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AP ENGLISH LITERATURE · FREE RESOURCE

Every Past FRQ Prompt by Year

A year-by-year archive of AP Literature free-response prompts: Question 1 poems, Question 2 prose passages, and Question 3 open prompts, 1970 through 2026, with a tally of the most-cited works, an analysis of recurring Q3 themes, and 25 original practice prompts in the current style. Use it to see patterns, to choose practice material, and to build your list of prepared Q3 works.

How to read this archive

- Task descriptions are **paraphrased**, not quoted. Passages and poems are not reproduced here (most are still under copyright). The official source for each is linked at the end.
- **"B"** after a year (for example, 2002B) marks the alternate exam form given 2002–2016. **S1 / S2** means Set 1 / Set 2, used 2023 onward.
- Before 2019 the essays were scored on a 9-point holistic scale. Since 2019–20 they are scored on the 6-point analytic rubric. Prompt wording changed with the scoring: the stable wording since 2019 asks how the author "uses literary elements and techniques" to convey a "complex" attitude, experience, or portrayal.
- 2020 was a disrupted year (a single online free-response question), so it appears as a gap.
- Where a table says "task not captured," the task was not recorded in this archive.

Part 1: Question 1, Poetry Analysis, 1970–2026

YEAR	POEM	POET	TASK (PARAPHRASED)
1970	"Elegy for Jane"	Theodore Roethke	Speaker's attitude toward a former student
1971	"The Unknown Citizen"	W. H. Auden	Implications about the society depicted
1972	(no poetry essay)	—	—
1973	(exam not available)	—	—
1974	excerpt, "Downstream" or untitled	Thomas Kinsella (attributed)	Imagery of the last stanza versus the speaker's self-view

YEAR	POEM	POET	TASK (PARAPHRASED)
1975	(no poetry essay)	—	—
1976	"Poetry of Departures"	Philip Larkin	Diction and attitude toward two ways of living
1977	"Piano" (two versions)	D. H. Lawrence	Why the revised version is better
1978	"Law Like Love"	W. H. Auden	Contrasting conceptions of law in two parts
1979	"Spring and All" / "For Jane Meyers"	W. C. Williams / Louise Glück	Differing attitudes toward spring
1980	"One Art"	Elizabeth Bishop	Attitude toward loss; verse form (villanelle)
1981	"Storm Warnings"	Adrienne Rich	Literal and metaphorical meaning; organization and title
1982	"The Groundhog"	Richard Eberhart	Changing perceptions of the groundhog's decay
1983	"Clocks and Lovers" ("As I Walked Out One Evening")	W. H. Auden	Clocks versus lover; imagery
1984	(no poetry essay)	—	—
1985	"There Was a Boy" / "The Most of It"	Wordsworth / Frost	Attitudes toward nature and solitude
1986	"Ogun"	Edward Kamau Brathwaite	Diction, imagery, movement; two sections
1987	"Sow"	Sylvia Plath	Presentation of the sow; neighbor versus narrator
1988	"Bright Star" / "Choose Something Like a Star"	Keats / Frost	Theme and style; allusion
1989	"The Great Scarf of Birds"	John Updike	Organization, diction, figurative language
1990	Soliloquy, <i>Henry IV, Part 2</i>	Shakespeare	King's sleeplessness; diction, imagery, syntax
1991	"The Last Night that She Lived"	Emily Dickinson	Attitude toward the woman's death
1992	excerpt, <i>The Prelude</i>	Wordsworth	Changing responses to nature

YEAR	POEM	POET	TASK (PARAPHRASED)
1993	"The Centaur"	May Swenson	Language, imagery, structure, point of view
1994	"To Helen" / "Helen"	Poe / H.D.	Contrasting views of Helen
1995	"The Broken Heart"	John Donne	Imagery and attitude toward love
1996	"The Author to Her Book"	Anne Bradstreet	Controlling metaphor; complex attitude
1997	"The Death of a Toad"	Richard Wilbur	Response to the toad's death
1998	"It's a Woman's World"	Eavan Boland	Complex conception of a woman's world
1999	"Blackberry-Picking"	Seamus Heaney	Deeper meaning beyond the literal picking
2000	Sirens episode, <i>Odyssey</i> / "Siren Song"	Homer / Margaret Atwood	Portrayals of the Sirens
2001	"London, 1802" / "Douglass"	Wordsworth / Paul Laurence Dunbar	Responses to place and time
2002	"The Convergence of the Twain"	Thomas Hardy	Attitude toward the Titanic's sinking; title
2002B	"If I Could Tell You"	W. H. Auden	Villanelle form and meaning
2003	"ΕΡΩΣ" / "Eros"	Robert Bridges / Anne Stevenson	Two concepts of Eros
2003B	Sonnet from <i>Modern Love</i>	George Meredith	View of modern love
2004	"We Grow Accustomed to the Dark" / "Acquainted with the Night"	Dickinson / Frost	Significance of dark and night
2004B	"Crossing the Swamp"	Mary Oliver	Relationship between speaker and swamp
2005	"The Chimney Sweeper" (1789 and 1794)	William Blake	Compare the two versions
2005B	"Five A.M." / "Five Flights Up"	William Stafford / Elizabeth Bishop	Early-morning states of mind
2006	"Evening Hawk"	Robert Penn Warren	Mood and meaning
2006B	"To Paint a Water Lily"	Ted Hughes	Attitudes toward nature and the artist's task

YEAR	POEM	POET	TASK (PARAPHRASED)
2007	"A Barred Owl" / "The History Teacher"	Richard Wilbur / Billy Collins	Adults explaining to children
2007B	"Here"	Philip Larkin	Attitude toward places
2008	"When I Have Fears" / "Mezzo Cammin"	Keats / Longfellow	Similar concerns, different techniques
2008B	"Hawk Roosting" / "Golden Retrievals"	Ted Hughes / Mark Doty	Animal speakers' worldviews
2009	Wolsey's speech, <i>Henry VIII</i>	Shakespeare	Complex response to dismissal; allusion, figurative language, tone
2009B	"Icarus"	Edward Field	Myth adapted to a contemporary setting
2010	"The Century Quilt"	Marilyn Nelson Waniek	Meanings attributed to the quilt
2010B	"To Sir John Lade, on His Coming of Age" / "When I Was One-and-Twenty"	Samuel Johnson / A. E. Housman	Views of coming of age
2011	"A Story"	Li-Young Lee	Father-son relationship; point of view, structure
2011B	"An Echo Sonnet"	Robert Pack	Form and meaning
2012	"Thou Blind Man's Mark"	Sir Philip Sidney	Complex attitude toward desire
2013	"The Black Walnut Tree"	Mary Oliver	Relationship between family and tree; literal versus figurative
2013B	"Remember" / "The Cross of Snow"	Christina Rossetti / Longfellow	Grief and memory
2014	"For That He Looked Not upon Her"	George Gascoigne	Complex attitude of the speaker
2015	"XIV" (from <i>Midsummer</i>)	Derek Walcott	Significance of the remembered experience
2016	"The Juggler"	Richard Wilbur	Juggler's significance to the speaker

YEAR	POEM	POET	TASK (PARAPHRASED)
2016B	"On Not Shoplifting Louise Bogan's <i>The Blue Estuaries</i> " / "London's Summer Morning" (two B forms reported)	Julia Alvarez / Mary Robinson	Encounter with a book; the city as inspiration
2017	"The Myth of Music"	Rachel M. Harper	Music and complex family memories
2018	"Plants"	Olive Senior	Speaker, implied audience, and plant life
2019	"The Landlady"	P. K. Page	Complex portrayal of the landlady
2020	(exam disrupted; single online FRQ, a prose question)	—	—
2021	"The Man with the Saxophone"	Ai	Complexity of the speaker's encounter
2022	"Shaving"	Richard Blanco	Complex associations with the shaving ritual
2023 S1	"Autumn"	Alice Cary	Complex response to changing seasons
2023 S2	"The Barren Moors"	William Ellery Channing	Complex experience of a natural setting
2024 S1	"To a Star Seen at Twilight"	John Rollin Ridge	Complex reflection on the star
2024 S2	"On Summer"	George Moses Horton	Complex portrayal of setting
2025 S1	"Monologue for Saint Louis"	Colleen McElroy	Complex experience of returning home
2025 S2	"Two Guitars"	Víctor Hernández Cruz	Task not captured
2026	"Marking Time"	Christopher Gilbert	Complex reflections while jogging

Patterns in Q1

1. **Paired-poem comparisons** were common from 1979 to 2013 and have not appeared since the redesign. Practice with a single poem.
2. **Poet selection has shifted.** Since 2019, College Board has alternated less-anthologized nineteenth-century American poets (Cary, Channing, Ridge, Horton) with late-twentieth- and twenty-first-century poets of color (Ai, Blanco, McElroy, Hernández Cruz, Gilbert).
3. **Every post-2019 prompt uses the word "complex."** Your thesis must say what the complexity is.

4. **Shakespearean dramatic verse** has been used as the “poem” (1990, 2009).

5. **Nature, memory, home, and loss** are the recurring subjects. A speaker in a natural setting who is changed by it is the closest thing to a default Q1.

Part 2: Question 2, Prose Fiction Analysis, 1970–2026

Before the redesign, the prose question often used nonfiction (essays, letters, biography, speeches). Since the question became “prose fiction,” nonfiction has not appeared.

YEAR	AUTHOR	WORK	TASK (PARAPHRASED)
1970	George Meredith	“Ferdinand and Miranda” (<i>The Ordeal of Richard Feverel</i>)	How the two are suited to each other
1971	George Orwell	“Some Thoughts on the Common Toad”	Attitude toward spring
1972	James Joyce	“Eveline”	How the story prepares for Eveline’s decision
1973	Charles Dickens	<i>Hard Times</i> (Coketown)	Shaping attitude toward place; diction, imagery, syntax
1974	Henry James	<i>What Maisie Knew</i>	Also a creative-writing option that year
1975	Pär Lagerkvist	“The Marriage Feast”	Subject and significance
1976	John Gardner (probable)	Epic excerpt	World, way of life, effect
1977	(no prose essay recorded)	—	—
1978	Samuel Johnson	Review of Jenyns’s <i>Free Enquiry</i>	Attitude toward Jenyns’s argument
1979	Quentin Bell	Biography of Virginia Woolf’s family	Attitude toward the Woolfs; style
1980	Henry James / Ralph Ellison	Funeral piece / <i>Invisible Man</i>	Compare attitudes; detail and diction
1981	G. B. Shaw	Letter on his mother’s cremation	Attitude; detail and diction
1982	Adlai Stevenson	“Cat Bill” veto	Effectiveness of the argument
1983	Thomas Carlyle	“Work”	How language persuades
1984	Jane Austen; Norman Mailer	<i>Emma</i> ; “The Death of Benny Pareť”	Characterization of Emma; diction, imagery, syntax

YEAR	AUTHOR	WORK	TASK (PARAPHRASED)
1985	Ernest Hemingway	<i>A Farewell to Arms</i> (two drafts)	Effect of revisions
1986	Charles Dickens	<i>Dombey and Son</i>	Attitude toward characters
1987	George Eliot	"Leisure" (<i>Adam Bede</i>)	Stylistic devices
1988	John Updike	"Reunion"	Humor, pathos, the grotesque
1989	Joseph Conrad	<i>Typhoon</i> (Captain MacWhirr)	Techniques defining the captain
1990	Joan Didion	"On Self-Respect"	Style and tone
1991	James Boswell	<i>Life of Samuel Johnson</i>	Characterization
1992	Tillie Olsen	"I Stand Here Ironing"	Mother's attitude; narrative techniques
1993	Lytton Strachey	<i>Eminent Victorians</i> (Florence Nightingale)	Strachey's view
1994	Sarah Orne Jewett	"A White Heron"	Dramatizing the heroine's adventure
1995	Sandra Cisneros	"Eleven"	Characterization of Rachel
1996	Nathaniel Hawthorne	<i>The House of the Seven Gables</i> (Judge Pyncheon)	Attitude toward the Judge
1997	Joy Kogawa	<i>Obasan</i>	Attitude toward the past
1998	George Eliot	<i>Middlemarch</i> (Dorothea)	Attitude toward Dorothea
1999	Cormac McCarthy	<i>The Crossing</i>	Impact of the experience on the protagonist
2000	Joseph Addison	<i>The Spectator</i> (diarist)	Satiric purpose
2001	Henry Fielding	<i>Tom Jones</i>	Allworthy and Mrs. Wilkins
2002	Alain de Botton	<i>Kiss and Tell</i>	Comic effect
2002B	Annie Proulx	<i>The Shipping News</i>	Impression of Quoyale
2003	Mavis Gallant	"The Other Paris"	Social commentary
2003B	Joyce Carol Oates	<i>We Were the Mulvaney's</i>	Narrative voice (Judd)
2004	Henry James	"The Pupil"	Three characters' relationships
2004B	Elizabeth Gaskell	<i>Mary Barton</i>	Social commentary
2005	Katharine Brush	"Birthday Party"	Author's purpose

YEAR	AUTHOR	WORK	TASK (PARAPHRASED)
2005B	Frank Norris	<i>McTeague</i>	Narrator's attitude through characterization
2006	Oscar Wilde	<i>Lady Windermere's Fan</i> (drama)	Values of characters and society
2006B	Wilkie Collins	<i>The Moonstone</i>	Attitude toward the people described
2007	Dalton Trumbo	<i>Johnny Got His Gun</i>	Father-son relationship
2007B	Seamus Deane	<i>Reading in the Dark</i>	Impact of experiences
2008	Anita Desai	<i>Fasting, Feasting</i>	Point of view
2008B	Jane Austen	<i>Northanger Abbey</i>	Catherine Morland
2009	Ann Petry	<i>The Street</i>	Lutie's relationship to the urban setting
2009B	Zora Neale Hurston	<i>Seraph on the Suwanee</i>	Characterizing Sawley
2010	Maria Edgeworth	<i>Belinda</i>	Characterization through narration
2010B	Maxine Clair	"Cherry Bomb"	Narrator's memories
2011	George Eliot	<i>Middlemarch</i> (Rosamond and Lydgate)	Narrative voice
2011B	Tomson Highway	<i>Kiss of the Fur Queen</i>	Okimasis's experience
2012	Helena María Viramontes	<i>Under the Feet of Jesus</i>	Estrella's development
2013	D. H. Lawrence	<i>The Rainbow</i>	The woman and her situation
2013B	Cyril Dabydeen	"Mammacita's Garden Cove"	Max's attitude toward place
2014	Edward P. Jones	<i>The Known World</i>	What the passage reveals about Moses
2015	Louise Erdrich	<i>The Beet Queen</i>	Environment's impact on two children
2015B	Penelope Lively	<i>Moon Tiger</i>	Complex relationships
2016	Thomas Hardy	<i>The Mayor of Casterbridge</i>	Henchard and Elizabeth-Jane's relationship
2016B	Kiran Desai	<i>The Inheritance of Loss</i>	Mood and setting
2017	Tobias Smollett	<i>Peregrine Pickle</i>	Emotions versus social norms

YEAR	AUTHOR	WORK	TASK (PARAPHRASED)
2018	Nathaniel Hawthorne	<i>The Blithedale Romance</i>	Narrator's attitude toward Zenobia
2019	William Dean Howells	<i>The Rise of Silas Lapham</i>	Two sisters' complex experience
2020	(single online FRQ, prose)	—	—
2021	Tim Winton	<i>Breath</i>	Narrator's response to a riverbank incident
2022	Linda Hogan	<i>People of the Whale</i>	Two events characterizing the community
2023 S1	Nisi Shawl	<i>Everfair</i>	Lisette's complex response to a bicycle ride
2023 S2	Brenda Peynado	"The Rock Eaters"	Complex portrayal of the narrator's situation
2024 S1	Mavis Gallant	"One Morning in June"	Mike's complex experience studying painting
2024 S2	Jane Urquhart	<i>The Night Stages</i>	Task not captured
2025 S1	Rachel Cusk	<i>The Bradshaw Variations</i>	Complex portrayal of Thomas Bradshaw
2025 S2	Jeannette Haien	<i>The All of It</i>	Complex portrayal of Father Declan
2026	Aimee Bender	<i>The Particular Sadness of Lemon Cake</i>	Narrator's complex experience eating the cake

Patterns in Q2

1. **Since 2012 the passages alternate** between nineteenth-century canonical British and American novels (Lawrence, Hardy, Smollett, Hawthorne, Howells) and contemporary, often global, Indigenous, or BIPOC authors (Viramontes, Jones, Erdrich, Winton, Hogan, Shawl, Peynado, Cusk, Bender).
2. **Only one drama excerpt** (2006, Wilde) has appeared on Q2 since 2000.
3. **Tasks are formulaic.** Nearly every recent prompt asks for the "complex portrayal of [a character]" or the "complex experience or response of [a character] to [an event or place]."
4. **Q2 is the lowest-scoring essay** (mean 3.28 in 2024; 3.22 in 2025). Readers report that students ignore secondary characters, irony, and the narrator's stance.
5. **Repeat authors** show the range of the pool: Dickens, George Eliot, Henry James, Hawthorne, Austen, and Mavis Gallant each appear more than once.

Part 3: Question 3, Open Prompts / Literary Argument, 1970–2026

YEAR	PROMPT CONCEPT (PARAPHRASED)
1970	A character's relationship to the standards of a fictional society (alternate: purposes served by an inanimate object)
1971	How titles of two works gain significance gradually (contrast, repetition, allusion, point of view)
1972	How an opening scene or first chapter introduces major themes
1973	Whether an ending provides appropriate closure, including remaining ambiguity
1974	Argue for and against a pre-1900 work's relevance to a 1974 reader
1975	How a conventional or stereotyped character achieves the author's purpose
1975B	How a playwright guides audience response without a narrator
1976	Conflict between individual and society; moral and ethical implications
1977	A character's view of the past (reverence, bitterness, longing) and theme
1977B	Parallel or recurring events and their significance
1978	An implausible incident or character and its relation to the work's realism
1979	How a seemingly evil character is made sympathetic
1980	A character's conflict between private passion and moral responsibility
1981	A predominant allusion (myth, Bible, literature) and how it enhances meaning
1982	A scene of violence and its contribution to meaning (alternates: struggle for dominance; illusion versus reality in a play)
1983	The nature of a villain's villainy and how it enhances meaning
1984	A memorable line or passage and why it is effective in its work
1985	Sources of "pleasure and disquietude" a work produces

YEAR	PROMPT CONCEPT (PARAPHRASED)
1986	An author's manipulation of time
1987	Attitudes or traditions a work seeks to change; techniques used
1988	Making internal, psychological events as exciting as external action
1989	Distortion over realism; distorted elements and effectiveness
1990	Parent-child conflict and its contribution to meaning
1991	Contrasting places representing opposed forces
1992	Functions of a confidant(e)
1993	A scene or character provoking "thoughtful laughter"
1994	A character who appears briefly or not at all yet is a significant presence
1995	A character alienated by gender, race, class, or creed revealing a society's values
1996	Spiritual reassessment or moral reconciliation at the end of a work
1997	A social occasion (wedding, funeral, party) revealing values
1998	"Uncivilized free and wild thinking" in a work once thought tame
1999	Two conflicting forces pulling a character's mind
2000	A mystery characters confront and how its investigation illuminates the work
2001	A character's apparent madness or irrational behavior and its reasonableness
2002	A morally ambiguous character
2002B	A character who must keep a secret
2003	A tragic figure instrumental in others' suffering
2003B	A character's response to a collision of cultures
2004	A central question the work raises and the extent to which it answers it (Barthes epigraph)
2004B	A specific death scene illuminating meaning
2005	Tension between outward conformity and inward questioning

YEAR	PROMPT CONCEPT (PARAPHRASED)
2005B	A character's struggle for power (freedom from others or power over them)
2006	How a country setting establishes values
2006B	A physical journey and its meaning
2007	A character's relationship to the past (personal or societal)
2007B	The nature of a betrayal
2008	A minor character serving as a foil
2008B	Portrayal of childhood or adolescence
2009	How one symbol functions
2009B	A political or social issue explored through literary elements
2010	Exile as alienating and enriching
2010B	Importance of "home" to a character who leaves
2011	A character's response to justice or injustice
2011B	An "illuminating" episode as a window onto the work's meaning
2012	How cultural, physical, or geographical surroundings shape a character
2013	A single pivotal moment in a bildungsroman protagonist's development
2013B	Opposing viewpoints of older and younger characters
2014	A character's deliberate sacrifice
2015	How cruelty functions and what it reveals about perpetrator or victim
2015B	A central character's name illuminating complexity
2016	A character's motives for deceiving others
2016B	Instructing and pleasing readers (Sidney)
2017	A character's unusual or mysterious origins
2018	A character's gift that is both advantage and problem
2019	A character's "ideal view of the world" and its consequences
2020	(no Q3; single online FRQ)
2021	A literal or unconventional house as a significant symbol

YEAR	PROMPT CONCEPT (PARAPHRASED)
2022	A character's response to a hierarchy (social, economic, political, familial)
2023 S1	A character's intentional reinvention of identity
2023 S2	Complex motivation of a rebel disrupting order
2024 S1	A character who delays, avoids, or resists making a decision
2024 S2	A character's sense of an unfulfilled need
2025 S1	A character significantly affected by a memory
2025 S2	A character's secret and its effect on relationships
2026	Tension between the old and the new

Q3 wording today

Since the redesign, the prompt uses the phrase “a work of fiction” (it used to say “novel or play”), so drama counts. A two- to four-sentence conceptual lead is followed by: “Either from your own reading or from the list below, choose a work of fiction in which [concept]. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how [concept] contributes to an interpretation of the work as a whole. Do not merely summarize the plot.” A list of about 38–43 suggested works follows; you may choose any work of literary merit.

Two recent suggested-works lists (verbatim titles)

These show the range. Both mix canonical and contemporary titles.

2024 Set 1 (indecision): The Age of Innocence; An American Marriage; Anna Karenina; The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman; Beloved; Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage; Corelli's Mandolin; Dubliners; Emma; Frankenstein; George Washington Gómez; Indian Horse; Interior Chinatown; Jane Eyre; The Kite Runner; Little Fires Everywhere; A Long Petal of the Sea; Love in the Time of Cholera; Madame Bovary; The Metamorphosis; The Miraculous Day of Amalia Gómez; The Namesake; The Night Watchman; North and South; One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest; Pipeline; The Professor's House; Quicksand; A Raisin in the Sun; Rebecca; A Room with a View; The Stranger; A Tale of Two Cities; Tess of the d'Urbervilles; Topdog/Underdog; Waiting; Whereabouts; Wuthering Heights.

2026 (old versus new): Afterlife; The Ambassadors; Anna in the Tropics; Annie John; The Awakening; Behold the Dreamers; Bread Givers; Brooklyn; Ceremony; Disgrace; A Doll's House; Fabulation, or the Re-Education of Undine; Fences; Frankenstein; Hard Times; A House for Mr. Biswas; How the García Girls Lost Their Accents; Kindred; The Mayor of Casterbridge; Middlemarch; Monkey Hunting; The Namesake; Native Speaker; The Nickel Boys; The Night Watchman; Nineteen Eighty-Four; North and South; Northanger Abbey; Passing; People of the Whale; The Rainbow; A Raisin in the Sun; The Remains of the Day; Romeo and Juliet; Sister Carrie; Song of Solomon; The Sun Also Rises; Their Eyes Were Watching God; There There; Things Fall Apart; Typical American; The Way We Live Now; The Woman Warrior.

Part 4: Most-cited works on Q3 lists, 1970–2026

The tally counts how often a work has appeared on the suggested-works lists attached to open prompts. Appearing on a list means College Board considers the work a strong fit for open prompts; it does not mean it will appear next year.

COUNT	WORK
36	<i>Invisible Man</i> (Ellison)
34	<i>Wuthering Heights</i> (Emily Brontë)
32	<i>Great Expectations</i> (Dickens)
30	<i>Jane Eyre</i> (Charlotte Brontë)
24	<i>The Scarlet Letter</i> (Hawthorne)
23	<i>Crime and Punishment</i> (Dostoevsky); <i>King Lear</i> (Shakespeare); <i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i> (Hurston)
21	<i>The Awakening</i> (Chopin); <i>Beloved</i> (Morrison); <i>Heart of Darkness</i> (Conrad)
19	<i>Moby-Dick</i> (Melville); <i>A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man</i> (Joyce)
18	<i>Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</i> (Twain); <i>Catch-22</i> (Heller); <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> (Hansberry)
17	<i>Native Son</i> (Wright); <i>Song of Solomon</i> (Morrison)
16	<i>Ceremony</i> (Silko)
15	<i>The Color Purple</i> (Walker); <i>Death of a Salesman</i> (Miller)
13–14	<i>Antigone</i> (Sophocles); <i>The Great Gatsby</i> (Fitzgerald); <i>Frankenstein</i> (Shelley); <i>Light in August</i> (Faulkner); <i>Othello</i> (Shakespeare)
10–12	<i>Anna Karenina</i> ; <i>A Doll's House</i> ; <i>Fences</i> ; <i>Macbeth</i> ; <i>The Tempest</i> ; <i>Hamlet</i> ; <i>Things Fall Apart</i> ; <i>The Namesake</i> ; <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> ; <i>Oedipus Rex</i>

Totals by group: Shakespeare plays account for 113 citations in all; classical Greek and Roman works for 40. Recent lists deliberately include contemporary and global writers (Adichie, Lahiri, Morrison, Erdrich, Whitehead, Ishiguro, Murakami, Nguyen, Orange, Charles Yu, Jesmyn Ward, Nilo Cruz, Lynn Nottage, Suzan-Lori Parks, August Wilson, Dominique Morisseau).

How to use the tally

- The top of the list is the safest ground, but graders read hundreds of essays on *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*. A specific, well-supported argument matters more than the title.

- Prepare three or four works, not ten. The research-backed combination: one nineteenth-century novel (*Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Frankenstein*, *Great Expectations*), one twentieth- or twenty-first-century novel (*Beloved*, *Invisible Man*, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, *The Namesake*, *Song of Solomon*), and one play or non-Western work (*Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *A Raisin in the Sun*, *Fences*, *Things Fall Apart*, *A Doll's House*).
- For each work, build a mental map: three or four scenes you can describe in concrete detail, two or three motifs or images, and one interpretive claim. Use the Major Works Data Sheet in folder 07.
- Choose works of literary merit that you remember well. A half-remembered book produces plot summary.

Part 5: Recurring Q3 themes, 1970–2026

Grouping the prompts by concept shows that the same few human subjects return in different wording. If you prepare each work against these families, you can answer almost any prompt.

THEME FAMILY	EXAMPLE PROMPT YEARS	WHAT THE PROMPT REALLY ASKS
Character against society or hierarchy	1970, 1976, 1995, 2005, 2022, 2023 S2	How a character's relationship to rules, class, or conformity reveals the work's values
Morally complex or antagonistic characters	1979, 1983, 2002, 2003, 2015, 2016	What a villain, a morally ambiguous figure, or an act of cruelty or deceit shows about the whole
Internal conflict and choice	1980, 1999, 2014, 2024 S1, 2024 S2	How a mind pulled in two directions, a decision, a sacrifice, or an unmet need drives meaning
The past, memory, and time	1977, 1986, 2007, 2019, 2025 S1, 2026	How history, remembered events, or the old versus the new shape character and theme
Secrets, mysteries, and origins	1994, 2000, 2002B, 2017, 2025 S2	How what is hidden, absent, or unknown organizes the work
Place, setting, and home	1991, 2006, 2010, 2010B, 2012, 2021	How a country, house, place of exile, or surroundings express values
Identity and development	2008B, 2013, 2018, 2023 S1	How a character's coming of age, reinvention, or distinctive trait shapes meaning
Symbol, allusion, and craft	1971, 1981, 1984, 2009, 2015B	How one symbol, name, title, allusion, or memorable passage works for the whole
Social occasions, scenes, and episodes	1982, 1997, 2004B, 2011B	How a single scene (violence, a party, a death, an illuminating episode) illuminates the work

THEME FAMILY	EXAMPLE PROMPT YEARS	WHAT THE PROMPT REALLY ASKS
Secondary and structural figures	1992, 1994, 2008	How a confidant, a foil, or an absent presence functions

Observations

1. **Character-centered prompts dominate.** Since 2010, almost every Q3 prompt begins “a character who...” or “a character’s...”. Prepare protagonists, but also secondary characters, since foils, confidants, and absent presences recur.
2. **The prompt names a concept, not a technique.** Q3 does not require you to name devices. It requires you to define the concept for your work and show how it contributes to the work as a whole.
3. **Define the key term.** The Chief Reader Reports for 2024 and 2025 list drifting from the key term (writing about decisions instead of indecision, “trauma” instead of “memory”) as a frequent failure.
4. **Recent prompts pair a state with a consequence.** “Significantly affected by a memory,” “sense of an unfulfilled need,” “secret and its effect on relationships.” You need the cause and the consequence.
5. **Recurring abstractions to prepare for every work:** memory and the past, secrets, home and exile, power and hierarchy, identity and reinvention, deception, sacrifice, betrayal, justice, conformity versus questioning, the old versus the new, and the symbolic function of a place or object.

Part 6: 25 likely practice prompts in the current style

These are original prompts written for practice, in the stable Q3 format. Each should be answered with “either from your own reading or from the list” in a 40-minute essay. They are not predictions, but each builds on a concept family that has appeared before. For each one, write down which of your prepared works fits before you start.

1. Many works of literature feature a character who keeps a promise made long ago, even when keeping it is costly. Choose a work of fiction in which a character’s loyalty to a past commitment shapes the action. Analyze how that loyalty contributes to an interpretation of the work as a whole.
2. Many works feature a character who is wrongly believed to be someone else. Choose a work in which mistaken identity matters. Analyze how that misidentification contributes to an interpretation of the work as a whole.
3. Authors often use an inheritance, tangible or intangible, to link generations. Choose a work in which something is inherited. Analyze how the inheritance contributes to an interpretation of the work as a whole.
4. In many works, silence is as significant as speech. Choose a work in which a character’s refusal or inability to speak shapes events. Analyze how that silence contributes to an interpretation of the work as a whole.
5. Many works of literature include a character who returns after a long absence. Choose a work in which a return disturbs the status quo. Analyze how the return contributes to an interpretation of the work as a whole.
6. Some works feature a character who achieves a goal and finds it hollow. Choose a work in which success proves unsatisfying. Analyze how that outcome contributes to an interpretation of the work as a whole.
7. In many works, a community turns on one of its own. Choose a work in which a character is excluded, blamed, or cast out by a group. Analyze how the exclusion contributes to an interpretation of the work as a whole.

whole.

8. Some works feature a character who lies to protect someone else. Choose a work in which a protective deception has consequences. Analyze how it contributes to an interpretation of the work as a whole.
9. Literature often explores the gap between a character's private self and public role. Choose a work in which a character performs a role that conceals a truth. Analyze how that gap contributes to an interpretation of the work as a whole.
10. In many works, a character is shaped by the expectations of a parent or guardian. Choose a work in which a character resists or submits to such expectations. Analyze how that struggle contributes to an interpretation of the work as a whole.
11. Many works of fiction depict a character's loss of faith, in a belief, an institution, or a person. Choose a work in which faith is lost or tested. Analyze how that loss contributes to an interpretation of the work as a whole.
12. Some works feature an object that changes hands and changes meaning. Choose a work in which an object accumulates significance as it passes between characters. Analyze how the object contributes to an interpretation of the work as a whole.
13. Authors sometimes place a character in a landscape that mirrors or opposes the character's inner life. Choose a work in which the natural world matters to a character's struggle. Analyze how the landscape contributes to an interpretation of the work as a whole.
14. In many works, a character experiences a moment of recognition that comes too late. Choose a work in which understanding arrives after the chance to act has passed. Analyze how that timing contributes to an interpretation of the work as a whole.
15. Many works feature a character who is an outsider by language, culture, or circumstance. Choose a work in which being an outsider shapes a character's view of the community. Analyze how that perspective contributes to an interpretation of the work as a whole.
16. Some works portray ambition as both a source of vitality and a source of ruin. Choose a work in which a character's ambition has dual effects. Analyze how that ambition contributes to an interpretation of the work as a whole.
17. In many works, a minor character delivers a truth the protagonist is unwilling to hear. Choose a work in which a secondary character challenges a central one. Analyze how that challenge contributes to an interpretation of the work as a whole.
18. Many works of literature feature a character who must choose between two loyalties. Choose a work in which divided allegiance creates a crisis. Analyze how that division contributes to an interpretation of the work as a whole.
19. Some works use a recurring ritual, a meal, a holiday, a ceremony, to reveal changes in a family or community. Choose a work in which a ritual recurs. Analyze how the repetition contributes to an interpretation of the work as a whole.
20. In many works, a character's physical or social confinement shapes thought and action. Choose a work in which confinement is literal or figurative. Analyze how it contributes to an interpretation of the work as a whole.
21. Many works examine a character who believes in luck, fate, or destiny. Choose a work in which a character's belief about control is tested. Analyze how that belief contributes to an interpretation of the work as a whole.
22. Some works feature a character whose generosity masks a need for control. Choose a work in which kindness is double-edged. Analyze how that doubleness contributes to an interpretation of the work as a

whole.

23. In many works, a significant event is told by someone who did not witness it, or told differently by several people. Choose a work in which conflicting accounts matter. Analyze how the competing versions contribute to an interpretation of the work as a whole.
24. Many works of literature feature a character who is cut off from language, tradition, or homeland and attempts to rebuild it. Choose a work in which a character tries to reconstruct what has been lost. Analyze how that effort contributes to an interpretation of the work as a whole.
25. Some works end with a decision that seems small but alters everything. Choose a work in which a late, quiet choice carries great weight. Analyze how that choice contributes to an interpretation of the work as a whole.

A practice routine for these prompts

1. Pick a prompt and give yourself three minutes to list every work you could write about.
2. Choose the one you can describe with the most concrete detail, not the one with the fanciest reputation.
3. Define the prompt's key term *for your work* in one sentence. That sentence is the seed of your thesis.
4. List three scenes or images that support your claim, and the effect each has on the meaning of the **whole** work.
5. Write for 35 minutes; score with *The 6-Point Rubrics Decoded*.

Part 7: Using the archive for practice

1. **Pre-2019 prompts** are written for the old 9-point scale. They are still excellent for practice, but rewrite the ask in current wording ("analyze how the poet uses literary elements and techniques to convey the speaker's complex ...") and score with the 6-point rubric.
2. **Recent prompts (2021 onward)** are the closest to what you will see; use them for timed practice late in the year.
3. **Read the Chief Reader Report** for any prompt you practice. It tells you what students did and what readers wished they had done.
4. **Read two scored samples** (one high, one low) after you write, and compare line of reasoning, not just quality of prose.

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