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AP ENGLISH LITERATURE · FREE RESOURCE

AP English Literature and Composition — Practice Exam 1

Answer Key, Explanations & Sample Essays

This document accompanies *Practice Exam 1*. It contains the Section I answer key, a full explanation for every multiple-choice question, the scoring rubric and scoring notes for each free-response question, scored sample essays at three levels (6, 4, and 2 points), and a guide to estimating your composite score.

About the passages. The three poems (Shakespeare's Sonnet 73, Dickinson's "Because I could not stop for Death," and Hardy's "The Darkling Thrush") are public-domain works. The prose and drama passages in Section I and the prose passage in Section II, Question 2, were written for this practice exam in the manner of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century fiction and drama; the Question 2 passage is not by Kate Chopin or any other published author. The sample essays are illustrations written for this exam; they are not actual student responses from an AP administration.

Part 1: Section I Answer Key

Q#	ANSWER	SKILL	PASSAGE	DIFFICULTY
1	B	NAR 4.A	P1 (poem)	E
2	D	FIG 5.A	P1 (poem)	E
3	A	STR 3.C	P1 (poem)	M
4	C	STR 3.B	P1 (poem)	M
5	B	FIG 5.D	P1 (poem)	M
6	A	FIG 6.C	P1 (poem)	M
7	D	STR 3.C	P1 (poem)	H
8	C	NAR 4.C	P1 (poem)	E
9	B	FIG 5.B	P1 (poem)	H
10	D	LAN 7.A	P1 (poem)	M

Q#	ANSWER	SKILL	PASSAGE	DIFFICULTY
11	A	FIG 6.B	P1 (poem)	E
12	C	NAR 4.B	P2 (prose)	E
13	A	FIG 6.C	P2 (prose)	E
14	D	NAR 4.C	P2 (prose)	M
15	B	NAR 4.C	P2 (prose)	H
16	C	SET 2.A	P2 (prose)	E
17	A	NAR 4.C	P2 (prose)	H
18	B	SET 2.B	P2 (prose)	H
19	D	CHR 1.A	P2 (prose)	E
20	C	LAN 7.A	P2 (prose)	H
21	B	NAR 4.D	P2 (prose)	H
22	A	NAR 4.B	P2 (prose)	H
23	D	NAR 4.A	P3 (poem)	E
24	B	CHR 1.A	P3 (poem)	M
25	C	FIG 5.B	P3 (poem)	M
26	A	NAR 4.C	P3 (poem)	M
27	D	STR 3.C	P3 (poem)	M
28	B	FIG 5.D	P3 (poem)	M
29	C	STR 3.C	P3 (poem)	H
30	D	FIG 5.D	P3 (poem)	E
31	A	FIG 5.A	P3 (poem)	M
32	C	STR 3.C	P3 (poem)	H
33	B	LAN 7.D	P3 (poem)	M
34	A	CHR 1.A	P4 (drama)	E
35	C	STR 3.C	P4 (drama)	M
36	D	CHR 1.E	P4 (drama)	M
37	B	CHR 1.D	P4 (drama)	M
38	A	FIG 5.B	P4 (drama)	M
39	C	CHR 1.A	P4 (drama)	M

Q#	ANSWER	SKILL	PASSAGE	DIFFICULTY
40	D	LAN 7.A	P4 (drama)	M
41	B	STR 3.C	P4 (drama)	H
42	D	CHR 1.E	P4 (drama)	H
43	A	STR 3.F	P4 (drama)	H
44	B	LAN 7.D	P4 (drama)	E
45	C	NAR 4.B	P5 (prose)	E
46	A	NAR 4.C	P5 (prose)	M
47	D	CHR 1.A	P5 (prose)	M
48	C	NAR 4.C	P5 (prose)	M
49	B	SET 2.C	P5 (prose)	M
50	A	FIG 5.D	P5 (prose)	M
51	D	CHR 1.D	P5 (prose)	E
52	B	CHR 1.D	P5 (prose)	M
53	C	FIG 5.C	P5 (prose)	H
54	A	STR 3.C	P5 (prose)	M
55	D	LAN 7.B	P5 (prose)	M

Skill category totals (55 questions)

CATEGORY	SKILL CODES	QUESTIONS	QUESTION NUMBERS
Narration / Speaker (NAR)	4.A–4.D	13	1, 8, 12, 14, 15, 17, 21, 22, 23, 26, 45, 46, 48
Character (CHR)	1.A–1.E	10	19, 24, 34, 36, 37, 39, 42, 47, 51, 52
Structure (STR)	3.A–3.F	10	3, 4, 7, 27, 29, 32, 35, 41, 43, 54
Figurative Language / Word Choice (FIG)	5.A–5.D, 6.A–6.D	13	2, 5, 6, 9, 11, 13, 25, 28, 30, 31, 38, 50, 53
Setting (SET)	2.A–2.C	3	16, 18, 49
Literary Argumentation (LAN)	7.A–7.E	6	10, 20, 33, 40, 44, 55

Answer distribution: A = 14, B = 14, C = 13, D = 14. **Difficulty:** Easy = 14, Medium = 27, Hard = 14. **Special formats:** EXCEPT items: 11, 24, 52. Roman-numeral items: 5, 18, 36.

Part 2: Section I Explanations

Passage 1: Poem (Shakespeare, Sonnet 73) — Questions 1–11

1. Answer: B. [Skill: NAR 4.A – Identify and describe the narrator or speaker.] The speaker invites the beloved to “behold” signs of age “in me” (line 1) and says the beloved “must leave ere long” (line 14), so the speaker is the one nearing death and is speaking to someone who loves him. (A) is wrong because nothing in the poem mentions a rival; the beloved’s love actually grows “more strong” (line 13). (C) is wrong because the poem addresses a particular “thou,” and the seasons are figures for the speaker himself, not the subject. (D) is wrong because the speaker is not mourning another person; the loss anticipated is his own, and the beloved is the one who will remain.

2. Answer: D. [Skill: FIG 5.A – Distinguish between literal and figurative meanings.] The phrase is a metaphor in apposition to “boughs” (line 3): the leafless branches resemble the roofless choir of a ruined church, and the clause “where late the sweet birds sang” completes the comparison by naming the birds as the former singers. (A) is wrong because this reads the figure literally; no church or human singers appear in the poem, only boughs and birds. (B) is wrong because no companions are mentioned; the sentence is about the physical appearance of the trees. (C) is wrong because the wind is suggested by “shake against the cold,” but “choirs” names the branches as a place of song, not a sound.

3. Answer: A. [Skill: STR 3.C – Explain the function of structure in a text.] Each quatrain offers a new image of the speaker (“In me thou seest...,” lines 5 and 9; “thou mayst in me behold,” line 1), and the couplet (lines 13–14) turns from description to the effect on the beloved. The parallel construction is the poem’s organizing principle. (B) is wrong because the couplet does not reverse despair; it accepts the loss and finds that it deepens love. (C) is wrong because the beloved never speaks, and no objections are raised; the poem is a single speaker’s address. (D) is wrong because the three images are distinct metaphors (a season, a day, a fire) rather than one continuous narrative.

4. Answer: C. [Skill: STR 3.B – Explain the function of a particular sequence of events.] The images move from a season (“that time of year”), to the closing of a single day (“twilight”), to the last glow of a fire on its “deathbed.” The time scale contracts and the final image names expiring (line 11), so the sequence tightens toward the end. (A) is wrong because nothing in the images is reversible; the fire is “consumed” (line 12) and night “take[s] away” the light. (B) is wrong because no supernatural image appears, and the fire is the only possibly domestic image. (D) is wrong because the tone stays calm throughout; the speaker does not resist or express increasing pain.

5. Answer: B. [Skill: FIG 5.D – Identify and explain the function of an image or imagery.] “Twilight,” “fadeth,” and “black night” establish I; “Death’s second self, that seals up all in rest” (line 8) establishes II. No dawn or return of light is mentioned; night “take[s] away” the day and nothing follows, so III is not evoked. (A) is wrong because it omits II, which is clearly present in “Death’s second self” and “rest.” (C) is wrong because it includes III, which the lines never suggest, and omits I. (D) is wrong because it includes III; the passage ends with night sealing everything in rest, not with renewal.

6. Answer: A. [Skill: FIG 6.C – Identify and explain the function of personification.] “Second self” makes night a counterpart of Death, and “seals up all in rest” gives it a death-like action: it closes in and silences the day. The personification links the daily end of light to the speaker’s own end. (B) is wrong because this reverses the

relationship; night is identified with death, not opposed to it. (C) is wrong because a servant would be a separate figure taking orders, whereas “second self” names a likeness, not a subordinate. (D) is wrong because night “take[s] away” the day and seals everything up; nothing in the line suggests it delays anything.

7. Answer: D. [Skill: STR 3.C – Explain the function of structure in a text.] Lines 1–12 repeatedly show what the beloved “behold[s]” in the speaker. Line 13 begins “This thou perceiv’st,” turning attention to the beloved’s perception and its result: love made “more strong.” (A) is wrong because the poem never recalls the past except as “ashes of his youth,” and it holds out no hope for the future. (B) is wrong because the speaker is composed throughout and never becomes defiant. (C) is wrong because the images in the quatrains are not neatly divided this way, and the couplet contains no image of the household at all.

8. Answer: C. [Skill: NAR 4.C – Identify and describe details, diction, or syntax that reveal a narrator’s or speaker’s perspective.] The speaker accepts decline calmly, offering gentle images instead of complaints, and the couplet’s “love that well which thou must leave ere long” is a tender instruction to the beloved. (A) is wrong because he does not blame the beloved or anyone else, and nothing in the language is bitter. (B) is wrong because he does not resist aging; he presents it as inevitable. (D) is wrong because the personal address (“thou,” “thy love”) and the affectionate closing couplet are not detached.

9. Answer: B. [Skill: FIG 5.B – Explain the function of specific words and phrases.] The fire burns on the “ashes of his youth,” fed by the same material that it is using up. The paradox applies to the speaker: the life that sustained him is also what is being spent, so his decline is built into his living. (A) is wrong because line 12 speaks of consumption and ending, not of love; love appears only in the couplet. (C) is wrong because the line makes no comparison of the value of youth and age. (D) is wrong because there is no moral language of guilt or punishment anywhere in the poem.

10. Answer: D. [Skill: LAN 7.A – Develop a paragraph with a claim and the evidence for it.] Line 13 is the only line that names a benefit: awareness of the speaker’s decline strengthens the beloved’s love. It therefore supports the claim that loss produces a gain. (A) is wrong because this line describes the loss of leaves and offers no gain. (B) is wrong because this line describes night removing the day, which is loss only. (C) is wrong because this line describes self-consumption, which supports the loss portion of the claim, not the gain.

11. Answer: A. [Skill: FIG 6.B – Identify and explain the function of a metaphor.] No river appears. The three comparisons are a tree in autumn (lines 1–4), twilight (lines 5–8), and a dying fire (lines 9–12). (B) is wrong because lines 1–4 compare him to boughs with “yellow leaves, or none, or few.” (C) is wrong because lines 5–8 compare him to the “twilight” that fades after sunset. (D) is wrong because lines 9–12 compare him to a fire lying “on the ashes of his youth.”

Passage 2: Prose Fiction (a Victorian governess arrives at a house) — Questions 12–22

12. Answer: C. [Skill: NAR 4.B – Identify and explain the function of point of view.] The narrator looks back from a later vantage: she says “it was not until some days afterwards” that she understood Mrs. Pellow (lines 28–31), that she “now find[s] touching” her earlier firmness (line 46), and that she finds it “hardest, now, to forgive” her happiness (lines 53–54). Hindsight colors the whole telling. (A) is wrong because the repeated “now” and “afterwards” show that the events are being recalled, not recorded as they happen. (B) is wrong because the narrator is the participant, uses “I” throughout, and openly offers personal judgments. (D) is wrong because the passage is addressed to no particular recipient and contains no reassurance or family reference.

13. Answer: A. [Skill: FIG 6.C – Identify and explain the function of personification.] By personifying the day as a spectator who “stepped aside,” the narrator makes the scene feel expectant and faintly watchful, setting up the unease that the rest of the paragraph and the following paragraph develop. (B) is wrong because her fatigue is mentioned elsewhere, but this image is about being watched, not about bodily discomfort. (C) is wrong because the passage shows apprehension and weariness, not eagerness. (D) is wrong because the house is described as cold and forbidding, so no warmth is being contrasted.

14. Answer: D. [Skill: NAR 4.C – Identify and describe details, diction, or syntax that reveal a narrator’s or speaker’s perspective.] The narrator says she has “examined” the resolutions so often that she “could no longer have said whether they were courage or only habit.” The worn-cloth image conveys repetition that has emptied the resolutions of certainty, not abandonment of them. (A) is wrong because she does not say she doubts the decision, only that she cannot tell courage from habit. (B) is wrong because no earlier situation is described or regretted. (C) is wrong because her state is one of exhausted self-scrutiny, not impatience.

15. Answer: B. [Skill: NAR 4.C – Identify and describe details, diction, or syntax that reveal a narrator’s or speaker’s perspective.] “Commodious” is a comfortable word in Mr. Ashcombe’s letter. Comparing it to a vault, a space that is roomy and a tomb, gives the word a grim second sense and reveals the narrator’s wry unease. (A) is wrong because the simile undermines, rather than praises, the notion of comfort. (C) is wrong because the sentence concerns the sense of the word, not the condition of the building. (D) is wrong because the narrator’s target is the gap between the letter’s words and her impression, not the letter-writer’s taste.

16. Answer: C. [Skill: SET 2.A – Identify and describe textual details that convey a setting.] The lamp is “punctually lit,” so someone expects her; the narrator then adds “whatever the household may feel on the subject of that somebody’s arrival,” deliberately leaving the household’s attitude open. (A) is wrong because the lamp says nothing about wealth. (B) is wrong because the narrator’s qualifying clause explicitly withholds a judgment of warmth. (D) is wrong because no fear is suggested; the lamp indicates expectation, not dread.

17. Answer: A. [Skill: NAR 4.C – Identify and describe details, diction, or syntax that reveal a narrator’s or speaker’s perspective.] The simile stresses an impersonal formula, but the narrator qualifies it (“not unkindly”) and later says she understood “how much the sentence had cost her.” The older narrator thus reads the stiffness as effortful courtesy. (B) is wrong because “not unkindly” rules out deliberate coldness. (C) is wrong because the narrator calls the words “very welcome,” and nothing indicates an insult. (D) is wrong because “written by someone else” is part of the figure for a formula, not a claim that Mr. Ashcombe wrote the words.

18. Answer: B. [Skill: SET 2.B – Explain the function of setting.] Mrs. Pellow’s reply, “They are not wrong, miss. They are only stopped,” treats the stopping as a fact with meaning, which supports II, and the narrator carries the “distinction up the stairs with me, like a parcel,” which supports III. I is false: Mrs. Pellow’s answer implies the clocks are stopped deliberately or for a reason, not through neglect. (A) is wrong because it names only the false statement. (C) is wrong because it includes the false statement and omits II. (D) is wrong because it includes I, which the passage does not support.

19. Answer: D. [Skill: CHR 1.A – Identify and describe what textual details reveal about a character, perspective, and motives.] The narrator describes “the sound a child makes when she has been listening for a long time and is afraid of being found out.” It is neither laughter nor weeping, and it implies watching and fear. (A) is wrong because nothing suggests play or defiance; the child is afraid. (B) is wrong because the narrator explicitly says the sound is “neither laughter nor weeping.” (C) is wrong because the sound is described as fearful, not delighted.

20. Answer: C. [Skill: LAN 7.A – Develop a paragraph with a claim and the evidence for it.] “Touching” expresses fond condescension toward the young woman who thought saying nothing a firm resolve. It shows both the older narrator’s perspective and her gentle irony at the younger self’s expense. (A) is wrong because this sentence simply situates the arrival and shows no attitude toward the younger self. (B) is wrong because this is Mrs. Pellow’s dialogue, not the narrator’s attitude toward herself. (D) is wrong because this reports an action without commentary or irony.

21. Answer: B. [Skill: NAR 4.D – Explain how a narrator’s reliability affects a narrative.] She admits “I have been accused of making the house darker in the telling than it was,” so she steps out of the narrative to assure the reader that she is describing the room fairly. The aside is an effort to protect her reliability, and it also reminds the reader that knowledge of later events colors her account. (A) is wrong because the aside concerns the narrator’s own fairness, not Mrs. Pellow. (C) is wrong because she describes the room confidently; the doubt concerns how others have judged her telling. (D) is wrong because her purpose is accuracy in the face of a charge of exaggeration, not persuasion about the house’s overall pleasantness.

22. Answer: A. [Skill: NAR 4.B – Identify and explain the function of point of view.] She was “more nearly happy than I had been in a twelvemonth,” yet she finds that happiness “hardest, now, to forgive.” The word “now” signals that later events have turned an innocent pleasure into something she holds against herself. (B) is wrong because “now” and “forgive” show she no longer regards the moment as simple contentment. (C) is wrong because the holly sprig is read as a kindness from Mrs. Pellow, and the narrator has already come to understand how much her welcome cost her. (D) is wrong because the passage places no blame on the child, whom the narrator describes with sympathy.

Passage 3: Poem (Emily Dickinson) — Questions 23–33

23. Answer: D. [Skill: NAR 4.A – Identify and describe the narrator or speaker.] The final stanza places the speaker in a time “Since then – ‘tis Centuries,” and she recalls the first moment she “surmised the Horses’ Heads / Were toward Eternity.” She is speaking from beyond death about the journey that brought her there. (A) is wrong because the gown and tippet are details of the speaker’s clothing for the ride, not evidence of a wedding. (B) is wrong because the ride is literal in the poem’s narrative but its destination is Eternity, not a place in the countryside. (C) is wrong because the speaker is not imagining the future; she recounts a completed past in a composed voice.

24. Answer: B. [Skill: CHR 1.A – Identify and describe what textual details reveal about a character, perspective, and motives.] Death is “kindly” (line 2), “knew no haste” (line 5), and offers “Civility” (line 8). Nowhere is he aggressive or urgent; the opposite is stressed. (A) is wrong because line 2 says “He kindly stopped for me.” (C) is wrong because line 5 says “He knew no haste.” (D) is wrong because line 8 attributes “Civility” to Death.

25. Answer: C. [Skill: FIG 5.B – Explain the function of specific words and phrases.] “Civility” denotes polite, correct behavior. Within the poem’s extended image of Death as a gentleman caller who arrives in a carriage, it conveys formal good manners rather than intimacy. (A) is wrong because the speaker never suggests that Death is deceiving her; she presents his courtesy at face value. (B) is wrong because “Civility” implies manners, not affection. (D) is wrong because Death is called “kindly” and is attentive to her, so he is not cold.

26. Answer: A. [Skill: NAR 4.C – Identify and describe details, diction, or syntax that reveal a narrator’s or speaker’s perspective.] “Labor” and “leisure” together cover the whole of daily life. The speaker presents herself as having put both away “For His Civility,” as one would clear the day for a guest, a quiet acceptance of death’s

arrival. (B) is wrong because the speaker describes setting things aside calmly in response to courtesy, not being forced. (C) is wrong because the pairing of “labor” with “leisure” treats them as equally set aside; no ranking is made. (D) is wrong because the tone shows no guilt or regret about these activities.

27. Answer: D. [Skill: STR 3.C – Explain the function of structure in a text.] The anaphora marks each sight as one more thing the carriage leaves behind, in a rhythm that matches the slow pace established in line 5. The repeated verb also lets the accumulating sights read as stages of a single passage. (A) is wrong because the pace is slow and the speaker is composed; she is not impatient. (B) is wrong because line 5 says they “slowly drove.” (C) is wrong because the scenes are ordinary, familiar places (school, fields), and nothing implies the speaker is a stranger to them.

28. Answer: B. [Skill: FIG 5.D – Identify and explain the function of an image or imagery.] Children at play, ripened grain, and a setting sun form a progression from youth to fullness to ending. As the carriage passes each, the speaker reviews her life’s stages on her way out of it. (A) is wrong because the images are neutral or even vivid and lively, with no hint of dislike. (C) is wrong because the images are generic, not tied to one place. (D) is wrong because no city is mentioned anywhere in the poem.

29. Answer: C. [Skill: STR 3.C – Explain the function of structure in a text.] The speaker first describes herself as passing the setting sun, then corrects herself: the sun passes “Us.” The reversal suggests that she is no longer part of ordinary, forward-moving time; the world, not she, is in motion. It marks the poem’s turn from pleasant retrospect to chill awareness. (A) is wrong because the correction is not about geography; it changes the relationship between the travelers and time. (B) is wrong because the previous stanza already stressed the slow pace, and no change of speed is indicated. (D) is wrong because the speaker shows no anger at any point.

30. Answer: D. [Skill: FIG 5.D – Identify and explain the function of an image or imagery.] The chill dew and the repeated “only” stress how thin her clothing is. She is cold and unprotected, which suggests an unreadiness for where she is being taken. (A) is wrong because “Chill” and “quivering” signal discomfort, not delight. (B) is wrong because the garments are named to show their flimsiness, not to display pride. (C) is wrong because Death is never criticized for being late.

31. Answer: A. [Skill: FIG 5.A – Distinguish between literal and figurative meanings.] The house “seemed / A Swelling of the Ground,” with a roof “scarcely visible” and a cornice “in the Ground.” These details describe a burial mound or grave marker presented in the vocabulary of a house. (B) is wrong because nothing indicates the house is familiar, and its features are sunken into the earth. (C) is wrong because the poem gives no sign that Death lives there; the carriage merely “paused” before it. (D) is wrong because no religious details appear, and the house is nearly underground.

32. Answer: C. [Skill: STR 3.C – Explain the function of structure in a text.] Stanzas 1–5 narrate the ride in the past tense. Stanza 6 begins “Since then” and reflects from a later vantage: centuries have passed, yet they “feel shorter than the Day” she first understood where the horses were heading. The poem turns from narrative to commentary on time. (A) is wrong because the carriage is still present in the “Horses’ Heads.” (B) is wrong because the same “I” continues to speak. (D) is wrong because nothing indicates a dream; the final stanza treats the journey as fact.

33. Answer: B. [Skill: LAN 7.D – Select and use relevant and sufficient evidence.] “First surmised” identifies the moment recognition began, and the verb “surmised” (guessed) shows the realization arriving after the ride was under way. Lines 23–24 pinpoint the speaker’s late understanding of the journey’s end. (A) is wrong because this

line shows Death's courtesy at the outset and nothing about her understanding. (C) is wrong because this line describes the pace of the ride, not what the speaker knew. (D) is wrong because this line shows an ordinary scene on the road, with no indication of changing awareness.

Passage 4: Drama (a drawing-room scene, early 1910s) — Questions 34–44

34. Answer: A. [Skill: CHR 1.A – Identify and describe what textual details reveal about a character, perspective, and motives.] Her reply to a compliment is a remark about the “light” and the weather, followed by a joke about the rug. Each comment turns attention away from his business, which Strand has not yet stated. (B) is wrong because her tone is dry and guarded, not delighted. (C) is wrong because she makes no reference to the hour. (D) is wrong because she soon shows (lines 19–21) that she knows exactly why he has come.

35. Answer: C. [Skill: STR 3.C – Explain the function of structure in a text.] By withholding the hospitable gesture of taking Strand's hat, the Ambler's household shows that this is not a normal social visit. The detail also lets the audience see the tension before any dialogue explains it. (A) is wrong because the direction reflects the household's failure to invite him to stay, not his own intention to leave. (B) is wrong because the hat is not described in a way that suggests poverty. (D) is wrong because the note is quietly ominous rather than comic.

36. Answer: D. [Skill: CHR 1.E – Explain how a character's choices, actions, and speech reveal complexities.] The phrase “lost money” anticipates the news she later names (“the Burnley shares are worth nothing”), supporting I. Her repetition of Henry's saying (“Henry always said”) shows she cherishes his wit, supporting II. Nothing expresses contempt, so III is false. (A) is wrong because it omits II, which is clearly supported. (B) is wrong because it chooses only III, the false statement. (C) is wrong because it includes III, which the passage contradicts, and omits I.

37. Answer: B. [Skill: CHR 1.D – Describe how textual details reveal nuances in characters' relationships.] First names, shared memories (Henry's funeral and wedding, lines 23–24 and 44–47), and Strand's “I am not a stranger to this house” (lines 40–41) show a long friendship, while the formal speech and the withheld confidences show propriety holding it in check. (A) is wrong because their shared past rules out a recent acquaintance. (C) is wrong because the banter is dry but not hostile, and Strand is sympathetic. (D) is wrong because Mrs. Ambler refers to personal history, and Strand's distress shows feeling beyond duty.

38. Answer: A. [Skill: FIG 5.B – Explain the function of specific words and phrases.] She pretends to treat the creditors as offenders against etiquette, a witty reversal that keeps her composed while acknowledging that she has been dreading the news for three weeks. (B) is wrong because the remark is not serious; the gap between the trivial complaint and the gravity of the news is the joke. (C) is wrong because she addresses the creditors, not Strand, and her tone is lightly ironic. (D) is wrong because she shows by naming the “Burnley shares” that she understands the situation.

39. Answer: C. [Skill: CHR 1.A – Identify and describe what textual details reveal about a character, perspective, and motives.] Faced with the proposal to dispose of the house, she answers with the one fact that matters to her: her daughter's marriage depends on appearances of comfort (“Mr. Fenwick's people think us comfortable,” lines 33–35). The short sentence shows where her concern lies. (A) is wrong because she makes no request; the statement is a bare fact. (B) is wrong because she does not accuse Strand of anything. (D) is wrong because the wedding has long been settled; it is not news.

40. Answer: D. [Skill: LAN 7.A – Develop a paragraph with a claim and the evidence for it.] Mrs. Ambler has sold her pearls and told her daughter a protective lie so that Dorothea will not learn the family's true position. The lines show a sacrifice and a deception made on the daughter's behalf. (A) is wrong because the remark about

the rug is a joke that hints at modest means but not at any sacrifice for Dorothea. (B) is wrong because Henry's saying is about a different matter and does not concern her daughter. (C) is wrong because this remark expresses her irony about the visit and concerns neither her sacrifice nor her daughter.

41. Answer: B. [Skill: STR 3.C – Explain the function of structure in a text.] After a scene of dry, deflecting wit, she admits that kindness from Strand would have been unbearable, and the stage directions ("A silence. The fire settles. She rises abruptly") mark the break. She then takes control again by ringing for hot water. (A) is wrong because her tone throughout is composed, and she shows no anger at Strand. (C) is wrong because she does not admit any guilt; she admits pride and vulnerability. (D) is wrong because she ends by returning to the lease and showing no hope.

42. Answer: D. [Skill: CHR 1.E – Explain how a character's choices, actions, and speech reveal complexities.] She says she "could not have borne it." Sympathy would have forced her to feel the loss that she has been controlling by wit, and so kindness endangers her composure. (A) is wrong because she respects Strand and speaks fondly of his past kindness, so she does not see it as weakness. (B) is wrong because her friend's rank is not at issue; they are social equals. (C) is wrong because she does not question his sincerity; she questions her own ability to bear it.

43. Answer: A. [Skill: STR 3.F – Explain the function of conflict in a text.] After the burst of feeling, she rings for "more hot water" so that "we shall be able to talk of the lease like two sensible people." The bell moves the scene back toward impersonal business. (B) is wrong because she is not dismissing Strand; she intends the conversation to continue. (C) is wrong because the next lines show her wanting to discuss the lease. (D) is wrong because her emotion is directed at the situation, not Strand.

44. Answer: B. [Skill: LAN 7.D – Select and use relevant and sufficient evidence.] The line states the strategy outright ("It saves so much disappointment") in the witty, deflecting manner that characterizes her speech. (A) is wrong because the line states a fact and does not demonstrate wit or protection. (C) is wrong because the line reports her daughter's inquiry and does not show wit used for protection. (D) is wrong because the line reveals a hidden sacrifice but does not itself show her using wit to avoid disappointment.

Passage 5: Prose Fiction (a returning soldier, 1920s) — Questions 45–55

45. Answer: C. [Skill: NAR 4.B – Identify and explain the function of point of view.] The narration reports what Lund notices and thinks ("He noticed that first," "He had thought on the boat that it would mean something") but uses "he" and "Lund." It never steps outside his perceptions to evaluate him. (A) is wrong because the narrator is never "I," and no later vantage is suggested. (B) is wrong because no judgment of Lund is made; the narration remains close to what he sees and feels. (D) is wrong because the narration reveals interior states such as what Lund "understood" and what he "thought," so it is not purely external.

46. Answer: A. [Skill: NAR 4.C – Identify and describe details, diction, or syntax that reveal a narrator's or speaker's perspective.] The plain, repetitive statements record facts without emotional comment, in keeping with Lund's effort, stated in lines 5–7, to "stop noticing." The syntax matches the restraint of his perception. (B) is wrong because the sentences concern arrival and sameness, not travel fatigue. (C) is wrong because the narration is not detached from Lund; it follows his perceptions closely. (D) is wrong because the passage elsewhere shows an observant and wary mind, not a simple one.

47. Answer: D. [Skill: CHR 1.A – Identify and describe what textual details reveal about a character, perspective, and motives.] Noticing a "gap in a hedgerow" suggests the scanning of terrain he developed as a soldier, and the sentence continues, "and then he made himself stop noticing." The two clauses show a learned alertness he

is trying to unlearn. (A) is wrong because the comparison is to a skill of watching, not to nostalgia for farm life. (B) is wrong because he registers the change without any expression of resentment. (C) is wrong because he recognizes at once that the station is “the same” and that the elms have changed, so his memory is intact.

48. Answer: C. [Skill: NAR 4.C – Identify and describe details, diction, or syntax that reveal a narrator’s or speaker’s perspective.] “Carefully” and “practicing” suggest a formula delivered with effort. Lund neither resents nor embraces it; his perception is of a kind but scripted gesture. (A) is wrong because nothing suggests imitation or mockery. (B) is wrong because Lund registers no hostility. (D) is wrong because the words “practicing” and “carefully” undercut spontaneity.

49. Answer: B. [Skill: SET 2.C – Describe the relationship between a character and a setting.] She looks from behind the curtain but avoids meeting his eye in the open. Lund’s response (“That was all right. He would have done the same”) shows that he reads her behavior as shyness or awkwardness and accepts it. (A) is wrong because no hostility is shown, and Lund explicitly accepts her conduct. (C) is wrong because he treats her behavior as reasonable, so he is not suspicious. (D) is wrong because the passage never suggests she feels guilt.

50. Answer: A. [Skill: FIG 5.D – Identify and explain the function of an image or imagery.] The familiar smell of cut grass and coal smoke was supposed to trigger feeling, but it does not. The plain denials show how far his actual response falls from what he imagined on the boat. (B) is wrong because the church is only a landmark where he stops. (C) is wrong because he recognizes the smell; the point is that it produces no feeling. (D) is wrong because nothing in the lines suggests irritation.

51. Answer: D. [Skill: CHR 1.D – Describe how textual details reveal nuances in characters’ relationships.] She has been keeping the meal back for days, and she “laughed, a short sound, and stopped it.” The stopped laugh shows she has revealed more eagerness than she intended. (A) is wrong because she shows no resentment; she has been ready since Tuesday. (B) is wrong because holding the roast “since Tuesday” shows long preparation, not haste. (C) is wrong because her porch vigil and the uneaten sewing show anxious attention.

52. Answer: B. [Skill: CHR 1.D – Describe how textual details reveal nuances in characters’ relationships.] Lund never describes the front or anything of his service in the passage; his silence is part of the strain. The other three details all show awkwardness between the two. (A) is wrong because the gesture shows her uncertainty about how to greet him. (C) is wrong because the denials show that both are working to hold back feeling. (D) is wrong because turning the chip to the wall shows her effort to make the house seem perfect.

53. Answer: C. [Skill: FIG 5.C – Identify and explain the function of a symbol.] He touches the chip she hid, turns it toward himself, and then, uncertain, turns it back. The gesture is a small attempt to acknowledge her effort, abandoned because “he had done something he could not explain.” The pitcher becomes a symbol of what the two cannot say. (A) is wrong because he says the flowers are “nice,” and the gesture shows tenderness, not contempt. (B) is wrong because he turns the pitcher gently and sets it back as it was. (D) is wrong because he does not examine or try to fix the chip.

54. Answer: A. [Skill: STR 3.C – Explain the function of structure in a text.] The passage has established counting as his defense: he counted the blocks (line 14). In the last lines he counts the cars, loses count, and “began again,” even as his mother calls. The repetition suggests a mind that keeps itself busy to avoid feeling. (B) is wrong because the tone is quiet and uneasy, not humorous. (C) is wrong because the supper time is mentioned but is not the paragraph’s point. (D) is wrong because the passage never says he wants to go back.

55. Answer: D. [Skill: LAN 7.B – Develop a thesis statement that conveys a defensible interpretation.] The plain style, the unspoken exchanges, and objects such as the pitcher and the counting all point to a man who is present at home but unreachable. The thesis ties technique to meaning and rests on the evidence. (A) is wrong because Lund shows no anger; he calls the woman’s behavior “all right.” (B) is wrong because the passage does not generalize about war or innocence. (C) is wrong because his mother’s anxious preparation contradicts the claim.

Part 3: Section II Scoring Materials

Each free-response question is scored on the 6-point analytic rubric. The sample essays that follow are scored the way an AP reader would score them, with commentary on each row. Remember that readers score drafts written in 40 minutes: they do not expect polish, and cross-outs or uneven conclusions do not lower a score.

Question 1: Poetry Analysis (Hardy, “The Darkling Thrush”)

SCORING RUBRIC (6 POINTS)

Row A: Thesis (0–1 point)

SCORE	DESCRIPTOR
0	There is no defensible thesis. Typical responses restate the prompt, only summarize the poem, name devices without making a claim, or do not respond to the prompt.
1	The response presents a defensible thesis that responds to the prompt. The thesis makes a claim about the meaning of the poem that the text can support; it does not have to preview the whole line of reasoning.

Decision rules: The thesis may be one sentence or several and may appear anywhere in the response. A thesis that merely restates the prompt (“The speaker has a complex response”), lists devices (“The author uses imagery and diction”), or announces a topic does not earn the point. A thesis that is defensible but general still earns the point; a thesis that is clearly contradicted by the text does not.

Row B: Evidence and Commentary (0–4 points)

SCORE	DESCRIPTOR	TYPICAL RESPONSES
0	Simply restates the thesis (if present), repeats information from the prompt, or offers irrelevant information.	Incoherent; opinion with no reference to the text; unrelated references.
1	Evidence is general. Commentary summarizes the evidence or the text but does not explain how it supports an argument.	Plot or content summary; paraphrase; lists devices with little or no explanation; “this shows” statements that restate the evidence.

SCORE	DESCRIPTOR	TYPICAL RESPONSES
2	Provides some specific, relevant evidence and some explanation of how it relates to the argument, but either no line of reasoning is established or the line of reasoning is faulty.	A mix of specific details and broad generalities; simplistic or repetitive explanations; one point developed while others are stubs; unclear connections between claims.
3	Provides specific evidence to support all claims in a line of reasoning. Commentary explains how <i>some</i> of the evidence supports the line of reasoning and explains how at least one literary element or technique contributes to meaning.	Uniformly specific evidence; focus on words and details of the poem; several supporting claims; some evidence unexplained or loosely integrated; technique analysis present but not sustained.
4	Provides specific evidence to support all claims in a line of reasoning. Commentary <i>consistently</i> explains how the evidence supports the line of reasoning and explains how <i>multiple</i> literary elements or techniques contribute to meaning.	Same as 3, plus every claim is explained, techniques are shown working together toward the interpretation, and the writing is controlled enough that errors do not interfere with communication.

Decision rules: Writing with errors that interfere with communication cannot earn the fourth point. Repeated instances of a single technique (for example, several images) count as multiple techniques only if the response shows that each contributes to meaning in a different way; otherwise the response is capped at 3. A response can earn 3 or 4 points without using technical terms if it analyzes how specific language choices create meaning. A response with no thesis can still earn Row B points. Plot summary or paraphrase alone is a 1.

Row C: Sophistication (0–1 point)

SCORE	DESCRIPTOR
0	Does not meet the criteria for the point.
1	Demonstrates sophistication of thought and/or develops a complex literary argument. This may be done by any of four pathways: (1) identifying and exploring complexities or tensions within the text; (2) illuminating the interpretation by situating it within a broader context; (3) accounting for alternative interpretations; or (4) employing a style that is consistently vivid and persuasive.

What does not earn the point: sweeping generalizations offered as “context” (“Throughout history, people have...”); merely gesturing at an alternative reading without developing it; a single insightful sentence that is not sustained; oversimplifying the complexities in the text; ornate or inflated language that does not advance the argument. The quality must be part of the argument throughout, not a flourish in the introduction or conclusion.

PROMPT-SPECIFIC SCORING NOTES

What a defensible thesis looks like. The prompt asks about the speaker's *complex* response to the thrush's song. A defensible thesis must say what that response is, and it should account for both the speaker's despair and his reaction to the bird. Examples that would earn Row A:

- Hardy's speaker moves from a world-weariness so total that he reads the dying century in every feature of the landscape to a tentative, unresolved openness toward hope that he can imagine but not claim.
- The thrush's song does not cure the speaker's despair; it unsettles it by offering a joy that has no visible cause, and Hardy uses tentative syntax to leave the speaker suspended between skepticism and wonder.
- Although the landscape seems to confirm the death of the old century and its consolations, the speaker is moved by a bird's unexplained song to suspect a hope he cannot know.

A thesis that says only "the speaker has a complex response" or "Hardy uses imagery and personification to show the speaker's feelings" does not earn Row A. A thesis that claims the speaker is *converted* to confident optimism is a weaker reading, since the final stanza keeps the hope hypothetical ("I could think," "some blessed Hope," "I was unaware"); it can still be defensible if supported, but it will have difficulty with Row B and Row C.

What strong responses might argue and use as evidence.

- *The landscape as funeral.* Personification and metaphor turn the end of the century into a corpse ("The Century's corpse outleant," "His crypt the cloudy canopy," "The wind his death-lament"), and the speaker's inner state is folded into the scene ("Seemed fervourless as I"). The word "seemed" hints that the speaker is projecting.
- *Diction of absence and decay.* "Spectre-gray," "dregs," "weakening eye of day," "shrunk hard and dry," and "broken lyres" build a world drained of life and music; the images of ruined instruments anticipate the arrival of song.
- *The turn at "At once."* The third stanza interrupts the first two with an abrupt voice. The bird's joy is "full-hearted" and "illimited," but the bird is "aged," "frail, gaunt, and small," and "blast-beruffled." The contrast between the diminished body and the unbounded song complicates any sentimental reading.
- *The verb "fling."* The bird "fling[s] his soul / Upon the growing gloom," a verb suggesting generosity and recklessness; "growing gloom" keeps the darkness advancing, so the song is not a victory.
- *Syntax of qualification.* The final eight lines form one sentence built on "So little cause . . . That I could think . . . Some blessed Hope, whereof he knew / And I was unaware." The modal "could," the indefinite "some," and the closing admission of ignorance keep hope conditional.
- *Sound and form.* Regular abab quatrains give the poem the steadiness of a hymn or dirge; the alliteration and sibilance of the bird stanzas ("blast-beruffled," "ecstatic sound," "carolings") bring a sudden audible richness against the muted opening. The quatrain form can be read as the structure the speaker's despair is built in, which the song disrupts without breaking.
- *Allusion and title.* "Darkling" echoes Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" and Arnold's "darkling plain." Hardy's thrush invites a Romantic reading of bird-song as transcendence only to complicate it. A response that situates the poem at the turn of the twentieth century and the loss of Victorian certainty can earn Row C if the context is integrated into the argument.
- *Tension between observation and feeling.* The speaker reports "so little cause" for the song and then offers a possibility rather than a belief. The most complex readings explore the way hope is imagined as something *the bird knows* and the speaker does not.

Common traps.

- Treating the poem as a simple journey from despair to hope and ignoring the conditional grammar of the last stanza.
- Treating the thrush as a symbol of hope without explaining how Hardy makes the bird's joy ambiguous ("frail, gaunt, and small," "so little cause").
- Stanza-by-stanza summary with the occasional device named ("Hardy uses personification") but no explanation of effect.
- Misreading "darkling" or ignoring the title and the setting at the century's end.
- Making broad claims about "nature" or "humanity" unsupported by the poem's language.
- Spending the whole essay on the sad landscape and giving the thrush only a closing sentence.

SAMPLE ESSAYS AND SCORING COMMENTARY

6-Point Sample Essay (about 683 words)

In "The Darkling Thrush," Hardy stages the last day of the nineteenth century as a funeral that is interrupted, and what interrupts it is not a consolation but a question. The speaker does not convert to the thrush's joy; he comes to hold, against his own evidence, the possibility that the bird knows something he cannot. Hardy builds this divided response through a landscape that is almost wholly dead, a sudden turn into song, and a closing sentence whose grammar keeps hope conditional.

The opening stanzas turn weather into mourning, and the speaker's own feeling is absorbed into the scene. The frost is "spectre-gray," winter's "dregs" leave the day's "weakening eye" desolate, and the vine stems scoring the sky are likened to "strings of broken lyres," so that even the instruments of song are ruined. Humanity has withdrawn: everyone who might "haunt nigh" has "sought their household fires." In the second stanza the landscape becomes an explicit elegy: "The Century's corpse outleant," its "crypt the cloudy canopy," the wind its "death-lament." Hardy personifies the era as a body laid out, but he lets the metaphor press inward. The "ancient pulse of germ and birth / Was shrunken hard and dry," and the stanza closes on the speaker himself: "every spirit upon earth / Seemed fervourless as I." The word "seemed" matters. It admits that the exhaustion he reads in the world may be partly his own projection, so even his despair is an interpretation rather than a fact. The regular abab quatrains of these stanzas, with their hard, clipped words, feel like a procession in which nothing could happen.

Something does happen at "At once a voice arose." The phrase breaks the stillness the poem has built, and Hardy's diction reverses the earlier pattern. Where the first half is full of absence ("dregs," "shrunken," "dry"), the bird's song is "full-hearted" and "joy illimited," a word that stretches the line past its limit. Yet Hardy refuses to make the singer grand. The thrush is "aged," "frail, gaunt, and small," in "blast-beruffled plume," and he sings by flinging "his soul / Upon the growing gloom." The verb "fling" gives the song a reckless generosity, while "growing" reminds us that the darkness is winning. The joy does not refute the gloom; it is set against it, and the bird's physical fragility makes the singing look less like evidence of well-being than like an act of will. The alliteration of "blast-beruffled" and the sibilance of "ecstatic sound" give this section an audible energy absent from the muted first half.

The speaker's response becomes most complex in the final two stanzas, and it does so through syntax. A single sentence runs across lines 25–32: there is "so little cause for carolings" written on "terrestrial things" that "I could think there trembled through / His happy good-night air / Some blessed Hope." The speaker does not say that hope exists. He says that the song is so unaccountable by earthly evidence that he "could think" it carries a

hope, and he describes that hope as one “whereof he knew / And I was unaware.” The modal “could,” the indefinite “some,” and the closing admission of ignorance keep the poem suspended. The rhyme of “through” with “knew” gives the ending a sense of closure, but the final word, “unaware,” leaves the speaker outside the knowledge he imagines.

The title deepens this unsettled hope. “Darkling” recalls Keats’s “Ode to a Nightingale,” in which the speaker listens “darkling” and finds himself “half in love with easeful Death.” Keats’s bird carried the listener toward transcendence. Hardy’s thrush sings in a world that has lost confidence in that Romantic move, and the poem invokes the tradition only to ask whether a bird’s song can still bear meaning once the century has died. Hardy does not answer. What he gives us is an honest speaker whose hope is credible precisely because he cannot claim it: he can neither join the thrush’s joy nor dismiss it. The new century begins not with faith or despair but with a listener who has heard something he cannot explain.

Scoring commentary: Row A 1, Row B 4, Row C 1 = 6/6.

Row A (1). The opening paragraph advances a defensible, specific interpretation: the speaker “does not convert to the thrush’s joy” but comes “to hold, against his own evidence, the possibility that the bird knows something he cannot.” It names the complexity rather than repeating the prompt.

Row B (4). Every claim is tied to specific words and details: “spectre-gray,” “dregs,” “strings of broken lyres,” “The Century’s corpse outleant,” “fling his soul,” “blast-beruffled plume,” “I could think,” “unaware.” The commentary consistently explains how the evidence builds the line of reasoning (despair, interruption, suspended hope). For instance, the response notes that “seemed” implies projection, that “fling” conveys reckless generosity while “growing” shows the gloom advancing, and that the modal “could” and the indefinite “some” keep hope conditional. Multiple, distinct techniques (personification and metaphor, diction, sound, syntax, form, allusion) are shown to contribute to meaning in different ways, and the prose is controlled.

Row C (1). The argument sustains a tension throughout: a funeral “interrupted” by a “question” rather than a consolation. It treats the speaker’s despair as partly his own interpretation, it explores the ambiguity of a joyful but physically fragile bird, and it situates the poem in a literary context (Keats’s nightingale, the end of Romantic confidence) that sharpens, rather than decorates, the claim. This is complexity that is part of the argument from the first paragraph to the last, not a final flourish.

4-Point Sample Essay (about 476 words)

In “The Darkling Thrush” by Thomas Hardy, the speaker begins feeling hopeless in a bleak winter landscape but is changed by the song of a thrush, which gives him a small sense of hope. Hardy uses imagery, contrast, and personification to show this change.

In the first two stanzas Hardy uses dark imagery to show the speaker’s depression. The frost is “spectre-gray” and the “weakening eye of day” makes the land desolate. These words make the setting seem lifeless like a ghost. The speaker also says that the vines look like “strings of broken lyres,” which suggests that music and joy have been broken. Hardy then uses personification to describe the century as a “corpse” with a “crypt” of clouds, and the wind is its “death-lament.” This shows that the speaker feels that the whole century is dying, and that his feelings match the world around him when he says every spirit “seemed fervourless as I.” The cold and death imagery sets up a feeling of hopelessness that makes the later change more powerful.

The change comes in the third stanza when “At once a voice arose.” The thrush is described as “aged” and “frail, gaunt, and small,” yet it sings a “full-hearted evensong / Of joy illimited.” Hardy contrasts the bird’s small body with its big joyful song. This contrast shows that hope can come from unexpected places. Also, the word

"fling" shows that the bird sings with all its energy even though it is surrounded by "growing gloom." The speaker is surprised because the bird has no reason to sing.

The structure of the poem also helps show this change. The first two stanzas are about the dead landscape, and the third stanza starts with "At once," which makes the change feel sudden. The poem is written in regular four-line stanzas with a rhyme scheme, which gives it an orderly feeling, and this makes the bird's song stand out more because it interrupts the quiet. The shift in structure shows that the thrush's song is the most important moment in the poem and that it gives the speaker something to think about.

In the last stanza the speaker says there is "so little cause for carolings" but he could think that the bird knows of "some blessed Hope." The speaker is not sure what the hope is because he says "I was unaware." This shows that although he has gained a little hope, he does not fully understand it. Hardy ends the poem this way to show that hope is mysterious.

In conclusion, Hardy uses imagery, contrast and personification to show how the speaker goes from a hopeless attitude to a mysterious sense of hope. The thrush's song shows that even in dark times there can be joy, and the speaker's complex feelings show that people do not always understand why they feel hopeful.

Scoring commentary: Row A 1, Row B 3, Row C 0 = 4/6.

Row A (1). The thesis claims that the speaker moves from hopelessness to "a small sense of hope" and that the thrush's song causes the change. This is a defensible, if conventional, reading, so the point is earned.

Row B (3). The essay uses specific evidence throughout ("spectre-gray," "strings of broken lyres," "The Century's corpse," "frail, gaunt, and small," "fling," "I was unaware") and organizes it into a line of reasoning (despair, change, uncertain hope). It explains how some evidence supports the argument, notably the contrast between the bird's "small body" and its "big joyful song," and how the structural shift at "At once" makes the change "feel sudden." It also identifies several techniques. It does not earn the fourth point because the commentary is uneven: many sentences stop at "This shows that..." and restate the evidence ("This shows that the speaker feels that the whole century is dying"), the explanation of tone and diction stays general, and the closing paragraph repeats the thesis. The essay also moves device by device and does not examine the conditional grammar of the final stanza, even though it quotes it.

Row C (0). The reading is clear but conventional. The essay touches the speaker's uncertainty ("he does not fully understand it") but states it without exploring it, and the final line ("people do not always understand why they feel hopeful") is a generalization rather than a sustained complexity. No alternative reading or broader context is developed.

2-Point Sample Essay (about 328 words)

Thomas Hardy's poem "The Darkling Thrush" is about a man who sees a bird in the winter and feels better. Hardy shows that a small moment of beauty can change a person's sad way of looking at the world.

In the first stanza the speaker is leaning on a gate in the cold. Hardy uses imagery to describe the winter. The frost is gray and the day is weak. Then he says the vines look like broken strings. The speaker is sad because everything is dying and it is the end of the century. He says "The Century's corpse outleant." This shows that he is sad and thinks that the world is dead. There are also many other sad words in the first two stanzas which show the speaker has no hope at the beginning.

Then a bird starts singing. The bird is old and small but it sings a happy song. Hardy uses a lot of sound when he says “full-hearted evensong.” The speaker is surprised by the bird because it is happy in a sad place. This shows that the speaker feels happier because of the bird and starts to feel hope.

At the end the speaker says he could think the bird knows about hope but he does not know. This shows he is complex because he is happy and sad at the same time. Hardy uses many literary devices like imagery, personification and symbolism to show this. The thrush is a symbol of hope. It shows that even when things are bad there can be hope in the world, and people should always keep hoping.

In conclusion, “The Darkling Thrush” shows the speaker’s complex response to the thrush. He is sad at first, but happy after the bird sings, and Hardy uses many literary devices to show this. The poem is a good example of how nature can make people feel better when they are sad, which is why it is still read today.

Scoring commentary: Row A 1, Row B 1, Row C 0 = 2/6.

Row A (1). The second sentence makes a claim: “a small moment of beauty can change a person’s sad way of looking at the world.” It is general and ignores the speaker’s lingering uncertainty, but the poem offers some support for it, so it is defensible. (The sentence “the speaker has a complex response because he feels both sad and happy,” on its own, would only restate the prompt.)

Row B (1). The evidence is mostly summary: “the speaker is leaning on a gate in the cold,” “the frost is gray and the day is weak,” “then a bird starts singing.” One line is quoted (“The Century’s corpse outleant”), but the commentary (“This shows that he is sad”) only restates the quotation. The essay names devices (“imagery, personification and symbolism”) without explaining what any of them do, claims that the thrush is “a symbol of hope” without using any textual detail, and misses the speaker’s tentative final stanza (“he is happy and sad at the same time” misreads “I was unaware”). There is some relevant evidence, but there is no line of reasoning and the commentary does not explain how the evidence supports a claim.

Row C (0). The essay offers no sustained complexity; its closing generalization (“nature can make people feel better when they are sad”) is a sweeping statement rather than context.

Question 2: Prose Fiction Analysis (Mrs. Prentiss on the gallery)

SCORING RUBRIC (6 POINTS)

Row A: Thesis (0–1 point)

SCORE	DESCRIPTOR
0	There is no defensible thesis. Typical responses restate the prompt, only summarize the passage, name devices without making a claim, or do not respond to the prompt.
1	The response presents a defensible thesis that responds to the prompt. The thesis makes a claim about the meaning of the passage that the text can support; it does not have to preview the whole line of reasoning.

Decision rules: The thesis may be one sentence or several and may appear anywhere in the response. A thesis that merely restates the prompt ("The speaker has a complex response"), lists devices ("The author uses imagery and diction"), or announces a topic does not earn the point. A thesis that is defensible but general still earns the point; a thesis that is clearly contradicted by the text does not.

Row B: Evidence and Commentary (0–4 points)

SCORE	DESCRIPTOR	TYPICAL RESPONSES
0	Simply restates the thesis (if present), repeats information from the prompt, or offers irrelevant information.	Incoherent; opinion with no reference to the text; unrelated references.
1	Evidence is general. Commentary summarizes the evidence or the text but does not explain how it supports an argument.	Plot or content summary; paraphrase; lists devices with little or no explanation; "this shows" statements that restate the evidence.
2	Provides some specific, relevant evidence and some explanation of how it relates to the argument, but either no line of reasoning is established or the line of reasoning is faulty.	A mix of specific details and broad generalities; simplistic or repetitive explanations; one point developed while others are stubs; unclear connections between claims.
3	Provides specific evidence to support all claims in a line of reasoning. Commentary explains how <i>some</i> of the evidence supports the line of reasoning and explains how at least one literary element or technique contributes to meaning.	Uniformly specific evidence; focus on words and details of the passage; several supporting claims; some evidence unexplained or loosely integrated; technique analysis present but not sustained.
4	Provides specific evidence to support all claims in a line of reasoning. Commentary <i>consistently</i> explains how the evidence supports the line of reasoning and explains how <i>multiple</i> literary elements or techniques contribute to meaning.	Same as 3, plus every claim is explained, techniques are shown working together toward the interpretation, and the writing is controlled enough that errors do not interfere with communication.

Decision rules: Writing with errors that interfere with communication cannot earn the fourth point. Repeated instances of a single technique (for example, several images) count as multiple techniques only if the response shows that each contributes to meaning in a different way; otherwise the response is capped at 3. A response can earn 3 or 4 points without using technical terms if it analyzes how specific language choices create meaning. A response with no thesis can still earn Row B points. Plot summary or paraphrase alone is a 1.

Row C: Sophistication (0–1 point)

SCORE	DESCRIPTOR
0	Does not meet the criteria for the point.

SCORE	DESCRIPTOR
1	Demonstrates sophistication of thought and/or develops a complex literary argument. This may be done by any of four pathways: (1) identifying and exploring complexities or tensions within the text; (2) illuminating the interpretation by situating it within a broader context; (3) accounting for alternative interpretations; or (4) employing a style that is consistently vivid and persuasive.

What does not earn the point: sweeping generalizations offered as “context” (“Throughout history, people have...”); merely gesturing at an alternative reading without developing it; a single insightful sentence that is not sustained; oversimplifying the complexities in the text; ornate or inflated language that does not advance the argument. The quality must be part of the argument throughout, not a flourish in the introduction or conclusion.

PROMPT-SPECIFIC SCORING NOTES

What a defensible thesis looks like. The prompt asks for the *complex* response of Mrs. Prentiss to the evening. A defensible thesis names the complexity: a woman who is both performing and perceiving, stirred and self-controlled. Examples that would earn Row A:

- Mrs. Prentiss’s response to the evening is double: she is moved by an unobserved song into recognizing her own emptiness as hostess, yet she answers that recognition with a flawless performance, so her awakening shows itself only as concealment.
- Through ironic narration and the contrast between the lit house and the dark bayou, the author presents a woman who admires in a servant’s child what she cannot allow herself, and who is both aware of her confinement and complicit in it.
- The author portrays Mrs. Prentiss’s response not as rebellion but as a private, unspoken shift, quickly suppressed, that reveals how thoroughly social performance governs her life.

A thesis that says only “Mrs. Prentiss has complex feelings about the dinner” does not earn Row A. A thesis claiming that she is simply liberated, or simply unhappy, is thin but may be defensible; the difficulty will come in Row B because the passage ends with her return to the party.

What strong responses might argue and use as evidence.

- *Ironic omniscient narration.* The husband’s and servants’ misreadings of her habit (“digestion,” “piety”) are comic and sad; the narrator knows what she knows and has a dry, gently ironic voice that also directs it at her (“a lady’s vague and tender notion”).
- *Similes of performance.* The dining-room “like a face that has been told it is admired,” the husband’s laugh “as a good horse takes a fence”: social life as trained and mechanical. “She marvelled at how little she was needed to it.”
- *Contrast of settings.* The lit dining-room and the dim “green chamber” of honeysuckle; the “black and slow” bayou; the “small yellow window.” The gallery as a threshold between performance and privacy.
- *The girl’s song as catalyst.* “Thin and not quite true,” sung “as one talks to oneself in an empty room.” What moves her is the lack of an audience, and the contrast with her own always-observed life.
- *The clock simile and the hands.* She is “merely attentive, as one is to a clock that has been long silent”: denial and revelation in one figure. Her hands go from “folded” to “unfolded,” and in the final sentence she

"never once looked at her own hands."

- *Class perspective.* Her envy of the girl romanticizes a life of poverty; the narrator's phrase "a lady's vague and tender notion" checks any simple identification.
- *Dialogue and voice.* Her reply to Edmund ("smooth and bright as a coin"; "whatever he holds with . . . the safest course") is a witty self-erasure, and Edmund praises it as diplomacy. The Judge's sister, "who observed everything," offers the last outside view.
- *The darkened window.* "As if someone had put a hand over it" parallels her silencing and signals the closing of the moment.

Common traps.

- Reading the passage as a straightforward story of female liberation and ignoring her return inside.
- Ignoring the narrator's irony, including irony directed at Mrs. Prentiss.
- Treating the girl's song as simply beautiful rather than flawed and unobserved.
- Device-by-device organization ("simile," "imagery," "tone") rather than organization by idea.
- Importing outside claims about "women in the nineteenth century" in place of analysis of the text.
- Overlooking the husband, the guests, and the Judge's sister as part of the portrayal.

SAMPLE ESSAYS AND SCORING COMMENTARY

6-Point Sample Essay (about 769 words)

In this passage the narrator presents Louisa Prentiss at the moment when the self she performs and the self she is briefly come apart, and the author declines to resolve the rift. Mrs. Prentiss does not rebel, nor does she simply submit: she hears something that stirs a longing she cannot name, and then she goes back inside and plays her part more flawlessly than before. Through a wry omniscient narrator, a contrast between the lit dining-room and the dark bayou, and the symbol of a girl singing for no audience, the author shows that her awakening is real but can be expressed only as silence and control.

The opening paragraph establishes a woman whose inner life is a habit nobody is allowed to interpret. Her husband "took it for a form of digestion," the servants "for a form of piety," and Mrs. Prentiss, who "knew it to be neither," takes care that it "should never be called anything at all." The parallel clauses are comic because both explanations are domestic and wrong, yet the final clause is quietly sad: she protects her privacy by keeping it unnamed. The narrator's dry tone invites us to smile at the household's misreading, but it also notes that her only freedom is concealment. That pairing of amusement and pity governs the passage.

The dinner inside is rendered through comparisons that make social life mechanical. The dining-room "glittered with a hard, expectant brilliance, like a face that has been told it is admired," a personification that makes the room vain and brittle. Her husband's laugh comes "at precisely the right interval, as a good horse takes a fence," a simile that reduces sociability to trained performance. Against these, Mrs. Prentiss's reaction is not resentment but astonishment: she "marvelled at how little she was needed to it." The verb is mild, yet the idea is large. The evening she labored over for three days runs perfectly without her, and the narrator lets us see that her usefulness has become indistinguishable from her absence.

Setting then sharpens the contrast. The gallery, under honeysuckle that makes "a dim green chamber," is a threshold between the lamps of the house and the "black and slow" bayou. The "small yellow window" across the water answers the dining-room's brilliance with something dimmer and warmer, and from it comes the girl's song, "thin and not quite true." The author deliberately imperfects the music: the singer "did not trouble to be

pretty" and sang "as one talks to oneself in an empty room." What moves Mrs. Prentiss is therefore not beauty but the absence of an audience. She would deny that she is moved, saying she is "merely attentive, as one is to a clock that has been long silent," yet the clock simile betrays her: something dormant has begun to strike "without apparent cause." Her hands, "folded before her" in the second paragraph, are now "unfolded," a physical sign of feeling pushing against her control.

The author complicates any simple sympathy, however. Mrs. Prentiss envies the child "the circumstance, so simple and so impossible, of singing a thing for no one at all," but the narrator notes that her idea of the girl's poverty is only "a lady's vague and tender notion." Her longing is genuine, and it is also the longing of someone who has never had to take in the town's washing, as the girl's household does. The narrator neither mocks nor endorses it. This restraint keeps the passage from becoming a tidy story of liberation, and it suggests that Mrs. Prentiss's freedom is imagined from inside a privilege that she cannot give up.

The final paragraph returns her to the performance, and the control with which she does so is the last irony. When Edmund calls, her voice is "smooth and bright as a coin," something valuable only in circulation, and her joke, "I hold with whatever he holds with," is at once a social triumph and a statement of self-erasure. He praises her as "a perfect diplomat." Meanwhile the lit window "went dark all at once, as if someone had put a hand over it," an image that echoes her own silencing. The Judge's sister, "who observed everything," notes only that Mrs. Prentiss laughed "at the right places" and "never once looked at her own hands." That last detail answers the folded and unfolded hands earlier: she now avoids looking at the part of herself that betrayed feeling. Her response to the evening is complex because it is both an awakening and a refusal to be seen awakening, and the author leaves us with the cost.

Scoring commentary: Row A 1, Row B 4, Row C 1 = 6/6.

Row A (1). The thesis is specific and arguable: the passage shows the moment "when the self she performs and the self she is briefly come apart," with an awakening that "can be expressed only as silence and control." It states both halves of the complexity.

Row B (4). The essay moves through the passage in order of ideas, and each paragraph advances the claim. Evidence is quoted precisely ("digestion," "piety," "a hard, expectant brilliance, like a face that has been told it is admired," "as a good horse takes a fence," "thin and not quite true," "a clock that has been long silent," "a lady's vague and tender notion," "smooth and bright as a coin," "never once looked at her own hands"). The commentary explains function, not just presence: the parallel clauses are "comic" but end "quietly sad"; the similes make social life "mechanical"; the clock simile "betrays" her denial; the hands motif is traced from the second paragraph to the last sentence. The response handles narration, simile, personification, setting, imagery, dialogue, and motif, each shown to shape the portrait differently.

Row C (1). The essay sustains a complex argument. It treats the narrator's irony as directed at both the household and Mrs. Prentiss, it examines the class limits of her envy, and it resists a "tidy story of liberation." The final paragraph shows that her self-erasure is both a social triumph and the cost of her awakening. These qualifications run through the whole essay, not just the conclusion.

4-Point Sample Essay (about 463 words)

In this passage, Mrs. Prentiss feels trapped in her role as a hostess and wife, and the song of the girl across the bayou makes her realize how much she wants to be free. The author uses setting, a simile, and the contrast between Mrs. Prentiss and the girl to show her complicated feelings.

At the beginning, the author shows that Mrs. Prentiss is different from the people around her. Her husband thinks her habit of standing on the gallery is “a form of digestion” and the servants think it is “a form of piety,” but she knows it is “neither.” This shows that nobody really understands her and that she keeps her real feelings hidden. The author also describes the dinner as having “a hard, expectant brilliance, like a face that has been told it is admired.” This simile shows that the dinner is fake and for show. Mrs. Prentiss “marvelled at how little she was needed to it,” which shows that she feels unimportant at her own party.

The setting also shows her feelings. Mrs. Prentiss is outside on the gallery in the “dim green chamber” of honeysuckle while the party is inside with the lamps. The bayou is “black and slow.” This contrast between inside and outside shows that she wants to get away from the artificial party and be in a place where she can be herself. The little cottage with a lamp is also described, which is where the girl is singing.

The girl’s song is the most important part. The song is “thin and not quite true” and the girl sings “as one talks to oneself in an empty room.” Mrs. Prentiss envies her because she can sing “for no one at all.” The author uses the clock simile to show that Mrs. Prentiss has feelings that have been silent for a long time and that now “begin to strike.” This shows that she is more moved than she wants to admit.

At the end, Mrs. Prentiss goes back inside when her husband calls her. Her voice is “smooth and bright as a coin,” which shows that she can pretend. She says she holds with whatever the Judge holds with. The window goes dark “as if someone had put a hand over it,” which shows that her freedom is gone. The Judge’s sister notices that she laughed at the right places, which shows that nobody can see how she really feels.

In conclusion, the author uses setting, similes, and contrast to show that Mrs. Prentiss wants to be free but goes back to her old role. This shows how hard it was for women in this time to be themselves, and it makes the reader sympathize with Mrs. Prentiss because she cannot show anyone her true feelings.

Scoring commentary: Row A 1, Row B 3, Row C 0 = 4/6.

Row A (1). The thesis claims that Mrs. Prentiss “feels trapped” and “wants to be free,” and that the author shows this through setting, a simile, and contrast. It is a defensible reading of the passage, although it simplifies the complexity.

Row B (3). Evidence is specific and drawn from across the passage (“digestion,” “piety,” “a hard, expectant brilliance,” “dim green chamber,” “black and slow,” “thin and not quite true,” “smooth and bright as a coin,” the window going dark). The essay explains how some evidence supports its claim, most clearly in the paragraph on setting (“contrast between inside and outside shows that she wants to get away from the artificial party”) and the clock simile. Multiple elements are identified and linked to meaning. It does not earn a 4 because much of the commentary relies on the formula “this shows that...” and restates the quotation (“this shows that her freedom is gone”), and because the line of reasoning does not engage the narrator’s irony or the fact that she returns to the party calmly.

Row C (0). The essay presents Mrs. Prentiss as simply wanting freedom and does not examine the tensions in her response (her denial that she is moved, her complicity, the class dimension of her envy). The last sentence about “women in this time” is a generalization offered as context and does not illuminate the passage.

2-Point Sample Essay (about 309 words)

In the passage by the author, Mrs. Prentiss has a complex response to the evening because she is both happy and unhappy. The author uses literary devices to show how she feels.

First, Mrs. Prentiss goes out on the gallery while her husband and the guests are eating dinner. The author tells us that she does this every night and nobody knows why. Her husband thinks it is digestion. This shows that Mrs. Prentiss is different from everyone else and wants to be alone.

Then she hears a girl singing across the bayou. The song is not very good but she listens to it. The author uses a simile when he says that she is like a clock that has started to strike. This shows that she has feelings that she did not know about before. She also thinks that the girl is lucky because she can sing for no one. The author uses imagery to describe the bayou as black and slow, and the lamp in the window is yellow. This shows that it is nighttime and that the setting is quiet.

After that her husband calls her to come in so she goes back in. She laughs a lot at dinner. The Judge's sister notices this. This shows that Mrs. Prentiss is putting on an act even though she is sad. The author uses a lot of description in the passage. The passage has a sad tone and the story is told in the third person.

Overall, the author uses imagery, similes, and tone to show Mrs. Prentiss's complex response to the evening. She is sad because she is not free, but she goes back to the dinner anyway. This is a good example of how a character can be complex, and it makes the reader think about her situation and how she feels about her life.

Scoring commentary: Row A 0, Row B 2, Row C 0 = 2/6.

Row A (0). The opening sentence ("Mrs. Prentiss has a complex response to the evening because she is both happy and unhappy") restates the prompt's key word, and "happy" is not supported by the passage. The concluding sentence ("she is sad because she is not free, but she goes back to the dinner anyway") comes closer to a claim, but it appears only as a summary at the end and is not offered as an interpretation that the essay then argues. The response never presents a defensible thesis, so Row A is not earned.

Row B (2). The essay supplies some specific, relevant evidence (the husband's "digestion" explanation, the clock simile, the "black and slow" bayou, the yellow lamp, the Judge's sister noticing that she laughs) and gives some explanation ("she is putting on an act even though she is sad"). That is enough for 2 points. It does not earn more because there is no line of reasoning: the paragraphs follow the passage's plot, the explanations are brief ("This shows that it is nighttime and that the setting is quiet"), device names ("imagery, similes, and tone") are listed without effect, and a statement about the "sad tone" and "third person" is not developed.

Row C (0). The essay offers only generalities in its final sentences ("a good example of how a character can be complex").

Question 3: Literary Argument (a character who keeps a secret)

SCORING RUBRIC (6 POINTS)

Row A: Thesis (0–1 point)

SCORE	DESCRIPTOR
0	There is no defensible thesis. Typical responses restate the prompt, only summarize the work, name devices without making a claim, or do not respond to the prompt.

SCORE	DESCRIPTOR
1	The response presents a defensible thesis that responds to the prompt. The thesis may make a claim about the secret in the chosen work or about how the secret and its consequences contribute to an interpretation of the work as a whole; any reasonable reading of “secret” is acceptable.

Decision rules: The thesis may be one sentence or several and may appear anywhere in the response. A thesis that merely restates the prompt (“The speaker has a complex response”), lists devices (“The author uses imagery and diction”), or announces a topic does not earn the point. A thesis that is defensible but general still earns the point; a thesis that is clearly contradicted by the text does not.

Row B: Evidence and Commentary (0–4 points)

SCORE	DESCRIPTOR	TYPICAL RESPONSES
0	Simply restates the thesis (if present), repeats information from the prompt, or offers irrelevant information.	Incoherent; opinion with no reference to the text; unrelated references.
1	Evidence is general. Commentary summarizes the evidence or the text but does not explain how it supports an argument.	Plot or content summary; paraphrase; lists devices with little or no explanation; “this shows” statements that restate the evidence.
2	Provides some specific, relevant evidence and some explanation of how it relates to the argument, but either no line of reasoning is established or the line of reasoning is faulty.	A mix of specific details and broad generalities; simplistic or repetitive explanations; one point developed while others are stubs; unclear connections between claims.
3	Provides specific evidence to support all claims in a line of reasoning. Commentary explains how <i>some</i> of the evidence supports the line of reasoning. (Row B for this question does not require identifying literary techniques.)	Specific scenes, details, or quotations from the chosen work; some evidence is explained and some is left to speak for itself; links to the work as a whole are present but uneven.
4	Provides specific evidence to support all claims in a line of reasoning. Commentary <i>consistently</i> explains how the evidence supports the line of reasoning, and the response addresses the interpretation of the work as a whole.	Every paragraph advances the claim about the secret and its consequences; evidence is selected and sequenced to build an interpretation of the whole work; the essay is not organized as a retelling.

Decision rules: Writing with errors that interfere with communication cannot earn the fourth point. Evidence may be paraphrased scenes and details rather than direct quotations, but it must be specific; broad plot summary stays at 1. Evidence that is inaccurate to the work cannot support a line of reasoning. A response with no thesis can still earn Row B points.

Row C: Sophistication (0–1 point)

SCORE	DESCRIPTOR
0	Does not meet the criteria for the point.
1	Demonstrates sophistication of thought and/or develops a complex literary argument. This may be done by any of four pathways: (1) identifying and exploring complexities or tensions within the text; (2) illuminating the interpretation by situating it within a broader context; (3) accounting for alternative interpretations; or (4) employing a style that is consistently vivid and persuasive.

What does not earn the point: sweeping generalizations offered as “context” (“Throughout history, people have...”); merely gesturing at an alternative reading without developing it; a single insightful sentence that is not sustained; oversimplifying the complexities in the text; ornate or inflated language that does not advance the argument. The quality must be part of the argument throughout, not a flourish in the introduction or conclusion.

PROMPT-SPECIFIC SCORING NOTES

What a defensible thesis looks like. The prompt asks students to choose a work in which a character keeps a secret and to analyze how the secret and its consequences contribute to an interpretation of the *work as a whole*. A defensible thesis makes a claim about what the secret reveals or does; it does not merely identify the secret. Examples:

- In *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne uses Dimmesdale’s concealed adultery and Chillingworth’s concealed identity to argue that hidden guilt corrodes more deeply than public shame.
- In *Frankenstein*, Victor’s refusal to disclose the creature’s existence converts private ambition into communal catastrophe and makes secrecy the novel’s clearest image of irresponsible knowledge.
- In *Jane Eyre*, Rochester’s concealment of Bertha tests the novel’s conviction that love requires equality and truth, and it defines the terms on which Jane can finally accept him.

A thesis such as “The secret affects the character’s relationships” is too general to guide an argument, but may still earn Row A if it makes a claim about the work. A response that treats “secret” loosely (for example, as something the *reader* does not know) should be judged on how well the claim fits the chosen work.

Works and approaches that can sustain a strong response.

- *The Scarlet Letter*: the three scaffold scenes; Dimmesdale’s double life; Chillingworth’s identity and his dependence on it; Hester’s silence; Pearl as the embodied secret; the ambiguous revelation on Election Day.
- *Jane Eyre*: Bertha in the attic; Thornfield’s Gothic signals; the interrupted wedding; Jane’s refusal and flight; the fire and Rochester’s injuries; the ending as a re-balancing of power.

- *The Great Gatsby*: Gatz's invented self; the source of Gatsby's wealth; Daisy driving the car and Gatsby's silence about it; Nick as keeper and revealer of secrets.
- *Frankenstein*: Victor's silence about the creature; Justine's execution; the frame narrative that makes the telling of the secret the plot's end.
- *Hamlet* (Claudius's murder, the ghost's command to Hamlet) or *Beloved* (Sethe's act and the community's silence), *Atonement* (Briony's false testimony), *The Remains of the Day* (Stevens's suppressed feelings), *Sula*, *Rebecca*, *The Turn of the Screw*, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, *The House of Mirth*, or *Ethan Frome*.
- Strong responses connect the secret to a larger claim about the work (the corrosion of concealment, the limits of community, the cost of loyalty, the relationship between private and public self) and return to that claim in each paragraph.

Common traps.

- Plot summary in place of analysis; the essay moves chronologically through events and mentions the secret only in passing.
- Losing the key term: drifting from "secret" to "lies" or "guilt" in general, or to a different theme altogether.
- Choosing a work whose details the student cannot recall, leading to vague or inaccurate evidence.
- Writing about the secret's revelation but not its *consequences*, or about the consequences for the character but not for the meaning of the whole.
- Concluding with a generic moral ("honesty is the best policy") that is not tied to the work.
- Treating the list as a requirement; any work of literary merit is acceptable.

SAMPLE ESSAYS AND SCORING COMMENTARY

6-Point Sample Essay (about 778 words)

In *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne makes secrecy the engine of the plot and the measure of every character's moral condition. A secret is not only something a person hides but something that does work on the hider: it isolates, it distorts, and it breeds a second life that the community never sees. By setting Arthur Dimmesdale's concealed adultery and Roger Chillingworth's concealed identity against Hester Prynne's publicly displayed sin, Hawthorne argues that hidden guilt corrodes more deeply than open shame, yet he also leaves unsettled whether the truth, once revealed, can ever be fully known.

Dimmesdale's secret is the novel's clearest case of concealment as self-destruction. He is the father of Pearl, yet for seven years he stands in the pulpit as the community's model of holiness. Because he cannot confess, his sin turns inward: he scourges himself, fasts, and keeps vigils, and he stands on the scaffold at midnight, where no one can see him, in a mock penance that confesses nothing. Hawthorne shows that the secret has produced a double life in which the minister's greatest eloquence comes from his guilt, so that his congregation reveres him for the agony he cannot name. When he tells them he is vile, they take it as humility. The community's inability to read him reveals the limits of a society that trusts appearances, and it sets up Hawthorne's sharpest irony: the more the people honor Dimmesdale, the more his silence tortures him.

Chillingworth's secret poisons in a different way. Hester agrees, at his demand, to hide that he is her husband, and Chillingworth uses that anonymity to move into Dimmesdale's house as his physician and probe his heart. The secret gives him power, but the power is a form of damnation. He begins as a scholar and becomes what Hawthorne repeatedly calls a fiend, his whole life organized around the discovery of another man's hidden sin.

Notably, once Dimmesdale dies and the secret is out, Chillingworth has nothing left to live for and withers within the year, leaving his property to Pearl. Hawthorne suggests that the keeper of a secret can be as dependent on it as its subject, and that a life built around concealment has no existence apart from it.

Hester complicates this pattern. Her sin is exposed on the scaffold in the first chapters, and her letter marks her for life, yet it is she who remains most whole. She also keeps a secret, Chillingworth's identity, and the strain of that silence is part of what she tells Dimmesdale in the forest, where she hopes to free him from the old physician's control. Because her sin is public and her guilt acknowledged, she is able to sew, to tend the sick, and to become a source of counsel for other women. The letter, meant as a brand, is gradually reinterpreted by the community. Against this, Dimmesdale's sin, still hidden, remains a wound. Hawthorne's contrast is a claim about the whole work: visible punishment, however harsh, allows a person to belong to the truth, while concealment divides the self.

Pearl, the living consequence of the secret, makes this division visible. Hawthorne treats her as the scarlet letter endowed with life, and she behaves like an interrogator who cannot be deceived. At the midnight vigil she asks Dimmesdale to take her hand and her mother's the next noon; when he puts her off until "the great judgment day," she laughs and tries to draw her hand away. In the forest she wants to know whether he will go back with them into the town, hand in hand, the three together. The child does not need to know the secret to sense the minister's evasion. Her questions make the choice plain: Dimmesdale can acknowledge the family he has hidden, or remain the respected man whose reputation depends on silence. Through Pearl, Hawthorne turns the secret from a private burden into a demand that the community cannot indefinitely refuse to hear.

But Hawthorne does not close the novel on a simple moral of confession. When Dimmesdale finally reveals himself on the scaffold on Election Day, the narrator reports that most spectators saw a scarlet letter on his chest, while others "denied that there was any mark whatever." Some thought it self-inflicted, others the work of Chillingworth's magic. The secret, even after disclosure, is split into competing accounts. Hawthorne's closing advice, "Be true! Be true!", is therefore offered in a world where truth is hard to witness and harder to hold. That uncertainty is the novel's final complexity: the secret and its consequences show that concealment ruins, yet the community that demands openness is itself unable to read what is shown.

Scoring commentary: Row A 1, Row B 4, Row C 1 = 6/6.

Row A (1). The thesis defines what secrecy does in the work ("a secret is not only something a person hides but something that does work on the hider") and makes a claim about the work as a whole: "hidden guilt corrodes more deeply than open shame," yet it remains unsettled "whether the truth, once revealed, can ever be fully known."

Row B (4). Evidence is specific and accurate: the seven-year double life, the midnight vigil, Dimmesdale's "vile" confession taken for humility, Chillingworth's residence in the minister's house and his withering after Dimmesdale's death, Hester's public letter and later counsel to other women, Pearl's questions, the conflicting reports on Election Day, and "Be true! Be true!" The commentary consistently explains how each piece supports the line of reasoning (the secret creates a double life; it gives power that becomes damnation; its opposite, public shame, allows belonging) and each paragraph ties back to an interpretation of the work as a whole. The essay is organized by idea, not chronology, and the writing is controlled.

Row C (1). The response develops a complex argument. It adds the parallel secrets of Chillingworth and Hester to Dimmesdale's, contrasts public and hidden guilt, and ends by complicating its own claim: even revealed, the secret splits into "competing accounts," so the community's demand for openness is matched by its inability to read what it sees. That tension is sustained, not tacked on.

4-Point Sample Essay (about 465 words)

In Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, the secret that Rochester keeps, the existence of his wife Bertha in the attic of Thornfield, shapes the whole novel. The secret and its consequences show that love without honesty cannot last, and that Jane must balance her desire for love with her need to keep her self-respect.

Rochester's secret is revealed to Jane in the middle of the novel, but Brontë has been preparing the reader for it from the start of Jane's time at Thornfield. There are strange laughs in the night, a fire in Rochester's bedroom that Jane puts out, and the attack on Mason. Grace Poole is blamed for everything, which shows how Rochester uses lies to protect his secret. These mysteries create a Gothic atmosphere that makes Thornfield seem like a place of danger as well as comfort. Because of this, the reader understands that Rochester's charm and passion are mixed with deception, and that Jane's happiness is built on something false.

The secret is exposed at the wedding, when Mr. Mason and the lawyer Mr. Briggs interrupt the ceremony and say that Rochester is already married. This is the turning point of the novel because Jane's hopes of marrying are destroyed. Rochester tries to justify himself by explaining that his father and brother arranged the marriage to Bertha for her money and that she became mad. He even asks Jane to live with him as his partner, but Jane refuses. This shows that Jane values her own integrity over her feelings. She says she must respect herself, and she leaves Thornfield in the night. The secret therefore tests Jane's character, and Brontë uses it to show that Jane will not accept love on any terms.

The consequences continue after Jane leaves. She almost starves on the moors before she is taken in by the Rivers family, and she discovers that she has an inheritance from her uncle. When St. John asks her to marry him and go to India, she hears Rochester's voice calling her and returns to find Thornfield burned down. Bertha has died in the fire, and Rochester has lost his sight and one hand. The ending can be read as a punishment for Rochester's secret, but it also lets Jane return as an equal because she now has money and independence. The secret, in other words, is what makes the final marriage possible on fairer terms.

Overall, the secret in *Jane Eyre* contributes to the meaning of the work as a whole by showing that real love needs truth and equality. Rochester's hiding of Bertha almost destroys his relationship with Jane, but it also lets Jane prove herself, and the novel ends with the two of them united only after the secret has been exposed and its consequences have been faced.

Scoring commentary: Row A 1, Row B 3, Row C 0 = 4/6.

Row A (1). The thesis claims that Rochester's secret shows "love without honesty cannot last" and that Jane must balance love with self-respect. This is a defensible claim about the work as a whole.

Row B (3). The evidence is specific and accurate (the laughs in the night, the fire in Rochester's bedroom, the attack on Mason, Grace Poole as scapegoat, the interrupted wedding, Mason and Briggs, Jane's refusal and night departure, the moors, the Rivers family, the inheritance, Rochester's injuries). The commentary explains how some of it supports the argument (the interrupted wedding as the "turning point," the inheritance letting Jane return as an equal), and the final paragraph ties the secret to the meaning of the whole. The response does not earn a 4 because several paragraphs lean toward chronological retelling (the third and fourth paragraphs summarize events with brief commentary) and some claims ("real love needs truth and equality") are stated rather than shown through the details.

Row C (0). The reading is sound but conventional. It does not consider the tension between Rochester's sympathetic account of Bertha and the novel's portrayal of her, or other complexities that would deepen the interpretation.

2-Point Sample Essay (about 336 words)

In *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald, Jay Gatsby keeps many secrets. His secret is that he is really James Gatz from North Dakota and that he got his money from illegal business. The secret contributes to the meaning of the book because it shows that the American Dream can be false.

At the beginning of the novel, Nick Carraway moves next door to Gatsby, who throws big parties every weekend. Nobody knows where he came from. People say that he killed a man or that he was a German spy. Gatsby wants to keep his past hidden because he wants Daisy to love him. He was poor when he met Daisy and he lied about his background, so he made himself rich to win her back. Nick finds out later that his name was James Gatz and that a rich man named Dan Cody took him in on a yacht. His business partner is Meyer Wolfsheim, who fixed the World Series.

The secret has many consequences. Daisy and Gatsby have an affair, and Tom finds out and confronts them at the Plaza Hotel. Tom says that Gatsby is a criminal. On the drive home Daisy hits Myrtle with Gatsby's car, but Gatsby says that he was driving to protect her. George Wilson thinks Gatsby was the driver, so he shoots Gatsby in his pool and then kills himself.

At the end of the book hardly anybody comes to Gatsby's funeral. Only Nick, Gatsby's father, and a few others come. Nick thinks that Tom and Daisy are careless people who "smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money." This shows that the secret caused Gatsby's death and that rich people do not care about others.

In conclusion, the secret in *The Great Gatsby* leads to a lot of bad things happening. It shows that the American Dream is not always real and that people should be honest. It contributes to the meaning of the work because it makes the story tragic.

Scoring commentary: Row A 1, Row B 1, Row C 0 = 2/6.

Row A (1). The thesis states that Gatsby's secret "shows that the American Dream can be false." It is general but defensible for this novel.

Row B (1). The essay is largely plot summary. It names accurate details (James Gatz, Dan Cody, Wolfsheim, the Plaza confrontation, Myrtle's death, Wilson's shooting, the sparsely attended funeral, Nick's "careless people" judgment), but the commentary seldom explains how any of them supports the thesis. The one analytic move ("this shows that the secret caused Gatsby's death and that rich people do not care about others") is asserted without discussion, and the second secret (that Daisy was driving) is mentioned but never connected to the argument. The conclusion ("people should be honest") is a generic moral. The evidence is mostly general narrative developments, which is typical of a score of 1.

Row C (0). There is no sophistication.

Part 4: How to Score Yourself

College Board does not publish its exact scoring formula or cut scores, and they shift slightly from year to year. The method below is a widely used approximation. Treat the result as a **rough estimate**, not a prediction.

Step 1: Multiple choice. Count your correct answers (there is no penalty for wrong answers). Multiply by 1.23 to get your weighted multiple-choice score (maximum about 67.5).

Step 2: Free response. Score each essay from 0 to 6 using the rubric (Row A + Row B + Row C), then add the three scores to get a total from 0 to 18. Multiply the total by 4.58 to get your weighted free-response score (maximum about 82.5).

Step 3: Composite. Add the two weighted scores. The maximum composite is about 150.

MC CORRECT	WEIGHTED MC	ESSAY TOTAL (OF 18)	WEIGHTED FRQ
55	67.5	18	82.5
50	61.5	16	73.3
45	55.4	14	64.1
40	49.2	12	55.0
35	43.1	10	45.8
30	36.9	8	36.7
25	30.8	6	27.5
20	24.6	4	18.3
15	18.5	2	9.2

Approximate composite-to-score conversion (not official):

APPROXIMATE AP SCORE	APPROXIMATE COMPOSITE (OF 150)
5	about 105 and above
4	about 87 to 104
3	about 65 to 86
2	about 45 to 64
1	below about 45

Worked example. A student answers 38 multiple-choice questions correctly ($38 \times 1.23 = 46.7$) and earns essay scores of 4, 3, and 4 (total 11; $11 \times 4.58 = 50.4$). The composite is about 97, which falls in the approximate 4 range.

Scoring your essays honestly. Most students score their own writing too generously on Row B and Row C. As you rate yourself, ask:

- *Row A:* Could I underline a sentence that makes a claim someone could disagree with, or does it only restate the prompt?
- *Row B:* For each piece of evidence, did I write a sentence explaining *how* it supports my claim, or did I stop at “this shows”? For Questions 1 and 2, did I explain at least two different techniques? For Question 3, did every paragraph return to the work as a whole?
- *Row C:* Did I develop a tension, context, alternative reading, or consistently vivid style throughout, or did I simply add one impressive sentence? Row C is rare; if in doubt, give yourself 0.

If possible, have a teacher or a classmate score your essays against the rubric and the samples above, and compare.

Diagnosing your multiple-choice results. Circle the question numbers you missed in the skill table in Part 1. A cluster of misses in a single category tells you what to practice.

IF YOU MISSED SEVERAL...	PRACTICE BY...
Narration / Speaker (NAR)	Asking who is speaking, to whom, from when, and how the language reveals attitude; marking tone words and the narrator's distance from the characters.
Character (CHR)	Tracking what a character says versus what the text shows; noting how speech, gesture, and stage directions reveal motive and relationships.
Structure (STR)	Marking shifts, repetitions, and the order in which information is revealed; asking what each section does for the whole.
Figurative Language / Word Choice (FIG)	Distinguishing literal from figurative meaning; explaining what an image or comparison <i>does</i> rather than only naming it.
Setting (SET)	Asking what details of place and time convey and how a character relates to them.
Literary Argumentation (LAN)	Practicing claims and evidence: for each claim, find the line that best supports it and say why the other lines do not.

Passage-by-passage review. Passage 1 (Questions 1–11) and Passage 3 (Questions 23–33) are poems; Passages 2 and 5 are prose fiction; Passage 4 is drama. If your accuracy is much lower on one genre than the others, spend your next practice session on that genre.

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