
AP[®] English Language and Composition

Sample Student Responses and Scoring Commentary Set 2

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Free-Response Question 2

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Rhetorical Analysis**6 points**

Raquel Vasquez Gilliland is a Mexican American poet, novelist, and painter whose works focus on myths, folklore, motherhood, and plants. In 2023 she published an opinion article in *The New York Times* titled “Go Outside, Sink Your Feet Into the Dirt and Engage With the World.” The following is an excerpt from that opinion article. Read the passage carefully. Write an essay that analyzes the rhetorical choices Vasquez Gilliland makes to develop her argument about the value of engaging with nature.

In your response you should do the following:

- Respond to the prompt with a thesis that analyzes the writer’s rhetorical choices.
- Select and use evidence to support your line of reasoning.
- Explain how the evidence supports your line of reasoning.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the rhetorical situation.
- 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 defensible thesis that analyzes the writer’s rhetorical choices.
	Decision Rules and Scoring Notes	
	Responses that do not earn this point: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only restate the prompt. Fail to address the rhetorical choices the writer of the passage makes. Describe or repeat the passage rather than making a claim that requires a defense. 	Responses that earn this point: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Respond to the prompt rather than restating or rephrasing the prompt <u>and</u> clearly articulate a defensible thesis about the rhetorical choices Vasquez Gilliland makes to develop her argument about the value of engaging with nature.
	Examples that do not earn this point: Restate the prompt <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>“In her op-ed ‘Go Outside, Sink Your Feet Into the Dirt and Engage With the World,’ Vasquez Gilliland shows that there is value in connecting to the land.”</i> Make a claim but do not address the writer’s rhetorical choices <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>“In the passage, Vasquez Gilliland says she gets inspiration from nature to help her with her writing.”</i> Repeat provided information from the passage <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>“Vasquez Gilliland became interested in nature at a young age when she first saw a dove land on her grandmother’s hand after she had called out to it.”</i> 	Examples that earn this point: Present a defensible thesis that analyzes the writer’s rhetorical choices <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>“Raquel Vasquez Gilliland argues for the value of engaging with nature by relying extensively on imagery.”</i> <i>“Vasquez Gilliland uses many moving personal anecdotes to show the benefits of spending time with nature. This is especially true today when we are often isolated and obsessed with social media.”</i> <i>“By relating to the audience and describing her relationship with nature, Vasquez Gilliland suggests that the land has the power to ground people and help them solve sometimes practical, sometimes philosophical problems.”</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 passage 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 rhetorical choice in the passage contributes to the writer’s argument, purpose, or message.	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 rhetorical choices in the passage contribute to the writer’s argument, purpose, or message.
	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 passage rather than specific details or techniques. Mention rhetorical choices 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 passage to build an argument. 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 passage to build an argument. 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 rhetorical choices contributes to the student’s interpretation of the passage.
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 rhetorical choice if each instance further contributes to the argument, purpose, or message of the passage. 					

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 a complex understanding of the rhetorical situation.
	Decision Rules and Scoring Notes	
	Responses that do not earn this point: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attempt to contextualize the text, but such attempts consist predominantly of sweeping generalizations (<i>“In a world where ...”</i> OR <i>“Since the beginning of time ...”</i>). Only hint at or suggest other arguments (<i>“While some may argue that ...”</i> OR <i>“Some people say ...”</i>). Examine individual rhetorical choices but do not examine the relationships among different choices throughout the text. Oversimplify complexities in the text. Use complicated or complex sentences or language that is ineffective because it does not enhance their analysis. 	Responses that earn this point may demonstrate sophistication of thought and/or a complex understanding of the rhetorical situation by doing any of the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Explaining the significance or relevance of the writer’s rhetorical choices (given the rhetorical situation). Explaining a purpose or function of the passage’s complexities or tensions. Employing a style that is consistently vivid and persuasive.
	Additional Note: <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. 	

Only recently humanity has become removed from the land. We have turned inwards, and for some people the only time they spend outside in a day is the walk from their car into school or their office building. But Raquel Vasquez Gilliland, a Mexican American writer, champions for a return to the outdoors and all the benefits nature provides for humans. By appealing to family and offering up almost outrageous suggestions to her audience, Gilliland emphasises the importance of reconnecting with nature.

Gilliland urges her audience to feel of nostalgia and love, as she appeals to family. The excerpt starts with a reference to Gilliland's "grandmother and mother", whose lessons taught her about the stories that nature has to tell. This reference helps Gilliland to connect to her audience, since most people can conjure up their own memories regarding the stories they were told by loved ones. The appeal to family helps, Gilliland to relate to her audience and to preserve warm feelings as she continues through her piece. Gilliland also explains that with the changing seasons she often finds herself "reminis[ing]" about "listening to the stories of my elders" as a child. This elaborates on the earlier references to her family, extending it to other generations and times. Which also helps to further her values surrounding nature, as people connect with past generations they should also find themselves recalling time spent in nature. Since people spent more time with nature in the past, as technology was not as advanced as it is today. Gilliland also references several anecdotes about her childhood, which in turn connects people to her past and relates her stories with their own. The advice Gilliland suggests, is unexpected and perhaps can be strange in some people's eyes, but because of it the suggestions make Gilliland's argument more convincing. She suggests that people should "befriend" a tree. This, almost childlike suggestion, makes people truly experience nature. Because it is one thing to simply note that there is a tree, but it is another thing entirely to become friends with one. As it requires an understanding and knowledge of that specific tree. What makes it different from other trees? What colors are the leaves? Which paths do the roots take? She also explains that when she is in a creative funk she "walk[s] barefoot on the earth" so that the "stories [can] feed the roots" so that she might become creatively entranced again. Gilliland also explains that she "sit[s]" and "speak[s]" with the "dahlias" so that she can write more lyrically. All of her strange advice adds to the interest of the suggestions. Giving people room to be creative like her, and question if it works for her could it work for them.

Gilliland does this in order to highlight the benefits of connecting with nature again. Not only does spending time in nature help her to become a more creative writer but to pay attention to "what the land has to say" so that she might reconnect with humankind's roots. Gilliland also recognises that spending time outdoors can help people "struggling with loneliness and isolation" to "feel more connected". Which is especially important in the context of a post Covid -19 world, in which this article was written. Connecting with nature, and our own roots, helps people to improve their mental health. As well as recognising the importance of protecting the natural world.

In Raquel Vasquez Gilliland's article to readers of the New York Times, she claims that great value can come from nature through her usage of the extended personification of nature and her vivid, detail-filled, exemplification, ultimately moving her readers to go outside and try out for themselves whether the earth wants to speak to them.

Throughout her entire article, whenever Gilliland refers to nature, it sounds almost like a person. In paragraph 4, she asks the reader to sink their feet in the dirt and consider how soil nourishes plants and animals, and even us. The way she describes it makes the soil sound almost motherly, wrapping our feet in a warm embrace. This powerful use of personification turns nature from an object we coexist with into family or a friend who we have a close relation with. This appeals to the reader, it makes them feel happy as if they really have just made a new friend they didn't know about. The reader begins to associate these warm feelings with nature, they want to feel more and so after reading this, they'll go outside and try to do what Gilliland described. In paragraph 6, Gilliland continues, saying 'My land wanted nothing but flowers'. The land having its own wants and needs now changes it from an cold, distant entity into a flower-loving character with its own personality. Reading this causes an itching to go outside and answer the question 'What does my land want?' After reading these powerful uses of personification people will feel a strong desire to go outside and get to know their land. They'll want to understand what it wants and feel its motherly embrace around their feet. They'll want to listen to its stories and sit with it under the sun that has risen and set upon thousands of generations of people.

Secondly, Gilliland uses exemplification throughout the article when describing nature in order to build the readers' confidence in what she's saying. She uses stories that she has experienced firsthand, causing the readers to feel as if she is sharing advice rather than just telling them that nature is good for them. Gilliland uses several examples in connection to problems with her writing. In paragraph 7, she mentions walking barefoot on the earth when creatively blocked, sitting with dahlias to make her writing more lyrical, and more. All of these problems with simple solutions from nature repeatedly enforce Gilliland's claim that engaging with nature is beneficial. The way Gilliland uses examples of writing problems, which don't seem related to nature, gives her claim broader implications. If she can use nature to solve writing-related problems, then other people could use it to solve problems related to business, art, and social connections, to name a few. Gilliland also uses exemplification earlier in the article to describe what she planted in her garden. In paragraph 6, she lists the plants that grew and the plants that didn't, as well as what she is trying to plant now. It seems unimportant. Many people probably don't even know what all the plants look like. But by listing all these plants and the insects it attracts, it sets a scene. People may not know what each plant looks like, but in their minds they can picture Gilliland's vivid, vibrant garden, full of life. This helps further Gilliland's claim about the value of nature by helping the audience see what she sees. While many regular people might look at her garden and think it looks pretty, when they read Gilliland's view, her garden sounds not just pretty, but real and full of living creatures, though not really creatures, just plants with the level of intelligence and vivacity we associate with creatures. Readers want to have that for themselves, they want to go out in their backyard and try their hand planting their own native plants.

Sample 2B (2 of 2)

Gilliland masterfully uses both extended metaphor and exemplification in order to convey the life and value of being in nature and to convince her audience that being in nature is an opportunity they need to take advantage of.

Gilliland uses the rhetorical choices of metaphor and tone in her article to highlight the value of engaging with nature.

Metaphors can leave a very deep meaning in an authors work. Often seen as a way to crack a joke such as you are a cow, metaphors can have a much deeper and profound meaning. Gilliland says in the article, "I walk barefoot on the earth, no matter the season, allowing storis to feed the roots of my entire body". Gilliland makes a brilliant comparison between the outdoors and how it benefits her writing by being in it. By emphasizing being barefoot and then talking about getting the roots of her body fed, it paints a picture of her being connected by roots to the very ground that she walks on. It is through these very roots that she is fed the information she needs to finsish her story and get over her writing blocks. The value of this is not to be underappreciated as writing blocks can cripple a writer, so being able to go in nature to get over them is a very valuble asset to have.

The tone in an authors work can change how every sentence comes across and is percieved. In Gillilands work she uses a very soft almost like a whisper tone that is as soft as a pillow. This can be seen when she says, "I visit my lemon and lime basil, staining my fingers with their citrus scents". She paints an image through her peaceful and soft tone that brings the reader into the situtation almost as if they had experienced themself. By doing this she has allowed the reader to feel the soft and gentle touch of nature. This in turn makes the reader understant the value that can come from being in the outdoors and the many benefits that it can have. Without this soft tone it would be much harder to picture yourself in her situation, which would also have made it much harder to appreaciate all that nature can do for us.

In conclusion Gilliland cleverly uses metaphor and tone in her articel to show her argument of why engaging in nature is so important.

Question 2

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: 2A

Score: 1-4-0

Thesis (0–1 points): 1

The response offers a defensible position in paragraph 1: “But Raquel Vasquez Gilliland, a Mexican American writer, champions for a return to the outdoors and all the benefits nature provides for humans. By appealing to family and offering up almost outrageous suggestions to her audience, Gilliland emphasises the importance of reconnecting with nature.”

Evidence and Commentary (0–4 points): 4

The response provides specific evidence to support all claims in its line of reasoning. For example, it points out, “The excerpt starts with a reference to Gilliland’s ‘grandmother and mother’, whose lessons taught her about the stories that nature has to tell” as evidence of the claim that “Gilliland urges her audience to feel nostalgia and love, as she appeals to family.” The response focuses on the importance of specific words and details to build an argument, such as, “She also explains that when she is in a creative funk she ‘walk[s] barefoot on the earth’ so that the ‘stories [can] feed the roots’ so that she might become creatively entranced again.”

The commentary consistently and clearly explains how the evidence supports the line of reasoning, such as in paragraph 2: “This elaborates on the earlier references to her family, extending it to other generations and times. Which also helps to further her values surrounding nature, as people connect with past generations they should also find themselves recalling time spent in nature.” Additionally, the commentary explains how multiple rhetorical choices contribute to the writer’s argument. The response explains that both “family” and seemingly “outrageous suggestions” relate to the argument: “Connecting with nature, and our own roots, helps people to improve their mental health. As well as recognising the importance of protecting the natural world.”

Sophistication (0–1 points): 0

The response does not demonstrate sophistication of thought or a complex understanding of the rhetorical situation. It situates the argument in the context of the “post Covid-19 world” but does not demonstrate a complex understanding of the article’s rhetorical situation.

Question 2 (continued)**Sample: 2B****Score: 1-3-0****Thesis (0–1 points): 1**

The response offers a defensible position in paragraph 1: “In Raquel Vasquez Gilliland’s article to readers of the New York Times, she claims that great value can come from nature through her usage of the extended personification of nature and her vivid, detail-filled, exemplification, ultimately moving her readers to go outside and try out for themselves whether the earth wants to speak to them.”

Evidence and Commentary (0–4 points): 3

The response provides specific evidence to support all claims in its line of reasoning about how “engaging with nature is beneficial.” For example, it states “Gilliland continues, saying ‘My land wanted nothing but flowers’. The land having its own wants and needs now changes it from an cold, distant entity into a flower-loving character with its own personality.” The response focuses on the importance of specific words and details to build an argument, such as “she lists the plants that grew and the plants that didn’t.”

The commentary explains how some of the evidence supports a line of reasoning, such as in paragraph 3 when it states “If she can use nature to solve writing-related problems, then other people could use it to solve problems related to business, art, and social connections, to name a few.” Additionally, the commentary explains how at least one rhetorical choice contributes to the writer’s argument. One instance is when the response explains that the writer uses personification in order to motivate the reader.

However, some commentary does not effectively integrate evidence into the argument. In paragraph 3, the response supports the claim, but the commentary about the “lists” provided for the evidence does not clearly connect to the claim. This is seen when it states, “While many regular people might look at her garden and think it looks pretty, when they read Gilliland’s view, her garden sounds not just pretty, but real and full of living creatures, though not really creatures, just plants with the level of intelligence and vivacity we associate with creatures.”

Sophistication (0–1 point): 0

The response does not demonstrate sophistication of thought or a complex understanding of the rhetorical situation. The response recognizes a difference in the writer and readers’ situations, but it does not delve into the article’s complexities or tensions.

Question 2 (continued)**Sample: 2C****Score: 1-2-0****Thesis (0–1 points): 1**

The response offers a defensible position as paragraph 1: “Gilliland uses the rhetorical choices of metaphor and tone in her article to highlight the value of engaging with nature.”

Evidence and Commentary (0–4 points): 2

The response provides relevant evidence. Some evidence is specific: “I walk barefoot on the earth, no matter the season, allowing storis to feed the roots of my entire body,” and “I visit my lemon and lime basil, staining my fingers with their citrus scents.” However, it also includes broad generalities, such as “Gilliland makes a brilliant comparison between the outdoors and how it benefits her writing by being in it.”

The response provides commentary that explains how some of the evidence relates to the argument, such as, “It is through these very roots that she is fed the information she needs to finsish her story and get over her writing blocks.” However, it does not explain the connection to the claim, so a line of reasoning is not clearly established.

Instead, the response contains some simplistic explanations that do not strengthen the argument such as “By doing this she has allowed the reader to feel the soft and gentle touch of nature.”

Sophistication (0–1 points): 0

The response does not demonstrate sophistication of thought or a complex understanding of the rhetorical situation. It mentions her role as “a writer,” but it does not explore this role as part of the rhetorical situation.