

**Free response questions—English Language and Composition—1982 – 2004**

**1982 Question 1** It has been said that “where ignorance is bliss, ‘tis folly to be wise.” The writer of the passage below takes a different stand on the subject of human happiness. Read the passage carefully. Then, in a well-organized essay, summarize the reasons he gives for his opinion and explain why you do or do not agree with his opinion.

Of two pleasures, if there be one to which all or almost all who have experience of both give a decided preference, irrespective of any feeling of moral obligation to prefer it, that is the more desirable pleasure. ...

Now it is an unquestionable fact that those who are equally acquainted with, and equally capable of appreciating and enjoying, both, do give a most marked preference to the manner of existence which employs their higher faculties. Few human creatures would consent to be changed into any of the lower animals, for a promise of the fullest allowance of a beast's pleasures; no intelligent human being would consent to be a fool, no instructed person would be an ignoramus, no person of feeling and conscience would be selfish and base, even though they should be persuaded that the fool, the dunce, or the rascal is better satisfied with his lot than they are with theirs. They would not resign what they possess more than he for the most complete satisfaction of all the desires which they have in common with him. If they ever fancy they would, it is only in cases of unhappiness so extreme, that to escape from it they would exchange their lot for almost any other, however undesirable in their own eyes. A being of higher faculties requires more to make him happy, is capable probably of more acute suffering, and certainly accessible to it at more points, than one of an inferior type; but in spite of these liabilities, he can never really wish to sink into what he feels to be a lower grade of existence. ...

Whoever supposes that this preference takes place at a sacrifice of happiness- that the superior being, in anything like equal circumstances, is not happier than the inferior- confounds the two very different ideas, of happiness, and content. It is indisputable that the being whose capacities of enjoyment are low, has the greatest chance of having them fully satisfied; and a highly endowed being will always feel that any happiness which he can look for, as the world is constituted, is imperfect. But he can learn to bear its imperfections, if they are at all bearable; and they will not make him envy the being who is indeed unconscious of the imperfections, but only because he feels not at all the good which those imperfections qualify. It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. And if the fool, or the pig, are a different opinion, it is because they only know their own side of the question. The other party to the comparison knows both sides.

**1982 Question 2** Read carefully the following statement of veto. In a well-organized essay, analyze the strategies or devices (organization, diction, tone, use of detail) that make Governor Stevenson's argument effective for his audience. Substantiate your observations with specific examples from the text.

To the Honorable, the Members of the Senate of the Sixth-sixth General Assembly:

I herewith return, without my approval, Senate Bill No. 93, entitled, "An Act to Provide Protection to Insectivorous Birds by Restraining Cats." This is the so-called "Cat Bill." I veto and withhold my approval from this Bill for the following reasons:

It would impose fines on owners or keepers who permitted their cats to run at large off their premises. It would permit any person to capture or call upon the police to pick up and imprison, cats at large. It would permit the use of traps. The bill would have statewide application— on farms, in villages, and in metropolitan centers.

This legislation has been introduced in the past several sessions of the Legislature, and it has, over the years, been the source of much comment— not all of which has been in a serious vein. It may be that the General Assembly has now seen fit to refer it to one who can view it with a fresh outlook. Whatever the reasons for passage at this session, I cannot believe there is a widespread public demand for this law or that it could, as a practical matter, be enforced.

Furthermore, I cannot agree that it should be the declared public policy of Illinois that a cat visiting a neighbor's yard or crossing the highway is a public nuisance. It is in the nature of cats to do a certain amount of unescorted roaming. Many live with their owners in apartments or other restricted premises, and I doubt if we want to make their every brief foray an opportunity for a small game hunt by zealous citizens— with traps or otherwise. I am afraid this Bill could only create discord, recrimination and enmity. Also consider the owner's dilemma: To escort a cat abroad on a leash is against the nature of the cat, and to permit it to venture forth for exercise unattended into a night of new dangers is against the nature of the owner. Moreover, cats perform useful service, particularly in rural areas, in combating rodents— work they necessarily perform alone and without regard for property lines.

We are all interested in protecting certain varieties of birds. That cats destroy some birds, I well know, but I believe this legislation would further but little the worthy cause to with its proponents give such unselfish effort. The problem of cat versus bird is as old as time. If we attempt to resolve it by legislation why knows but what we may be called upon to take sides as well in the age old problems of dog versus cat, bird versus bird, or even bird versus worm. In my opinion, the State of Illinois and its local governing bodies already have enough to do without trying to control feline delinquency.

For these reasons, and not because I love birds the less or cats the more, I veto and withhold my approval from Senate Bill No. 93.

Respectfully,  
ADLAI E. STEVENSON, Governor

**1982 Question 3**

Write a description of a place in such a way that the description conveys a recognizable feeling (for example, delight, revulsion, nostalgia, disappointment) more through the use of concrete and specific details than by direct statement of attitude.

**1983 Question 1**

Any change for the better brings its own evil with it, and so one powerful consideration should always be in the back of our minds: if we releases this good thing, what evil is likely to escape with it?

Select a change for the better that has occurred or that you would like to see occur in society and, in a well-organized essay, analyze both its desirable and undesirable effects.

**1983 Question 2** The writer of the following passage expresses an attitude toward work and in so doing makes certain assumptions about human nature. In a well-written essay, define precisely what that attitude and those assumptions are and analyze how the writer uses language to convince the reader of the rightness of his position.

For there is a perennial nobleness, and even sacredness, in Work. Were he never so benighted, forgetful of his high calling, there is always hope in a man that actually and earnestly works: in Idleness alone is there perpetual despair. Work, never so Mammonish, mean *is* in communication with Nature; the real desire to get Work done will itself lead one more and more to truth, to Nature's appointments and regulations, which are truth.

The latest Gospel in this world is, Know thy work and do it. 'Know thyself:' long enough has that poor 'self' of thine tormented thee; thou wilt never get to 'know' it, I believe! Think it not thy business, this of knowing thyself; thou art an unknowable individual: know what thou canst work at; and work at it, like a Hercules! That will be thy better plan.

It has been written, 'an endless significance lies in Work;' a man perfects himself by working. Foul jungles are cleared away, fair seedfields rise instead, and stately cities; and withal the man himself first ceases to be a jungle and foul unwholesome desert thereby. Consider how, even in the meanest sorts of Labour, the whole soul of a man is composed into a kind of real harmony, the instant he sets himself to work! Doubt, Desire, Sorrow, Remorse, Indignation, Despair itself, all these like hell-dogs lie beleaguering the soul of the poor dayworker, as of every man: but he bends himself with free valour against his task, and all these are stilled, all these shrink murmuring far off into their caves. The man is now a man. The blessed glow of Labour in him, is it not as purifying fire wherein all poison is burnt up, and of sour smoke itself there is made bright blessed flame!

Blessed is he who has found his work; let him ask no other blessedness. He has a work, a Life-purpose; he has found it, and will follow it! How as a free-flowing channel, dug and torn by noble force through the sour mud-swamp of one's existence, like an ever deepening river there, it runs and flows; - draining off the sour festering water, gradually from the root of the remotest grass-blade; making instead of pestilential swamp a green fruitful meadow, with its clear-flowing stream. How blessed for the meadow itself, let the stream and its value be great or small! Labour is Life: from the inmost heart of the Worker rises his god-given Force, the sacred celestial Life-essence breathed into him by Almighty God; from his inmost heart awakens him to all nobleness, - to all knowledge, 'self-knowledge' and much else, so soon as Work fitly begins. Knowledge? The Knowledge that will hold good in working, cleave thou to that; for Nature herself accredits that, says Yea to that. Properly thou hast no other knowledge but what thou hast got by working: the rest is yet all a hypothesis of knowledge, a thing to be argued of in schools, a thing floating in the clouds, in endless logic-vortices, till we try it and fix it. 'Doubt of whatever kind can be ended by Action alone.'

Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present* (1843)

### 1983 Question 3

We live in an era of language inflation. Being a star is no longer significant because we have superstars; what is normal is tremendous or fabulous (or excellent, extraordinary, superterrific, etc.) This wholesale distribution of highest ratings defeats its own purpose. Everything is presented as something unique, unheard-of, outstanding. Thus, nothing is unique, unheard-of, outstanding. When everything is superlative, everything is mediocre.

Write an essay in which you agree or disagree with the position taken in this passage by considering the ethical and social consequences of language inflation.

**1984 Question 1**

In a well-organized essay, explain the nature and relative importance of two or three means by which you keep track of time and discuss what these means reveal about the kind of person you are. (You are not limited to familiar time-keeping devices; you may consider recurring events, "inner clocks," or other means.)

## 1984 Question 2

Each of the two passages below offers a definition of freedom. In a well-written essay, describe the concept of freedom embodied in each and discuss the differences between the two.

- (1) The loathsome mask has fallen, the man remains  
Sceptreless, free, uncircumscribed, but man  
Equal, unclassed, tribeless, and nationless,  
Exempt from awe, worship, degree, the king  
Over himself.

Percy Bysshe Shelley

- (2) To be free is precisely the same thing as to be pious, wise, just, and temperate,  
careful of one's own, abstinent from what is another's and thence, in fine,  
magnanimous and brave.

John Milton

**1984 Question 3** Read the following passage carefully. Then write an essay that explains and analyzes the effect of the passage on the reader. Pay particular attention to how the writer uses diction, syntax, imagery, and tone to produce that effect.

Paret was a Cuban, a proud club fighter who had become welterweight champion because of this unusual ability to take a punch. His style of fighting was to take three punches to the head in order to give back two. At the end of ten rounds, he would still be bouncing, his opponent would have a headache. But in the last two years, over the fifteen-round fights, he had started to take some bad maulings.

This fight had its turns. Griffith won most of the early rounds, but Paret knocked Griffith down in the sixth. Griffith had trouble getting up, but made it, came alive and was dominating Paret again before the round was over. Then Paret began to wilt. In the middle of the eighth round, after a clubbing punch had turned his back to Griffith, Paret walked three disgusted steps away, showing his hindquarters. For a champion, he took much too long to turn back around. It was the first hint of weakness Paret had ever shown, and it must have inspired a particular shame, because he fought the rest of the fight as if he were seeking to demonstrate that he could take more punishment than any man alive. In the twelfth, Griffith caught him. Paret got trapped in a corner. Trying to duck away, his left arm and his head became tangled on the wrong side of the top rope. Griffith was in like a cat ready to rip the life out of a huge boxed rat. He hit him eighteen right hands in a row, an act which took perhaps three or four seconds, Griffith making a pent-up whimpering sound all the while he attacked, the right hand whipping like a piston rod which has broken through the crankcase, or like a baseball bat demolishing a pumpkin. I was sitting in the second row of that corner -- they were not ten feet away from me, and like everybody else, I was hypnotized. I had never seen one man hit another so hard and so many times. Over the referee's face came a look of woe as if some spasm had passed its way through him, and then he leaped on Griffith to pull him away. It was the act of a brave man. Griffith was uncontrollable. His trainer leaped into the ring, his manager, his cut man, there were four people holding Griffith, but he was off on an orgy, he had left the Garden, he was back on hoodlum street. If he had been able to break loose from his handlers and the referee, he would have jumped Paret, knocked him to the floor, and whaled on him there.

And Paret? Paret died on his feet. As he took those eighteen punches something happened to everyone who was in psychic range of the event. Some part of his death reached out to us. One felt it hover in the air. He was still standing in the ropes, trapped as he had been before he gave some little half-smile of regret, as if he were saying, "I didn't know I was going to die just yet." And then, his head leaning back but still erect, his death came to breathe about him. He began to pass away. As he passed, so his limbs descended beneath him, and he sank slowly to the floor. He went down more slowly than any fighter had ever gone down, he went down like a large ship which turns on end and slides second by second into its grave. As he went down, the sound of Griffith's punches echoed in the mind like a heavy ax in the distance chopping into a wet log.

## 1985 Question 1

The two passages below begin essays dealing with the same event, the launching of the first space satellite by the Soviets in 1957. The writers approach their subject and audiences very differently.

Write an essay in which you analyze the specific stylistic and rhetorical differences between these introductory passages.

### I

In 1957, an earth-born object made by man was launched into the universe, where for some weeks it circled the earth according to the same laws of gravitation that swing and keep in motion the celestial bodies—the sun, the moon, and the stars. To be sure, the man-made satellite was no moon or star, no heavenly body which could follow its circling path for a time span that to us mortals, bound by earthly time, lasts from eternity to eternity. Yet, for a time it managed to stay in the skies; it dwelt and moved in the proximity of the heavenly bodies as though it had been admitted tentatively to their sublime company.

This event, second in importance to no other, not even to the splitting of the atom, would have been greeted with unmitigated joy if it had not been for the uncomfortable military and political circumstances attending it. But, curiously enough, this joy was not triumphal; it was not pride or awe at the tremendousness of human power and mastery which filled the hearts of men, who now, when they looked up from the earth toward the skies, could behold there a thing of their own making. The immediate reaction, expressed on the spur of the moment, was relief about the "first step toward escape from men's imprisonment to the earth." And this strange statement, far from being the accidental slip of some American reporter, unwittingly echoed the extraordinary line which, more than twenty years ago, had been carved on the funeral obelisk for one of Russia's great scientists: "Mankind will not remain bound to the earth forever."

### II

On October 4, 1957, the Soviet Union launched into orbit a 184-pound sphere carrying a radio transmitter, enough batteries to run it for about two weeks, and four car-radio-style antennas, swept back to conform to the shape of the nose cone in which it rode atop its launch vehicle.

James Van Allen remembers Sputnik differently from most Americans. On a South Pacific expedition aboard the U.S.S. Glacier to study cosmic rays for the International

Geophysical Year (IGY) at the time of its launch, he heard the news on the Armed Forces Radio.

“Before I swallowed it, I wanted to personally confirm it,” he recalled in an interview at the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum (NASM). The ship’s radioman picked up a signal at the right frequency, and soon Van Allen and his team were listening to Sputnik’s steady beeping with astonishment at the strength of the signal. Checking its orbital period, the length of the passes during which the ship’s receiver held the signal, and the change in frequency of the signal as it passed like a fast-moving train, they convinced themselves that this was in fact the Russian satellite.

Sputnik demonstrated the muscle of Soviet rocketry, but the satellite was mainly for show: it carried no scientific instruments and took no measurements in space. The launch intensified a scientific and technological competition that continues to this day. The United States was close to a launch itself, and had intended all along to orbit apparatus that could measure and record the space environment. Scientists like Van Allen wanted to show, as did the government, that space could be used for peaceful purposes as well as for the missiles of war.

## 1985 Question 2

The excerpts below represent early and later drafts of a prose passage that records the writer's thoughts on how the experience of war affected his attitude toward language.

Write a well-organized essay in which you discuss the probable reasons for the writer's additions and deletions and the ways in which those revisions change the effect of the paragraph.

### Early Draft

I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious, sacrifice and the expression in vain. We had heard them and read them now for a long time and I had seen nothing sacred and the only things glorious had no glory and the sacrifices seemed like the stockyards at Chicago if nothing was done with the meat except to bury it. There were many words that you could not hear and finally only the names of places had dignity. Certain numbers were the same way and certain dates and these with the names of places were all you could say and mean anything and they meant everything. Abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were a little obscene beside the concrete names of places, the numbers of roads, the numbers of regiments and the dates.

### Later Draft

I did not say anything. I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious, sacrifice and the expression in vain. We had heard them now for a long time, sometimes standing in the rain almost out of earshot, so that only the shouted words came through, and we had read them, on posters that were slapped up over other posters. There were many words that you could not stand to hear, and finally only the names of places had dignity. Beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates, abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene. I had seen nothing sacred, and the things that were glorious had no glory and the sacrifices were like the stockyards at Chicago if nothing was done with the meat except to bury it. There were many words that you could not stand to hear and finally only the names of places had dignity. Certain numbers were the same way and certain dates and these with the names of places were all you could say and have them mean anything. Abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the number of regiments and the dates.

### 1985 Question 3

The study described in the passage below draws certain conclusions about the present state of television in the United States and implies that television should reflect the real world. Consider whether you agree with these conclusions and this implication. Then write an essay in which you take and defend a position on one or more of the issues raised in the passage.

Americans watch an average of over four hours of television daily, one-third of it during prime time. They see a world of adventure, melodrama, and fantasy. Gerbner and Signorielli, of the University of Pennsylvania's School of Communications, add that even the population of these shows is poor reflection of reality.

In an analysis of some 14,000 characters appearing in 878 prime-time entertainment shows from 1969 to 1981, they found that men, who make up 49 percent of the United States population, were 73 percent of the prime-time population. Nearly half the White men were 35 and 50 years old—the “age of authority” on TV, the authors say—while non-White men tended to be younger. Blacks were underrepresented by 27 percent compared to the real world, Hispanics by 63 percent.

Only 27 percent of the prime-time population was female. On children's programs, women were outnumbered four to one by men. Television women tended to be disproportionately young—one-third were in their twenties—and their marital status was left unclear in only 12 percent of the cases. Women also tended to age faster on television. More than 90 percent of the women over age 65 were portrayed as “elderly,” the authors say, compared to 77 percent of the over-65 males. While a majority of the real world's working women are married, on television they were not, and they were employed in traditional female jobs—nurses, secretaries, teachers.

Indeed, the overall occupational makeup of the television world was skewed. Two-thirds of the United States labor force is in blue-collar or service work, but professional, celebrity, and police characters dominated the prime-time airwaves. The heavy police population should come as no surprise: “Prime-time crime is at least ten times as rampant as in the real world,” the authors report.

Television not only exaggerates real-world dangers, they say, but heightens feelings of “mistrust, vulnerability, and insecurity.” White, middle-aged men have even more power on TV than they do in the real world, undermining minority viewers' sense of opportunity.

Why worry? Gerbner and Signorielli believe that today, television programs, not parents, tell children how the world works.

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## 1986 Question 1

In the following passages, two Native American writers describe similar landscapes. Read the passages carefully. Then, in a well-organized essay, explain how the passages reveal the differences in the authors' purposes. Consider such features as diction, syntax, imagery, and tone.

A single knoll rises out of the plain in Oklahoma, north and west of the Wichita Range. For my people, the Kiowas, it is an old landmark, and they gave it the name Rainy Mountain. The hardest weather in the world is there. Winter brings blizzards, hot tornadic winds arise in the spring, and in summer the prairie is an anvil's edge. The grass turns brittle and brown, and it cracks beneath your feet. There are green belts along the rivers and creeks, linear groves of hickory and pecan, willow and witch hazel. At a distance in July or August the steaming foliage seems almost to writhe in fire. Great green and yellow grasshoppers are everywhere in the tall grass, popping up like corn to sting the flesh, and tortoises crawl about on the red earth, going nowhere in the plenty of time. Loneliness is an aspect of the land. All things in the plain are isolate; there is no confusion of objects in the eye, but one hill or one tree or one man. To look upon that landscape in the early morning, with the sun at your back, is to lose the sense of proportion. Your imagination comes to life, and this, you think, is where Creation was begun.

N. S. Momaday

Out on the Plains later that summer it seemed that everything had turned bad. Day after day the sun baked the dry earth drier, the streams stopped running, great whirlwinds of grasshoppers were flung out of the metallic sky to consume the parched grass. If such a season had come upon this land a few years earlier, a thunder of a million buffalo hooves would have shaken the prairie in frantic stampedes for water. But now the herds were gone, replaced by an endless desolation of bones and skulls and rotting hooves. Most of the white hunters departed. Bands of Comanches, Kiowas, Cheyennes, and Arapahos roamed restlessly, finding a few small herds, but many had to return to their reservations to keep from starving.

D. Brown

## 1986 Question 2

The list below is made up of pairs of words that are closely related in meaning but differ in connotation. Select one or more pairs; then write an essay in which you discuss and elaborate on the distinctions between the words in each pair you have chosen. Include in your discussion such considerations as how, when, where, why, and by whom each word is likely to be used.

Note: You should write a single, unified essay, even if you choose more than one pair of words.

Art ... Craft  
Faith ... Creed  
Gang ... Club  
Imaginative ... Fanciful  
Instrument ... Tool  
Intelligent ... Smart  
Labor .. Work  
Lady ... Woman  
Recreation ... Play  
Religion ... Cult  
Terrorist ... Revolutionary

**1986 Question 3**

“It is human nature to want patterns, standards, and a structure of behavior. A pattern to conform to is a kind of shelter.”

In a well-written essay, evaluate the truth of the assertion above. Use evidence or examples from your reading or experience to make your argument convincing.

## 1987 Question 1

In the following passage, E. M. Forster argues that personal relations are more important than causes or patriotism. Read the passage carefully. Then write an essay agreeing or disagreeing with Forster's view.

I hate the idea of causes, and if I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friend, I hope I should have the guts to betray my country. Such a choice may scandalise the modern reader, and he may stretch out his patriotic hand to the telephone at once and ring up the police. It would not have shocked Dante<sup>1</sup>, though. Dante places Brutus and Cassius in the lowest circle of Hell because they had chosen to betray their friend Julius Caesar rather than their country Rome.

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<sup>1</sup> Dante: Italian poet, 1265 - 1321

## 1987 Question 2

Read the following passage carefully. Then write an essay in which you analyze how Zora Neale Hurston enriches our sense of her childhood world through her diction and manipulation of point of view.

We lived on a big piece of ground with two big chinaberry trees shading the front gate and Cape jasmine bushes with hundreds of blooms on either side of the walks. I loved the fleshy, white, fragrant blooms as a child but did not make too much of them. They were too common in my neighborhood. When I got to New York and found out that the people called them gardenias, and that the flowers cost a dollar each, I was impressed. The home folks laughed when I went back down there and told them. Some of the folks did not want to believe me. A dollar for a Cape jasmine bloom! Folks up north there must be crazy.

There were plenty of orange, grapefruit, tangerine, guavas and other fruits in our yard. We had a five-acre garden with things to eat growing in it, and so we were never hungry. We had chicken on the table often; home-cured meat, and all the eggs we wanted. It was a common thing for us smaller children to fill the iron tea-kettle full of eggs and boil them, and lay around in the yard and eat them until we were full. Any left-over boiled eggs could always be used for missiles. There was plenty of fish in the lakes around the town, and so we had all that we wanted. But beef stew was something rare. We were all very happy whenever Papa went to Orlando and brought back something delicious like stew-beef. Chicken and fish were too common with us. In the same way, we treasured an apple. We had oranges, tangerines and grapefruit to use as hand-grenades on the neighbors' children. But apples were something rare. They came from way up north.

Our house had eight rooms, and we called it a two-story house; but later on I learned it was really one story and a jump. The big boys all slept up there, and it was a good place to hide and shirk from sweeping off the front porch or raking up the back yard.

Downstairs in the dining-room there was an old "safe," a punched design in its tin doors. Glasses of guava jelly, quart jars of pear, peach and other kinds of preserves. The left-over cooked foods were on the lower shelves.

There were eight children in the family, and our house was noisy from the time school turned out until bedtime. After supper we gathered in Mama's room, and everybody had to get their lessons for the next day. Mama carried us all past long division in arithmetic, and parsing sentences in grammar, by diagrams on the blackboard. That was as far as she had gone. Then the younger ones were turned over to my oldest brother, Bob, and Mama sat and saw to it that we paid attention. You had to keep on going over things until you did know. How I hated the multiplication tables—especially the sevens!

We had a big barn, and a stretch of ground well covered with Bermuda grass. So on moonlight nights, two-thirds of the village children from seven to eighteen would be

playing hide and whoop, chick-mah-chick, hide and seek, and other boisterous games in our yard. Once or twice a year we might get permission to go and play at some other house. But that was most unusual. Mama contended that we had plenty of space to play in; plenty of things to play with; and, furthermore, plenty of us to keep each other's company. If she had her way, she meant to raise her children to stay at home. She said that there was no need for us to live like "no-count Negroes and poor-white trash"—too poor to sit in the house—had to come outdoors for any pleasure, or hang around somebody else's house. Any of her children who had any tendencies like that must have got it from the Hurston side. It certainly did not come from the Pottses. Things like that gave me my first glimmering of the universal female gospel that all good traits and leanings come from the mother's side.

Mama exhorted her children at every opportunity to "jump at de sun." We might not land on the sun, but at least we would get off the ground. Papa did not feel so hopeful. Let well enough alone. It did not do for Negroes to have too much spirit. He was always threatening to break mine or kill me in the attempt. My mother was always standing between us. She conceded that I was impudent and given to talking back, but she didn't want to "squinch my spirit" too much for fear that I would turn out to be a mealy-mouthed rag doll by the time I got grown. Papa always flew hot when Mama said that. I do not know whether he feared for my future, with the tendency I had to stand and give battle, or that he felt a personal reference in Mama's observation. He predicted dire things for me. The white folks were not going to stand for it. I was going to be hung before I got grown. Somebody was going to blow me down for my sassy tongue. Mama was going to suck sorrow for not beating my temper out of me before it was too late. Posses with ropes and guns were going to drag me out sooner or later on account of that stiff neck I toted. I was going to tote a hungry belly by reason of my forward ways. My older sister was meek and mild. She would always get along. Why couldn't I be like her?

### 1987 Question 3

Just as every individual has an idiolect—a language that varies in minute ways from the language of every other person—so every group has a sociolect or language of its own. That language may differ from other varieties of the same language in pronunciation, inflections, syntax, vocabulary, or the manner and conditions in which it is used.

Write an essay describing some major features of the language used in one specific group that you know well—an occupational, ethnic, social, or age group, for example. Your essay should indicate what purposes these features serve or what influences they reflect. You should assume that your reader is not familiar with the language you describe.

## 1988 Question 1

Read the following passage carefully. Then write an essay evaluation De Tocqueville's assertions about democracy and aristocracy and his conclusion that democracy "throws [man] back forever upon himself alone."

Among aristocratic nations, as families remain for centuries in the same condition, often in the same spot, all generations become, as it were, contemporaneous. A man almost always knows his forefathers and respects them; he thinks he already sees his remote descendants and he loves them. He willingly imposes duties on himself towards the former and the latter, and he will frequently sacrifice his personal gratifications to those who went before and to those who will come after him. Aristocratic institutions, moreover, have the effect of closely binding every man to several of his fellow citizens. As the classes of an aristocratic people are strongly marked and permanent, each of them is regarded by its own members as a sort of lesser country, more cherished and more tangible than the country at large. As in aristocratic communities all the citizens occupy fixed positions, one above another, the result is that each of them always sees a man above himself whose patronage is necessary to him, and below himself another man whose co-operation he may claim. Men living in aristocratic ages are therefore almost always closely attached to something placed out of their own sphere, and they are often disposed to forget themselves. It is true that in these ages the notion of human fellowship is faint and that men seldom think of sacrificing themselves for mankind; but they often sacrifice themselves for other men. In democratic times, on the contrary, when the duties of each individual to the race become much more clear, devoted service to any one man becomes more rare; the bond of human affection is extended, but it is relaxed.

Among democratic nations new families are constantly springing up, others are constantly falling away, and all that remain change their condition; the woof of time is every instant broken and the track of generations effaced. Those who went before are soon forgotten; of those who will come after, no one has any idea: the interest of man is confined to those in close propinquity to himself. As each class gradually approaches others and mingles with them, its members become undifferentiated and lose their class identity for each other. Aristocracy had made a chain of all the members of the community, from the peasant to the king; democracy breaks that chain and severs every link of it.

As social conditions become more equal, the number of persons increases who, although they are neither rich nor powerful enough to exercise any great influence over their fellows, have nevertheless acquired or retained sufficient education and fortune to satisfy their own wants. They owe nothing to any man, they expect nothing from any man; they acquire the habit of always considering themselves as standing alone, and they are apt to imagine that their whole destiny is in their hands.

Thus not only does democracy make every man forget his ancestors, but it hides his descendants and separates his contemporaries from him; it throws him back forever upon himself alone and threatens in the end to confine him entirely within the solitude of his own heart.

—Alexis De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (1835, 1840)

## 1988 Question 2

Read the following passage in which Frederick Douglass recounts his emotions on escaping slavery and arriving in New York in 1838. Then write an essay in which you analyze the language—especially the figures of speech and syntax—Douglass uses to convey his state of mind.

The wretchedness of slavery, and the blessedness of freedom, were perpetually before me. It was life and death with me. But I remained firm, and, according to my resolution, on the third day of September, 1838, I left my chains, and succeeded in reaching New York without the slightest interruption of any kind. How I did so,—what means I adopted,—what direction I travelled, and by what mode of conveyance,—I must leave unexplained, for the reasons before mentioned.

I have been frequently asked how I felt when I found myself in a free State. I have never been able to answer the question with any satisfaction to myself. It was a moment of the highest excitement I ever experienced. I suppose I felt as one may imagine the unarmed mariner to feel when he is rescued by a friendly man-of-war from the pursuit of a pirate. In writing to a dear friend, immediately after my arrival at New York, I said I felt like one who had escaped a den of hungry lions. This state of mind, however, very soon subsided; and I was again seized with a feeling of great insecurity and loneliness. I was yet liable to be taken back, and subjected to all the tortures of slavery. This in itself was enough to damp the ardor of my enthusiasm. But the loneliness overcame me. There I was in the midst of thousands, and yet a perfect stranger; without home and without friends, in the midst of thousands of my own brethren—children of a common Father, and yet I dared not to unfold to any one of them my sad condition. I was afraid to speak to any one for fear of speaking to the wrong one, and thereby falling into the hands of money-loving kidnappers, whose business it was to lie in wait for the panting fugitive, as the ferocious beasts of the forest lie in wait for their prey. The motto which I adopted when I started from slavery was this—"Trust no man!" I saw in every white man an enemy, and in almost every colored man cause for distrust. It was a most painful situation; and, to understand it, one must needs experience it, or imagine himself in similar circumstances. Let him be a fugitive slave in a strange land—a land given up to be the hunting-ground for slaveholders—whose inhabitants are legalized kidnappers—where he is every moment subjected to the terrible liability of being seized upon by his fellowmen, as the hideous crocodile seizes upon his prey!—I say, let him place himself in my situation—without home or friends—without money or credit—wanting shelter, and no one to give it—wanting bread, and no money to buy it,—and at the same time let him feel that he is pursued by merciless men-hunters, and in total darkness as to what to do, where to go, or where to stay,—perfectly helpless both as to the means of defence and means of escape,—in the midst of plenty, yet suffering the terrible gnawings of hunger,—in the midst of houses, yet having no home,—among fellow-men, yet feeling as if in the midst of wild beasts, whose greediness to swallow up the trembling and half-famished fugitive is only equalled by that with which the monsters of the deep swallow up the helpless fish upon which they subsist,—I say, let him be placed in this most trying situation,—the situation in which I was placed,—then, and not till then, will he fully appreciate the hardships of, and know how to sympathize with, the toil-worn and whip-scarred fugitive slave.

### **1988 Question 3**

Imagine that you have been asked to contribute to a magazine or newspaper an article about a specific place. Write such an article, describing a place that you know well and that might be of interest or significance to your readers. Besides defining that interest or significance, your article should use its descriptive detail to make clear your attitude toward the place you describe.

## 1989 Question 1

The following announcement from a church bulletin was reprinted without other comment in a magazine under the heading "The Religious Life." By using that heading, the magazine implied a criticism of American values. Read the announcement carefully. Write an essay arguing for or against the validity of the implied criticism.

FLASH.....FLASH.....FLASH.....FLASH

### CHANGE OF PLANS FOR INSTALLATION SERVICE

Due to a scheduling conflict with the Superbowl, the Board of Trustees of the church has changed the time for the installation of our new minister from 4:45 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.

Television consoles will be set up in the education wing of the church. Kickoff is at 4:30.

We invite you to join us for an afternoon of celebration—the service of installation, reception following, the Superbowl, and dancing into the evening. Child care will be available.

Clergy: You are invited to robe and process. Please meet in the Board Room by 3:15.

## 1989 Question 2

The following passage is the introduction to Martin Luther King's *Why We Can't Wait*, a book that describes the social conditions and the attitudes of many Black Americans in the 1960's. Read the passage carefully. Then write a cohesive essay in which you describe the rhetorical purpose of the passage and analyze its stylistic, narrative, and persuasive devices.

It is the beginning of the year of our Lord 1963.

I see a young Negro boy. He is sitting on a stoop in front of a vermin-infested apartment house in Harlem. The stench of garbage is in the halls. The drunks, the jobless, the junkies are shadow figures of his everyday world. The boy goes to a school attended mostly by Negro students with a scattering of Puerto Ricans. His father is one of the jobless. His mother is a sleep-in domestic, working for a family on Long Island.

I see a young Negro girl. She is sitting on the stoop of a rickety wooden one-family house in Birmingham. Some visitors would call it a shack. It needs paint badly and the patched-up roof appears in danger of caving in. Half a dozen small children, in various stages of undress, are scampering about the house. The girl is forced to play the role of their mother. She can no longer attend the all-Negro school in her neighborhood because her mother died only recently after a car accident. Neighbors say if the ambulance hadn't come so late to take her to the all-Negro hospital the mother might still be alive. The girl's father is a porter in a downtown department store. He will always be a porter, for there are no promotions for the Negro in this store, where every counter serves him except the one that sells hot dogs and orange juice.

This boy and girl, separated by stretching miles, are wondering: Why does misery constantly haunt the Negro? In some distant past, had their forebears done some tragic injury to the nation, and was the curse of punishment upon the black race? Had they shirked in their duty as patriots, betrayed their country, denied their national birthright? Had they refused to defend their land against a foreign foe?

Not all of history is recorded in the books supplied to school children in Harlem or Birmingham. Yet this boy and this girl know something of the part of history which has been censored by the white writers and purchasers of board-of-education books. They know that Negroes were with George Washington at Valley Forge. They know that the first American to shed blood in the revolution which freed his country from British oppression was a black seaman named Crispus Attucks. The boy's Sunday-school teacher has told him that one of the team who designed the capital of their nation, Washington, D. C., was a Negro, Benjamin Banneker. Once the girl had heard a speaker, invited to her school during Negro History Week. This speaker told how, for two hundred years, without wages, black people, brought to this land in slave ships and in chains, had drained swamps, built the homes, made cotton king and helped, on whip-

lashed backs, to lift this nation from colonial obscurity to commanding influence in domestic commerce and world trade.

Wherever there was hard work, dirty work, dangerous work—in the mines, on the docks, in the blistering foundries—Negroes had done more than their share.

The pale history books in Harlem and Birmingham told how the nation had fought a war over slavery. Abraham Lincoln had signed a document that would come to be known as the Emancipation Proclamation. The war had been won but not a just peace. Equality had never arrived. Equality was a hundred years late.

The boy and girl knew more than history. They knew something about current events. They knew that African nations had burst the bonds of colonialism. They knew that a great-great grandson of Crispus Attucks might be ruled out of some restricted, all-white restaurant in some restricted, all-white section of a southern town, his United States Marines uniform notwithstanding. They knew that Negroes living in the capital of their own nation were confined to ghettos and could not always get a job for which they were qualified. They knew that white supremacists had defied the Supreme Court and that southern governors had attempted to interpose themselves between the people and the highest law of the land. They knew that, for years, their own lawyers had won great victories in the courts which were not being translated into reality.

They were seeing on television, hearing from the radio, reading in the newspapers that this was the one-hundredth birthday of their freedom.

But freedom had a dull ring, a mocking emptiness when, in their time—in the short life span of this boy and girl—buses had stopped rolling in Montgomery; sit-inners were jailed and beaten; freedom riders were brutalized and mobbed; dogs' fangs were bared in Birmingham; and in Brooklyn, New York, there were certain kinds of construction jobs for whites only.

It was the summer of 1963. Was emancipation a fact? Was freedom a force?

The boy in Harlem stood up. The girl in Birmingham arose. Separated by stretching miles, both of them squared their shoulders and lifted their eyes toward heaven. Across the miles they joined hands, and took a firm, forward step. It was a step that rocked the richest, most powerful nation to its foundations.

This is the story of that boy and that girl. This is the story of *Why We Can't Wait*.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Atlanta, Georgia  
January 1964

**1989 Question 3**

Our perceptions of people often differ according to our attitudes and circumstances. Describe in a vivid and concrete way one person seen at two different times (or in two different situations) so that the reader understands the difference in your attitude.

**1990 Question 1** The passage below is from an autobiography. After reading the passage carefully, write an essay analyzing how the author uses juxtaposition of ideas, choice of details, and other aspects of style to reveal the kind of person she is.

From the time I arrived in British East Africa at the indifferent age of four and went through the barefoot Stage of early youth hunting wild pig with the Nandi, later training race-horses for a living, and still later scouting Tanganyika and the waterless bush country between the Tana and Athi rivers, by aeroplane, for elephant, I remained so happily provincial I was unable to discuss the boredom of being alive with any intelligence until I had gone to London and lived there a year. Boredom, like bookworm, is endemic.

I have lifted my plane from the Nairobi airport for perhaps a thousand flights and I have never felt her wheels glide from the earth into the air without knowing the uncertainty and the exhilaration of firstborn adventure.

The call that took me to Nungwe came about one o'clock in the morning, relayed from Muthaiga Country Club to my small cottage in the eucalyptus grove near by. It was a brief message asking that a cylinder of oxygen be flown to the settlement at once for the treatment of a gold miner near death with a lung disease. The appeal was signed with a name I had never heard, and I remember thinking that there was a kind of pathetic optimism about its having been sent at all, because the only way it could have reached me was through the telegraph station at Mwanza - itself a hundred miles by native runner from Nungwe. During the two or three days the message had been on its way, a man in need of oxygen must either have died or shown a superhuman determination to live. So far as I know I was the only professional woman pilot in Africa at that time. I had no freelance competition in Kenya, man or woman; and such messages or at least others not always so urgent or melancholy, were frequent enough to keep me occupied most days and far too many nights.

Night flying over charted country by the aid of instruments and radio guidance can still be a lonely business, but to fly in unbroken darkness without even the cold companionship of a pair of ear-phones or the knowledge that somewhere ahead are lights and life and a well-marked airport is something more than just lonely. It is at times unreal to the point where the existence of other people seems not even a reasonable probability. The hills, the forests, the rocks, and the plains are one with the darkness, and the darkness is infinite. The earth is no more your planet than is a distant star - if a star is shining: the plane is your planet and you are its sole inhabitant.

Before such a flight it was this anticipation of aloneness more than any thought of physical danger that used to haunt me a little and make me wonder sometimes if mine was the most wonderful job in the world after all. I always concluded that, lonely or not, it was still free from the curse of boredom.

**1990 Question 2** Both passages below, written in the nineteenth century, describe the same place, the Galápagos Islands (also called the Enantadas), off the coast of Ecuador. Read the passage carefully. Then, in a well-organized essay, analyze the specific stylistic and rhetorical difference between the two descriptions.

### I.

In the morning (17th) we landed on Chatham Island, which, like the others, rises with a tame and rounded outline, broken here and there by scattered hillocks, the remains of former craters. Nothing could be less inviting than the first appearance. A broken field of black basaltic lava, thrown into the most rugged waves, and crossed by great fissures, is everywhere covered by stunted, sun-burnt brushwood, which shows little signs of life. The dry and parched surface, being heated by the noon-day sun, gave to the air a close and sultry feeling, like that from a stove: we fancied even that the bushes smelt unpleasantly. Although I diligently tried to collect as many plants as possible, I succeeded in getting very few; and such wretched-looking little weeds would have better become an arctic than an equatorial Flora. The brushwood appears, from a short distance, as leafless as our trees during winter; and it was some time before I discovered that not only almost every plant was now in full leaf, but that the greater number were in flower. The commonest bush is one of the Euphorbiaceae: an acacia and a great odd-looking cactus are the only trees which afford any shade. After the season of heavy rains, the islands are said to appear for a short time partially green. The volcanic island of Fernando Noronha, placed in many respects under nearly similar conditions, is the only other country where I have seen a vegetation at all like this of the Galápagos Islands.

### II.

Take five-and-twenty heaps of cinders dumped here and there in an outside city lot; imagine them magnified into mountains, and the vacant lot the sea; and you will have a fit idea of the general aspect of the Enchanted Isles. A group rather of extinct volcanoes than of isles; looking much as the world at large might, after a penal conflagration.

It is to be doubted whether any spot of earth can, in desolateness, furnish a parallel to this group. Abandoned cemeteries of long ago, old cities by piecemeal tumbling to their ruin, these are melancholy enough; but, like all else which has but once been associated with humanity, they still awaken in us some thoughts of sympathy, however sad. Hence, even the Dead Sea, along with whatever other emotions it may at times inspire, does not fail to touch in the pilgrim some of his less unpleasurable feelings.

And as for solitariness; the great forests of the north, the expanses of unnavigated waters, the Greenland icefields, are the profoundest of solitudes to a human observer; still the magic of their changeable tides and seasons mitigates their terror; because, though unvisited by men, those forests are visited by the May; the remotest seas reflect familiar stars even as Lake Erie does; and in the clear air of a fine Polar day, the irradiated, azure ice shows beautifully as malachite.

But the special curse, as one may call it, of the Encantadas, that which exalts them in desolation above Idumea and the Pole is, that to them change never comes; neither the change of seasons nor of sorrows. Cut by the Equator, they know not autumn, and they know not spring; while already reduced to the lees of fire, ruin itself can work little more upon them. The showers refresh the deserts; but in these isles, rain never falls. Like split Syrian gourds left withering in the sun, they are cracked by an everlasting drought beneath a torrid sky. "Have mercy on me," the wailing spirit of the Encantadas seems to cry, "and send Lazarus<sup>1</sup> that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame."

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<sup>1</sup> Beggar in the parable who lay suffering at the rich man's gate. After death the rich man, parching in hell, pleads in vain that Lazarus, now happy in heaven, be permitted to give him a cooling drink.

### 1990 Question 3

Recently the issue of how much freedom we should (or must) allow student newspapers was argued all the way to the Supreme Court. Read the following items carefully and then write an essay presenting a logical argument for or against the Supreme Court decision.

1. The First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States of America states that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.”
2. In 1983 the principal of Hazelwood East High School objected to two articles in the proofs of the student newspaper (one story described three unnamed Hazelwood students’ experiences with pregnancy; the other discussed the impact of divorce on students). The principal instructed the faculty advisor to delete the two pages on which these articles appeared. The students sued the school district on the grounds that their First Amendment rights had been violated.
3. The district court concluded that school officials may impose restraints on students’ speech in activities that are “an integral part of the school’s educational function.”
4. The court of appeals reversed the district court’s decision, arguing that the school newspaper was not only “a part of the school-adopted curriculum” but also a public forum, “intended to be operated as a conduit for student viewpoint.” Accordingly, the court held that school officials had violated the students’ First Amendment rights.
5. The Supreme Court, in 1988, overruled the court of appeals, arguing in its majority opinion that a school need not tolerate student speech that is inconsistent with its “basic educational mission,” and that Journalism II (the class that produces the newspaper) is a “laboratory situation” in which students apply the skills they have learned in journalism. The Court concluded that educators do not offend the First Amendment by exercising editorial control in school-sponsored activities so long as these actions are related to legitimate pedagogical concerns.
6. In the dissenting opinion, three of the justices argued that the principal had violated the First Amendment, as the deleted articles neither disrupted classwork nor invaded the rights of others. In addition, they pointed out that such censorship in no way furthers the curriculum purposes of a student newspaper, unless one believes that the purpose of the school newspaper is to teach students that the press ought never to report bad news, express unpopular views, or print a thought that might upset its sponsors.

## 1991 Question 1

In the following passage, the composer Igor Stravinsky discusses orchestra conductors. In a well-organized essay, analyze the language and the rhetorical devices Stravinsky uses to convey his point of view.

Conducting, like politics, rarely attracts original minds, and the field is more for the making of careers and the exploitation of personalities-another resemblance to politics - than a profession for the application of exact and standardized disciplines. A conductor may actually be less well equipped for his work than his players, but no one except the players need know it, and the society women (including critics) to whom his musical qualities are of secondary importance. The successful conductor can be an incomplete musician but he must be a compleat angler. His first skill has to be power politics.

In such people the incidence of ego disease is naturally high to begin with, and I hardly need add that the disease grows like a tropical weed under the sun of a pandering public. The results are that the conductor is encouraged to impose a purely egotistical false, and arbitrary authority, and that he is accorded a position out of all proportion to his real value in the musical, as opposed to the music-business, community. He soon becomes a "great" conductor, in fact, or as the press agent of one of them recently wrote me, a "titan of the podium," and as such is very nearly the worst obstacle to genuine music-making. "Great" conductors, like "great" actors, are unable to play anything but themselves; being unable to adapt themselves to the work, they adapt the work to themselves, to their "style," their mannerisms. The cult of the "great" conductor also tends to substitute looking for listening, so that to conductor and audience alike (and to reviewers who habitually fall into the trap of describing a conductor's appearance rather than the way he makes music sound, and of mistaking the conductor's gestures for the music's meanings), the important part of the performance becomes the gesture.

If you are incapable of listening, the conductor will show you what to feel. Thus, the film-actor type of conductor will act out a life of Napoleon in "his" *Eroica*,<sup>1</sup> wear an expression of noble suffering on the retreat from Moscow (TV having circumvented the comparatively merciful limitation to the dorsal view) one of ultimate triumph in the last movement, during which he even dances the Victory Ball. If you are unable to listen to the music, you watch the corybantics,<sup>2</sup> and if you are able, you had better not go to the concert.

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<sup>1</sup> Beethoven's Third Symphony, originally dedicated to Napoleon

<sup>2</sup> wild, frenzied dancing

## 1991 Question 2

The following passage was written by Richard Rodriguez, the first college-educated member of his family. Read the passage carefully. Then write an essay analyzing how Rodriguez' presentation of the events in the passage suggests his attitude toward his family and himself. You might consider such elements as narrative structure, selection of detail, manipulation of language, and tone.

My mother is not surprised that her children are well-off. Her two daughters are business executives. Her oldest son is a lawyer. She predicted it all long ago. 'Someday,' she used to say when we were young, 'you will all grow up and all be very rich. You'll have lots of money to buy me presents. But I'll be a little old lady. I won't have any teeth or hair. So you'll have to buy me soft food and put a blue wig on my head. And you'll buy me a big fur coat. But you'll only be able to see my eyes.'

Every Christmas now the floor around her is carpeted with red and green wrapping paper. And her feet are wreathed with gifts.

By the time the last gift is unwrapped, everyone seems very tired. The room has become uncomfortably warm. The talk grows listless. ('Does anyone want coffee or more cake?' Somebody groans.) Children are falling asleep. Someone gets up to leave, prompting others to leave. ('We have to get up early tomorrow.')

'Another Christmas,' my mother says. She says that same thing every year, so we all smile to hear it again.

Children are bundled up for the fast walk to the car. My mother stands by the door calling good-bye. She stands with a coat over her shoulders, looking into the dark where expensive foreign cars idle sharply. She seems, all of a sudden, very small. She looks worried.

'Don't come out, it's too cold,' somebody shouts at her or at my father, who steps out onto the porch. I watch my younger sister in a shiny mink jacket bend slightly to kiss my mother before she rushes down the front steps. My mother stands waving toward no one in particular. She seems sad to me. How sad? Why? (Sad that we all are going home? Sad that it was not quite, can never be, the Christmas one remembers having had once?) I am tempted to ask her quietly if there is anything wrong. (But these are questions of paradise, Mama.)

My brother drives away.

'Daddy shouldn't be outside,' my mother says. 'Here, take this jacket out to him.'

She steps into the warmth of the entrance hall and hands me the coat she has been wearing over her shoulders.

I take it to my father and place it on him. In that instant I feel the thinness of his arms. He turns. He asks if I am going home now too. It is, I realize, the only thing he has said to me all evening.

## 1991 Question 3

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

### 1992 Question 1

In 1588 Queen Elizabeth I of England made the following speech to her troops. They were assembled at Tilbury, a town on the Thames River, to repel an expected invasion of England by troops serving the king of Spain. Read the speech carefully. Then write an essay in which you identify the purpose of the queen's remarks and analyze how she uses the resources of language—such as diction, imagery, and sentence structure—to achieve her purpose.

My loving people,

We have been persuaded by some that are careful of our safety, to take heed how we commit our selves to armed multitudes, for fear of treachery; but I assure you I do not desire to live to distrust my faithful and loving people. Let tyrants fear, I have always so behaved myself that, under God, I have placed my chiefest strength and safeguard in the loyal hearts and goodwill of my subjects; and therefore I am come amongst you, as you see, at this time, not for my recreation and disport, but being resolved, in the midst and heat of the battle, to live and die amongst you all; to lay down for my God, and for my kingdom, and my people, my honour and my blood, even in the dust. I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England too, and think foul scorn that Parma or Spain, or any prince of Europe, should dare to invade the borders of my realm; to which rather than any dishonour shall grow by me, I myself will take up arms, I myself will be your general, judge, and rewarder of every one of your virtues in the field. I know already, for your forwardness you have deserved rewards and crowns; and We do assure you in the word of a prince, they shall be duly paid you. In the mean time, my lieutenant general shall be in my stead, than whom never prince commanded a more noble or worthy subject; not doubting but by your obedience to my general, by your concord in the camp, and your valour in the field, we shall shortly have a famous victory over those enemies of my God, of my kingdom, and of my people.

### 1992 Question 2

In *The Spectator* for December 15, 1711, Joseph Addison wrote:

If the talent of ridicule were employed to laugh men out of vice and folly, it might be of some use to the world; but instead of this, we find that it is generally made use of to laugh men out of virtue and good sense, by attacking everything that is solemn and serious, decent and praiseworthy in human life.

Write a carefully reasoned persuasive essay that defends, challenges, or qualified Addison's assertion. Use evidence from your observation, experience, or reading to develop your position.

### 1992 Question 3

In the following passage Nancy Mairs, who has multiple sclerosis, calls herself a “cripple.” Read the passage carefully. Then write an essay in which you analyze how Mairs presents herself in this passage. In addition to discussing the significance of Mairs’ choice of the word “cripple” to name herself, you should consider such rhetorical features as tone, word choice, and rhetorical structure.

I am a cripple. I choose this word to name me. I choose from among several possibilities, the most common of which are “handicapped” and “disabled.” I made the choice a number of years ago, without thinking, unaware of my motives for doing so. Even now, I’m not sure what those motives are, but I recognize that they are complex and not entirely flattering. People—crippled or not—wince at the word “cripple,” as they do not at “handicapped” or “disabled.” Perhaps I want them to wince. I want them to see me as a tough customer, one to whom the fates/gods/viruses have not been kind, but who can face the brutal truth of her existence squarely. As a cripple I swagger.

But, to be fair to myself, a certain amount of honesty underlies my choice. “Cripple” seems to me a clean word, straightforward and precise. It has an honorable history, having made its first appearance in the Lindisfarne Gospel in the tenth century. As a lover of words, I like the accuracy with which it describes my “Disabled,” by contrast, suggests any incapacity, physical or mental.” And I certainly don’t like “handicapped.” Which implies that I have deliberately been put at a disadvantage, by whom I can’t imagine (my God is not my Handicapper General), in order to equalize chances in the great race of life. These words seem to me to be moving away from my condition, to be widening the gap between word and reality. Most remote is the recently coined euphemism “differently disabled,” which partakes of the same semantic hopefulness, that transformed countries from “undeveloped” to “underdeveloped,” then “less developed,” and finally to “developing” nations. People have continued to starve in those countries during the shift. Some realities do not obey the dictates of language.

Mine is one of them. Whatever you call me, I remain crippled. But I don’t care what you call me, so long as it isn’t “differently abled,” which strikes me as pure verbal garbage designed, by its ability to describe anyone, to describe no one. I subscribe to George Orwell’s thesis that “the slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts.” And I refuse to participate in the degeneration of the language to the extent that I deny that I have lost anything in the course of the calamitous disease; I refuse to pretend that the only differences between you and me are the various ordinary ones that distinguish any person from another. But call me “disabled” or “handicapped” if you like. I have long since grown accustomed to them; and if they are vague, at least they hint at the truth. Moreover, I use them myself. Society is no readier to accept crippledness than to accept death, war, sex, sweat, or wrinkles. I would never refer to another person as cripple. It is the word I use to name only myself.

### 1993 Question 1

The passages below are from two different novels. In each passage, a man is proposing marriage. Compare the rhetorical strategies—such as arguments, assumptions, attitudes, diction—used by the speakers in the two passages and comment on both the intended and the probable effects of their proposals on the women being addressed.

"My reasons for marrying are, first, that I think it a right thing for every clergyman in easy circumstances (like myself) to set the example of matrimony in his parish. Secondly, that I am convinced it will add very greatly to my happiness; and thirdly—which perhaps I ought to have mentioned earlier, that it is the particular advice and recommendation of the very noble lady whom I have the honour of calling patroness. Twice has she condescended to give me her opinion (unasked too!) on this subject; and it was but the very Saturday night before I left Hunsford—between our pools at quadrille, while Mrs. Jenkinson was arranging Miss de Bourgh's foot-stool, that she said, "Mr. Collins, you must marry. A clergyman like you must marry.—Chuse properly, chuse a gentlewoman for *my* sake; and for your *own*, let her be an active, useful sort of person, not brought up high, but able to make a small income go a good way. This is my advice. Find such a woman as soon as you can, bring her to Hunsford, and I will visit her." Allow me, by the way, to observe, my fair cousin, that I do not reckon the notice and kindness of Lady Catherine de Bourgh as among the least of the advantages in my power to offer. You will find her manners beyond any thing I can describe; and your wit and vivacity I think must be acceptable to her, especially when tempered with the silence and respect which her rank will inevitably excite."

"You know what I am going to say. I love you. What other men may mean when they use that expression, I cannot tell; what I mean is, that I am under the influence of some tremendous attraction which I have resisted in vain, and which overmasters me. You could draw me to fire, you could draw me to water, you could draw me to the gallows, you could draw me to any death, you could draw me to anything I have most avoided, you could draw me to any exposure and disgrace. This and the confusion of my thoughts, so that I am fit for nothing, is what I mean by your being the ruin of me. But if you would return a favourable answer to my offer of myself in marriage, you could draw me to any good—every good—with equal force. My circumstances are quite easy, and you would want for nothing. My reputation stands quite high, and would be a shield for yours. If you saw me at my work, able to do it well and respected in it, you might even come to take a sort of pride in me;—I would try hard that you should. Whatever considerations I may have thought of against this offer, I have conquered, and I make it with all my heart. Your brother favours me to the utmost, and it is likely that we might live and work together; anyhow, it is certain that he would have my best influence and support. I don't know what I could say more if I tried. I might only weaken what is ill enough said as it is. I only add that if it is any claim on you to be in earnest, I am in thorough earnest, dreadful earnest."

## 1993 Question 2

Read the following selection by H. L. Mencken. Then write a carefully reasoned essay that defends, challenges, or qualifies Mencken's views on the artist's relation to society. Be sure to support your argument with references to particular writers, composers, or other artists.

It is almost as safe to assume that an artist of any dignity is against his country, i.e., against the environment in which God hath placed him, as it is to assume that his country is against the artist. The special quality which makes an artist of him might almost be defined, indeed, as an extraordinary capacity for irritation, a pathological sensitiveness to environmental pricks and stings. He differs from the rest of us mainly because he reacts sharply to phenomena which leave the rest of us unmoved, or, at most, merely annoy us vaguely. He is, in brief, a more delicate fellow than we are, and hence less fitted to prosper and enjoy himself under the conditions of life which he and we must face alike. Therefore, he takes to artistic endeavor, which is at once a criticism of life and an attempt to escape from life.

So much for the theory of it. The more the facts are studied, the more they bear it out. In those fields of art, at all events, which concern themselves with ideas as well as with sensations it is almost impossible to find any trace of an artist who was not actively hostile to his environment, and thus an indifferent patriot.

### 1993 Question 3

The following paragraphs begin E. M. Forster's essay "My Wood," written in 1936. In the essay, Forster considers his reaction to owning the small estate he bought with royalties from his novel *A Passage to India*.

Write an essay in which you define Forster's attitude toward the experience of owning property and analyze how Forster conveys that attitude. In your discussion, consider Forster's word choice, his manipulation of sentences, and his use of Biblical allusions.

A few years ago I wrote a book which dealt in part with the difficulties of the English in India. Feeling that they would have had no difficulties in India themselves, the Americans read the book freely. The more they read it the better it made them feel, and a cheque to the author was the result. I bought a wood with the cheque. It is not a large wood—it contains scarcely any trees, and it is intersected, blast it, by a public foot-path. Still, it is the first property that I have owned, so it is right that other people should participate in my shame, and should ask themselves, in accents that will vary in horror, this very important question: What is the effect of property upon the character? Don't let's touch economics; the effect of private ownership upon the community as a whole is another question--a more important question, perhaps, but another one. Let's keep to psychology. If you own things, what's their effect on you? What's the effect on me of my wood?

In the first place, it makes me feel heavy. Property does have this effect. Property produces men of weight, and it was a man of weight who failed to get into the Kingdom of Heaven.<sup>1</sup> He was not wicked, that unfortunate millionaire in the parable, he was only stout; he stuck out in front, not to mention behind, and as he wedged himself this way and that in the crystalline entrance and bruised his well-fed flanks, he saw beneath him a comparatively slim camel passing through the eye of a needle and being woven into the robe of God. The Gospels all through couple stoutness and slowness They point out what is perfectly obvious, yet seldom realized: that if you have a lot of things you cannot move about a lot, that furniture requires dusting, dusters require servants, servants require insurance stamps, and the whole tangle of them makes you think twice before you accept an invitation to dinner or go for a bathe in the Jordan.<sup>2</sup> Sometimes the Gospels proceed further and say with Tolstoy that property is sinful; they approach the difficult ground of asceticism here, where I cannot follow them. But as to the immediate effects of property on people, they just show straightforward logic. It produces men of weight. Men of weight cannot, by definition, move like the lightning from the East unto the West, and the ascent of a fourteen-stone<sup>3</sup> bishop into a pulpit is thus the exact antithesis of the coming of the Son of Man. My wood makes me feel heavy.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 19:24 "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

<sup>2</sup> The Jordan is the river in which John the Baptist christened repentant sinners.

<sup>3</sup> A stone is a British unit of weight; 14 atones equals 196 pounds.

## 1994 Question 1

The passage below is a series of excerpts from an essay about England's King Charles II (1630 – 1685) by Sir George Savile, a member of Charles's Privy Council. Many in Savile's audience thought of Charles mainly as a lover of pleasure.

Read the passage carefully. Then write an essay in which you define the attitude toward Charles II that Savile would like his readers to adopt and analyze the rhetorical strategies Savile employs to promote that attitude.

A prince neither sharpened<sup>1</sup> by his misfortunes whilst abroad, nor by his power when restored,<sup>2</sup> is such a shining character that it is a reproach not to be so dazzled with it as not to be able to see a fault in its full light. It would be a scandal in this case to have an exact memory. And if all who are akin to his vices should mourn for him, never prince would be better attended to his grave. He is under the protection of common frailty, that must engage men for their own sakes not to be too severe where they themselves have so much to answer.

What therefore an angry philosopher would call lewdness, let frailer men call a warmth and sweetness of the blood that would not be confined in the communicating itself; an overflowing of good nature, of which he had such a stream that it would not be restrained within the banks of crabbed and unsociable virtue ...

If he loved too much to lie upon his own down bed of ease, his subjects had the pleasure during his reign of lolling and stretching upon theirs. As a sword is sooner broken upon a feather bed than upon a table, so his pliantness broke the blow of a present mischief much better than a more immediate resistance would perhaps have done. . . .

If he dissembled, let us remember, first, that he was a king, and that dissimulation is a jewel of the crown; next, that it is very hard for a man not to do sometimes too much of that which he concludeth necessary for him to practice. Men should consider that, as there would be no false dice if there were no true ones, so if dissembling is gown universal, it ceaseth to be foul play, having an implied allowance by the general practice. He that was so often forced to dissemble in his own defense might the better have the privilege sometimes to be the aggressor and to deal with men at their own weapon.

Subject are apt to be as arbitrary in their censure as the most assuming kings can be in their power. If there might be matter for objections, there is not less reason for excuses; the defects laid to his charge are such as may claim indulgence from mankind.

Should nobody throw a stone at his faults but those who are free from them, there would be but a slender shower.

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<sup>1</sup> made harsh or cruel

<sup>2</sup> Charles II of England spent the years from 1649 to 1660 in exile after his father, King Charles I, was executed. He was brought back to the throne by the Restoration of 1660/.

What private man will throw stones at him because he loved? Or what prince because he dissembled? ...

The truth is, the calling of a king, with all its glittering, hath such an unreasonable weight upon it that they may rather expect to be lamented than to be envied for being set upon a pinnacle, where they are exposed to censure if they do not do more to answer men's expectations that corrupted nature will allow.

It is but justice therefore to this Prince to give all due softenings to the less shining parts of his life; to offer flowers and leaves to hide, instead of using aggravations to expose, them.

Let his royal ashes then lie soft upon him, and cover him from harsh and unkind censures; which though they should not be unjust, can never clear themselves being indecent.

## 1994 Question 2

In *The March of Folly*, historian Barbara Tuchman writes:

Wooden-headedness, the source of self-deception, is a factor that plays a remarkably large role in government. It consists in assessing a situation in terms of preconceived fixed notions while ignoring or rejecting any contrary signs. It is acting according to wish while not allowing oneself to be deflected by the facts.

Some people would claim that what Tuchman calls wooden-headedness plays a remarkably large role in all organizations and, indeed, in all human affairs.

Write a carefully reasoned persuasive essay that defends, challenges, or qualifies this idea about the prevalence of wooden-headedness in human actions and decisions. Use evidence from your reading and/or observation to develop your position.

### 1994 Question 3

The following paragraphs open Joan Didion's essay "Los Angeles Notebook.": Read them carefully. Then write an essay in which you characterize Didion's view of the Santa Ana winds and analyze how Didion conveys this view. Your analysis might consider such stylistic elements as diction, imagery, syntax, structure, tone, and selection of detail.

There is something uneasy in the Los Angeles air this afternoon, some unnatural stillness, some tension. What it means is that tonight a Santa Ana will begin to blow, a hot wind from the northeast whining down through the Cajon and San Gorgonio Passes, blowing up sandstorms out along Route 66, drying the hills and the nerves to the flash point. For a few days now we will see smoke back in the canyons, and hear sirens in the night. I have neither heard nor read that a Santa Ana is due, but I know it, and almost everyone I have seen today know it too. We know it because we feel it. The baby frets. The maid sulks. I rekindle a waning argument with the telephone company, then cut my losses and lie down, given over to whatever it is in the air. To live with the Santa Ana is to accept, consciously or unconsciously, a deeply mechanistic view of human behavior.

I recall being told, when I first moved to Los Angeles and was living on a isolated beach, that the Indians would throw themselves into the sea when the bad wind blew. I could see why. The Pacific turned ominously glossy during a Santa Ana period, and one woke in the night troubled not only the peacocks screaming in the olive trees but by the eerie absence of surf. The heat was surreal. The sky had a yellow cast, the kind of light sometimes called "earthquake weather." My only neighbor would not come out of her house for days, and there were no lights at night, and her husband roamed the place with a machete. One day he would tell me that he had heard a trespasser, the next a rattlesnake.

"On nights like that," Raymond Chandler once wrote about the Santa Ana, "every booze party ends in a fight. Meek little wives feel the edge of the carving knife and study their husbands' necks. Anything can happen." That was the kind of wind it was. I did not know then that there was any basis for the effect it had on all of us, but it turns out to be another of those cases in which science bears out fold wisdom. The Santa Ana, which is named for one of the canyons it rushes through, is a *foehn* wind, like the *foehn* of Austria and Switzerland and the *khamsin* of Israel. There are a number of persistence malevolent winds, perhaps the best known of which are the mistral of France and the Mediterranean sirocco, but a *foehn* wind has distinct characteristics: it occurs on the leeward slope of a mountain range and, although the air begins as a cold mass, it is warmed as it comes down the mountain and appears finally as a hot dry wind. Whenever and wherever a foehn blows, doctors hear about headaches and nausea and allergies, about "nervousness" and "depression." In Los Angeles some teachers do not attempt to conduct formal classes during a Santa Ana, because the children become unmanageable. In Switzerland the suicide rate goes up during the foehn, and in the courts of some Swiss cantons the wind is considered a mitigating circumstance for crime. Surgeons are said to watch the wind, because the blood does not clot normally during a foehn. A few years ago an Israeli physicist discovered that not only during such winds, for the ten or twelve hours that precede them, the air carries an unusually high ratio of positive to negative ions. No one seems to know exactly why that should be; some talk about friction and others suggest solar disturbances. In any case the

positive ions are there, and what an excess of positive ions does, in the simplest terms, is make people unhappy. One cannot get much more mechanistic than that.

(1968)

## 1995 Question 1

John Ruskin, the English critic of art and society, wrote the following in 1860. Read the passage. Then write a carefully reasoned essay evaluating Ruskin's argument for giving precedence to the soldier rather than the merchant or manufacturer.

I have already alluded to the difference hitherto existing between regiments of men associated for the purposes of violence, and for purposes of manufacturer; in that the former appear capable of self-sacrifice—the latter, not; which singular fact is the real reason of the general lowness of estimate in which the profession of commerce is held, as compared with that of arms. Philosophically, it does not, at first sight, appear reasonable (many writers have endeavoured to prove it unreasonable) that a peaceful and rational person, whose trade is buying and selling should be held in less honour than an impeachable and often irrational person, whose trade is slaying. Nevertheless, the consent of mankind has always, in spite of the philosophers, given precedence to the soldier.

And this is right.

For the soldier's trade, verily and essentially, is not slaying, but being slain. This, without well knowing its own meaning, the world honours it for. A bravo's<sup>1</sup> trade is slaying; but the world has never respected bravos more than merchants: the reason it honours the soldier is, because he holds his life at the service of the State. Reckless he may be—fond of pleasure or of adventure—all kinds of bye-motives and mean impulses may have determined the choice of his profession, and may affect (to all appearance exclusively) his daily conduct in it; but our estimate of him is based on this ultimate fact—of which we are well assured—that, put him in a fortress breach, with all the pleasures of the world behind him, and only death and duty in front of him, he will keep his face to the front; and he knows that this choice may be put to him at any moment—and has beforehand taken his part—virtually takes part continually—does in reality, die daily.

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<sup>1</sup> a desperado or hired assassin

## 1995 Question 2

The following piece, “The Company Man,” is by the columnist Ellen Goodman. Read the passage and then write an essay analyzing the rhetorical techniques Goodman uses to convey her attitude toward Phil.

He worked himself to death, finally and precisely, at 3:00 a.m. Sunday morning.

The obituary didn't say that, of course. It was said that he died of a coronary thrombosis—I think that was it—but everyone among his friends and acquaintances knew it instantly. He was a perfect Type A, a workaholic, a classic, they said to each other and shook their heads—and thought for five or ten minutes about the way the lived.

This man who worked himself to death finally and precisely at 3:00 a.m. Sunday morning—on his day off—was fifty-one years old and a vice-president. He was, however, on of three who might conceivably—if the president died or retired soon enough—have moved to the top spot. Phil knew that.

He worked six days a week, five of them until eight or nine at night, during a time when his own company had begun the four-day week for everyone but the executives. He worked like the Important People. He had no outside “extracurricular interests,” unless, of course, you think about a monthly golf game that way. To Phil, it was work. He always ate egg salad sandwiches at his desk. He was, of course, overweight, by 20 or 25 pounds. He thought it was okay, though, because he didn't smoke.

On Saturdays, Phil wore a sports jacket to the office instead of a suit because it was the weekend.

He had a lot of people working for him, maybe sixty, and most of them liked him most of the time. Three of them will be seriously considered for his job. The obituary didn't mention that.

But it did list his "survivors" quite accurately. He is survived by his wife, Helen, forty-eight years old, a good woman of no particular marketable skills, who worked in an office before marrying and mothering. She had, according to her daughter, given up trying to compete with his work years ago, when the children were small. A company friend said, “I know how much you will miss him.” And she answered, “I already have.”

“Missing him all these years,” she must have given up part of herself which had cared too much for the man. She would be “well taken care of.”

His "dearly beloved" eldest of the "dearly beloved" children is a hard-working executive in a manufacturing firm down South. In the day and half before the funeral, he went around the neighborhood researching his father, asking the neighbors what he was like. They were embarrassed.

His second child is a girl, who is twenty-four and newly married. She lives near her mother and they are close, but whenever she was alone with her father, in a car driving somewhere, they had nothing to say to each other.

The youngest is twenty, a boy, a high-school graduate who has spent the last couple of years, like a lot of his friends, doing enough odd jobs to stay in grass and food. He was the one who tried to grab at his father and tried to mean enough to him to keep the man at home. He was his father's favorite. Over the last two years, Phil stayed up nights worrying about the boy.

The boy once said, "My father and I only board here."

At the funeral, the sixty-year-old company president told the forty eight-year-old widow that the fifty-one-year-old deceased had meant much to the company and would be missed and would be hard to replace. The widow didn't look him in the eye. She was afraid he would read her bitterness and, after all, she would need him to straighten out the finances — the stock options and all that.

Phil was overweight and nervous and worked too hard. If he wasn't at the office, he was worried about it. Phil was a Type A, a heart-attack natural. You could have picked him out in a minute from a lineup.

So when he finally worked himself to death, at precisely 3:00 A.M. Sunday morning, no one was really surprised.

By 5:00 P.M. the afternoon of the funeral, the company president had begun, discreetly of course, with care and taste, to make inquiries about his replacement. One of three men. He asked around: "Who's been working the hardest?"

### 1995 Question 3

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.

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 also, your future.

## 1996 Question 1

In the following passage from a letter to her daughter, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689-1762) discusses the education of her granddaughter.

Read the passage carefully. Then write an essay in which you analyze how Lady Mary uses rhetorical strategies and stylistic devices to convey her views about the role knowledge played in the lives of women of her time.

True knowledge consists in knowing things, not words. I would wish her no further a linguist than to enable her to read books in their originals, that are often corrupted, and always injured, by translations. Two hours' application every morning will bring this about much sooner than you can imagine, and she will have leisure enough besides to run over the English poetry, which is a more important part of a woman's education than it is generally supposed. Many a young damsel has been ruined by a fine copy of verses, which she would have laughed at if she had known it had been stolen from Mr. Waller. I remember, when I was a girl, I saved one of my companions from destruction, who communicated to me an epistle she was quite charmed with. As she had a natural good taste, she observed the lines were not so smooth as Prior's or Pope's, but had more thought and spirit than any of theirs. She was wonderfully delighted with such a demonstration of her lover's sense and passion, and not a little pleased with her own charms, that had force enough to inspire such elegancies. In the midst of this triumph I showed her that they were taken from Randolph's poems, and the unfortunate transcriber was dismissed with the scorn he deserved. To say truth, the poor plagiary was very unlucky to fall into my hands; that author being no longer in fashion, would have escaped any one of less universal reading than myself. You should encourage your daughter to talk over with you what she reads; and, as you are very capable of distinguishing, take care she does not mistake pert folly for wit and humour, or rhyme for poetry, which are the common errors of young people, and have a train of ill consequences. The second caution to be given her (and which is most absolutely necessary) is to conceal whatever learning she attains with solicitude . . . ; the parade of it can only serve to draw on her the envy, and consequently the most inveterate hatred, of all he and she fools, which will certainly be at least three parts in four of all her acquaintance. The use of knowledge in our sex, besides the amusement of solitude, is to moderate the passions, and learn to be contented with a small expense, which are the certain effects of a studious life; and it may be preferable even to that fame which men have engrossed to themselves, and will not suffer us to share.

## 1996 Question 2

Read carefully the following autobiographical narrative by Gary Soto. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze some of the ways in which Soto recreates the experience of his guilty six-year-old self. You might consider such devices as contrast, repetition, pacing, diction, and imagery.

I knew enough about hell to stop me from stealing. I was holy in almost every bone. Some days I recognized the shadows of angels flopping on the backyard grass, and other days I heard faraway messages in the plumbing that howled underneath the house when I crawled there looking for something to do.

But boredom made me sin. Once, at the German Market, I stood before a rack of pies, my sweet tooth gleaming and the juice of guilt wetting my underarms. I gazed at the nine kinds of pie, pecan and apple being my favorites, although cherry looked good, and my dear, fat-faced chocolate was always a good bet. I nearly wept trying to decide which to steal and, forgetting the flowery dust priests give off, the shadow of angels and the proximity of God howling in the plumbing underneath the house, sneaked a pie behind my coffee lid frisbee and walked to the door, grinning to the bald grocer whose forehead shone with a window of light.

"No one saw," I muttered to myself, the pie like a discus in my hand, and hurried across the street, where I sat on someone's lawn. The sun wavered between the branches of a yellowish sycamore. A squirrel nailed itself high on the trunk, where it forked into two large bark-scabbed limbs. Just as I was going to work my cleanest finger into the pie, a neighbor came out to the porch for his mail. He looked at me, and I got up and headed for home. I raced on skinny legs to my block, but slowed to a quick walk when I couldn't wait any longer. I held the pie to my nose and breathed in its sweetness. I licked some of the crust and closed my eyes as I took a small bite.

In my front yard, I leaned against a car fender and panicked about stealing the apple pie. I knew an apple got Eve in deep trouble with snakes because sister Marie had shown us a film about Adam and Eve being cast into the desert, and what scared me more than falling from grace was being thirsty for the rest of my life. But even that didn't stop me from clawing a chunk from the pie tin and pushing it into the cavern of my mouth. The slop was sweet and gold-colored in the afternoon sun. I laid more pieces on my tongue, wet finger-dripping pieces, until I was finished and felt like crying because it was about the best thing I had ever tasted. I realized right there and then, in my sixth year, in my tiny body of two hundred bones and three or four sins, that the best things in life came stolen. I wiped my sticky fingers on the grass and rolled my tongue over the corners of my mouth. A burp perfumed the air.

I felt bad not sharing with Cross-Eyed Johnny, a neighbor kid. He stood over my shoulder and asked, "Can I have some?" Crust fell from my mouth, and my teeth were bathed with the jam-like filling. Tears blurred my eyes as I remember the grocer's forehead. I remembered the other pies on the rack, the warm air of the fan above the door and the car that honked as I crossed the street without looking.

"Get away," I had answered Cross-Eyed Johnny. He watched my fingers greedily push big

chunks of pie down my throat. he swallowed and said in a whisper, "Your hands are dirty," then returned home to climb his roof and sit watching me eat the pie by myself. After a while, he jumped off and hobbled away because the fall had hurt him.

I sat on the curb. The pie tin glared at me and rolled away when the wind picked up. My face was sticky with guilt. A car honked, and the driver knew. Mrs. Hancock stood on her lawn, hands on hip, and she knew. My mom, peeling a mountain of potatoes at the Redi-Spud factory knew. I got to my feet, stomach taut, mouth tired of chewing, and flung my Frisbee across the street, its shadow like the shadow of an angel feeling bad deeds. I retrieved it, jogging slowly. I flung it again until I was bored and thirsty.

I returned home to drink water and help my sister glue bottle caps onto cardboard, a project for summer school. But the bottle caps bored me, and the water soon filled me up more than the pie. with the kitchen stifling with heat and lunatic flies, I decided to crawl underneath our house and lie in the cool shadows listening to the howling sound of plumbing. was it God? Was it Father, speaking from death, or Uncle with his last shiny dime? I listened, ear pressed to a cold pipe, and heard a howl like the sea. I lay until I was cold and then crawled back to the light, rising from one knee, then another , to dust off my pants and squint in the harsh light. I looked and saw the glare of a pie tin on a hot day. I knew sin was what you took and didn't give back.

from *A Summer Life*, 1990

### 1996 Question 3

In his book *Money and Class in America*, Lewis Lapham makes the following observations about attitudes toward wealth in the United States. Drawing on your own knowledge and experience, write a carefully reasoned essay defending, challenging, or qualifying Lapham's view of "the American faith in money."

I think it fair to say that the current ardor of the American faith in money easily surpasses the degrees of intensity achieved by other societies in other times and places. Money means so many things to us—spiritual as well as temporal—that we are at a loss to know how to hold its majesty at bay....

Henry Adams in his autobiography remarks that although the Americans weren't much good as materialists they had been so "deflected by the pursuit of money" that they could turn "in no other direction." The national distrust of the contemplative temperament arises less from an innate Philistinism than from a suspicion of anything that cannot be counted,, stuffed, framed or mounted over the fireplace in the den. Men remain free to rise or fall in the world, and if they fail it must be because they willed it so. The visible signs of wealth testify to an inward state of grace, and with- out at least some of these talismans posted in one's house or on one's person an American loses all hope of demonstrating to himself the theorem of his happiness. Seeing is believing, and if an American success is to count for any- thing in the world it must be clothed in the raiment of property. As often as not it isn't the money itself that means anything; it is the use of money as the currency of the soul.

Against the faith in money, other men in other times and places have raised up countervailing faiths in family, honor, religion, intellect and social class. new merchant princes of medieval Europe would have looked upon the American devotion as sterile cupidity; the ancient Greeks would have regarded it as a form of insanity. Even now, in the last decades of a century commonly defined as American, a good many societies both in Europe and Asia manage to balance the desire for wealth against the other claims of the human spirit. An Englishman of modest means can remain more or less content with the distinction of an aristocratic name or the consolation of a flourishing garden; the Germans show to obscure university professors the deference accorded by Americans only to celebrity; the Soviets honor the holding of political power; in France a rich man is a rich man, to whom everybody grants the substantial powers that his riches command but to whom nobody grants the respect due to a member of the National Academy. But in the United States a rich man is perceived as being necessarily both good and wise, which is an absurdity that would be seen as such not only by a Frenchman but also by a Russian. Not that the Americans are greedier than the French, or less intellectual than the Germans, or more venal than the Russians, but to what other tribunal can an anxious and supposedly egalitarian people submit their definitions of the good, the true and the beautiful if not to the judgment of the bottom line?

(1987)

## 1997 Question 1

Read the following passage from Meena Alexander's autobiography, *Fault Lines* (1993). Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how Alexander uses language to explore and represent her fractured identity.

The plate glass window that protected me inside the place of delicate teas and sharply flavored asparagus, tuna fish sandwiches with heapings of scallions and mint, glinted bad oddly in my face. I caught my two eyes crooked, face disfigured.

What would it mean for one such as I to pick up a mirror and try to see her face in it?

Night after night, I asked myself the question. What might it mean to look at myself straight, see myself? How many different gazes would that need? And what to do with the crookedness of flesh, thrown back at the eyes? The more I thought about it, the less sense any of it seemed to make. My voice splintered in my ears into a cacophony: whispering cadences, shorts, moans, the quick delight of bodily pleasure, all rising up as if the condition of being fractured had freed the selves jammed into my skin, multiple beings locked into the journey of one body.

And what of all the cities and small towns and village I live in since birth: Allahabad, Tiruvella, Kozencheri, Pune, Delhi, Hyderabad, all within the boundaries of India; Khartoum in the Sudan; Nottingham in Britain; and now this island of Manhattan? How should I spell out these fragments of broken geography?

And what of all the languages compacted in my brain: Malayalam, my mother tongue, the language of first speech; Hindi which I learnt as a child; Arabic from my years in the Sudan—odd shards survive; French; English? How would I map all this in a book of days? After all, my life did not fall into the narratives I had been taught to honor, tales that closed back on themselves, as a snake might, swallowing its own ending: birth, an appropriate education—not too much, not too little—an arranged marriage to a man of suitable birth and background, somewhere within the boundaries of India.

Sometimes in my fantasies, the kind that hit you in broad daylight, riding the subway, I have imagined being a dutiful wife, my life perfect as a bud opening in the coon monsoon winds, then blossoming on its stalk on the gulmohar tree, petals dark red, falling onto the rich soil outside my mother's house in Tiruvella. In the inner life coiled within me, I have sometimes longed to be a bud on a tree, blooming in due season, the tree trunk well rooted in a sweet, perpetual place. But everything I think of is filled with ghosts, even this longing. This imagined past—what never was—is a choke hold.

I sit here writing, for I know that time does not come fluid and whole into my trembling hands. All that is here comes piecemeal, though sometimes the joints have fallen into place miraculously, as if the heavens had opened and mango trees fruited in the rough asphalt of upper Broadway.

But questions persist: Where did I come from? How did I become who I am? How shall I start to write myself, configure my “I” as Other, image this life I lead, here, now, in America? What could I ever be but a mass of faults, a fault mass?

I looked it up the Oxford English Dictionary. It went like this:

Fault: Deficiency, lack, want *of* something ... Default, failing, neglect. A defect, imperfection, blameable quality or feature: a. in moral character, b. in physical or intellectual constitution, appearance, structure or workmanship. From geology or mining: a dislocation or break the strata or vein. Examples: “Every coal field is ... split asunder, and broken into tiny fragments by faults.” (Anstead, *Ancient World*, 1847) “There are several kinds of fault e.g., faults of Dislocation; of Denudation; of Upheaval, etc.” (Greasley, *Glossary of Terms in Coal Mining*, 1883) “Fragments of the adjoining rocks mashed and jumbled together, in some cases bound into a solid mass called fault-stuff or fault-rock.” (Green, *Physical Geography*, 1877)

That’s it, I thought. That’s all I am, a woman cracked by multiple migrations. Uprooted so many times she can connect with nothing. Her words are all askew. And so I tormented myself on summer nights, and in the chill wind of autumn, tossing back and forth, worrying myself sick. Till my mind slipped back to my mother—amma—she who gave birth to me, and to amma’s amma, my veliammechi, grandmother Junju, drawing me back into the darkness of the Tiuvella house with its cool bedrooms and coiled verandas: the shelter of memory.

## 1997 Question 2

The following passage comes from the 1845 autobiography *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*. Read the passage carefully, noting such elements as syntax, figurative language, and selection of detail. Then write an essay in which you identify the stylistic elements in the third paragraph that distinguish it from the rest of the passage and show how this difference reinforces Douglass' rhetorical purpose in the passage as a whole.

If at any one time of my life more than another, I was made to drink the bitterest dregs of slavery, that time was during the first six months of my stay with Mr. [Edward] Covey. We were worked in all weathers. It was never too hot or too cold; it could never rain, blow, hail, or snow too hard for us to work in the field. Work, work, work was scarcely more the order of the day than of the night. The longest days were too short for him, and the shortest nights too long for him. I was somewhat unmanageable when I first went there, but a few months of this discipline tamed me. Mr. Covey succeeded in breaking me. I was broken in body, soul, and spirit. My natural elasticity was crushed, my intellect languished, the disposition to read departed, the cheerful spark that lingered about my eye died; the dark night of slavery closed in upon me; and behold a man transformed into a brute!

Our house stood within a few rods of the Chesapeake Bay, whose broad bosom was ever white with sails from every quarter of the habitable globe. Those beautiful vessels, robed in purest white, so delightful to the eye of freemen, were to me so many shrouded ghosts, to terrify and torment me with thoughts of my wretched condition. I have often, in the deep stillness of a summer's Sabbath, stood all alone upon the lofty banks of that noble bay, and traced, with saddened heart and tearful eye, the countless number of sails moving off to the mighty ocean. The sight of these always affected me powerfully. My thoughts would compel utterance; and there, with no audience but the Almighty, I would pour out my soul's complaint, in my rude way, with an apostrophe to the moving multitude of ships:—

"You are loosed from your moorings, and are free; I am fast in my chains, and am a slave! You move merrily before the gentle gale, and I sadly before the bloody whip! You are freedom's swift-winged angels, that fly round the world; I am confined in bands of iron!. O that I were free!. O, that I were on one of your gallant decks, and under your protecting wing!. Alas! betwixt me and you, the turbid waters roll. Go on, go on. O that I could also go! Could I but swim!. If I could fly!. O, why was I born a man, of whom to make a brute!. The glad ship is gone; she hides in the dim distance. I am left in the hottest hell of unending slavery. O God, save me!. God, deliver me!. Let me be free! Is there any God? Why am I a slave? I will run away. I will not stand it. Get caught, or get clear, I'll try it. I had as well die with ague as the fever. I have only one life to lose. I had as well be killed running as die standing. Only think of it; one hundred miles straight north, and I am free!. Try it? Yes!. God helping me, I will. It cannot be that I shall live and die a slave. I will take to the water. This very bay shall yet bear me into freedom. The steam-boats steered in a north-east course from North Point. I will do the same; and when I get to the head of the bay, I will turn my canoe adrift, and walk straight through Delaware into Pennsylvania. When I get there, I shall not be required to

have a pass; I can travel without being disturbed. Let but the first opportunity offer, and, come what will, I am off. Meanwhile, I will try to bear up under the yoke. I am not the only slave in the world. Why should I fret? I can bear as much as any of them. Besides, I am but a boy, and all boys are bound to some one. It may be that my misery in slavery will only increase my happiness when I get free. There is a better day coming."

Thus I used to think, and thus I used to speak to myself; goaded almost to madness at one moment, and at the next reconciling myself to my wretched lot.

### 1997 Question 3

In the following passage, the contemporary social critic Neil Postman contrasts George Orwell's vision of the future, as expressed in the novel *1984* (written in 1948), with that of Aldous Huxley in the novel *Brave New World* (1936). Read the passage, considering Postman's assertion that Huxley's vision is more relevant today than is Orwell's. Then, using your own critical understanding of contemporary society as evidence, write a carefully argued essay that agrees or disagrees with Postman's assertion.

We were keeping our eye on 1984. When the year came and the prophecy didn't, thoughtful Americans sang softly in praise of themselves. The roots of liberal democracy had held. Wherever else the terror had happened, we, at least, had not been visited by Orwellian nightmares.

"But we had forgotten that alongside Orwell's dark vision, there was another—slightly older, slightly less well known, equally chilling: Aldous Huxley's [Brave New World](#). Contrary to common belief even among the educated, Huxley and Orwell did not prophesy the same thing. Orwell warns us that we will be overcome by an externally imposed oppression. But in Huxley's vision, no Big Brother is required to deprive people of their autonomy, maturity and history. As he saw it, people will come to love their oppression, to adore the technologies that undo their capacities to think.

What Orwell feared were those who would ban books. What Huxley feared was that there would be no reason to ban a book, for there would be no one who wanted to read one. Orwell feared those who would deprive us of information. Huxley feared those who would give us so much that we would be reduced to passivity and egoism. Orwell feared that the truth would be concealed from us. Huxley feared the truth would be drowned in a sea of irrelevance. Orwell feared we would become a captive culture. Huxley feared we would become a trivial culture, preoccupied with some equivalent of the feelies, the orgy porgy, and the centrifugal bumblepuppy. As Huxley remarked in *Brave New World Revisited*, the civil libertarians and rationalists who are ever on the alert to oppose tyranny "failed to take into account man's almost infinite appetite for distractions." In *1984*, Huxley added, people are controlled by inflicting pain. In *Brave New World*, they are controlled by inflicting pleasure. In short, Orwell feared that what we hate will ruin us. Huxley feared that what we love will ruin us.

## 1998 Question 1

Carefully read the following letter from Charles Lamb to the English romantic poet William Wordsworth. Then, paying particular attention to the tone of Lamb's letter, write an essay in which you analyze the technique Lamb uses to decline Wordsworth's invitation.

January 30, 1801

I ought before this to have reply'd to your very kind invitation into Cumberland. With you and your Sister I could gang anywhere. But I am afraid whether I shall ever be able to afford so desperate a Journey. Separate from the pleasure of your company, I don't much care if I never see a mountain in my life. I have passed all my days in London, until I have formed as many and intense local attachments, as any of your Mountaineers can have done with dead nature. The Lighted shops of the Strand and Fleet Street, the unnumerable trades, tradesmen and customers, coaches, wagons, playhouses, all the bustle and wickedness round about Covent Garden, the very women of the Town, the Watchmen, drunken scenes, rattles;—life awake, if you awake, at all hours of the night, the impossibility of being dull in Fleet Street, the crowds, the very dirt & mud, the Sun shining upon houses and pavements, the print shops, the old Book stalls, parsons cheap'ning books, coffee houses, steams of soup from kitchens, the pantomimes, London itself a pantomime and a masquerade, all these things work themselves into my mind and feed me without a power of satiating me. The wonder of these sights impells me into night walks about the crowded streets, and I often shed tears in the motley Strand from fulness of joy at so much Life.—All these emotions must be strange to you. So are your rural emotions to me. But consider, what must I have been doing all my life, not to have lent great portions of my heart with usury to such scenes?—

My attachments are all local, purely local.—I have no passion (or have had none since I was in love, and then it was the spurious engendering of poetry & books) to groves and vallies.—The rooms where I was born, the furniture which has been before my eyes all my life, a book case which has followed me about (like a faithful dog, only exceeding him in knowledge) wherever I have moved, old tables, streets, squares, when I have sunned myself, my old school,—these are my mistresses. Have I not enough, without your mountains? I do not envy you, I should pity you, did I not know, that the Mind will make friends of any thing. Your sun & moon and skies and hills & lakes affect me no more, or scarcely come to me in more venerable characters, than as a gilded room with tapestry and tapers, where I might live with handsome visible objects.—

## 1998 Question 2

The following passage, from Henry James's novel *The Portrait of a Lady*, is a conversation between two characters, Madame Merle and Isabel Archer. Read the passage attentively, noting the conflicting views about what constitutes the self. Then write a carefully reasoned, persuasive essay that demonstrates which of these conceptions of the self has greater validity. Use specific evidence from your observation, experience, or reading to develop your position.

“When you've lived as long as I you'll see that every human being has his shell and that you must take the shell into account. By the shell I mean the whole envelope of circumstances. There's no such thing as an isolated man or woman; we're each made up of some cluster of appurtenances. What shall we call our 'self'? Where does it begin? Where does it end? It overflows into everything that belongs to us—and then it flows back again. I know a large part of myself is in the clothes I choose to wear. I've a great respect for things! One's self—for other people—is one's expression of one's self; and one's house, one's furniture, one's garments, the books one reads, the company one keeps—these things are all expressive.”

This was very metaphysical; not more so, however than several observations Madame Merle had already made. Isabel was fond of metaphysics, but was unable to accompany her friend into this bold analysis of human personality. “I don't agree with you. I think it is just the other way. I don't know whether I succeed in expressing myself, but I know that nothing else expresses me. Nothing that belongs to me is any measure of me; everything's on the contrary a limit, a barrier, and a perfectly arbitrary one. Certainly the clothes which, as you say, I choose to wear, don't express me; and heaven forbid they should!”

“You dress very well,” Madame Merle lightly interposed.

“Possibly; but I don't care to be judged by that. My clothes may express the dressmaker, but they don't express me. To begin with it's not my own choice that I wear them; they're imposed upon me by society.”

“Should you prefer to go without them?” Madame Merle enquired in a tone which virtually terminated the discussion.

### 1998 Question 3

The following letters constitute the complete correspondence between an executive of the Coca-Cola company and a representative of Grove Press. Read the letters carefully. Then write an essay analyzing the rhetorical strategies each writer uses to achieve his purpose and explaining which letter offers the more persuasive case.

March 25, 1970

Mr. R. W. Seaver  
Executive Vice President  
Grove Press, Inc.  
214 Mercer Street  
New York, New York 10012

Dear Mr. Seaver:

Several people have called to our attention your advertisement for *Diary of a Harlem Schoolteacher* by Jim Haskins, which appeared in the *New York Times* March 3, 1970. The theme of the ad is "This book is like a weapon...it's the real thing."

Since our company has made use of "It's the Real Thing" to advertise Coca-Cola long prior to the publication of the book, we are writing to ask you to stop using this theme or slogan in connection with the book.

We believe you will agree that it is undesirable for our companies to make simultaneous use of "the real thing" in connection with our respective products. There will always be likelihood of confusion as to the source or sponsorship of the goods, and the use by such prominent companies would dilute the distinctiveness of the trade slogan and diminish its effectiveness and value as an advertising and merchandising tool.

"It's the Real Thing" was first used in advertising for Coca-Cola over twenty-seven years ago to refer to our product. We first used it in print advertising in 1942 and extended it to outdoor advertising, including painted walls--some of which are still displayed throughout the country. The line has appeared in advertising for Coca-Cola during succeeding years. For example, in 1954 we used "There's this about Coke--You Can't Beat the "Real Thing" in national advertising. We resumed national use of "It's the Real Thing" in the summer of 1969 and it is our main thrust for 1970.

Please excuse my writing so fully, but I wanted to explain why we feel it necessary to ask you and your associates to use another line to advertise Mr. Haskin's book.

We appreciate your cooperation and your assurance that you will discontinue the use of "It's the real thing."

Sincerely,  
Ira C. Herbert

March 31, 1970

Mr. Ira C Herbert  
Coca-Cola USA  
P.O. Drawer 1734  
Atlanta, Georgia 30301

Dear Mr. Herbert:

Thank you for your letter of March 25th, which has just reached me, doubtless because of the mail strike.

We note with sympathy your feeling that you have a proprietary interest in the phrase "It's the real thing," and I can fully understand that the public might be confused by our use of the expression, and mistake a book by a Harlem schoolteacher for a six-pack of Coca-Cola. Accordingly, we have instructed all our salesmen to notify bookstores that whenever a customer comes in and asks for a copy of Diary of a Harlem Schoolteacher they should request the sales personnel to make sure that what the customer wants is the book, rather than a Coke. This, we think, should protect your interest and in no way harm ours.

We would certainly not want to dilute the distinctiveness of your trade slogan nor diminish its effectiveness as an advertising and merchandising tool, but it did not occur to us that since the slogan is so closely identified with your product, those who read our ad may well tend to go out and buy a Coke rather than our book. We have discussed this problem in an executive committee meeting, and by a vote of seven to six decided that, even if this were the case, we would be happy to give Coke the residual benefit of our advertising.

Problems not dissimilar to the ones you raise in your letter have occurred to us in the past. You may recall that we published Games People Play which became one of the biggest nonfiction best-sellers of all time, and spawned conscious imitations (Games Children Play, Games Psychiatrists Play, Games Ministers Play, etc.). I am sure you will agree that this posed a far more direct and deadly threat to both the author and ourselves than our sue of "It's the real thing." Further, Games People Play has become part of our language, and one sees it constantly in advertising, as a newspaper headline, etc. The same is true of another book which we published six or seven years ago, One Hundred Dollar Misunderstanding.

Given our strong sentiments concerning the First Amendment, we will defend to the death your right to use "It's the real thing" in any advertising you care to. We would hope you would do the same for us, especially when no one here in our advertising agency, I am sorry to say, realized that you owned the phrase. We were merely quoting in our ads Peter S. Prescott's review of Diary of a Harlem Schoolteacher in Look which begins "Diary of a Harlem Schoolteacher is the real thing, a short, spare, honest book which will, I suspect, be read a generation hence as a classic...."

With all best wishes,

Sincerely yours,  
Richard Seaver

## 1999 Question 1

Read the following two passages about Florida's Okefenokee Swamp carefully. Then write an essay in which you analyze how the distinctive style of each passage reveals the purpose of its writer.

### Passage 1

**Okefenokee Swamp**, primitive swamp and wildlife refuge in southeastern Georgia and northern Florida, is a shallow, saucer-shaped depression approximately 25 mi wide and 40 mi long and covers an area of more than 600 sq mi. Lying about 50 mi inland from the Atlantic Coast, the swamp is bounded on the east by the low, sandy Trail Ridge, which prevents direct drainage into the Atlantic. The swamp is partially drained southward into the Atlantic by the Suwannee and St. Mary's rivers. The Okefenokee Swamp includes low, sandy ridges, wet grassy savannas, small islands (called hummocks) surrounded by marshes, and extensive "prairies," or dark water areas covered by undergrowth and trees. Vegetation is dense in the swamp and includes giant tupelo and bald cypress trees festooned with Spanish moss, brush, and vines: where sandy soil is above the water, pine trees predominate. Meandering channels of open water form an intricate maze. Exotic flowers, among them floating hearts, lilies, and rare orchids, abound. The swamp is populated with diverse and abundant wildlife, with about 175 species of birds and at least 40 species of mammals, which include raccoons, black bear, white-tail deer, bobcats, fox, and otter. Alligators are also present.

(1988)

### Passage 2

Vast and primeval, unfathomable, unconquerable, bastion of cottonmouth, rattlesnake and leech, mother of vegetation, father of mosquito, soul of silt, the Okefenokee is the swamp archetypal, the swamp of legend, racial memory, of Hollywood. It gives birth to two rivers, the St. Mary's and the Suwannee, fanning out over 430,000 leaf-choked acres, every last one as sodden as a sponge. Four hundred and thirty thousand acres of stinging, biting and boring insects, of maiden cane and gum and cypress, of palmetto, slash pine and peat, of muck, mud, slime and ooze. Things fester here, things cook down, decompose, deliquesce. The swamp is home to two hundred and twenty-five species of birds, forty-three of mammals, fifty-eight of reptiles, thirty-two of amphibians and thirty-four of fish—all variously equipped with beaks, talons, claws, teeth, stingers and fangs—not to mention the seething galaxies of gnats and deerflies and no-see-ums, the ticks, mites, hookworms and paramecia that exist only to compound the misery of life. There are alligators here, bears, puma, bobcats and bowfin, there are cooters and snappers, opossum, coon and gar. They feed on one another, in the sludge and muck and on the floating mats of peat they bury eggs, they scratch and stink and sniff at themselves, caterwauling and screeching through every minute of every day and night till the place reverberates like some hellish zoo.

(1990)

## 1999 Question 2

The passage below (on this page and on the following page) is from the opening of an essay, “On Seeing England for the First Time,” by Jamaica Kincaid. Kincaid grew up on the Caribbean island of Antigua before it became independent from England in 1981. Read the entire passage carefully. Then write an essay analyzing the rhetorical strategies Kincaid employs to convey her attitude toward England.

When I saw England for the first time, I was a child in school sitting at a desk. The England I was looking at was laid out on a map gently, beautifully, delicately, a very special jewel; it lay on a bed of sky blue—the background of the map—its yellow form mysterious, because though it looked like a leg of mutton, it could not really look like anything so familiar as a leg of mutton because it was England—with shadings of pink and green, unlike any shadings of pink and green I had seen before, squiggly veins of red running in every direction. England was a special jewel all right, and only special people got to wear it. The people who got to wear England were English people. They wore it well and they wore it everywhere: in jungles, in deserts, on plains, on top of the highest mountains, on all the oceans, on all the seas, in places where they were not welcome, in places they should not have been. When my teacher had pinned this map up on the blackboard, she said, “This is England”—and she said it with authority, seriousness, and adoration, and we all sat up. It was as if she had said, “This is Jerusalem, the place you will go to when you die but only if you have been good.” We understood then—we were meant to understand then—that England was to be our source of myth and the source from which we got our sense of reality, our sense of what was meaningful, our sense of what was meaningless—and much about our own lives and much about the very idea of us headed that last list.

At the time I was a child sitting at my desk seeing England for the first time, I was already very familiar with the greatness of it. Each morning before I left for school, I ate a breakfast of half a grapefruit, an egg, bread and butter and a slice of cheese, and a cup of cocoa; or half a grapefruit, a bowl of oat porridge, bread and butter and a slice of cheese, and a cup of cocoa. The can of cocoa was often left on the table in front of me. It had written on it the name of the company, the year the company was established, and the words “Made in England.” Those words, “Made in England,” were written on the box the oats came in too. They would also have been written on the box the shoes I was wearing came in; a bolt of gray linen cloth lying on the shelf of a store from which my mother had bought three yards to make the uniform that I was wearing had written along its edge those three words. The shoes I wore were made in England; so were my socks and cotton undergarments and the satin ribbons I wore tied at the end of two plaits of my hair. My father, who might have sat next to me at breakfast, was a carpenter and cabinet maker. The shoes he wore to work would have been made in England, as were his khaki shirt and trousers, his underpants and undershirt, his socks and brown felt hat. Felt was not the proper material from which a hat that was expected to provide shade from the hot still should be made, but no, father must have seen and admired a picture of an Englishman wearing such a hat in England, and this picture that he saw must have been so compelling that it caused him to wear the wrong hat for a hot climate most of his long life. And this hat—a brown felt hat—became so central to his character that it was the first thing he put

on in the morning as he stepped out of bed and the last thing he took off before he stepped back into bed at night. As we sat at breakfast a car might go by. The car, a Hillman or a Zephyr, was made in England. The very idea of the meal itself, breakfast, and its substantial quality and quantity was an idea from England; we somehow knew that in England they began the day with this meal called breakfast and a proper breakfast was a big breakfast. No one I knew liked eating so much food so early in the day; it made us feel sleepy, tired. But this breakfast business was Made in England like almost everything else that surrounded us, the exceptions being the sea, the sky, and the air we breathed.

At the time I saw this map—seeing England for the first time—I did not say to myself, “Ah, so that’s what it looks like,” because there was no longing in me to put a shape to those three words that ran through every part of my life, no matter how small; for me to have had such a longing would have meant that I lived in a certain atmosphere, and atmosphere in which those three words were felt as a burden. But I did not live in such an atmosphere. My father’s brown felt hat would develop a hole in its crown, the lining would separate from the hat itself, and six weeks before he thought that he could be seen wearing it—he was a very vain man—he would order another hat from England. And my mother taught me to hear my food in the English way: the knife in the right hand, the fork in the left, my elbows held still close to my side, the food carefully balanced on my fork and then brought up to my mouth. When I had finally mastered it, I overheard her saying to a friend, “Did you see how nicely she can eat?” But I knew then that I enjoyed my food more when I ate it with my bare hands, and I continued to do so when she wasn’t looking. And when my teacher showed us the map, she asked us to study it carefully, because no test we would ever take would be complete without this statement: “Draw a map of England.”

I did not know then that the statement “Draw a map of England” was something far worse than a declaration of war, for in fact a flat-out declaration of war would have put me on alert, and again in fact, there was no need for war—I had long ago been conquered. I did not know then that this statement was part of a process that would result in my erasure, not my physical erasure, but my erasure all the same. I did not know then that this statement was meant to make me feel in awe and small whenever I heard the word “England”: awe at its existence, small because I was not from it. I did not know very much of anything then—certainly not what a blessing it was that I was unable to draw a map of England correctly.

### 1999 Question 3

In the following excerpt from *Antigone*, by the classical Greek playwright Sophocles, the wise Teiresias 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.

## 2000 Question 1

In the following passage from her autobiography, *One Writer's Beginnings*, Eudora Welty recalls early experiences of reading and books that had later impact on her craft as a writer of fiction. In a well-organized essay, analyze how Welty's language conveys the intensity and value of these experiences.

I never knew anyone who'd grown up in Jackson without being afraid of Mrs. Calloway, our librarian. She ran the Library absolutely by herself, from the desk where she sat with her back to the books and facing the stairs, her dragon eye on the front door, where who knew what kind of person might come in from the public? SILENCE in big black letters was on signs tacked up everywhere. She herself spoke in her normally commanding voice; every word could be heard all over the Library above a steady seething sound coming from her electric fan; it was the only fan in the Library and stood on her desk, turned directly onto her streaming face.

As you came in from the bright outside, if you were a girl, she sent her strong eyes down the stairway to test you; if she could see through your skirt she sent you straight back home: you could just put on another petticoat if you wanted a book that badly from the public library. I will willing; I would do anything to read.

My mother was not afraid of Mrs. Calloway. She wished me to have my own library card to check out books for myself. She took me in to introduce me and I saw I had met a witch. "Eudora is nine years old and has my permission to read any book she wants from the shelves, children or adult," Mother said. "With the exception of Elsie Dinsmore,"<sup>1</sup> she added. Later she explained to me that she'd made this rule because Elsie the heroine, being made by her father to practice too long and hard at the piano, fainted and fell off the piano stool. "You're too impressionable, dear," she told me. "You'd read that and the very first thing you'd do, you'd fall off the piano stool." "Impressionable" was a new word. I never her it yet without the image that comes with of falling straight off the piano stool.

Mrs. Calloway made her own rules about books. You could not take back a book to the Library on the same day you'd taken it out; it made no difference to her that you'd read every word in it and needed another to start. You could take out two books at a time and two only; this applied as long as you were a child and also for the rest of your life, to my mother as severely as to me. So two by two, I read library books as fast as I could go, rushing them home in the basket of my bicycle. From the minute I reached our house, I started to read. Every book I seized on, from *Bunny Brown and His Sister Sue at Camp Rest-a-While* to *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, stood for the devouring wish to read being instantly granted. I knew this was bliss, knew it at the time. Taste isn't

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<sup>1</sup> Elsie Dinsmore was the long-suffering heroine in a popular series of children's books written by Martha Finley and first published in 1868.

nearly so important; it comes in its own time. I wanted to read immediately. The only fear was that of books coming to an end.

My mother was very sharing of this feeling of insatiability. Now, I think of her as reading so much of the time while doing something else. In my mind's eye *The Origin of Species* is lying on the shelf in the pantry under a light dusting of flour—my mother was a bread maker; she'd pick it up, sit by the kitchen window and find her place, with one eye on the oven. I remember her picking up *The Man in Lower Ten* while my hair got dry enough to unroll from a load of kid curlers trying to make me like my idol, Mary Pickford. A generation later, when my brother Walter was away in the Navy and his two little girls often spent the day in our house, I remember Mother reading the part of the Wolf in a game of "Little Red Riding Hood" with the children. She'd just look up at the right time, long enough to answer—in character—"The better to eat you with, my dear," and go back to her place in the war news.

(1983)

## 2000 Question 2

In the following passage, George Orwell uses the example of Gandhi to make an argument for choosing human imperfection over “sainthood.” As you read Orwell’s remarks, note his choice of details and his tone. Then write an essay in which you analyze how Orwell criticizes Gandhi’s position and assess how effectively Orwell develops his own position.

Close friendships, Gandhi<sup>1</sup> says, are dangerous, because 'friends react on one another' and through loyalty to a friend one can be led into wrong-doing. This is unquestionably true. Moreover, if one is to love God, or to love humanity as a whole, one cannot give one's preference to any individual person. This again is true, and it marks the point at which the humanistic and the religious attitudes cease to be reconcilable. To an ordinary human being, love means nothing if it does not mean loving some people more than others. The autobiography<sup>2</sup> leaves it uncertain whether Gandhi behaved in an inconsiderate way to his wife and children, but at any rate it makes clear that on three occasions he was willing to let his wife or a child die rather than administer the animal food prescribed by the doctor. It is true that the threatened death never actually occurred, and also that Gandhi—with, one gathers, a good deal of moral pressure in the opposite direction—always gave the patient the choice of staying alive at the price of committing a sin: still, if the decision had been solely his own, he would have forbidden the animal food, whatever the risks might be. There must, he says, be some limit to what we will do in order to remain alive, and the limit is well on this side of chicken broth. This attitude is perhaps a noble one, but, in the sense which—I think—most people would give to the word, it is inhuman. The essence of being human is that one does not seek perfection, that one *is* sometimes willing to commit sins for the sake of loyalty, that one does not push asceticism to the point where it makes friendly intercourse impossible, and that one is prepared in the end to be defeated and broken up by life, which is the inevitable price of fastening one's love upon other human individuals. No doubt alcohol, tobacco and so forth are things that a saint must avoid, but sainthood is also a thing that human beings must avoid.

(1949)

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<sup>1</sup> Mohandas Gandhi (1869 – 1948). Political and spiritual leader in India.

<sup>2</sup> Gandhi's autobiography, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*

**2000 Question 3**

Through tatter'd clothes small vices do appear;  
Robes and furr'd gowns hide all. Plate sin with gold,  
And the strong lance of justice hurtless breaks;  
Arm it in rags, a pigmy's straw does piece it.

Shakespeare, *King Lear*

The lines above are from a speech by King Lear. Write a carefully reasoned essay in which you briefly paraphrase Lear's statement and then defend, challenge, or qualify his view of the relationship between wealth and justice. Support your argument with specific references to your reading, observation, or experience.

## 2001 Question 1

The letter below was written in 1866 by the English novelist Marian Evans Lewes (who used the pen name George Eliot) in response to a letter from an American woman, Melusina Fay Peirce.

Read the letter carefully. Write an essay in which you analyze the rhetorical strategies Lewes uses to establish her position about the development of a writer.

My dear Madam,

I do not usually answer letters unless they demand an answer, finding the days too short for much correspondence; but I am so deeply touched by your words of tenderness and by the details you tell me about yourself, that I cannot keep total silence toward you.

My consciousness is not of the triumphant kind your generous joy on my behalf leads you to imagine. Exultation is a dream before achievement, and rarely comes after. What comes after, is rather the sense that the work has been produced within one, like offspring, developing and growing by some force of which one's own life has only served as a vehicle, and that what is left of oneself is only a poor husk. Besides, the vision of something that life might be and that one's own ignorance and incompleteness have hindered it from being, presses more and more as time advances. The only problem for us, the only hope, is to try and unite the utmost activity with the utmost resignation. Does this seem melancholy? I think it is less melancholy than any sort of self-flattery.

I want to tell you not to fancy yourself old because you are thirty, or to regret that you have not yet written anything. It is a misfortune to many that they begin to write when they are young and give out all that is genuine and peculiar in them when it can be not better than trashy, unripe fruit. There is nothing more dreary than the life of a writer who has early exhausted himself. I enter into those young struggles of yours to get knowledge, into the longing you feel to do something more than domestic duties while yet you are held fast by womanly necessities for neatness and household perfection as well as by the lack of bodily strength. Something of all that I have gone through myself. I have never known perfect health, and I have known what it was to have close ties making me feel the wants of others as my own and to have very little money by which those wants could be met. Before that, I was too proud and ambitious to write: I did not believe that I could do anything fine, and I did not choose to do anything of that mediocre sort which I despised when it was done by others. I began, however, by a sort of writing which had no great glory belonging to it, but which I felt certain I could do faithfully and well. This resolve to work at which did not gratify my ambition, and to care only that I worked faithfully. Was equivalent to the old phrase—"using the means of grace." Not long after that, I wrote a fiction which has been thought a great deal of—but the satisfaction I have got out of it has not been exactly that of ambition. When we are young we say, "I should be proud if I could do that." Have done it, one finds oneself the reverse of proud.

I will say no more about myself except that you must not imagine my position to be at all like Romola's.<sup>1</sup> I have the best of husbands, the most sympathetic of companions; indeed, I have more than my share of love in a world where so many are pining for it. Mr. Lewes,<sup>2</sup> who cares supremely for science, is interested in what you say of your husband's labours, and he is so delighted when anything good or pretty comes to me that I think he is more grateful to you than I am for your generous, affectionate words. Yet I too am not insensible, but shall remain always

Yours in grateful memory  
M. E. Lewes.

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<sup>1</sup> Romola: the isolated, unhappily married main character in one of Eliot's novels

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Lewes: Eliot's common-law husband, a prominent philosopher

## 2001 Question 2

Carefully read the following passage from “owls” by Mary Oliver. Then write an essay in which you analyze her Oliver’s style conveys the complexity of her response to nature.

When the great horned [owl] is in the trees its razor-tipped toes rasp the limb, flakes of bark fall through the air and land on my shoulders while I look up at it and listen to the heavy, crisps, breathy snapping of its hooked beak. The screech owl I can imagine on my wrist, also the delicate saw-whet that flies like big soft moth down by Great Pond. And I can imagine sitting quietly before that luminous wanderer the snowy old, and learning, from the white glean of its feathers, something about the Arctic. But the great horned I can’t imagine in any such proximity—if one of those touched me, it would be to the center of my life, and I must fall. They are the pure wild hunters of our world. They are swift and merciless upon the backs of rabbits, mice, voles, snakes, even skunks, even cats sitting in dusky yards, thinking peaceful thought. I have found the headless bodies of rabbits and bluejays, and known it was the great horned old that did them in, taking the head only, for the owl has an insatiable craving for the taste of brains. I have walked with prudent caution down paths at twilight when the dogs were puppies. I know this bird. If it could, it would eat the whole world.

In the night, when the owl is less than exquisitely swift and perfect, the scream of the rabbit is terrible. But the scream of the owl, which is not of pain and hopelessness, and the fear of being plucked out of the world, but of the sheer rollicking glory of the deathbringer, is more terrible still. When I hear it resounding through the woods, and then the five black pellets of its song dropping like stones into the air, I know I am standing at the edge of the mystery, in which terror is naturally and abundantly part of life, part of even the most becalmed, intelligent, sunny life—as, for example, my own. The world where the owl is endlessly hungry and endlessly on the hunt is the world in which I live too. There is only one world.

Sometimes, while I have stood listening to the owl’s auguring song drifting through the trees, when it is ten degrees about nothing and life for any small creature is hard enough without *that*, I have found myself thinking of summer fields. Fields full of flowers—poppies or lupines. Or, here, fields where the roses hook into the dunes, and their increase is manyfold. All summer they are red and pink and white tents of softness and nectar, which wafts and hangs everywhere—a sweetness so palpable and excessive that, before it, I’m struck. I’m taken, I’m conquered, I’m washed into it, as though it was a river, full of dreaming and idleness—I drop to the sand, I can’t move; I am restless no more; I am replete, supine, finished, filled to the last edges with an immobilizing happiness. And is this not also terrible? Is this not also frightening?

Are the roses not also—even as the owl is—excessive? Each flower is small and lovely, but in their sheer and silent abundance the roses become an immutable force, as though the work of the wild roses was to make sure that all of us who come wandering over the sand may be, for a while, struck to the heart and saturated with a simple happiness. Let the mind be teased by such *stretches* of the imagination, but such balance. Now I am cringing at the very sound of the owl’s dark wings opening over my head—not long ago I could do nothing but lounge on the sand and stare into the cities of the roses.

### 2001 Question 3

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 American 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<sup>1</sup> 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, which 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 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

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<sup>1</sup> Krupp: a German weapons manufacturing firm that was instrumental in the Nazi rearmament effort of the 1930's.

## 2002 Question 1

In his Second Inaugural Address, given one month before the end of the Civil War, United States President Abraham Lincoln surprised his audience—which expected a lengthy speech on politics, slavery, and states’ rights—with a short speech in which he contemplated the effects of the Civil War and offered his vision for the future of the nation. Read the address carefully. Then write an essay in which you analyze the rhetorical strategies President Lincoln used to achieve his purpose. Support your analysis with specific references to the text.

At this second appearing to take the oath of the Presidential office there is less occasion for an extended address than there was at the first. Then a statement somewhat in detail of a course to be pursued seemed fitting and proper. Now, at the expiration of four years, during which public declarations have been constantly called forth on every point and phase of the great contest which still absorbs the attention and engrosses the energies of the nation, little that is new could be presented. The progress of our arms, upon which all else chiefly depends, is as well known to the public as to myself, and it is, I trust, reasonably satisfactory and encouraging to all. With high hope for the future, no prediction in regard to it is ventured.

On the occasion corresponding to this four years ago all thoughts were anxiously directed to an impending civil war. All dreaded it, all sought to avert it. While the inaugural address was being delivered from this place, devoted altogether to *saving* the Union without war, urgent agents were in the city seeking to *destroy* it without war—seeking to dissolve the Union and divide effects by negotiation. Both parties deprecated war, but one of them would *make* war rather than let the nation survive, and the other would *accept* war rather than let it perish, and the war came.

One-eighth of the whole population were colored slaves, not distributed generally over the Union, but localized in the southern part of it. These slaves constituted a peculiar and powerful interest. All knew that this interest was somehow the cause of the war. To strengthen, perpetuate, and extend this interest was the object for which the insurgents would rend the Union even by war, while the Government claimed no right to do more than to restrict the territorial enlargement of it. Neither party expected for the war the magnitude or the duration which it has already attained. Neither anticipated that the *cause* of the conflict might cease with or even before the conflict itself should cease. Each looked for an easier triumph, and a result less fundamental and astounding. Both read the same Bible and pray to the same God, and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces, but let us judge not, that we be not judged. The prayers of both could not be answered. That of neither has been answered fully. The Almighty has His own purposes. “Woe unto the world because of offenses; for it must needs be that offenses come, but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh.” If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offenses which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South this terrible war as the woe due to those by whom the offense came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a living God always ascribe to Him? Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall

be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said “the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.”

With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.

(March 4, 1865)

## 2002 Question 2

In the following excerpt from her memoirs, Virginia Woolf (1882 – 1941) reflects upon her childhood summers spent in a seaside village in Cornwall, England. Read the passage carefully. Then write an essay in which you analyze how Woolf uses language to convey the lasting significance of these moments from her past.

Better than these walks, a great announced perhaps once a fortnight, was an afternoon sailing. We would hire a lugger;<sup>1</sup> the fisherman went with us. But once Thoby was allowed to steer us home. “Show them you can bring her in, my boy,” father said, with his usual trust and pride in Thoby. And Thoby took the fisherman’s place; and steered; flushed and with his blue eyes very blue, and his mouth set, he sat there, bringing us round the point, into harbour, without letting the sail flag. One day the sea was full of pale jelly fish, like lamps, with streaming hair; but they stung you if you touched them. Sometimes lines would be handed us; baited by gobbets cut from fish; and the line thrilled in one’s fingers as the boat tossed and shot through the water; and then—how can I convey the excitement?—there was a little leaping tug; then another; up one hauled; up through the water at length came the white twisting fish; and was slapped on the floor. There it lay flapping this way and that in an inch or two of water.

Once, after we had hung about, tacking, and hauling in gunard after gunard, dab after dab,<sup>2</sup> father said to me: “Next time if you are going to fish I shan’t come; I don’t like to see fish caught but you can go if you like.” It was a perfect lesson. It was not a rebuke; not a forbidding; simply a statement of his own feeling, about which I could think and decide for myself. Though my passion for the thrill and the tug had been perhaps the most acute I then knew, his words slowly extinguished it; leaving no grudge, I ceased to wish to catch fish. But from the memory of my own passion I am still able to construct an idea of the sporting passion. It is one of those invaluable seeds, from which, since it is impossible to have every experience fully, one can grow something that represents other people’s experiences. Often one has to make do with seeds; the germs of what might have been, had one’s life been different. I pigeonhole ‘fishing’ thus with other momentary glimpses; like those rapid glances, for example, that I cast into basements when I walk in London streets.

—*Moments of Being*

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<sup>1</sup> A lugger is a type of small fishing boat.

<sup>2</sup> Gunards and dabs are varieties of fish.

### 2002 Question 3

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: 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 badmouth 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)

### 2003 Question 1

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

One does not necessarily have to cluck 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.

## 2003 Question 2

Alfred M. Green delivered the following speech in Philadelphia in April 1861, the first month of the Civil War. African Americans were not yet permitted to join the Union army, but Green felt that they should strive to be admitted to the ranks and prepare to enlist. Read the speech carefully. Then write an essay in which you analyze the methods that Green uses to persuade his fellow African Americans to join the Union forces.

The time has arrived in the history of the great Republic when we may again give evidence to the world of the bravery and patriotism of a race in whose hearts burns the love of country, of freedom, and of civil and religious toleration. It is these grand principles than enable men, however proscribed, when possessed of true patriotism, to say, "My country, right or wrong, I love thee still!"

It is true, the brave deeds of our fathers, sworn and subscribed to by the immortal Washington of the Revolution of 1776 and by Jackson and others in the War of 1812, have failed to bring us into recognition as citizens, enjoying those rights so dearly bought by those noble and patriotic sires.

It is true that our injuries in many respects are great: fugitive-slave laws, Dred Scott<sup>1</sup> decisions, indictments for treason, and long and dreary months of imprisonment. The result of the most unfair rules of judicial investigation as been the pay we have received for our sollicitude, sympathy and aid in the dangers and difficulties of those "days that tried men's souls."

Our duty, brethren, is not to cavil over past grievances. Let us not be derelict to duty in the time of need. While we remember the past and regret that our present position in the country is not such as to create within us that burning zeal and enthusiasm for the field of battle which inspires other men in the full enjoyment of every civil and religious emolument, yet let us endeavor to hope for the future and improve the present auspicious moment for creating anew our claims upon the justice and honor of the Republic; and, above all, let not the honor and glory achieved by our father be blasted or sullied by a want of true heroism among their sons.

Let us, then, take up the sword, trusting in God, who will defend the right, remembering that these are other days than those of yore; that the world today is on the side of freedom and universal political equality; that the war cry of the howling leaders of Secession and treason is: "Let us drive back the advance guard of civil and religious freedom; let us have more slave territory; let us build stronger the tyrant system of slavery in the great American Republic." Remember, too, that your very presence among the troops of the North would inspire your oppressed brethren in the South with zeal for the overthrow of the tyrant system, and confidence in the armies of the living God—the God of truth, justice and equality to all men.

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<sup>1</sup> A slave who sued in federal court for his and his family's freedom

### 2003 Question 3

The two passages below, one by John James Audubon and the other by Annie Dillard, describe large flocks of birds in flight. Read the passages carefully. Then write an essay in which you compare and contrast how each writer describes the birds and conveys their effect of the writer as observer.

#### Passage 1

In the autumn of 1813, I left my house at Henderson, on the banks of the Ohio, on my way to Louisville. In passing over the Barrens a few miles beyond Hardensburgh, I observed the Pigeons flying from north-east to south-west, in greater numbers than I thought I had ever seen them before, and feeling an inclination to count the flocks that might pass within the reach of my eye in one hour, I dismounted, seated myself on an eminence, and began to mark with my pencil, making a dot for every flock that passed. In a short time finding the task which I had undertaken impracticable, as the birds poured in in countless multitudes, I rose, and counting the dots then put down, found that 163 had been made in twenty-one minutes. I travelled on, and still met more the farther I proceeded. The air was literally filled with Pigeons; the light of noon-day was obscured as by an eclipse, the dung fell in spots, not unlike melting flakes of snow; and the continued buzz of wings had a tendency to lull my senses to repose.

Whilst waiting for dinner at YOUNG'S inn at the confluence of Salt river with the Ohio, I saw, at my leisure, immense legions still going by, with a front reaching far beyond the Ohio on the west, and the beech-wood forests directly on the east of me. Not a single bird alighted; for not a nut or acorn was that year to be seen in the neighborhood. They consequently flew so high, that different trials to reach them with a capital rifle proved ineffectual; nor did the reports disturb them in the least. I cannot describe to you the extreme beauty of their aerial evolutions, when a Hawk chanced to press upon the rear of a flock. At once, like a torrent, and with a noise like thunder, they rushed into a compact mass, pressing upon each other towards the center. In these almost solid masses, they darted forward in undulating and angular lines, descended and swept close over the earth with inconceivable velocity, mounted perpendicularly so as to resemble a vast column, and, when high, were seen wheeling and twisting within their continued lines, which then resembled the coils of a gigantic serpent.

John James Audubon  
*Ornithological Biographies*, 1831 – 1839

## Passage 2

Out of the dimming sky a speck appeared, then another, and another. It was the starlings going to roost. They gathered deep in the distance, flock sifting into flock and strayed toward me, transparent, and whirling, like smoke. They seemed to unravel as they flew, lengthening in curves, like a loosened skein. I didn't move; they flew directly over my head for half an hour. The flight extended like a fluttering banner, an unfurled oriflamme, in either direction as far as I could see. Each individual bird bobbed and knitted up and down in the flight at apparent random, for no known reason except that's how starlings fly, yet all remained perfectly spaced. The flocks each tapered at either end from a rounded middle, like an eye. Over my head I heard a sound of beaten air, like a million shook rugs, a muffled whuff. Into the woods they sifted without shifting a twig, right through the crown of trees, intricate and rushing, like wind.

After half an hour, the last of the stragglers had vanished into the trees. I stood with difficulty bashed by the unexpectedness of this beauty, and my spread lungs roared. My eyes pricked from the effort of trying to trace a feather dot's passage through a weft of limbs. Could tiny birds be sifting through me right now, birds winging through the gaps between my cells, touching nothing, but quickening in my tissues, fleet?

Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*,

1974

## 2004 Question 1

The passage below is an excerpt from a letter written by the eighteenth-century author Lord Chesterfield to his young son, who was traveling far from home. Read the passage carefully. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how the rhetorical strategies that Chesterfield uses reveal his own values.

Bath, October 4, 1746

Dear Boy,

Though I employ so much of my time in writing to you, I confess I have often my doubts whether it is to any purpose. I know how unwelcome advice generally is; I know that those who want it most, like it and follow it least; and I know, too, that the advice of parents, more particularly, is ascribed to the moroseness, the imperiousness, or the garrulity of old age. But then, on the other hand, I flatter myself, that as your own reason, though too young as yet to suggest much to you of itself, is however, strong enough to enable you, both to judge of, and receive plain truths: I flatter myself (I say) that your own reason, young as it is, must tell you, that I can have no interest but yours in the advice I give you; and that consequently, you will at least weigh and consider it well: in which case, some of it will, I hope, have its effect. Do not think that I mean to dictate as a parent; I only mean to advise as a friend, and an indulgent one too: and do not apprehend that I mean to check your pleasures; of which, on the contrary, I only desire to be the guide, not the censor. Let my experience supply your want of it, and clear your way, in the progress of your youth, of those thorns and briars, which scratched and disfigured me in the course of mine. I do not, therefore, so much as hint to you, how absolutely dependent you are upon me; that you neither have, nor can have a shilling in the world but from me; and that, as I have no womanish weakness for your person, your merit must, and will, be the only measure of my kindness. I say, I do not hint these things to you, because I am convinced that you will act right, upon more noble and generous principles: I mean, for the sake of doing right, and out of affection and gratitude to me.

I have so often recommended to you attention and application to whatever you learn, that I do not mention them now as duties; but I point them out to you as conducive, nay, absolutely necessary to your pleasures; for can there be a greater pleasure than to be universally allowed to excel those of one's own age and manner of life? And, consequently, can there be anything more mortifying than to be excelled by them? In this latter case, your shame and regret must be greater than anybody's, because everybody knows the uncommon care which has been taken of your education, and the opportunities you have had of knowing more than others of your age. I do not confine the application which I recommend, singly to the view and emulation of excelling others (though that is a very sensible pleasure and a very warrantable pride); but I mean likewise to excel in the thing itself; for, in my mind, one may as well not know a thing at all, as know it but imperfectly. To know a little of anything, gives neither satisfaction nor credit; but often brings disgrace or ridicule.

**2004 Question 2**

Contemporary life is marked by controversy. Choose a controversial local, nation, or global issue with which you are familiar. Then, using appropriate evidence, write an essay that carefully considers the opposing positions on this controversy and proposes a solution or compromise.

### 2004 Question 3

Read carefully the following passage from the introduction to *Days of Happiness* by Richard Rodriguez. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how Rodriguez uses contrasts between Mexico and California to explore and convey his conflicting feelings.

For the last several years, I have told friends that I was writing a book about California and Mexico. That was not saying enough. I've been writing a book about comedy and tragedy. In my mind, in my life, Mexico plays the tragic part; California plays the role of America's wild child.

Or was I writing a book about competing theologies?

Josiah Royce, another Californian, another writer, became a famous Harvard professor. Royce wrote about California with disappointment from the distance of New England. Royce believed that some epic opportunity had been given California—the chance to reconcile the culture of the Catholic south and the Protestant north. California had the chance to heal the sixteenth-century tear of Europe. But the opportunity was lost. That Catholic—the Mexican—impulse was pushed back, vanquished by comedy; a Protestant conquest.

I use the word “comedy” here as the Greeks used it, with utmost seriousness, to suggest a world where youth is not a fruitless metaphor; where it is possible to start anew; where it is possible to escape the rivalries of the Capulets and the McCoys; where young women can disprove the adages of grandmothers.

The comedy of California was constructed on a Protestant faith in individualism. Whereas Mexico knew tragedy.

My Mexican father, as his father before him, believed that old men know more than young men; that life will break your heart; that death finally is the vantage point from which a life must be seen.

I think now that Mexico has been the happier place for being a country of tragedy. Tragic cultures serve up better food than optimistic cultures; tragic cultures have sweeter children, more opulent funerals. In tragic cultures, one does not bear the solitary burden of optimism. California is such a sad place, really—a state where children run away from parents, a state of pale beer, and young old women, and divorced husbands living alone in condos. But at a time when Californians are driven to despair by the relentless optimism of their state, I can only marvel at the comic achievement of the place, California's defiance of history, the defiance of ancestors.

Something hopeful was created in California through the century of its Protestant settlement. People believed that in California they could begin new lives. New generations of immigrants continue to arrive in California, not a few of them from Mexico, hoping to cash in comedy.

It is still possible in California to change your name, change your sex, get a divorce, become a movie star. My Mexican parents live in a California house with four telephones, three televisions, and several empty bedrooms.

How could California ever reconcile comedy and tragedy? How could there not have been a divorce between Mexico and California in the nineteenth century?

The youth of my life was defined by Protestant optimism. Now that I am middle-aged, I include more toward the Mexican point of view, though some part of me continues to resist the cynical conclusions of Mexico.

Which leaves me with at least a literary problem to start with: How shall I present the argument between comedy and tragedy, this tension that describes my life? Shall I start with the boy's chapter, then move toward more "mature" tragic conclusions? But that would underplay the boy's wisdom. The middle-aged man would simply lord over the master.

No, I will present this life in reverse. After all, the journey my parents took from Mexico to America was a journey from an ancient culture to a youthful one—backward in time. In their path I similarly move, if only to honor their passage to California, and because I believe the best resolution to the debate between comedy and tragedy is irresolution, since both sides can claim wisdom.

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