

2020
Question 2

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

The following excerpt is from a novel published in 2010. In this passage, Mrs. Pritchett observes an interaction that provokes her to reflect on her life. Read the passage carefully. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how the author uses literary elements and techniques to convey Mrs. Pritchett's complex reaction to the events of the day.

That fateful day begins with Mrs. Pritchett enjoying A cup of lemon tea in her morning kitchen, closing her eyes and breathing in the tangy steam. She believes in life's small pleasures. Around her, the kitchen gleams: immaculate granite counters, a purring Sub-Zero refrigerator, a blue ceramic bowl she made in pottery class. The bowl is filled with apples and pears, her husband's favorite fruits. Mrs. Pritchett has sent her husband off to his office on a wholesome breakfast of oatmeal with almonds and brown sugar and a glass of freshly squeezed orange juice. Until he returns in the evening, the day lies ahead of her, luxurious as a stretching cat waiting for her to stroke it. She makes a mental list: go into her dewy garden and pick an armful of irises; tidy the house in preparation for dinner guests, Mr. Pritchett's old clients, grown into friends over the years; visit the local market to pick up strawberries for an English trifle she's planning to create. After shopping, she may stop for lunch at the little deli nearby. Their sandwiches are excellent, made with bread they bake each morning in the back. At teatime she'll meet her monthly book club, intelligent, pleasant women, several of them in their late sixties like her; she is ready for the meeting, with a page of notes on *The House of the Spirits*. When she gets home, she'll put on a Satie CD and lie down on the couch. (This need for rest would have irked her when she was younger; she accepts it with equanimity now.) Then it'll be time to prepare dinner—an easy task. The lamb has already been marinated, the greens washed and patted dry.

It does not strike Mrs. Pritchett that her life is small and contained, filled with bourgeois pleasures. If it did, she would not consider that a bad thing.

She is running late, and the little café is empty when she gets to it, the lunchtime crowd gone. This disappoints her for a moment; she loves to people watch. But no matter. She orders ham and melted cheese on rye and bites into the crusty bread with vigorous pleasure. Then she sees the couple walking in. They're old; the husband has age spots on his face

and trembly hands with which he guides his wife. She has aged worse than he. She wears thick, Cokebottle glasses and shuffles with painful slowness, leaning on a cane, one of those ugly aluminum quadruped things. Mrs. Pritchett watches them with a mix of pity and fear. One day soon, she and her husband will come to this.

The couple has reached a table. The old man lets go of his wife's arm and pulls a chair out for her. He helps her off with her coat, an action that takes some maneuvering as she shifts her cane from one hand to the other. But he is patient, and when it's off, he hangs it carefully on the back of her chair. He flicks a speck off the sleeve before he turns back to his wife and helps her sit down. The couple discusses the menu, the woman pointing with sudden animation to items while the man inclines his head toward her to hear better. Then he nods gravely and summons the waitress. Mrs. Pritchett dawdles over her sandwich; she is curious about their order, which turns out to be a sugar-dusted lemon square and a decadent, oversized éclair. The man cuts each in half so they can share them. It's the flicking of the speck off the sleeve that gets Mrs. Pritchett—the caring behind the gesture, even though his wife with her poor vision would never have noticed whatever was on the coat sleeve.

Throughout book club, Mrs. Pritchett can't stop thinking about the couple in the café. In her distracted state, she forgets to bring up her best points during discussion. At home, the Satie makes her want to weep. She stares blankly at the oven while the lamb roasts, trying to figure out why she is so obsessed with the old man and his wife, and when she finally understands, she cannot move. By the time Mr. Pritchett returns from the office, she has made a decision. After dinner, when the men swoon over her trifle and the women clamor for the recipe, which she writes down for them on monogrammed notecards, she tells Mr. Pritchett that she has a terrible headache. Would it be okay if she slept in the guest room? He agrees easily, as she knew he would.

Excerpt from *One Amazing Thing* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. New York: Hyperion, 2009.

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In your response you should do the following:

- Respond to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible interpretation.
- Select and use evidence to support your line of reasoning.
- Explain how the evidence supports your line of reasoning.
- Use appropriate grammar and punctuation in communicating your argument.

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High Scoring Essays – One Amazing Thing - 2020 AP Literature & Composition Question 2

Essay 1

In the provided passage, a woman named Mrs. Pritchett observes an interaction that elicits her to reflect on her life. The author is able to characterize Mrs. Pritchett's desirous, almost envious reaction to the events she viewed that day through imagery describing her seemingly perfect life at home, a procedural tone, and details surrounding her encounter with the older couple at the deli shop.

To begin with, the author uses attractive, bright imagery to introduce Mrs. Pritchett and what at first seems to be the ideal life she and her husband lives. For example, in the beginning of the passage, the author describes, in great detail, Mrs. Pritchett's surroundings by stating "the kitchen gleams: immaculate granite counters, a purring Sub-Zero refrigerator, a blue ceramic bowl she made in pottery class. The bowl is filled with apples and pears, her husband's favorite fruit." By illustrating her kitchen in a very luxurious manner, the author makes obvious how externally, Mrs. Pritchett lives a very appealing life and begins the idea that, although the woman has everything, she may not be as content on the inside. Furthermore, the author continues this idea of perfection in Mrs. Pritchett's life by describing her role as a devoted housewife, including "Mrs. Pritchett has sent her husband off to his office on a wholesome breakfast of oatmeal with almonds and brown sugar and a glass of freshly squeezed orange juice." Through phrases "a wholesome breakfast of oatmeal" and "freshly squeezed orange juice," the author continues to provide a detailed image of the life Mrs. Pritchett lives at home that will later lead her to reflect on as she realizes she is not as happy as her life may deceive her as.

Additionally, the author establishes a procedural tone that further emphasizes the lack of excitement and liveliness in Mrs. Pritchett's day to day life. For instance, after Mrs. Pritchett's husband leaves for work, she begins to start her day by making a "mental list: go into her dewy garden and pick an armful of irises; tidy the house in preparation for dinner guests...visit the local market to pick up strawberries for an English trifle she's planning to create," and continues to plan her day out from start to finish. As a result of including her plans for the day, the author is able to reveal her life lacks variety and can appear as repetitive as it is implied she does this on a daily basis. The author conveys a more monotonous tone as he continues to illustrate her life with strong regularity that leads her desiring the life the older couple possesses later in the passage. In the same paragraph, as Mrs. Pritchett tells herself she will need time to debrief and rest, the author states "This need for rest would have irked her when she was younger; she accepts it with equanimity now." The author implies that while there was a time where Mrs. Pritchett would have been hungry for a more lively, exciting life, she now has accepted it as the new normal further creating a more routinely tone, contributing ultimately to her desirous reaction to others that hold the life she would have earlier wished for.

Lastly, the author includes details revolving around the older couple and her thoughts and feelings as she watched them in the deli shop. Near the end of the passage, after she ordered from the deli shop she regularly eats at, an elderly couple walks and takes a seat, with the author stating "He helps her off with her coat, an action that takes some maneuvering...but he is patient, and when it's off, he hangs it carefully on the back of her chair." It is these small details that leads Mrs. Pritchett to reflect back on her own marriage and how happy she really is.

Through details that characterize the older man as a gentleman, readers are able to realize how Mrs. Pritchett wishes her own husband would hold these certain traits and treat her like the older couple treats one another. Moreover, as Mrs. Pritchett watches the older man “flicks a speck off the sleeve before he turns back to his wife and helps her sit down,” she reveals how the “caring behind the gesture” speaks to her, further allowing her to consider her own marriage and how happy she really is with her past. As the author includes these details that continue to make Mrs. Pritchett realize she wants more in her own life, readers are able to see her reaction of being eager for more in her way of living.

The author is able to convey Mrs. Pritchett’s almost covetous reaction as she reflects on her own life through imagery describing her lifestyle externally, a procedural, boring tone as she goes on to describe her daily routine, by including details surrounding the small acts of kindness the older couple does for each other that makes Mrs. Pritchett ultimately want more.

Essay 2

Love displays itself in many ways: in grand gestures or in small, unnoticeable actions. The truest form of love and happiness, however, shows itself best when no one else is watching. In the novel, the author gives great detail to the events of the day and uses a unique point of view and specific diction to relay to readers that Mrs. Pritchett is both touched and disheartened by witnessing the truest form of love and comparing it to her own life.

Through the use of vivid imagery, the author crafts a detailed window into the luxurious life of Mrs. Pritchett. Phrases such as “immaculate granite counters, purring Sub-zero refrigerator” reveal that Pritchett is living a picturesque life. Her house is impressive and spotless, there are no issues of money in the family, and she is able to spend her days at her leisure. The visual and auditory imagery the author uses transports readers into her life, highlighting the domesticity of her days and that fact that she is surrounded by any and all comforts one could want. There is no reason she should be unsatisfied in her mind because her life is seemingly perfect. After breakfast she visits her “dewy garden” to pick a handful of irises, creating a vivid mental image of a lush and blooming garden that represents the ease at which she exists- her husband is at work, she has nowhere to be. Her garden, much like the garden of eden, symbolizes a place of paradise and this visual translates to her seemingly- perfect life.

The retelling of the event through a third person omniscient lens allows readers to view the inner thoughts and turmoils of Mrs. Pritchett as she reacts to the events of her day, highlighting the undeniable impact the old couple had on her. Because the author only allows the narrative to see into the mind of Mrs. Pritchett, her thoughts such as “this rest would have irked her... she now accepts it with equanimity” demonstrates her contentment with her life as it is before seeing the old couple that day- her routines are set and she does not fault the lifestyle she lives as she would have years ago. The third person omniscient also reveals Mrs. Pritchett’s firstmost thoughts when she sees the old couple enter the cafe, watching them with “a mix of pity and fear.” She is initially frightened by the sight of the old couple because she is reminded that that is the future for her and her husband- reliant on each other for simple tasks. By focusing on the inner dialogue of Mrs. Pritchett in these specific scenes, the author conveys a sense of dread

growing in Mrs. Pritchett at the thought of aging and relying on her husband as the old woman does. The point of view never shifts to her husband, so readers cannot tell if Mr. Pritchett reciprocates the feelings of pity and fear, but by focusing on Mrs. Pritchett's reaction, enough about the relationship between Mr and Mrs Pritchett is revealed.

The diction the author uses while discussing the old couple in the cafe compared to Mrs. Pritchett's interaction with her own husband effectively juxtaposes the two couples, to the eventual dismay of Mrs. Pritchett. The scene in the cafe focuses on the appearance of the old couple and the actions of the old man- the old man has "age spots on his face and trembly hands as he guides his wife," and as he helps his wife to her seat he "flicks a speck off the sleeve" of her jacket while she looks at the menu. While the old man is elderly and somewhat struggling himself, he helps his wife maneuver around the cafe and get settled without a single complaint. Moreover, he flicks a speck off of her jacket, which she would never see or notice. The minute details the author chooses to use demonstrates that Mrs. Pritchett recognizes the pure love of the actions and that even if his wife would never notice, the man took the time and care to flick the speck. The flick represents the measures to which the man goes to look after his wife and always have her best interest, which strikes Mrs. Pritchett because of the lack of this constant unadulterated love in her own life. When she goes home and tests her husband by asking him to sleep in the guest room, he agrees "easily, as she knew he would." Juxtaposed to the interaction between the old couple, the relationship between her and her husband appears to be relatively mundane compared to the love of the elderly pair. He agrees without complaint or question, and whereas the old man went to great lengths to care for his wife even when he didn't have to.

By painting her picturesque life and juxtaposing it to the scene in the cafe, the author emphasizes the myriad of emotions Mrs. Pritchett experienced that day. She is deeply impacted by the couple, yet most likely feels guilty of her shock at their love. Her life is one of comfort and contentment and she should not feel as impacted by the scene as she was, but the display of love by the old couple ostensibly revealed to her that her current lifestyle is not one of unadulterated contentment and that there is more to life and love than what she has.