

## Q1 Poem Choices

2017

The following poem is by Rachel M. Harper. Read the poem carefully. Then, considering such elements as imagery, form, and tone, write a well-organized essay in which you analyze the relationship between music and the speaker's complex memories of her family.

### The Myth of Music *for my father*

If music can be passed on  
like brown eyes or a strong  
left hook, this melody  
is my inheritance, lineage traced  
through a title track,  
displayed on an album cover  
that you pin to the wall  
as art, oral history taught  
on a record player, the lessons  
sealed into the grooves like fact.  
This is the only myth I know.  
I sit on the hardwood  
floors of a damp November,  
my brother dealing cards  
from an incomplete deck,  
and I don't realize that this  
moment is the definition  
of family, collective memory  
cut in rough-textured tones,  
the voice of a horn so familiar  
I don't know I'm listening,  
Don't know I'm singing,  
a child's improvisation  
of *Giant Steps* or *Impressions*<sup>1</sup>:  
songs without lyrics  
can still be sung.

In six months, when my mother  
is 2,000 miles away, deciding  
if she wants to come home,  
I will have forgotten

this moment, the security  
of her footsteps, the warmth  
of a radiator on my back and you  
present in the sound of typing  
your own accompaniment,  
multiphonics disguised as chords  
in a distant room, speakers set  
on high to fill the whole house  
with your spirit, your call  
as a declaration of love.

But the music will remain.  
The timeless notes of jazz  
too personal to play out loud,  
stay locked in the rhythm  
of my childhood, memories fading  
like the words of a lullaby,  
come to life in a saxophone's blow.  
They lie when they say  
music is universal—this is my song,  
the notes like fingerprints  
as delicate as breath.  
I will not share this air  
with anyone  
but you.

<sup>1</sup> *Giant Steps* is a jazz album (1960) by John Coltrane. *Impressions* (1963) is another album by Coltrane.

**2016**

Read carefully the following poem by Richard Wilbur, first published in 1949. Then, write an essay in which you analyze how the speaker describes the juggler and what that description reveals about the speaker. You may wish to consider poetic elements such as imagery, figurative language, and tone.

The Juggler

A ball will bounce, but less and less. It's not  
A light-hearted thing, resents its own resilience.  
Falling is what it loves, and the earth falls  
So in our hearts from brilliance,  
Settles and is forgot.  
It takes a sky-blue juggler with five red balls

To shake our gravity up. Whee, in the air  
The balls roll round, wheel on his wheeling hands,  
Learning the ways of lightness, alter to spheres  
Grazing his finger ends,  
Cling to their courses there,  
Swinging a small heaven about his ears.

But a heaven is easier made of nothing at all  
Than the earth regained, and still and sole within  
The spin of worlds, with a gesture sure and noble  
He reels that heaven in,  
Landing it ball by ball,  
And trades it all for a broom, a plate, a table.

Oh, on his toe the table is turning, the broom's  
Balancing up on his nose, and the plate whirls  
On the tip of the broom! Damn, what a show, we cry:  
The boys stamp, and the girls  
Shriek, and the drum booms  
And all comes down, and he bows and says good-bye.

If the juggler is tired now, if the broom stands  
In the dust again, if the table starts to drop  
Through the daily dark again, and though the plate  
Lies flat on the table top,  
For him we batter our hands  
Who has won for once over the world's weight.

## 2009b

The following poem, written by Edward Field, makes use of the Greek myth of Daedalus and Icarus.\* Read the poem carefully. Then write an essay in which you analyze how Field employs literary devices in adapting the Icarus myth to a contemporary setting.

### Icarus

Only the feathers floating around the hat  
Showed that anything more spectacular had occurred  
Than the usual drowning. The police preferred to ignore  
The confusing aspects of the case,  
And the witnesses ran off to a gang war.  
So the report filed and forgotten in the archives read simply  
“Drowned,” but it was wrong: Icarus  
Had swum away, coming at last to the city  
Where he rented a house and tended the garden.  
“That nice Mr. Hicks” the neighbors called him,  
Never dreaming that the gray, respectable suit  
Concealed arms that had controlled huge wings  
Nor that those sad, defeated eyes had once  
Compelled the sun. And had he told them  
They would have answered with a shocked, uncomprehending stare.  
No, he could not disturb their neat front yards;  
Yet all his books insisted that this was a horrible mistake:  
What was he doing aging in a suburb?  
Can the genius of the hero fall  
To the middling stature of the merely talented?  
And nightly Icarus probes his wound  
And daily in his workshop, curtains carefully drawn,  
Constructs small wings and tries to fly  
To the lighting fixture on the ceiling:  
Fails every time and hates himself for trying.  
He had thought himself a hero, had acted heroically,  
And dreamt of his fall, the tragic fall of the hero;  
But now rides commuter trains,  
Serves on various committees,  
And wishes he had drowned.

\* Daedalus and his son, Icarus, fashioned wings of feathers and wax in an attempt to escape from prison by flying across the sea. Before their flight, Daedalus warned his son not to fly too close to the sun. But, caught up in the experience of flying, Icarus ignored the warning and soared upward. The heat of the sun melted the wax, the wings fell off, and he plunged to his death in the sea.

## 2007b

Read the following poem carefully. Then, write a well-organized essay in which you analyze the techniques the poet uses to convey his attitude toward the places he describes.

### “Here” by Philip Larkin

Swerving east, from rich industrial shadows  
And traffic all night north; swerving through fields  
Too thin and thistled to be called meadows,  
And now and then a harsh-named halt, that shields  
Workmen at dawn; swerving to solitude  
Of skies and scarecrows, haystacks, hares and pheasants,  
And the widening river’s slow presence,  
The piled gold clouds, the shining gull-marked mud.

Gathers to the surprise of town:  
Here domes and statues, spires and cranes cluster  
Beside grain-scattered streets, barge-crowded water,  
And residents from raw estates, brought down  
The dead straight miles by stealing flat-faced trolleys,  
Push through plate-glass swing doors to their desires –  
Cheap suits, red kitchen-ware, sharp shoes, iced lollies,  
Electric mixers, toasters, washers, driers –

A cut-price crowd, urban yet simple, dwelling  
Where only salesmen and relations come  
Within a terminate and relations come  
Pastoral of ships up streets, the slave museum,  
Tattoo-shops, consulates, grim head-scarfed wives;  
And out beyond its mortgaged half-built edges  
Fast-shadowed wheat-fields, running high as hedges,  
Isolate villages, where removed lives

Loneliness clarifies. Here silence stands  
Like heat. Here leaves unnoticed thicken,  
Hidden weeds flower, neglected waters quicken,  
Luminously-peopled air ascends;  
And past the poppies bluish neutral distance  
Ends the land suddenly beyond a beach  
Of shapes and shingle. Here is unfenced existence:  
Facing the sun, untalkative, out of reach.

## Q2 Prose Choices

2015

The following excerpt is from the opening of *The Beet Queen*, a 1986 novel by Louise Erdrich. Read the passage carefully. Then write a well-developed essay in which you analyze how Erdrich depicts the impact of the environment on the two children. You may wish to consider such literary devices as tone, imagery, selection of detail, and point of view.

Long before they planted beets in Argus and built the highways, there was a railroad. Along the track, which crossed the Dakota-Minnesota border and stretched on to Minneapolis, everything that made the town arrived. All that diminished the town departed by that route, too. On a cold spring morning in 1932 the train brought both an addition and a subtraction. They came by freight. By the time they reached Argus their lips were violet and their feet were so numb that, when they jumped out of the boxcar, they stumbled and scraped their palms and knees through the cinders.

The boy was a tall fourteen, hunched with his sudden growth and very pale. His mouth was sweetly curved, his skin fine and girlish. His sister was only eleven years old, but already she was so short and ordinary that it was obvious she would be this way all her life. Her name was square and practical as the rest of her. Mary. She brushed her coat off and stood in the watery wind. Between the buildings there was only more bare horizon for her to see, and from time to time men crossing it. Wheat was the big crop then, and the topsoil was so newly tilled that it hadn't all blown off yet, the way it had in Kansas. In fact, times were generally much better in eastern North Dakota than in most places, which is why Karl and Mary Adare had come there on the train. Their mother's sister, Fritzie, lived on the eastern edge of town. She ran a butcher shop with her husband.

The two Adares put their hands up their sleeves and started walking. Once they began to move they felt warmer, although they'd been traveling all night and the chill had reached deep. They walked east, down the dirt and planking of the broad main street, reading the signs on each false-front clapboard store they passed, even reading the gilt letters in the window of the brick bank. None of these places

was a butcher shop. Abruptly, the stores stopped, and a string of houses, weathered gray or peeling gray paint, with dogs tied to their porch railings, began.

Small trees were planted in the yards of a few of these houses, and one tree, weak, a scratch of light against the gray of everything else, tossed in a film of blossoms. Mary trudged solidly forward, hardly glancing at it, but Karl stopped. The tree drew him with its delicate perfume. His cheeks went pink, he stretched his arms out like a sleepwalker, and in one long transfixed motion he floated to the tree and buried his face in the white petals.

Turning to look for Karl, Mary was frightened by how far back he had fallen and how still he was, his face pressed in the flowers. She shouted, but he did not seem to hear her and only stood, strange and stock-still among the branches. He did not move even when the dog in the yard lunged against its rope and bawled. He did not notice when the door to the house opened and a woman scrambled out. She shouted at Karl too, but he paid her no mind and so she untied her dog. Large and anxious, it flew forward in great bounds. And then, either to protect himself or to seize the blooms, Karl reached out and tore a branch from the tree.

It was a large branch, from such a small tree, that blight would attack the scar where it was pulled off. The leaves would fall away later on that summer and the sap would sink into the roots. The next spring, when Mary passed it on some errand, she saw that it bore no blossoms and remembered how, when the dog jumped for Karl, he struck out with the branch and the petals dropped around the dog's fierce outstretched body in a sudden snow. Then he yelled, "Run!" and Mary ran east, toward Aunt Fritzie. But Karl ran back to the boxcar and the train.

2014

The following passage is from the novel *The Known World* by Edward P. Jones. Read the passage carefully. Then, in a well-organized essay, analyze how the author reveals the character of Moses. In your analysis, you may wish to consider such literary elements as point of view, selection of detail, and imagery

The evening his master died he worked again well after he ended the day for the other adults, his own wife among them, and sent them back with hunger and tiredness to their cabins. The young ones, his son among them, had been sent out of the fields an hour or so before the adults, to prepare the late supper and, if there was time enough, to play in the few minutes of sun that were left. When he, Moses, finally freed himself of the ancient and brittle harness that connected him to the oldest mule his master owned, all that was left of the sun was a five-inch-long memory of red orange laid out in still waves across the horizon between two mountains on the left and one on the right. He had been in the fields for all of fourteen hours. He paused before leaving the fields as the evening quiet wrapped itself about him. The mule quivered, wanting home and rest. Moses closed his eyes and bent down and took a pinch of the soil and ate it with no more thought than if it were a spot of cornbread. He worked the dirt around in his mouth and swallowed, leaning his head back and opening his eyes in time to see the strip of sun fade to dark blue and then to nothing. He was the only man in the realm, slave or free, who ate dirt, but while the bondage women, particularly the pregnant ones, ate it for some incomprehensible need, for that something that ash cakes and apples and fatback did not give their bodies, he ate it not only to discover the strengths and weaknesses of the field, but because the eating of it tied him to the only thing in his small world that meant almost as much as his own life.

This was July, and July dirt tasted even more like sweetened metal than the dirt of June or May. Something in the growing crops unleashed a metallic life that only began to dissipate in mid-August, and by harvest time that life would be gone altogether, replaced by a sour moldiness he associated with the coming of fall and winter, the end of a relationship he had begun with the first taste of dirt back in March, before the first hard spring rain. Now, with the sun gone and no moon and the darkness having taken a nice hold of him, he walked to the end of the row, holding the mule by the tail. In the clearing he dropped the tail and moved around the mule toward the barn.

The mule followed him, and after he had prepared the animal for the night and came out, Moses smelled the coming of rain. He breathed deeply, feeling it surge through him. Believing he was alone, he smiled. He knelt down to be closer to the earth and breathed deeply some more. Finally, when the effect began to dwindle, he stood and turned away, for the third time that week, from the path that led to the narrow lane of the quarters with its people and his own cabin, his woman and his boy. His wife knew enough now not to wait for him to come and eat with them. On a night with the moon he could see some of the smoke rising from the world that was the lane—home and food and rest and what passed in many cabins for the life of family. He turned his head slightly to the right and made out what he thought was the sound of playing children, but when he turned his head back, he could hear far more clearly the last bird of the day as it evening- chirped in the small forest far off to the left.

He went straight ahead, to the farthest edge of the cornfields to a patch of woods that had yielded nothing of value since the day his master bought it from a white man who had gone broke and returned to Ireland. "I did well over there," that man lied to his people back in Ireland, his dying wife standing hunched over beside him, "but I longed for all of you and for the wealth of my homeland." The patch of woods of no more than three acres did yield some soft, blue grass that no animal would touch and many trees that no one could identify. Just before Moses stepped into the woods, the rain began, and as he walked on the rain became heavier. Well into the forest the rain came in torrents through the trees and the mighty summer leaves and after a bit Moses stopped and held out his hands and collected water that he washed over his face. Then he undressed down to his nakedness and lay down. To keep the rain out of his nose, he rolled up his shirt and placed it under his head so that it tilted just enough for the rain to flow down about his face. When he was an old man and rheumatism chained up his body, he would look back and blame the chains on evenings such as these, and on nights when he lost himself completely and fell asleep and didn't come to until morning, covered with dew.

2013

The following passage is from D. H. Lawrence's 1915 novel, *The Rainbow*, which focuses on the lives of the Brangwens, a farming family who lived in rural England during the late nineteenth century. Read the passage carefully. Then write an essay in which you analyze how Lawrence employs literary devices to characterize the woman and capture her situation.

It was enough for the men, that the earth heaved and opened its furrow to them, that the wind blew to dry the wet wheat, and set the young ears of corn wheeling freshly round about; it was enough that they helped the cow in labour, or ferreted the rats from under the barn, or broke the back of a rabbit with a sharp knock of the hand. So much warmth and generating and pain and death did they know in their blood, earth and sky and beast and green plants, so much exchange and interchange they had with these, that they lived full and surcharged, their senses full fed, their faces always turned to the heat of the blood, staring into the sun, dazed with looking towards the source of generation, unable to turn around.

But the woman wanted another form of life than this, something that was not blood-intimacy. Her house faced out from the farm-buildings and fields, looked out to the road and the village with church and Hall and the world beyond. She stood to see the far off world of cities and governments and the active scope of man, the magic land to her, where secrets were made known and desires fulfilled. She faced outwards to where men moved dominant and creative, having turned their back on the pulsing heat of creation, and with this behind them, were set out to discover what was beyond, to enlarge their own scope and range and freedom; whereas the Brangwen men faced inwards to the teeming life of creation, which poured unresolved into their veins.

Looking out, as she must, from the front of her house towards the activity of man in the world at large, whilst her husband looked out to the back at sky and harvest and beast and land, she strained her eyes to see what man had done in fighting outwards to

knowledge, she strained to hear how he uttered himself in his conquest, her deepest desire hung on the battle that she heard, far off, being waged on the edge of the unknown. She also wanted to know, and to be of the fighting host.

At home, even so near as Cossethay, was the vicar, who spoke the other, magic language, and had the other, finer bearing, both of which she could perceive, but could never attain to. The vicar moved in worlds beyond where her own menfolk existed. Did she not know her own menfolk; fresh, slow, full-built men, masterful enough, but easy, native to the earth, lacking outwardness and range of motion. Whereas the vicar, dark and dry and small beside her husband, had yet a quickness and a range of being that made Brangwen, in his large geniality, seem dull and local. She knew her husband. But in the vicar's nature was that which passed beyond her knowledge. As Brangwen had power over the cattle so the vicar had power over her husband. What was it in the vicar, that raised him above the common men as man is raised above the beast? She craved to know. She craved to achieve this higher being, if not in herself, then in her children. That which makes a man strong even if he be little and frail in body, just as any man is little and frail beside a bull, and yet stronger than the bull, what was it? It was not money nor power nor position. What power had the vicar over Tom Brangwen—none. Yet strip them and set them on a desert island, and the vicar was the master. His soul was master of the other man's. And why—why? She decided it was a question of knowledge.

## 2008b

Jane Austen's novel *Northanger Abbey* (1818) opens with the following passage. Read the passage carefully. Then, in a well-organized essay, analyze the literary techniques Austen uses to characterize Catherine Morland.

No one who had ever seen Catherine Morland in her infancy would have supposed her born to be an heroine. Her situation in life, the character of her father and mother, her own person and disposition, were all equally against her. Her father was a clergyman, without being neglected or poor, and a very respectable man, though his name was Richard, and he had never been handsome. He had a considerable independence besides two good livings,<sup>1</sup> and he was not in the least addicted to locking up his daughters. Her mother was a woman of useful plain sense, with a good temper, and, what is more remarkable, with a good constitution. She had three sons before Catherine was born; and, instead of dying in bringing the latter into the world, as anybody might expect, she still lived on—lived to have six children more—to see them growing up around her, and to enjoy excellent health herself. A family of ten children will be always called a fine family, where there are heads, and arms, and legs enough for the number; but the Morlands had little other right to the word, for they were in general very plain, and Catherine, for many years of her life, as plain as any. She had a thin awkward figure, a sallow skin without colour, dark lank hair, and strong features; so much for her person, and not less unpropitious for heroism seemed her mind. She was fond of all boys' play and greatly preferred cricket, not merely to dolls, but to the more heroic enjoyments of infancy, nursing a dormouse, feeding a canary-bird, or watering a rose-bush. Indeed she had no taste for a garden, and if she gathered flowers at all, it was chiefly for the pleasure of mischief, at least so it was conjectured from her always preferring those which she was forbidden to take. Such were her propensities; her abilities were quite as extraordinary. She never

could learn or understand anything before she was taught, and sometimes not even then, for she was often inattentive, and occasionally stupid. Her mother was three months in teaching her only to repeat the "Beggar's Petition," and, after all, her next sister Sally could say it better than she did. Not that Catherine was always stupid; by no means; she learnt the fable of "The Hare and many Friends," as quickly as any girl in England. Her mother wished her to learn music; and Catherine was sure she should like it, for she was very fond of tinkling the keys of the old forlorn spinnet,<sup>2</sup> so at eight years old she began. She learnt a year and could not bear it; and Mrs. Morland, who did not insist on her daughters being accomplished in spite of incapacity or distaste, allowed her to leave off. The day which dismissed the musicmaster was one of the happiest of Catherine's life. Her taste for drawing was not superior; though whenever she could obtain the outside of a letter from her mother, or seize upon any other odd piece of paper, she did what she could in that way by drawing houses and trees, hens and chickens, all very much like one another. Writing and accounts she was taught by her father; French by her mother. Her proficiency in either was not remarkable, and she shirked her lessons in both whenever she could. What a strange unaccountable character! for with all these symptoms of profligacy at ten years old, she had neither a bad heart nor a bad temper, was seldom stubborn, scarcely ever quarrelsome, and very kind to the little ones, with few interruptions of tyranny. She was, moreover, noisy and wild, hated confinement and cleanliness, and loved nothing so well in the world as rolling down the green slope at the back of the house.

<sup>1</sup> Incomes or endowments

<sup>2</sup> Piano

### Q3 Free Response Choices

**2017.** Select a novel, play, or epic poem that features a character whose origins are unusual or mysterious. Then write an essay in which you analyze how these origins shape the character and that character's relationships, and how the origins contribute to the meaning of the work as a whole.

**2015.** In literary works, cruelty often functions as a crucial motivation or a major social or political factor. Select a novel, play, or epic poem in which acts of cruelty are important to the theme. Then write a well-developed essay analyzing how cruelty functions in the work as a whole and what the cruelty reveals about the perpetrator and/or victim. Do not merely summarize the plot.

**2014.** It has often been said that what we value can be determined only by what we sacrifice. Consider how this statement applies to a character from a novel or play. Select a character that has deliberately sacrificed, surrendered, or forfeited something in a way that highlights that character's values. Then write a well-organized essay in which you analyze how the particular sacrifice illuminates the character's values and provides a deeper understanding of the meaning of the work as a whole.

**2012.** "And, after all, our surroundings influence our lives and characters as much as fate, destiny or any supernatural agency." Pauline Hopkins, *Contending Forces*

Choose a novel or play in which cultural, physical, or geographical surroundings shape psychological or moral traits in a character. Then write a well-organized essay in which you analyze how surroundings affect this character and illuminate the meaning of the work as a whole. You may choose a work from the list below or one of comparable literary merit. Do not merely summarize the plot.