AP® ENGLISH LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION 2006 SCORING GUIDELINES

Question 1 (Robert Penn Warren’s “Evening Hawk”)

The score reflects the quality of the essay as a whole—its content, its style, its mechanics. Students are rewarded for what they do well. The score for an exceptionally well-written essay may be raised by 1 point above the otherwise appropriate score. In no case may a poorly written essay be scored higher than a 3.

9–8 These essays offer a persuasive analysis of the language the poet uses to describe the scene and to convey mood and meaning. Although these essays offer a range of interpretations and choose to emphasize different poetic techniques, these papers provide convincing readings of the poem and demonstrate consistent and effective control over the elements of composition in language appropriate to the analysis of poetry. Their textual references are apt and specific. Though they may not be error-free, these essays are perceptive in their analysis and demonstrate writing that is clear and sophisticated, and in the case of a 9 essay, especially persuasive.

7–6 These competent essays offer a reasonable analysis of the language the poet uses to describe the scene and to convey mood and meaning. They are less thorough or less precise in their discussion of the themes and techniques, and their analysis of the relationship between the language and the themes is less convincing. These essays demonstrate the student’s ability to express ideas clearly with references to the text, although they do not exhibit the same level of effective writing as the 9–8 papers. While essays scored 7–6 are generally well written, those scored a 7 demonstrate more sophistication in both substance and style.

5 These essays may respond to the assigned task with a plausible reading of the poem, but they may be superficial in analysis of theme and technique. They often rely on paraphrase but paraphrase that contains some analysis, implicit or explicit. Their analysis of the language of the poem may be vague, formulaic, or inadequately supported by references to the text. There may be minor misinterpretations. These students demonstrate control of language, but the writing may be marred by surface errors. These essays are not as well conceived, organized, or developed as 7–6 essays.

4–3 These lower-half essays fail to offer an adequate analysis of the language of the poem. The analysis may be partial, unconvincing, or irrelevant. Evidence from the poem may be slight or misconstrued, or the essays may rely on paraphrase only. The writing often demonstrates a lack of control over the conventions of composition: inadequate development of ideas, accumulation of errors, or a focus that is unclear, inconsistent, or repetitive. Essays scored a 3 may contain significant misreadings and/or demonstrate inept writing.

2–1 These essays compound the weaknesses of the papers in the 4–3 range. Although some attempt has been made to respond to the prompt, the student’s assertions are presented with little clarity, organization, or support from the poem. They may contain serious errors in grammar and mechanics. These essays may offer a complete misreading or be unacceptably brief. Essays scored a 1 contain little coherent discussion of the poem.

0 These essays give a response with no more than a reference to the task.

— These essays are either left blank or are completely off topic.

1A

Humans are often mislead in their feelings of superiority to the world that surrounds them. Robert Penn Warren’s poem, “Evening Hawk,” questions the belief of human immortality and instead presents the idea that nature is a severe judge of humanity’s mistakes. The diction used by the narrator conveys a mood of dark foreboding and illustrates the fallacy of humans in their belief that that they control Time and the earth. The imagery of the hawk as the powerful master of Time and judgement further underlines the fragility of mankind.

The narrator’s language drive the mood and meaning of the piece. The poem begins with a stark description of dusk; there is much motion and a sense of unease. The hawk appears “out of a peak’s black angularity of shadow”; such language depicts the rigid mathematical lines that the world is made up. There is no romance or lofty descriptions of the evening. The light shines in “planes” and builds “geometries.” The light is not playful, it is a “tumultuous avalanche.” The hawk is a force to be reckoned with. His wing “scythes down another day,” meaning it violently cuts Time away. The Hawk is not a gentle bird; his wing “is a honed steel-edge” and he viciously harvests the “stalks of Time.” Human fallacy is evident, as the only fruit borne by the stalks of Time is “our error.” The harvest is our failure, as “each stalk is heavy with the gold of our error.” The hawk controls Time and humans have contributed nothing but a wealth of errors. The majestic bird leaves with the last ray of light, and leaves behind humanity “unforgiven.” He is not a compassionate savior, he has no knowledge of “time or error” and thus does not deal with the trivialities of forgiving, and so saving, humans. The earth is left in darkness as it “swings into shadow.” Nature is superior to the people that inhabit the earth. Even “the bat” is wise and “ancient.” Humans cannot control the rotation of the earth; it “grinds on its axis” and thus Time flows on unabated by human’s efforts at conquering the world. “History drips in darkness like a leaking pipe in the cellar,” indicates the narrator’s belief that the history of humans’ actions deserves nothing else but to be kept in a dank, neglected basement. The mood of the poem is heavy with the guilt of human deficiency. The narrator’s use of words such as “black,” “scythes,” “heavy,” “unforgiven,” and darkness convey a sad scene. Night is settling as the Hawk “scythes down” Time, and the culmination of human history amounts to only the dripping of a leaky basement pipe.

The narrator’s dark language conjures up a scene of foreboding for the future of humans. Mankind’s actions are not exalted, instead the narrator depicts the hawk, and thus nature, as the controller of life and time. Humanity produces nothing but “stalks” heavy with “error.” The poem suggests a grim notion, that people are not in control of their lives, and are subject to the unbiased judgment of a “steel-edged” bird.

Strengths?

Weaknesses?

Your score: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_/9

1B

The language used in Robert Penn Warren’s poem, “Evening Hawk,” conveys the mood and meaning by providing the reader with images that give him or her certain feelings. These feelings are of speculative and insecure expectancy.

In the first stanza, Warren’s language is one of learned simplicity in the way he describes the hawk’s actions. He is not very elegant, but he has an adjective for almost every noun, that portrays a feeling of contrasting ideas. In line two, the personification of the sun building “geometries and orchids” is contrasted with the primitive descriptions of “the last tumultuous avalanche light above pines and the guttural gorge.” The contrast between an advanced sun and a primitive earth gives a feeling of separation.

Stanza two and line ten are connected by their common thread of agricultural images. The lines from six through ten provide the reader with the images of a scythe cutting down the fruits of Time. Although the second stanza’s image is one of harvest, the language in line ten provides a different idea. The heavy gold of the grain is not of man’s good fruits, but of man’s errors and mistakes.

The hawk in the fourth stanza is shown as a judge, high above the earth, by the use of the language in lines thirteen and fourteen. He is shown as the one who does not forgive. The hawk does not associate himself with the earth but with the “last light who knows neither Time nor error.” The language in this part of the passage provides a sense of dread and grim expectations by utilizing the parallelism of an unforgiving eyes and an unforgiven world.

The last two stanzas show the reader, through the language, the darkness and immensity of the world. It is shown to be night as Warren reveals by saying “Long now, the last thrush is still…” the language in the last stanza, however, shows everything man knows as worthless. The earth is so old it “[grinds] on its axis,” and “history [drips] in darkness like a leaking pipe in the cellar.”

When all is said and done, the reader is left with a feeling of insignificance, provided by the despondent language Warren chose to use to describe many things mankind holds in high esteem.

Strengths?

Weaknesses?

Your score: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_/9

1C

In his poem, “Evening Hawk,” Robert Penn Warren admires the grace, elegance, and strength with which the hawk flies through the night, and in order to do so, he uses many language techniques, but primarily diction and syntax. The speaker in the poem is watching the flight of a hawk and is in awe of its steadfast strength, set against the similar strength of its background. Warren best shows the strength of the scene, as well as his admiration for the hawk, through complex diction and flowing syntax.

The diction in “Evening Hawk” is not at all simple. The words Warren chooses are, like the hawk, strong and bold. Words such as “angularity,” “tumultuous,” and “guttural,” invoke in the reader a recognition of the harsh boldness of the landscape and also the hawk in the foreground. The hawk’s wisdom is described as “ancient” and “immense” which help to portray a sense of admiration for the hawk’s strength and agility. Many of the adjectives chosen by Warren in describing the hawk are complex and elegant, which mirrors the mood and meaning of the poem in that the hawk, too, is meant to appear complex and elegant.

Like the diction in the poem, syntax is also used by Warren to convey the mood, meaning, and scene. In stanzas one, two, and four, syntax is especially manipulated to show the strength and beauty of the hawk. In those stanzas, there are no periods to chop up the thought except for at the end. In this way, Warren shows that the hawk’s flight also appears as a smooth movement. The syntax throughout “Evening Hawk,” is swift and steady, like the hawk itself.

Robert Penn Warren’s “Evening Hawk,” paints a picture of a hawk in flight, set in front of a mountainous, rugged landscape. By using strong diction and flowing syntax, Warren conveys his admiration for the scene before him, and his interpretation of the scene as both strong and elegant. He utilizes syntax and diction to further show his belief that the hawk is the epitome of strength.

Strengths?

Weaknesses?

Your score: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_/9