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AP[®] English Literature and Composition

Sample Student Responses and Scoring Commentary

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Question 3: Literary Argument

6 points

Many works of literature feature characters who accept or reject a hierarchical structure. This hierarchy may be social, economic, political, or familial, or it may apply to some other kind of structure.

Either from your own reading or from the list below, choose a work of fiction in which a character responds to a hierarchy in some significant way. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how that character’s response to the hierarchy contributes to an interpretation of the work as a whole. Do not merely summarize the plot.

In your response, you should do the following:

- Respond to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible interpretation.
- Provide 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</p> <p>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</p> <p>Responds to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible interpretation of the selected work.</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 selected work that doesn't respond to the prompt. 		<p>Responses that earn this point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a defensible interpretation of how a character responds to a hierarchy in the selected work. <p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make a claim about how a character's response to a hierarchy contributes to an interpretation of the work as a whole.
<p>Examples that do not earn this point:</p> <p>Restate the prompt</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"Hierarchical structures are a major part of society. In literature, characters can be seen either accepting or rejecting economic, political, and familial hierarchies among others."</i> <p>Do not respond to the prompt but make a generalized comment about the selected work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"In <u>The Chrysalids</u> by John Wyndham, David and the other telepaths hide their mutation from the rest of Waknuk, which is not an easy thing to do."</i> • <i>"People establish hierarchies because they believe they help keep order. Going against a hierarchy is very difficult. Many works of literature have characters that suffer the consequences of doing this."</i> 		<p>Examples that earn this point:</p> <p>Provide a defensible interpretation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"Offred's development as a character in <u>The Handmaid's Tale</u> is shaped by her quiet rebellion against a government hierarchy that enforces her assigned role as a Handmaid."</i> • <i>"In S.E. Hinton's <u>The Outsiders</u>, Ponyboy and Cherry's violation of the strict hierarchy of Greasers versus Socs causes several characters to question their loyalty to these groups and brings tragedy to those who try to uphold these rules."</i> • <i>"Hurston shows how the expectations put on Janie Crawford by her grandmother and her first two husbands are meant to uphold gender-based hierarchies in society and the family. After Janie revolts against these hierarchies and runs away with Tea Cake, she is able to become independent."</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 selected work 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. • A thesis that offers a defensible claim about a character's response to any type of hierarchical structure in the selected work may earn the point; any reasonable student interpretation of the terms "hierarchical structure" or "hierarchy" is acceptable. • 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				
Row B Evidence AND Commentary (0–4 points)	0 points Simply restates thesis (if present), repeats provided information, or offers information irrelevant to the prompt.	1 point EVIDENCE: Provides evidence that is mostly general. AND COMMENTARY: Summarizes the evidence but does not explain how the evidence supports the argument.	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.	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.	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.
	Decision Rules and Scoring Notes				
	Typical responses that earn 0 points: <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. 	Typical responses that earn 1 point: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tend to focus on overarching narrative developments or description of a selected work rather 	Typical responses that earn 2 points: <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 	Typical responses that earn 3 points: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uniformly offer evidence to support claims. Focus on the importance of specific details from the selected work 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. 	Typical responses that earn 4 points: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uniformly offer evidence to support claims. Focus on the importance of specific details from the selected work 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.
Additional Notes: <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 must address the interpretation of the selected work as a whole. 					

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 text could be said to ...</i>”). • Oversimplify complexities of the topic and/or the selected work. • 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 selected work. 2. Illuminating the student’s interpretation by situating it within a broader context. 3. Accounting for alternative interpretations of the text. 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. 		

Important: Completely fill in the circle that corresponds to the question you are answering on this page.

Question 1

Question 2

Question 3



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

Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* ^{features} an unfortunate character demise due to the weighty expectations of society. As Edna Pontellier, the novel's protagonist longs for social freedom and her own identity, she is bound by societal ~~exp~~ tradition and hierarchy. Edna actively rejects the familial hierarchy that confine her to the role of the subservient wife and doting mother as well as social hierarchy that prevent her from attaining freedom. Together, ~~edna~~ the chains of these hierarchies on Edna's life ultimately lead to her suicide, ~~the~~ developing the tragic theme of struggle between desire and expectation. To accomplish this, Chopin employs the use of a powerful foil against Edna, an inner struggle that undermines her relationships, and prominent bird/house metaphors.

As part of the family hierarchy Edna tries to reject, she is confined to the role of a doting mother within this structure. To develop her response, Chopin utilizes a foil, Adele Ratignolle, to exaggerate Edna's desire to break away. Adele is described as a perfect mother and woman, symbolizing the woman that Edna is expected to become. Edna often looks up to Adele but is uncomfortable with the life she leads; at a certain point when Adele is giving birth, Edna cannot stand her discomfort. Here, it becomes apparent that Edna is unable to accept the expectation that society has for her compliance within the family hierarchy. ~~However~~ Instead, Edna rejects this and attempts to break away. She even says that "she would give up the unessential... but she wouldn't give herself" for her children. This is a direct explanation for Edna's inability to remain

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Important: Completely fill in the circle that corresponds to the question you are answering on this page.

Question 1

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

within the family hierarchy since she desires more for her life than to devote it to her children. On the other hand, Adele is ~~also~~ shocked by this statement and her reaction reassures her status as a foil to Edna, exaggerating Edna's rejection of the societal standard. Thus, the use of a foil is very prominent in *The Awakening* as it contributes to the development of Edna wanting to separate away from family hierarchy. As a whole, this connects back to the tragic theme of internal desire and external expectation since Edna's wants of independence clash with what Adele symbolizes as societal expectation for a mother.

Also within the family hierarchy is the role of a subservient wife. To develop Edna's rejection to this as well and build upon a larger meaning, Chopin includes an internal conflict. Edna is torn between her relationship to Leonce, her husband, and her growing feelings for Robert. This man vs. self conflict begins to define Edna as she comes to realize her unhappiness in her marriage. This escalates to the point where Edna even attempts to smash her wedding ring but her "boot heel does not make an indenture". ~~However~~ As Edna struggles to reconcile her place in her relationship with Leonce and her attraction to Robert, Edna begins to externalize this internal conflict. The wedding ring acts as metonymy since it represents the marriage as whole, deepening the conflict. However, the issue with this sect of the family hierarchy is Edna's unfortunate ~~issue~~ confinement as a subservient wife regardless of if she rejects this specific family. In the setting of late 1800s Louisiana, all women were expected to be inferior in their partnership and Edna would not be able to make an exception. Leaving Leonce would

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

simply bind her in the same position in the family hierarchy with Robert. The inescapability of this status drives Edna to realize her ~~despair~~ hidden despair and the struggle leads to her suicide. Although Edna attempts to reject this position within the family hierarchy, she cannot, and this contributes to the larger themes that play within the novel.

Outside of the family hierarchy, Edna also challenges the social hierarchy. Edna recognizes and is largely uncomfortable with her role as an upper class member in New Orleans society. Her ~~rich~~ wealthy status however has offered little ~~reprieve~~ reprieve to her despair and her inability to create change as a woman. She, as a result, rejects this status and attempts to downgrade. To show this progression, Chopin utilizes heavy house and bird imagery/metaphors. For example, when living in the large and luxurious estate in her husband's name, Edna is often described as confined and unhappy. As she begins to seek independence and explore her own identity, Edna separates from her family and moves into a "pigeon house". Here, although the space is much smaller and enclosed, Edna is ironically much freer and happy. By rejecting the social hierarchy as symbolized by wealth and status, Edna begins to find herself and shed the persona she has been trapped within. However, the burden of social expectation and judgment troubles Edna and forces her to realize she can never fully live as she pleases especially since she is tied to her place in the social hierarchy. Thus, she chooses to drown herself and in the final moments, sees a broken winged bird. The image of

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● **Important:** Completely fill in the circle that corresponds to the question you are answering on this page.

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

this bird induces despair, as it is free and uncaged yet unable to fly, symbolizing Edna herself. Thus, in her journey to freedom from the social hierarchy, Edna meets a tragic end, which adds to the meaning of the work as a whole in its commentary on social expectation.

Chopin's novel *The Awakening* is a profound yet saddening work. Edna's desires for independence and self-expression are constantly hindered by the ever-present social and familial hierarchies. By developing these ideas with foils, man vs. self conflicts, and powerful metaphors/imagery, Chopin demonstrates how societal expectation and judgment can destroy a person, even as they break free.

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Question 1

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Question 3



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

Every ~~person~~ ~~struggles~~ ~~with~~ ~~a~~ ~~ter~~ ~~rible~~ person struggles to find their role in their family. Whether you are the youngest child, the oldest, or even a parent, you ~~will~~ will find yourself struggling to figure out where you belong and who is in charge. In the play "A Raisin in the Sun", Lorraine Hansbury shows how Mama uses her familial hierarchy to do what is best for her family though the characters' actions, societies expectations, and gender roles.

Each member of the younger family has their own idea of ~~what~~ how the money from their father's inheritance would be best suited. Beneatha and Walter Lee's arguments lead Mama to the realization of her own family's competitive ^{and} strong willed nature. When Ruth discovers her pregnancy and Walter dismisses her concerns and intentions, Mama knows what she must do for her family. She knows that the family needs to rekindle their love and appreciation for one another. This is when Mama uses her power to buy a new house for her family.

After Mr. Younger's death, Mama took ~~the~~ over his job as the "head of the household." She was ~~was~~ responsible for both the role she plays as mother and now, the paternal role as well. ~~Mama~~ Without the help of her husband, mama had tremendous pressure ~~at~~ on her shoulders. Society had an idea for what the "ideal" family would look like and ~~was~~ Mama was responsible for making up what was lost after Mr. Younger's death.

Page 2

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● Important: Completely fill in the circle that corresponds to the question you are answering on this page.

Question 1

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

In order to maintain a reasonable status as a family, Mama was led to making decisions in everyone's best interest. She knew what she had to do to keep everyone happy and she was willing to sacrifice for her family.

In addition to Society's extremely high standards putting pressure on Mama, she was also faced with the challenge of overcoming gender roles. Mama knew that she did not fit into the conventional head of the house role for the sole purpose of her gender. Women were not meant to run a family and they were not seen as equals with the men of Society. Luckily, Walter Lee was able to fill the father's role as the man of the house. However, Mama is ~~still~~ much older and wiser than Walter, who is still trying to find his place in the world.

~~The wrong answer~~ Through the character's actions, Society's expectations, and gender roles in society, Mama struggles to find her own place in her family. She is responsible for looking out for the family's best interests and has the pressure on herself to make everyone happy. Mama overcomes ~~her~~ the unbelievable stress she faces when she decides to use the money for a downpayment on a new house. She knows this will be good for her family and is hopeful this will be the beginning of a new life.

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Important: Completely fill in the circle that corresponds to the question you are answering on this page.

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 novel Fences by August Wilson, the main character responds to the social hierarchy by becoming stuck in his past, losing his family. ~~and losing his family.~~

In the novel, Troy, the main character faces hardship with his society, trying to find a place to belong. The problem of color is introduced which affects how he looks at the outside world. For instance, Cory asked his Troy can he go play football in college knowing it meant everything to him. But Troy denied him, risking ~~his~~ his son's spot. Troy was scared they wouldn't accept him because of his color in which he didn't want to see his son go through the same thing he went through. The fear of his son experiencing the same thing, made their relationship fall.

Trying to move on from the past takes change. In the novel the rejection of their ~~own~~ skin color caused Troy to fear the outside world. As the main character in the novel Fences responds to the hierarchy, he concluded on willing to risk his family. The work of whole contributed to Troy being stuck in the past, unable to move on, losing his relationship with his family.

Page 4

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Question 3

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

Overview

For Question 3, the literary argument question, students were asked to respond to the following prompt:

Many works of literature feature characters who accept or reject a hierarchical structure. This hierarchy may be social, economic, political, or familial, or it may apply to some other kind of structure.

Either from your own reading or from the list below, choose a work of fiction in which a character responds to a hierarchy in some significant way. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how that character’s response to the hierarchy contributes to the work as a whole. Do not merely summarize the plot.

In a timed-writing situation and without access to the text, students were expected to complete three tasks. They were expected to:

- select a work of fiction in which a character responds to a hierarchy in a significant way,
- analyze the character’s response to the hierarchy and how that response contributes to the meaning of the work as a whole, and
- write a well-written response based on that analysis.

Selecting a work of fiction—a novel, play, or epic poem—that addresses the focus of the prompt, in this case a text with a significant hierarchy, is the first essential step for students. Students benefit from more complex texts: ones that contain multiple viewpoints, a variety of characters or narrative arcs, and language that lends itself to interpretation. Texts with less complexity make analysis more difficult. It should be noted that there is no formal list of acceptable texts; rather, students demonstrate the appropriateness of the text through their analysis and writing. The texts in the list offered with the prompt are meant as suggestions, representing diverse possibilities.

Analyzing the work of fiction here required two steps. First, students were asked to analyze the character’s response to the hierarchy. To do so, students needed both to identify the character and to define the hierarchy itself. The prompt offered students suggestions on a variety of hierarchies—such as “social, economic, political, or familial”—but it also invited students to define the concept in different or unique ways, depending on the text they chose. Second, students were asked to apply that focused analysis to the work as a whole, exploring how the character’s response to the hierarchy affects other people or events in the larger work. In doing so, students could demonstrate both close reading and their ability to negotiate longer texts. As always, students were cautioned not to summarize the text, a reminder that the evidence they draw from the text should be used in service of analysis.

Writing a well-written literary argument requires students to negotiate a range of information, including the focus of the prompt and evidence from a substantial text. Here, students were asked to articulate an overall thesis about how a character responds to a hierarchy as well as how that response contributes to the meaning of the work as a whole. They also needed to develop the

Question 3 (continued)

argument through evidence and commentary, ideally constructing a line of reasoning that shows the complexity of their understanding. Students were not expected to use direct quotations in their response. Stronger responses used more specific, precise evidence, and used the evidence as support for defensible claims rather than merely as plot summary.

Sample: 3A—*The Awakening***Score: 1-4-1****Row A: Thesis (0–1 points): 1**

In the introductory paragraph, the response presents its thesis in two sentences: “Edna actively rejects the familial hierarchy that confine her to the role of the subservient wife and doting mother as well as social hierarchy that prevent her from attaining freedom. Together, the chains of these hierarchies on Edna’s life ultimately lead to her suicide, developing the tragic theme of struggle between desire and expectation.” This insightful and complex thesis provides a defensible interpretation of Edna’s response to the hierarchies and makes a claim about how that response contributes to the interpretation of the work as a whole. It earned 1 point in Row A.

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

The essay provides specific examples from Chopin’s novel and uses that evidence to consistently support a line of reasoning that focuses on Edna’s struggles against the hierarchies of her time. The essay is skillfully organized to develop several supporting claims. In paragraph 2, the response considers the role of Edna’s friend, Adele, who “is described as a perfect mother and woman, symbolizing the woman that Edna is expected to become.” The response suggests that Adele serves as a foil to Edna, who “is uncomfortable with the life she leads.” The response points out that Edna’s rejection of the familial hierarchy is seen in her assertion that she would “‘give up the unessential ... but she wouldn’t give herself’ for her children” and goes on to argue that “the use of a foil is very prominent in *The Awakening* as it contributes to the development of Edna wanting to separate away from family hierarchy.” Paragraph 3 moves from Edna’s role as a mother to her role as a wife who is “torn between her relationship to Leonce, her husband, and her growing feelings for Robert.” The response characterizes this conflict as “man vs. self” and uses the evidence of Edna’s attempt “to smash her wedding ring” as proof of her desire to break free. The student sees Edna’s wedding ring “as metonymy since it represents the marriage as whole, deepening the conflict.” The response points out that “[i]n the setting of late 1800s Louisiana, all women were expected to be inferior in their partnership and Edna would not be able to make an exception.” Finally, the response considers Chopin’s use of “house and bird imagery/metaphors.” In particular, it argues that Edna’s move to the “‘pigeon house’” ironically makes her feel “much freer and happy.” Later, the essay points to the example of “a broken winged bird” Edna sees in her final moments and in the commentary maintains, “The image of this bird induces despair as it is free and uncaged yet unable to fly, symbolizing Edna herself.” The response’s use of specific evidence works in tandem with the insightful commentary to build a complex interpretation of the novel and a clear line of reasoning. This essay earned 4 points in Row B.

Row C: Sophistication (0–1 points): 1

This response consistently employs a vivid and persuasive style and explores how Chopin develops complexities and tensions within the work. The sentence “However, the burden of social expectation and judgment troubles Edna and forces her to realize she can never fully live as she pleases

Question 3 (continued)

especially since she is tied to her place in the social hierarchy” is an example of this insightful exploration. This essay earned the sophistication point in Row C.

Sample: 3B—*A Raisin in the Sun*

Score: 1-3-0

Row A: Thesis (0–1 points): 1

This essay responds to the prompt with a thesis located in the introductory paragraph: “In the play ‘*A Raisin in the Sun*’, Lorraine Hansbury shows how Mama uses her familial hierarchy to do what is best for her family though the characters’ actions, societies expectations, and gender roles.” The thesis earned 1 point in Row A because it provides a defensible interpretation.

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

The essay offers specific examples from the play in order to develop a line of reasoning that focuses on Mama Younger’s struggles to do what is best for her family after her husband’s death. In paragraph 2, the response points out the conflict between Beneatha and Walter Lee (their “competative and strong willed nature”) and the complication of Ruth’s pregnancy. The essay argues that Mama “knows that the family needs to rekindle their love and appreciation for one another. This is when Mama uses her power to buy a new house for her family.” In paragraph 3, Mama’s role as “head of the household” is explored, and the essay points out that she is “responsible for both the role she plays as mother and now, the paternal role as well.” Additionally, the essay argues, “Society had an idea for what the ‘ideal’ family would look like and Mama was responsible for making up what was lost after Mr. Younger’s death,” and in an attempt to “maintain a reasonable status as a family, Mama was led to making decisions in everyone’s best interest.” Paragraph 4 focuses on the dispute between Mama and Walter Lee, which the response characterizes as “the challenge of overcoming gender roles” and acknowledges, “Mama knew that she did not fit into the conventional head of the house role” because “women were not meant to run a family and they were not seen as equals with the men of society.” While these details from the play are used to build an interpretation, some of the commentary fails to integrate some evidence. For example, the comment “Luckily, Walter Lee was able to fill the father’s role as the man of the house” is offered without clear explanation of how this was done or why it is significant. The generalized commentary (“She knew what she had to do to keep everyone happy and she was willing to sacrifice for her family”) does not strengthen the argument or the interpretation. This essay earned 3 points in Row B.

Row C: Sophistication (0–1 points): 0

The essay oversimplifies some of the complexities in the play (“She is responsible for looking out for the family’s best interests and has the pressure on herself to make everyone happy.”) Additionally, the writing does not enhance the argument; therefore, this essay did not earn the sophistication point in Row C.

Question 3 (continued)

Sample: 3C—*Fences*

Score: 1-1-0

Row A: Thesis (0–1 points): 1

The response argues in the first sentence, “In the novel Fences by August Wilson, the main character responds to the social hierarchy by becoming stuck in his past, losing his family.” Because it offers a defensible interpretation of the work, this thesis earned the point in Row A.

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

The evidence provided in this essay is largely general, and the sparse commentary does not adequately explain how the evidence supports the argument. In paragraph 2, the response makes an observation about Troy, who “faces hardship with his society, trying to find a place to belong.” The response offers some generalized evidence about Troy’s reaction to Cory’s football plans, but the commentary, “Troy was scared they wouldn’t accept him because of his color in which he didn’t want to see his son go through the same thing he went through,” is not fully explained nor does it connect clearly to the thesis. In the last paragraph, the essay contends, “As the main character in the novel Fences responds to the hierarchy, he concluded on willing to risk his family.” No explanations of how Troy responds to the hierarchy or how he risks his family are provided. Without adequate evidence and commentary, no line of reasoning is established. This essay earned 1 point in Row B.

Row C: Sophistication (0–1 points): 0

This essay does not demonstrate sophistication of thought nor develop a complex literary argument. It did not earn the point in Row C.