

AP English Literature and Composition  
Prose Fiction Analysis Free-Response Question (2020)  
Sample Student Responses

**Sample A**

[1] No matter the strides in technological innovation and improvement in quality of life, man still suffers from the anathema of aging, decreed by nature to bring all men to their knees whether peasant or king. In a 2010 novel, an aging housewife's daily schedule is interrupted by an observation that forces her to contemplate the changes in her lifestyle over time and what the future holds for her vitality. Throughout the text, the author uses visual imagery and symbolism to conclude that Mrs. Pritchett's daily rituals distract her from her own mortality, and by extension, humanity's modern behaviors distract from the universal truth of impermanence and aging, preventing Man from living life to the fullest.

[2] The passage begins by describing Mrs. Pritchett's home. The kitchen includes "immaculate granite counters, a purring Sub-Zero refrigerator, a blue ceramic bowl she made in pottery class." These basic material goods are generalized to be in every home filled with "bourgeois pleasures." These goods symbolize aspects of human desire. The granite countertop shows man's desire to tame nature by shaping a material that creates mountains into a simple countertop. The refrigerator is Man's attempt to prolong the inevitable rotting and wasting away of organic matter. This imagery establishes the connection between Mrs. Pritchett and modern humanity: self-centered and desperate to prolong life. Later in the cafe, Mrs. Pritchett first notices the elderly couple. They order a "sugar-dusted lemon square and a decadent, oversize éclair." Sugary foods are typically associated with the desires of children, while adults tend to enjoy more complex flavors. However, this depiction of the couple's behavior shows the cyclical nature of life. As a child, one enjoys the simpler things: less material and less complexity. And when adults attempt to shape their reality in complex ways, they will eventually return to their simple lives. This transition is shown at the end of the passage when Mrs. Pritchett leaves her dinner party that she spent time cooking and preparing food for to sleep in the guest room. Leaving a dinner party for bedtime is the typical behavior of a young child, whose bedtime is mandated by the adults. Therefore she abandons adult pleasures and returns to the behaviors of her youth.

[3] By the end of the passage, Mrs. Pritchett realizes that all of her cooking, vigorous note-taking for her book club, and tending of her garden (another attempt to control the path of nature) has distracted her from her own mortality. She struggles with this, shown through her "terrible

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**Sample A (continued)**

headache”, but the author also explains that her daily schedule is not inherently *bad*. The author conveys this through the elderly couple at the cafe. They still attend the cafe and enjoy life’s simple pleasures, but they have full knowledge of their own aging. Mrs. Pritchett notices only their weakness, the “painful slowness, leaning on a cane, one of those ugly aluminum quadruped things”. She feels “pity and fear”, but the couple behaves as though they are still very much in love with each other and life itself. The old man “flicks a speck off the sleeve before he turns back to his wife”, even though “his wife with her poor vision would never have noticed whatever was on the coat sleeve. The man tucks her into her chair, maintaining her dignity and upholding the old value of chivalry, a custom that has nearly died out in modern today. The author uses this old couple as a paradigm for old age. Old age is nothing to be feared; it is merely an acknowledgement of impermanence and humility, leading humans to simplify their lives and treat every moment with intention and dignity. Another symbol used in the text is the roasted lamb. At the beginning of the text, Mrs. Pritchett is prepared to cook dinner. As she describes, “The lamb has already been marinated and patted dry... It does not strike Mrs. Pritchett that her life is small and contained.” The description of “small and contained” is an allusion to the image of animals in captivity. “Small and contained” describes the living conditions of the lamb, killed for its meat to please dinner party guests. Mrs. Pritchett thinks nothing of it, except perhaps the flavor combinations between the marinade and the greens. However, when the lamb is in the oven at the end of the story, Mrs. Pritchett stares “blankly at the oven”. Her previous enjoyment of the Satie CD makes her “want to weep.” The juxtaposition between these two mindsets in relation to the cooking of the lamb draws a comparison between Mrs. Pritchett’s modern living conditions and an animal in captivity. The author uses this comparison to prove that Man needs to be confronted with His own mortality to truly live their life meaningfully.

[4] Using all of these symbols and images, the author of this passage attempts to meaningfully convey the recognition of aging within a fictional framework. While the author doesn’t detail how Mrs. Pritchett resolves this mental conflict, the author intends to show readers that aging is nothing to be feared, but something to be accepted so that one may truly live the rest of their lives honestly and to the fullest.

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**Sample B**

[1] In this excerpt from the novel, the author uses ambiguity in describing why Mrs. Pritchett was so affected by the observation of the elderly couple, along with a third- person perspective and omniscient narrator to demonstrate how witnessing the depth of their relationship has shaken Mrs. Pritchett, who lives a very mundane, uncomplicated life. This vague conclusion to the passage enables the audience to come to their own conclusions, thus allowing them to discover for themselves that Mrs. Pritchett's reaction to the day was a combination of melancholy, being touched by their sweet relationship, and the realization that her own time with her husband will eventually (perhaps soon) come to an end.

[2] Throughout the passage, we see the development of how Mrs. Pritchett's life works from the view of an omniscient, third-person perspective. The author employed to use of such a narrator in order for the readers to see that Mrs. Pritchett, as detailed in the second paragraph, lives a small, simple life, filled with basic things. In the next paragraph, it says, "It does not strike Mrs. Pritchett that her life is small and contained, filled with bourgeois pleasures. If it did, she would not consider it a bad thing". This directly contrasts with how she appears to feel at the end of the passage, as it seems as though Mrs. Pritchett has come to the realization that her life is so much so filled with these "bourgeois pleasures", and lacks the depth of the sweet relationship she witnessed over lunch. From this external perspective, the audience can recognize the beginning of her complex reaction to the experiences of the day. She appears to be touched by the interactions witnessed between husband and wife, while at the same time feeling "pity and fear" for the couple's state, yet then once she returns home she feels like weeping. Viewing this from an external, omniscient perspective gives readers additional insight to see how her simple life juxtaposes this tender relationship, yet at the same time having an external perspective creates ambiguity about why and how Mrs. Pritchett reacted.

[3] Because, as readers, we cannot view Mrs. Pritchett's innermost thoughts and feelings about the situation, nor can it be explicitly revealed as to what she finally understands in the last paragraph, creates a sense of ambiguity. This obscurity is used by the author so that readers must contemplate the why behind Mrs. Pritchett's feelings, and in turn, consider their own experiences and feelings with realizing that life has passed us by. By not providing an absolute conclusion and

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**Sample B (continued)**

explanation, the author gives the passage added depth. And allows readers to search for the truth themselves.

[4] The organization of the passage also contributes to how the audience comes to understand Mrs. Pritchett's reaction. At first, we are given a detailed list of her day and perspective as to her simplistic life, then once we reach the middle of the excerpt, the elderly couple acts as a catalyst for Mrs. Pritchett to discover the shallowness of her own life, and start coming to that realization.

[5] Throughout this excerpt from the novel, the author uses organization, ambiguity, and an omnipotent perspective to create depth and complexity to Mrs. Pritchett's reaction to the events of her day, and to her realization that her life is not all that she wished it could be.

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**Sample C**

[1] In this novel that was published in 2010, Mrs. Pritchett observes an interaction between an elderly couple which makes her reflect on her own marriage. She becomes obsessed over the idea and gets a headache, sleeping in the guest room as a result. In this passage the author uses many literary elements in order to convey a message to the reader. The author is showing that even though Mrs. Pritchett is living a financially secure life, she feels as if she is living a small, contained, and unfulfilling marriage. The author uses distinct adjectives and adverbs to describe the environment in order to show the reader what social class the couple are in. Also, the author uses elements to convey the emotions Mrs. Pritchett feels about the couple, describing her pity and her fear, but also what she feels is missing in her own marriage.

[2] In the novel, the author describes the environment she lives in as luxurious and plentiful. "Around her, the kitchen gleams: immaculate granite counters, a purring Sub-Zero refrigerator, a blue ceramic bowl she made in poetry class" (Paragraph 1) In this quote from the passage, the author describes the items in her kitchen using adjectives and adverbs. For example, "immaculate" and "purring". These words are used to describe the high end kitchen she has, also the fact that they're granite counters and a Sub-Zero refrigerator which is not very common in many households. However, it is more common in homes that belong to people in higher economic status. Since she is the one who stays at home and does the cleaning, it is safe to presume that she is a housewife, making her husband responsible for the income that is going into the home. This classifies him as the "breadwinner". This is also evident when he leaves to go to the office. As a housewife, she feels that she is underappreciated as she is the one who is making the preparations while the husband comes back in the evening to enjoy himself. "...tidy the house in preparation for dinner guests,"(Paragraph 2) It is shown that she is making all the preparations herself and is not getting any help at all. As if she is treated as more of a servant than a wife.

[3] While watching the elderly couple in the deli, she feels sadness and pity for them as she relates this to what her future marriage will look like. However, as she keeps watching them, she realizes that this is what she is missing in her own marriage. The chivalry, the companionship, and most importantly the love that is non existing. "It's the flicking of the speck off the sleeve that gets Mrs. Pritchett-the caring behind the gesture"(Paragraph 2) What she realizes after watching this

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**Sample C (continued)**

moment is that her husband would not be capable of reproducing this moment with her. He either is not as chivalrous or it feels as they don't have the same bond the elderly couple has. The idea of companionship between the elderly couple makes her realize that her own bond between her husband is not like that. Another case would be when she gets a headache after constantly thinking about it. The husband does not help her or ask if she's okay, but just simply agrees for her to sleep in the guest room. As if her having a headache is interrupting his party he did nothing to prepare for.

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**Sample D**

[1] In the beginning of the excerpt, the protagonist, Mrs. Pritchett, displays utter content and satisfaction with her life, but the interaction Mrs. Pritchett faces in the second half of the excerpt prompts her to contemplate her life and where she will eventually be as time creeps up on her. Through extensive use of rich imagery and an abrupt shift in tone, the author is able to convey the contrasting attitudes of content and fear from Mrs. Pritchett before and after her interaction at the cafe, as well as how that interaction impacted her perspective on life with her husband.

[2] The imagery that the author employs in this excerpt allows the reader to become completely immersed in the mood that each description produces. From the start of the excerpt, the reader can visualize Mrs. Pritchett “enjoying her cup of lemon tea” and being surrounded by “immaculate granite counters” and a bowl “filled with apples and pears”. The small, yet impactful details each add a little flavor to the atmosphere that Mrs. Pritchett basks in. The author goes on to describe her orderly day, consisting of going “into her dewy garden [to] pick an armful of irises” and seeing friends who “visit the local market to pick up strawberries for an English trifle”. By establishing this initial tone of content and gratitude towards her current life, the pivot in tone in the second half of the excerpt emphasizes how her interaction in the cafe alters her perspective on her current state of living.

[3] The second half of the excerpt includes Mrs. Pritchett in a cafe, rushing to her book club meeting and spotting an elderly couple walking to a table. Mrs. Pritchett observes, “the husband has age spots on his face and trembly hands”. She also notices that the wife had “aged worse than he”, which alarms Mrs. Pritchett as she “watches them with a mix of pity and fear”. Here, a shift in pace indicates that the readers are experiencing a different attitude from Mrs. Pritchett concerning other people’s lives. Mrs. Pritchett ponders over how the husband can remain so patient with his wife who clearly needs much attention as “the flicking of the speck off the sleeve”. The “caring behind the gesture makes her wonder how her and her husband could possibly end up like that elderly couple, prompting some fear. The shift in tone from pleasure and comfort to pity and distress highlights the fact that Mrs. Pritchett is uncertain about how she and her husband can

[4] It seems as though by the end of the excerpt, Mrs. Pritchett chooses to focus not on the luxuries in her present life, but more about the state of her and her husband’s lives in the future.

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**Sample D (continued)**

She is overcome by the idea that her and Mr. Pritchett are not cut out for an elderly lifestyle, causing Mrs. Pritchett to step away from her planned dinner.



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**Sample E**

[1] Mrs. Prichett is an elder woman, who spends her days cooking and cleaning, as a housewife. She takes care of her husband, who is portrayed to be of such distance in her life. She has a small, collected lifestyle, with simple pleasures, in which she may be excited over, had she noticed them. Each day she comes across is “fateful,” and in this, the author uses such literary devices, to accentuate the realities in which she faces, and further reflects upon.

[2] Many times, the author makes use of comparison, in order to show Mrs. Prichett’s life as it is, to that of another couple, in which she wished hers was. She entered the cafe alone, however, witnessed an older couple enter together. She experiences the kind gestures of the elder man to his wife, “let[ting] go of his wife’s arm and pulls a chair out for her. He helps her off with her coat, an action that takes some maneuvering...[b]ut he is patient.” She notices this, as “one day soon, she and her husband [would] come to this.” The author puts extreme emphasis on this comparison and interaction Mrs. Prichett had with the elder couple, in order to enhance the reflection she has upon her own relationship and life, and the qualities she seeks of her husband. The passage closes with her claiming to have a headache asking to sleep in the guest room. With her husband’s response “agree[ing] easily, as she knew he would.” Here she is comparing her lack of love received from her husband to that of which she saw at the cafe.

[3] The diction and imagery the author uses is also a help in this comparison, and overall reflection of her life. This allows the reader to further into Mrs. Prichett’s life, and experience of the internal conflict she has. She finally notices that she is alone, and her husband is not of which others have. By placing the reading at the scene with vivid images, they are then further able to feel for her, and come to an understanding of the circumstances.

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**Sample F**

[1] Mrs. Pritchett days are not full of extravagant times. She starts her day with a cup of lemon tea, before she makes Mr. Pritchett his meal for his work day. While relaxing in the morning Mrs. Pritchett plans her day, she plans to pick flowers, clean the house for Mr. Pritchett's guest, shop and maybe grab some lunch. When Mrs Pritchett goes to lunch she is mesmerized by an older couple. She is stuck on the old couple because she hopes her future relationship will be just as beautiful.

[2] When Mrs Pritchett sees the old couple they just look like an ordinary older couple. But the man has spots on his face and his hands shake. The woman has glasses and walks slowly as she leans on her cane. The man holds on to his women's arm as they are walking into the front of the restaurant. They walk into the same restaurant as Mrs. Pritchett.

[3] When they get to their table the man lets go of the woman's arm and pulls out the chair for him. Mrs Pritchett is impressed by this because they are both struggling to get around. They order sugar-dusted lemon square and a decadent oversized éclair. When the desert comes out the man cuts it for the both of them.

[4] The wife flicks off a flack of the desert that has fallen on the man's sleeve. This proves that she is caring for him. His wife struggles to see with her old fashion glasses. The wife still finds a way to help her husband take care of himself. This couple is strong and their age has nothing on their love for each other. Mrs. Pritchett can not seem to keep her mind off of the two of them.

[5] Mrs. Pritchett is stuck on the old couple because she hopes her future relationship will be just as beautiful. She is impressed by the fact that they are not considered beautiful anymore, they have wrinkles and scars and are struggling to function but their attraction is still running strong. The woman cares for the man, and the man cares for the woman. The couple is strong, they support each other and you can see they have a best friend relationship while being in love. Mrs. Pritchett hopes to someday have a relationship just as strong. When both her and the man she will put in the same effort to help and guide each other through the end.

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**Sample G**

[1] The novel uses literary elements in one of the paragraphs. For example she uses imagery in the part where she says “The couple has reached a table. The old man lets go of his wife’s arm and pulls a chair out for her. He helps her off with her coat, an action that takes some maneuvering as she shifts her cane from one hand to the other.” Mrs. pritchett feels like she doesn’t get that attention no more from her husband. Mrs. Pritchett can’t stop thinking about the couple in the café. In her distracted state, she forgets to bring up her best points during discussion.