Chief Reader Report on Student Responses:

2024 AP® English Literature and Composition Set 1 Free-Response Questions

- Number of Students Scored 389,272
- Number of Readers 1,815
- Score Distribution

Exam Score	N	%At
5	53,268	13.7
4	104,672	26.9
3	123,961	31.8
2	64,223	16.5
1	43,148	11.1

- Global Mean 3.16

The following comments on the 2024 free-response questions for AP® Literature and Composition were written by the Chief Reader, Steve Price, Mississippi College, assisted by Exam Leader Kathy Keyes and the following reading leaders: Question 1, Exam Leaders Christine De Vinne and Kim Windsor, and Question Leader Priscilla Eng; Question 2, Exam Leaders Matt Heitzman and Celine Gomez, and Question Leader Adenike Davidson; and Question 3, Exam Leaders Eric Bishop and Brenda Buckley-Kuhn, and Question Leader Enithie Hunter. These comments 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: Poetry Analysis
Topic: John Rollin Ridge, "To a Star Seen at Twilight"
Max Score: 6
Mean Score: 3.53

What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?

For Question 1, the Poetry Analysis question, students were asked to read John Rollin Ridge's poem "To a Star Seen at Twilight" and respond to the following prompt:

> In John Rollin Ridge's poem "To a Star Seen at Twilight," published in 1868, the speaker admires a solitary star shining at twilight and considers its significance. Read the poem carefully. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how Ridge uses literary elements and techniques to convey the speaker's complex reflection on the star.

In a timed-writing situation and with an unfamiliar text, students were expected to complete three main tasks successfully:

Reading the poem involves more than simply understanding individual words and describing what happens. Students were expected to view the text specifically as a poem, recognizing literary elements and techniques in the context of poetry, and then analyzing how those techniques are used to shape the poem and its meaning. For example, in "To a Star Seen at Twilight," students might identify and explore the poem's use of metaphor ("The rays around thy brow / Are an eternal wreath for thee"; "Thou art the throne / Of thy own spirit"); personification (especially in stanza 3, "Thy speaking face, they calm, fair brow"); or imagery (for instance, how the star is cast as "Alone" in the final stanza). Students could also use the structure of the poem to explore the speaker's complex reflection, noticing how the speaker first praises the star in stanza 1 ("Hail solitary star!"), then sees similarities between the star and people in stanza 3 before shifting to differences; the speaker next offers a plea to humans ("I would all men might look / Upon thy pure sublimity") before concluding with encouragement for the singular star to remain "Alone" ("Shine on companionless / As now thou seem'st"). More advanced readers will notice in the prompt how the "speaker admires a solitary star" and will explore what "admires" means in this particular context (rather than treating the verb as a thesis itself), perhaps noticing the variety of ways Ridge expresses being "Alone" ("solitary" and "companionless") and the importance of particular words in describing the admiration (like in the "sublimity" of the star).

Analyzing the poem means taking the relevant elements that students identified in their reading and exploring how the parts function collectively to create the meaning of the work as a whole. In "To a Star Seen at Twilight," students needed to consider how the parts "convey the speaker's complex reflection on the star." Less skilled readers will recognize that the speaker admires the star for having exemplary, singular traits. More advanced readers will recognize that the word "complex" is central to the prompt and look for and explore the shifting, contradictory, or paradoxical aspects of the poem. These students might focus on line 23 and the conjunction "But" ("But there the likeness ends"), recognizing this as a turning point in the speaker's reflections. Students aware of the poem's complexity might also notice how the speaker sees being "Alone" in a less typical, positive way. While solitary living is often seen as negative ("Those burning worlds which God has thrown / Upon the universe in wrath"), here the speaker finds it admirable ("mighty things must be alone" and "'Tis great, 'tis great to be alone!"). (A savvy reader could also explore the speaker's use of the exclamation point throughout the poem, teasing out the nuanced shifts that add to the speaker's reflection.)

Writing a well-written response means demonstrating a variety of skills. Students are asked to establish a thesis that shows understanding of the speaker's complex reflection on the star. They build this defensible interpretation with specific, relevant evidence from the poem and through their own commentary that explains the connection between their argument and the evidence. The more successful responses build a line of reasoning that connects ideas and shows the relationships among them. In "To a Star Seen at Twilight," students could create a line of reasoning that takes advantage of the structure of the poem. Students might show the similarities between star and man, then transition into the differences, which accentuates the poem's complexity, and then explain how those differences necessitate the star being alone for eternity; or they might argue how this singular star ultimately becomes a reflection on the speaker and humanity more generally. A well-written response is more than grammatically correct writing, and it should be noted that students are not expected to write a polished, revised essay in the limited time allotted for the exam.

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?

Overall, responses to Free-Response Question 1, the Poetry Analysis question, were strong, with this being the question students scored highest on this year. "To a Star Seen at Twilight" is an accessible poem, both in language and theme (that an inanimate object has both similarities and differences to humans). Students generally understood the poem and what it was literally describing. Students overall also avoided the potential problem of using the language of the prompt as their thesis (that the "speaker admires a solitary star"). Instead, they recognized that the thesis should in fact be a defensible claim about "the speaker's complex reflection on the star" and constructed their theses appropriately. Most responses were full, complete essays, and students had ample thoughts to convey about the speaker's reflections on the star. In particular:

- Most students were able to read and understand the narrative of the poem, that the speaker was reflecting on a solitary star.
- Many students recognized that the poem had different sections (even if they didn't specifically refer to structure), differentiating, for instance, between how the speaker described the star and the plea the speaker makes to the star to remain alone.
- Most students had a thesis about the speaker's reflection on the star. There's opportunity, though, for students to construct more precise, nuanced arguments (for instance, what does "alone" mean to the speaker in this particular context?); there's also opportunity for students to develop a line of reasoning in their thesis, previewing connections between the ideas they'll develop in their responses.
- Most students were able to identify at least one literary element in the poem, with personification and imagery the most frequently discussed.
- Most students included evidence, including direct quotations, to support their discussion of the speaker's complex reflection on the star and to develop their thesis. There's opportunity, though, for students to analyze evidence more closely, including at the word level. For instance, even if a student is unfamiliar with "sublimity," they could decode it from the context of the poem (and think too about why it's described here as "pure"); similarly, students could explore how meaning changes in the synonyms "solitary," companionless," and "Alone."
- Some students explored the complexities of the poem, with the recognition of both similarities and differences between the star and humans most frequently discussed. There's opportunity for students to explore the complexity further—for instance, to think more about how "the likeness ends" and what the differences say about human beings (in other words, for students to shift their focus from the star to the speaker and humans more generally).
- There's opportunity for students to demonstrate their sophisticated thinking. In writing about "To a Star Seen at Twilight," two paths to sophistication seem most accessible. First, students could focus more on tensions within the poem, like how humankind can be empowered and inspired by the star

but never quite attain its eternal greatness. Second, and related, students could focus on situating their argument in a broader context: for instance, humankind's history of looking to nature to find meaning or make sense of human existence.

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

Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps	*Responses that Demonstrate Understanding*
• While most students had a thesis about the speaker's reflection on the star, there's opportunity for students to construct more precise, nuanced arguments.	• "In John Rollin Ridge's poem, "To a Star Seen at Twilight," he examines the solitary star's eternal reign and explores the glorious empowerment derived from its solitude—ultimately constructing his epiphany on human lonesomeness." • In John Rollin Ridge's poem "To a Star Seen at Twilight," Ridge utilizes heavy repetition with phrases exclaiming the nature of solitude which is paired with a unique outlook on the beauty of a star's outcasted position in the night in order to show appreciation of such holy creations, ultimately preaching how solitude is not always an act of banishment or lack of belonging in the world."
• Most students included evidence, including direct quotations, to support their thesis. There's opportunity, though, for students to analyze evidence more closely, including at the word level.	• "Ridge begins his complex reflexion on the solitary star by characterizing its grandure; as its rays create a bright, 'eternal wreath,' the star ascends above all to overlook 'Heaven' and 'Earth.' He describes the lone star as 'companionless in light,' suggesting its lonesome reign. By worshipping the distant star's glorious, yet solitary throne in the sky, Ridge begins recognize the empowerment cultivated by solitude. Despite the erosion of time and evolution on Earth, 'they giant progress stays.' In any era of time, the glorious star rules the sky without threat of a brighter companion. Grand, companionless, and powerful—each describe the star's position in the sky. Unlike humankind, the solitary star is immune to corruption or arrogance; though it overlooks the vast open ocean and all life on Earth, the star shines on peacefully from its 'calm … eternity' in the sky." • "He then continues to admire such a powerful creation by noting that it shines from even great

	heights and it's a creation by Heaven (lines 2–4). However, although the narrator's appreciation is proud, the speaker notes the being is 'not proud, like man' (line 7) in order to clarify the purity of the star. With such a pure creation yet so far from Earth, one cannot fathom it was outcasted there as a malicious act. In this way, the nature of the star's solitude is not viewed as a sad position but rather a position of honor or love because of its purity." • "With the repetition of words such as 'alone' and 'solitude,' Ridge further normalizes natural solitude. Especially in lines 40–50, the speaker continues with the repeated diction of solitude to provide natural examples of honorable and accepted creations of solitude. He explains 'alone the ocean heaves' which the ocean before was notes to be a mirror of his treasured star (line 8) and the sea is calm and mighty. Mountains and comets, each example at different levels on Earth and sky to show how beautiful solitude is everywhere, are also used to show the honor in solitude."

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?

1. **Word-Level Scavenger Hunt:** We once again saw many students successfully identifying longer quotations from the poetry passages this year—sentence-length quotes, full stanzas. What we didn't see as often were students dialing in on word choice and doing word-level analysis. To encourage this, ask your students to go on a scavenger hunt for words as they explore a poem to help them become more intentional about word-level observations as they read and annotate. For instance, help them get into the practice of identifying things like the following: the 5 words they think are most important in the poem; words they see repeated; words that are similar but also vary slightly in meaning; and words that stand out as unusual. Also, be sure to invite your students to highlight words where they're unsure of the meaning. These spots can be *so* fruitful! Sometimes, they can decode the meaning through old-fashioned context clues. And by leaning into what they don't know, they're not only building confidence as thinkers but also engaging in the close reading and close analysis that we know is so important.

2. **Scaffolded Read Alouds:** I'm suggesting here that we apply the "I Do—We Do—You Do" model to read alouds in order to mentor students on the thinking and reading processes necessary for line of reasoning and sophistication. Poetry seems a good place to do this, partly because Question 1 was where students were most successful this year in Set 1 and because the poetry passages are shorter and more manageable for something like this. Read Alouds as a pedagogy have some useful "rules" that can assist us. (There are lots of examples of formal Read Aloud protocols on YouTube. Take a look.) First, teachers are encouraged to be authentic and read and think through the text in front of the students without preparation. And second, the reading is supposed to be authentic, which means that

sometimes you'll be "in the zone," identifying important spots, offering smart observations, and connecting ideas. Sometimes you'll hit a dead end and realize you're off base. And that's okay. Remember, sometimes we learn through what didn't work. Let students see you persevering as a thinker as you show them how to continue exploring.

I would suggest having a hidden agenda in your Read Aloud, at least occasionally, which is to do it with the goal of illustrating for students a line of reasoning in Row B or an argument that would earn the sophistication point in Row C. Too many students believe that both line of reasoning and sophistication magically appear, like readers mine for gold. Instead, I'd like for them to see that both a line of reasoning and sophistication are constructed by us as thinkers and writers—that we build both by how we comment on evidence, connect ideas, preview where we've been and where we're going, etc. The Read Aloud shows students how you build a line or reasoning or construct the sophisticated argument.

After you demonstrate the read aloud yourself, of course, shift into doing it collaboratively, as a class exercise. And then hand it off to them to do individually, either in writing or paired up, verbally.

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

To better prepare students for the Poetry Analysis Free-Response Question, teachers may find the following resources helpful.

- Teachers may benefit from using the **Unit Guides** in the Course and Exam Description to pace and sequence their teaching of poetry analysis skills and to provide students with opportunities to practice these skills at increasing levels of difficulty and complexity.
- Students can develop their reading, analysis, and writing skills over the course of the year by practicing with the formative free-response questions in the **Progress Checks for Units 2, 5, and 8** on AP Classroom. Student performance on these formative assessments provides teachers with valuable data that can help inform their lesson planning throughout the year.
- **The AP Daily videos and AP Faculty Lecture videos for Units 2, 5, and 8** on AP Classroom can supplement teachers' poetry analysis instruction, as well as provide remediation for individual students who may struggle with a particular skill.
    - These videos also examine how close readings of poetry at the word level can support students' evidence analysis, a skill highlighted in the "Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps" column of the table above.
    - The **Faculty Lecture for Unit 5 ("A Brief Conversation on Contemporary Sonneteering")**, for example, offers a close reading of three modern sonnets and explores the value of the sonnet form. Through watching this video, students can develop their understanding of how a close reading of a poem at the word level can strengthen their analysis of the evidence they select in support of their interpretation.
- Students can practice with summative free-response questions that appeared on previous AP English Literature and Composition exams when a teacher assigns a Poetry Analysis Free-Response Question from the **Question Bank** on AP Classroom. Teachers can simply filter the Question Type for FRQ: Poetry Analysis and/or for particular skills they'd like to have their students practice. These questions can be assigned as homework or as in-class assessments.
- **Student Samples, Scoring Guidelines, and Scoring Commentaries** for the Poetry Analysis Free-Response Question can be found on AP Central. The Scoring Commentaries clarify how the student samples earned the various points described in the Scoring Guidelines. Reviewing the samples and commentaries with students can help teachers illustrate the difference between the

construction of solid arguments and that of more precise, nuanced arguments, an important distinction highlighted in the “Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps” column in the table above.

Question 2

Task: Prose Fiction Analysis
Topic: Mavis Gallant, "One Morning in June"
Max Score: 6
Mean Score: 3.28

What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?

For Question 2, the Prose Fiction Analysis question, students were asked to read an excerpt from Mavis Gallant's short story "One Morning in June" and respond to the following prompt:

> The following excerpt is from Mavis Gallant's short story "One Morning in June," published in 1952. In this passage, Mike Cahill is in France for one year to explore his talent for art. Read the passage carefully. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how Gallant uses literary elements and techniques to convey Mike's complex experience of studying painting.

In a timed-writing situation and with an unfamiliar text, students were expected to complete three main tasks successfully:

Reading the prose passage means reading closely for both literary techniques and meaning, which can be an additional challenge for some students given the relative length and richness of the prose passage. Students were expected to view the text specifically as a prose fiction passage, recognizing conventions particular to the genre, and then analyze how those techniques are used to shape the passage and its meaning. For example, in "One Morning in June," students might notice the importance of setting (and consider whether the Paris winter or Mike's artistic talents led to his pictures being "flat, empty, and the color of cement"); focus on characterization (and the impact of Mr. Chitterley being a "nearsighted" and complacent teacher who "once a week or so, comment[s] on their work"); note the diction and how it also contributes to characterization (for instance, the relevance of Mike's having been "Prodded in the direction of art"). Students could also use the structure and plot of the prose passage to explore Mike's complex experience of studying painting, noticing how initially he goes to Paris not because of innate artistic talent or interest in art but because of a family story; how upon arrival, he spent "the first three weeks standing in the wrong queue" and only took Mr. Chitterley's course out of convenience, having seen a poster "in a café"; how he himself "recognized that his pictures were flat, empty, and the color of cement"; and how, despite this self-awareness, he is unable to make a choice himself at the end about his artistic future (the structure then helping to build the characterization of Mike as passive and malleable). More advanced readers will notice the irony and humor of the passage and how this contributes to Mike's characterization (for instance, "that his was a talent not to be buried under the study of medicine or law"; that as an artist, "it was not his nature to take chances"—"art" is simply copying for him, unless it involves people, which "he had never been taught to draw"; and how at the end, "for want of a better thought," Mike takes Mr. Chitterley's weak advice and heads on a train to the south of France).

Analyzing the prose passage means taking the relevant parts that students identified in their reading and thinking about how the parts function collectively to create the meaning of the prose passage as a whole. In "One Morning in June," students needed to consider how the parts convey Mike's complex experience of studying painting. The word "complex" is again central to the prompt, reminding students to look for and explore the shifting, contradictory, or paradoxical aspects of the prose passage. Less skilled readers may recognize that Mike isn't particularly excited about art and that this stays consistent across the passage,

and they'll note that Mr. Chitterley wasn't the teacher best suited for him. More advanced readers will recognize that the word "complex" is central to the prompt and look for and explore the shifting, contradictory, or paradoxical aspects of the passage. These students might focus on the variety of people who influence Mike, from his family to his "high school art teacher" to Mr. Chitterley and how Mike lets each in their own way control his actions. These students might also take an empathetic approach to Mike. While he's passive and unable to make decisions for himself, he also seems to be trying to be an artist (as ill-fated a pursuit as it may be). Students might note, for instance, how Mike "wished [Mr. Chitterley] would be more specific" in his feedback, as if he really did want to learn; how he was "searching for the clue that would set him on a course" to be a better painter; how Mike is passive but how his mentors also let him down—how Mr. Chitterley fails to tell him he is, in fact, "wasting time" trying to paint.

Writing a well-written response to a prose passage again means that students demonstrate the ability to establish an overall thesis and build the argument through evidence and commentary, ideally constructing a line of reasoning that shows the complexity of their understanding. In response to "One Morning in June," students could create a line of reasoning focused on characterization that connects Mike's passivity with his good intentions to improve; or, they might focus on setting and explore the ways Mike's American home, Paris (the main setting), and the south of France (described with limited information from Mr. Chitterley in this regard, but still relevant to Mike's experience) impact his actions. A challenge of any prose passage lies in the amount of evidence that students must account for and analyze, a challenge certainly present in "One Morning in June," given the ample details of Mike's characterization, including some that are ironic and demand additional thought to fully analyze. The more successful responses discuss the passage more fully, with the exploration illuminating the complexity across the full passage. It should again be noted that students are not expected to respond to these timed free-response questions with a polished, revised essay but rather to engage in a process of thinking as they explore the passage and draft their response.

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?

Overall, responses to Free-Response Question 2, Prose Fiction Analysis, were generally solid, though this prompt proved to be the most challenging for students this year. The passage from "One Morning in June" is largely accessible, both in language and theme (something of a coming-of-age story). Students generally understood the passage and what it was literally describing, though they tended to discuss broader meaning and missed opportunities to look more closely at Mike's complex experience of studying painting. The ironic aspects were frequently overlooked. In addition:

- Most students were able to read and understand the overall narrative of the passage, that Mike was a young art student traveling to Paris to explore his potential as a painter.
- Most students had a thesis about Mike's experience of studying painting. Often, however, the theses offered overly simplified arguments, that Mike hadn't really changed or that he changed from disinterested to somewhat interested in painting. Similar to an earlier observation about students' responses to the Poetry Analysis question, there's opportunity with the Prose Fiction Analysis question for students to construct more precise, nuanced arguments (for instance, to explore what "passivity" means for Mike in the context of this particular passage) and to build the line of reasoning that connects the different ideas.
- Most students were able to identify at least one literary element in the poem, with characterization, diction, and figurative language the most frequently discussed.
- Most students included evidence, including direct quotations, to support their characterization of Mike and to develop their thesis. There's opportunity, though, for students to use a more varied range of evidence from throughout the passage. Students tended to rely on details specifically about Mike but

would often overlook indirect evidence (for instance, the anecdote about his high school art teacher and the even richer details about Mr. Chitterley). Relatedly, the closing scene with Mike and Mr. Chitterley was often ignored (leaving out important characterization of Mike as a typical American and another aspect of his passivity).

- There's also opportunity for students to analyze evidence more closely at the word level. For instance, students could analyze potential meanings of "Prodded," such as being poked in an annoying way or forced into something; or, students could read it more positively, suggestive of Mr. Chitterley actually stimulating the interest of his student.
- Some students explored the complexities of the passage, for instance discerning and then exploring Mike's passivity, trying to better understand its causes. Evidence used here included Mike's standing in the wrong queue for three weeks, picking a non-French art teacher through a café advertisement, and continuing to seek direction from Mr. Chitterley in the conclusion. However, in many cases students could explore the complexity further, for instance by incorporating the ironic details and by exploring the perspective of the omniscient third-person narrator.
- Students also showed room for improvement in demonstrating their sophisticated thinking. In writing about "One Morning in June," the sophistication path of broader context would seem to offer the most potential. For instance, students could situate their argument within the context of parent/child relationships or student/teacher relationships, or they might compare the ideas about and attitudes toward artistic creation they encounter in the passage with alternative perspectives on the creation of art.

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

Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps	*Responses that Demonstrate Understanding*
• Most students had a thesis about Mike's experience of studying painting. Often, however, the theses offered overly simplified arguments. There's opportunity for students to construct more precise, nuanced arguments and to build a line of reasoning that connects the different ideas.	• To strengthen the student thesis that Mike has an uneasy relationship with art, the commentary woven through the response clearly explains how the evidence provided supports the line of reasoning. For instance, the response points out that "Immediately, Gallant forces Mike to meet disappointment and begin his journey on the wrong foot, punishing the character for the unoriginal reason for coming. Mike spends the 'first three weeks standing in the wrong queue' and takes a class from a painter who is not even French, and whose nearsightedness demand Mike to create 'paintings [that] were large.'" Additionally, a paragraph later, the response offers the additional commentary that "Mike's attitude prevents him from truly finding any talent as an artist, leading to a directionless and uninspired work."

• Most students used evidence, including direct quotations, to support their characterization of Mike and to support their thesis. There's opportunity, though, for students to use a more varied range of evidence from throughout the passage.	• "Mike's dismissal of his self-doubt causes him to seek external excuses for abandoning his study. When Mr. Chitterley suggests to Mike that he 'go to the country,' Mike laments, 'I can't afford it … I mean is it wasting time for me to paint, paint, paint?' Though Mike is insecure about his artistic ability, he uses the excuse of insufficient funds to quit his study in order to avoid confronting his self-doubt. However, Mr. Chitterley sees through this excuse, understanding that what is really causing Mike's sudden desire to abandon his study is not a lack of 'time and money' itself, but rather that Mike uses those traditional concepts as 'measuring rods' for his success rather than focusing on his artistic talents." • "Towards the end, his teacher's recommendation to continue painting is paired with the image of 'a paradise of lemon ice and sunshine,' (67), using imagery to develop that Mike's whole perspective of art changed and it now is a bright opportunity for him. The imagery used helps portray the complex feelings and development in Mike's experience with art."

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?

1. **Notice–Focus–Interpret** can be a helpful model to show a *process* for identifying and analyzing significant textual elements, offering students concrete steps for close reading regardless of their skill level. The following quick overview provides teachers with some guiding questions and instructional tips for how to implement Notice–Focus–Interpret as a strategy when the class is studying a text. **Notice:** With or without a prompt in mind, ask students to identify what they see in a text. Don't have them judge, just list or annotate aspects of the text that seem important to the class. **Focus:** To develop an interpretation based on the features students have identified, dial in on a particular question or controlling element. For the AP English Literature and Composition exam, the focus could be the main idea of the prompt—in the case of this Question 2, the class could consider "Mike's complex experience of studying painting" as the focus and then review the features identified during the "Notice" phase that are most relevant to that topic. **Interpret:** Using that focus and those relevant items, ask students to identify what the evidence is telling them. Remind students that analysis is always circular and ongoing—they can go back to more Noticing, for instance, any time.

   Notice–Focus–Interpret can provide students with a framework for how to approach analysis of a prose excerpt. Sometimes students can struggle to see how textual details "add up" and contribute toward an overall argument. The Notice part of N–F–I can help students identify related details and how they work together to create meaning. As a class, brainstorm important aspects of rich texts, writing everything on the board—the more information the better. Offer small groups a guiding question (a Focus) and ask them to select relevant evidence from the board *and* to draft commentary

that explains the relationship of the evidence to the question. Students practice both focusing evidence and constructing commentary. Along the way, encourage students to use the full passage and to identify individual words and well as longer quotations.

2. **What Don't I Know?:** Our focus in teaching is usually on expanding what our students know, obviously—we want them to learn, and we assess to find out the extent of their knowledge. But paying close attention to what we don't know can also be valuable and can ultimately enhance our learning.

   This strategy is quite simple: Carve out space for your students to highlight their questions and emphasize what they don't know. When exploring a prose excerpt, for instance, encourage them to proudly pronounce "I'm not sure what's going on here" or to ask, "What is she saying here?"

   With this suggestion, I'm thinking about how many students overlooked the ironic comments at the beginning of "One Morning in June" or skipped over Mr. Chitterley's admittedly odd comment about "lemon ice and sunshine" at the end of the passage. While the sheer abundance of details in this passage offers students plenty of material from which to confidently select evidence without having to grapple with the parts that may confuse them, steering away from the odd or complicated details can cause students to miss opportunities to identify complexities and tensions within the passage that invite a sophisticated interpretation.

   Encourage your students to shift that thinking and to lean into what they don't know. Help them to get comfortable with uncertainty in class and in low-stakes brainstorming activities. Remember that inquiry starts with questions, and we authentically learn when we're aware of our own questions.

   Help students to be comfortable with what they (temporarily) don't know, equip them to negotiate the unknown, and they'll elevate their reading, thinking, and writing skills.

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

To better prepare students for the Prose Fiction Analysis Free-Response Question, teachers may find the following resources helpful.

- Teachers may benefit from using the **Unit Guides** in the Course and Exam Description to pace and sequence their teaching of prose fiction analysis skills and to provide students with opportunities to practice these skills at increasing levels of difficulty and complexity.
- Students can develop their reading, analysis, and writing skills over the course of the year by practicing with the formative free-response questions in the **Progress Checks for Units 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, and 9** on AP Classroom. Student performance on these formative assessments provides teachers with valuable data that can help inform their lesson planning throughout the year.
- The **AP Daily videos and AP Faculty Lecture videos for Units 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, and 9** on AP Classroom can supplement teachers' prose fiction analysis instruction, as well as provide remediation for individual students who may struggle with a particular skill.
    - To support students in the practice of close reading of prose fiction to identify a broad and varied range of possible evidence from which to draw upon in a text (a common area of struggle as noted in the table above) teachers may want to have students watch the **Faculty Lecture for Unit 4, "Transcultural Reading."**
- Students can practice with summative free-response questions that appeared on previous AP English Literature and Composition exams when a teacher assigns a Prose Fiction Analysis Free-Response Question from the **Question Bank** on AP Classroom. Teachers may simply filter the

Question Type for FRQ: Prose Fiction Analysis and/or for particular skills they wish their students to practice. These questions can be assigned as homework or as in-class assessments.

- **Student Samples, Scoring Guidelines, and Scoring Commentaries** for the Prose Analysis Free-Response Question can be found on AP Central. The Scoring Commentaries clarify how the student samples earned the various points described in the Scoring Guidelines. Reviewing the samples and commentaries with students can help teachers demonstrate the difference between overly simplified arguments and precise, nuanced ones with a strong line of reasoning, a common area of struggle as noted in the "Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps" column in the table above.

Question 3

Task: Literary Argument
Topic: Indecisive Character
Max Score: 6
Mean Score: 3.39

What were the responses to this question expected to demonstrate?

For Question 3, the Literary Argument question, students were asked to respond to the following prompt:

> Many works of literature feature a character who may be reluctant to make a decision, unable to make a decision, or is resistant to doing so. This indecision can have broader implications for that character or other characters. Such implications may include changes to a character's relationships, social and/or financial stability, well-being, or any other aspects of the character's existence.
>
> Either from your own reading or from the list below, choose a work of fiction in which a character delays or avoids making a decision. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how the impact of this indecision contributes to an interpretation of the work as a whole. Do not merely summarize the plot.

In a timed-writing situation and without the text in-hand, students were expected to complete three main tasks successfully:

Selecting a work of fiction that addresses the focus of the prompt, in this case a text with an indecisive character, is the first essential step for students. Students benefit from selecting more complex texts, ones that contain multiple viewpoints, a variety of characters or narrative arcs, and language that lends itself to interpretation. Texts with less complexity often make analysis more difficult. The list of texts provided with the prompt offers diverse suggestions of possible texts that work with the prompt, but students are not limited to choose a text from this list. Students demonstrate the appropriateness of their chosen text through their analysis and writing. It should be noted that there is no list of acceptable texts.

Analyzing the work of fiction here requires two steps. First, students are asked to identify a fictional text "in which a character delays or avoids making a decision." The prompt offers students suggestions on a variety of ways that characters can be indecisive—the character "may be reluctant to make a decision, unable to make a decision, or is resistant to doing so." Importantly, the prompt does not provide a definitive explanation of the concept but instead invites students to define the concept themselves in different or unique ways, depending on the text and character they choose. Second, students analyze "how the impact of this indecision contributes to an interpretation of the work as a whole." The prompt again offers students suggestions on how indecisiveness might impact the narrative—"Such implications may include changes to a character's relationships, social and/or financial stability, well-being, or any other aspects of the character's existence." In their analysis, students demonstrate both their ability to focus on a particular indecisive character and to examine the implications of that character's actions (or inaction) across the broader overall text. Students are cautioned not to summarize the text, a reminder that the evidence they draw from the text should be used in service to analysis.

Writing a well-written literary argument requires students to negotiate a range of information, including the focus of the prompt and evidence from a substantial text. In this instance, they must articulate an overall thesis about "a work of fiction in which a character delays or avoids making a decision" as well as "how the

impact of this indecision contributes to an interpretation of the work as a whole." Students must develop their arguments through evidence and commentary, with the more successful responses building a line of reasoning that connects ideas and shows the relationships among them. Students are not expected to use direct quotations in their response, though stronger responses use more specific, precise evidence and use the evidence as support for defensible claims rather than as plot summary. A well-written response is not defined by or limited to grammatically correct writing, and it should again be noted that students are not expected to respond to the timed free-response question with a polished, revised essay.

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?

Generally, students found the prompt accessible and understood the concept of an indecisive character. They used a variety of texts to explore a character's indecision and its impact on the work as a whole. In particular:

- Because students do not have the text in front of them in Question 3 (as they do in the Poetry Analysis and Prose Fiction Analysis questions), understanding the prompt and concept is especially important. Most students understood the concept of indecision and were able to identify a relevant text with an applicable indecisive character. Some students, however, did struggle to understand the prompt as written, focusing on a decision a character made without drawing attention to any moments of indecision. It is useful for students to identify key phrases in the prompt and understand the expectations of the Question 3 task in order to ensure they understand the concept fully and make the most appropriate choices of text and character.
- Some students were insightful and creative in their definition of what constituted a moment of indecision. The prompt affords students this opportunity, and stronger responses often identified less typical examples of indecision, sometimes with minor characters (whose actions nonetheless still contributed to an interpretation of the work as a whole). These responses tended to explore the instances more fully and with more particular evidence.
- Most students had a thesis about a character's indecision (and many included previews of potential lines of reasoning). Often, however, the theses offered overly simplified arguments, along the lines that a character simply was indecisive in a particular way and that the indecision impacted the interpretation of the work as a whole. As in the other two free-response questions, students could improve their performance by constructing more precise, nuanced arguments (for instance, exploring what "indecision" means for a particular character or better explaining the root causes of the indecision, which often impact the broader narrative).
- Relatedly, some students neglected to connect the character's indecision to an interpretation of the work as a whole. Students would benefit from working not only to describe and analyze, in this case, an example of indecision, but also to consider how that lack of action impacts the broader narrative.
- Most students included evidence to support their discussion of a character's indecision. However, some students relied on overly general evidence (which was often in service to plot summary rather than a more specific discussion of the indecision itself). It would be helpful for students to use more specific and varied evidence, including details of characterization, that are relevant to indecision and to the interpretation of the work as a whole.
- Students who created a clear line of reasoning or demonstrated a sophisticated response often did so through analyzing how the impact of the character's indecision contributes to the interpretation of the work as a whole. Common paths for the sophistication point included exploring complexities and tensions in the text and placing the argument in a broader context, for instance exploring the psychology of a character's indecision.

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

Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps	*Responses that Demonstrate Understanding*
• Most students had a thesis about a character's indecision. Often, however, the theses offered overly simplified arguments. More successful student responses construct more precise, nuanced arguments.	• With regard to Santiago's indecision about modernizing his factory in Nilo Cruz's play, *Anna in the Tropics*, one student writes, "Santiago is the owner of the factory, and his resistance to making a decision regarding whether or not to modernize this cigar factory causes strife with many of those around him, but eventually leads several characters to reevaluate their relationships for the better. Through this, Cruz explores the idea that is our cultural heritage that most significantly impacts our unique interpretations of the American Dream." [Note: Although not required, the thesis identifies the unfolding consequences of the indecision, forecasting a line of reasoning (Row B), and it hints at a broader context that is developed further in the essay to earn the point for sophistication (Row C). Students do not earn more points for doing such in their thesis, but it can be a helpful approach to essay planning for some students.] • Discussing the character Milkman in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, another student writes, "For decades, this indecision to start living sourced the destruction of his relationships and the disconnection of his family. In the end, Milkman directed his attention toward his problems instead of away from them, as he sacrificed himself for the general wellbeing of others." • In an essay about Shakespeare's *King Lear*, a student writes, "In William Shakespeare's 'King Lear' we see an expanded indecision of truly giving up power from the main antagonist King Lear. He creates an elongated process of giving up his king-hood instead of doing it all at once, which leads to a tragic downfall of the kingdom, family hood, and sanity."

• Most students included evidence to support their discussion of a characters' indecision. However, some students relied on overly general evidence. Students' performance improves when they use more specific and varied evidence, and in this case, including details of characterization that are relevant to indecision and to the interpretation of the work as a whole.	• In the essay about Santiago's indecision about modernizing his factory in Nilo Cruz's play, *Anna in the Tropics,* the student writes, "Cheché insists that a lector is a waste of money, but but Santiago's wife Ofelia asserts that Juan Julian will stay and calls Cheché by his American name, Chester. This is the first time that the decision over steps toward modernization leads to conflict in the factory, and Ofelia referring to Cheché as 'Chester' serves to convey once again his symbol as being more American than Cuban and differentiates him based on his cultural heritage. As the decision of whether to modernize continues to get drawn out as Santiago finds it difficult to put his foot down and make a decision, tensions continue to rise in the factory. The growing tension comes to a head when Cheché bursts into the factory while Juan Julian is reading to the workers and shoots Juan Julian, killing him. This grotesque act of violence by Cheché suggests a symbolic attack on traditional values by American industry, with Cheché—the American capitalist—shooting Juan Julian—the Cuban lector who served as a direct tie to the culture the factory grew out of. This act of violence—and all the tension leading up to it illustrates the failure of Santiago, as if he had made a decision and been firm with Cheché earlier in the play, there may have been a chance for cohabitation of the differing cultural and economic views." • In the essay discussing Milkman from Toni Morrison's Song of *Solomon*, the response notes, "Initially, Milkman is born into a wealthy, influential family, and by inheritance, his reputation was already established before he was born. Furthermore, this set the precedence for his development as, for the majority of his life until the age of forty-five, he would have every priviledge handed to him and challenge removed. The inheritance of his father's business, his mother's obscure behavior and his sister's insignificance founded his indifference towards the political makeup of the world and the discord present between him and his family, and him and his community. Milkman, within his own sphere, was merely living; this indifference to all

	other things around him, generated rifts in his relationships, thus kickstarting his call-to-action."

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?

1. **2-Minute Thesis Revision:** I've heard a lot of AP Literature teachers talk about encouraging students to know their thesis before they start writing. Great advice—foundational to being intentional and planning. I'd like to take it a step further here: I know students' time is limited during the exam, but I'd like to encourage them to spend two extra minutes with that initial thesis idea and do some revision with it.

   After students have reviewed the prompt, selected the work of fiction, and thought through their argument, they may wish to consider a few questions, designed to push their thinking and to build more nuanced, specific understanding. With their thesis draft in mind, students may ask themselves:

   - What do I mean by the key words or phrases in my thesis? For example, if a student is arguing that a character is indecisive because of her "fear," the thesis could benefit from closer consideration of what "fear" means for this character in the context of this particular work of fiction. Does the nature or source of that fear change over the course of the text and, if so, should the thesis be revised from a simple focus on the "fear" underlying the character's indecision to something more complicated or multifaceted?

   - Where in the selected work of fiction does the text *not* support this argument? How do I need to adjust my thinking as a result?

   The following two questions are especially important ones for students to elevate their work:

   - What's my line of reasoning to build this argument?

   - How can I discuss this thesis in terms of tensions in the text or in terms of a broader context (and build the sophistication of the argument)?

   With these new ideas, students can refine their argument, incorporating more nuanced, specific ideas, as well as doing some more planning for how they'll construct their response. A few minutes of time and thinking can be leveraged into a more detailed and intentional response.

2. **Exit Ticket: Complex Thesis Draft.** This strategy is related to the one above to give students some practice elevating their arguments in low-stakes practice situations.

   To help students to grapple with complexities of a text, at the end of each class, ask them to draft a complex thesis. During class discussion, have students identify shifting, contradictory, or paradoxical aspects of the passage or text. Then, to help them grapple with these complexities, ask them to draft a thesis that combines shifting, contradictory, or paradoxical elements by using terms like "but," "and," "not," and "or" (as well as answering the questions included above). Students can explore the idea briefly (for just a couple of minutes), sketching out particular evidence and their own initial commentary that explains their complex idea. Let students know that these are initial ideas and that they'll be incomplete or even confusing at the start. They're taking risks as thinkers, and sometimes

these risks work out. At the beginning of the next class, let students reread their draft ideas and add to them.

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

To better prepare students for the Literary Argument Free-Response Question, teachers may find the following resources helpful.

- Teachers may benefit from using the **Unit Guides** in the Course and Exam Description to pace and sequence their teaching of literary argumentation skills and to provide students with opportunities to practice these skills at increasing levels of difficulty and complexity.
- Students can develop their literary argumentation skills over the course of the year by practicing with the formative free-response questions in the **Progress Checks for Units 3, 6, and 9** on AP Classroom. Student performance on these formative assessments provides teachers with valuable data that can help inform their lesson planning throughout the year.
- The **AP Daily videos and AP Faculty Lecture videos for Units 3, 6, and 9** on AP Classroom can supplement teachers' literary argumentation instruction, as well as provide remediation for individual students who may struggle with a particular skill.
    - To address the common misconceptions and knowledge gaps noted in the table above, teachers may wish to assign the following AP Daily videos to supplement or reinforce their instruction.
        - **Unit 9: Skill 7.B Daily Video 1**
        - **Unit 9: Skill 7.C Daily Video 1**
        - **Unit 9: Skill 7.D Daily Video 1**
- Students can practice with summative free-response questions that appeared on previous AP English Literature and Composition exams when a teacher assigns a Literary Argument Free-Response Question from the **Question Bank** on AP Classroom. Teachers may simply filter the Question Type for FRQ: Literary Argument and/or for particular skills they wish their students to practice. These questions can be assigned as homework or as in-class assessments.
- **Student Samples, Scoring Guidelines, and Scoring Commentaries** for the Literary Argument Free-Response Question can be found on AP Central. The Scoring Commentaries clarify how the student samples earned the various points described in the Scoring Guidelines. Reviewing the samples and commentaries with students can help teachers explain the value of providing more specific evidence and developing more precise, nuanced arguments, important areas of growth highlighted in the "Common Misconceptions/Knowledge Gaps" column in the table above. The samples provide a range of thesis statements which may also help students identify opportunities in their own writing to move beyond overly general claims to more specific ones that demonstrate an understanding of complexity within the text.