

2025



AP[®] English Literature and Composition

Free-Response Questions Set 1

ENGLISH LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION

SECTION II

TIME – 2 HOURS

Directions:

Section II has 3 free-response questions and lasts 2 hours.

This section of the exam requires answers in essay form. Each essay will be judged on its clarity and effectiveness in dealing with the assigned topic and on the quality of the writing. In responding to Question 3, select a work of fiction that will be appropriate to the question. Use a work that you are familiar with either from your AP English Literature and Composition class or from other literature you have previously read.

You may pace yourself as you answer the questions in this section, or you may use these optional timing recommendations:

It is suggested that you spend an equal amount of time, approximately 40 minutes, on each question.

You may use scratch paper for notes and planning, but credit will only be given for responses entered in this application. Text you enter as an annotation will **not** be included as part of your answer. You can go back and forth between questions in this section until time expires. The clock will turn red when 5 minutes remain—**the proctor will not give you any time updates or warnings.**

Note: This exam was originally administered digitally. It is presented here in a format optimized for teacher and student use in the classroom.

1. In Colleen McElroy’s poem “Monologue for Saint Louis,” published in 1980, the speaker returns to her childhood home in St. Louis, Missouri, after an extended absence and contemplates how she has changed. Read the poem carefully. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how McElroy uses literary elements and techniques to convey the speaker’s complex experience of returning home.

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.

Monologue for Saint Louis

home again and the heart barely there
when choked by clusters of words
thick as the clumps of blue-black
grapes we snatched every summer
Line 5 from the neighbor’s arbor¹
succulent pockets of flesh laced
with green staining our lips and fingers

it is summer again and I am home
vowing penance² for all my disappearances
10 since that first summer
when the arbor was clotted
with pockets of grapes latticed on each
interlocking vine

now earthworms have trellised the arbor
15 and that crumbling heap of rotting black
sticks cannot shield us from wind or words
we are the women we whispered about each summer
familiar houses and schoolyards have disappeared
childhood streets are blocked with singular black

20 one-way signs aligned like a lacework
of warnings or accusing fingers
I am home again
and my cousins sit in their cloaks of black
skin dragging me through twisted vines
25 of genetic maps thick with childhood vows

they remember each summer
how each year I vowed to return home
forever but I am lost in a riddle of words
home is a vacant lot its back yard clotted
30 with a stainless-steel arch³ and clusters
of tiny parks sprouting like trelliswork

enclosing some strange summer
resort my cousins have disappeared
into like the shadows of beasts and bad air
35 that infect this flat country and I am home
a stranger in love with words
with tart sweet clusters of poems

“Monologue for Saint Louis” from *Queen of the Ebony Isles* ©1984 by Colleen J. McElroy. Published by Wesleyan University Press.
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1: vining plants trained to grow over a lattice, framework, or trellis

2: an act that demonstrates regret and offers amends through self-sacrifice

3: the Gateway Arch, a 630-foot-tall arch located in a national park

2. The following excerpt is from Rachel Cusk's novel *The Bradshaw Variations*, published in 2008. This passage describes Thomas Bradshaw's morning interactions with members of his household. Read the passage carefully. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how Cusk uses literary elements and techniques to develop a complex portrayal of Thomas.

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.

Par.

- 1 What is art? Thomas Bradshaw asks himself this question frequently. He does not yet know the answer. He used to believe art was a kind of pretending, but he doesn't think that any more. He uses the word *authenticity* to describe what he thinks now. Some things are artificial and some are authentic. It is easy to tell when something is artificial. The other is harder.
- 2 In the mornings he listens to music, to Bach or Schubert. He stands in the kitchen in his dressing gown. He waits for his wife and daughter to come downstairs. He is forty-one, the age when a life comes out of its own past like something out of a mould; and either it is solid, all of a piece, or it fails to hold its shape and disintegrates. The disintegration is not difficult to imagine. It is the solidity, the concrete form, that is mystifying. Disintegration does not involve questions of authenticity, but of a solid form the questions must be asked.
- 3 Mostly, in fact, it is the lodger¹ Olga who comes down first. He hears her tread on the stairs and doesn't recognise it: that is how, every day, he identifies her, by hearing her quiet, slightly plodding step and wondering who on earth it belongs to. She ducks her peroxided head at him, flashes her uncertain train-track smile. For six months now Olga has been embroiled in protracted dentistry. Beneath the metal braces her teeth are grey and disorderly. As a child her mother apparently never took her to the dentist. This was not out of neglect, Olga has told him. It was because Olga was frightened of going, and her mother couldn't bear her to be frightened, or to feel pain. She has told Thomas that she is saving up for a bridge and a set of caps. She has three different jobs and all the money goes on her teeth. She complains of the expense: in Poland the cost of dentistry is much lower. There, she could have all the work done—'All!' Olga repeats, making a chopping motion with her hand—for what she pays here for just one monthly visit.
- 4 These conversations do not entirely engage Thomas. When he talks to Olga he is both there and not there. He is waiting for Tonie² to come down, as the platform guard waits for the London train to come through. Tonie's appearances in the kitchen are brief. Like the train she stops, disgorging³ activity, and then departs again. It is a matter of minutes, but he needs to be ready. He hears Olga—in some ways he even identifies himself with her, both of them platform dwellers—but when she speaks he cannot reciprocate. He is as though sealed behind glass. He wonders if she realises this, realises that she can see but not touch him. She drinks tea from a giant Garfield⁴ mug and eats cereal, topping up the milk frequently from the plastic container that stands beside her bowl. He glimpses her bare, mushroom-coloured legs beneath the table, her feet clad in large soft slippers. He turns the music up a little: it is an offering, a form of explanation. He wants her to know that he is aware of his own limitations, of his failure to

make anything of their conversations in the morning. Sometimes this failure appears to him as something intrinsic to time itself, as an inner force, like decay. They pass and are forgotten, these interludes in the kitchen. And yet they are always the same: he could stand here for a hundred years and still have much the same conversation with Olga. There are, it seems, limitless copies of this conversation, but it never goes anywhere or develops. By the same token, it never dies. It has no relationship to time. This may be because it lacks authenticity.

Excerpt from *THE BRADSHAW VARIATIONS* by Rachel Cusk. Copyright © 2009 and 2012 by Rachel Cusk, used by permission of Farrar, Straus and Giroux and The Wylie Agency LLC. All rights reserved.

- 1:** a person who rents a room in a house
- 2:** his wife
- 3:** pouring out, releasing
- 4:** a cartoon cat

3. 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.

Afterlife
Annie John
Behold the Dreamers
Beloved
Big Fish
The Buried Giant
Ceremony
Crime and Punishment
A Doll's House
Dominicana
The English Patient
The Farming of Bones
Fences
A Gesture Life
The Glass Menagerie
The Importance of Being Earnest
Invisible Man
Jane Eyre

Kindred
Love Medicine
Macbeth
The Mayor of Casterbridge
Mrs. Dalloway
The Nickel Boys
Obasan
Of Mice and Men
On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous
Purple Hibiscus
The Scarlet Letter
The Secret History
The Sound and the Fury
A Tale of Two Cities
Washington Black
The Woman Warrior
Wuthering Heights
The Yellow Birds

STOP
END OF EXAM