

**AP[®] ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION FREE-RESPONSE
QUESTIONS**

**ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION SECTION II
2 hours**

—Total time

Question 1

(Suggested time—40 minutes. This question counts for one-third of the total essay section score.) **Directions:** The following prompt is based on the accompanying sources.

This question requires you to synthesize a variety of sources into a coherent, well-written essay. When you synthesize sources you refer to them to develop your position and cite them accurately. *Your argument should be central; the sources should support this argument. Avoid merely summarizing sources.*

Remember to attribute both direct and indirect citations.

Assignment

Read the following sources carefully. **Then write an essay in which you develop a position on the relationship between society and education.**

Samuelson, S. "Why I Teach Plato to Plumbers." Apr. 29, 2014.
www.theatlantic.com

The problem facing the humanities, in my view, isn't just about the humanities. It's about the liberal arts generally, including math, science, and economics. These form half of the so-called STEM (science, technology, engineering, math) subjects, but if the goal of an education is simply economic advancement and technological power, those disciplines, just like the humanities, will be—and to some degree already are—subordinated to future employment and technological progress. Why shouldn't educational institutions predominately offer classes like Business Calculus and Algebra for Nurses? Why should anyone but hobbyists and the occasional specialist take courses in astronomy, human evolution, or economic history? So, what good, if any, is the study of the liberal arts, particularly subjects like philosophy? Why, in short, should plumbers study Plato?

My answer is that we should strive to be a society of free people, not simply one of well-compensated managers and employees. Henry David Thoreau is as relevant as ever when he writes, "We seem to have forgotten that the expression 'a liberal education' originally meant among the Romans one worthy of free men; while the learning of trades and professions by which to get your livelihood merely, was considered worthy of slaves only."

Baldwin, J. "A Talk to Teachers" (Delivered Oct. 16, 1963).

Since I am talking to schoolteachers and I am not a teacher myself, and in some ways am fairly easily intimidated, I beg you to let me leave that and go back to what I think to be the entire purpose of education in the first place. It would seem to me that when a child is born, if I'm the child's parent, it is my obligation and my high duty to civilize that child. Man is a social animal. He cannot exist without a society. A society, in turn, depends on certain things which everyone within that society takes for granted. Now the crucial paradox which confronts us here is that the whole process of education occurs within a social framework and is designed to perpetuate the aims of society. Thus, for example, the boys and girls who were born during the era of the Third Reich, when educated to the purposes of the Third Reich, became barbarians. The paradox of education is precisely this - that as one begins to become conscious one begins to examine the society in which he is being educated. The purpose of education, finally, is to create in a person the ability to look at the world for himself, to make his own decisions, to say to himself this is black or this is white, to decide for himself whether there is a God in heaven or not. To ask questions of the universe, and then learn to live with those questions, is the way he achieves his own identity. But no society is really anxious to have that kind of person around. What societies really, ideally, want is a citizenry which will simply obey the rules of society. If a society succeeds in this, that society is about to perish. The obligation of anyone who thinks of himself as responsible is to examine society and try to change it and to fight it - at no matter what risk. This is the only hope society has. This is the only way societies change.

Emerson, R. E. *Education*.

Is it not manifest that our academic institutions should have a wider scope; that they should not be timid and keep the ruts of the last generation, but that wise men thinking for themselves and heartily seeking the good of mankind, and counting the cost of innovation, should dare to arouse the young to a just and heroic life; that the moral nature should be addressed in the school-room, and children should be treated as the high-born candidates of truth and virtue?

Prose, F. "I Know Why The Caged Bird Cannot Read." Sept. 1999.
www.harpers.com

Teaching students to value literary masterpieces is our best hope of awakening them to the infinite capacities and complexities of human experience, of helping them acknowledge and accept complexity and ambiguity, and of making them love and respect the language that allows us to smuggle out, and send one another, our urgent, eloquent dispatches from the prison of the self.

That may be what writers—and readers desire. But if it's not occurring, perhaps that's because our culture wants it less urgently than we do. Education, after all, is a process intended to produce a product. So we have to ask ourselves: What sort of product is being produced by the current system? How does it change when certain factors are added to, or removed from, our literature curriculum? And is it really in the best interests of our consumer economy to create a well-educated, smart, highly literate society of fervent readers? Doesn't our epidemic dumbing down have undeniable advantages for those institutions (the media, the advertising industry, the government) whose interests are better served by a population not trained to read too closely or ask too many questions?

On the most obvious level, it's worth noting that books are among the few remaining forms of entertainment not sustained by, and meant to further, the interests of advertising.