



AP[®] English Literature and Composition

Sample Student Responses and Scoring Commentary Set 2

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Free-Response Question 2

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Question 2: Prose Fiction Analysis

6 points

The following excerpt is from Brenda Peynado’s short story “The Rock Eaters,” published in 2021. In this passage, the narrator is one of a group of people who left their home country after developing the ability to fly, an ability that is accepted as realistically possible within the story. Years later, the group returns to that country with their children. Read the passage carefully. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how Peynado uses literary elements and techniques to convey the narrator’s complex experience of this return home.

In your response you should do the following:

- Respond to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible interpretation.
- Select and use evidence to support your line of reasoning.
- Explain how the evidence supports your line of reasoning.
- Use appropriate grammar and punctuation in communicating your argument.

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria	
Row A Thesis (0–1 points)	0 points For any of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is no defensible thesis. The intended thesis only restates the prompt. The intended thesis provides a summary of the issue with no apparent or coherent claim. There is a thesis, but it does not respond to the prompt. 	1 point Responds to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible interpretation of the passage.
Decision Rules and Scoring Notes		
	Responses that do not earn this point: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only restate the prompt. Make a generalized comment about the passage that doesn't respond to the prompt. Describe the passage or features of the passage rather than making a claim that requires a defense. 	Responses that earn this point: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide a defensible interpretation of the narrator's complex experience of this return home.
	Examples that do not earn this point: Restate the prompt <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>"In the excerpt from 'The Rock Eaters,' Peynado uses myriad literary devices to convey the narrator's complex experience of returning home."</i> Do not respond to the prompt but make a generalized comment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>"Humans have always longed for the ability to fly through the air like birds."</i> Describe the passage or features of the passage <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>"Brenda Peynado paints a vivid picture of people flying through the air on their way home."</i> 	Examples that earn this point: Provide a defensible interpretation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>"The narrator in the 'Rock Eaters' expresses how the group rediscovers their love of their home by introducing it to their kids."</i> <i>"Using richly detailed descriptions, Peynado reveals that the narrator's return home is complex: their 'old friends' are now prickly, and the houses lack the comforts they've grown used to while away, but the visit provides meaningful new experiences for the children in their group."</i> <i>"In 'The Rock Eaters,' the metaphor of flight illustrates the narrator's paradoxical experience of immigration. The narrator's flight from her 'island country' is perceived as a betrayal by some, but her return can be read as a sign of her enduring loyalty."</i>
Additional Notes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The thesis may be more than one sentence, provided the sentences are in close proximity. The thesis may be anywhere within the response. For a thesis to be defensible, the passage must include at least minimal evidence that <i>could</i> be used to support that thesis; however, the student need not cite that evidence to earn the thesis point. The thesis <i>may</i> establish a line of reasoning that structures the essay, but it needn't do so to earn the thesis point. A thesis that meets the criteria can be awarded the point whether or not the rest of the response successfully supports that line of reasoning. 		

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria				
Row B Evidence AND Commentary (0–4 points)	0 points Simply restates thesis (if present), repeats provided information, or offers information irrelevant to the prompt.	1 point EVIDENCE: Provides evidence that is mostly general. AND COMMENTARY: Summarizes the evidence but does not explain how the evidence supports the student’s argument.	2 points EVIDENCE: Provides some specific, relevant evidence. AND COMMENTARY: Explains how some of the evidence relates to the student’s argument, but no line of reasoning is established, or the line of reasoning is faulty.	3 points EVIDENCE: Provides specific evidence to support all claims in a line of reasoning. AND COMMENTARY: Explains how some of the evidence supports a line of reasoning. AND Explains how at least one literary element or technique in the passage contributes to its meaning.	4 points EVIDENCE: Provides specific evidence to support all claims in a line of reasoning. AND COMMENTARY: Consistently explains how the evidence supports a line of reasoning. AND Explains how multiple literary elements or techniques in the passage contribute to its meaning.
	Decision Rules and Scoring Notes				
	Typical responses that earn 0 points: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are incoherent or do not address the prompt. May be just opinion with no textual references or references that are irrelevant. 	Typical responses that earn 1 point: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tend to focus on overarching narrative developments or description of a passage rather than specific details or techniques. Mention literary elements, devices, or techniques with little or no explanation. 	Typical responses that earn 2 points: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consist of a mix of specific evidence and broad generalities. May contain some simplistic, inaccurate, or repetitive explanations that don’t strengthen the argument. May make one point well but either do not make multiple supporting claims or do not adequately support more than one claim. Do not explain the connections or progression between the student’s claims, so a line of reasoning is not clearly established. 	Typical responses that earn 3 points: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uniformly offer evidence to support claims. Focus on the importance of specific words and details from the passage to build an interpretation. Organize an argument as a line of reasoning composed of multiple supporting claims. Commentary may fail to integrate some evidence or fail to support a key claim. 	Typical responses that earn 4 points: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uniformly offer evidence to support claims. Focus on the importance of specific words and details from the passage to build an interpretation. Organize and support an argument as a line of reasoning composed of multiple supporting claims, each with adequate evidence that is clearly explained. Explain how the writer’s use of multiple literary techniques contributes to the student’s interpretation of the passage.
Additional Notes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Writing that suffers from grammatical and/or mechanical errors that interfere with communication cannot earn the fourth point in this row. To earn the fourth point in this row, the response may observe multiple instances of the same literary element or technique if each instance further contributes to the meaning of the passage. 					

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria	
Row C Sophistication (0–1 points)	0 points Does not meet the criteria for one point.	1 point Demonstrates sophistication of thought and/or develops a complex literary argument.
	Decision Rules and Scoring Notes	
	Responses that do not earn this point: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attempt to contextualize their interpretation, but such attempts consist predominantly of sweeping generalizations (<i>“Human experiences always include ...”</i> OR <i>“In a world where ...”</i> OR <i>“Since the beginning of time ...”</i>). Only hint at or suggest other possible interpretations (<i>“While another reader may see ...”</i> OR <i>“Though the passage could be said to ...”</i>). Make a single statement about how an interpretation of the passage comments on something thematic without consistently maintaining that thematic interpretation. Oversimplify complexities in the passage. Use complicated or complex sentences or language that is ineffective because it does not enhance the student’s argument. 	Responses that earn this point may demonstrate sophistication of thought or develop a complex literary argument by doing any of the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying and exploring complexities or tensions within the passage. Illuminating the student’s interpretation by situating it within a broader context. Accounting for alternative interpretations of the passage. Employing a style that is consistently vivid and persuasive.
	Additional Notes: This point should be awarded only if the sophistication of thought or complex understanding is part of the student’s argument, not merely a phrase or reference.	

- Important: Completely fill in the circle that corresponds to the question you are answering on this page.

Question 1

Question 2

Question 3



Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

Success can be exciting and gratifying, but our heritage is what grounds us and provides meaning to life. In the passage from Brenda Reynaldo's "Rock Eaters," ~~the group~~ a series of comparisons between the past and present reveal how the group's return home shifts from an experience of excitement and wonder to a feeling of alienation, and parallel ~~structure~~ sentences to express their process of rediscovering the importance of community and heritage.

Throughout the narrative, a series of contrasts are used to convey the group's feelings of excitement and joy gradually shifting to alienation. When the group first ~~returned to~~ ^{returned to} their homelands, Reynaldo described their ~~journey~~ journey with words such as "jackknifed" and "dodged." Both ~~express~~ express a sense of fun, thrill, and anticipation, reflecting the group's raw and simple excitement to return home. The fact that they didn't fully realize the reason they returned is revealed by the quote

"That year, we all decided we were ready to return." As there was no reason provided for the return and the passage did not elaborate further into the decisionmaking process, it can be inferred that the decision was made hastily and without much thought. However, this simplistic ~~hope~~ ^{hope} ~~hope~~ is quickly dour by the terms used to describe their arrival: "skidding," "rough," "banging," "squashing," "rattling." These words give an impression of destruction, clumsiness (unlike the agility they demonstrated while flying), and an off-kilter feeling. Though the group departed with privilege and grandiosity due to their unique ^{powerful} abilities to fly (flight is often a sign of being "high"; superiority, exceptionalism, success),

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Important: Completely fill in the circle that corresponds to the question you are answering on this page.

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Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

their landing proved clumsier than the ground people and destructive to their community. In the real world, many folks from less developed communities or countries often migrate to wealthy regions in search of success. Some forget their origins, or do not bring their privilege back to their homes. With the symbol of flying ~~and~~ and this juxtaposition, Reynaldo seems to indirectly criticize those who blindly seek success for themselves. Another comparison is made in the text: "Our parents, those who were still alive, came out to greet us... Others were surprised, terrified at the spectacle of ~~the~~ millions of their prodigals." ~~Not all~~ members of the community equally ~~welcomed~~ welcomed the group; the parents nurtured and defended their children despite other community friends and family didn't "trust" them or invite them to celebrations. ^{This reflects the difference between family & community; those who provide unconditional love is those that ask for healthy citizenship to be accepted} Additionally, some of their parents were no longer alive, a manifestation of the loss the group missed while they were away from home. Despite the welcome from their family, the group's ~~high~~ hopes soon turned to a feeling of alienation.

However, they soon found a greater meaning in returning home; through parallel sentence structure, the author ~~delivers~~ delineates the parts of their community that align with their heritage and remind the group of where their true home is. ~~When~~ When the group sees their families' candlelit homes and ~~low~~ low standard of living, they react: "We remember," we said, recoiling at how little the place fit us anymore. ~~But~~ But by the end of the passage, ~~they~~ "We remembered ~~we~~ we'd been happy. "We loved this land," we said. We forgot why we even left." The repetition of

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The phrase "We remember" ~~signals~~ with opposing nuances signals the shift that happened to the attitudes of the group toward their old home; while they felt out of place and ~~almost~~ almost disgusted by the underdeveloped community, they eventually remembered that they were happier in their community and culture than the prosperous outside world. So, how did this shift happen?

Between the two sentences, the author uses a series of sentences that start with the word "we" to list elements of the community and take the reader along in their journey of realization: "We introduced our children to everyone... We showed our children the flamboyant trees... We walked past the stray dogs... We dug through the holes for the ~~snail~~ ^{snails}...". Through ~~these~~ ^{those} parallel sentences, the reader can immerse themselves into the natural scenery and populace of the community, and also see the beauty in the backward town. The series of "we" sentences concludes with the word "Lost" (italicized for impact), signaling that all of the endearing elements were lost to the group when they departed from home. When they were reminded of them, they came to see that they were always happier in their home. In the modern world, success away from home, whether it be studying abroad or getting ~~success~~ a high-paying job, is considered happiness. However, this passage contradicts this sentiment by ~~advocating~~ advocating that no amount of privilege and success can replace the comfort and meaning of home.

Ⓐ Throughout the passage, Reyna establishes the theme "Although success can be a sweet and thrilling escape from home,

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one must return to their roots to discover true fulfillment and happiness." With this revelation, the group's children will hopefully be grounded with ~~the same~~ the same sense of community and heritage during as they develop.

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Important: Completely fill in the circle that corresponds to the question you are answering on this page.

Question 1

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Begin your responses to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

Brenda Peynado, in her short story "The Rock Eaters" used the literary techniques of diction, selection of detail, and nostalgia in order to express the details of a tumultuous journey and adjustment back at home, illustrating that the people and things in life make a place home, not the location or house itself.

Peynado's use of diction allowed her to impliment both the literal and figurative meaning of the word into the story. For example, the narrator said, "...recoiling at how little the place fit us anymore" (36). The use of the word "fits" was adapted both figuratively and literally. Literally, the narrator continued speaking and noted, "Those first nights we slept in our old beds, our feet hanging over the edges..." (36-37). The people who returned home came back to everything they left, including the beds that they were no longer small enough to fit in. Figuratively, the returnees felt that they also no longer fit into the society that they were once a part of. The narrator said, "... the noises of the city and the country crowing and honking us awake, music from radios and guitars, celebrations we'd not been invited to" (37-40). Though the "prodigals" (18) had returned, life had not exactly fallen back into place, especially with the friends and family they had left behind.

Peynado's selection of detail also allows readers

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● Important: Completely fill in the circle that corresponds to the question you are answering on this page.

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to understand that there were other areas of life that the people who returned did not quite fit into yet, especially in their relationships. Peynado chose to include that they "dragged [their] children along to knock on the doors of old friends and siblings" (41-42). The interactions were less than fluid, as the narrator said, "At first we sat stiffly on couches and inquired after their health and others we once knew" (44-46). However, after conversating for some time and exchanging stories, the friends warmed up to their old companions once more. After the friendships were reignited, the tone of the story shifted from uncomfortable to reminiscient and nostalgic.

Brenda Peynado's use of nostalgia emphasized the fact that home is more than a house or a location. For example, after the distant friendships were resolved, the returnees began to show their children all of the things they loved to do there growing up. "[They] introduced [their] children to everyone [they] used to know..." and "showed [their] children the flamboyán trees in the parks..." and several other aspects of their old lives.

Peynado's use of literary devices like diction, selection of detail, and nostalgia allowed her to portray the theme that home is more than a house or a location. Before the narrator refamiliarized themselves with all of their own friends and distant family, they felt lost and

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Out of place in a setting that was once very familiar. Then after they found their people again, the setting became much less daunting and more comfortable to the narrator. Peynado's use of diction, selection of detail, and nostalgia allowed her to elaborate on the difficult adjustment after moving back home while emphasizing the theme that home is not a house, it is the people and surroundings that make a place home.

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~~Reynado's slow pace~~ Reynado's writing pace of the story is slow, they're taking their time to put in the details. This slow pace makes the story feel relaxed and comfortable. The pace shows the readers that the characters in the story are enjoying their time home. A contrast that further emphasizes this connection is the pace of the story in the beginning. In the beginning of the story was going a much faster pace because the characters were nervous & possibly a frightening because going back home.

② ~~Reynado's use of flashbacks~~ Reynado also uses flashbacks to ^{show} the narrator's experience of being home again. The flashbacks are all of great childhood memories the narrator experienced. The reminder of that comfortable feeling shows the narrator to feel more natural with the country and create that deeper connection.

The usage of both literary elements, flashbacks & pace, shows the narrators to understand that their leaving caused them to create a deeper meaning of home. This

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Important: Completely fill in the circle that corresponds to the question you are answering on this page.

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Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

Contributes to the work as a whole because
it creates the thesis of having to
experience ~~new~~ change to ~~understand~~ create
better connections.

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Question 2

Note: Student samples are quoted verbatim and may contain spelling and grammatical errors.

Overview

For Question 2, the prose fiction analysis question, students were asked to read an excerpt from Brenda Peynado’s short story “The Rock Eaters” and respond to the following prompt:

The following excerpt is from Brenda Peynado’s short story “The Rock Eaters,” published in 2021. In this passage, the narrator is one of a group of people who left their home country after developing the ability to fly, an ability that is accepted as realistically possible within the story. Years later, the group returns to that country with their children. Read the passage carefully. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how Peynado uses literary elements and techniques to convey the narrator’s complex experience of this return home.

In a timed writing situation and with an unfamiliar text, students were expected to complete three tasks. They were expected to:

- read the excerpt carefully;
- analyze the narrator’s complex experience of returning home; and,
- write a well-written response based on that analysis.

Reading the prose passage means reading closely for both literary techniques and meaning, which can be an additional challenge for some students given the relative length of the prose passage. Students were expected to view the text specifically as a prose passage, recognizing conventions particular to the genre, and then analyze how those techniques are used to shape the passage and its meaning. For example, in “The Rock Eaters,” students might identify and explore a variety of devices and techniques that impact meaning, including a first-person narrator and the details they choose to share / not share with readers. Students might also comment on particular diction (for instance, “terrified at the spectacle of millions of their prodigals” and “We dragged our children along”) or syntax (“They eventually, reluctantly, opened their doors”).

Analyzing the prose passage means taking the relevant parts that students identified in their reading and thinking about how the parts function collectively to create meaning in the prose passage as a whole. In “The Rock Eaters,” students needed to consider how the parts convey the narrator’s complex experience of the return home. The word “complex” is again central to the prompt, reminding students to look for and explore the shifting, contradictory, or paradoxical aspects of the prose passage. For instance, students might analyze the shift that occurs when the returning group is finally accepted (“They didn’t trust us, not after our betrayal decades ago” becomes “We smiled when we saw [the children] climbing trees together in the patios”). The passage also includes ample tensions for the students to explore (for instance, foreign / familiar, comfortable / uncomfortable, welcome / unwelcome). It should be noted that the prompt supplies students with important background information, that the ability to fly “is accepted as realistically possible within the story.” Students who overlooked this context risked getting off track and questioning how the visitors were able to fly.

Writing a well-written response to a prose passage again means that students demonstrate the ability to establish an overall thesis and build the argument through evidence and commentary,

Question 2 (continued)

ideally constructing a line of reasoning that shows the complexity of their understanding. A challenge of any prose passage lies in the amount of evidence that students must account for and analyze. The more successful responses discuss the passage more fully, with the exploration illuminating the complexity of the passage. It should again be noted that students are not expected in a timed writing situation to write a polished, revised essay but rather are engaged in a process of thinking as they explore the passage and draft their response.

Sample: 2A**Score: 1-4-1****Row A: Thesis (0–1 points): 1**

This essay responds to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible interpretation of the passage. The thesis, “In the passage from Brenda Peynado’s ‘Rock Eaters,’ a series of comparisons between the past and present reveal how the group’s return home shifts from an experience of excitement and wonder to a feeling of alienation, and parallel sentences to express their process of rediscovering the importance of community and heritage,” is presented in the introductory paragraph. It earned 1 point in Row A.

Row B: Evidence and Commentary (0–4 points): 4

The essay uniformly offers specific evidence to support its line of reasoning which focuses on the complex and evolving feelings that encompass a homecoming. In paragraph 2, for example, the essay argues that words such as “jackknifed” and “dodged” are significant because they “express a sense of fun, thrill, and anticipation,” while words such as “skidding,” “rough,” “denting,” “squashing,” and “rattling” offer “an impression of destruction, clumsiness ... and an off-kilter feeling.” Also in paragraph 2, the essay considers the mixed feelings associated with the prodigals’ return home and asserts, “Not all members of the community equally welcomed the group; the parents nurtured and defended their children despite other friends and family didn’t ‘trust’ them or invite them to celebrations.” This reaction is significant, according to the essay, because it contributes to the fact that “the group’s high hopes soon turned to a feeling of alienation.” This evidence and commentary about the shifts in attitudes help to describe the changing emotions that the returnees experience, a major claim in the essay. In addition to the emphasis on the contrasts the returnees’ experience, the response considers the role parallel sentence structure plays in developing the interpretation. In paragraph 3, the essay points to the repetition of the words “We remember” as evidence both in a negative connotation (“recoiling at how little the place fit us anymore”) and a positive one (“We remembered we’d been happy.”). The commentary then points out that repetition “with opposing nuances signals the shift that happened to the attitudes of the group toward their old home.” Later in the same paragraph, the essay points out the sentences that begin with “we” and argues that the structure of these sentences allows the reader to “immerse themselves into the natural scenery and populace of the community, and also see the beauty in the beaten down town.” This essay’s incorporation of specific evidence, compelling commentary, and a thorough explanation of the use of multiple literary devices results in a response that astutely supports a line of reasoning. This response earned 4 points in Row B.

Row C: Sophistication (0–1 points): 1

This response earned the point in Row C because it situates the argument in the broader context of those who leave home, especially migrants. Through its comparison of flight to “superiority, exceptionalism, success” in paragraph 2, the essay considers the broader context of migration and

Question 2 (continued)

makes the larger point that “In the real world, many folks from less developed communities or countries often migrate to wealthy regions in search of success.” The essay’s later observation that the passage argues that “no amount of privilege and success can replace the comfort and meaning of home” (paragraph 3) enhances the student’s interpretation and helped the essay earn the sophistication point.

Sample: 2B**Score: 1-3-0****Row A: Thesis (0–1 points): 1**

The response contains a defensible thesis in the first paragraph that states, “Brenda Peynado, in her short story ‘The Rock Eaters’ used the literary techniques of diction, selection of detail, and nostalgia in order to express the details of a tumultuous journey and adjustment back at home, illustrating that the people and things in life make a place home, not the location or house itself.” The essay earned the point in Row A.

Row B: Evidence and Commentary (0–4 points): 3

The essay provides specific evidence and commentary to develop a line of reasoning that focuses on the challenge the returnees face upon their return. In paragraph 2 the essay focuses on specific word choice, in particular the use of the word “fit.” Using the evidence, “recoiling at how little the place fit us anymore,” the response goes on to compare the literal and figurative meaning of the word and contends that “the returnees felt that they also no longer fit into the society that they were once a part of.” Paragraph 3 delves into how selection of detail contributes to the prodigals’ initial feeling of discomfort upon their arrival. The response points out the evidence: “At first we sat stiffly on couches and inquired after their health and others we once knew.” The commentary suggests that these details are significant because “after conversating for some time and exchanging stories, the friends warmed up to their old companions.” The essay also points out a tone shift that occurs “after the friendships were reignited” (paragraph 3). One piece of evidence is provided without commentary to connect it to the line of reasoning. In paragraph 3, the essay describes how the returnees show their children “the flamboyán trees in the parks”; however, the commentary does not clarify how this detail supports the claim that “home is more than a house or a location.” The essay provides specific evidence, but because it does not connect all the evidence to the line of reasoning, the response earned 3 points in Row B.

Row C: Sophistication (0–1 points): 0

While the essay does exhibit some insights, it does not meet the criteria to earn the sophistication point because it does not fully identify and explore complexities with the passage, situate its interpretation within a broader context, account for an alternative interpretation, or employ a style that is consistently vivid and persuasive. The essay did not earn the point in Row C.

Sample: 2C**Score: 1-1-0****Row A: Thesis (0–1 points): 1**

At the end of paragraph 1, the essay presents a defensible claim that “the characters were nervous & possibly regretting going back home.” This essay earned 1 point in Row A.

Question 2 (continued)

Row B: Evidence and Commentary (0–4 points): 1

The response provides evidence that is largely general such as “the characters in the story are enjoying their time home” (paragraph 1) and “the flashbacks are an of great childhood memories the narrator experience” (paragraph 2). This evidence is not connected to the thesis; therefore, no line of reasoning is established. The response contains some commentary about narrative pace and flashbacks. The essay makes the assertion that the “slow pace makes the story feel relaxed and comfortable” (paragraph 1) and the flashbacks convey “the narrators experience of being home again” (paragraph 2). These simplistic explanations do not strengthen the essay’s argument. In the conclusion, the essay presents the idea of “having to experience change to create better connections,” but the point is not developed further. This essay earned 1 point in Row B.

Row C: Sophistication (0–1 points): 0

This essay does not meet the criteria to earn the sophistication point due to its oversimplified reasoning and lack of a complex literary argument. It did not earn the point in Row C.