



## Student Performance Q&A:

### 2002 AP<sup>®</sup> French Literature Free-Response Questions

The following comments are provided by the Chief Reader regarding the 2002 free-response questions for AP French Literature. *They are intended to assist AP readers as they develop training sessions to help teachers better prepare their students for the AP Exams.* They give an overview of each question and its performance, 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 performance in these areas are also included. Readers are encouraged to use their expertise to create strategies for teachers to improve student performance in specific areas.

#### **Question 1: *Analyse***

*What was intended by the question?*

Both sub-questions required an analytical close reading of the Louise Labé's sonnet "Oh si j'étais en ce beau sein ravie."

*Sub-question 1* asked students to state the relationship between the images of nature and the poet's feelings in the poem.

*Sub-question 2* asked students to a) analyze the one-sentence structure of the poem and b) show how this sentence progresses toward the affirmation at the end.

*How well did students perform?*

Students performed remarkably well, especially considering the difficulty of the Louise Labé poem and the demanding nature of the analysis required by this year's questions. During the debriefing session at the end of the Reading this year, the literature team felt that this analysis question would have been a challenging one for French lycée students.

The mean score on the analysis portion of the exam was 8.9 out of a possible 15 points (5 each for content grade on the two sub-questions and 5 for language). Another way of gauging performance would be to look at the raw score on the content portion of the two sub-questions: 437 out of 1539 students received at least one 4 out of a possible 5 on at least one of the two questions.

Students who take the AP French Literature Exam are usually quite well-prepared and most of them were able to respond well to these challenging questions in the limited period of time provided. Students receiving scores of 4 and 5 on each of the analytical sub-questions are students whom any college professor of French literature would be delighted to have in class.

*What were common errors or omissions?*

In sub-question 1, students sometimes misconstrued images and the emotions of the poet with surprising results. The two most common mistakes were that the students took “*sein*” to be an image of nature and they mistook the poet for the lover and vice-versa. The other problem with sub-question 1 was that students clearly saw the references to nature but they did not clearly analyze (or even attempt to analyze in many cases) the relationship between those images and the poet’s feelings.

In sub-question 2, the students did understand the question and were able to deal with the one sentence structure of the poem. Their difficulty was to show the progression, a crucial part of a good answer. It was also very surprising that many students did not even mention that the one-sentence structure is composed of a series of ‘if’ clauses. The word “*structure*” seemed to be a problem for the students, who did not always understand it to be a reference to the structure of the sentence that composes the poem, but took it to mean structural features of the poem in general. The errors mentioned above frequently led students into a cascade of related misinterpretations.

*Based on your experience with this question at the AP Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that could improve the performance of their students on the exam?*

Teachers should help students focus on the question being asked. Have them underline key words in the formulation of the question and make sure they cover these areas in the response. Generally, students need practice selecting pertinent and persuasive examples to support their analysis.

Because the text for the *analyse* may not always be a poem, teachers should train students to analyze different types of prose (e.g., narrative, interior monologues, dialogues) as well. They should select various types of passages and have students analyze them in a comprehensive manner. Although when dealing with a prose passage, students may make some reference to the novel or play from which the excerpt is taken, they should concentrate on a close reading of the particular passage given for analysis. The students need to make clear distinctions between content and form and be able to show the relationship between the two.

## **Question 2: Essai**

*What was intended by the question?*

The student was asked to choose pair of radically opposed characters, either Hector and Ulysse in Jean Giraudoux’s *La Guerre de Troie n’aura pas lieu* or Pierre and Jean in Maupassant’s eponymous novel, and to show how the opposition between these characters evolves and contributes to the development of theme.

*How well did students perform?*

Students who take the AP French Literature Examination are usually among the best and were able to respond to challenging questions in a limited period of time. Any college professor would be delighted to have in class students who received 7s, 8s and 9s on the essay. There were 318 out of 1539 students who received 7, 8, or 9 on the content portion of the essay question; the mean score was 8.9 out of a possible 14 (9 for content and 5 for language). This was a very good question and the students responded well.

*What were common errors or omissions?*

A common error was to give a plot summary rather than focus on the specifics of the question. Mediocre essays often did not show the evolution of the opposition or they did not clearly relate the opposition to theme. Students chose *Pierre et Jean* in overwhelming numbers (perhaps 80 percent). The “radical” opposition was clearer in that work. But it must be said that the students who did choose to write about Hector and Ulysse produced some of the best essays.

*Based on your experience at the AP Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that could improve the performance of their students on the exam?*

Students need to be repeatedly urged to read instructions. They need to learn to break the question down, understand exactly what is being asked and organize their response in a coherent manner, making good use of pertinent and persuasive examples. They need to focus on the passage itself and avoid plot summary. Teachers should help students practice reading questions, thinking about them and underlining key words or phrases. Students should be encouraged to organize their answers in clear paragraphs so that their thought is clearly presented and more easily followed by a reader.