
AP[®] English Literature and Composition

Sample Student Responses and Scoring Commentary Set 1

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Free-Response Question 3

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Question 3: Literary Argument

6 points

In many works of literature, characters may be significantly affected by memories of the past. A character may be inspired by the past, haunted by the past, unable to let go of the past, or motivated by the past to craft a better future.

Either from your own reading or from the list below, choose a work of fiction in which a character is significantly affected by a memory. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how the impact of the memory on the character 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	
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 selected work.
	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 selected work that doesn't respond to the prompt. 	Responses that earn this point: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide a defensible interpretation of the impact of a memory on a character in the selected work. OR <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make a claim about how the impact of a memory on a character contributes to an interpretation of the work as a whole.
	Examples that do not earn this point: Restate the prompt <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>"Literary characters are often motivated by their memories of the past to craft a better future."</i> Do not respond to the prompt but make a generalized comment about the selected work <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>"Memories of the past have a big impact on the events of <u>The Scarlet Letter</u>."</i> <i>"In <u>Beloved</u>, Sethe and Paul D remember each other from when they were enslaved at the plantation Sweet Home."</i> <i>"Macbeth shares the memory of what the witches said about his future with his wife."</i> 	Examples that earn this point: Provide a defensible interpretation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>"In <u>The Odyssey</u>, Odysseus's memories of his home inspire him to continue his quest to return. Even when it would be easy for him to give up on Calypso's island, Odysseus's memories press him to complete his quest."</i> <i>"Axl's experience in Ishiguro's <u>The Buried Giant</u> shows how remembering the past can be a source of conflict as much as a source of clarity and understanding."</i> <i>"In <u>Mrs. Dalloway</u>, Septimus's memories of his wartime experiences have made him unable to live a normal life. He has hallucinations of his friend Evan and is overwhelmed by the real world."</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. A thesis that offers a defensible claim about the impact of a memory in the selected work may earn the point; any reasonable student interpretation of "the impact of a memory" 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)	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 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.	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.
	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 overarching narrative developments or description of a selected work rather than specific details. 	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 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. 	Typical responses that earn 4 points: <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.
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 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 Charles Dickens' novel *A Tale of Two Cities*, memories serve as an essential plot point for many of the characters. Memories and their impact on both the large and small fates of the characters weave through the narrative, pushing conflict and encouraging growth. In Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*, the impact of memory is chiefly seen through the character of Dr. Manette, who portrays both the impact memories have on the individual and their reflections of the greater fate of Paris.

A Tale of Two Cities is chiefly a story of family and the strength to be found in relationships. The story begins with young Lucie Manette collecting her father, Dr. Manette, upon his release from prison not long before the beginning of the French Revolution. As Lucie cares for her father throughout the narrative, the theme of memory's impact becomes immediately apparent. Dr. Manette is portrayed as deeply traumatized and shattered by his experiences both before and during his prison sentence. His past haunts him throughout the story, manifesting in an obsession with shoe-making. While Dr. Manette's trauma takes a backseat role in the story to the trouble of his daughter and her family, Dickens nonetheless allows his personal growth to be a central topic of focus. Throughout Dr. Manette's life in the aftermath of his prison sentence, he struggles greatly. Even as he grows further and further away from the time that so harmed him, the ghosts of the memory continue to exist within him. This allows for Dickens to masterfully explore the effects memories can have on an individual, as he portrays these past recollections in their starkest, bleakest forms.

Dr. Manette's memories likewise serve as a stark mirror for the current state of Paris. Dr. Manette's mental illness ebs and flows with the social and political tide of France, as his memories are later shown to be connected to them. In this way, Dr. Manette serves as both a view of the individual struggles happening in France, and the grand ideas held within the country as a whole. Although Dr. Manette is initially portrayed as far removed from the conflict, Dickens eventually reveals his close ties to the start of the Revolution. In this way, Dickens shows Dr. Manette as less of an individual but more of a symbol, who reflects the pain and suffering of the people in France. He has been hurt and suffered great injustice, as is the same with the French citizens, and both parties find that a grand upheaval is needed to get their lives back. In this way, Dr. Manette represents the memories and suffering of all those in France, and how the ways of dealing with deep sorrow and traumatic memories can so greatly differ. Even as the story continues, and the people of France grow ever more violent and hostile, Dickens is careful to portray them as sympathetic. Dr. Manette, with his connections to the DeFarges, is just like the revolutionaries. He has suffered just as they have suffered, with the only difference coming from how each group decides to deal with their pain.

In conclusion, Dr. Manette in *A Tale of Two Cities* is a man haunted by his past, which comes to manifest in his present. Dickens both carefully explores the individual sufferings that come from traumatic memories, and the greater implications that trauma can have on a society. Dr. Manette provides a smaller-scale representation of the sorrow of an entire populace, allowing for the audience to connect with the struggles of the people of France, even as their actions are condemned. In this way, memory serves as a chief theme in Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*, portrayed most notably through Dr. Manette, as his sufferings

explore not only the damage memories can have on an individual, but also the larger ramifications of trauma and its lasting impact on a society.

In Lisa Ko's novel "The Leavers," Deming Guo is significantly affected the memories of his ruined childhood, especially after his mother had "abandoned" him. The contribution of the Deming's memory contributes to an interpretation of this novel as a whole, symbolizing the result of parental absence and misunderstandings that impact the life and growth of individuals.

Throughout the novel, Ko alternates between the past and present life of Deming Guo, who originally believed that his mother, Peilin had abandoned him. The sudden event of Peilin's absence in Deming's life depicts not only a misunderstanding for Deming, but a lifelong trouble that he tries to understand even in his adulthood. Because no one how Peilin disappeared, Deming became the outsider within his uncle's family, despite being close with his cousin, Michael. Despite their familial ties, Deming's uncle decided to give up Deming when faced with financial struggles and supporting his family, which shows the utmost importance of the parental presence in an individual's life. In reality, Peilin had been taken away by force and lived at an isolated labor camp for years before escaping. The immense confusion and self-blame in Deming's early childhood forms a consistent struggle in university and relationships in both his family and his band, representing the result parental absence that leads hinders the growth of the child.

Further in the novel, Ko describes Deming's challenge of loving his adoptive parents and figuring out his identity in search of his mother. Displayed thorough Deming's Chinese identity and the bits of the Fuzhou language in his head, Ko emphasizes further struggle of adopted children who have lived with lifelong misunderstandings about themselves. Deming doesn't know how to balance his cultural difference with his adoptive parents, who despite having efforts to improve, fail to fully understand Deming and thoroughly help him with his identity struggles. In the instance that Deming goes to a Chinese restaurant with his adoptive parents, he feels reconnected to a part of himself, one that used to explore the bustling streets of Chinatown with his caring mother. After this moment at the restaurant, Deming decides to find his mother and his ultimate purpose in life, signifying the lifelong impact of understanding an individual's roots and family.

In the book Frankenstein, Frankenstein's memories of the monster haunt him all throughout his life. These memories caused him to make poor decisions again and again leading to him being seen as a monster himself.

He was so obsessed with bringing a mangled corpse back to life that he didn't think of the consequences of his actions. When he finally completed his goal he was disgusted with the creature that he had created, and ran away thinking nothing of it.

Later on when his family members start to die off he realizes who their killer is but since he is so ashamed of his past memories and actions he doesn't confess who the killer is. The creature he created tried to ask for peace but Frankenstein couldn't give him the one thing he asked for because of all the memories of the creature killing his family and loved ones. So when the creature told Frankenstein that he wasn't going to stop until he had felt the same pain that Frankenstein inflicted onto him, Frankenstein didn't listen. In the end Frankenstein's wife was killed by the creature and Frankenstein never got to avenge her death.

In conclusion He lived his entire life haunted by his memories and actions over and over again all because he kept making poor decisions. He thought his creature was a monster but by the end of the story he looked just as evil as the monster.

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

Score: 1-4-1

Row A: Thesis (0–1 points): 1

This response provides a defensible interpretation of the impact of a memory on Dr. Manette in *A Tale of Two Cities*: “Memories and their impact on both the large and small fates of the characters weave through the narrative, pushing conflict and encouraging growth. In Charles Dickens’ *A Tale of Two Cities*, the impact of memory is chiefly seen through the character of Dr. Manette, who portrays both the impact memories have on the individual and their reflections of the greater fate of Paris.” This thesis appears as the last two sentences of paragraph 1 and earned 1 point in Row A.

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

This essay provides specific evidence to support all claims in its line of reasoning that highlights how memories impact the characters by developing conflict that encourages growth. Paragraph 2 offers specific and relevant evidence of the effect Dr. Manette’s memories have on him: “Dr. Manette is portrayed as deeply traumatized and shattered by his experiences both before and during his prison sentence. His past haunts him throughout the story, manifesting in an obsession with shoe-making.” The commentary that follows this evidence asserts, “Even as he grows further and further away from the time that so harmed him, the ghosts of the memory continue to exist within him. This allows for Dickens to masterfully explore the effects memories can have on an individual, as he portrays these past recollections in their starkest, bleakest forms.” The perceptive commentary explains how the evidence supports the line of reasoning. Additionally, paragraph 3 presents the evidence, “Although Dr. Manette is initially portrayed as far removed from the conflict, Dickens eventually reveals his close ties to the start of the Revolution.” This evidence supports the claim that “Dr. Manette’s memories likewise serve as a stark mirror for the current state of Paris. Dr. Manette’s mental illness ebbs and flows with the social and political tide of France, as his memories are later shown to be connected to them.” Additionally, the essay’s commentary argues, “In this way, Dickens shows Dr. Manette as less of an individual but more of a symbol, who reflects the pain and suffering of the people in France. He has been hurt and suffered great injustice, as is the same with the French citizens, and both parties find that a grand upheaval is needed to get their lives back.” The essay showcases the use of specific, relevant evidence and astute commentary to support a thoughtful line of reasoning. For these reasons, the essay earned 4 points in Row B.

Row C: Sophistication (0–1 points): 1

The essay demonstrates sophistication of thought by situating the interpretation of *A Tale of Two Cities* within a broader context. Woven throughout the essay are observations connecting Dr. Manette’s struggle with memories to that of the French people. The argument culminates in paragraph 4 with the assertion that “Dr. Manette provides a smaller-scale representation of the sorrow of an entire populace, allowing for the audience to connect with the struggles of the people of France, even as their actions are condemned. In this way, memory serves as a chief theme in Charles Dickens’ *A Tale of Two Cities*, portrayed most notably through Dr. Manette, as his sufferings explore not only the damage memories can have on an individual, but also the larger ramifications of trauma and its lasting impact on a society.” The response earned 1 point in Row C.

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

The essay responds to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible interpretation of *The Leavers* by Lisa Ko. The thesis appears in paragraph 1 and states, “Deming’s memory contributes to an interpretation of this novel as a whole, symbolizing the result of parental absence and misunderstandings that impact the life and growth of individuals.” The response earned 1 point in Row A.

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

The response provides specific evidence to support all claims in its line of reasoning about “the memories of his ruined childhood” (paragraph 1). In paragraph 2, for example, the essay presents the evidence, “Because no one how Peilin disappeared, Deming became the outsider within his uncle’s family, despite being close with his cousin, Michael” as support for the claim that the memory of Peilin’s sudden absence “depicts not only a misunderstanding for Deming, but a lifelong trouble that he tries to understand even in his adulthood.” The paragraph concludes with commentary that argues that “The immense confusion and self-blame in Deming’s early childhood forms a consistent struggle in university and relationships in both his family and his band, representing the result parental absence that leads hinders the growth of the child.” Furthermore, in paragraph 3, the essay presents as evidence, “Deming’s Chinese identity and the bits of the Fuzhou language in his head” to support the claim that “Ko emphasizes further struggle of adopted children who have lived with lifelong misunderstandings about themselves,” but the commentary does not adequately explain how this evidence supports the claim. This response 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. The response attempts to situate the argument within a broader context of parental absence from a child’s life, but the connection between Deming’s experience and this broader context is often asserted as fact rather than explained or developed as part of the argument. For example, in paragraph 3, the response states that “Deming decides to find his mother and his ultimate purpose in life” and that this signifies “the lifelong impact of understanding an individual’s roots and family.” The response did not earn the point in Row C.

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

The essay responds to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible interpretation of Frankenstein by Mary Shelley. The thesis, “These memories caused him to make poor decisions again and again leading to him being seen as a monster himself,” appears in the first paragraph and earned 1 point in Row A.

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

The response provides some specific, relevant evidence; for example, in paragraph 2, it mentions, “When he finally completed his goal he was disgusted with the creature that he had created, and ran away thinking nothing of it.” No commentary, however, is provided to connect this evidence to a claim. Paragraph 3 offers a related claim that since Frankenstein “is so ashamed of his past memories and actions he doesn’t confess who the killer is,” and supporting evidence that “The creature he created tried to ask for peace but Frankenstein couldn’t give him the one thing he asked for because of all the memories of the creature killing his family and loved ones. So when the creature told Frankenstein that he wasn’t going to stop until he had felt the same pain that Frankenstein inflicted onto him, Frankenstein didn’t listen.” However, the commentary does not explain the connections between ideas and the progression of claims within the argument. Therefore, a line of reasoning is not clearly established. The essay concludes with a simplistic explanation: “He lived his entire life haunted by his memories and actions over and over again all because he kept making poor decisions. He thought his creature was a monster but by the end he looked just as evil as the monster.” This essay earned 2 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. It did not earn the point in Row C.