
AP[®] English Literature and Composition

Sample Student Responses and Scoring Commentary Set 2

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Free-Response Question 1

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Question 1: Poetry Analysis

6 points

In Victor Hernández Cruz’s poem “Two Guitars,” published in 2001, the speaker imagines that two guitars are alive and engaging in conversation about their musical experiences. Read the poem carefully. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how Hernández Cruz uses literary elements and techniques to convey a complex portrayal of the guitars’ musical world.

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 complex portrayal of the guitars' musical world.
	Examples that do not earn this point: Restate the prompt <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>"The poet conveys the guitars' complex musical world through the use of several literary techniques."</i> Do not relate to the prompt <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>"Music is a vital element of many cultures around the world."</i> Describe the poem or features of the poem <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>"Victor Hernández Cruz's poem consists of 36 lines and depicts two guitars speaking to one another. He uses figurative language to convey the experiences of the guitars."</i> 	Examples that earn this point: Provide a defensible interpretation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>"The poet uses personification and vivid imagery to convey the powerful emotions that bring the guitars' emotional, energetic musical world into being."</i> <i>"The poem depicts the experiences of playing an instrument and hearing music in a way that portrays the guitars inhabiting spaces that connect ordinary life to timeless truths."</i> <i>"In the 2001 poem 'Two Guitars,' Victor Hernández Cruz employs metaphor and simile to portray the guitars' musical world. This musical world reflects life in New York City's vibrant Latino community."</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 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. 	

Hernandez Cruz uses juxtaposition and personification in his poem Two Guitars to portray the guitars' complex musical world with their differing struggles which is ultimately used to show that although passion opens the bottle to the ugliness of one's pain, passion is the true beauty and spirit of music.

Cruz's first creates juxtaposition with the two main sections in the middle which focus on each of the two guitars separately creating a strong and clear contrast. This contrast creates a comparison in the reader's mind between the seeming pain between the first guitar and the lack of true purpose in the second. The separate parts with no interjection from the other guitar allows Cruz to tell the story of each guitar fully so when the second guitar is introduced the reader's perceptions of the first guitar are being projected onto the description of the second, which allows the reader to realize contrasts for both guitars for themselves in ways that would not be realized without the order, separation, and shifts. The most obvious contrast comes through the spiritual uses of the guitars. The first guitar is described to, "bring down the angels who live off the chorus," while the second guitar has a parallel experience in a religious practice being played "after a baptism pregnant with women The men flirted and were offered Chicken soup." The reverence and emotion/passion in the first guitar's religious experience seems very intense only for the second guitar to have a very casual and unpassionate experience. There is a large contrast in bringing down the angels and being casually played at a baptism. The insignificance of the second guitar is even highlighted in the details such as men and women flirting afterwards (undermining the significance of this religious event) and the chicken noodle soup. The reader may not have realized the irreverence towards the musical effect in this ceremony if not for the first guitar having such a profound effect to bring down angels. This shows that although the situation with the baptism seems easier due to it being more casual, the situation of the second guitar has a much greater impact and truly portrays the purpose of music. There are also more subtle contrasts such as how the first guitar feels "so big in the harmony" as both a display of the mountain of the stew of pain, beauty and passion while the smaller guitar has its singular events highlighted which makes its impact seem smaller and more simple such as listing out small community events it participated in such as the "apartment on 102nd street."

Cruz also uses personification to more emphasize not only the significance and beauty of the passion filled guitar but also the pain that comes with it. The attitudes of the guitar (having human emotions) are highly shown in the words that they use. The use of words like "mountains," "pores," and "danger" portray a sense of the ideas being very large, scary, and important to the reader. It makes the first guitar almost seem like a tortured soul at first glance as the reader understands how much the guitar has been through with its artist. On further investigation, though, the guitar shows the human principle that pain leads to passion which leads to purpose. This guitar player experiences a pain that they rely on the guitar to help them portray to the world in a creative show of artistry which projects onto the guitar to show the beauty created from passion even though the emotions of the guitar at times seem to produce an ugly sense of pain. This is, frankly, nonexistent in the other guitar with its more casual experiences. The phrases used also help to portray the ideal of music which is in the focus of the first guitar like, "I have seen it melt out of his eyes" (talking about tears), and "we are always in danger of blowing up with passion." These phrases show the absolute

intensity of creating music like this. While, yes, passion and pain are strenuous and hard, this is what melds together into beauty as we cultivate a human experience where people don't need to feel bottled up and alone. While the second guitar still participates in nice experiences, it shows the fading of this passion of music as modern day people opt for lives and situations that are easy until we see the inevitable destruction of this music form as seen in the last line.

Cruz's purpose is to show the fading of the passion of music. He shows this as a complex idea by showing the ugly pain that comes behind inspiring great beauty and uses his juxtaposition and personification in order to show the gradual shift over the poem that passion is being lost. His complex portrayal of the guitar's musical world allows readers to ponder the true beauty and spirit of music and the seemingly conflicting path to obtain it in the path from pain to passion to beauty.

In Victor Hernandez Cruz's poetic portrayal of the guitars', Cruz uses first person narration, personification, as well as imagery in order to bring the instruments to life and portray the guitars' world. By allowing the guitar to speak for itself, Cruz is able to create an emotional connection which turns an inanimate object into a vessel of identity and memory.

By using first person narration, Cruz allows the guitar to have its own voice as it tells its story and experiences as if it has lived through time and generations. This allows the instrument to express its thoughts, feelings, and observations. Through lines such as "My strings are tight and full of tears", "I have seen it leave out of his mouth", "I have seen it melt out of his eyes", etc., the reader is encouraged to imagine the guitar not only being played, but also remembering past experiences as if it has a soul and memory within its wood and hardware.

Furthermore, personification also plays a big role in the poem. The guitar is not just an object but also a being that feels touch, has memories, and expresses emotion. Cruz's personified guitar recalls being "held tight like a woman", and has recollections of being in "theaters and cabarets", "after a baptism pregnant with women". These accounts deepen the sense that the guitar is aware of what happens and participates in the cultural and emotional life of its surroundings.

Cruz also uses vivid imagery and sound to recreate the experiences of music and setting. His language mirrors the rhythms of guitar music, which is done purposefully to engage the reader. The description of "their throats gardenia gardens"/"An airport for dreams" or "we are always in danger of blowing up with passion" evoke a sense of emotion in the audience. Throughout the poem as the guitars recall their experiences, Cruz uses imagery in order to make the audience feel captivated and emotional.

By giving the guitar a voice, Victor Hernandez Cruz allows the guitar not only to play music, but also to retell its history and stories. Through literary techniques that bring the guitars' to life, he turns the guitar into a story teller and honors it. The guitar tells a story that speaks across generations. Each string holds a memory and each strum creates a new one.

In "Two Guitars" Hernandez Cruz illustrates the diversity of music through contrast and comparison by using symbolism, detailed description, and imagery. The guitars speak of their experiences where there is a parallel in their sharings. This ultimately hints at the idea that music, no matter the motive or origin, has meaning.

The first guitar speaks of his owner having no heart, he spills it out through his music sharing his heart and gift with the rest of the world. Starting at line 5 it says "The man who plays me has no heart ... it dives into the pores of the earth" which represents how the guitar is able to make an impact on the world through music. The guitar is the owner's tool to share his gift so beautiful that it attracts angels, a symbol of purity, guidance, and often the end of a life.

The second guitar speaks of his experiences of belonging to a musical group, the guitar is grateful to be in the possession of group and sees them as a tool to live out his dreams of being heard. They've played events in theaters, cabarets, and one in particular a baptism. Baptisms are a symbol of new beginnings, purity, and are usually associated with the beginning of life.

The parallel between the guitars and their shared experience exemplifies Cruz's idea of music having a universal impact. One guitar beat with worn strings symbolising the end of its time, bringing angels a sign of passing in order to share its gift, the other being cared for and "held tight like a woman" symbolises purity new beginnings and baptism, often associated with new life. The contrast between these two shared stories reinforces Cruz's idea of music being universally impactful.

Question 1

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: 1A

Score: 1-4-1

Row A: Thesis (0–1 points): 1

The essay responds to the prompt with a defensible interpretation of the complex portrayal of the musical worlds of the guitars. The thesis appears in the introductory paragraph and states, “Hernandez Cruz uses juxtaposition and personification in his poem *Two Guitars* to portray the guitars’ complex musical world with their differing struggles which is ultimately used to show that although passion opens the bottle to the ugliness of one’s pain, passion is the true beauty and spirit of music.” The essay earned 1 point in Row A.

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

The response provides specific evidence to support all claims in its line of reasoning that highlights not only the contrast between the two guitars but also the passion and pain that they share. In paragraph 2, the essay describes the contrast between “the seeming pain” of “the first guitar” and “the lack of true purpose in the second.” This distinction is supported through evidence (“The first guitar is described to, ‘bring down the angels who live off the chorus,’ while the second guitar has a parallel experience in a religious practice being played ‘after a baptism pregnant with women The men flirted and were offered Chicken soup’”) that focuses on the spiritual natures of the guitars. The evidence is connected to the line of reasoning through the commentary that argues, “The reverence and emotion/passion in the first guitar’s religious experience seems very intense only for the second guitar to have a very casual and unpassionate experience.” Additionally, the essay points out the contrast of the effects of the music. “There is a large contrast in bringing down the angels and being casually played at a baptism.” The essay suggests, “There are also more subtle contrasts such as how the first guitar feels ‘so big in the harmony’ as both a display of the mountain of the stew of pain, beauty and passion while the smaller guitar has its singular events highlighted which makes its impact seem smaller and more simple such as listing out small community events it participated in such as the ‘apartment on 102nd street.’” This combination of precise and relevant evidence and insightful commentary that analyzes the evidence to support claims in the line of reasoning strengthens the essay.

Paragraph 3 looks at “not only the significance and beauty of the passion filled guitar but also the pain that comes with it.” This dichotomy is central to the essay’s line of reasoning and is fully explored here. For example, the essay suggests that the words “‘mountains,’ ‘pores,’ and ‘danger’ portray a sense of the ideas being very large, scary, and important to the reader.” This focus on specific words builds an interpretation through the commentary that suggests these words make “the first guitar almost seem like a tortured soul at first glance as the reader understands how much the guitar has been through with its artist.” In contrast, the essay contends that the second guitar “still participates in nice experiences, it shows the fading of this passion of music as modern day people opt for lives and situations that are easy until we see the inevitable destruction of this music form as seen in the last line.”

Question 1 (continued)

The essay also explains how literary elements such as juxtaposition, details, and personification contribute to the meaning of the poem. For example, in paragraph 3, the essay considers the significance of the phrases “‘I have seen it melp out of his eyes’ (talking about tears), and ‘we are always in danger of blowing up with passion.’” These specific words, the essay contends, “show the absolute intensity of creating music like this.” The seamless merging of specific evidence, astute commentary, and clear explanations creates an essay that earned 4 points in Row B.

Row C: Sophistication (0–1 points): 1

The response demonstrates sophistication of thought as it identifies and explores complexities within the poem. For example, the last sentence of paragraph 4, “His complex portrayal of the guitar’s musical world allows readers to ponder the true beauty and spirit of music and the seemingly conflicting path to obtain it in the path from pain to passion to beauty,” explains the complex nature of music. Additionally, the essay employs a style that is consistently vivid and persuasive, as evidenced in paragraph 3 with the sentence: “While, yes, passion and pain are strenuous and hard, this is what melds together into beauty as we cultivate a human experience where people don’t need to feel bottled up and alone.” The essay earned the sophistication point in Row C.

Sample: 1B

Score: 1-3-0

Row A: Thesis (0–1 points): 1

The essay provides a defensible interpretation of the complex portrayal of the guitars’ musical worlds in its thesis that appears in the first paragraph: “In Victor Hernandez Cruz’s poetic portrayal of the guitars’, Cruz uses first person narration, personification, as well as imagery in order to bring the instruments to life and portray the guitars’ world. By allowing the guitar to speak for itself, Cruz is able to create an emotional connection which turns an inanimate object into a vessel of identity and memory.” The essay earned 1 point in Row A.

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

The response provides specific evidence to support its line of reasoning that connects specific literary elements with the guitar’s role as “a story teller” that “speaks across generations” (paragraph 5). Paragraph 2 focuses on the first-person narration of the poem and gives specific examples of this voice. The examples are followed by the commentary that “the reader is encouraged to imagine the guitar not only being played, but also remembering past experiences as if it has a soul and memory within its wood and hardware.” In paragraph 3, the essay focuses on the role of personification in the poem. Examples of the guitar being “‘held tight like a woman’” and having “recollections of being in ‘theaters and cabarets’” are offered in support of the commentary that states that “the guitar is aware of what happens and participates in the cultural and emotional life of its surroundings.”

Question 1 (continued)

In paragraph 4, however, the commentary is vague as the essay suggests that the poem’s description of “‘their throats gardenia gardens’/‘An airport for dreams’ or ‘we are always in danger of blowing up with passion’ evoke a sense of emotion in the audience” and later comments that the poet uses imagery to “make the audience feel captivated and emotional.” This vague commentary does not support the main claim that the guitar is “a vessel of identity and memory” (paragraph 1). Instead, this commentary focuses on the reader’s emotions. In addition, the essay touches on Cruz’s use of first-person voice, personification, and imagery in the poem, but again, the analysis tends to be vague, such as “personification also plays a big role in the poem” (paragraph 3). The essay thus earned 3 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. While the previously referenced commentary in paragraph 2 that suggests the guitar is “remembering past experiences as if it has a soul and memory within its wood and hardware” displays a vivid and persuasive style, that style is not employed consistently throughout the response. The essay did not earn the point in Row C.

Sample: 1C

Score: 1-2-0

Row A: Thesis (0–1 points): 1

This essay responds to the prompt with a defensible interpretation of the poem. The thesis, “In “Two Guitars” Hernandez Cruz illustrates the diveristy of music through contrast and comparrison by using symbolism, detailed description, and imagery. The guitars speak of their experiences where there is a parallel in their sharings. This ultimately hints at the idea that music, no matter the motive or origin, has meaning,” appears in paragraph 1 of the essay and earned 1 point in Row A.

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

The essay offers some specific, relevant evidence and some broad generalities. In paragraph 2, for example, the response offers a specific line from the poem, “‘The man who plays me has no heart ... it dives into the pores of the earth” but follows with the commentary that it “represents how the guitar is able to make an impact on the world through music.” This commentary is vague and does not relate to the interpretation. In paragraph 3, no specific evidence is presented, and generalizations such as “the guitar is grateful to be in the possession of group and sees them as a tool to live out his dreams of being heard” weaken the argument. While some evidence and commentary are present in the essay, no line of reasoning is established, the commentary does not connect the evidence to any claims, and the response contains some simplistic and repetitive explanations about the symbolic nature of the beginning and ending of life (“Baptisms are a symbol of new beginnnings, purity, and are usually associated with the beginning of life.”) that do not support the argument. The response earned 2 points in Row C.

Row C: Sophistication (0–1 points): 0

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