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AP[®] English Literature and Composition

Free-Response Questions

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ENGLISH LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION

SECTION II

Total time—2 hours

3 Questions

Question 1

(Suggested time—40 minutes. This question counts as one-third of the total essay section score.)

In Richard Blanco’s poem “Shaving,” published in 1998, the speaker writes about the act of shaving. Read the poem carefully. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how Blanco uses literary elements and techniques to develop the speaker’s complex associations with the ritual of shaving.

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.

Shaving

I am not shaving, I’m writing about it.
 And I conjure the most elaborate idea—
 how my beard is a creation of silent labor
 like ocean steam rising to form clouds,
 5 or the bloom of spiderwebs each morning;
 the discrete mystery of how whiskers grow,
 like the drink roses take from the vase,
 or the fall of fresh rain, becoming
 a river, and then rain again, so silently.
 10 I think of all these slow and silent forces
 and how quietly my father’s life passed us by.

I think of those mornings, when I *am* shaving,
 and remember him in a masquerade of foam, then,
 as if it was his beard I took the blade to,
 15 the memory of him in tiny snips of black whiskers
 swirling in the drain—dead pieces of the self
 from the face that never taught me how to shave.

His legacy of whiskers that grow like black seeds
 sown over my cheek and chin, my own flesh.

20 I am not shaving, but I will tell you about the
 mornings
 with a full beard and the blade in my hand,
 when my eyes don’t recognize themselves
 in a mirror echoed with a hundred faces
 I have washed and shaved—it is in that split second,
 25 when perhaps the roses drink and the clouds form,
 when perhaps the spider spins and rain transforms,
 that I most understand the invisibility of life
 and the intensity of vanishing, like steam
 at the slick edges of the mirror, without a trace.

“Shaving” from *City of a Hundred Fires* by Richard Blanco, © 1998. All rights are controlled by the University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, PA 15260. Used by permission of the University of Pittsburgh Press.

Begin your response to this question at the top of a new page in the separate Free Response booklet and fill in the appropriate circle at the top of each page to indicate the question number.

Question 2

(Suggested time—40 minutes. This question counts as one-third of the total essay section score.)

The following excerpt is from Linda Hogan’s novel *People of the Whale*, published in 2008. In this passage, the narrator describes two events that occur in a community: an infant’s birth shortly followed by an octopus’s walking out of the sea. Read the passage carefully. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how the author uses literary elements and techniques to develop a complex characterization of the community.

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.

The infant Thomas W. Just was born on July 2, 1947, to much happiness and many pictures of his mother smiling down at him. It was the day just
 Line before the octopus left the water, walked on all eight
 5 legs across land and into Seal Cave. Sometimes young people made love in that cave. Sometimes boys escaped school and smoked cigarettes there.

But on this day, the day after Thomas was born, the octopus walked out of the sea and they watched it.
 10 Every one of these ocean people stood back, amazed to see it walk, the eye of it looking at them, each one seen, as if each one were known in all their past, all their future. Its skin paled at the sight of men smoking cigarettes and women in their cardigans pulled tight,
 15 with their dark windblown hair. One child stepped toward it as if to speak before his mother grabbed his arm and pulled him back to her, claiming him as a land dweller and no communicator or friend of any eight-legged sea creature.

None of them, not even the oldest, had ever seen an octopus do this and their people had lived there for thousands of years. It scared them into silence, then they talked about it. They knew it meant something. They didn’t know what. Four fishermen in dirty
 20 clothes wanted to kill it and use it for fishing bait. “It’s only practical!” they argued. “It’s the best thing that could happen to us.” They could take it, undigested, out of the stomach of flounder and halibut and use it again. For days they talked about it. They
 25 quarreled. They cried about how blessed they were. A few wild-haired men, afraid of its potent meaning, wanted to throw kerosene in the cave and burn it.

But one of the powerful women stepped up. She believed it had a purpose for going into the cave and
 35 that the humans, a small group of lives beside a big

ocean, should leave it alone. Others agreed. Its purpose was a mystery. Or perhaps it was sick or going to give birth. It turned a shade of red as it reached the safety of the cave. And so the people
 40 thought it was holy and they left gifts outside the entrance to the black rock cave. Some left sage and red cedar. Some offered shining things, glass smoothed by the sea, even their watches. As for the infant Thomas, his mother, whose own infancy was
 45 fed on whale and seal fat, was one of those who thought it was a holy creature and its presence at the time of his birth granted to Thomas a special life. She came from Thomas’s birth at the place of the old people and stood before the entrance of the octopus
 50 cave and held her kicking baby up to it, to be seen by it. “Here is my son. You knew his grandfather. Watch over him.” They were poor people. She had little to leave but the pearl she inherited from her father, Witka. She rolled it into the cave. She was convinced
 55 the octopus would be the spirit-keeper of her son, because she thought like the old people used to think, that such helpers existed and they were benevolent spirits. An older man named Samuel left his silver ring at the entrance to the cave; it was his finest
 60 possession. Not to have given something they cared about would have been no gift at all, so, following his example, others left sparkling glasses, pieces of gold, beads, all the shining things the octopus people love in their homes beneath water.

For the time it dwelt there, they brought offerings, even the first flowers of morning. The treasures built up like small middens.¹ Even the children didn’t take the treasures, although they did go look at them and marvel at what they found, until their mothers
 70 grabbed them away. The younger children tasted them

and found them without flavor except the salt from the air.

75 Those who were afraid the octopus was created by magic or called into being by some force on land not benevolent kept an eye on how it stood in the back of the cave. But it sensed their emotions and formed itself to fit beneath a ledge. It could shape itself to fit into anything, a bottle, a basket. That was how they were caught in the old days, by baskets lowered into
80 the water at night and lifted in the mornings, the creature inside it. Yet, that quality scared people who knew little about them, but had heard much about

shape-shifters and their deceits and witchery on humans, always with poor outcomes for the mortals.

85 Nevertheless, the mother of Thomas, in a plain white dress, took the baby Thomas daily across the sand to the cave when the tide was out.

¹ piles of odds and ends gathered by rodents

From *People of the Whale: A Novel* by Linda Hogan. Copyright © 2008 by Linda Hogan. Used by permission of W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

Begin your response to this question at the top of a new page in the separate Free Response booklet and fill in the appropriate circle at the top of each page to indicate the question number.

Question 3

(Suggested time—40 minutes. This question counts as one-third of the total essay section score.)

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.

The Bluest Eye

Brighton Rock

Catch-22

The Dispossessed

Dominicana

The Dragon Can’t Dance

East of Eden

Fahrenheit 451

Great Expectations

Hope Leslie

The House of the Spirits

The Hummingbird’s Daughter

If Beale Street Could Talk

The Inheritance of Loss

Invisible Man

Jane Eyre

The Kite Runner

Love Medicine

The Mill on the Floss

Native Son

The Nickel Boys

Nineteen Eighty-Four

On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous

On Such a Full Sea

Othello

Parable of the Sower

A Passage to India

Pride and Prejudice

The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie

Purple Hibiscus

A Raisin in the Sun

Robinson Crusoe

The Scarlet Letter

Sweat

Their Eyes Were Watching God

Things Fall Apart

Vanity Fair

White Tiger

The Women of Brewster Place

Wuthering Heights

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STOP

END OF EXAM