
AP[®] English Literature and Composition

Sample Student Responses and Scoring Commentary Set 1

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Free-Response Question 1

- ☒ **Scoring Guidelines**
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Question 1: Poetry Analysis

6 points

In John Rollin Ridge’s poem “To a Star Seen at Twilight,” published in 1868, the speaker admires a solitary star shining at twilight and considers its significance. Read the poem carefully. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how Ridge uses literary elements and techniques to convey the speaker’s complex reflection on the star.

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	
Row A Thesis (0–1 points)	0 points For any of the following: <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. 	1 point Responds to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible interpretation of the poem.
	Decision Rules and Scoring Notes	
	Responses that do not earn this point: <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. 	Responses that earn this point: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide a defensible interpretation of the speaker's complex reflection on the star.
	Examples that do not earn this point: Restate the prompt <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>"The speaker admires a star at twilight and has a complex reflection on it."</i> <i>"John Rollin Ridge employs multiple literary elements and techniques to convey the speaker's reflection in all its complexity."</i> Do not relate to the prompt <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>"Looking at the sky can inspire a lot of thought and emotion."</i> Describe the poem or features of the poem <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>"What makes this poem particularly striking is that the speaker talks to a star."</i> 	Examples that earn this point: Provide a defensible interpretation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>"The speaker of the poem compares humankind to the star seen at twilight, which emphasizes the speaker's sense of wonder of the star and dissatisfaction with being human."</i> <i>"Clearly the speaker of the poem wishes to be as alone as the star he sees in the sky, as he equates being 'companionless' with being sublime."</i> <i>"Through rhyme, imagery, and direct address, Ridge presents the speaker of the poem as someone who projects his desire to escape human nature onto the star, which he admires and yet can never truly emulate."</i>
	Additional Notes: <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				
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 student’s 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. AND Explains how at least one literary element or technique in the poem contributes to its meaning.	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.
	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 summary or description of a poem rather than specific details or techniques. Mention literary elements, devices, or techniques with little or no explanation. 	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 is not clearly established. 	Typical responses that earn 3 points: <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. 	Typical responses that earn 4 points: <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.
	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 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 a sophistication of thought or develop a complex literary argument by doing any of the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying and exploring complexities or tensions within the poem. Illuminating the student’s interpretation by situating it within a broader context. Accounting for alternative interpretations of the poem. 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.

FRQ #1

In John Rollin Ridge's poem, "To a Star Seen at Twilight," he examines the solitary star's eternal reign and explores the glorious empowerment derived from its solitude — ultimately constructing his epiphany on human lonesomeness.

Ridge begins his ^{complex} reflexion on the solitary star by characterizing its grandure; as its rays create a bright, "eternal wreath," the star ^{ascends above} ~~above~~ all to overlook "Heaven" and "Earth." ~~Ridge examines the star's story by depicting~~ The star takes its throne ~~in the sky, and~~ He describes the lone star as "companionless in light," suggesting its lonesome reign. By worshipping the distant star's glorious, yet solitary throne in the sky, Ridge begins recognize the empowerment cultivated by solitude. Despite the erosion of time and ~~the~~ evolution on Earth, "thy giant progress stays." In any era of time, the glorious star rules the sky without threat of a brighter companion. ~~It is~~ Grand, companionless, and powerful — each describe the star's position in the sky. Unlike humankind, the solitary star is immune to corruption ~~and~~ or arrogance; though it ~~looks down on~~ the overlooks the vast open ocean and all life on Earth, the star shines on peacefully from its "calm... eternity" in the sky.

Ridge furthers his reflection on the star by comparing his shared qualities of the star and seeking to internalize its greatness. He recognizes his shared lonesomeness with the great star that radiates above him, and finds a gravitating connection to it. Like himself, the star is "native" to the night, and thrives in solitude. But the solitary star, however, can surpass any obstacle, "storm," or "wreck" ^{in its path.} ~~The star~~

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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.

It transcends beyond "the reach of clouds" and continues to shine brighter. ^{Ultimately,}
 Ridge worships the star's perseverance and capacity to "shine on companionless." His ~~glorifying~~ ^{of} glorifying the solitary star ignites his epiphany that "mighty things must be alone," and his knack for solitude ~~can~~ can foster empowerment. Ridge continues by listing various elements of nature that rule in solitude: "Alone the ocean heaves," and "Alone each mountain stands." Through his complex reflection on the star above him, Ridge ~~harnesses~~ harnesses a newfound sense of power.

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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.

A common goal for most seems to be finding companionship. Whether this be romantically or platonically, as humans it is natural for us to depend on others for validation and comfort. However, it is equally important to gain self-validation and respect. Growing a dependency on others may lead us to lose our sense of self if ~~it is taken~~^{it is taken} too far. By ^{use of} personification, repetition, and ^{powerful diction} ~~symbolism~~, Ridge crafts a ^{splendid} ~~testimony~~ testimony to the importance of self-fulfillment, in his poem "To a Star Seen at Twilight".

This entire poem is built around the star being personified as the main subject. For example, "Thy speaking Face, thy calm, fair brow,". By describing the star as 'calm' and 'fair' Ridge is able to send the message that the star is wise and content with being on its own. In another instance he says, "Upon thy pure sublimity", once again emphasizing the current state of the star being at peace. The use of the word 'pure' here also shows that the star is untainted by heartbreak and is ^{not} ~~is~~ in need of anyone else.

Throughout this text ^{there} ~~are~~ are many points of repetition that help emphasize the overall theme of independence. The main type of repetition in this poem is anaphora. In the first stanza lines three and four each start with "And", and refer to the stars ability to overlook the universe emphasizing its ^{timeless} ~~timeless~~ wisdom. In stanza ^{four} ~~the~~ (lines twenty-one and twenty-two), both lines begin with "Like thee...". This reaffirms to ~~the~~ the audience that the narrator wishes to be like the star but has certain limitations.

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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.

He cannot be as steady or constant as the star, but he can try to find peace in solitude.

The ~~author's~~ writer's choice of wording is very intentional within this poem. ~~He uses words such as~~ He says in line ^{Six} ~~3~~ "Are an eternal wreath for thee", and in line four, "And Heaven, companion ^{light!} in ~~step~~". The use of words such as 'eternal', and 'heaven' offer an almost divine quality to the star. This along with the usage of words such as 'mighty' ^{in line forty} ~~and~~ shows us that one can be powerful on their own, just a star shines or the ocean heaves without any help.

As the audience reads this poem, it is clear that Ridge is able to convey his message of finding power through independence by his honed use of personification, repetition, and ^{impactful} ~~to the~~ diction.

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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 poem "To a Star Seen at Twilight" by John Rollin Ridge, the author utilizes personification, analogies, and natural diction to convey the captivated yet regretful attitude towards the star, illustrating that although sedentary, nature is very powerful and beautiful.

First, Ridge uses personification ~~to talk to the star itself~~ ^{by having the speaker} talk to the star directly as if it were a person; worshipping it and glorifying it. "I love to gaze upon thy speaking face, thy calm, fair brow, and feel my spirit dark and deep, grow bright and pure as thou." (17-20) The speaker directly speaking to the star, telling it how much he loves to stare at its face, is a perfect example of personification in this poem. Not only the conversation, but the "face" of the star are used to describe how beautiful the star is.

Secondly, the author utilizes analogies to ~~compare~~ ^{show that} nothing in the universe compares to the star's beauty. "As now thou seem'st, thou art the throne of thy own spirit, star! And mighty things must be done" (38-40) Here the speaker explains that the star is alone in terms of beauty and role.

Finally, the author uses natural diction to convey the captivated yet regretful attitude towards the star. Although the speaker is captivated by the star's beauty, he feels ashamed and regretful that he's the only person who feels this way. "Oh lofty star! I would all men might look upon thy pure sublimity, And in their bosoms shrink thy loveliness and light like me" (28-32) This means that he is the only one captivated by the star's

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Question 1

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Question 3



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beauty, and he's ashamed of that.

So, in the poem "To a Star Seen at Twilight," John Rollin Ridge uses personification, analogies, and natural fiction to convey the captivated yet regretful reflection of the speaker on the stars, illustrating that although sedentary, nature is very powerful and beautiful.

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0293931



Question 1

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

Overview

For Question 1, the Poetry Analysis question, students were asked to read John Rollin Ridge’s poem “To a Star Seen at Twilight” and respond to the following prompt:

In John Rollin Ridge’s poem “To a Star Seen at Twilight,” published in 1868, the speaker admires a solitary star shining at twilight and considers its significance. Read the poem carefully. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how Ridge uses literary elements and techniques to convey the speaker’s complex reflection on the star.

In a timed-writing situation and with an unfamiliar text, students were expected to complete three main tasks successfully:

Reading the poem involves more than simply understanding individual words and describing what happens. Students were expected to view the text specifically as a poem, recognizing literary elements and techniques in the context of poetry, and then analyzing how those techniques are used to shape the poem and its meaning. For example, in “To a Star Seen at Twilight,” students might identify and explore the poem’s use of metaphor (“The rays around thy brow / Are an eternal wreath for thee”; “Thou art the throne / Of thy own spirit”); personification (especially in stanza 3, “Thy speaking face, they calm, fair brow”); or imagery (for instance, how the star is cast as “Alone” in the final stanza). Students could also use the structure of the poem to explore the speaker’s complex reflection, noticing how the speaker first praises the star in stanza 1 (“Hail solitary star!”), then sees similarities between the star and people in stanza 3 before shifting to differences; the speaker next offers a plea to humans (“I would all men might look / Upon thy pure sublimity”) before concluding with encouragement for the singular star to remain “Alone” (“Shine on companionless / As now thou seem’st”). More advanced readers will notice in the prompt how the “speaker admires a solitary star” and will explore what “admires” means in this particular context (rather than treating the verb as a thesis itself), perhaps noticing the variety of ways Ridge expresses being “Alone” (“solitary” and “companionless”) and the importance of particular words in describing the admiration (like in the “sublimity” of the star).

Analyzing the poem means taking the relevant elements that students identified in their reading and exploring how the parts function collectively to create the meaning of the work as a whole. In “To a Star Seen at Twilight,” students needed to consider how the parts “convey the speaker’s complex reflection on the star.” Less skilled readers will recognize that the speaker admires the star for having exemplary, singular traits. More advanced readers will recognize that the word “complex” is central to the prompt and look for and explore the shifting, contradictory, or paradoxical aspects of the poem. These students might focus on line 23 and the conjunction “But” (“But there the likeness ends”), recognizing this as a turning point in the speaker’s reflections. Students aware of the poem’s complexity might also notice how the speaker sees being “Alone” in a less typical, positive way. While solitary living is often seen as negative (“Those burning worlds which God has thrown / Upon the universe in wrath”), here the speaker finds it admirable (“mighty things must be alone” and “’Tis great, ’tis great to be alone!”). (A savvy reader could also explore the speaker’s use of the exclamation point throughout the poem, teasing out the nuanced shifts that add to the speaker’s reflection.)

Question 1 (continued)

Writing a well-written response means demonstrating a variety of skills. Students are asked to establish a thesis that shows understanding of the speaker’s complex reflection on the star. They build this defensible interpretation with specific, relevant evidence from the poem and through their own commentary that explains the connection between their argument and the evidence. The more successful responses build a line of reasoning that connects ideas and shows the relationships between them. In “To a Star Seen at Twilight,” students could create a line of reasoning that takes advantage of the structure of the poem. Students might show the similarities between star and man, then transition into the differences, which accentuates the poem’s complexity, and then explain how those differences necessitate the star being alone for eternity; or they might argue how this singular star ultimately becomes a reflection on the speaker and humanity more generally. A well-written response is more than grammatically correct writing, and it should be noted that students are not expected to write a polished, revised essay in the limited time allotted for the exam.

Sample: 1A**Score: 1-4-1****Row A: Thesis (0–1 points): 1**

This essay responds to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible interpretation of the poem, “To a Star Seen at Twilight.” The thesis comprises the first paragraph of the essay and asserts, “In John Rollin Ridge’s poem, ‘To a Star Seen at Twilight,’ he examines the solitary star’s eternal reign and explores the glorious empowerment derived from its solitude—ultimately constructing his epiphany on human lonesomeness.” The essay earned 1 point in Row A.

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

The response blends specific and apt evidence with insightful commentary to support a line of reasoning that focuses on the unique power and greatness of the star. The essay presents evidence in paragraph 2 that focuses on the importance of specific words and details of the poem and helps to characterize the star’s strength: “‘eternal wreath,’” “‘companionless in light’” and “‘calm ... eternity’ in the sky.” The commentary that accompanies this evidence connects these details to the “grandure” of the star through the observation, “Unlike humankind, the solitary star is immune to corruption or arrogance.” In paragraph 3, the essay compares the speaker’s “shared qualities of the star.” The evidence demonstrates the traits the star and the speaker have in common: “Like himself, the star is ‘native’ to the night and thrives in solitude.” The evidence also, however, distinguishes the differences: “But the solitary star, however, can surpass any obstacle, ‘storm,’ or ‘wreck’ in its path.” The commentary provided consistently connects this evidence to the line of reasoning with the observation, “His glorifying of the solitary star ignites his epiphany that ‘mighty things must be alone,’ and his knick for solitude can foster empowerment.” The essay explains how the literary techniques characterization and comparison contribute to its meaning. Because the essay provides specific evidence to support its line of reasoning, commentary that clearly explains how that evidence relates to the thesis, and an explanation of how multiple literary elements contribute to the meaning of the poem, the essay earned 4 points in Row B.

Question 1 (continued)**Row C: Sophistication (0–1 points): 1**

The essay demonstrates sophistication of thought by exploring the complexity of the relationship between the star and the speaker's experiences. For example, in paragraph 3, the essay notes that the speaker "recognizes his shared lonesomeness with the great star that radiates above him, and finds a gravitating connection to it." The exploration of these complexities builds to a decisive conclusion: "Through his complex reflection on the star above him, Ridge harnesses a newfound sense of power." The essay earned the sophistication point in Row C.

Sample: 1B**Score: 1-3-0****Row A: Thesis (0–1 points): 1**

This response provides a defensible interpretation of the speaker's complex reflection on a star in its thesis located in the final sentence of paragraph 1: "By use of personification, repetition, and powerful diction, Ridge crafts a splendid testimony to the importance of self-fulfillment in his poem 'To a Star Seen at Twilight.'" The essay earned 1 point in Row A.

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

The line of reasoning for this essay focuses on "self-fulfillment" and "independence." The body paragraphs of the essay examine the poet's use of personification, repetition, and diction and how they contribute to the meaning of the poem. Each paragraph pairs specific evidence and commentary. In paragraph 2, for example, the essay presents the evidence, "'Thy speaking face, thy calm, fair brow,'" then follows with the commentary that the personification sends "the message that the star is wise and content with being on its own." The essay considers examples of anaphora within the poem ("And" and "Like thee") in paragraph 3 in support of the claim in the first sentence: "Throughout this text there are many points of repetition that help emphasize the overall theme of independence." The explanation of how the repetition relates to independence is, however, a bit unclear as the final sentence of the paragraph contends, "This reaffirms to the audience that the narrator wishes to be like the star but has certain limitations. He cannot be as steady or constant as the star, but he can try to find peace in solitude." Paragraph 4 considers the role of diction in the poem and provides several examples of "powerful" words. The commentary here clearly connects the evidence to the line of reasoning with the observation at the end of the paragraph that the diction of the poem "shows us that one can be powerful on their own, just [as] a star shines or the ocean heaves without any help." Because the commentary explains how some of the evidence supports the line of reasoning, the response earned 3 points in Row B.

Row C: Sophistication (0–1 points): 0

While the essay begins with an attempt to contextualize its interpretation ("A common goal for most seems to be finding companionship" paragraph 1), it is a generalization and does not demonstrate sophistication of thought. Likewise, the essay does not develop a complex literary argument. The response did not earn the sophistication point in Row C.

Question 1 (continued)

Sample: 1C

Score: 1-2-0

Row A: Thesis (0–1 points): 1

The essay presents its thesis, “In the poem ‘To a Star Seen at Twilight’ by John Rollin Ridge, the author uses personification, analogies, and natural diction to convey the captivated yet regretful attitude towards the star, illustrating that although sedintary, nature is very powerful and beautiful,” in the first paragraph of the essay. The thesis presents a defensible interpretation of the poem; therefore, the response earned 1 point in Row A.

Row B: Evidence and Commentary (0–4 points): 2

The response provides some specific, relevant evidence throughout the essay as it offers examples of personification, analogies, and diction. In paragraph 2, for example, the essay offers an example of personification (“I love to gaze upon thy speaking face, thy calm, fair brow, and feel my spirit dark and deep, grow bright and pure as thou”). The commentary that follows, (“The speaker directly speaking to the star, telling it how much he loves to stare at its face, is a perfect example of personification in this poem”) is, however, simplistic and does not strengthen the argument. In paragraph 3, the response presents an analogy from the poem: “‘As not thou seem’st. Thou art the throne of thy own spirits, star! And mighty things must be done’ (38–40.)” The commentary here attempts to relate the evidence to the thesis in its assertion that “Here, the speaker explains that the star is alone in terms of beauty and role,” but the commentary does little more than acknowledge the beauty of the star. Paragraph 4 focuses on “natural diction” and again provides some examples of word choice in the poem; however, the commentary at the end of the paragraph, “This means that he is the only one captivated by the star’s beauty, and he’s ashamed of that” is inaccurate and fails to strengthen the argument. No explanation of the “captivated yet regretful attitude towards the star” is developed. Because the essay does not present multiple supporting claims, no line of reasoning is established. The essay, therefore, earned 2 points in Row B.

Row C: Sophistication (0–1 points): 0

The essay does not demonstrate sophistication of thought or develop a complex literary argument. It did not earn the sophistication point in Row C.