



Chief Reader Report on Student Responses: 2025 AP[®] African American Studies Set 1 Free-Response Questions

• Number of Students Scored	21,480		
• Number of Readers	136		
• Score Distribution	Exam Score	N	%At
	5	3,707	17.3
	4	6,979	32.5
	3	6,294	29.3
	2	3,420	15.9
	1	1,080	5.0
• Global Mean	3.41		

The following comments on the 2025 free-response questions for AP[®] African American Studies were written by the Chief Reader, Teresa Reed, Professor of Music, University of Louisville. They give an overview of each free-response question and of how students performed on the question, including typical student errors. General comments regarding the skills and content that students frequently have the most problems with are included. Some suggestions for improving student preparation in these areas are also provided. Teachers are encouraged to attend a College Board workshop to learn strategies for improving student performance in specific areas.

Question 1

Task: Free-response question with text-based stimulus

Topic: Harriet Tubman’s Reflection

Max Points: 4

	Max Points:	Mean Score:
Part A	1	.95
Part B	1	.75
Part C	1	.93
Part D	1	.65
Overall Mean Score:	3.27	

What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?

Responses to this four-part question were expected to demonstrate an understanding of Harriet Tubman’s reflection on the experience of enslavement as presented in an excerpt from Benjamin Drew’s *The Refugee*. Responses were then expected to explain how African American women helped to overcome the legacy of enslavement.

Responses to FRQ1, part A, were expected to describe one claim that the author made in the provided excerpt.

Responses to FRQ1, part B, were expected to use a specific piece of outside evidence, not included in the source, that supported any claim made by the author in the provided excerpt.

Responses to FRQ1, part C, were expected to explain how Harriet Tubman contributed to change for African Americans in the nineteenth century.

Responses to FRQ1, part D, were expected to use a specific example to explain how an African American woman or African American women’s political activism in the twentieth or twenty-first century helped to overcome the legacy of enslavement.

How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skill(s) required on this question?

Responses demonstrated skills in the following categories:

Skill Category 1: Applying Disciplinary Knowledge

Skill Category 2: Source Analysis

Overall, responses demonstrated strong source analysis skills by describing the author’s claims. Responses to part A underscored Harriet Tubman’s claims about the dreadful and hellacious conditions of enslavement and consistently highlighted enslaved peoples’ desire to stay in their “native land,” but their unwillingness to return to enslavement and the fear and psychological trauma of family separation.

Some responses disregarded the task verb for part B (describe) and part C (explain) and simply identified evidence that connected to the prompt. Most of the responses to part C demonstrated an understanding of Harriet Tubman’s contributions to change for African Americans and frequently identified her work with the Underground Railroad and her service during the U.S. Civil War.

In many cases, responses to part D lacked historically accurate descriptions of African American women and/or African American women’s political activism. Overall, responses to part D suggested widely ranging levels of understanding and preparedness as related to African American women’s experiences and material conditions over time. Additionally, responses tended to conflate the time periods in the prompt, thereby failing to correctly situate historical figures in their appropriate centuries.

What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflating time periods. <p>Some responses failed to distinguish between the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries, which led to inaccurate descriptions of key figures, documents, and actions.</p> <p>This response to part D identifies Sojourner Truth in women’s rights and abolitionist struggles although she was not a twentieth- or twenty-first century figure:</p> <p>“Sojourner Truth was also a previously enslaved African American women’s political activist and made sure that (just like Harriet Tubman) African Americans (specifically the women) got the freedom and the equality that they deserved.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful responses provided answers that matched the time periods signaled in the question: <p>“Maya Angelou helped overcome the legacy of enslavement with her poetry and writing. For example, her work <i>Still I Rise</i> serves as a work of inspiration and resilience for African Americans. Maya Angelou’s artistic activism helped overcome the legacy of enslavement by inspiring African Americans and speaking to their resilience and strength in resisting oppression and remaining strong.”</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disregarding task verbs <i>describe</i> and <i>explain</i>. <p>In part B some responses simply identified a piece of outside evidence with no description.</p> <p>Unsuccessful responses to part C, simply stated “Underground Railroad” without providing an explanation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful responses provided information as required by the task verb in the question. <p>In part B for example, <i>describing</i> the evidence entailed providing relevant characteristics of the outside information:</p> <p>“The diagrams of slave ships used in the transatlantic slave trade serve as a piece of evidence that supports the claim. These diagrams show how cramped and packed the conditions of the enslaved people were on the ships. These conditions were rife with disease and malnutrition, supporting the claim that slavery is a dreadful condition.”</p>

	<p>In part C <i>explaining</i> Tubman’s contribution entailed providing relevant information about how or why she contributed:</p> <p>“Tubman helped liberate hundreds of enslaved African Americans from bondage in the South and took them where they could be free via the Underground Railroad. She also contributed to end slavery working as a spy for the Union. She would gather intel in the South and transmit it to the Northern army.”</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing inaccurate descriptions or identifications of historical figures. <p>In part C while it was appropriate to highlight Harriet Tubman’s work in the Underground Railroad, it was inaccurate to characterize it as a literal “railroad,” or to describe it as having “underground tunnels,” or to claim that it freed “millions of slaves.”</p> <p>In part D while Rosa Parks was an appropriate choice to highlight, it was inaccurate to characterize her as an “abolitionist” seeking to end slavery.</p> <p>Similarly, while Condoleezza Rice was an appropriate choice to highlight in part D, it was inaccurate to characterize her as the first “Supreme Court justice.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful responses used terms, identifications, and descriptions in ways that were historically accurate: <p>“Rosa Parks made an incredible stride in overcoming the legacy of enslavement when she refused to give up her seat near the front of a segregated bus to a white person. Parks’ act of resistance reflected that of those who resisted slavery before emancipation. Parks’ resistance is a symbol of pride and strength in African Americans and how they are going to fight against oppression and discrimination.”</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disregarding components of the prompt. <p>In part B the prompt required one piece of evidence not included in the source. Unsuccessful responses provided quotes from the provided source to answer the question.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful responses observed all instructions in the prompt and included outside evidence that could support one of the author’s claims: <p>“An African American woman who has participated in political activism in the twenty-first century that has helped overcome the legacy of enslavement would be Michelle Obama. Obama has been an advocate for racial equality in many aspects with one of them being education. She advocates for more people to pursue higher education as well more opportunities for people to be able to attend higher education institutions. She has helped overcome the legacy of enslavement by letting people now that access to education and work opportunities are more widely available to communities like the African American community now more than ever.”</p>

Based on your experience at the AP[®] Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer teachers to help them improve student performance on the exam?

- **Teach the task verbs.** Teach students what each task verb means within the context of AP African American Studies and how their answers should provide what the task verb requires. Break down the meaning of each task verb and model how to meet the expectations of verbs such as *explain* or *describe*. Students can then practice writing responses to *explain* and *describe* questions that fully meet the expectations of those task verbs.
- **Stress periodization.** Although the free-response questions do not require students to memorize specific dates, students should be reminded to place events and people in the correct time frame. Teach students to notice the time period signaled in a prompt, and practice writing responses that accurately match that part of history.
- **Stress the unique experiences of African-descendant women.** Utilize the Course and Exam Description (CED) to teach the unique experiences of African and African-descendant women over time and how they have differed from other women, especially in the context of the United States. This helps to ensure that students do not conflate the material conditions and lived experiences of Black women with those of other groups. Note, for example, that despite the 19th Amendment, racial discrimination continued to prevent many African American women from voting.
- **Practice short-answer responses frequently.** Provide consistent exposure to free-response questions to help students become confident in their ability to express their ideas with specificity. Have them write responses to practice questions similar to those on the AP exam and encourage them to start by rephrasing the prompt. This helps to ensure that they stay on topic, notice task verbs, and see all components of the question.

What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?

- The Course and Exam Description provides an “Instructional Approaches” section on pages 311–332. This section provides instructional strategies and sample activities for incorporating the course skills into classroom instruction.
- Additional resources may be found on the AP African American Studies on AP Central at: <https://apcentral.collegeboard.org/courses/ap-african-american-studies>
- Sign into AP Classroom to access AP Videos and questions on the topics and skills addressed in this question. AP teachers can assign students short AP Videos as homework, warm-ups, lectures, reviews, and more.
- AP teachers can also use the AP Question Bank in AP Classroom to enable students to practice and get feedback on formative topic questions and past AP Exam questions.
- The AP African American Studies Online Teaching Community (OTC) is another great resource, which includes materials and resources posted not only by the College Board, but also by other teachers. The OTC Discussion Board is the place to ask questions, share resources, and exchange teaching ideas at: <https://apcommunity.collegeboard.org/communities/community-home?CommunityKey=9a0b3fd3-1786-408a-934a-0189f5e8e645>

Question 2

Task: Free-response question with visual stimulus

Topic: Jesse Owens

Max Points: 3

	Max Points:	Mean Score:
Part A	1	.49
Part B	1	.55
Part C	1	.53
Overall Mean Score:	1.57	

What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?

Responses to this three-part question were expected to demonstrate knowledge of how African Americans used sports and education to overcome discrimination.

Responses to FRQ2, part A, were expected to describe the broader historical context of the image of the 1936 Olympics where Jesse Owens ran in the 200-Meter race in Berlin, Germany.

Responses to FRQ2, part B, were expected to describe an athlete other than Jesse Owens who broke discriminatory barriers in the twentieth or twenty-first century.

Responses to FRQ2, part C, were expected to use a specific example to explain how the increased access to education contributed to overcoming discrimination.

How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skill(s) required on this question?

Responses demonstrated skills in the following categories:

Skill Category 1: Applying Disciplinary Knowledge

Skill Category 2: Source Analysis

Skill Category 3: Argumentation

Overall, the responses demonstrated a historical understanding of challenges that African Americans faced and overcame. Responses to part A successfully placed the 1936 track and field achievements of Jesse Owens in a broader historical context. Many students accurately noted that he was competing at a time when African Americans were facing discrimination both in Germany and at home in the United States. Responses correctly identified American Jim Crow era laws and racial segregation as well as Adolph Hitler's unwillingness to shake hands with Jesse Owens due to his belief that African Americans were inferior.

Many responses to part B accurately described Jackie Robinson as one who broke discriminatory barriers by becoming the first African American baseball player in the Major Leagues.

Additionally, responses to part C commonly described other athletes, such as Serena Williams, who broke discriminatory barriers in tennis. Responses to part C commonly cited historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) in their explanations of how education helped to overcome discrimination in the

twentieth or twenty-first century. Responses also highlighted Ruby Bridges (in conjunction with *Brown v. Board of Education*) to discuss how increased access to education helped to challenge discrimination.

What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Failing to provide historical context. <p>Some responses to part A simply described the image itself (Jesse Owens running the race with two white competitors), or mentioned Black participation in the Olympics without addressing the unique historical situation that the image depicts:</p> <p>“Black athletes started competing with white athletes in the Olympics and other sports events. They demonstrated black achievement and resilience through competing.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Successful responses placed the 1936 Olympics in a broader historical context, noting that, due to racial bias, African American athletes were commonly considered inferior to white athletes both in Germany and at home in the United States: <p>“For example, the ‘separate but equal’ term legalized racial segregation but equality was in no way carried out, as African Americans faced the borders of unfair segregation on a daily basis with substandard facilities and materials compared to whites. The barriers Black Americans faced during this time period and all throughout history exemplify why this photo of Jesse Owen’s success at the 1936 Olympics is so significant.”</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing truncated descriptions. <p>Some responses to part B named a celebrated African American athlete aside from Jesse Owens, but were unable to describe how that athlete challenged a discriminatory barrier:</p> <p>“Joe Louis was a very good Black boxer who beat white boxers and was a world heavyweight champion for a long time.”</p> <p>Other responses provided statistical descriptions of the athlete but failed to describe how the athlete broke discriminatory barriers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Successful responses described athletes that broke barriers (like Jackie Robinson, the first African American baseball player in the Major Leagues) or Tiger Woods (the first African American golfer to win the Masters Tournament). Additionally, successful responses described how other athletes (Serena Williams, Simone Biles, and Colin Kaepernick) broke discriminatory barriers in their respective sports: <p>“Another African American athlete who’s still breaking barriers almost a century later is Simone Biles. As a world-class gymnast she has continuously showed up and seen success at multiple Olympics time after time. She is the most “decorated” athlete in Olympics history, meaning she has won more Olympic medals than any other athlete, of any race or gender. The fact that this accomplishment belongs to an African American is an incredible example of Black excellence and strength, not only physically but also the strength to keep resisting and pushing through oppression in a country where they have constantly been held back and treated in inhumane ways solely because of race.”</p>

	<p>“An example of an African American Athlete who broke discriminatory barriers was Colin Kaepernick. Colin Kaepernick was a player in the NFL who during the national anthem took a knee instead of standing to protest the police brutality African Americans were facing. He received tons of backlash for this action but continued to do so and motivated other African American NFL players to do the same during the national anthem. He used his platform as an athlete to help African Americans overcome discriminatory practices and broke those barriers.”</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Failing to explain the relationship between increased educational access and overcoming discrimination. <p>Many responses to part C struggled to provide a specific example of African Americans’ increased access to education, and/or they failed to connect increased educational access to overcoming discrimination in the twentieth or twenty-first century.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Successful responses provided specific educational examples and explained how those examples connected to African Americans overcoming discrimination. The most common example was HBCUs, where African Americans gained education and used their acquired knowledge and skills to break discriminatory barriers: <p>“Tuskegee University, an HBCU, taught Black men the technical and industrial skills necessary to fly airplanes. When it became time for the U.S. to go to war, these Black men broke the discriminatory barrier the military set.”</p>

Based on your experience at the AP[®] Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer teachers to help them improve student performance on the exam?

- Teach students to read and respond to each question part (part A, part B, part C) separately.** Although parts A, B, and C all connect in some way to the stimulus, remind students that each question part requires its own distinct response.
- Stress claims with evidence rather than reports.** Remind students to establish a claim when responding to *describe* and *explain* prompts. Responses should not be reports or data but should provide evidence to support the claim.
- Review and contextualize historical events, both in the United States and elsewhere.** Teach students that historical events don’t occur in a vacuum or unfold in isolation. When examining international resources in the CED, have students connect those resources to events happening concurrently in the United States.

What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?

- The Course and Exam Description provides an “Instructional Approaches” section on pages 311–332. This section provides instructional strategies and sample activities for incorporating the course skills into classroom instruction.
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Question 3

Task: Free-response question (non-stimulus)

Topic: Ancient African Societies

Max Points: 3

	Max Points:	Mean Score:
Part A	1	.63
Part B	1	.76
Part C	1	.41
Overall Mean Score:	1.80	

What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?

Responses to this three-part question were expected to demonstrate an understanding of cultural and historical continuity linking ancient West African societies to later (or more recent) traditions, practices, or developments.

Responses to FRQ3, part A, were expected to describe a cultural or artistic contribution made by one of the ancient African societies.

Responses to FRQ3, part B, were expected to describe an effect trade had on ancient West African empires such as Ghana, Mali, or Songhai.

Responses to FRQ3, part C, were expected to explain how a contribution made by one of the ancient West African societies can be connected to a tradition, practice, or development in the nineteenth, twentieth, or twenty first centuries.

How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skill(s) required on this question?

Responses demonstrated skills in the following categories:

Skill Category 1: Applying Disciplinary Knowledge

Skill Category 3: Argumentation

Responses reflected a wide range of historical understanding and skill proficiency. Many responses demonstrated clear and nuanced engagement with the course content, accurately describing cultural or artistic contributions such as oral traditions, textile production, or architectural achievements. Strong responses effectively synthesized historical content, analyzed cause and effect, and demonstrated awareness of continuity over time.

In addressing the effects of trade on empires like Ghana, Mali, or Songhai, stronger responses articulated how commerce influenced political power, urbanization, and cultural exchange. The most sophisticated responses successfully connected ancient contributions to later traditions or developments, demonstrating continuity across time and reflecting the interdisciplinary focus of the AP African American Studies curriculum. Some responses, however, struggled to fully answer all three parts of the prompt or relied on generalizations rather than upon specific evidence.

Responses varied in their integration of the required skills, with many demonstrating strength in applying disciplinary knowledge. For example, high-scoring responses clearly articulated the role of griots, terracotta art, or trans-Saharan trade networks in shaping political and cultural life in empires such as Mali or Songhai. Additionally, stronger responses successfully demonstrated argumentation skills, connecting ancient contributions to modern developments, presenting a logical line of reasoning across time. Less successful responses tended to list facts without fully developing a connection to a tradition, practice, or development in the nineteenth, twentieth, or twenty first centuries.

What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overgeneralizing rather than responding with specificity. <p>A common error in responses to part A was the tendency to generalize African culture as a monolith rather than referencing a specific society, such as Nok, Kush, or Great Zimbabwe. Many responses referred broadly to “African art” or “tribal music” without identifying a distinct contribution tied to a particular historical context:</p> <p>“A contribution made by many West African societies is dancing. Dancing is brought down to generations and is a traditional practice done to bring the community together. It can be a cultural and heritage thing.”</p> <p>The less successful responses exhibited a clear knowledge gap with regard to oral traditions, metallurgy, or textile production, either omitting these contributions entirely or failing to explain their cultural value within the society. This underscores the need for more focused instruction on the diversity of ancient African civilizations and the importance of grounding contributions in their specific historical and geographic settings.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Successful responses demonstrated understanding by clearly identifying a specific cultural or artistic contribution and accurately attributing it to an ancient African society. <p>The stronger responses to part A described the role of griots in West African societies as oral historians responsible for preserving genealogies, cultural traditions, and political narratives. Others highlighted the architectural achievements of Great Zimbabwe, such as the stone enclosures and conical towers constructed without mortar, or the terracotta sculptures of the Nok civilization:</p> <p>“The Nok were known for their terracotta sculptures which had stability and longevity to where they lasted centuries. Many are in museums today.”</p> <p>These responses not only named the contribution but also described its cultural significance within the society, demonstrating an understanding of how artistic and cultural practices reflected social, political, or religious values. Successful responses consistently grounded their analysis in historical context, showing both content mastery and clarity of explanation.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing vague or inaccurate descriptions. <p>Responses to part B commonly gave vague or inaccurate descriptions of the role trade played in the development of ancient West African empires. Some responses mistakenly treated trade as a minor or incidental factor instead of a driving force</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Successful responses provided detailed descriptions that were historically accurate. <p>Strong responses to part B demonstrated understanding that trade served as a foundational force in the rise and success of ancient West African empires such as Ghana, Mali, and Songhai.</p>

<p>behind the political and economic strength of empires like Ghana, Mali, and Songhai.</p> <p>Additionally, some students failed to connect trade to specific effects (such as the rise of powerful cities like Timbuktu, the spread of Islam, or the accumulation of wealth by rulers like Mansa Musa) instead offering general statements without deeper analysis.</p> <p>“Mali was a very good trading route which meant a lot of items passed through it.”</p>	<p>Strong responses identified specific effects of trade, such as the accumulation of wealth by rulers, the development of major commercial cities like Timbuktu, and the spread of Islam through trans-Saharan exchange:</p> <p>“Mali’s trade of salt and gold carried them throughout many centuries and that became what they were most known for. They became one of the wealthiest societies in ancient Africa. Mali’s construction of Timbuktu and other ancient cities led to the building of structures that held knowledge and encouraged people to learn more about Mali.”</p> <p>Successful responses connected historical content to broader themes of economic development, cultural diffusion, and state-building, reflecting a solid grasp of both factual knowledge and historical significance.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failing to make historically grounded connections across time. <p>Some responses to part C struggled to link an ancient West African contribution to a specific tradition, practice, or development in the nineteenth, twentieth, or twenty-first centuries. Instead, students often made broad or vague claims—such as saying “African culture still exists today”—without identifying a specific contribution or showing how it endured or evolved. Others misunderstood the time periods, or confused cultural survival with influence, or failed to connect practices such as oral storytelling, metalwork, or religious tradition to later Black cultural expression.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful responses traced a specific contribution from an ancient West African society to a clearly connected tradition, practice, or development in the nineteenth, twentieth, or twenty-first centuries. <p>Successful responses to part C identified contributions such as oral storytelling, textile production, spiritual systems, or artistic expression and explained how these traditions continued or were reinterpreted in later historical contexts.</p> <p>Some responses effectively connected the griot tradition to contemporary spoken word, hip-hop, or Black oral history practices. Others drew links between ancient textile designs and the use of African-inspired patterns in modern fashion or cultural identity movements. These responses went beyond surface-level associations and provided logical, evidence-based explanations that reflected an understanding of cultural continuity, adaptation, and legacy:</p> <p>“The spread of the Bantu people influenced almost all language development of those in the current African diaspora. Even AAVE which stands for African American Vernacular English is influenced by the Bantu language.”</p>

Based on your experience at the AP[®] Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer teachers to help them improve student performance on the exam

- **Teach students to anchor their responses in specific historical content**, ensuring they name particular societies, contributions, and time periods instead of general statements about “Africa” or “African culture.”
- **Stress the importance of historical continuity** by helping students understand how ancient contributions influence later traditions, movements, or cultural expressions across the African diaspora.
- **Emphasize the use of academic language** and evidence-based reasoning when constructing arguments, especially when connecting ancient practices to modern developments.
- **Review key content areas** such as ancient West African empires, trans-Saharan trade networks, and the cultural significance of griots, architecture, religion, and material culture.
- **Create activities that provide opportunities for students to make cross-temporal connections** by analyzing how cultural practices evolved from ancient to contemporary contexts.
- **Practice responding to multi-part prompts** that require synthesis of knowledge and historical reasoning, ensuring students address each component of the question thoroughly and clearly.

What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?

- The Course and Exam Description provides an “Instructional Approaches” section on pages 311–332. This section provides instructional strategies and sample activities for incorporating the course skills into classroom instruction.
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Question 4

Task: Document-based question

Topic: Cultural Contributions of African Americans

Max Points: 7

	Max Points:	Mean Score:
Thesis Claim	1	.63
Context	1	.53
Evidence from Sources	2	.75
Evidence Beyond Sources	1	.27
Source Use	1	.14
Reasoning	1	.33
Overall Mean Score:	2.65	

What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?

Responses to the DBQ were expected to demonstrate knowledge of how cultural contributions of African Americans promoted resilience during Jim Crow segregation. Specifically, responses were expected to demonstrate the ability to (1) formulate a defensible claim, (2) provide historical context relevant to the prompt, (3) support an argument using at least three of the provided sources, (4) support the argument with evidence beyond the provided sources, (5) for at least two of the sources, describe perspective, purpose, context and/or audience relevant to an argument, (6) demonstrate the use of reasoning, and (7) explain the relevance of a source’s point of view, purpose, situation, and/or audience through elaboration.

How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skill(s) required on this question?

Responses demonstrated skills in the following category:

Skill Category 3: Argumentation

Many responses addressed the course content by correctly identifying, defining, and explaining the conditions of the Jim Crow era and the resilience of African Americans throughout that period. Most responses highlighted African American artistic creativity during that period citing literature, performing arts, and visual arts. These discussions included mention of the Harlem Renaissance, the New Negro movement, HBCUs, the *Négritude* and *Negrismo* movements, sports achievements, and musical genres including gospel, blues, and jazz, as examples of resilience.

Many responses successfully wrote a defensible claim that identified the ways in which the cultural contributions of African Americans promoted resilience during Jim Crow. Numerous responses incorporated a robust selection of documents with students displaying a level of comfort with each of the provided sources. Some of the more frequently used documents are Source 1 (the image of the Fisk Jubilee Singers), Source 3 (James Weldon Johnson’s article from *Harpers Monthly*) and Source 5 (the Bob Moses interview).

Most responses successfully provided the proper contextualization of the Jim Crow period in American history. Responses frequently conveyed an understanding of the general timeframe of the Jim Crow period and identified laws that placed social, political, and economic restrictions on African Americans. Many responses cited *Plessy v. Ferguson* as the landmark case that established the “separate-but-equal” doctrine

in America, resulting in a plethora of restrictive laws aimed at African Americans. Some responses also referenced the conditions of inequality that African Americans resisted in the years leading up to (and resulting in) the Civil Rights movement.

Responses used the content of several documents to prove claims about the resilience of African Americans. They often cited Source 1 to support the idea that, despite the restrictions of Jim Crow, the Fisk Jubilee Singers displayed poise, sophistication, and musical excellence. Responses frequently cited Source 3 to emphasize James Weldon Johnson’s position that African Americans were producing works of art that effectively challenged the stereotype of African American inferiority. Responses referenced Source 5 extensively to explain how the actions of Fannie Lou Hamer inspired young activist Bob Moses to overcome his fears while fighting for equal rights. Responses citing Source 4 often misidentified figures such as Marcus Garvey and Alain Locke as Harlem Renaissance artists. Responses struggled to successfully incorporate Source 2, as few could articulate the social impact of the touring female Blues singers.

Responses provided a wide range of evidence beyond the sources. Examples such as gospel and jazz music, the Harlem clubs, juke joints, poetry, photography, Nina Simone, Black films like *Cabin in the Sky*, black newspapers and other publications, and the creation of HBCUs were all used as outside evidence to support claims of African American resilience.

Responses often struggled to explain the source’s point of view, purpose, context and/or audience, thus failing to show how the selection of a source was relevant to the argument being made. Notably, many responses correctly explained that the purpose of Source 1 (the image of the Fisk Singers) was to challenge the stereotype of African American inferiority. A significant number of responses also correctly provided the context and James Weldon Johnson’s point of view in Source 3. Lastly, many responses correctly identified Bob Moses’s point of view of Source 5.

In many responses, reasoning was apparent either throughout the argument or in explicit statements. Responses used causation, change, or continuity across time or geography to set up their arguments. The use of reasoning was also made clear through appropriate use of sources, valid outside evidence, and culminating statements that “closed the loop.”

What common student misconceptions or gaps in knowledge were seen in the responses to this question?

<i>Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps</i>	<i>Responses that Demonstrate Understanding</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Restating the prompt rather than writing a defensible thesis: <p>“The cultural contributions of African Americans promoted resilience during Jim Crow segregation” is an opening sentence that restates the prompt but does not provide a defensible thesis.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Successful responses provided a defensible thesis in the form of a claim that established a line of reasoning: <p>“The cultural contributions of African Americans promoted resilience during Jim Crow segregation through movements such as the Harlem Renaissance which promoted the creations of Black artists and portrayed the complexity of their identities as both part of the African diaspora and as Americans.”</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing vague descriptions of historical context. <p>This statement lacks specificity: “During this time black people were facing discrimination and segregation that caused many black children to feel that they were inferior to their white counter parts.”</p> <p>Although “discrimination” and “segregation” are mentioned, the description lacks the historical detail necessary to situate the argument in the era of Jim Crow.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful responses provided context relevant to the topic with specific information (timeframe, geography, pertinent events and other details) that situated the argument against a broader historical backdrop. <p>“As American society continued to develop, after the institution of slavery was outlawed, Jim Crow laws overtook and the de facto segregation that white Americans promoted through their way of life transitioned into de jure segregation, and the complete separation of the lives and cultures of the two societies was enforced by law, rather than by instinct. And yet, African Americans persisted, and continued to create art and through this art, shared their stories, their pleas for more, and their fight for freedom.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying sources without explaining their relevance to the argument. <p>This reference to the source lacks an explanation of its relevance to the argument: “One example is the Fisk Jubilee Singers, who sang spirituals and hymns and supported each other and made that music popular.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful responses provided explanations that included accurate and relevant information about the sources in support of the argument: <p>“Black artists incorporated an expression of their identities as the descendants of Africans and mixed this with their identities as citizens of America to demonstrate the unique experiences of facing racism and segregation in a nation that is supposedly all about liberty and equality. The map of Black female blues singers’ performances from 1910 to 1930 demonstrates how Black women performed music all throughout the East of the country, in both Northern and Southern states to be heard by audiences of all races and colors (Source 2).”</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neglecting to explain how the perspective, purpose, context, and/or audience of a source was relevant to the argument. <p>A common error was to provide only a summary of the source: “Within Source 5 it states, “We got off and tried to leaflet, they arrested us, and we were in jail for overnight. This shows a form of the peaceful protests that the African Americans would do, as well as the form of punishment received for their protests.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful responses clearly explained how the perspective, purpose, context, and/or audience of the source supported the argument: <p>“(Source 1). The purpose of the photograph of the Jubilee Singers was to highlight resilience by showcasing the identity, power, and aspirations of Black Americans to not be subjected to separate doctrines and mockery but rather valued for their resilience and artistic contributions. The purpose of such a piece is also to highlight how the Jubilee Singers encouraged resilience in aspiring Black communities, to use educational means against such</p>

	oppression and express their intellect through the freedom of the arts.”
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Based on your experience at the AP[®] Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer teachers to help them improve student performance on the exam?

- **Teach periodization.** Emphasize important events that reinforce chronological reasoning. Direct students to focus on the dates of major episodes using timelines to help with periodization. Teach students to periodize documents to help strengthen their contextualization skills. Use the units and topics in the Course and Exam Description to help students to sharpen periodization skills.
- **Teach contextualization** by directing students to notice the time period signaled in a prompt. Have students practice writing responses that match the parts of history treated (including relevant events and people) in each of the units of the Course and Exam Description. Encourage students to start by rephrasing the prompt as a way to ensure that they stay on topic, notice task verbs, and see all components of the prompt.
- **Teach the argumentation skills needed for a successful response to the DBQ.**
 - Provide ample opportunities for students to review, create, practice, and critique thesis statements.
 - Teach students to study sources for their relevance, limitations, and commonalities in order to select those that best support their arguments; then, have students practice writing explanations of how the sources support a claim or an argument.
 - Select sources directly from the Course and Exam Description (as well as outside sources) that allow students to practice articulating the point of view, purpose, context and/or audience of those sources.
 - Provide ample writing practice, emphasizing discipline-specific terminology.

What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?

- The Course and Exam Description provides an “Instructional Approaches” section on pages 311–332. This section provides instructional strategies and sample activities for incorporating the course skills into classroom instruction.
- Additional resources may be found on the AP African American Studies on AP Central at: <https://apcentral.collegeboard.org/courses/ap-african-american-studies>
- Sign into AP Classroom to access the “Practice Session: DBQ” video for instruction and guidance.
- AP teachers can also use the AP Question Bank in AP Classroom to enable students to practice and get feedback on formative topic questions and past AP Exam questions.
- The AP African American Studies Online Teaching Community (OTC) is another great resource, which includes materials and resources posted not only by the College Board, but also by other teachers. The OTC Discussion Board is the place to ask questions, share resources, and exchange teaching ideas at: <https://apcommunity.collegeboard.org/communities/community-home?CommunityKey=9a0b3fd3-1786-408a-934a-0189f5e8e645>

Question 5

Task: Reflect on Sources Used in Individual Student Project

Topic: Explain how two of your sources provide a different perspective on one aspect of your topic.

Max Points: 2

Mean Score: .79

Overall Mean Score: .39

What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?

Responses to the Exam Day Validation question were expected to explain how two of the sources used for the Individual Student Project provided different perspectives on one aspect of the topic.

How well did the responses address the course content related to this question? How well did the responses integrate the skill(s) required on this question?

Responses demonstrated skills in the following categories:

Skill Category 1: Applying Disciplinary Knowledge

Skill Category 2: Source Analysis

Overall, responses demonstrated mixed competencies. Some responses demonstrated a clear understanding of the prompt, while other responses struggled to adequately describe sources used and explain their varied perspectives.

The responses integrated the required skills with varying degrees of understanding. Some responses clearly identified two sources, and a specific aspect of the topic was chosen for comparison. However, not all responses fully explained the differences in perspectives. Some focused more on description than on explaining differing perspectives.

Overall, while most responses demonstrated the ability to describe differing perspectives on an aspect of their topic, a deeper explanation of the reasons behind those differences would strengthen the integration of the required skills.

Based on your experience at the AP[®] Reading with student responses, what advice would you offer teachers to help them improve student performance on the exam?

- **Teach** task verbs and emphasize the definitions and differences between *describe* and *explain*.
- **Teach** perspective and point of view.
- **Teach** source analysis.
- **Teach** students how to cite evidence.
- **Review** how to decode a prompt and stress the importance of answering all parts of the prompt.
- **Provide** opportunities to practice and give students feedback on ways to be clear in their responses and make improvements as needed.

What resources would you recommend to teachers to better prepare their students for the content and skill(s) required on this question?

- The Course and Exam Description provides an “Individual Student Project” section on pages 333–401. This section provides instructional strategies, project plans, rubric, and additional materials for incorporating the Individual Student Project into the course.
- Sign into AP Classroom to access AP Videos about the Individual Student Project.
- The AP African American Studies Online Teaching Community (OTC) is another great resource, which includes materials and resources posted not only by the College Board, but also by other teachers. The OTC Discussion Board is the place to ask questions, share resources, and exchange teaching ideas at: <https://apcommunity.collegeboard.org/communities/community-home?CommunityKey=9a0b3fd3-1786-408a-934a-0189f5e8e645>