

AP ARGUMENT QUESTIONS

2003 AP® ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION FREE-RESPONSE QUESTIONS

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION

SECTION II

Total time—2 hours

Question 1

(Suggested time—40 minutes. This question counts one-third of the total essay section score.)

In his 1998 book *Life the Movie: How Entertainment Conquered Reality*, Neal Gabler wrote the following:

One does not necessarily have to chuck in disapproval to admit that entertainment is all the things its detractors say it is: fun, effortless, sensational, mindless, formulaic, predictable and subversive. In fact, one might argue that those are the very reasons so many people love it.

At the same time, it is not hard to see why cultural aristocrats in the nineteenth century and intellectuals in the twentieth hated entertainment and why they predicted, as one typical nineteenth century critic railed, that its eventual effect would be "to overturn all morality, to poison the springs of domestic happiness, to dissolve the ties of our social order, and to involve our country in ruin."

Write a thoughtful and carefully constructed essay in which you use specific evidence to defend, challenge, or qualify the assertion that entertainment has the capacity to "ruin" society.

2012 AP® ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION FREE-RESPONSE QUESTIONS

Question 3

(Suggested time—40 minutes. This question counts for one-third of the total essay section score.)

Consider the distinct perspectives expressed in the following statements.

If you develop the absolute sense of certainty that powerful beliefs provide, then you can get yourself to accomplish virtually anything, including those things that other people are certain are impossible.

William Lyon Phelps, American educator, journalist, and professor (1865–1943)

I think we ought always to entertain our opinions with some measure of doubt. I shouldn't wish people dogmatically to believe any philosophy, not even mine.

Bertrand Russell, British author, mathematician, and philosopher (1872–1970)

In a well-organized essay, take a position on the relationship between certainty and doubt. Support your argument with appropriate evidence and examples.

1999

Question 3

(Suggested time—40 minutes. This question counts one-third of the total essay section score.)

In the following excerpt from *Antigone*, by the classical Greek playwright Sophocles, the wise Tiresias observes

Think all men make mistakes,
But a good man yields when he
Knows his course is wrong,
And repairs the evil: The only
Crime is pride.

Take some time to think about the implications of the quotation. Then write a carefully reasoned essay that explores the validity of the assertion, using examples from your reading, observation, or experience to develop your position.

END OF EXAMINATION

2003 AP® ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION FREE-RESPONSE QUESTIONS (Form B)

Question 2

(Suggested time—40 minutes. This question counts one-third of the total essay section score.)

The following passage comes from "The Common Life," a 1994 essay by the American writer Scott Russell Sanders. Read the passage carefully and then write an essay that defends, challenges, or qualifies Sanders' ideas about the relationship between the individual and society in the United States. Use specific evidence to support your position.

A woman who recently moved from Los Angeles to Bloomington [Indiana] told me that she would not be able to stay here long, because she was already beginning to recognize people in the grocery stores, on the sidewalk, in the library. Being surrounded by familiar faces made her nervous, after years in a city where she could range about anonymously. Every traveler knows the sense of liberation that comes from journeying to a place where nobody expects anything of you. Everyone who has gone to college knows the exhilaration of slipping away from the watchful eyes of Mom and Dad. We all need seasons of withdrawal

from responsibility. But if we make a career of being unaccountable, we have lost something essential to our humanity, and we may well become a burden or a threat to those around us. A community can support a number of people who are just passing through, or who care about no one's needs but their own; the greater the proportion of such people, however, the more vulnerable the community, until eventually it breaks down. . . . Taking part in the common life means dwelling in a web of relationships, the many threads tugging at you while also holding you upright.

2004 AP® ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION FREE-RESPONSE QUESTIONS (Form B)

Question 3

(Suggested time—40 minutes. This question counts one-third of the total essay section score.)

Michael Ignatieff, Professor of the Practice of Human Rights Policy at Harvard University, made the following observation.

To belong is to understand the tacit codes of the people you live with.
—*Blood and Belonging*

Consider how unspoken rules help to define group identity. Then write a carefully reasoned essay that examines the relationship between unspoken rules and belonging. Use specific examples to develop your position.

2001

(Suggested time— 40 minutes. This question counts one-third of the total essay section score.)

Carefully read the following passage by Susan Sontag. Then write an essay in which you support, refute, or qualify Sontag's claim that photography limits our understanding of the world. Use appropriate evidence to develop your argument.

Photography implies that we know about the world if we accept it as the camera records it. But this is the opposite of understanding, which starts from *not* accepting the world as it looks. All possibility of understanding is rooted in the ability to say no. Strictly speaking, one never understands anything from a photograph. Of course, photographs fill in blanks in our mental pictures of the present and the past: for example, Jacob Riis's images of New York squalor in the 1880's are sharply instructive to those unaware that urban poverty in late-nineteenth-century America was really that Dickensian. Nevertheless, the camera's rendering of reality must always hide more than it discloses. As Brecht points out, a photograph of the Krupp works* reveals virtually nothing about that organization. In contrast to the amorous relation, which is based on how something looks, understanding is based on how it functions. And functioning takes place in time and must be explained in time. Only that which narrates can make us understand.

The limit of photographic knowledge of the world is that, while it can goad conscience, it can, finally, never be ethical or political knowledge. The knowledge gained through still photographs will always be some kind of sentimentalism, whether cynical or humanist. It will be a knowledge at bargain prices—a semblance of knowledge, a semblance of wisdom. . . . The very muteness of what is, hypothetically, comprehensible in photographs is what constitutes their attraction and provocativeness. The omnipresence of photographs has an incalculable effect on our ethical sensibility. By furnishing this already crowded world with a duplicate one of images, photography makes us feel that the world is more available than it really is. Needing to have reality confirmed and experience enhanced by photographs is an aesthetic consumerism to which everyone is now addicted. Industrial societies turn their citizens into image-junkies; it is the most irresistible form of mental pollution.

—On Photography, 1977

* Krupp: a German weapons manufacturing firm that was instrumental in the Nazi rearmament effort of the 1930's.

2002 AP® ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION FREE-RESPONSE QUESTIONS

Question 3

(Suggested time—40 minutes. This question counts one-third of the total essay section score.)

Carefully read the following passage from *Testaments Betrayed*, by the Czech writer Milan Kundera. Then write an essay in which you support, qualify, or dispute Kundera's claim. Support your argument with appropriate evidence.

I wrote about this in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*: Jan Prochazka, an important figure of the Prague Spring, came under heavy surveillance after the Russian invasion of 1968. At the time, he saw a good deal of another great opposition figure, Professor Vaclav Cerny, with whom he liked to drink and talk. All their conversations were secretly recorded, and I suspect the two friends knew it and didn't give a damn. But one day in 1970 or 1971, with the intent to discredit Prochazka, the police began to broadcast these conversations as a radio serial. For the police it was an audacious, unprecedented act. And, surprisingly: it nearly succeeded; instantly Prochazka was discredited: because in private, a person says all sorts of things, slurs friends, uses coarse language, acts silly, tells dirty jokes, repeats himself, makes a companion laugh by shocking him with outrageous talk, floats heretical ideas he'd never admit in public, and so forth. Of course, we all act like Prochazka, in private we bad-mouth our friends and use coarse language; that we

act different in private than in public is everyone's most conspicuous experience, it is the very ground of the life of the individual; curiously, this obvious fact remains unconscious, unacknowledged, forever obscured by lyrical dreams of the transparent glass house, it is rarely understood to be the value one must defend beyond all others. Thus only gradually did people realize (though their rage was all the greater) that the real scandal was not Prochazka's daring talk but the rape of his life; they realized (as if by electric shock) that private and public are two essentially different worlds and that respect for that difference is the indispensable condition, the sine qua non, for a man to live free; that the curtain separating these two worlds is not to be tampered with, and that curtain-rippers are criminals.

(1995)

2007 AP® ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION FREE-RESPONSE QUESTIONS

Question 3

(Suggested time—40 minutes. This question counts for one-third of the total essay section score.)

A weekly feature of *The New York Times Magazine* is a column by Randy Cohen called “The Ethicist,” in which people raise ethical questions to which Cohen provides answers. The question below is from the column that appeared on April 4, 2003.

At my high school, various clubs and organizations sponsor charity drives, asking students to bring in money, food, and clothing. Some teachers offer bonus points on tests and final averages as incentives to participate. Some parents believe that this sends a morally wrong message, undermining the value of charity as a selfless act. Is the exchange of donations for grades O.K. ?

The practice of offering incentives for charitable acts is widespread, from school projects to fund drives by organizations such as public television stations, to federal income tax deductions for contributions to charities. In a well-written essay, develop a position on the ethics of offering incentives for charitable acts. Support your position with evidence from your reading, observation, and/or experience.

2008 AP® ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION FREE-RESPONSE QUESTIONS

Question 3

(Suggested time—40 minutes. This question counts for one-third of the total essay section score.)

For years corporations have sponsored high school sports. Their ads are found on the outfield fence at baseball parks or on the walls of the gymnasium, the football stadium, or even the locker room. Corporate logos are even found on players' uniforms. But some schools have moved beyond corporate sponsorship of sports to allowing “corporate partners” to place their names and ads on all kinds of school facilities—libraries, music rooms, cafeterias. Some schools accept money to require students to watch Channel One, a news program that includes advertising. And schools often negotiate exclusive contracts with soft drink or clothing companies.

Some people argue that corporate partnerships are a necessity for cash-strapped schools. Others argue that schools should provide an environment free from ads and corporate influence. Using appropriate evidence, write an essay in which you evaluate the pros and cons of corporate sponsorship for schools and indicate why you find one position more persuasive than the other.

STOP

END OF EXAM

1995

Question 3

(Suggested time—40 minutes. This question counts one-third of the total essay section score.)

The paragraph below comes from a 1979 essay by expatriate African American writer James Baldwin. Read the paragraph carefully and then write an essay that defends, challenges, or qualifies Baldwin's ideas about the importance of language as a "key to identity" and to social acceptance. Use specific evidence from your observation, experience, or reading to develop your position.

Line (5) It goes without saying, then, that language is also a political instrument, means, and proof of power. It is the most vivid and crucial key to identity: It reveals the private identity, and connects one with, or divorces one from, the larger, public, or communal identity. There have been, and are, times, and places, when to speak a certain language could be dangerous, even fatal. Or, one may speak the same language, but in such a way that one's antecedents are revealed, or (one hopes) hidden. This is true in France; and is absolutely true in England: The range (and reign) of accents on that damp little island make England coherent for the English and totally incomprehensible for everyone else. To open your mouth in England is (if I may use black-English) to "put your business in the street": You have confessed your parents, your youth, your school, your salary, your self-esteem, and, alas, your future.

2003 AP® ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION
FREE-RESPONSE QUESTIONS (Form B)

Question 3

(Suggested time—40 minutes. This question counts one-third of the total essay section score.)

Read the following excerpt from a news story. Then, using appropriate support, write an editorial for your school or local newspaper in which you develop a position on the issues raised in this news story.

PIPER, Kansas (AP) — High school teacher Christine Pelton wasted no time after discovering that nearly a fifth of her biology students had plagiarized their semester projects from the Internet.

She had received her rural Kansas district's backing before when she accused students of cheating, and she expected it again this time after failing the 28 sophomores.

Her principal and superintendent agreed: It was plagiarism and the students should get a zero for the assignment.

But after parents complained, the Piper School Board ordered her to go easier on the guilty.

Pelton resigned in protest in an episode that some say reflects a national decline in integrity.

"This kind of thing is happening every day around the country, where people with integrity are not being backed by their organization," said Michael Josephson, founder and president of the Josephson Institute of Ethics in Marina del Rey, California.

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1991 Lang + Comp

Question 3

(Suggested time—40 minutes. This question counts one-third of the total essay section score.)

The first chapter of Ecclesiastes, a book in the Bible, concludes with these words:

"For in much wisdom is much grief, and increase of knowledge is increase of sorrow."

Write a carefully reasoned, persuasive essay that defends, challenges, or qualifies this assertion. Use evidence from your observation, experience, or reading to develop your position.

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