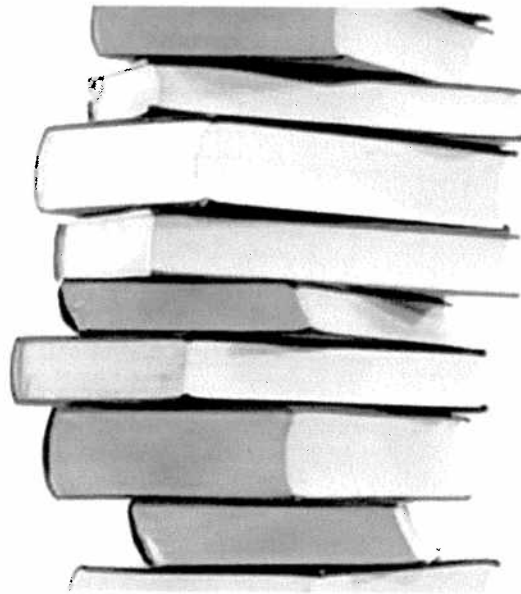


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# STUDYING FOR THE OPEN QUESTION 3 AP FREE-RESPONSE EXAM



## STEPS

1. Study the 2011 Open Question 3, including the list of suggested books to use in the response.
2. Read the 3 student responses, which appear in order of score points: 9, 7, and 5. Note the clarity of the thesis statements, the thoroughness of the support, and the insightfulness of the arguments.
3. Using the book you are reading for the upcoming test, outline a possible essay you would write for the 2011 exam, including as much details as possible.
4. You will have 15 minutes at the end of class to share your responses.
5. Outside of class you may wish to read Susan Strehlle's "Successful Writing on the AP English Literature and Composition Open Question," which provides tips for writing through the lens of an exam reader. The article is definitely worth reading.

2011 AP® ENGLISH LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION FREE-RESPONSE QUESTIONS

Question 3

(Suggested time—40 minutes. This question counts as one-third of the total essay section score.)

In a novel by William Styron, a father tells his son that life “is a search for justice.”

Choose a character from a novel or play who responds in some significant way to justice or injustice. Then write a well-developed essay in which you analyze the character’s understanding of justice, the degree to which the character’s search for justice is successful, and the significance of this search for the work as a whole.

You may choose a work from the list below or another work of comparable literary merit. Do not merely summarize the plot.

*All the King’s Men*  
*All the Pretty Horses*  
*Antigone*  
*Atonement*  
*Beloved*  
*The Blind Assassin*  
*The Bonesetter’s Daughter*  
*Crime and Punishment*  
*A Gathering of Old Men*  
*The God of Small Things*  
*The Grapes of Wrath*  
*Invisible Man*  
*King Lear*  
*A Lesson Before Dying*  
*Light in August*  
*Medea*

*The Merchant of Venice*  
*Murder in the Cathedral*  
*Native Son*  
*No Country for Old Men*  
*Oedipus Rex*  
*The Poisonwood Bible*  
*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*  
*Set This House on Fire*  
*The Story of Edgar Sawtelle*  
*The Stranger*  
*Things Fall Apart*  
*A Thousand Acres*  
*A Thousand Splendid Suns*  
*To Kill a Mockingbird*  
*The Trial*

STOP

END OF EXAM

**AP® ENGLISH LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION**  
**2011 SCORING COMMENTARY**

**Question 1**

**Sample: 1A**  
**Score: 9**

This essay offers a persuasive analysis of how Lee develops the complex relationship between father and son, supporting its ideas with reference to literary elements such as imagery and irony. The student notes, for instance, the irony in the father's inability to come up with a new story for his five-year-old despite being "[i]n a room full of books in a world/ of stories." The essay's eloquence mirrors its perceptiveness, arguing that the father "sees his inability to fabricate a new story as a precursor to many more disappointments in the future." Equally insightful is the claim that from the father's point of view, the experience of storytelling is more about developing an intimate bond than it is about entertainment, a thought that intensifies the pressure to create a new story. When he cannot, the essay maintains, the father is thrown "into a panic of losing his son." In its less carefully worded conclusion (even essays scored a 9 may not be error-free, as the scoring guidelines make clear), the essay notes how comparisons in the final stanza (a part of the poem many students chose to skirt) reflect the juxtaposition of a child requesting a simple story with a father feeling an ominous inadequacy. Despite occasional lapses, the essay's sustained analysis, varied sentence structure, general facility with language, and well-chosen, well-integrated textual references earned it a top score.

**Sample: 1B**  
**Score: 7**

This essay begins with flair, describing the poem as "a story of stories, a narrative of narratives" that portrays a father who "finds himself in the midst of a quiet battle of the soul." The body of the essay, however, does not always live up to this early promise. The essay offers two sweeping statements about parenthood ("It is a natural thing for a parent to feel guilty when they [sic] cannot provide for a child ..." and "No parent wants to feel unneeded, and it is something they [sic] all fear") and uses them to enter into some reasonable analysis of the poem, as when it discusses the irony of the father being unable to think of a story while surrounded by them. Occasionally the essay's language runs the risk of cliché ("Amidst a tangled, existensial [sic] web ..."), while at other times it catches the situation just right ("[t]he son's simple, inquisitive plea proves the catalyst for the father's meditations on the future"). The essay demonstrates a good understanding of the poem, contains a clear thesis and reasonable analysis, and provides enough support to guide the reader. The frequently strong command of language helps make this a 7, but the analysis is not sufficiently persuasive to rise to the level of an 8.

**Sample: 1C**  
**Score: 5**

This essay is illustrative of a plausible reading that tends toward superficiality. The opening portrays the relationship as "complex and strained," but the essay seems hesitant to venture into the complexity suggested. The second paragraph begins with a look at how the point of view of the "observer is very objective," maintaining that "as the poem continues, not only does the action become more involved, but the narrator becomes less objective & more emotionally attached." Closer attention to the vivid, suggestive details of the text would have strengthened both this paragraph and the paragraph succeeding it, which correlates syntactical changes in the poem to changes in "the father-son dynamic." The essay understands the poem at a surface level and closes inconclusively; greater depth of insight would have raised this essay above its mid-range score of 5.

Write in the box the number of the question you are answering on this page as it is designated in the exam.

1A

1A

(1 of 3)

The relationship between a father and his son is very special and unique. In Li-Yung Lee's 1990 poem "A Story" the speaker, the father, struggles to "come up with" (2) a story for his young son. Although seemingly a trivial event, the significance of this plea is amplified by the father's desire to be admired by his boy <sup>yet</sup> and fear that he will only be a disappointment. Lee uses sentimental <sup>and painful</sup> imagery, a first-person point-of-view and a parallel structure of the poem to convey this complex and trying relationship between parent and child.

It is ironic that the father is so preoccupied with ~~being a good role~~ in creating a new story for his <sup>only</sup> son "five-year-old son" (3). ~~where the boy~~ Not only does the boy's age make it <sup>easy</sup> ~~simple~~ for the father to tell <sup>simple</sup> an entertaining story, but this irony is emphasized by the fact that the two are "In a room full of books in a world of stories" (6-7) and that "he can recall not one" (7-8). The father is pressed to please his son and come up with "A new one" (4) and not stories that he has repeated for his child such as the alligator, angel or spider stories (13-14). His role and criticisms as a parent come to light as he realizes he cannot live up to his son's wishes. The father becomes blinded by the impending future and the apparent inevitability of "the day this boy will go" (11). The father loves his son dearly and sees



1

Write in the box the number of the question you are answering on this page as it is designated in the exam.

his inability to fabricate a new story as a precursor to many more disappointments in the future.

As important as this tradition of storytelling is to the young child, this act of love and affection is actually more meaningful <sup>to the speaker</sup> and indicative of the father's capabilities. As he imagines watching his son packing up to leave their house <sup>the father</sup> ~~he~~ cries, "Don't go!" - tries to entice him to stay by offering to repeat some favorite stories that his son both loved and laughed at (11-13). The concluding line in the stanza, however, is most ~~important~~ <sup>revealing</sup>, signifying the importance of telling stories to his son; "let me tell it!" (14). This experience of storytelling goes far beyond the superficial purpose of keeping the boy entertained, and acts as an intimate bonding experience between the father and his son. The son's fawning love and adoration fill a much-needed hole in the father's heart, and when this feeling is jeopardized, the father is thrown into a panic of losing his son. The images of the son and father as gods relate to the speaker's desire to be idolized by the boy. ~~However~~, nevertheless, it is important to note that with a reputation so great, any shortcomings will be hard felt, a reference to the question the father asks himself, "Am I a god that I should never disappoint?" (18).

The speaker finally escapes his nightmare through and returns to the present moment, his son sitting on his



of 3)

Write in the box the number of the question you are answering on this page as it is designated in the exam.

1A  
1 (3 of 3)

lap a story for a new story. The boy addresses his father endearingly with "Baba" (4, 19), signifying the love and strength of their relationship. The poem both begins and ends with a somber tone and the father fully aware of his own shortcomings. He realizes though the comparisons between his relationship to his son and his ability to tell a story as "an emotional rather than logical equation," (20), and one that is in reach and within his control, "rather than heavenly" (21). The first-person perspective and narrative style of the poem make the meaning more personal. Though there is not too much structure in the poem, other than that the length of each stanza varies with two, three, four, five, and then four and five lines, the poet ends mathematically. He cannot find the emotional strength within him to create a new story, and sadly, can only conclude that "a boy's supplications, and a father's love add up to silence" (22-23).



Write in the box the number of the question you are answering on this page as it is designated in the exam.

1 B

1	(1 of 3)
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Li-Young Lee's poem, "A story" is a story of stories, a narrative of narratives, a tale of tales experienced untold times in the nursery rooms of children the world over. The poem's subject, a loving father and a wise man, finds himself pondering the day that his stories will no longer be of use to his son, and yet while his son sits at present in his arms, he cannot think of a story to tell. Amidst a tangled, existential web of emotion and insecurity, the father finds himself in the midst of a ~~a deep combat~~ quiet battle of the soul.

~~We are a~~ It is obvious that the father and son, like many others, have a loving family bond between them. In the second stanza ~~we see our first~~ the child first appears ~~or~~ pleading in a childlike way for a ~~new~~ fresh tale from his father: "Not the same story, Baba." we hear him say. Li-Young Lee's use of italics emphasizing the break in the speaker's thoughts. "A new one." The son's simple, ~~inquisitive~~ inquisitive plea proves the catalyst for the father's meditations on the future, and his own ~~inadequacy~~.

It is a natural thing for a parent to feel guilty when they cannot provide for a child in some manner. What father ~~at~~ in the world has not once thought "Am I a bad parent?" at some point in their life? The father here is no exception. He cannot think of a new story, and despite being surrounded by them through the breadth of

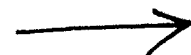
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his experience, cannot think of a single new tale to tell his son. Li-Young Lee sets ~~the~~ this realization apart ("In a room... give up on his father") to emphasize the irony of the situation. This through this separation of stanza, Li-Young Lee ~~emphasizes~~ creates a window into the speaker's mind, revealing to us the feelings of inadequacy his is experiencing, the thoughts that he may have run out of things to teach his son.

No parent wants to feel unneeded, and it is something they all fear. With In his feelings of shame, the father ~~think~~ ponders the future, when his son will leave for his own. Through a change to dialogue, Li-Young Lee makes us emphasize with the father's plight, but also his ~~of~~ lessons of the past are of no use. The parallel structure of the next stanzas opening ("he is packing his shirts, he is looking for his keys") only drives home the feelings of despair. The present tense continues the feeling of a narrative, and the father's emotions finally pour out, a silent scream within his tormented mind.

The worries of the future the father experiences are worries caused by his son's love, though. Deeply afraid of losing the affection of his child, he returns to the present in the final stanza, brought back by his young son's affectionate plea for a story. In closing, Li-Young Lee turns away from the father and son to summarize their relationship — even though logic dictates and the father find a tale for his son, it is out of love

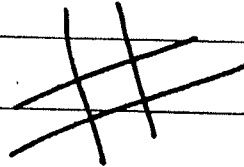




Write in the box the number of the question you are answering on this page as it is designated in the exam.

1 B  
7 (3 of 3)

that he remains silent — ~~ever~~ unable to find the words to express his feelings without disappointing his child, the man continues his battle of the spirit, so emphasized by the strong conclusion of the final stanza. When there is no <sup>more</sup> story to be had, silence tells more than any old one would.



Write in the box the number of the question you are answering on this page as it is designated in the exam.

1C  
Question 1 (1 of 3)

"Please, Baba, a story?" In A Story by Li-Young Lee, a father and son relationship is portrayed as complex and strained. In order to convey this relationship, the author implements third-person point of view and varying syntax and structure. Through these literary devices, a complex yet loving relationship is portrayed between father and son.

Throughout A Story, the poem is told by a third-person point of view. At the beginning, this observer is very objective, observing actions such as "rubbing his chin, scratching his ear." It begins with observations of a boy sitting in his father's lap, begging to hear a story. However, as the poem continues, not only does the action become more involved, but the narrator becomes less objective & more emotionally attached. From observing outward actions, the narrator begins to comment upon "emotional rather than logical" occurrences. This progressive and developing point of view reflects the changing relationship between son & father. As the poem continues and the point of view develops, the relationship changes from

## Question 1

Write in the box the number of the question you are answering on this page as it is designated in the exam.

1C  
(2 of 3)

one of blind love to ~~relationship~~ one of tense silence. The objective point of view reflects the non-volatile relationship at first, but as the point of view changes to one more emotionally connected, the relationship becomes more emotional as well.

Sentence structure also plays a role in characterizing the father-son dynamic. At the beginning of the poem the syntax is short and choppy, representing the ~~relationship~~ relationship's foreboding nature. Later, as the father predicts the day his son will leave, the syntax becomes frenzied: "Don't go! Hear the alligator story!... Let me tell it!" A combination of short syntax and exclamation points reflect the father's desperate, frantic attempts to get his son to stay. The last stanza of the poem employs a very long sentence in lines 20-24. In this sentence, the narrator reflects on the strained relationship as a whole. The length of this syntax ~~relationship~~ mirrors the lamenting, confused feelings left from the father and son ~~relationship~~ interactions.

in A story, a father and a son

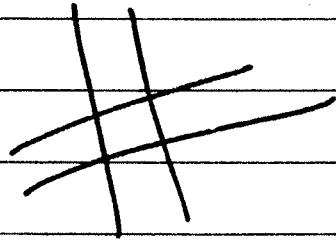


#3)

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1c  
QUESTION 1 (3 of

display a very complicated and emotional relationship. As displayed through ~~the~~<sup>changing</sup> syntax and ~~the~~<sup>developing</sup> point of view, the relationship grows into an uncomfortable one. As emotions develop and alter, the realization is eventually made that "a boy's applications and a father's love add up to silence," leading to an "emotional rather than logical" ending.



# Successful Writing on the AP English Literature and Composition Open Question

**Susan Strehle**

Expressing a shared belief that good reading, thinking, and writing about literature can be taught and measured, many high schools offer students courses in AP English Literature and Composition, and many colleges and universities grant college credit for successful work on the AP English Literature and Composition Exam. As a university faculty member who has participated in grading this exam for many years, I bring a seasoned Reader's reflections to my three topics for today: what the test measures; how well the scoring process works; and what the AP Program contributes to students and teachers of literature. I will focus my remarks on what is called the Open Question, the third question of the free-response section of the exam. This question requires students to select a novel or play of literary merit and write an essay about a specific topic not known to them in advance. The topics change yearly: in 2007 it was the effect of the past, either personal or societal, on the actions, attitudes, or values of a character.

The AP Exam in general, and the open question in particular, measure a student's ability to read, write, and think both analytically and creatively about literature. Some students can quickly formulate a plausible argument that answers the specific question through an insightful reading of their chosen text. To do this they must know the text well and analyze its elements from the perspective introduced by the topic—this year, the effect of the past. They must actually know several literary texts well, so they can select one that will yield a rich essay on the topic before them. Successful students create an argument, design a logical structure for the essay, and recall evidence from the text that illustrates and adds support to their claims; strong students always refer to incidents and sometimes even quote from memory. The best students envision the trajectory of their essays so well that they create flawless transitions, increasingly persuasive claims and evidence, and graceful conclusions.

A few examples from the 2007 open question will show that essays in the upper half begin with an argument that answers the question in a specific and interesting way. One writer begins a fine essay on the impact of Jane Eyre's education on her later life by saying that Jane "is affected very much by her past experiences from eight years of living at Lowood School, a Christian charity school. . . . This radically reserved teaching follows her all her life and influences her feelings, values, and decisions" (see Appendix A).

Looking at Jane's choices and values through the specific lens of her schooling, with what the writer elegantly terms its "radically reserved teaching," the writer identifies a particular phase in her past and proceeds to show how it shapes Jane's later life. Another essay thinks about Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* as a retrospective narrative in which the protagonist evaluates her past. The novel tells "the story of beautiful Janie. . . . The novel is in fact the narration of past events by Janie herself in which she describes the hardships she suffered through and the life-lessons she learned" (see Appendix B). This essay regards the novel as a meditation on the topic of the effect of the past and thus maintains a clear focus on Janie's self-analysis as an unfolding answer to the question.

Some successful students choose surprising and interesting characters for their focus, developing arguments about the effects of the past in the novel on a secondary character for whom the past bears different burdens. Such an essay remains focused on the effects of the past, from an angle that may lead to a different look at the novel. One student, for example, selects the monster rather than Victor Frankenstein as shaped by the past and writes an essay about the traumatic effects of the monster's abandonment in Shelley's *Frankenstein*. The essay concludes: "The monster's strong tie to his troubling past essentially *is* the novel. All of the action spawns from this source, whether being carried out by the monster or Victor's reaction to the monster" (see Appendix C).

Students who succeed on the open question have learned to write well, without much time for revision, while developing an argument. Students sometimes write with an elegance that surprises, given the 40-minute time limit for the essay: "The past comes a-haunting," one student wrote, and another observed that "humanity is often haunted by memories of the past while living out the rest of their misguided lives in an attempt to undo what has been done to them." In scoring the essays holistically, Readers do not separate strong writing from smart thinking; but we respond positively to writers who use language with sensitivity and grace. Indeed, it is always impressive to see how many high school students *do* write powerful prose,

with a rich control of language and nuance shaped by copious reading. Every year there are essays that, on a 9-point scale, deserve scores of 10. This year, for example, a student wrote that Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* warns the South to relinquish its obsession with the past. Quoting the novel from memory, the student observes that "Clocks, or 'mausoleums of all human hope and desire,' are the subject of Quentin's hate and perpetual speculation... Clocks tick the South's past grandeur away into the recesses of dusty memory."

For Readers of these student essays, it is relatively easy to tell an essay that scores in the upper half of the scoring range from an essay that scores in the lower half. Lower-half essays sometimes impose a five-paragraph template and well-worn assumptions about culture or values onto thin or inadequate readings of the text. They may mistake a character's values for the author's, or they may misread one part of a text's contents for its central theme. One essay on *The Great Gatsby*, for example, asserts that Gatsby's past leaves him "in love with the lifestyle of the rich. The glitz and glamour and all it had to offer." Another on *Death of a Salesman* finds tragedy in Willy Loman's refusing to take a risk that could have made him wealthy: "And so he stayed a salesman while other's got rich." They interpret the relationship between past and present in simplistic, mechanical, or literal ways, avoiding any complex assessment of causality or change in character: "If Pip had not helped this convict then he would not have been caught again which means he would not have been sent to the Americas which means that he would not have been able to work to get the money for Pip." Lower-half essays often simply describe the novel or play, summarizing events that occurred in a character's past, without grappling at all with the way past events alter present actions or values. Paraphrase without analysis fails to answer the question, because the writer does not explore how the past affects the present in the chosen text.

Upper-half essays, in contrast, select a specific focus and develop readings that cohere around a well-chosen angle of approach. Not only do they answer the question and write clearly and often well, they also reject the simplistic, clichéd, and obvious in favor of more sophisticated and original thinking. One essay this year, for example, argued that *Jane Eyre* emerges from a formative experience when Aunt Reed locks her in the red room where her uncle died:

"She believes she sees his ghost and faints. From then on, she fears entrapment of any form. She initially does not marry Rochester because it would mean enslavement as a mistress, breaking her principles. When St. John proposes that she be his wife in India, she again refused marriage because of fear of imprisonment.

In this case, she could exercise her principles of charitable work but would be trapped emotionally; there is no affection between her and St. John.”

At the end, “She is in no way trapped because she can legally marry Rochester (his wife died), she is financially his equal (because of her inheritance), and his injuries actually make him dependent upon her. They can support each other’s emotional needs.” While this essay could have used more development of its claims, it was scored in the upper half for its sustained focus on Jane’s yearning for a relationship in which her choices and principles matter, a commitment freely chosen rather than imposed and entrapping. The events cited throughout this essay are related to the analytical argument rather than appearing for the sake of summary or paraphrase.

In the Appendix B sample, the writer traces Janie’s maturation as she seeks an identity, love, and her own voice. The young Janie “describes her youthful depiction of love as that of a blossoming pear tree. To her it is a naturally progressing event, not something pressed upon her.” But she uses her “failed relationship” with Logan “as a catalyst to drive her search for a true relationship.” Jody Starks seems to promise happiness, but Janie finds that “she is shut off from society and treated as an object.” Then, when Jody dies, Janie discovers a “renewed desire for personal identity.” She “lets down her hair and burns her head rags. In the past, Jody had required her to bind up her hair... Now, free of a restricting man, Janie was ‘free.’” Tea Cake brings her a natural love that allows her own voice and identity to flourish, and after he dies, Janie finds herself “a new person. Janie, now, is simply content to be. She has found her voice.” This writer implicitly discovers that Janie, who begins her life with a quest for romantic love (the “blossoming pear tree”), discovers instead that freedom and self-possession (nicely interpreted through the detail of her unbound hair) are a source of greater satisfaction. While Tea Cake appears to some young readers to be the model of a good relationship, the third suitor and therefore Prince Charming, this writer sees beyond that fairy-tale model to Hurston’s emphasis on Janie’s “owning” herself, accepting her past, and claiming permission to speak in her own voice. This essay received a score of 9. Not flawless in its writing or development, somewhat marred by its conclusion, it nonetheless develops a subtle interpretation of the effect of the past in this novel.

Scoring Question 3 is both challenging and rewarding for Readers because of the wide variety of texts students write about. This year’s most popular choices included *The Great Gatsby*, *Death of a Salesman*, *Beloved*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and *The Kite Runner*, all listed with the question. We also read about *Paradise Lost*, *Don Quixote*, *Medea*, *Anna*



*Karenina, My Antonia, Wide Sargasso Sea, Mama Day, The Namesake, Ceremony, Snow Falling on Cedars, and Grendel.* Students wrote about contemporary global texts including *Midnight's Children, Love in the Time of Cholera, The Bone People, Nervous Conditions, and The God of Small Things.* Readers positively enjoy the range and diversity of literary texts they read about and find that they can score consistently across the broad bandwidth of subjects.

By providing a national program in which vital skills in reading, writing, and thinking critically are taught and measured, the Advanced Placement Program® offers a significant opportunity for high school students to learn and practice these skills. The AP Program immerses high school students in thinking about literary texts, those we reflect on when we think about values and meanings. Students engage at least some of the literary classics of the Western tradition, and with many adventurous teachers they range outside it as well. *The Odyssey, The Tempest, Great Expectations, Mrs. Dalloway, The American, The Awakening, and The Bonesetter's Daughter:* these texts are part of the prize handed to high school students who accept the challenge of AP English Literature and Composition.

AP English Literature and Composition classes resemble college classrooms and give both students and teachers an opportunity to challenge easy answers, replace formulaic writing with original and complex arguments, and grapple with more subtle and divergent understandings of perennial human problems. Indeed, AP classes prepare students to succeed at the most important challenges they will find in college. While AP credit allows students to skip a required freshman writing course in some universities, students who receive grades of 3, 4, and 5 do not always skip English; they may start at higher levels and continue to improve their ability to write college-level analysis. Since learning to read increasingly complicated texts, to analyze in greater depth, to grasp issues that do not resolve themselves in simple, tidy conclusions, and to write increasingly sophisticated essays is one main goal of college education, these students should be imagined, not as getting *out* of important work, but rather as getting more richly *into* it.

While AP programs enrich and enliven high school experiences for teachers and students, they also contribute to college and university teachers. They contribute by giving students an interest in and appreciation for literature, attunement to the nuances of language, and the desire for further reading and study of fiction, poetry, and plays. These students enliven college classes at every level, writing essays that remind faculty how fortunate we are. Some students who complete the AP Program become English majors in college; a few of these become English graduate students,

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**SPECIAL FOCUS:** Writing About Literature

English teachers at high school and college levels, and eventually, even Readers of the AP English Literature and Composition Exam. A lifelong appreciation for excellent fiction, poetry, and plays often begins in the AP classroom. Some of the students who complete AP English become lawyers, doctors, engineers, and business people; many of these students take college English classes for the pure pleasure of literature. In their later lives, some students who complete AP English subscribe to local drama performances, organize book clubs, attend readings given by local writers, and support bookstores in the community and online. In a culture increasingly given over to visual media, to film and television, they *read*.