

## Introduction to the Question Three Essay (Q3 Essay)

### What is it?

The Question 3 essay (hereafter, the Q3 essay) is the last of the three essays on the AP exam. It will assign a task, and you write an essay using a major work of literary fiction. This is why we read the books and plays that we do in this class. Unlike the AP Language test, you will actually be using those books on the AP exam.

### What types of essay prompts could I see?

These are the four major categories: 1) about a third of the time, the prompt asks how a specific type of detail contributes to the whole; 2) about a quarter of the time it is a characterization prompt, or the test will ask you to analyze a specific type of character; 3) about fifteen percent of the time, the prompt asks you to analyze a specific literary or narrative technique; and 4) about ten percent of the time, the prompt asks you to analyze the effects of some idea, circumstance, or other external factor on a character.

I choose the novels and plays so that you will have good options for every prompt that has ever been and every prompt that is ever likely to be. When you blow off reading a novel or play, then, you are blowing off a work chosen to answer a specific type of prompt. Therefore, unless you wish to diminish your chances of passing the test, keep up with the reading. This essay is the one part of the test that you control (since you can prepare for it); do not screw this up.

### What are some examples of specific prompts?

Here are the prompts for the last three years to give you a flavor:

**2016.** Many works of literature contain a character who intentionally deceives others. The character's dishonesty may be intended either to help or to hurt. Such a character, for example, may choose to mislead others for personal safety, to spare someone's feelings, or to carry out a crime. Choose a novel or play in which a character deceives others. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze the motives for that character's deception and discuss how the deception contributes to the meaning of the work as a whole.

**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.

**2018.** Many works of literature feature characters who have been given a literal or figurative gift. The gift may be an object, or it may be a quality such as uncommon beauty, significant social position, great mental or imaginative faculties, or extraordinary physical powers. Yet this gift is often also a burden or a handicap. Select a character from a novel, epic, or play who has been given a gift that is both an advantage and a problem. Write a well-developed essay analyzing the complex nature of the gift and how the gift contributes to the meaning of the work as a whole.

### Will I have access to the books on the test?

No. You will use very specific paraphrase instead of quotation. Therefore, it is critical that you know these books and plays well, including the spellings of the author and characters

In practice, this means describing specific episodes from the novel or play as evidence to support topic sentences. The two biggest pitfalls are 1) writing about the novel in general (describing patterns without ever being specific), and 2) writing extensive plot summaries with little or no analysis.

## What if the person grading my essay hasn't read the novel or play I am writing about?

This happens all the time. It is **your job to teach the novel or play to the reader** as you make your argument. The more effective you are at doing this, the better your grade will likely be.

## How do I structure the essay?

Four paragraph essays work best given the time constraints (I. Intro and thesis; II. Body Paragraph; III. Body Paragraph; IV. Conclusion with discussion of big picture idea or theme). It is not acceptable to have one long paragraph (you are no longer in eighth grade).

The three go-to structures for the Q3 Essay should be:

- **Contrast** [I. Intro and thesis; II. Concept X; III. Contrasts with Concept Y; IV. Difference/Preference for X or Y shows something important in the text (from thesis)]
- **Before/After** [I. Intro and thesis; II. Up until X moment, Y is true (Y=an interpretation, not an event); III. After X moment, Z is true (Z=an interpretation, not an event); IV. Change shows something important in the text (from thesis)]
- **Idea/Qualification** [I. Intro and thesis; II. Idea/Expectation/Appearance; III. Idea/Expectation/Appearance is qualified/contradicted/reversed; IV. The gap between the two shows something important in the text (from thesis)]
- **Cause/Effect** [I. Intro and thesis; II. X is true; III. X causes Y; IV. Y shows Theme (from thesis)]

Essays that develop one idea (where one paragraph sets up the next paragraph) score higher than a two or three reason essay (where body paragraph order could be altered with no consequence for the argument).

## What should be in the introduction?

Title, author, and genre (novel or play) [Acronym: TAG]. You also want to set up the text with character introductions and set up the conflict you will be writing about. Remember, a grader might not have read the text you are engaging. It is certainly unlikely that he or she has read it lately.

The last sentence needs to be your thesis (what you will be proving). **Do not copy your thesis from the wording of the prompt** (it should be narrowed, and it should be in your own words).

## What should be in the conclusion?

1) Sum up what you have proved, and 2) discuss how this fits into the larger picture of the work as a whole. This second part is easiest if you are discussing a particular theme.

A good conclusion can improve your essay grade by a score point, since this is where you demonstrate knowledge of the larger thematic design of the text. Even a good introduction will not raise your score.

Here's a sample conclusion to an imaginary paper written about Taeko Kōno's "Bone Meat":

As a document of the times, then, Kōno's "Bone Meat" is suggestive of the way that post-World War II Japanese men and women conceived of their respective roles within a relationship-- true both in the way that male perspectives are privileged over female perspectives and how this ultimately denies the possibility of female agency. In other words, even when post-war Japanese women (such as the protagonist in "Bone Meat") seem to be making active decisions, in actuality these choices tend to affirm a status quo that undermines the ability of

women to take control of their own lives. **This, in turn, exemplifies Kōno's broader pessimism about forming productive romantic relationships, since, dependent on gender, each partner's point-of-view is largely incomprehensible to the other, since these perspectives are predicated on two different sets of experiences about the way the world functions. As a result, the most likely outcomes are alienation and dysfunction. The tragedy of "Bone Meat," then, becomes the way that the fulfillment of a real human need for connection is undermined by the persistence of socially constructed barriers to understanding.**

## How should I prepare for the essay?

- 1) Know the names of the author and main characters (including correct spellings).
- 2) Know the major character arcs and plot lines.
- 3) Have an idea what themes you want to discuss beforehand (target two or three themes you understand well).

### Old Q3 Prompts Grouped into Topic Categories (Some Have Appeared More than Once)

#### Thematic Prompts

- How society shapes individuals
- How author critiques society: politics, social or cultural norms
- How author attempts to address an important idea

#### Structural Prompts

- Importance of structural feature(s) to whole: symbol, allusion, non-chronological ordering of text, mystery or quest for knowledge
- Importance of text feature(s) to whole: title, beginning, conclusion, recurring events, setting or contrast between two settings, epiphanies
- Importance of text detail(s): unrealistic details, recurring events, violent imagery, social occasions, secrets, death scene, physical journey, single important moment, acts of cruelty, literal or figurative gift

#### Writer's Craft Prompts

- How author creates effect: complex response in reader
- Justifying author's choices: deviations from literary realism, use of humor, unconventional ideas

#### Conflict Prompts

- Individual vs. Society
- Individual vs. Parent Figure
- Individual vs. Self
- Individual vs. Cultural Norms
- Individual vs. Control of Others
- Passion vs. Responsibility
- Outer Conformity vs. Inner Rebellion
- Acts of betrayal
- Search for justice

#### Character and Characterization Prompts

- Importance of a type of character to whole: stock or stereotyped characters, villains, confidantes, minor or absent characters, seemingly irrational characters, morally ambiguous characters, tragic characters who cause suffering for others, foils, characters separated from home (literally or figuratively), characters who sacrifice something, liars and deceivers, mysterious origins
- How external factors shape characterization: society, a difficult past, childhood or adolescence, physical or cultural setting