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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 3: Idealism and Its Consequences

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 a character’s idealism, its consequences, and how the author’s portrayal of the idealism contributes to the meaning of the work as a whole. Using apt and specific textual support, these essays demonstrate consistent and effective control over the elements of composition and language appropriate to the discussion. Although these well-focused essays may not be error-free, they make a strong case for their interpretation and discuss the literary work with insight and understanding 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 a character’s idealism, its consequences, and how the author’s portrayal of the idealism contributes to the meaning of the work as a whole. Using textual support, these essays are organized and demonstrate control over the elements of composition and language appropriate to the discussion. 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 command of the elements of effective composition.

**5** These essays respond to the assigned task with a plausible reading of a character’s idealism, its consequences, and/or how the author’s portrayal of the idealism contributes to the work as a whole, but the analysis may be superficial and thinly developed. They often rely upon plot summary or general textual support that includes some analysis, implicit or explicit. They may demonstrate a rather simplistic understanding of the character’s idealism or its consequences. 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 reading of a character’s idealism, its consequences, and/or how the author’s portrayal of the idealism contributes to the work as a whole. The analysis may be partial, unsupported, oversimplified, or irrelevant, and the essays may reflect an incomplete understanding of the character’s idealism, its consequences, and/or the author’s portrayal. They may rely on plot summary that is not in service to a clear idea. These essays may be characterized by an unfocused or repetitive presentation of ideas, an absence of textual support, or an accumulation of errors; they may lack control over the elements of college-level composition. Essays scored a three 3 may contain significant misreading and/or demonstrate inept writing.

**2-1** These essays compound several weaknesses. Often, they are unacceptably brief or incoherent in presenting their ideas. They may be poorly written on several counts; they may contain pervasive errors that interfere with understanding. The student’s remarks may be presented with little clarity, organization, or supporting evidence. Essays scored a 1 contain little coherent discussion of the text.

**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.

3

3A  
(1 of 4)

Idealists are often characterized as inappropriately youthful because of their views. However, when maintained, their optimism can transform those around them. Edgar from William Shakespeare's King Lear maintains a largely idealistic view throughout the play. Edgar's idealism has its pitfalls, but it carries him through to survive the end of the play demonstrating that a positive outlook is essential to a full life. Although Edgar's idealism sometimes blinds him to life's harsher realities, it also helps Edgar to find the compassion to better the lives of others.

Edgar's optimistic nature prevents him from seeing his brother's betrayal or the true depths pain can reach thus casting him as naive. When his brother Edmund suggests he goes away for a while so Edmund could handle their father's temper, Edgar only sees his brother's generosity and readily agrees. → However, Edmund takes the opportunity

3

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

3A  
(2 of 4)

to turn Gloucester against the oldest, Edgar, paving Edmund's path to power. Being more suspicious of his brother would have saved Edgar significant pain, but he had no reason to suspect him. At this point in the play only the audience knows Edmund's true nature, so while Edgar's trust seems foolhardy to them. It is justified in his eyes. Later, Edgar's idealism leads him to compare man's fortune to a wheel: at the bottom the only place to go is up. However, Edgar then comes across his father Gloucester who has been blinded and cast out by the Duke of Cornwall. Upon seeing his father's pain, Edgar sees that pain in fact has no bottom. Compared to his father's belief that some higher beings "crush us for sport", Edgar's views of pain seem inexperienced and juvenile. Despite his best efforts, Edgar's idealism at times leaves him unaware of true face of those around him. →

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

3

3A  
(3 of 4)

On the other hand, Edgar has also been able to improve the lives of others through his realistic nature and the compassion that comes with it. Gloucester's blindness makes him suicidal and Edgar, disguised as Poor Tom, ~~shows~~ tries to convince his father how miraculous life is. Edgar stages a fake suicide attempt where Gloucester believes he's survived a fall from the cliffs of Dover and that, according to Edgar who "finds" him, his survival is divine intervention. Through Edgar's conviction that life is worth living and his corresponding compassion, Edgar is able to stabilize his father's mental state to the point where Gloucester is determined to be the master of his pain. The tale of how Edgar cared for their father also has an impact on Edmund in his final moments. Edmund admits that Edgar's story has affected him and could perhaps "do some good." Edmund makes good.

3

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

3A  
(4 of 4)

on his promise by revealing King Lear and Cordelia are about to be assassinated. Edgar's idealism breathed new life into a man who wished for death and stirred some loyalty in his traitorous brother. Without Edgar's belief that life is more than pain King Lear would quickly become even more a ~~tragedy~~ tragedy.

Edgar redeems his narrative at his brother's betrayal and father's pain by helping the same two men better their lives through his idealistic nature. Edgar's life and the lives of those around him are all the better for his idealism, and it illuminates Shakespeare's point that the best traits of humanity include compassion and optimism. After all, there is a reason another word for "best" is "ideal."

#

In Ernest Hemingway's book, "The Sun Also Rises," the majority of the characters are cynical and do not much care about the world, accepting their unfulfilling lives. One exception to this is Robert Cohn. He ~~keeps~~ continues to dream long after the other characters have stopped. Cohn holds an ideal view of the world, which briefly makes him very happy before constantly disappointing him.

Because Cohn holds an ideal view of the world, he can be truly happy when something works out for him. Among the many characters in love with Brett is Cohn. He falls for <sup>her</sup> as soon as he meets her and continues to pursue her. Brett decides to have a one-week fling with him. Cohn, unlike Brett, still associates sex with love thanks to his view of the world. So, for a brief time, Cohn believes Brett genuinely loves him and is overcome with joy, something that no longer happens to the other characters. But according to Hemingway, all good things must end.

When Cohn follows Brett to Spain, believing they're in love, he is hit with reality. Brett has all but forgotten about him. He continues to pursue her while she is busy wooing other men, like Pedro Romero. As if that is not disappointing enough, the other men do not want him there. Mike, Brett's old boyfriend, constantly teases



3

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

3B  
(2 of 2)

and yells at Cohn, and they even fight at one point. Even Jake, one of Cohn's only friends, belittles Cohn and tells him to shut up. Finally Cohn gives up on Brett. He ~~was~~<sup>is</sup> so disappointed that he ~~accepted~~<sup>he</sup> accepts ~~at~~ his situation and abandons his ideal view of the world.

Hemingway's overall message in the whole book is that an ideal view of the world is a foolish thing. Brett believes Jake would be perfect for her if he could have sex, and this thought haunts her. While she does not view the world ideally, she does see Jake that way. Jake knows this is not true and moves on. Hemingway gives the characters with the most idealistic views ~~that~~ the saddest endings, and he gives Cohn the very saddest.

#

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

Q 3

30  
(1 of 1)

In "1984" by George Orwell, the majority of society is a victim to Big Brother's fabricated view of an ideal world. These people are watched near constantly, scream like animals during the two minutes hate, and are happy with every aspect of their life being controlled by the government. This "ideal view" is extremely detrimental, as the citizens ~~are~~ are reprogrammed to believe that Big Brother only wants the best for them, and are tortured & often killed if they stray ever so slightly from the ideal. An ideal view of the world brings nothing but order to the people's lives, but they are only happy because Big Brother tells them to be.

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

## 2019 SCORING COMMENTARY

### Question 3

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

#### Overview

For Question 3, the “open” question, students were asked to respond to the following prompt:

In his 2004 novel *Magic Seeds*, V. S. Naipaul writes: “It is wrong to have an ideal view of the world. That’s where the mischief starts. That’s where everything starts unravelling.”

Select a novel, play, or epic poem in which a character holds “an ideal view of the world.” Then write an essay in which you analyze the character’s idealism and its positive or negative consequences. Explain how the author’s portrayal of idealism illuminates the meaning of the work as a whole.

You may choose a work from the list below or one of comparable literary merit. Do not merely summarize the plot.

Students were expected to complete three tasks successfully:

- They were expected to select an appropriate novel, play, or epic poem that contained a character with “an ideal view of the world.”
- They were expected to analyze the character’s idealism, its consequences, and how that idealism illuminates the meaning of the work as a whole.
- They were expected to write an essay presenting their analysis and explanation.

As with the other two free-response questions, these tasks are interrelated and interdependent. Selection leads to analysis leads to writing; writing leads to further analysis and a deeper understanding of the selected text as a whole.

- **Selection** of a literary work that contains an appropriate character is crucial to success in Question 3. While no work or genre is automatically deemed to be “unworthy” of Question 3, some works can be limiting for the student. This can happen when the student chooses a work that is not sufficiently complex to support a well-developed essay, or the student chooses a work that is beyond their ability to manage. The issue of text selection was addressed in the 2018 Chief Reader Report and bears repeating: Selection of appropriate works should be an outgrowth of a student’s ability to read, identify, and understand complexity within a text and not simply the result of a list or single rule. No formal canon of “acceptable works” exists for Question 3. Helping students make good selections — that is, helping them understand what the criteria and judgment guidelines should be for them individually — should be part of individualized instruction. The list given is a suggested list for both students and teachers to consider and represents a widely diverse set of possibilities.
- **Analysis** in Question 3 usually has two parts (as it does this year): Students are asked to analyze the idealism of a character and its consequences, and they are asked to explain how that idealism contributes to the meaning of the work as a whole. In the first part of the analysis they develop a specific claim about a character. In the second, they make a claim about a larger literary work. The analysis task, then, for Question 3, might be understood as being able to relate “parts” to a single whole (the character) and then relate that single whole to the larger whole (the work itself).
- **Writing** an essay means that students are asked to assemble evidence to support their defensible claim about the character’s idealism and its impact on the meaning of the work. Here, students need to select plot details carefully and make sure that they use them to serve the central thesis in clearly connected and explained ways. 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).

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**2019 SCORING COMMENTARY**

**Question 3 (continued)**

**Sample: 3A**  
**Score: 9**

***King Lear***

This essay offers a cogent and persuasive analysis of Edgar’s idealism in Shakespeare’s tragedy. The essay thoroughly considers both the positive and negative consequences of that idealism and explains how this portrayal illuminates the meaning of the work as a whole. It begins with the claim that “although Edgar’s idealism sometimes blinds him to life’s harsher realities, it also helps Edgar to find the compassion to better the lives of others.” Embedded in a solidly developed argument are apt and specific references to details from the play that serve to explore the depth of Edgar’s idealism. The essay describes Edgar as “naive” and supports that characterization with details of Edmund’s plot to betray Edgar, pointing out that “Edgar only sees his brother’s generosity.” It also connects Edgar’s naïveté to one of the major symbols in the play — the wheel of fortune — and Edgar’s belief that “at the bottom the only place to go is up,” observing that this connection between the wheel and “men’s fortune’s [*sic*]” exemplifies Edgar’s idealistic nature. The essay then explores Edgar’s relationship with his father and contrasts Edgar’s idealism with Gloucester’s desperate negativity: “Compared to his father’s belief that some higher beings ‘crush us for sport,’ Edgar’s views of pain seem inexperienced and juvenile.” It then addresses the positive consequences of Edgar’s idealism for both Gloucester and Edmund, pointing out that “[t]hrough Edgar’s conviction that life is worth living and his corresponding compassion, Edgar is able to stabilize his father’s mental state” and “Edmund admits that Edgar’s story has affected him and could perhaps ‘do some good.’” While not required or necessary, the use of quotations from the text elevates the essay and demonstrates the student’s depth of understanding of the text. The concluding assertion that Edgar’s idealism “illuminates Shakespeare’s point that the best traits of humanity include compassion and optimism” clearly encapsulates the meaning of the work as a whole. Effective control of language and especially convincing analysis led to this essay earning a score of 9.

**Sample: 3B**  
**Score: 5**

***The Sun Also Rises***

This essay offers a plausible reading of the idealism of Robert Cohn in *The Sun Also Rises* and considers the consequences of that idealism. The essay claims that Cohn’s idealism contrasts with the other characters who are “cynical and do not much care about the world, accepting their unfulfilling lives” and that “Cohn holds an ideal view of the world, which briefly makes him very happy before constantly disappointing him.” These points demonstrate the student’s attempt to consider both the positive and negative consequences of idealism. The textual evidence used consists largely of plot summary with some analysis. In considering Cohn’s relationship with Brett, the essay points out that “Cohn believes Brett genuinely loves him and is overcome with joy.” The observation, “But according to Hemingway, all good things must end,” is an example of the simplistic understanding of the consequences of idealism. The essay points out the change that occurs in Cohn’s idealism: “When Cohn follows Brett to Spain, believing they’re in love, he is hit with reality.” It provides an overview of the problems Cohn experiences in Spain and comes to the conclusion that “[h]e [Cohn] is so disappointed that he accepts his situation and abandons his ideal view of the world.” The essay does not explore the effects of this change in Cohn, but it does consider how this change relates to the meaning of the work as a whole (“Hemingway’s overall message in the whole book is that an ideal view of the world is a foolish thing”). It concludes with the observation that “Hemingway gives the characters with the most idealistic views the saddest endings, and he gives Cohn the very saddest.” This essay is largely simplistic in its understanding of character and meaning. Its findings are not invalid, but they are minimally supported and explored. These reasons coupled with a lack of sustained development of analysis resulted in this essay’s score of 5.

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**2019 SCORING COMMENTARY**

**Question 3 (continued)**

**Sample: 3C**

**Score: 2**

**1984**

This essay fails to identify a character and confusingly identifies the government's repressive efforts as presenting a "fabricated view of an Ideal [*sic*] world." The response refers to a few incidents from the novel — "These people are watched near constantly, scream like animals during the two minutes hate, and are happy with every aspect of their life being controlled by the government" — but not in a manner that demonstrates an understanding of idealism. The essay does not convincingly consider the positive or negative consequences of idealism or how the portrayal of idealism contributes to the meaning of the work as a whole. Its concluding statement, "An ideal view of the world brings nothing but order to the peoples' lives, but they are only happy because Big Brother tells them to be," is an example of its lack of coherence. This brief essay also lacks an organizing principle. For these reasons, it earned a score of 2.