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# AP<sup>®</sup> English Literature and Composition

## Sample Student Responses and Scoring Commentary

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# AP<sup>®</sup> ENGLISH LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION

## 2019 SCORING GUIDELINES

### Question 2: William Dean Howells, *The Rise of Silas Lapham*

The score should reflect the quality of the essay as a whole — its content, style, and mechanics. **Reward the students for what they do well.** The score for an exceptionally well-written essay may be raised by 1 point above the otherwise appropriate score. In no case may a poorly written essay be scored higher than a 3.

**9–8** These essays offer a persuasive analysis of how the author portrays the experience of the two sisters within their family and society. Using apt and specific textual support, the essays demonstrate consistent and effective control over the elements of composition in language appropriate to the discussion of prose. Although these well-focused essays may not be error-free, their perceptive analysis is apparent in writing that is clear and effectively organized. Essays scored a 9 have especially convincing analysis and effective control of language.

**7–6** These essays offer a reasonable analysis of how the author portrays the experience of the two sisters within their family and society. Using textual support, they are organized and demonstrate control over the elements of composition in language appropriate to the discussion of prose. These focused essays show some insight, and they offer clear and controlled analysis and writing. Essays scored a 7 have solidly developed analysis and consistent control of organization and language.

**5** These essays respond to the assigned task with a plausible reading of how the author portrays the experience of the two sisters within their family and society, but the analysis may be superficial and thinly developed. While the essays include some analysis of the passage, implicit or explicit, the analysis of the author’s portrayal of the experience of the two sisters or the use of literary techniques may be slight, and support from the passage may tend toward summary or paraphrase. Their analysis and discussion may be vague, formulaic, or minimally supported. These essays demonstrate some control of language, but they may be marred by surface errors. These essays have difficulty presenting a cohesive idea, clear organization, or sustained development of analysis.

**4–3** These lower-half essays fail to offer an adequate analysis of the passage. The analysis of how the author portrays the experience of the two sisters within their family and society may be partial, unconvincing, oversimplified, or irrelevant; the essays may ignore how the author portrays the experience of the sisters within their family or society or the use of literary techniques. Evidence from the passage may be slight or misconstrued, or the essays may rely only on paraphrase. The essays often demonstrate a lack of control over the conventions of composition: inadequate development of ideas, accumulation of errors, or a focus that is unclear, inconsistent, or repetitive. Essays scored a 3 may contain significant misreading and/or demonstrate inept writing.

**2–1** These essays compound several weaknesses. Although they make some attempt to respond to the prompt, they are often unacceptably brief or incoherent in presenting their ideas. The essays may be poorly written on several counts; they may contain pervasive errors that interfere with understanding. Ideas may be presented with little clarity, organization, or support from the passage. Essays scored a 1 contain little coherent discussion of the passage.

**0** These essays give a response that is completely off topic or inadequate; there may be some mark or a drawing or a brief reference to the task.

— These essays are entirely blank.

Write in the box the number of the question you are answering on this page as it is designated in the exam.

Question 2

2A  
(1 of 3)

A family unit can have a profound impact on peoples' lives. It can be the glue that holds them together, or the chaos that tears them apart. Family units lay the foundation ~~for~~<sup>upon</sup> which all ideas are built off of, however, sometimes ~~it is necessary to~~ the foundation is faulty and it is necessary to rebuild from scratch. In his novel "The Rise of Silas Lapham" William Dean Howells describes the complex relationships two sisters have with their family and society through his selection.

Both sisters, Penelope and Irene, are described as having a similar relationship with their family. Both sisters are described as modeling their mother "a kind of idol," buying her expensive things that are "beyond her capacity to wear." Through the use of the word "idol," Howells portrays a relationship that doesn't seem to possess any long bond between the individuals, but it is rather something that is entirely materialistic. Furthermore, idols are generally objects of great value that are worshipped and deified, a state of mind that Howells connects to how the sisters view their mother, a force in their life that is to be worshipped. The entire family seems to be ~~unhealthily~~ unhealthily devoted to one another, as they "dressed for one another" and "lived richly to themselves... because they did not know otherwise." They are a family that live entirely for each other, and the sisters have no knowledge of what other life there could be because this is the foundation that has been built for them. Howells rarely discusses each sister individually when discussing the family as a whole, using "they" and "the sisters" to describe them instead. This dehumanizes the sisters in the context of their interactions with the family, making them seem less like individuals and more just small parts of a larger and more important unit.



Question 2

Write in the box the number of the question you are answering on this page as it is designated in the exam.

2A  
(2 of 3)

~~Text~~ Howells also discusses and shows the effects of this family unit on how the sisters interact with society, however this is where the sisters differ slightly. Throughout the whole passage, Howells makes a conscious effort to not use Penelope's name, opting to just refer to her as the "eldest daughter" or "eldest sister." This further establishes just how entrenched Penelope is into her family and how she is not a self-thinking individual. Even when the passage mentions her "self-guided search for self-improvement," it was ultimately just for a "matter of talk for the whole family." By just focusing on how Penelope used the experience to contribute to the family and not on the benefit she personally saw in going, Howells establishes how all of Penelope's interactions with society are fainter with the lens of her family unit, and how "the very strength of their mutual affection was a barrier to worldly knowledge." Irene however, is presented in a different way in relation to society. Howells mentions her by name, which immediately contrasts her to Penelope and makes her feel more human. Also, being younger has a connotation of being more wild and free-thinking, as opposed to the elder sister who is stuck in her ways. Howells puts a lot of focus on Irene's interaction with a young man, and how she "took account of everything he ~~said~~ did and said... the inflection of a syllable, the slightest movement or gesture." By focusing on such small details, Howells reveals that Irene is hungry for knowledge outside of her family and wants to "form ideas which she had not derived from her family." While she still depends on that foundation built for her, Irene is becoming more conscious of the harmful nature of it, and is exploring alternatives.

By presenting the complex relationships of the daughters in slightly different ways, Howells establishes the importance of being able to think for yourself and questioning harmful authority. Penelope was



Write in the box the number of the question you are answering on this page as it is designated in the exam.

Question 2

2A  
(3 of 3)

merely merged with her family, thinking as they think, while young Irene is presented as this hopeful flower that is beginning to bloom.



2

Write in the box the number of the question you are answering on this page as it is designated in the exam.

2B  
(1 of 2)

Family can have a great impact on the social interactions of people. In the excerpt from The Rise of Silas Lapham, two sisters develop socially within the context of their family's means and attitude towards society. The use of style, tone, and selection of detail show the complex experience of Penelope and Irene in a close-knit family with mid-range social status.

The style of the passage is casual, juxtaposing statements about the family's status with conciliatory statements about their happiness or contentment. The mostly informal structure—such as in line 21: "they were, perhaps, not the wisest young men"—brings a familiar and comfortable feel to the passage which reflects the comfort that the Lapham sisters feel, despite social attitudes towards them. Furthermore, the addition of humor (such as in the previously mentioned quote) makes the passage feel more endearing than ridiculing. In lines #67-70, Irene's opinions are described as hers because "they were often mistaken." This is amusing and also reveals how much Irene depended on her mother and sisters to form opinions before she came of age.

The light and conciliatory tone as well as the occasional sympathetic phrase reveal the family's contentment as well as their social status, which works to their detriment. Penelope, the older sister, attends church lectures in search



Write in the box the number of the question you are answering on this page as it is designated in the exam.

2

2B  
(2 of 2)

of self-improvement, appears to be free from the material inclinations of society and thus provides topics of discussion to her family, from the topics she attends lectures of. Irene, on the other hand, is stylish and perhaps materialistic. Despite these differences, both sisters are humbled by their social status and lack of acknowledgement from suitors. Their family is not inclined to rise socially and thus the girls are content where they are.

Selection of detail reveals perhaps the biggest difference between the girls. Fanny "did not care for society"—she had no desire to be a part of it. However, Irene was beautiful and stylish which allowed her to be noticed by society. It is her being noticed that finally allows her to break off from her mother and sister and begin to form her own opinions—however incorrect—and live an individual life. Therefore although the two sisters were brought up the same way, their differing interests and physical traits caused their experiences to differ once Irene's beauty was realized.

Through style, tone, and selection of detail, the complex social and familial experiences of Fanny and Irene are developed.

##

Question 2

Write in the box the number of the question you are answering on this page as it is designated in the exam.

20  
(1 of 3)

The family described in this passage were always just one step away from fitting in. They also never fully agreed with society and society never fully agreed with them. They lived a secluded life from society and at the end one learned this and went to make a change.

To be secluded ~~is~~ no from anything ~~&~~ like this family is from society is not ~~&~~ ideal. Society tends to have rules of some sort. Rules like how to dress, how to act and how to interact with others within said society. If these rules/expectations are not met you will most definitely be excluded and in turn secluded. The family expressed in the passage never fully grasped the rules within society, yet they tried. leaving them always one step behind. They had not even known ~~about~~ <sup>of</sup> them, and a great ~~gap~~ <sup>gap</sup> divided them from those who did. (P. 2-4) (P. paragraph 1: lines) ~~this was~~ ~~the~~ The girls learned how to dance at a school but didn't take private lessons therefore they are one step behind and aren't able to fit into society. Their father did not like company, except such as came

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Write in the box the number of the question you are answering on this page as it is designated in the exam.

Question 2

2C  
(2 of 3)

informally their way;" (p2 L4-6). The girls father also didn't know how to socialize as well as expected leaving them another step behind and furthering the divide. The family seems as if they know that they are steps behind society and often resort to not wanting much part in ~~it~~ it instead.

~~being~~ being divided from society can be a very lonely feeling. The author emphasizes the loneliness of the family in the passage which gives the ~~to~~ passage a very lonely tone.

"Irene complained that she scared away the young men whom they got acquainted with at the dancing-school Sociables" (p12 18-20). They don't have many suitors which for a young lady can ~~be~~ create a very lonely feeling. They try to dress well but it doesn't work out for them often times. They realize that it may be because they don't fully have a grasp on the rules and expectations that society has laid out. The family thinks quite differently as well which is noticed by the youngest daughter when she finally has time away from the thoughts and suggestions given to her by her sister and mother. She realizes that with a change of her thought process she could be less lonely and fit in with society.



Question 2.

Write in the box the number of the question you are answering on this page as it is designated in the exam.

2C  
(3.0+3)

The family described in the passage could look at Society but never understand it to its full extent. And Society did the same with them. They tried their best to be included but in the end they couldn't giving this passage a tone of loneliness and seclusion.

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## 2019 SCORING COMMENTARY

### Question 2

**Note:** Student samples are quoted verbatim and may contain spelling and grammatical errors.

#### Overview

For Question 2, the prose analysis question, students were asked to read an excerpt from William Dean Howells' novel *The Rise of Silas Lapham* and respond to the following prompt:

Carefully read the following excerpt from William Dean Howells' novel *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885). Then, in a well-constructed essay, analyze how the author portrays the complex experience of two sisters, Penelope and Irene, within their family and society. You may wish to consider such literary elements as style, tone, and selection of detail.

The students were, once again, expected to accomplish three specific tasks:

- They were expected to read carefully.
- They were expected to analyze how the author portrays the complex experience of the two sisters.
- They were expected to write a well-constructed essay based on that analysis.

Again, the three tasks are interrelated and interdependent.

- **Reading** carefully means reading “closely,” employing the techniques practiced during students' Advanced Placement class and engaging with qualities, terms, and characteristics related to the study of prose. Reading in this way begins with the assumption of meaning, and students should, even at first reading, begin to pay attention to how particular features of the text begin to create an overall effect or meaning. It is worth noting that beginning with next year's examination, the prompts for poetry and prose analysis will not contain any suggested literary techniques for students to consider at the beginning of their analysis. Students are not required to name specific literary elements or terms, but knowledge of prose elements will help the student begin to analyze the text.
- **Analyzing** means identifying the important parts of a larger whole and being able to explain how those parts connect to and function within that whole. In this case, students needed to identify the way the author revealed the two sisters' complex experience. The prompt did not ask the students to be familiar with the nouveau riche experience in 19<sup>th</sup>-century America or to be aware of changing economic and gender contexts (although these do inform the novel as a whole). Instead, students were to identify how, in the given passage, the author, Howells, uses literary techniques to portray Penelope and Irene in this brief excerpt.
- **Writing** a well-constructed essay means controlling many features, including a defensible thesis, full development and textual support for ideas, clear connections and transitions that help cue the reader, and an attention to the standard conventions of writing. Again, students are not expected in the free-response section of the examination to write a polished, revised essay. Instead, the organization may be implicit throughout and may be understood by claims formed late in the essay. The essay should, however, enable the readers to see and to follow the student's reasoning (even if that reasoning is still developing).

#### Sample: 2A

#### Score: 9

This essay closely examines several areas of the text, offering a persuasive analysis of how Howells portrays the experience of Irene and Penelope within their family and society. It begins with the claim that “[f]amily units lay the foundation from which all ideas are built off of, however, sometimes the foundation is faulty and it is necessary to rebuild from scratch.” In considering the importance of the family, it offers convincing analysis of Howells' use of the word “idol” to refer to the girls' mother: “idols are generally objects of great value that are worshipped and deified, a state of mind that Howells connects to how the sisters view their mother, a force in

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## 2019 SCORING COMMENTARY

### Question 2 (continued)

their life that is to be worshipped.” In focusing on the similarities of the sisters, the student points out that “Howells rarely discusses each sister individually when discussing the family as a whole” and insightfully claims, “This dehumanizes the sisters in the context of their interactions with the family, making them seem less like individuals and more just small parts of a larger and more important unit.” Later in the essay, the student considers each sister individually and suggests that “Howells makes a conscious effort to not use Penelope’s name, opting to just refer to her as ‘the eldest daughter’ or ‘eldest sister.’ This further establishes just how entrenched Penelope is into her family and how she is not a self-thinking individual.” The student then considers Irene’s relationship with a young man and claims this relationship “reveals that Irene is hungry for knowledge outside of her family.” Both statements exemplify perceptive and convincing analysis. The essay shows consistent and effective control over the elements of composition and is clearly focused. For these reasons, it earned a score of 9.

#### **Sample: 2B**

#### **Score: 6**

This essay offers a reasonable analysis of Howells’ portrayal of the complex experience of the two sisters within their family and society. It focuses on “the complex experience of Penelope and Irene in a close-knit family with mid-range social status.” It describes the style of the passage as “casual, juxtaposing statements about the family’s status with conciliatory [*sic*] statements about their happiness or contentment.” This observation would have been strengthened by an example of textual evidence. The student recognizes and explores Howells’ gentle humor in the passage, pointing to the description of the young men as “perhaps, not the wisest” and Irene’s opinions “as hers because ‘they were often mistaken.’” The comment that this humor makes the passage “more endearing than ridiculing” shows insight. The essay moves on to focus on the differences between the sisters, describing Penelope as “free from the material inclinations of society” and Irene as “stylish and perhaps materialistic.” The observation that “[t]heir family is not inclined to rise socially and thus the girls are content where they are” shows an attempt at insight without adequate textual support. The essay is clearly organized and demonstrates control over the elements of composition in language appropriate to the discussion of prose. Although it makes a number of insightful observations, it tends to move from one to the next rather than delving into any of them. For these reasons, the essay earned a score of 6.

#### **Sample: 2C**

#### **Score: 4**

This essay offers a limited discussion of the family’s seclusion and difficulty fitting into society and fails to offer an adequate analysis of the passage. It begins with an oversimplified claim: “They [the family] also never fully agreed with society and society never fully agreed with them.” The student points out, “If these rules/expectations [of society] are not met you will most definitely be excluded and in turn secluded” and then attempts to offer textual support for the idea that “[t]he family expressed in the passage never fully grasped the rules within society, yet they tried leaving them always one step behind.” The essay does make attempts at analysis, but it relies heavily on paraphrase, presenting relevant quotations from the passage and then simply paraphrasing them rather than analyzing how they illustrate larger claims: “‘They had not even known of them, and a great gulf divided them from those who did’ ... the girls learned how to dance at a school but didn’t take private lessons therefore they are one step behind and aren’t able to fit into society.” The images of being “one step behind” and being “lonely” are repetitive and oversimplified: “The author emphasizes the loneliness [*sic*] of the family in the passage which gives the passage a very lonely tone.” These characteristics result in analysis that is vague and an essay that does not quite reach the level of a plausible reading. This essay earned a score of 4.