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# AP<sup>®</sup> Art History

## Sample Student Responses and Scoring Commentary

### **Inside:**

#### **Free-Response Question 4**

- ☒ **Scoring Guidelines**
- ☒ **Student Samples**
- ☒ **Scoring Commentary**

**Question 4: Contextual Analysis****5 points**

<b>A</b>	Accurately describes ONE visual characteristic of the Forbidden City.	<b>1 point</b>
Point 1	<p><b>Examples of acceptable responses may include the following:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Forbidden City is a large, rectangular architectural complex.</li> <li>• The complex includes wooden buildings.</li> <li>• The Forbidden City is surrounded by a tall outer wall.</li> <li>• There are towers on each corner of the wall circuit.</li> <li>• The site is surrounded by a moat.</li> <li>• The main entrance to the complex is the central (Meridian) gate.</li> <li>• The Forbidden City is divided into an inner court and an outer court.</li> <li>• The plan is symmetrical.</li> <li>• A plan aligns with a central north-south axis.</li> <li>• There are interior gates/courtyards leading to the Hall of Supreme Harmony.</li> <li>• The largest building is the Hall of Supreme Harmony.</li> <li>• The Hall of Supreme Harmony has a large courtyard.</li> <li>• The courtyard is paved with white marble.</li> <li>• The principal colors of the Forbidden City are red and yellow.</li> <li>• Many structures have red walls/yellow glazed roof tiles.</li> <li>• The exteriors of the buildings are decorated with sculpture.</li> <li>• There are rows of sculptures on roof ridges.</li> </ul>	
<b>B</b>	Accurately describes the historical function of the Forbidden City.	<b>1 point</b>
Point 2	<p><b>Examples of acceptable responses may include the following:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Forbidden City was the home to Chinese emperors (and their households).</li> <li>• The Forbidden City was the ceremonial/political center of China during the Ming/Qing dynasties.</li> <li>• The emperor held court/received visitors at the complex.</li> <li>• State ceremonies occurred at the site.</li> <li>• The Forbidden City was the center of the walled city of Beijing and was enclosed within a larger walled area called the Imperial City.</li> <li>• The Forbidden City reinforced the power/stability of imperial rule (in China).</li> </ul>	

<b>C</b> Point 3	<p>Accurately uses ONE example of contextual evidence to explain how the historical function of the site influenced the design of the Forbidden City.</p> <p><b>Examples of acceptable responses may include the following:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• As the home to the Chinese emperor and his household, the Forbidden City’s design included multiple buildings for both state/public and domestic functions.</li><li>• Because state ceremonies occurred at the site, the Forbidden City’s plan included an inner and outer court to separate the spaces for official/court events from the domestic/living spaces.</li><li>• Because the Forbidden City was a royal palace, the lavish décor/layout of the structures reinforced the social hierarchy/family roles of the ruling elite.</li><li>• Because the Chinese emperor lived at the site, the Forbidden City included structures on either side of the inner court to accommodate the emperor’s consorts and keep them near the ruler.</li><li>• The Forbidden City’s design included a moat/surrounding walls to separate the court members who lived there from the surrounding city to ensure the status/safety/privacy of the ruling family.</li><li>• The Forbidden City’s gates restricted access to/from the site to ensure the court’s status/safety/privacy.</li><li>• To reinforce the stability of the emperor’s reign, the Forbidden City was designed with a symmetrical layout that reflected cultural beliefs (Confucian principles) about balance/harmony.</li></ul>	<b>1 point</b>
<b>D</b> Point 4	<p>Accurately uses ANOTHER example of contextual evidence to explain how the historical function of the site influenced the design of the Forbidden City.</p> <p><b>Examples of acceptable responses may include the following:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Another example from those listed in Part C.</li></ul>	<b>1 point</b>
<b>E</b> Point 5	<p>Accurately uses specific visual evidence to explain why scholars have interpreted the Forbidden City as an expression of social and/or political hierarchy in Chinese society.</p> <p><b>Examples of acceptable responses may include the following:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• This interpretation is based on the Forbidden City’s massive scale, which was used to inspire awe in the people in the surrounding city/intimidate foreign visitors.</li><li>• Scholars interpret the site as expressing power because the Forbidden City’s axial plan/symmetrical layout symbolized the emperor’s power to impose order in social/political settings.</li><li>• The Forbidden City has been interpreted in this way because the site incorporated symbolic (animal) imagery.</li><li>• The Forbidden City’s use of symbolic colors (yellow was an imperial color, red symbolized power and wealth, etc.) functions as evidence of the site’s expression of power.</li><li>• Buildings that were larger/had more elaborate decoration were used (or commissioned) by people with higher status.</li></ul>	<b>1 point</b>

Two visual characteristics of the Forbidden City are the presence of Tiled Roofing which appears gold, and the use of red coloring on the structure itself. Red, which is often associated with good fortune, and wealth in Chinese culture, contextually adds up regarding the historical function of the Forbidden City.

The historical function of the forbidden city was to serve as a palace and center of governance for Ming, and later Qing dynasty Chinese rulers. The complex was consistently expanded upon, and only royalty/nobility or government officials were allowed entrance into the complex. In the modern day, it serves as a museum for China's imperial legacy.

One example of contextual evidence which explains how the historical function of the site influenced its design is the function of the complex itself. Because it served as a palace and center for governance, it was intricately and elaborately decorated, not just through gold tiled roofing but intricate painting work and landscaping, evidenced by the green, blue, and red facade of the main entrance as well as the numerous courtyards and gardens found on the inside.

Another example of contextual evidence which explains how its function influenced the design process was China's embracing of Confucianism and Feng Shui principles in design. The complex's design takes into account principles of Feng Shui and Confucianism, such as balance and harmony with nature. These principles influenced certain aspects of the Forbidden City's design, such as the symmetry of the complex and the numerous gardens.

Scholars have interpreted the Forbidden City as an expression of social and political hierarchy in Chinese society due to the presence of the complex's outer wall and moat. The vast majority of individuals in China were denied access to the complex, instead only nobility and officials were allowed to enter. This reflects the rigidity of Chinese society at the time, in which one's familial status usually predetermined their entire life trajectory. The moat and wall exemplify this, serving not only as a physical barrier with the rest of China, but a metaphorical one too.

## 2025 Sample 4B Page 1 of 1

The Forbidden City has a courtyard--almost-- layout with buildings and city plans within the courtyard. As well as sections within the courtyard predetermining functions/uses of said buildings in a cluster.

The Forbidden City's function was to keep people out and the people who are inside protected, and also protecting the ruler.

The site had seen a lot of war, so the city was built to encapsulate its people protecting them from harm or any unfamiliar faces, you can see this clear with the ginormous wall and small three doors that are the only way of entry. The groups of buildings as well serves to provide a confusing layout of the city that may confuse newcomers, as well as keep people safe and contained rather than scattered and unprepared if there were an attack.

Scholars may have interpreted the Forbidden City as an expression of social and/or political hierarchy due to its organization around the rulers palace, the rich seem to be secluded with the ruler while poorer people push forward towards the entrance of the city, putting them in harms way in case of a raid every breaking out. That way the ruler may escape at any time easily before the attackers may get to him.

One visual characteristic of the Forbidden city is that they all look like good ,big, high quality buildings which was probobly for the higher ranks like nobles, and emperors in chinese society. A historical function of this city is the housing of the emperor and this is also where they probobly did important meetings.

## Question 4

**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: 4A

**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 Forbidden City. (1 point)**

The response earned the point for accurately describing the “Tiled Roofing which appears gold.” The response could have also earned the point for accurately describing “the use of red coloring on the structure itself.”

### **Task B: Accurately describes the historical function of the Forbidden City. (1 point)**

The response earned the point for accurately describing the Forbidden City “as a palace and center of governance for Ming, and later Qing dynasty Chinese rulers.” The response could have also earned the point for accurately describing how “the complex was consistently expanded upon, and only royalty/nobility or government officials were allowed entrance into the complex.” While the response accurately states that “in the modern day, it serves as a museum for China’s imperial legacy,” this statement would not have earned the point because it does not describe the site’s historical function as specified in the prompt.

### **Task C: Accurately uses ONE example of specific contextual evidence to explain how the historical function of the site influenced the design of the Forbidden City. (1 point)**

The response earned the point by accurately explaining that “[b]ecause it served as a palace and center for governance, it was intricately and elaborately decorated.”

### **Task D: Accurately uses ANOTHER example of specific contextual evidence to explain how the historical function of the site influenced the design of the Forbidden City. (1 point)**

The response earned the point by accurately explaining how the “design takes into account principles of feng shui and confucianism, such as balance and harmony with nature.” The response provides additional specificity by explaining that “[t]hese principles influenced ... the symmetry of the complex and the numerous gardens.” Either of these explanations could have earned the point as long as the response makes a connection between the design elements and feng shui and/or Confucianism.

### Question 4 (continued)

**Task E: Accurately uses specific visual evidence to explain why scholars have interpreted the Forbidden City as an expression of social and/or political hierarchy in Chinese society. (1 point)**

The response earned the point by accurately explaining how “the presence of the Complexes outer wall and moat” served “not only as a physical barrier with the rest of China, but a metaphorical one too.” The response develops this idea by explaining how the “vast majority of individuals in China were denied access to the complex, instead only nobility and officials were allowed to enter. This reflects the rigidity of Chinese society at the time, in which one’s familial status usually predetermined their entire life trajectory,” but this additional specificity is not necessary to earn the point.

**Sample: 4B**

**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 Forbidden City. (1 point)**

The response earned the point by accurately describing the Forbidden City having “a courtyard ... layout with buildings and city plans within the courtyard. As well as sections within the courtyard predetermining functions/uses of said buildings in a cluster.”

**Task B: Accurately describes the historical function of the Forbidden City. (1 point)**

The response earned the point by accurately describing how the “Forbidden City’s function was to keep people out and the people who are inside protected.” The response could also have earned the point for describing that the site’s function was for “protecting the ruler.”

**Task C: Accurately uses ONE example of specific contextual evidence to explain how the historical function of the site influenced the design of the Forbidden City. (1 point)**

The response earned the point by accurately explaining how “the city was built to encapsulate its people protecting them from harm or any unfamiliar faces, you can see this clear with the ginormous wall and small three doors that are the only way of entry.” The inclusion of either “ginormous wall” or “small three doors” could have earned the point.

**Task D: Accurately uses ANOTHER example of specific contextual evidence to explain how the historical function of the site influenced the design of the Forbidden City. (0 points)**

The response did not earn the point. The response attempts the task by stating how the “groups of buildings as well serves to provide a confusing layout of the city that may confuse newcomers, as well as keep people safe and contained.” However, this information is incorrect because the buildings were organized in a symmetrical manner that reflected Chinese spiritual, social, and political beliefs of the time.

**Question 4 (continued)**

**Task E: Accurately uses specific visual evidence to explain why scholars have interpreted the Forbidden City as an expression of social and/or political hierarchy in Chinese society. (0 points)**

The response did not earn the point. The response attempts the task by stating “[s]cholars may have interpreted the Forbidden City as an expression of social and/or political hierarchy due to its organization around the rulers palace ... while poorer people push forward towards the entrance of the city, putting them in harms way in case of a raid every breaking out. That way the ruler may escape.” Although the response uses accurate visual evidence, it does not accurately explain why this is an expression of social and/or political hierarchy in Chinese society.

**Sample: 4C**

**Task A (Point 1): 0**

**Task B (Point 2): 1**

**Task C (Point 3): 0**

**Task D (Point 4): 0**

**Task E (Point 5): 0**

**Score: 1**

**Task A: Accurately describes ONE visual characteristic of the Forbidden City. (0 points)**

The response did not earn the point. The response attempts the task by stating, “One visual characteristic of the Forbidden city is that they all look like good ,big, high quality buildings which was probably for the higher ranks like nobles, and emperors in chinese society,” but this description is too general and not specific to the Forbidden City.

**Task B: Accurately describes the historical function of the Forbidden City. (1 point)**

The response earned the point by accurately describing “a historical function of this city is the housing of the emperor.”

**Task C: Accurately uses ONE example of specific contextual evidence to explain how the historical function of the site influenced the design of the Forbidden City. (0 points)**

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

**Task D: Accurately uses ANOTHER example of specific contextual evidence to explain how the historical function of the site influenced the design of the Forbidden City. (0 points)**

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

**Task E: Accurately uses specific visual evidence to explain why scholars have interpreted the Forbidden City as an expression of social and/or political hierarchy in Chinese society. (0 points)**

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