



## Student Performance Q&A:

### 2004 AP<sup>®</sup> French Literature Free-Response Questions

The following comments on the 2004 free-response questions for AP<sup>®</sup> French Literature were written by the Chief Reader, John Lambeth of Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Virginia. They 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 performance 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: *Analyse***

##### ***What was the intent of this question?***

The *analyse* question consists of two directed questions that require a close reading of a text students have read and discussed in class during the year. The questions this year focused on a Du Bellay poem, "Heureux qui, comme Ulysse."

The first subquestion asked students to show how Du Bellay uses oppositions to communicate his feelings in the sonnet. The second subquestion pointed out that the sonnet is made up of three sentences and asked students to show how each one of them contributes to the poem's meaning.

##### ***How well did students perform on this question?***

Students performed remarkably well on the *analyse* question, especially considering the difficulty of the Du Bellay poem. The content mean score for the two subquestions was 5.9 out of a possible 10 points; the language mean score was 3.7 out of a possible 5 points. The total mean score for the *analyse* question was 9.6 out of a possible 15 points.

The Readers and Team Leaders thought the *analyse* question was a little more difficult this year than last year, mostly because of the relative difficulty of the Du Bellay poem compared to the La Fontaine poem that appeared on last year's exam. The two subquestions themselves were well formulated and straightforward.

Students who take the AP French Literature Exam are usually well qualified and able to respond to challenging questions in a limited period of time. Any college professor would be delighted to have in a class those students who receive a score of 4 or 5 on the *analyse* question.

### ***What were common student errors or omissions?***

In the first subquestion, students did not always focus on the oppositions as they were instructed to do, and often they simply pointed to certain contrasts or comparisons in the poem. They also focused more on the tercets than on the quatrains. In the second subquestion, students sometimes rehashed what they had already said in answer to the first subquestion in their attempt to show how each sentence contributed to the meaning of the poem. Few students pointed out that these were three different types of sentences, each with its rhetorical function, but this may be a complicated analysis to expect.

### ***Based on your experience of student responses at the AP Reading, what message would you like to send to teachers that might help them to improve the performance of their students on the exam?***

In general, 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. They should organize their response around pertinent and persuasive examples. In answering the subquestions, they need to focus on the passage. (Obviously, in the case of a prose passage, students may support interpretation by pertinent reference to the book as a whole or to other parts of the book, but the analysis should begin with the selected passage and remain close to it.)

It seems that teachers put a great deal of emphasis on analyzing poetry, as they should. But they should also train students to analyze all aspects of prose, like narrative, interior monologues, dialogues, and so on. They should select various types of passages and have students analyze them in a comprehensive manner.

## **Question 2: *Essai***

### ***What was the intent of this question?***

The intent of this question is to allow students to show how well they can write about a literary work they have read and discussed in class. This year students were told that education plays an important part in social integration but that it may also create conflicts. They were then asked to choose either Molière's *L'Ecole des femmes* or Camara Laye's *L'Enfant noir* and to treat the theme of education in the chosen work.

### ***How well did students perform on this question?***

In general, students did very well on the essay question. Readers estimated that about two-thirds of the students chose to write about Camara Laye's *L'Enfant noir*. The content mean score was 5.2 out of a possible nine points; the language mean score was 3.3 out of a possible five points, slightly lower than on the *analyse*. The total mean score for the *essai* question was 8.5 out of a possible 14 points. Readers explain this difference by pointing to the fact that the *analyse* question requires close reading of a specific text that students have before them on the page as a constant point of reference and source of vocabulary cues.

### ***What were common student errors or omissions?***

A common error, as always, was to give a plot summary rather than focus on the specifics of the question. Mediocre essays often spoke about education but did not clearly tie the theme of education to the text.

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

Teachers should help students focus on the question being asked by underlining key words in the formulation of the question and making sure that they are all covered in the response. Teachers should also give students practice in selecting pertinent and persuasive examples to support their arguments.