

AP[®] ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION

2013 SCORING COMMENTARY

Question 1

Overview

Question 1 provided students with seven sources to draw from in composing essays that “examine the factors a group or agency should consider in memorializing an event or person *and* in creating a monument.” Students were instructed to respond to the prompt with an **argument** supported by a synthesis of material from at least three of the sources. Students were also required to clearly and accurately cite the sources they used in formulating their responses.

As always, this year’s synthesis question asked students to integrate reading and writing skills. Students had to read and comprehend six verbal texts and one pictorial text and consider how these texts might constitute a “conversation” about the question posed by the prompt. Next, students had to **use** the sources to help them formulate their own arguments in response to the question. While the direction to “examine the factors” might not seem to call for an argument, the prompt clarifies the argumentative task with the verb “should consider.” Students’ arguments, in other words, had to take a position on the responsibilities a group or agency must take into consideration when undertaking the two-fold task of deciding who or what to memorialize *and* how to memorialize this subject. Students had to substantiate their positions with information or perspectives offered in at least three of the sources; they were also free to draw from their own experiences and observations to supplement their use of sources to explain and support their positions. Finally, students had to demonstrate responsible attribution skills by clearly identifying the sources of material they used to help them formulate their responses. The direction to “use the sources to illustrate and support your reasoning” was intended to underscore the centrality of the student’s own argument in the synthesis essay. “Using” sources entails more than simply quoting or paraphrasing and citing sources and surrendering responsibility for formulating an argument to the sources themselves.

Sample: 1A Score: 8

The student develops an effective argument that examines three key factors (location, size, and material) a group or agency should consider in memorializing an event or person *and* in creating a monument in order to “effectively pay homage to deep sacrifice or honor moments of great achievement.” The sources selected illustrate a critical understanding of each source’s position, allowing the student to convincingly engage the sources to facilitate the student’s own argument. For example, in the first body paragraph, the student argues that it was a good decision to place the statue of Christopher Columbus in a serene location in order to invite reflection on the “important role Christopher Columbus had in American history” rather than “behind an abandoned building or amongst a cluster of billboards” that would have robbed people of the opportunity to be inspired by Columbus’ contributions. The student proceeds to effectively contrast the appropriateness of the location of Columbus’ statue with the placement of the Holocaust Memorial Museum within the boundaries of the United States since Americans did little to stop the atrocities. Likewise, in the second body paragraph, the student compares the decision to downsize the Holocaust Memorial Museum with Maya Lin’s thoughtful choice of materials for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial to demonstrate the importance of considering the “effect on those paying omage [*sic*] to an event or person.” The student’s final paragraph rounds out a fully developed essay emphasizing, once again, the importance of the message portrayed by a monument, bringing back a connection to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and adding an explanation of how the design of the statue of Crazy Horse “commemorates the great accomplishments Crazy Horse had in the Black Hills while commemorating his love for them.” The sources are clearly cited, and source material is smoothly integrated into the student’s own prose. The essay earned an 8 for its effective argument, appropriate synthesis of sources, and consistent ability to control a wide range of the elements of effective writing, as particularly evidenced in its coherence and transitions.

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Question 1 (continued)

Sample: 1B

Score: 5

The student opens the essay with some description of the prevalence of monuments that immortalize “memory in granite and stone,” then proceeds to identify three key factors a group or agency should consider in memorializing an event or person *and* in creating a monument: meaningful representation, purposeful intention of remembrance, and smooth incorporation within the “surrounding landscape.” Although essays scoring in the upper range do sometimes use each factor as an organizing element, the links between the factors and paragraphs in this essay are strained, and the formulaic structure keeps the essay from adequately developing the student’s argument. The essay is unevenly developed, moving in and out of focus in each paragraph, and sometimes making unsubstantiated claims, as in the second paragraph, where the student notes that the reason the H. Elroy Johnson statue was neglected was “because this is only meaningful to a select few people.” Likewise, the paragraph about memory contains mostly summary of a single source and presents a vague commentary that while the statue of Crazy Horse “may offend some people,” it serves a purpose. The student brings the essay back into focus in discussing the importance of a monument working “harmoniously with the land” but relies on lengthy quotations rather than on the student’s own commentary in developing the argument. Although the student uses at least three sources and cites them appropriately, the essay earned a 5 for its inability to synthesize the sources in the service of the student’s argument and for its uneven explanation of how the sources contribute to the student’s examination of the factors to be considered in memorializing an event or person *and* in creating a monument.

Sample: 1C

Score: 2

The student demonstrates little success in developing a position on the factors to be considered in memorializing an event or person *and* in creating a monument, choosing instead to open the essay by questioning the government’s rationale for creating monuments because of the “excessive amounts of money” spent and the idea that “monuments and memorials don’t bring emotion to people.” In the second paragraph, the student simplistically argues that the Lincoln Memorial “has no importance to some” because it sits on old mud from the Potomac River Valley, a piece of evidence drawn almost word for word from Source A without any attribution. The student continues to examine only one side of the task (creation of monuments) in the third paragraph by contrasting the waste associated with building the Holocaust Memorial Museum because it “angered many people” with the “fantastic job” Maya Lin did in designing the Vietnam Veterans Memorial because it did not “damage the earth.” The student consistently struggles to use and cite sources in the service of an argument. The essay earned a 2 for its misreading of sources, simplistic argument, and consistent weaknesses in writing, particularly in its lack of development and control.