

Free Response Practice
in

British Literature
PRE-AP/AP**

By Various Authors

RESOURCE GUIDE

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APPLIED PRACTICE
Free Response Practice in British Literature

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Question 4

(Suggested time—40 minutes)

Note to teachers and students: On the English Literature and Composition Exam, students are given an open free-response question and a list of possible works from which to choose in answering the question. For the purposes of applied practice in class, the question given here was written with *1984* in mind. However, the question could be applied to numerous literary works. It is important for students to understand that, on the actual exam, a student's choice would not be restricted to a given work.

Some critics argue that even dystopian literary works are hopeful because they have at least one character who struggles against the evils of the dominant society. Select a dystopian work, and discuss whether this assertion applies and how the inclusion of a positive character or characters affects the theme of such a work.

Question 1

(Suggested time—40 minutes)

Note to teachers and students: On the English Literature and Composition Exam, students are given an open free-response question and a list of possible works from which to choose in answering the question. For the purposes of applied practice in class, the question given here was written with *Animal Farm* in mind. However, the question could be applied to numerous literary works. It is important for students to understand that, on the actual exam, a student's choice would not be restricted to a given work.

Edna St. Vincent Millay once wrote, "I know, But I do not approve. And I am not resigned."

Some authors say that this feeling is what led them to write some of their works. Select a work for which this seems to be true, and explain what it is that the author knows and does not approve of and how the author shows that he or she is not resigned.

Question 1

(Suggested time—40 minutes)

Read the following passage from Part I of *Heart of Darkness*. Then, in a well-organized essay, discuss how the author characterizes both the narrator and the station manager through his narrative techniques and selection of details.

(5) He had no genius for organizing, for initiative, or for order even. That was evident in such things as the deplorable state of the station. He had no learning, and no intelligence. His position had come to him—why? Perhaps because he was never ill . . . He had served three terms of three years out there . . . Because triumphant health in the general rout of constitutions is a kind of power in itself. When he went home on leave he rioted on a large scale—pompously, Jack ashore—with a difference—in externals only. This one could gather from his casual talk. He originated nothing, he could keep the routine going—that’s all. But he was great. He was great by this little thing that it was impossible to tell what could control such a man. He never gave that secret away. Perhaps there was nothing within him. Such a suspicion made one pause—for out there there were no external checks. Once when various tropical diseases had laid low almost every ‘agent’ in the station, he was heard to say, ‘Men who come out here should have no entrails.’ He sealed the utterance with that smile of his, as though it had been a door opening into a darkness he had in his keeping. You fancied you had seen things—but the seal was on. When annoyed at meal-times by the constant quarrels of the white men about precedence, he ordered an immense round table to be made, for which a special house had to be built. This was the station’s mess-room. Where he sat was the first place—the rest were nowhere. One felt this to be his unalterable conviction. He was (10) neither civil nor uncivil. He was quiet. He allowed his ‘boy’—an overfed young negro from the coast—to treat the white men, under his very eyes, with provoking insolence.

(15) “He began to speak as soon as he saw me. I had been very long on the road. He could not wait. Had to start without me. The up-river stations had to be relieved. There had been so many delays already that he did not know who was dead and who was alive, and how they got on—and so on, and so on. He paid no attention to my explanations, and, playing with a stick of sealing-wax, repeated several times that the situation was ‘very grave, very grave.’ There were rumours that a very important station was in jeopardy, and its chief, Mr. Kurtz, was ill. (20) Hoped it was not true. Mr. Kurtz was . . . I felt weary and irritable. Hang Kurtz, I thought. I interrupted him by saying I had heard of Mr. Kurtz on the coast. ‘Ah! So they talk of him down there,’ he murmured to himself. Then he began again, assuring me Mr. Kurtz was the best agent he had, an exceptional man, of the greatest importance to the Company; therefore I could understand his anxiety. He was, he said, ‘very, very uneasy.’ Certainly he fidgeted on his chair a good deal, (25) exclaimed, ‘Ah, Mr. Kurtz!’ broke the stick of sealing-wax and seemed dumfounded by the accident. Next thing he wanted to know ‘how long it would take to’ . . . I interrupted him again. Being hungry, you know, and kept on my feet too, I was getting savage. ‘How can I tell?’ I said. ‘I haven’t even seen the wreck yet—some months, no doubt.’ All this talk seemed to me futile. ‘Some months,’ he said. ‘Well, let us say three months before we can make a start. Yes. That ought to do the affair.’ I flung out of his hut (he lived all alone in a clay hut with a sort of verandah) muttering to myself my opinion of him. He was a chattering idiot. Afterwards I took it back when it was borne in upon me startlingly with what (30) extreme nicety he had estimated the time requisite for the ‘affair.’

“I went to work the next day, turning, so to speak, my back on that station. In that way only it seemed to me I could keep my hold on the redeeming facts of life.

Still, one must look about sometimes; and then I saw this station, these men
strolling aimlessly about in the sunshine of the yard. I asked myself sometimes
(50) what it all meant. They wandered here and there with their absurd long staves in
their hands, like a lot of faithless pilgrims bewitched inside a rotten fence. The
word 'ivory' rang in the air, was whispered, was sighed. You would think they
were praying to it. A taint of imbecile rapacity blew through it all, like a whiff from
some corpse. By Jove! I've never seen anything so unreal in my life. And outside,
(55) the silent wilderness surrounding this cleared speck on the earth struck me as
something great and invincible, like evil or truth, waiting patiently for the passing
away of this fantastic invasion.

Question 4

(Suggested time—40 minutes)

Note to teachers and students: On the English Literature and Composition Exam, students are given an open free-response question and a list of possible works from which to choose in answering the question. For the purposes of applied practice in class, the question given here was written with *A Tale of Two Cities* in mind. However, the question could be applied to numerous literary works. It is important for students to understand that, on the actual exam, a student's choice would not be restricted to a given work.

Some works of literature contain one or more objects which, as symbols, are crucial to an understanding of the themes of the work. The Guillotine is such a symbolic object in *A Tale of Two Cities*. In a well-organized essay, discuss the symbolism of "La Guillotine" and its importance to the development of one or more of the novel's themes. Do not merely summarize the plot.