

2024



AP[®] English Literature and Composition

Sample Student Responses and Scoring Commentary Set 2

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Question 3: Literary Argument

6 points

Many works of literature explore a character’s sense of lacking something important in life. The character perceives an unfulfilled need which may be emotional, spiritual, financial, or something the character does not understand or cannot articulate. Either from your own reading or from the following list, choose a work of fiction in which such a feeling is explored. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how the character’s sense of an unfulfilled need 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 a character's sense of an unfulfilled need in the selected work. <p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make a claim about how a character's sense of an unfulfilled need 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>"A common theme in literature is a character who feels like one of their needs has not been met, or they are missing something that they want out of life."</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>"Gatsby is never really satisfied with anything in his life."</i> • <i>"The Bell Jar follows the life of the protagonist, Esther, through a short period of time in her young adulthood."</i> • <i>"In Ceremony, Tayo feels like something is missing from his life."</i> 		<p>Examples that earn this point:</p> <p>Provides a defensible interpretation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>"Edna's lack of freedom to pursue her desires, in Chopin's <u>The Awakening</u>, highlights how societal constraints can drive a person to both rebellion and submission."</i> • <i>"In <u>The Bluest Eye</u>, Pecola's need to be loved goes unfulfilled and contributes to the violence of the world in which she lives."</i> • <i>"Throughout <u>The Age of Innocence</u>, Newland Archer believes he needs more excitement than his traditional, comfortable life with his wife provides. This drives him to consider a relationship with Ellen Olenska and makes him realize that this 'unfulfilled need' is really a foolish idea."</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. • A thesis that offers a defensible claim about a character's sense of an unfulfilled need in the selected work may earn the point; any reasonable student interpretation of "an unfulfilled need" is acceptable. • 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. • 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)	<p>0 points Simply restates thesis (if present), repeats provided information, or offers information irrelevant to the prompt.</p>	<p>1 point EVIDENCE: Provides evidence that is mostly general. AND COMMENTARY: Summarizes the evidence but does not explain how the evidence supports the argument.</p>	<p>2 points EVIDENCE: Provides some specific, relevant evidence. AND COMMENTARY: Explains how some of the evidence relates to the student’s argument, but no line of reasoning is established, or the line of reasoning is faulty.</p>	<p>3 points EVIDENCE: Provides specific evidence to support all claims in a line of reasoning. AND COMMENTARY: Explains how some of the evidence supports a line of reasoning.</p>	<p>4 points EVIDENCE: Provides specific evidence to support all claims in a line of reasoning. AND COMMENTARY: Consistently explains how the evidence supports a line of reasoning.</p>
Decision Rules and Scoring Notes					
	<p>Typical responses that earn 0 points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are incoherent or do not address the prompt. • May be just opinion with no textual references or references that are irrelevant. 	<p>Typical responses that earn 1 point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tend to focus on overarching narrative developments or description of a selected work rather than specific details. 	<p>Typical responses that earn 2 points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consist of a mix of specific evidence and broad generalities. • May contain some simplistic, inaccurate, or repetitive explanations that don’t strengthen the argument. • May make one point well but either do not make multiple supporting claims or do not adequately support more than one claim. • Do not explain the connections or progression between the student’s claims, so a line of reasoning is not clearly established. 	<p>Typical responses that earn 3 points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uniformly offer evidence to support claims. • Focus on the importance of specific 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. 	<p>Typical responses that earn 4 points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uniformly offer evidence to support claims. • Focus on the importance of specific 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.
<p>Additional Notes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing that suffers from grammatical and/or mechanical errors that interfere with communication cannot earn the fourth point in this row. • To earn the fourth point in this row, the response 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 a 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. 		

In the book *Fences*, the main character Troy had a very poor childhood and young adult life. His unfortunate circumstances and lack of freedom led him to want that sense of youth back as an adult, which is unfortunately something that can't be restored, and leads to the idea that youth is something that must be taken advantage of at the right time because it only fades away as one grows older.

During the novel, Troy cheats on his wife, Rose, with someone named Alberta, which is later revealed to Rose when he tells her Alberta is going to have a baby. One of the excuses he gives for being unfaithful is that Alberta made him feel something new, something he hadn't really experienced with Rose. Whether Troy knew it or not, this feeling is that of being young and carefree, something he didn't get to experience when he was younger. Being with Alberta gave him a sense of rebellion, one that is often associated with teenagers and younger people wanting to go against the system and do whatever they want. Since he had an extremely strict father, this wasn't something he could ever do, and so he compensates in his older years in hopes of getting to experience it. The consequences are much worse when you're older however, because much more responsibility is in your hands, and Troy learned this the hard way when Rose gave up on him.

Troy has a son named Cory who is on the football team at his high school. He is very successful and even has a talent agent come to scout him out. When Troy was younger, he played baseball, but due to his skin color, he was never able to go anywhere with it. However, Cory had a very high possibility of getting to play in college, which made Troy jealous and force Cory to stop playing. Baseball was something very important to Troy, and to see somebody else accomplish his own dreams would have been very difficult to witness, even if it was his own son. He longed for the ability to go back and play baseball again, which was evident whenever he went and swung his bat at the tree in their yard. His time in jail when he was a young adult also did not help his chances at going far in baseball, which places more of the blame on himself, that if he stayed out of trouble and tried harder, he could have gone on to play baseball for the pros. Since that time is gone, he can never have that opportunity again.

Troy also has a second son names Lyons. Lyons doesn't have a job that supports him well, and often has to rely on Troy or his girlfriend for support. This is something that makes Troy extremely angry, because he refuses to grow up and get a real job that he can use to be independent. Although part of the reason he is so angry is because Lyons always asks him for money, another is that Lyons is in his thirties and yet still behaving as if he is a teenager. Troy is exasperated at the idea of someone who is a full adult still acting so young, and yet he likely feels a bit jealous that he can't have that as well. He will never be able to retain that youth however, because he has nobody else that he can rely on, since his parents are both dead and he ran away from home when he was younger. He has had to support himself since the beginning, which is unfair in his mind, since his son doesn't need to support himself at all. It becomes something always in the back of his mind, something he really can't unsee, and it hurts because he desperately needs to feel that. He's never had someone take care of him and he needs to feel that, but he can't because his time has passed for that opportunity.

Youth is an extremely coveted thing in many people because many people didn't get to experience being carefree and not having to worry about taking care of yourself from such a young age. This became the thing that Troy needed the most in his adult life, but it is not

something he ever was able to get. The things that go along with being young slowly go away as you age until eventually they are out of the picture and no longer possible to acheive.

In the novel *Sing Unburied Sing* the main character Jojo experiences hunger. Throughout the book the idea of not having enough and needing more is common. Jojo comes from a lowerclass family living in rural Mississippi. During the duration of the story Jojo and his little sister Kayla struggle with nourishing themselves and finding people who will help care for them.

In Jojo's life he doesn't have many people to care for him. He lives with his grandparents, mother, and sister. His grandmother is dying, so his grandfather is often busy taking care of her. This leaves his mother, Leonie, to take care of him, but she often neglects his needs and cares more for herself. This is especially shown when Jojo, Kayla, and Leonie take a trip down to parchman prison to bring Jojo's father back home. They leave for the trip before they get a chance to eat breakfast which leaves the two kids malnourished the entire trip. When they do end up stopping Leonie gives Jojo money to buy her a coke and leaves nothing for him. These examples show how Jojo has no one to care for him and is often left with less than he needs. This paints Leonie in a negative light and makes the reader sympathetic towards Jojo. This view of the characters helps the reader to infer what actions they will take later in the book and how they will respond to hardship.

Throughout the book Jojo sometimes resorts to stealing from others to fulfill his sister and his own needs. On the way to the prison Leonie makes a stop at a friend's house. While there, she declines food and doesn't check on Jojo or Kayla. As a last resort Jojo steals crackers and juice from the house and shares them with his sister in the car. If Jojo had enough to eat he would not need to steal from others. This shows how great these unfulfilled needs are and the lengths he has to go to resolve them. Jojo is seen as independent because he cannot rely on others to care for him.

Unfulfilled needs are commonplace for Jojo throughout the book. This theme of hunger contributes to the overall interpretation by setting up expectations and character actions. This theme allows the reader to read into the complex relationships the characters have with one another and why they act in the way that they do. Without the context of unfulfilled needs the reader wouldn't understand the environment the characters live in.

Within *Romeo and Juliet*, Romeo feels a sense of unfulfilled need. With this need it drives him to go and try to defy fate by falling in love with Juliet. This contributes to the theme of the play as it shows how inevitable fate is no matter how hard a character can try to change it.

For example Romeo throughout the play is shown to be smitten with Juliet who is with the rival family. Due to this they are fated to be enemies instead of star crossed lovers. This is evident with how Romeo interacts with the side characters. This can be seen with Romeo interacting with Juliet's cousin Tybalt. Tybalt is very aggressive against Romeo's family due to the rivalry which highlights how fate cannot be changed.

Moreover within the final moments of the play, Romeo arrives too late to the meeting place and assumes Juliet is dead. This causes him to take his life, and which has Juliet waking up from the coma-like status. Upon waking up she sees Romeo dead next to her, which shows how they are destined to not be together.

All in all *Romeo and Juliet* is a prime example of how a character's sense of an unfulfilled need can contribute to the interpretation of the theme within the work.

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 explore a character’s sense of lacking something important in life. The character perceives an unfulfilled need which may be emotional, spiritual, financial, or something the character does not understand or cannot articulate. Either from your own reading or from the following list, choose a work of fiction in which such a feeling is explored. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how the character’s sense of an unfulfilled need contributes to an interpretation of the work as a whole. Do not merely summarize the plot.

In a timed-writing situation and without the text in hand, students were expected to complete three main tasks successfully:

Selecting a work of fiction that addresses the focus of the prompt, in this case a text with a character with a “sense of lacking something important in life,” is the first essential step for students. Students benefit from choosing 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 often make analysis more difficult. The list of texts provided with the prompt offers diverse suggestions of possible texts that work with the prompt, but students are not limited to choose a text from this list. Students demonstrate the appropriateness of their chosen text through their analysis and writing. It should be noted that there is no list of acceptable texts.

Analyzing the work of fiction here requires two steps. First, students are asked to identify a fictional text that “explore[s] a character’s sense of lacking something important in life.” The prompt offers students suggestions on a variety of ways that characters might feel this unfulfilled need—it “may be emotional, spiritual, financial, or something the character does not understand or cannot articulate.” Importantly, the prompt does not define the concept definitively but instead invites students to define the concept themselves in different or unique ways, depending on the text and character they choose. Second, students analyze “how the character’s sense of an unfulfilled need contributes to an interpretation of the work as a whole.” In their analysis, students demonstrate both their ability to focus on a particular, relevant character with an unfulfilled need and to examine the implications of that character’s actions (or inaction) across the broader overall text. Students are cautioned not to summarize the text, a reminder that the evidence they draw from the text should be used in service to 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. In this instance, they must articulate an overall thesis about a character with a “sense of lacking something important in life” as well as how the “sense of an unfulfilled need contributes to an interpretation of the work as a whole.” Students must develop their arguments through evidence and commentary, with the more successful responses building a line of reasoning that connects ideas and shows the relationships between

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them. Students are not expected to use direct quotations in their response, though stronger responses use more specific, precise evidence and use the evidence as support for defensible claims rather than merely as plot summary. A well-written response is more than grammatically correct writing, and it should again be noted that students are not expected in the time allotted to write a polished, revised essay.

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

This essay responds to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible interpretation of the selected work. The thesis, “In the book *Fences*, the main character Troy had a very poor childhood and young adult life. His unfortunate circumstances and lack of freedom led him to want that sense of youth back as an adult, which is unfortunately something that can’t be restored, and leads to the idea that youth is something that must be taken advantage of at the right time because it only fades away as one grows older,” serves as the introductory paragraph of the response. It earned 1 point in Row A.

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

The essay provides specific evidence to support all claims in a line of reasoning that focuses on Troy’s regrets about his lost youth and his lack of fulfillment with his current life. The essay examines Troy’s relationship with his wife, Rose, and his two sons, Cory and Lyons. In paragraph 2, the essay presents evidence about Troy’s affair with Alberta. The commentary explains, “One of the excuses he gives for being unfaithful is that Alberta made him feel something new, something he hadn’t really experienced with Rose.” Later in the same paragraph, the essay points out, “Being with Alberta gave him a sense of rebellion, one that is often associated with teenagers.” Paragraph 3 considers Troy’s relationship with Cory “who is on the football team at his high school” and “is very successful and even has a talent agent come to scout him out.” The commentary stresses the significance of this evidence by explaining Troy’s frustration about his own athletic career: “Baseball was something very important to Troy, and to see somebody else accomplish his own dreams would have been very difficult to witness, even if it was his own son. He longed for the ability to go back and play baseball again, which was evident whenever he went and swung his bat at the tree in their yard.” Paragraph 4 focuses on Troy’s relationship with Lyons who “doesn’t have a job that supports him well, and often has to rely on Troy or his girlfriend for support.” The evidence is followed by the commentary, “Troy is exasperated at the idea of someone who is a full adult still acting so young, and yet he likely feels a bit jealous that he can’t have that as well.” The paragraph ends with the insightful claim that “He’s never had someone take care of him and he needs to feel that, but he can’t because his time has passed for that opportunity.” The theme of missed opportunities is woven throughout the essay and helps to support the claims. The essay provides specific and appropriate evidence and consistently explains how that evidence supports the response’s line of reasoning. The essay earned 4 points in Row B.

Row C: Sophistication (0–1 points): 0

The response does not demonstrate sophistication of thought or develop a complex literary argument. Although the essay develops and explains several claims, the response fails to address complexities in the work or situate these events in a broader context of race, class, or poverty, for example. This essay did not earn the point in Row C.

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

The thesis in this essay provides a defensible interpretation of Jojo’s sense of an unfulfilled need in the novel *Sing, Unburied, Sing*. The thesis, “Unfulfilled needs are commonplace for Jojo throughout the book. This theme of hunger contributes to the overall interpretation by setting up expectations and character actions,” appears in the final paragraph of the essay. The essay earned 1 point in Row A.

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

The essay establishes a line of reasoning that focuses on the ways in which Jojo’s unfulfilled need for people to care for him. Paragraph 2 analyzes Jojo’s relationship with his mother who, the essay notes, “often neglects his needs and cares more for herself. This is especially shown when Jojo, Kayla, and Leonie take a trip down to parchman prison to bring Jojo’s father back home. They leave for the trip before they get a chance to eat breakfast which leaves the two kids malnourished the entire trip.” This commentary that follows, “These examples show how Jojo has no one to care for him and is often left with less than he needs,” connects the evidence directly back to the line of reasoning. In paragraph 3, the essay examines the thefts Jojo commits due to hunger: “As a last resort Jojo steals crackers and juice from the house and shares them with his sister in the car.” The commentary again explains how this evidence supports the line of reasoning: “This shows how great these unfulfilled needs are and the lengths he has to go to resolve them.” The response does not, however, consistently explain how all the evidence supports the line of reasoning. For example, in paragraph 3, the essay suggests “Jojo is seen as independent because he cannot rely on others to care for him,” but this claim is unsupported. The essay scored 3 points in Row B.

Row C: Sophistication (0–1 points): 0

The essay did not earn the sophistication point in Row C, because it does not demonstrate sophistication of thought or develop a complex literary argument. The broad statement in the concluding paragraph, “This theme allows the reader to read into the complex relationships the characters have with one another and why they act in the way that they do,” diminishes the arguments of the essay.

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

The essay presents a defensible thesis in the introductory paragraph of the essay: “With this need it drives him to go and try to defy fate by falling in love with Juliet. This contributes to the theme of the play as it shows how inevitable fate is no matter how hard a character can try to change it.” The essay earned 1 point in Row A.

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

The essay provides evidence that is mostly general and focused on plot summary. For example, in paragraph 2, the response offers the evidence “Tybalt is very aggressive against Romeo’s family due to the rivalry which highlights how fate cannot be changed.” The commentary “which highlights how fate cannot be changed” does not explain how the evidence connects to the thesis. The observation in

Question 3 (continued)

paragraph 3 that “Upon waking up she sees Romeo dead next to her, which shows how they are destined to not be together” focuses on narrative development rather than supporting a claim about Romeo’s unfulfilled need. No line of reasoning is developed in the essay. The essay earned 1 point in Row B.

Row C: Sophistication (0–1 points): 0

The response does not demonstrate sophistication of thought or develop a complex literary argument; therefore, it did not earn the point in Row C.