

AP[®] ART HISTORY
2006 SCORING GUIDELINES

Question 6

Left slide: Jan Vermeer. *The Guitar Player*, circa 1672.

Right slide: Blank

6. Attribute this painting to an artist you have studied. Support your attribution by comparing this painting to another specific painting by the same artist. (10 minutes)

Background:

Attribution is a basic term in art history with which students should be familiar. The process of attribution is a fundamental component of connoisseurship and art history more generally since it establishes the artist's individual corpus. In introductory college-level courses students are often given unknown works of art to test their skills at attribution. This type of question tests the student's ability to closely observe and analyze a work of art, to recognize stylistic characteristics specific to a particular artist, and to make an independent judgment based on art historical knowledge. Through a process of deductive reasoning and analogy, the student arrives at an attribution by comparing the unknown work to other art works with which he or she is familiar. The best answers to this question will not simply identify the artist but will present a full and persuasive case for the attribution based on style and thematic content.

The Guitar Player was painted by the Dutch artist Johannes (or Jan) Vermeer (1625-75). It currently resides in London (Kenwood House). Little known during his lifetime and totally forgotten for the next 200 years, Vermeer was dramatically rediscovered by the French critic Thoré-Bürger in 1866 and has become one of the most celebrated artists of the seventeenth century. His art is discussed in most art history texts and students may be familiar with Vermeer through the 2003 film *Girl with a Pearl Earring*. Although fewer than 40 paintings by Vermeer are known today, he is universally admired for his tranquil luminous interior scenes featuring women engaged in ordinary domestic activities or playing music. *The Guitar Player*, with its dreamy solitary female subject and musical theme, is a typical example that is similar to works such as *Woman Holding a Balance* (circa 1664), *The Letter* (1666), and *Allegory of the Art of Painting* (1670-75), which are illustrated in the leading survey texts.

Students have two tasks:

- (1) They must attribute this painting to Vermeer.
- (2) They must support their attribution by comparing this work to another specific painting by Vermeer.

This is an attribution question. To make a persuasive case for the attribution, the student must compare the work to another painting and discuss the features that are characteristic of Vermeer's art.

Characteristics of Vermeer's art that students might discuss include:

- Interest in depicting intimate interior scenes featuring women
- Evocative light effects
- Balance and simplicity of his compositions
- Emphasis on optical effects, such as reflections and mirrors (Vermeer used a *camera obscura*, and "circles of confusion" appear in some works.)
- Use of a painting within a painting
- Musical themes
- Subtle use of color, especially blue and yellow
- Opulent furnishings, clothing, and jewelry, such as pearls
- An overall enigmatic quality

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Question 6 (continued)

Points to remember:

- In an upper-level response, the student will attribute the painting to Vermeer or another seventeenth-century Dutch artist such as Metsu, Ter Borch, De Hooch, Leyster, Rembrandt, or Hals and will support the attribution by comparing it to another specific (and relevant) work by that artist. Vermeer's style is distinctive, and students who are familiar with his work present quite detailed analyses of the characteristic subject matter and stylistic features.
- In a lower-level response when the student makes a misattribution, it is important to distinguish between the more credible Baroque attributions, such as Caravaggio, Gentileschi, and Velázquez, which occur quite frequently, and the totally indefensible misattributions, such as Turner and Van Gogh.
- In order to earn a 2, the student must make a compelling case. That will not be possible if the attribution itself is not credible.
- This is a 10-minute question.

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Question 6 (continued)

Scoring Criteria

Score Scale 0–4

- 4** Correctly attributes the painting to Vermeer and supports the attribution by comparing it to another specific painting by Vermeer. Presents a full and persuasive case for the attribution by analyzing the features of Vermeer’s art found in the works. Discussion is full and contains no significant errors.
- 3** Correctly attributes the painting to Vermeer and supports the attribution by comparing it to another specific painting by Vermeer. Presents a persuasive case for the attribution. Discussion is not as full and may contain minor errors.

OR

Attributes the painting to another seventeenth-century Dutch artist and supports the misattribution by comparing it to a painting by that artist. Presents a persuasive case for the misattribution, but discussion is not full and may contain errors.

NOTE: Students cannot earn more than a 2 unless they attribute the painting to Vermeer or another seventeenth-century Dutch artist.

- 2** Attributes the painting to an artist who is not seventeenth-century Dutch and supports the misattribution by comparing it to a painting by that artist. Presents a case for the misattribution, but the discussion is not full and may contain errors.
- 1** Attributes the painting to Vermeer or another seventeenth-century Dutch artist but fails to make a case for the attribution.

OR

Attributes the painting to an artist who is not seventeenth-century Dutch and supports the misattribution by comparing it to a painting by that artist. Presents a case for the misattribution, but the discussion is weak and may contain significant errors.

- 0** Makes an attempt, but the response is without merit because it fails to make an attribution or makes only incorrect or irrelevant statements.

— Indicates a nonresponse, such as a blank paper, crossed-out words, or personal notes.

6A

6. Attribute this painting to an artist you have studied. Support your attribution by comparing this painting to another specific painting by the same artist. (10 minutes)

This painting looks like a painting by Dutch master Vermeer. The painting shows a smiling young girl strumming on her guitar. Light hits part of her body ~~from the left~~ while her face is mostly in shadow.

This painting is very reminiscent of Vermeer's painting The Letter. In that piece, two women talk about an ambiguous subject, while one wears a shadowed look on her face. The two paintings share similar attributes. They both make good use of a light source, and ~~they~~ effectively implement chiaroscuro. Vermeer also likes to show ~~people~~ people engaging in everyday activities, while in detailed rooms. The painting on the back wall ^(of this painting) is a detailed landscape in a pretty frame; similarly, in The Letter, the back wall is covered in ~~paintings~~ artwork. Vermeer also captures faces in a unique method. The faces of his subjects are so lifelike that they essentially speak to us. It is clear from this work that the girl is happy and enjoying herself.

Vermeer also revels in showing detailed small objects. In The Letter he shows objects from around the room, what is on the wall, or what is on the table. Here, he does not show us the same panoramic view, but still perfectly (in the spirit of the Dutch masters) recreates a guitar. Every string is visible and the wood looks like it can be felt. The girl's clothing also has a sense of texture and realism, and her body is visible underneath. All of these factors seem to add up and reveal that Vermeer is the artist behind this painting.

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6. Attribute this painting to an artist you have studied. Support your attribution by comparing this painting to another specific painting by the same artist. (10 minutes)

An artist that this work can be attributed to is Judith Leyster. A good work to compare it to is her self-portrait. Both show a classy woman who is doing her own form of art—in this case, playing an instrument. Judith Leyster also has a musical quality to her work, as the way she holds her brush is likened to a violin bow, and her other hand also alludes to the stance of holding a violin. Both works also have a painting within them. The one shown has what appears to be a landscape; Leyster's contained a portrait of her she had been working on, or would have been, as it was her career. Both women depicted are doing what they love very naturally. Leyster, being a Flemish Baroque artist, did very 'picture-like' portraits—*et moment in time*, much like Hals, who actually received credit for some of Leyster's works until recent discoveries. Both pictures also have a dramatic ~~light~~ main source of lighting. The light is contrasted by a very dark corner of background on one side. Both women are also shown realistically, possibly even slightly idealized.

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6. Attribute this painting to an artist you have studied. Support your attribution by comparing this painting to another specific painting by the same artist. (10 minutes)

This painting resembles a Velasquez painting. He often painted royalty & children, like the Las Meninas painting. He used strong shadows, like the one partially covering the girl's face. This painting looks like a royalty genre painting. The girl is evidently rich, which is shown by her fine clothes, the artwork in the background, & her time for leisurely activities. Velasquez always painted in fine detail, & this portrait showcases that. The same roundness & paleness of the hands & face of this girl copy the child in Las Meninas. The painting in the background looks like another clever addition to a good painting, like the mirror & painting ^{of} himself in Las Meninas. Although this girl & her surroundings are not Spanish, she resembles the artwork known to be done by Velasquez.

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AP[®] ART HISTORY

2006 SCORING COMMENTARY

Question 6

Overview

This question asked students to attribute an unknown painting to an artist they had studied. Students had to support their attribution by comparing the painting shown to one other work by that artist. This is the first time on the AP Art History Exam that students were asked to make an attribution rather than simply to identify an artist. Since Vermeer is a very well-known artist today, it was expected that many students would know his work and would be able to support their attribution through analysis of the work of art on the screen compared to another of his works. As with other questions, the knowledge that students brought to the question could inform their answer, but the quality of their essay was determined by the level of their analysis.

Sample: 6A

Score: 4

The essay correctly attributes the painting to Vermeer and supports the attribution by comparing it to *The Letter*. The essay presents a full and persuasive case for the attribution by analyzing the characteristic features of Vermeer's art found in the two works, such as the effective "use of a light source" and shading of the woman's face, the depiction of everyday activities in a detailed interior setting, the use of a painting within a painting, and the detailed depiction of the clothing and textures.

Sample: 6B

Score: 3

The essay attributes the painting to Judith Leyster and supports the attribution by comparing it to her *Self-Portrait*. Although the attribution is incorrect, Leyster, who was a seventeenth-century Dutch artist, is quite closely related to Vermeer in terms of style and subject matter. The essay presents a persuasive case for the attribution by analyzing features found in the Leyster work, including the focus on the female subject performing an activity such as playing music or painting, the use of a painting within a painting, and the "dramatic" use of highly contrasted lighting, which are also found in Vermeer's work.

Sample: 6C

Score: 2

The essay attributes the painting to Velázquez and supports the attribution by comparing it to *Las Meninas*. This attribution is further from the mark since Velázquez was a seventeenth-century Spanish artist. However, the student makes a compelling case for the misattribution by analyzing Baroque characteristics like the strong use of shadows and spatial illusionism found in the works of both artists, while recognizing that the girl and her surroundings are not Spanish.