

AP English Literature and Composition
Question 2: Prose Analysis (2019)
Sample Student Responses

The student responses in this packet were selected from the 2019 Reading and have been rescored using the new rubrics for 2020. Commentaries for each sample are provided in a separate document.

Student responses have been transcribed verbatim; any errors in spelling or grammar appear as they do in the original handwritten response.

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Sample C

[1] From an excerpt of his The Rise of Silas Lapham, William Dean Howell portrays sisters Penelope and Irene as dependent on their family yet independent from society through selection of detail, words focused on self-reliance, and a significant shift in tone in order to challenge why we feel the need to constantly seek the acceptance and adoration of others but also warn against the dangers of living an overly sheltered life.

[2] Howell has a careful selection of detail to show how these sisters are different from other girls of that time period. In fact, the excerpt opens with “They were not girls who...” which implies that these sisters deviated from the societal norm. The younger sister Irene “dressed herself very stylish, and spent hours on her toilet every day”, which was not so others could see and admire her, but simply for her own contentment because the Laphams “lived richly to themselves.” Howell shows how in theory there is nothing particularly destructive about the mindset that family can rely on each other and live for each other. In account of the elder daughter, Howell shows how she “went to many church lectures on a vast variety of secular subjects” and “[made] fun of nearly everything,” her wit deterred potential suitors, differentiating her from the marriage-obsessed girls of her day. Through highlighting the sisters’ odd social behavior but apparent contentment and peace, Howell criticizes how most girls and families are obsessed with impressing others and climbing up the social ladder.

[3] Howell also uses words like “self-guided,” “self-improvement,” and “mutual affection” to highlight the strong, but isolated bonds that the Lapham family shares. The Laphams are implied to be not of great social status because “a great gulf divided” them from wealthier families; however, the Laphams “had no skill or courage to make themselves noticed”, but more specifically, “The elder daughter did not care for society apparently.” They are described as “lurk[ing] helplessly... looking on and not knowing how to put themselves forward” in social settings which could be of detriment to the daughters when they want to get married of course a liberal perspective would claim there is no need for the daughters to get married, but as social norms of the day define, it is pure ignorance that the Laphams sheltered their daughters so much from social interaction. Here, Howell warns against overreliance of family and groups for support because once you’re in, you may find it hard to get out.

[4] Howell finally shifts his tone from objective and observant to critical of this excessive sheltering from societal values and mannerisms from line 58 and onwards. Irene attracts the attention of one young man, but is completely at a loss on how to act for “so wholly had she depended on her mother and sister for her opinions”: “she began for the first time to form ideas, which she has not derived from her family.” Howell illustrates the importance in thinking for yourself, for although her family’s nonconformity suited them, Irene was only conforming to her family’s beliefs.

[5] With almost contrasting and ironic messages, Howell calls for his readers to seek a balance of conformity to social norms and individualism, all the while discerning yourself what fraction of each should guide your actions and thoughts.

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Sample GG

[1] People develop understanding of the world and of life in several different ways, depending on who they spend time with and how they spend their time. America has often emphasized learning values from ones family but always making sure to spend time in society to truly cultivate your personality and identity. In his novel "The Rise of Silas Lapham" William Dean Howell portrays an example and experience of two sisters, Penelope and Irene, who [illegible] their main affection and family bond are sheltered from society's attitudes. The social world and the world of the family sit in opposition. The tension between familial intimacy and the inaccessibility of society organize their experience. Howell utilizes descriptors of and imagery of the sisters family life, the metaphor of a flower to describe the younger daughter, and contrasts the younger daughter experience with the young man at Baie St. Joan with her experience at home.

[2] Howells utilizes imagery of the Lapham family life to portray the insular and idealistic nature of family. For example, Howells describes the coordination of the girls and the mother as "[taking] long naps every day, and [sitting] hours together minutely discussing what they saw out of the window." This description set up the image of 3 well dressed, sequestered women who slept for long periods of time and simply stared out the window talking about [illegible] things. His description of them spending "hours" together and taking "long naps" makes them look unusually bonded and surprises the reader, given that in the late 1800s there was a lot occurring in society and work to be done. Rather than actively engaging with what was outside the Laphams stared out the window and wanted in it, including passivity and the lack of readiness to engage with the world around them. Looking through a window is symbolic of the Laphams looking out at the world/life that they could not access or understand.

[3] Furthermore, Howells utilizes the metaphor of vegetable and flower to convey the sisters' natural state and contrast it with the artificially organized social world around them. Howells describes the younger sister as "having an innocence almost vegetable" and as eventually "bloom[ing] and glow[ing] with the unconsciousness of a flower." Through this Howells conveys the importance of engaging with society and actively contributing to it and learning from it; he also lends support to the natural human state, represented by the family. Howells comparing the same girl to a glowing but unconscious flower. The girls beauty was evident but meant little because she had no one to admire her or desire her beauty. Despite her happiness with her family, this shows how her beauty and personality were wasted by her constantly being in the house and with her sibling and family.

[4] Finally Howell utilized the details of the younger daughters interactions to portray the contrast between her home life and the experience she would have interacting with society. The girl's entire perspective of people and her entire mindset was entirely based off two people, showing truly how narrow minded the girl must be and the extent of her narrative. The girls are unable to exist in the world around them or understand its rules. Her interaction with the boy in Baie St. John shows this clearly.

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Sample P

[1] Society's point of view always has a tendency to shape who people are. In the novel *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, by William Dean Howell, two sisters of different nature both view societal point of view as foreign. Howells uses a plethora of literary devices such as style, tone, and selection of detail when portraying the sisters' conflicted experience due to society's influence. Howell shows that the sisters are isolated from the world outside the home and unable to communicate with the people they meet.

[2] Even though the sisters are different they are both isolated, just in different ways. Irene spends lots of time trying to look good. This can be inferred as the passage says, "Irene dressed herself very stylishly..." (line 7). The style used here can best be described as flashy or appealing in appearance due to the adjective "stylishly". The passage also reads, "...spent hours on her toilet every day." (lines 7-8). When oneself usually spends hours in the bathroom, it is predicted that their physical appearance is of large importance to that person. Penelope on the other hand is the opposite, with her style being much more simpler. This is seen as the passage reads, "Her sister has a simpler taste...might even have slighted dress." (lines 8-10). Even though Irene spends a lot of time on her appearance and Penelope doesn't know how, it ultimately doesn't matter. No one will see either sister because they are unable to enter society: "the Laphams had no skill or courage to make themselves noticed."

[3] The Lapham family differs from the other families when it comes to society as well. The passage says, "where they witnessed the spectacle which such resorts present throughout New England...humbly glad of the presence of any sort of young man..." (lines 32-36). The tone throughout this quote is best described as very picturesque and royal. "Humbly glad of the presence of any sort of young man...", this shows that the family cares about what others think about them. But really, they don't know what to do with society because their family keeps society out: "The very strength of their mutual affection was a barrier to worldly knowledge; they dressed for one another; they equipped their house for their own satisfaction; they lived richly to themselves, not because they were selfish, but because they did not know how to do otherwise." The tone here is best seen as humble.

[4] Because the sisters live in their own world, they have no choice but to live within it, cut off from other people. When one of the sisters meets a boy, she can't really understand what he's saying because she's never seen the world through her own eyes: She took account of everything he did and said, pondering it, and trying to make out exactly what he meant, to the inflection of a syllable, the slightest movement or gesture. In this way she began for the first time to form ideas which she had not derived from her family, and they were none the less her own because they were often mistaken." Because she lives in the world of family, she can't understand.

[5] When describing the sisters experience, Howells uses devices such as style, tone, and selection of detail. Irene and Penelope, two sisters with different interest both find pleasing society as unimportant. Societal point of view usually has a tendency of building the way an individual is, but in the case of Irene and Penelope, this does not apply.

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Sample RR

[1] The two sisters, Penelope and Irene, from William Dean Howell's The Rise of Silas Lapham, have very similar upbringings, yet differ from one another immensely. The author uses selection of detail along with symbolism to convey the differences and similarities between the sister's life experiences.

[2] Both Penelope and Irene are described as girls who had not "abandoned themselves to needle work," meaning they were both young girls; stereotypically, older women took to needle work as a pastime. However, the three year difference between the girls may have made all of the difference in their intellect, as well as their futures. The author includes details on how the two girls dress. Irene spends much of her time shopping for new clothing while Penelope does not see the point in dressing so fancy and preferred a simpler style. The author's choice to include these details on their personal styles serves a purpose – it shows that Penelope has developed the same values as her parents. The two were so secluded during their childhoods, Penelope does not see the point in dressing nice to only impress her mother and sister.

[3] It almost seems as if Irene was from re-living the boring, seclusive life of her parents before it was too late. Irene refers to her life before meeting a new man as "detached," saying she "depended on her mother and sister for her opinions." It's almost as if Irene did not meet this man, in three years she would no longer care about the standards of society, just like her sister.

[4] The family is also projected to be a very shallow simplistic family by the author. At one point, maybe before Penelope closed her mind to the possibility of being intellectual, she spent a period of time going to church services to "find herself." However, it is included that when she came home, she would speak of the lectures "with a comic account for them, and that made more matter of talk for the whole family." The author most likely included this detail to show that at one point, Penelope was intellectually curious, like Irene is today. However, her family's lack of intelligence rubbed off on her before she found a way out like Irene did. At one point, it is even mentioned that "Irene complained that [Penelope] scared away the men they were acquainted with."

[5] The Lapham family is portrayed as an uneducated, unexperienced family with an extremely surface level life through selection of detail. The author includes details that may seem random, such as their vacation preferences, daily habits, and style choices to show how elementary the minds of most of the family members are. Penelope and Irene are only 3 years apart, yet Irene's attractive features allowed her to escape the simple minded family before it was too late. Penelope, who stayed with her parents for just 3 years longer, has almost completely detached herself from society. Society's standards of beauty allowed Irene to live an intellectual life, yet left Penelope in the boring house she grew up in, watching people pass by the window for entertainment and huffing her days away.

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Sample TT

[1] This excerpt from *The Rise of Silas Lapham* discusses the lavish yet helpless lives of sister Irene and Penelope in a satirical way in an attempt to explain the seemingly selfish lives of Laphams “because they did not know how to do otherwise”. Author William Dean Howells highlights the clueless and unaware sisters through detailed examples and a satirical tone.

[2] The many satire-based observations in the excerpts prompt the reader to take pity on the family, especially the Lapham sisters in their interactions with each other and with society. This is exemplified in lines 38-40 when both Irene and Penelope are so focused on each other that they are completely unaware of how to be confident with others, especially with men. Their affection for each other outweighs their affection for anyone outside of their family, which distracts the sisters from focusing on the rest of the world.

[3] The sisters’ deceptively self-absorbed nature is simply a manifestation of their contentedness and complacency in every aspect of their lives. This is shown in Howell’s details about private dance lessons and European travel, which the girls did not care about because they did not know about it. This captures the very essence of blissful ignorance, and the role ignorance plays in determining the happiness and success of an individual.

Sample B

[1] In the excerpt from the novel *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, written by William Dean Howells, it shows how different the two sisters are. Irene and the eldest daughter have two completely different views on life and it is described through style, tone, and selection of detail.

[2] There is a certain style of writing the author is using. Throughout the excerpt, the eldest daughter’s name is not presented anywhere. She is only mentioned as the eldest. The style is also throughout the first paragraph, making it seem as if the two sisters are complete opposites and have nothing in common.

[3] The tone of the excerpt is very “upbeat and happy”. It is also very informative about sister Irene in the final paragraph. The tone isn’t competitive, but it is comparing the two sisters. For example Irene likes to be stylish when the eldest doesn’t really care. The tone is also very “soft” meaning that there really isn’t any darker than that, It’s just normal.

[4] The selection to detail in the excerpt seems to rely on Irene the most. Although she is the youngest, she tried to seem much more mature. For example, it states, “Irene complained that she scared away the young men whom they got acquainted with...” (paragraph 1) to receive the attention of boys. The author gave more detail with Irene, and since he did that, we now realize that Irene and her sister aren’t really the same.

[5] This excerpt portrayed the experiences of the two sisters with style, tone, and the selection of detail. Although the excerpt was mostly about Irene, readers still understood how the two sisters has two different views on life.

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Sample EE

[1] From the beginning of the excerpt from “The Rise of Silas Lapham”, William Dean Howell depicts the way of lives of two sisters: Penelope and Irene.

[2] “They were not girls who embroidered or abandoned themselves to needle-work” (line 1-2) exhibits the contrast of the stereotype of girl with following the girls of with “abundant leisure” (line 3). According to description of first paragraph, the two sisters obsess with shopping. For example, “Irene spent her abundant...far beyond her capacity to wear.” (lines 2-7) Moreover, “They all three took long naps... they saw out of the window.” (line 10-12) shows they have free life and without worrisome. Above description is abundant evidence of their normal life in the family.

[3] On the contrary, they are ignorant in the aspect of European travel. For instance, “they did not know... how to attract it in the sophisticated city fashion.” (line 22-29) It is obvious evidence of their lack of knowledge of outside world.

[4] At next, they coincidentally go to New England; but they had gone about the mountain... humbly glad of the presence of any sort of young man.” (line 30-36) the girls from outside are totally extintive. They are more attractive, manipulate, and elegant. “They lurked helpless” contrast with life in their family.

[5] In the end, the girls who “she could make fun of nearly everything” (lines 17-18) becomes “she had scarcely lived a detached, ...almost her sensation.” Their personality change with big contrast.

Sample U

[1] In William Dean Howell’s novel, “The Rise of Silas Lapham, two sisters Penelope and Irene did not care for the views of society but for themselves. Through the use of a self-satfiicd and detail we gain insight to the sisters experience within their family and society.

[2] In the beginning of the passage we see how the girls act within society