 5**Mean Score:** 3.27***What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?***

Responses were supposed to demonstrate primarily the art historical thinking skill of identifying and analyzing artistic traditions, as well as visual and contextual analysis. To be awarded all five score points, the response needed to successfully accomplish the following tasks:

- Identify two materials or architectural elements of the MAXXI Museum.
- Explain how these elements or materials depart from or reference earlier architectural traditions.
- Explain the architect's intentions behind those decisions, using contextual evidence.

How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skills required on this question?

Overall, the responses addressed the course content in the following ways:

- Most responses could correctly identify two materials or elements used in the building.
- Many responses situated the building in Rome and connected the work to Classical Roman structures through Hadid's use of concrete, columns, and curving walls. Stronger responses specifically cited the Pantheon or the Colosseum.
- Many responses successfully differentiated MAXXI from premodern traditions because of its asymmetry, lack of ornamentation, and organic forms.
- Some responses compared the building and identified similarities to either Baroque architecture (through curving walls) or International Style modernism in its use of minimal decoration and its projecting overlook (similar to Wright's Falling Water).
- Some responses explained Hadid's references to tradition as rooted in the museum's proximity to historic Roman monuments or as related to its function as a contemporary art space. These were less frequently cited in responses than other points.

What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?

The most common gaps in knowledge occurred in the following ways:

- Responses lacked a facility with appropriate and accurate architectural vocabulary.
- Students had difficulty recognizing what constituted a related architectural tradition.
- Many responses blurred the distinctions between "Modern" as a historic style and used it instead as a general descriptor for a contemporary building.
- There was a general difficulty in linking contextual evidence to the architect's motivations, with responses frequently substituting visual evidence (or descriptions) for required contextual evidence.

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The building uses metal support beams and poles in its structure.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The museum’s entrance lacks the Doric, Ionic, or Corinthian capitals, fluting, and bases of Classical columns like those on the Pantheon’s portico or the engaged pilasters on the Colosseum.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “MAXXI diverges from Gothic since it does not have flying buttresses or stained glass.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Hadid used many stylistic features of modernism found in the Villa Savoye or the Seagram Building.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “The architect makes the building look plain and curvy to make it look new.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “One effect Hadid had from referencing the traditional Roman use of concrete was bringing a connection between old Rome and new Rome. It establishes a sense of heritage in the new and modern city while also respecting old tradition.”

Based on your experience at the AP[®] Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer teachers to help them improve the student performance on the exam?

Teachers might try discussing contextual issues before projecting the image they will be teaching. They could talk through the contextual situation and/or discuss reasons why someone would engage with or diverge from those traditions. Once students have a grounding or list of reasons that seems appropriate, then show them the image and continue the discussion. This would enable students to have a more intuitive, historical understanding of continuity and change rather than starting with looking at visual elements in relation to what came before. This approach might also help students differentiate this skill of contextual analysis and artistic traditions from comparison of works of art.

What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?

AP[®] resources that are relevant to the content and skill(s) addressed in this question:

- Unit 10 in the CED includes content related to art of the Global Contemporary, 1980 C.E.–Present.
- The resources for Unit 10 in AP Classroom include topic questions and formative assessments on this content area.
- The questions for Topic 10.1 address visual elements and techniques related to contemporary architecture.
- AP Daily videos for Topic 2.2 discuss related content of architecture in ancient Rome.