
AP[®] Art History

Sample Student Responses and Scoring Commentary

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Free-Response Question 3

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Question 3: Visual Analysis**5 points**

A Point 1	<p>Accurately describes ONE visual characteristic of <i>The Valley of Mexico (El Valle de México)</i>.</p> <p>Examples of acceptable responses may include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The painting depicts an expansive landscape. • There is a high level of realism/naturalism. • The work includes mountains in the distance. • The plants, rocks, and geological formations are highly detailed. • There are people in the foreground. • Houses/buildings are scattered throughout the landscape. • The humans/houses/settlements appear small. • The artist uses earthtones. • It is a bright/sunny day. • The landscape has an aerial/overhead perspective. • The shadows of the clouds darken the mountains/the landscape. • The figures wear brightly colored/traditional Mexican clothing. • The figures are working. 	1 point
B Point 2	<p>Accurately describes ANOTHER visual characteristic of <i>The Valley of Mexico (El Valle de México)</i>.</p> <p>Examples of acceptable responses may include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Another example from those listed in Part A. 	1 point
C Point 3	<p>Accurately uses specific visual evidence to explain how the artist creates a sense of depth.</p> <p>Examples of acceptable responses may include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Velasco makes objects in the distance look smaller to create a sense of depth (relative/diminished scale of objects). • The mountains in the background rising above the figures in the front of the canvas create a clear foreground/background. • The small houses/buildings/settlements in the distance draw the viewer's eye into the background of the painting, creating a sense of distance. • Velasco creates a detailed foreground and a hazy background, creating the illusion that they are separated by a great distance (aerial/atmospheric perspective). 	1 point

D Point 4	Accurately uses specific visual evidence to explain how the artist helps the viewer identify the landscape as a specific place in Mexico. Examples of acceptable responses may include the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The artist included recognizable landmarks (the volcano, the site of the appearance of the Virgin of Guadalupe, Lake Texcoco, etc.) to indicate that the setting is the Valley of Mexico.• The artist depicts vegetation (the cactus, the agave, etc.) that is native to the Valley of Mexico/Mexican desert regions, which indicates the scene’s location.• The artist creates a dry/desert landscape that is recognizable as the area around Mexico City/other regions in Mexico.• The (even) lighting that the artist uses suggests it is a hot/sunny day that is characteristic of the Valley of Mexico/areas of Mexico near the equator.	1 point
E Point 5	Accurately uses specific visual or contextual evidence to explain how <i>The Valley of Mexico (El Valle de México)</i> demonstrates continuity with nineteenth-century Romantic landscape paintings. Examples of acceptable responses may include the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• By showing the power/grandeur of nature, the painting demonstrates continuity with other Romantic landscape paintings that emphasize the size/power of nature in relation to humans/built structures.• The focus on a sweeping view with dramatic mountain range is similar to the focus on nature in Romantic landscape painting.• The scene includes evidence of human existence (the depiction of buildings, smoke, settlements, roads, etc.) like other Romantic landscape paintings to explore the impact of human beings on the natural world.• The work has a high level of naturalism (the emphasis on the atmospheric qualities of light, the minute details of specific plants and rocks, the shadows of clouds, etc.), which can also be seen in other Romantic landscape paintings.• The artist attempted to associate the physical qualities of the landscape with a specific national or cultural identity, which is a common characteristic of Romantic landscape paintings.	1 point

The Valley of Mexico (El Valle De Mexico) follows Romantic painting conventions as the artist seek to endow the viewer with reverence and awe for a Mexican landscape. This piece uses a rich, though limited color palette, with deep greens and yellows emphasizeing natural Mexican foliage and providing contrast to a soft blue sky. There is a focus on the landscape, as is typical of Romantic work, but some small figures are included, as well as small outlines of houses and chimney smoke, demonstrating that this land is inhabited. The artist creates depth by increasing detail and color in the foreground, and providing less detail and introducing less detail and more blue into the color palette as the viewer's gaze is drawn backwards.

In order to represent the Valley of Mexico to the viewer, the artist focuses on distinct natural features as well as some subtle cultural references. The sprawling valley itself, the large body of water that can be made out in the middle left of the canvas, and the towering mountain range are all physical aspects that any viewer familiar with the valley would be able to recognize. The three women in the foreground, possessing darker skin and wearing traditional clothing, also work to inform the viewer that this scene is Mexican.

Finally, the artist's alignment with the Romantic genre is made clear in several ways. First, his focus on the vast, overwhelming beauty of nature creates a sense of the sublime. The depiction of this sprawling landscape, along with the realistic yet loose painting style is characteristic of Romantic works. Additionally, the focus on a large beautiful sky another indication that this piece falls firmly in the Romantic genre.

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Despite the fact that *The Valley of Mexico* uses a small range of colors, it holds much detail and depth. In the Foreground we see lush bushes and trees with a few women gathering something. As you look furthur back we see some smoke near a clearing, which possibly shows where the women are from.

As you look furthur back the details get smaller and smaller, but are still distinct enough to see detail. This demonstrates just how large scale the scenery is. As you reach the backgroung of the painting you are met with a pale blue sky and a large scale mountain range that lightens the furthur back the painting goes.

To create depth in the painting the artist dullens the vibrance of the painting. The foreground uses vivid and detailed colors and shapes. But as you look furthurs back the colos soften and become lighter an closer in shade to the sky and mountains.

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In this artwork The Valley of Mexico the painting looks like oil on canvas. In this artwork i can see a campfire and i can see mountains in the further distance and 3 women in the middle of the painting looks like there getting food and passing it and putting them in baskets. This art work is kinda gives me like old western vibes of how the trees look and the dust and the grass like it just looks western.

Question 3

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

Overview

NEW for 2025: The question overviews can be found in the *Chief Reader Report on Student Responses* on [AP Central](#).

Sample: 3A

Task A (Point 1): 1

Task B (Point 2): 1

Task C (Point 3): 1

Task D (Point 4): 1

Task E (Point 5): 1

Score: 5

Task A: Accurately describes ONE visual characteristic of *The Valley of Mexico (El Valle de México)*. (1 point)

The response earned the point by accurately describing the “limited color palette, with deep greens and yellows.”

Task B: Accurately describes ANOTHER visual characteristic of *The Valley of Mexico (El Valle de México)*. (1 point)

The response earned the point for accurately describing “a soft blue sky.” The response could have also earned the point for accurately describing “some small figures are included” or “small outlines of houses and chimney smoke.”

Task C: Accurately uses specific visual evidence to explain how the artist creates a sense of depth. (1 point)

The response earned the point by accurately explaining how the “artist creates depth by increasing detail and color in the foreground, and providing less detail and introducing less detail and more blue into the color palette as the viewer’s gaze is drawn backwards.”

Task D: Accurately uses specific visual evidence to explain how the artist helps the viewer identify the landscape as a specific place in Mexico. (1 point)

The response earned the point by accurately explaining how the “sprawling valley itself, the large body of water that can be made out in the middle left of the canvas, and the towering mountain range are all physical aspects that any viewer familiar with the valley would be able to recognize.” The response could have earned the point by using valley, the body of water, or the mountain range as examples of specific visual evidence.

Question 3 (continued)

Task E: Accurately uses specific visual or contextual evidence to explain how *The Valley of Mexico (El Valle de México)* demonstrates continuity with nineteenth-century Romantic landscape paintings. (1 point)

The response earned the point by accurately explaining how “*The Valley of Mexico (El Valle De Mexico)* follows Romantic painting conventions as the artist seek to endow the viewer with reverence and awe for a Mexican landscape.” The response could have also earned the point for accurately explaining how “his focus on the vast, overwhelming beauty of nature creates a sense of the sublime” demonstrates “the artist’s alignment with the Romantic genre.”

Sample: 3B

Task A (Point 1): 1

Task B (Point 2): 1

Task C (Point 3): 1

Task D (Point 4): 0

Task E (Point 5): 0

Score: 3

Task A: Accurately describes ONE visual characteristic of *The Valley of Mexico (El Valle de México)*. (1 point)

The response earned the point by accurately describing “lush bushes and trees.”

Task B: Accurately describes ANOTHER visual characteristic of *The Valley of Mexico (El Valle de México)*. (1 point)

The response earned the point by accurately describing “a few women gathering something.” It could have also earned the point for accurately describing “some smoke near a clearing.”

Task C: Accurately uses specific visual evidence to explain how the artist creates a sense of depth. (1 point)

The response earned the point by accurately explaining that “as you look furthur back the details get smaller.” The response could have also earned the point for accurately explaining “to create depth ... The foreground uses vivid and detailed colors and shapes. But as you look furthurs back the colos soften and become lighter an closer in shade to the sky and mountains.”

Task D: Accurately uses specific visual evidence to explain how the artist helps the viewer identify the landscape as a specific place in Mexico. (0 points)

The response did not earn the point because it does not attempt the task.

Task E: Accurately uses specific visual or contextual evidence to explain how *The Valley of Mexico (El Valle de México)* demonstrates continuity with nineteenth-century Romantic landscape paintings. (0 points)

The response did not earn the point because it does not attempt the task.

Question 3 (continued)**Sample: 3C****Task A (Point 1): 1****Task B (Point 2): 1****Task C (Point 3): 0****Task D (Point 4): 0****Task E (Point 5): 0****Score: 2****Task A: Accurately describes ONE visual characteristic of *The Valley of Mexico (El Valle de México)*. (1 point)**

The response earned the point for accurately describing how “the painting looks like oil on canvas.”

Task B: Accurately describes ANOTHER visual characteristic of *The Valley of Mexico (El Valle de México)*. (1 point)

The response earned the point by accurately describing the “mountains in the further distance.” The response could also have earned the point for accurately describing the “3 women in the middle of the painting looks like there getting food.” While the response also identifies “a campfire,” this does not provide a description of a visual characteristic and would not earn the point.

Task C: Accurately uses specific visual evidence to explain how the artist creates a sense of depth. (0 points)

The response did not earn the point because it does not attempt the task.

Task D: Accurately uses specific visual evidence to explain how the artist helps the viewer identify the landscape as a specific place in Mexico. (0 points)

The response did not earn the point because it does not attempt the task.

Task E: Accurately uses specific visual or contextual evidence to explain how *The Valley of Mexico (El Valle de México)* demonstrates continuity with nineteenth-century Romantic landscape paintings. (0 points)

The response did not earn the point because it does not attempt the task.