

**ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION**  
**SECTION II**  
**Total time – 2 hours and 15 minutes**

**Question 1**

**Suggested reading and writing time – 55 minutes**

**It is suggested you spend 15 minutes reading the question, analyzing and evaluating the sources, and 40 minutes writing your response.**

**Note: You may begin writing your response before the reading period is over.**

(This question counts for one-third of the total essay section score)

Batman is a comic book character who has had many iterations on film. He is a classic character that directors keep coming back to showcase his story on the screen. He has a rabid fanbase of all different types of people and is one of the most recognizable characters in Western film. He will continue to be shown on the big screen, which means that directors often have to make important choices when it comes to making a new movie that centers around the “Dark Knight.”

Carefully read the following seven sources, including the introductory information for each source, and consider the different elements that go into making a great Batman movie. Then, synthesize material from at least three sources and incorporate it into a coherent, well-written argument in which you develop a position on the most important factors that a director should consider when deciding to produce a new Batman movie..

Your argument should be the focus of your essay. Use the sources to develop your argument and explain the reasoning for it. Avoid merely summarizing the sources. Indicate clearly which sources you are drawing from, whether through direct quotation, paraphrase, or summary. You may cite the sources as Source A, Source B, etc., or by using the descriptions in parentheses.

Source A (David)  
Source B (Miller)  
Source C (Baxter)  
Source D (Anders)  
Source E (Clegg)  
Source F (Ebert)  
Source G (infographic)

### Source A

David, Javier E. "No Joke: Comic Book Movies Aren't for Kids Anymore, and Studios Embrace It."  
CNBC.com. 21 May 2016.

Imagine this narrative of an upcoming R-rated movie: A homicidal maniac escapes captivity, kidnaps a high-ranking city official and subjects him to a litany of extreme degradation and torture. The story's protagonist races against the clock to rescue the victim — but not before someone close to both men suffers a grievous wound.

It may come as a surprise that the hero and villain in question are none other than Batman and The Joker. The synopsis describes the latest superhero movie — this one a cartoon video, no less — called "The Killing Joke" that's expected to be released in July. Based on an iconic graphic novel published by Warner Brothers' DC Comics in 1988, "The Killing Joke's" dark tone and decidedly adult content earned it a place in the pantheon of avant garde storylines. To date, many fans and experts consider it one of the best Dark Knight stories ever written.

"We're at a point now that we can choose to be as authentic to the source material," said Sam Register, president of Warner Brothers Animation, in a recent interview with CNBC. "'The Killing Joke'" had been on the slate for years, and the director felt it could be close to the source material. "We didn't go for rated-R but we knew that would be a possibility," he said. "We decided to embrace it."

The soon to be released video, whose R-rating is a first for a DC superhero endeavor, is part of a fabric of highly lucrative comic book films that are darker and more violent. However, what has become increasingly apparent is that fewer of them are suitable for children and young adults. Movies like the PG-13 rated "Batman v. Superman," which hauled in nearly \$900 million worldwide, and Marvel's "Deadpool" — the first R-rated film in the studio's cinematic universe and one that earned about \$762 million globally — were noteworthy for their intense action, vulgarity and bloodshed. The last decade has turned comic book movies into creative goldmines, as fanboys who came of age reading the source material flock to relive childhood memories on the big screen. Yet the somber tone and violence has more people questioning whether the entertainment should be more kid-friendly, because many fans were first exposed to characters like Batman, Superman and the X-Men as children.

"It's fair to say superheroes are still for anybody, but filmed entertainment is catching up with the comics and that's a good thing," said Register, who himself has young children and was once a top exec at Cartoon Network. "If there's an audience we should be reaching that likes that [children's] content, then we should be talking to them too." With the wide array of alternative forms of entertainment, including video games and Web-based platforms, "kids have a lot of stuff they can do ... other than reading comics," he added.

### Source B

Miller, David. "Sam Raimi is Perfect for Batman: Here's What His Movie Could Look Like." Screenrant.com. 19 March 2022.

Director Sam Raimi has expressed interest in making a *Batman* movie, which he'd be an excellent fit for, utilizing his expertise in horror and superhero films to great effect. Raimi's appreciation for superheroes and his experience directing horror films would make for a crowd-pleasing new iteration of the Dark Knight.

Batman and his mythos are unique within the superhero genre in that they're astoundingly malleable, with each new team of creators reimagining the character in their chosen medium. The *Batman* comics of the 50s and 60s were notably lighthearted, lacking the violence and dark subject matter that *Batman* stories became known for from the 70s to the present day. On film, *Batman* stories can be surreal as Tim Burton and Joel Schumacher's movies or as realistic and grounded as Christopher Nolan and Matt Reeves' franchises. As a lifelong comic fan, Sam Raimi's hypothetical version of Batman would likely have a lot in common with the 1960s series and the DCEU's Batman, drawing inspiration from the comics first and foremost. Sam Raimi's directorial style lends itself well to comic book films, and he'd likely take inspiration from the era of *Batman* comics that he grew up with.

Although *Batman* stories don't fall into the horror genre, the Dark Knight famously uses intimidation tactics against his enemies, often appearing as a supernatural being to Gotham City's criminal element. The Burton, Nolan, Snyder, and Reeves iterations of Batman demonstrated this trait excellently, but Sam Raimi's particular affinity for the horror genre makes him especially well-suited to making Batman appear terrifying. Additionally, many of Batman's enemies, particularly The Joker, are similarly frightening characters who could easily be at their most horrific in a Raimi-directed *Batman* movie. Sam Raimi's tendency to juxtapose horror with comedy makes him particularly well-suited to depicting Batman's greatest nemesis.

If Sam Raimi's *Spider-Man* movies are any indication, he excels at emphasizing the relatable and naturalistic sides of his characters, reminding viewers that no matter how high-concept his movies might be, their characters still feel real. Staying true to the spirit of the source material, Raimi treated Peter Parker's ordinary woes with the same importance as villains who threatened New York City. In a *Batman* movie, Raimi may use a similar approach to characterizing his iteration of Bruce Wayne. While Wayne would need to uphold an image of a bumbling billionaire, Raimi could also emphasize his relationships with key allies. In more recent comics, Bruce Wayne's various Robin and Batgirl sidekicks have grown to become known as the "Bat-Family," whose interactions with Batman could be a key component of Raimi's movie.

### Source C

Baxter, Joseph. "Michael Keaton Clashed with Joel Schumacher Over Batman's Darkness." Den of Geek. 4 Jan. 2022.

While *Batman Forever* has a contingent of fans, the film felt like a sequel to a different franchise; a notion driven home by its bombarded green aesthetics and, notably, the fact that Val Kilmer was in the starring role, replacing the departed Keaton. While the threequel—scripted by Akiva Goldsman, Lee Batchler and Janet Scott Batchler—retained the idea established in the Burton films of Bruce Wayne's crimefighting escapades being a dark, destructive manifestation of permanent childhood trauma from experiencing the murder of his parents, the dramatic element was overshadowed exponentially by Schumacher's ostentatious approach.

Schumacher's steadfast intent to go big left Keaton heading for the exit in spite of his apparent desire to keep playing the Caped Crusader. As he recalls of a specific conversation with the director, "I remember one of the things that I walked away going, 'Oh boy, I can't do this'. He [Schumacher] asked me, 'I don't understand why everything has to be so dark and everything so sad,' and I went, 'Wait a minute, do you know how this guy got to be Batman? Have you read... I mean, it's pretty simple.'"

With Schumacher apparently not even on board with the basic concept of Batman's story being dark and sad, his differences with Keaton appeared to be irreconcilable. Presenting a contrast by explaining the harmony of his collaboration with Burton, Keaton describes the central concept that seemingly eluded Schumacher, stating, "It was always Bruce Wayne, it was never Batman. [It's about] who does that? Who becomes that? What kind of person [does that]? You just read the Frank Miller stuff [specifically in DC's influential 1986 comic miniseries, *The Dark Knight Returns*] and talk to Tim, and you say, 'Well, this is what I'm seeing,' and we all know his history, all know what happened to him as a young boy. You got a lot of your work done for you right there, just work from that. And then I wanted to make him *my take* on him—there's all that and then *my take* on him. It coincided with what Tim would see."

### Source D

Anders, Charlie Jane. "Fun Batman or Dark Batman? Hell, Why Not Both?" *Wired Magazine*. 10 Feb. 2017.

EVERY FAN KNOWS Batman's origin story. No, not the one about Bruce Wayne's parents dying in Crime Alley. I'm talking about the tale of a gritty urban vigilante who was created in 1939, only to be mercilessly watered down into kid-friendly fluff, culminating in a hyperkitschy 1966 TV show. Ever since then, the story goes, brave creators have fought to make the Dark Knight dark again.

For years, everyone I knew believed in this legend. We all looked down on the Adam West version of Batman and sneered at the Joel Schumacher films. I came of age believing that Neal Adams, Frank Miller, and a handful of other comics creators had rescued Batman from a fate worse than death. And that Tim Burton and the team behind *Batman: The Animated Series* had helped to complete a much-needed rescue operation. Then Christopher Nolan came along more than a decade after them to once again save Batman from his worst enemy: silliness.

But I never could have predicted that I would be devouring a new comic based on that 1960s TV Batman, while eagerly awaiting *The Lego Batman Movie*, the candy-colored spinoff of *Lego Movie* hitting theaters today. Somehow, in the past decade I've learned that you don't have to choose between dark, brooding Batman, and goofy, self-mocking Batman. Gotham City is big enough for both. . . .

But I wasn't alone in having a preferred version of Batman—I remember many an intense conversation in comic-book shops about the merits of a Bruce Wayne who had a scowl to go with his cowl. "To many people, insisting on one single Batman as the pure version was very important," says Will Brooker, author of the Bat-studies books *Batman Unmasked* and *Hunting the Dark Knight*. Brooker believes that for some fans, trying to strip Batman of all campiness was an effort to remove the character's homosexual overtones. But the harder question to answer was why fans felt they had to choose, and why dark Batman often came out on top.

And increasingly, says Brooker, the best takes on Batman have been the ones that honor his entire history, from the wartime propaganda of the early 1940s to the zany sci-fi 1950s to the street detective of the 1970s. Grant Morrison's run of Batman comics managed to "encompass every often-contradictory Batman within the same figure," says Brooker. The result was a portrait of "one man, who just had an exceptionally busy and complicated life."

And the *Lego Batman Movie* version of Bruce Wayne, Brooker says, is actually pretty similar to Morrison's: In the movie, Lego Batman has been around for 78 years, living through all of the flesh-and-blood character's historical phases, from World War II serial through the 1966 TV show to the recent movies. Along the way, both the Adam West and the Ben Affleck versions of the character come in for some affectionate mockery.

That fun-poking is for the best. With fans and creators able to appreciate the multitudes Batman contains, they've also seen the "serious" Batman taken to some pretty wild extremes—and once Batman gets too dark and violent, the result is actually, well, kind of silly. "The Nolan movies and

*Batman v Superman* pushed the tough-guy Batman so far, they became melodramatic and almost comical," says Brooker. Affleck's portrayal in particular, he says, proves that "once you push masculinity to a certain degree, it actually, often, becomes camp." That may be exactly why the brick-based version of Bruce Wayne owes its comedic success to alpha-bats Affleck and Bale: Will Arnett is able to push his own portrayal a crucial tick past direct spoof until Lego Batman becomes likable in his vulnerability.

Still, there will always be something great about a Batman who's willing to go to some intense places, and there's no more fertile psychological ground than a rich man who's so traumatized by his parents' death that he creates a monstrous alter-ego to fight crime. That's a fascinating premise, and every now and then I read a Batman comic that sheds new light on the darkest version. But at the same time, it turns out that you can't properly appreciate grim-warrior Batman unless you also take the time to enjoy all the other, sunnier Bat-flavors.

### Source E

Clegg, River. "I AM EIGHT YEARS OLD AND WOULD LIKE A BATMAN MOVIE AIMED AT ME, PLEASE." *McSweeney's*. 11 Mar. 2022

*McSweeney's is a satirical magazine. This is a satirical take on the Batman phenomenon.*

I get it. Things are scary right now. The environment is collapsing, democracy is eroding, and the worst pandemic in a century shows no signs of ending. It makes sense that you want a couple hours of escapism with the latest Batman movie—a brief respite when you can catch up with the caped crusader in a dark, gritty film that caters to your adult tastes while rekindling your memories of childhood. But guess what? I am a child, and I would like a freaking Batman movie aimed at me, please. Yeah, I said “freak” just then, and I will receive a time-out for it. That’s how it works when you’re eight years old, but I don’t care. I’m just that mad. Did you know I’m not even allowed to see the new Batman? Mom happened to catch the trailer—with the Riddler suffocating people with duct tape or whatever—and said no way. You’re adults! Who pay taxes! Go watch *Phantom Thread* or something.

Not that I want to see any of these new Batman movies, mind you. You ruined them! Take *The Dark Knight*—which came out before I was even born, by the way. We watched it at Caleb’s sleepover last weekend, and the Joker, I kid you not, hangs a guy by the neck from a skyscraper. I’m in elementary school, for God’s sake!

Here’s a bit of trivia you might not know: Batman was originally a character from comic books, and comic books have traditionally been aimed at—you might want to sit down for this—children. You know, those little people you’d have three of by now if you were born in any era besides this one? They’d read them after school while their parents were busy doing grown-up stuff, like listening to jazz or drinking that brown juice that makes Dad happy and then sleepy.

And don’t give me any of this nonsense about how the latest Batman movies are better than the ’90s ones. Sure, Arnold Schwarzenegger made a ton of silly ice puns in *Batman & Robin*. Know who found them delightful? Me! Because I’m a human being who has yet to learn long division..

Hey, grown-ups, let’s do an experiment! Two-Face will next be played by Chris Pine. (I don’t know if that’s true, but if you had any emotional reaction to it whatsoever, you’re part of the problem.)

Maybe it’s something psychological. You’re always making silly jokes about “adulting” whenever you manage to do your laundry or send an email. It’s sad. Are the realities of aging so bleak that you still need Batman to be a character that’s aimed at you? It’s like you’re hopelessly trapped in the mindset of a kid, and you can’t even consider growing up and putting the obsessions of your childhood to rest, no matter how formative or scarring they were—

Oh, wait, I understand. Maybe you need Batman more than I do.

### Source F

Ebert, Roger. "Film Review of Batman and Robin." rogerebert.com. 20 Jun. 1997.

Because of my love for the world of Batman, I went to Joel Schumacher's "Batman & Robin" with real anticipation. I got thrilled all over again by the Gothic towers of Gotham City. I was reminded of how cool the Batmobile is (Batman has a new one), and I smiled at the fetishistic delight with which Batman and Robin put on their costumes, sheathing themselves in shiny black second skins and clamping on lots of belts, buckles, shields, hooks, pulleys, etc. (How much does that stuff weigh? How do they run while they're wearing it?) But my delight began to fade at about the 30-minute mark, when it became clear that this new movie, like its predecessors, was not *\*really\** going to explore the bizarre world of its heroes, but would settle down safely into a special effects extravaganza. "Batman & Robin," like the first three films in the series, is wonderful to look at, and has nothing authentic at its core.

Watching it, I realized why it makes absolutely no difference who plays Batman: There's nobody at home. The character is the ultimate Suit. Garb him in leather or rubber, and he's an action hero--Buzz Lightyear with a heartbeat. Put him in civilian clothes, and he's a nowhere man.

I've always suspected they cast movie Batmans by their chins, which is all you see when the Bat costume is being worn, and Clooney has the best chin yet. But like Michael Keaton and Val Kilmer, he brings nothing much to the role because there's nothing much there. Most of the time he seems stuck for conversation. I think the way to get him started would be to ask about his technological gimmicks. This is a guy who would rather read the Sharper Image catalog than Playboy.

The series has been driven by its villains. They make some good memories: Jack Nicholson as the Joker, Danny DeVito as the Penguin, Michelle Pfeiffer as Catwoman, Tommy Lee Jones as Two-Face, Jim Carrey as the Riddler. In "Batman & Robin" we get Arnold Schwarzenegger as Mr. Freeze, a man who can survive only by keeping his body at zero degrees (Celsius? Fahrenheit? absolute?), and Uma Thurman as Poison Ivy, a botanist who turns into an evil plant and wages war against animals. They earn their places in the pantheon of Batman's enemies, but the screenplay doesn't do them justice: It meanders, and some of the big action sequences are so elaborate, they're hard to follow.

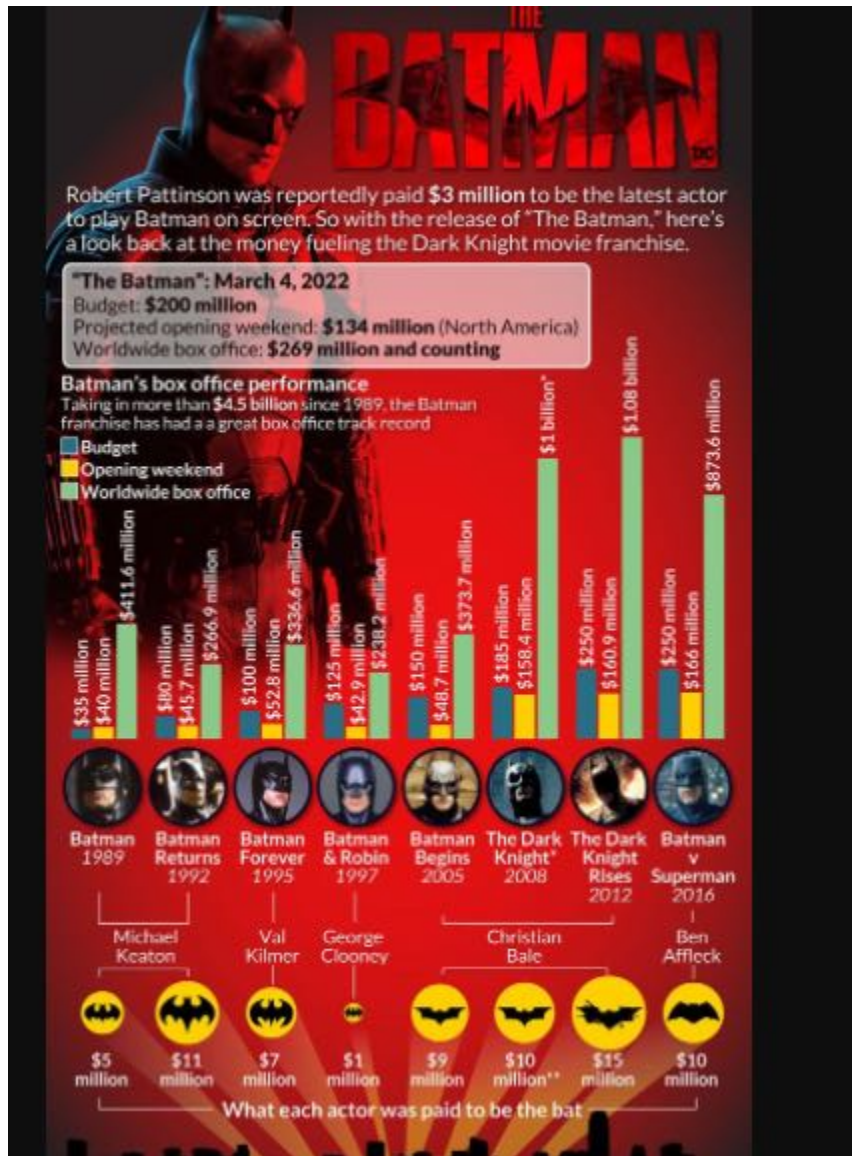
Listening to Schwarzenegger's one-liners ("The iceman cometh!"), I realized that a funny thing is happening to the series: It's creeping irresistibly toward the tone of the 1960s TV show. The earlier Batman movies, especially the dark "Batman Returns" (1992), made a break with the camp TV classic and went for moodier tones. But now the puns and punchlines come so fast the action has to stop and wait for them. Although we don't get the POW! and WHAM! cartoon graphics, this fourth movie seems inspired more by the TV series than the Bob Kane comic character.

My prescription for the series remains unchanged: scale down. We don't need to see \$2 million on the screen every single minute. Give the foreground to the characters, not the special effects. And ask the hard questions about Bruce Wayne.



Source G

Batman infographics. mktw.net.



### Batman movie reviews

After the abysmal reviews of 2016's "Batman v Superman" (29%), the Caped Crusader appears to be winning over critics and fans again with "The Batman"



\*First comic book film to make \$1 billion

\*\*In addition to his salary, Bale was also given a \$20 million performance bonus

Sources: BoxOfficeMojo, DC, Warner Bros., Rotten Tomatoes, MarketWatch.com