



Skill-building Free-Response Question

AP[®] English Literature and Composition

Prompt #1

The following excerpt is from Jannette Lee’s short story, “At the End of the Rainbow,” published in 1915. In this scene, a man works to hide something valuable. Read the passage carefully. Write a paragraph in which you make a defensible claim regarding how Lee uses literary elements and techniques to portray the man’s relationship with the setting. In your paragraph, you should incorporate at least one piece of evidence from the text to support your claim.

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 develop and support your interpretation.
- Explain the relationship between the evidence and your interpretation.
- Use appropriate grammar and punctuation in communicating your argument.

Line	The Island lay in darkness. Only an occasional flash of lightning revealed the great headlands to the east and the figure of a man busily at work. When the lightning came the man crouched a little toward a pile of loose earth at his feet. Then the shovel resumed its play, scooping the earth into the hole before him. Now and then he paused, leaning forward on his spade to listen. No sound came through the dark but the tide creeping on the rocks at the foot of the headland and a distant mutter of thunder to the east.		grotesque, leaping haste. The moon that had glimmered faintly when the work began had disappeared; but the rhythmic throw of the shovel sent each shovelful skillfully to place till it lay heaped in the hole. Then the man leaped down and trod it with heavy, cautious feet. The thunder grew louder and the lightning broke through upon the great figure treading the earth.
5			25
10	In a fitful flutter of lightning the Island stretched away, its dry grass and gaunt trees and half-shrubs leaping in a kind of sinister dance in the flickering light. Then darkness, and the muttered thunder rolling from the east—and the man bent again to his work, shoveling earth into the half-filled hole with		30
15			35
20			40
			He flung aside the shovel and dropped to his hands and knees, scraping the earth out of the grass and moss in swift handfuls and throwing it loosely on top of the hole. The lightning playing across the sky flickered on the dry grass and moss and over the great trees and bleak cliff and the figure in its clumsy garment, half cape, half coat, crawling about the hole like some huge insect surprised at its work.



Skill-building Free-Response Question: AP Literature

His hands reached out for a great, shallow stone on the edge of the hole and tugged at it a moment, and he stood up, half swearing under his breath, his greatcoat falling apart as he bent to the stone and flapping about his legs. Something fell from the folds and dropped among the loose dirt. A moment later his fingers, groping for the shovel, encountered it, and he gave an exclamation of disgust, throwing it hastily into the hole.

He pried at the stone with the shovel and lifted it and rolled it skillfully into place over the shoveled dirt—not a crack or crevice left for prying eyes or curious ringers¹. And the rain would wash away all trace of his work. He shuffled a little with his feet, crouching in the grass and rubbing back and forth to erase the signs.

He got to his feet and stood erect and raised himself, stretching his arms high

to free the muscles. There was a burst of thunder, a sharp flash that rent the air—and for a moment the great figure in its flopping coat loomed with arms outstretched on the night. Then darkness and the thunder rolling heavily away and swift drops of rain.

He seized the shovel and moved toward the sea, his greatcoat outspreading as he ran. With the falling of the rain the Island seemed to waken and stir. Lights flashed from the hamlet below and vague sounds of living came on the wind. The figure on the cliff paused a moment—then dropped cautiously over the edge; there was a low whistle, an answering sound from the water, and the muffled, even chug of oars moving in clumsy oarlocks. The wind had risen and swept up from the sea and across the headland, driving the rain that fell from a black sky over dry grass and moss and a great, shallow, rounded stone on the top of it.



Rubric for All Skill-building Prompts

Thesis

0 points Does not present a defensible interpretation

1 point Presents a defensible interpretation

Evidence and Commentary

0 points Does not offer information relevant to the prompt or repeats information in the prompt

1 point The response meets ONE of the following criteria:

- Summarizes the plot AND provides little or no commentary
- Provides general references to the text AND provides little or no commentary
- Provides vaguely relevant references to the text AND provides little or no commentary

2 points The response meets BOTH of the following criteria:

- Makes specific, relevant references (direct quotes or paraphrases)
- Provides commentary (may repeat, oversimplify, or misinterpret cited evidence)

Exemplar Prompt #1

In the short story “At the End of the Rainbow,” Jennette Lee’s bleak imagery and figurative language convey a sinister setting that reinforces the suspicious nature of the man. For example, when the storm offers “an occasional flash of lightning,” the man “crouch[es] a little toward a pile of loose earth,” as if hiding from the light and the view of anyone in the area. He feels the need to wait for darkness before “the shovel resumed its play,” which suggests dishonesty in his character. Later, another flash of lightning reveals the man “crawling about the hole like some huge insect surprised at its work.” This comparison brings to mind the disgust many people feel for insects, which by association makes the man seem repulsive. When this simile is considered along with the man’s secretive actions, he appears extremely deceitful. Finally, the narrator notes that “the rain would wash away all trace of his work” to avoid the discovery of his efforts, possibly because it would implicate him in something illegal or immoral. The man’s actions are emphasized by the description of the setting, creating a sense of suspicion toward this secretive man.



Scoring commentary: 3/3

Thesis: 1/1

Responds to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible interpretation of the passage:

- States a defensible claim in the first sentence: “In the short story ‘At the End of the Rainbow,’ Jennette Lee’s bleak imagery and figurative language convey a sinister setting that reinforces the suspicious nature of the man.”

Evidence and commentary: 2/2

Provides evidence that is relevant to the thesis:

- Integrates evidence in the form of short quotations to support the claim concerning figurative language: “Later, another flash of lightning reveals the man ‘crawling about the hole like some huge insect surprised at its work.’”

Provides commentary explaining how the evidence relates to the thesis:

- Commentary supports the argument that the imagery used to describe the setting reflects the nature of the man: “This comparison brings to mind the disgust many people feel for insects, which by association makes the man seem repulsive. When this simile is considered along with the man’s secretive actions, he appears extremely deceitful.”



Prompt #2

In the poem by Lorna Dee Cervantes (published in 1981), the speaker describes her neighborhood. Read the poem carefully. Write a paragraph in which you make a defensible claim regarding how Cervantes uses contrasts to convey the speaker's complex relationship with her neighborhood. In your paragraph, you should incorporate at least one piece of evidence from the text to support your claim.

In your response you should do the following:

- Respond to the prompt with a claim that presents an interpretation.
- Select and use evidence to develop and support your interpretation.
- Explain the relationship between the evidence and your interpretation.
- Use appropriate grammar and punctuation in communicating your argument.

Freeway 280

Line	Las casitas ¹ near the gray cannery, nestled amid wild abrazos ² of climbing roses and man-high red geraniums are gone now. The freeway conceals it 5 all beneath a raised scar. But under the fake windsounds of the open lanes, in the abandoned lots below, new grasses sprout, wild mustard remembers, old gardens come back stronger than they were, 10 trees have been left standing in their yards. Albaricoqueros, cerezos, nogales ³ ... Viejitas ⁴ come here with paper bags to gather greens. Espinaca, verdolagas, yerbabuena ⁵ ... 15 I scramble over the wire fence	that would have kept me out. Once, I wanted out, wanted the rigid lanes to take me to a place without sun, without the smell of tomatoes burning 20 on swing shift in the greasy summer air. Maybe it's here en los campos extraños de esta ciudad ⁶ where I'll find it, that part of me mown under 25 like a corpse or a loose seed.
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- 1 the little houses
- 2 embraces
- 3 apricot trees, cherry trees, walnut trees
- 4 old women
- 5 spinach, purslane, mint
- 6 in the strange fields of this city



Exemplar Prompt #2

Lorna Dee Cervantes' poem "Freeway 280" expresses the speaker's complex relationship with her neighborhood through a significant contrast between her past and present that ultimately reveals her hope for the future. In the past, the speaker viewed her neighborhood as one that she "wanted out" of because of "the smell of tomatoes burning," suggesting her dislike for the smells of the cannery in her Hispanic neighborhood. She once saw the freeway's "rigid lanes" as a means to escape, but in the present, she notices how grasses and gardens, symbols for growth, are now coming back "stronger" despite the concrete "scar" of the freeway. This new, stronger growth reflects the speaker's new relationship with her neighborhood. The speaker connects herself to the new growth in nature in the poem's final line. Cervantes uses "a loose seed" to symbolize that part of the speaker's character that the neighborhood once mowed under but, like the new grasses and gardens, may still grow, signifying her hope for the future. Thus, Cervantes' speaker celebrates the resiliency of life in her former neighborhood and expresses her optimism in her own resiliency to continue to grow in the "campos extraños" (strange fields) of her present life.

Scoring commentary: 3/3

Thesis: 1/1

Responds to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible interpretation of the passage:

- States a defensible claim in the first sentence: "Lorna Dee Cervantes' poem 'Freeway 280' expresses the speaker's complex relationship with her neighborhood through a significant contrast between her past and present that ultimately reveals her hope for the future."

Evidence and commentary: 2/2

Provides evidence that is relevant to the thesis:

- Integrates short quotations to support the claim concerning the contrast between past and present: "...but in the present, she notices how grasses and gardens, symbols for growth, are now coming back 'stronger' despite the concrete 'scar' of the freeway."

Provides commentary explaining how the evidence relates to the thesis:

- Commentary supports the argument that the symbolism creates a contrast reflecting the speaker's hope for the future: "Thus, Cervantes' speaker celebrates the resiliency of life in her former neighborhood and expresses her optimism in her own resiliency to continue to grow in the 'campos extraños' (strange fields) of her present life."



Prompt #3

In Emily Brontë's novel *Wuthering Heights*, a character remarks, "Treachery and violence are spears pointed at both ends; they wound those who resort to them worse than their enemies."

Either from your own reading or from the list below, choose a work of fiction in which acts of treachery or violence are committed. Write a thesis statement that you might use for an essay that analyzes how that action and its consequences contribute to an interpretation of the work as a whole. Then write a paragraph in support of your thesis that uses at least one piece of evidence from the text. 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.
- Select and use evidence to develop and support your interpretation.
- Explain the relationship between the evidence and your interpretation.
- Use appropriate grammar and punctuation in communicating your argument.

Absalom, Absalom!

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

All the King's Men

All the Pretty Horses

Atonement

Beloved

Bless Me, Ultima

A Clockwork Orange

The Crucible

East of Eden

Frankenstein

Gone Girl

The Grapes of Wrath

The Great Gatsby

Hamlet

Heart of Darkness

The Kite Runner

Light in August

Lying in Wait

Macbeth

Mama Day

Native Son

No Country for Old Men

Nutshell

Of Mice and Men

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest

Othello

The Poisonwood Bible

The Revenant

The Scarlet Letter

Shadow Country

A Tale of Two Cities

Their Eyes Were Watching God

Things Fall Apart

We Were the Mulvaney

Wide Sargasso Sea



Exemplar Prompt #3

Thesis

From the stabbing of the sleeping King Duncan to the hired murder of his close friend Banquo, Macbeth's acts of treachery and violence result in not just a crown but also his well-deserved death, illustrating that unbridled ambition often has fatal consequences.

Paragraph

Macbeth's first act of treachery, the murder of his king, is a direct result of his ambition. After winning a battle with Norway, Macbeth encounters three witches who prophesy that he will become king. However, the throne is already occupied by Duncan, so Macbeth must either wait for Duncan to die or take matters into his own hands. His impatience, along with his ambition, compel him to murder Duncan in his sleep. Unfortunately, his actions bring not happiness and contentment, but rather, anxiety. He must continue in his treacherous ways and kill all those who now pose a threat to the throne, actions that cause others to suspect him and eventually kill him on the battlefield. His greed and impatience do not bring success but rather defeat and death, illustrating the fatal consequences of violent acts motivated by unbridled ambition.

Scoring commentary: 3/3

Thesis: 1/1

Responds to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible interpretation of the work:

- Provides the interpretation that “Macbeth’s acts of treachery and violence result in...his well-deserved death” and the claim that “unbridled ambition often has fatal consequences.”

Evidence and commentary: 2/2

Provides evidence that is relevant to the thesis:

- The paragraph describes how the witches’ prophecy “that he will become king” rouses Macbeth’s ambition, “[compelling] him to murder Duncan in his sleep.” This is relevant to the thesis because it provides an example of Macbeth’s violence.

Provides commentary explaining how the evidence is relevant to the thesis:

- The discussion at the end of the paragraph explains how Macbeth’s murderous tendencies cause others to “kill him on the battlefield.” The paragraph ends with commentary stating that Macbeth’s death due to his “greed and impatience” illustrates “the fatal consequences of violent acts motivated by unbridled ambition,” which supports the meaning of the work as a whole, as stated in the thesis.