

MAJOR FIELD TEST IN LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

Directions: Each of the questions or incomplete statements below is followed by five suggested answers or completions. Select the one that is best in each case.

1. ----- is the *chef-d'oeuvre* of Milton's early poetry, and one of the greatest lyrics in the language. In it Milton confronts and works through his most profound personal concerns: about vocation, about early death, about belatedness and unfulfillment, about the worth of poetry. He also sounds the leitmotifs of reformist politics: the dangers posed by a corrupt clergy and church, the menace of Rome, the adumbrations of apocalypse, the call to prophecy. The opening phrase, "Yet once more," prepares for such inclusiveness.

The poem discussed above is

- (A) *Comus (A Maske Presented at Ludlow Castle)*
- (B) "On the Death of a Fair Infant Dying of a Cough"
- (C) "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity"
- (D) *Lycidas*
- (E) *Il Penseroso*

2. The closest I came to seeing a dragon whole was when the old people cut away a small strip of bark on a pine that was over three thousand years old. The resin underneath flows in the swirling shapes of dragons. "If you should decide during your old age that you would like to live another five hundred years, come here and drink ten pounds of this sap," they told me. "But don't do it now. You're too young to decide to live forever." The old people sent me out into thunderstorms to pick the red-cloud herb, which grows only then, a product of dragon's fire and dragon's rain. I brought the leaves to the old man and old woman, and they ate them for immortality.

The passage above from Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* illustrates magic realism, a literary technique used extensively in the works of

- (A) Gabriel García Márquez
- (B) Alice Walker
- (C) Chinua Achebe
- (D) Kurt Vonnegut
- (E) Jamaica Kincaid

3. John Anderson, my jo, John,
We clamb the hill thegither;
And mony a cantie day, John,
We've had wi ane anither:
Now we maun totter down, John,
And hand in hand we'll go,
And sleep thegither at the foot.
John Anderson, my jo.

The speaker of the lines above is most likely

- (A) a young boy addressing his older brother
- (B) a young woman addressing her lover
- (C) a father addressing his son
- (D) an older woman addressing her son
- (E) an older woman addressing her beloved

Questions 4–5 are based on the following passage.

Now there was, not far from the place where they lay, a castle called Doubting Castle, the owner whereof was Giant Despair; and it was in his grounds that they were now sleeping.

4. The passage is an example of
- (A) allegory
 - (B) psalm
 - (C) fabliau
 - (D) eulogy
 - (E) farce
5. The passage is from
- (A) Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*
 - (B) Jonathan Swift's *A Tale of a Tub*
 - (C) John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*
 - (D) Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy*
 - (E) Thomas Traherne's *Centuries of Meditations*

6. On Sundays she got into his car in the basement garage and they drove to the country and picnicked away up in the Magaliesberg, where there was no one. He read or poked about among the rocks; they climbed together, to the mountain pools. He taught her to swim. She had never seen the sea. She squealed and shrieked in the water, showing the gap between her teeth, as—it crossed his mind—she must do when among her own people.

The limited omniscient point of view in the passage above is used to suggest the

- (A) woman's wish to recapture her innocence
- (B) woman's awareness of her power over the man
- (C) man's unwitting condescension toward the woman
- (D) couple's dissatisfaction with city life
- (E) narrator's approval of the relationship

7. New Criticism, which was at the height of its influence in the United States from the 1940's to the 1960's, encouraged readers to

- (A) read literary texts closely for meaning, with special attention to themes, symbolism, and the use of language
- (B) study literature based on the appreciation of genres and read individual works comparatively within genres
- (C) evaluate the meaning and purpose of works based on historical context
- (D) focus on the nature of meaning, namely the relationship between signifiers and the signified
- (E) recognize how meaning is always deferred and implied only in the opposition of ideas

8. Sappho and Catullus primarily influenced the literary tradition of which genre?

- (A) Tragedy
- (B) Satire
- (C) Lyric poetry
- (D) Comedy
- (E) Epic

9. The action of ----- appears to stop short of World War II, but the narrator's meditations in his underground cellar must be imagined to include this period, which served in part to crystallize the search for significant advances in black civil rights and economic opportunity.

The novel discussed above is

- (A) *Jazz*
- (B) *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man*
- (C) *Cane*
- (D) *Uncle Tom's Children*
- (E) *Invisible Man*

Questions 10–11 are based on the following passage from Rudyard Kipling's *Puck of Pook's Hill*.

As he worked, and the rain fell on the tiles, he talked—now clearly, now muttering, now breaking off to frown or smile at his work. He told them he was born at Little Lindfens Farm, and his father used to beat him for drawing things instead of doing things, till an old priest called Father Roger, who drew illuminated letters in rich people's books, coaxed the parents to let him take the boy as a sort of printer's apprentice. Then he went with Father Roger to Oxford, where he cleaned plates and carried cloaks and shoes for the scholars of a College called Merton.

10. Which of the following is true of the passage?

- (A) It romanticizes the British Empire.
- (B) It idealizes the lives of ordinary workingmen.
- (C) It illustrates British class distinctions.
- (D) It endorses capitalist values.
- (E) It criticizes those who are naïve and powerless.

11. The last sentence suggests that

- (A) the boy would enjoy great success one day
- (B) the boy's days at Oxford were among his happiest
- (C) the boy's father loved his son very much
- (D) Father Roger failed to nurture the boy's promising talents
- (E) Father Roger abandoned the boy at Oxford

12. I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by
madness, starving hysterical naked,
dragging themselves through the negro streets at
dawn looking for an angry fix,
angelheaded hipsters burning for the ancient
heavenly connection to the starry dynamo in
the machinery of night

The lines above are from a poem by

- (A) Theodore Roethke
(B) Gwendolyn Brooks
(C) Anne Sexton
(D) Allen Ginsberg
(E) Sylvia Plath
13. No help or backing was to be had then
from his high-born comrades; that hand-picked
troop
broke ranks and ran for their lives
to the safety of the wood. But within one heart
sorrow welled up: in a man of worth
the claims of kinship cannot be denied.
. . . .
Sad at heart, addressing his companions,
Wiglaf spoke wise and fluent words:
“I remember that time when mead was flowing,
how we pledged loyalty to our lord in the hall,
promised our ring-giver we would be worth our
price,
make good the gift of the war-gear,
those swords and helmets, as and when
his need required it. He picked us out
from the army deliberately, honoured us and
judged us
fit for this action, made me these lavish gifts—
and all because he considered us the best
of his arms-bearing thanes.”

The passage above from *Beowulf* describes

- (A) a rite of passage
(B) loss of life in battle
(C) fulfillment of *wyrd*
(D) settling of *wergild*
(E) broken *comitatus*

14. *Here's a wagon that's going a piece of the way. It
will take you that far;* backrolling now behind her a
long monotonous succession of peaceful and
undeviating changes from day to dark and dark to
day again, through which she advanced in identical
and anonymous and deliberate wagons as though
through a succession of creakwheeled and
limpeared avatars, like something moving forever
and without progress across an urn.

The final words in the passage above from
William Faulkner's *Light in August* allude to a
famous poem by

- (A) Matthew Arnold
(B) William Wordsworth
(C) Percy Bysshe Shelley
(D) John Keats
(E) William Butler Yeats

**Questions 15–16 are based on the following lines
from Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*.**

Hither the heroes and the nymphs resort,
To taste awhile the pleasures of a Court;
In various talk th' instructive hours they past,
Who gave the ball, or paid the visit last;
Line 5 One speaks the glory of the British Queen,
And one describes a charming Indian screen;
A third interprets motions, looks, and eyes;
At every word a reputation dies.

15. Which of the following words is used ironically?
- (A) “resort” (line 1)
(B) “pleasures” (line 2)
(C) “instructive” (line 3)
(D) “charming” (line 6)
(E) “reputation” (line 8)
16. Pope's use of parallel grammatical structure in lines
5 and 6 results in which of the following?
- (A) Off-rhyme
(B) Oxymoron
(C) Pathetic fallacy
(D) Epic simile
(E) Anticlimax

17. Ships at a distance have every man's wish on board. For some they come in with the tide. For others they sail forever on the horizon, never out of sight, never landing until the Watcher turns his eyes away in resignation, his dreams mocked to death by Time. That is the life of men.

Now, women forget all those things they don't want to remember, and remember everything they don't want to forget. The dream is the truth. Then they act and do things accordingly.

In the passage above from Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the narrator implies that men and women are different because of their

- (A) interest in pleasing others
- (B) acceptance of social expectations
- (C) ability to work together to attain their dreams
- (D) willingness to teach each other valuable lessons
- (E) readiness to influence the course of their dreams

18. My Parents had early given me religious Impressions, and brought me through my Childhood piously in the Dissenting Way. But I was scarce 15 when, after doubting by turns of several Points as I found them disputed in the different Books I read, I began to doubt of Revelation it self. Some Books against Deism fell into my Hands; they were said to be the Substance of Sermons preached at Boyle's Lectures.* It happened that they wrought an Effect on me quite contrary to what was intended by them: For the Arguments of the Deists which were quoted to be refuted, appeared to me much stronger than the Refutations. In short I soon became a thorough Deist.

* Established by the bequest of Robert Boyle (1627-1691) to defend Christianity against unbelievers

The speaker ultimately arrives at a religious view by means of

- (A) attending Dissenting services
- (B) reading books by Deists
- (C) receiving divine revelation
- (D) reasoning logically
- (E) learning lessons from his parents

19. Fair insect! that, with threadlike legs spread out,
And blood-extracting bill and filmy wing,
Dost murmur, as thou slowly sail'st about,
In pitiless ears full many a plaintive thing,
And tell how little our large veins would bleed,
Would we but yield them to thy bitter need.

The stanza above from William Cullen Bryant's poem "To a Mosquito" includes all of the following EXCEPT

- (A) pastoral setting
- (B) anthropomorphism
- (C) iambic pentameter
- (D) apostrophe
- (E) rhymed couplet

Questions 20–22 are based on the following excerpt from a play.

She never told her love,
But let concealment, like a worm i'th' bud,
Feed on her damask cheek. She pined in thought,
And with a green and yellow melancholy
She sat like patience on a monument,
Smiling at grief. Was not this love indeed?

20. The passage describes a woman who is
- (A) experiencing the joy of falling in love
 - (B) overwhelmed by regret for the man she has lost
 - (C) worried that her change of heart will be discovered
 - (D) consumed by the love she holds in secrecy
 - (E) overcome with guilt for betraying her lover

21. Lines 2 and 5 contain examples of

- (A) allusion
- (B) metaphor
- (C) simile
- (D) alliteration
- (E) personification

22. The passage was written by

- (A) Christopher Marlowe
- (B) William Shakespeare
- (C) Ben Jonson
- (D) John Webster
- (E) William Congreve

Questions 23–25 refer to the passages below, in which critics discuss Henry James’s “The Turn of the Screw.”

- (A) Not only does James’s governess fit the classic profile of the female sexual hysteric, she also experiences the “hysterical fit” observed by turn-of-the-century clinicians. That her first hallucination precipitates a “nervous explosion” of some intensity is clear from her own account. Like that of the classic hysteric, her “mental activity . . . is split up, and only a part of it is conscious.” Her initial fantasy of her handsome employer is conscious, but his transformation into a figure embodying her fear of sexuality is generated by deep-rooted unconscious inhibitions.
- (B) The former governess, like the present governess, has allowed her erotic desires to stray across class lines; the only difference is that the object of Miss Jessel’s feelings is someone below her on the social scale (Quint) rather than someone above her (the master in Harley Street). One might imagine, therefore, that the governess would recognize in the story of those tragic lovers something of her own longings. Of course she does not. On the contrary, their class transgression immediately brands them in her eyes as *evil* spirits rather than *good* spirits, which Henry James showed some interest in. (In James’s notebook entry of January 22, 1888, for example, the ghost desires to “interpose, redeem, protect.”) Indeed, it seems at times as if the fact that Quint and Jessel appear to her as ghosts is less important and even less horrifying to the governess than the social violation they committed while they were alive.
- (C) What is even more troublesome is disagreement among critics about just what standards are to be applied. Two “straight” readers, seeing the ghosts as real and the story as an attempt to “turn the screws” of horror as thrillingly as possible, might flatly disagree with each other about whether the literary experience of thrilling horror is good or bad for “us,” or for a given immature reader, or for a former governess now incarcerated in a mental institution.

Because of all this variety, we have to ask our questions as if we were dealing not with one *The Turn of the Screw* but many different ones.

- (D) The difficulties involved in the governess’s effort to create a space for herself outside of patriarchal boundaries are metaphorically represented in her struggle for the children. While she believes she is engaged in a battle with the ghosts for the children’s souls, she is also, symbolically, involved in overcoming patriarchal definitions of womanhood. Rejecting the ineffectual role played by Mrs. Grose, the respectable matron character, the governess attempts to define herself against the sexualized whore figure, Miss Jessel, as she tries to supplant the male-authority figure, Peter Quint. Neither of these roles can help her in her struggle for a subject position, however, as is made clear when the governess cannot replace Miss Jessel for Flora, or Quint for Miles.
- (E) But the compelling theme and the extraordinarily vivid plot-form are not the entirety of *The Turn of the Screw*; there are other methods by which James extends and intensifies his meaning and strikes more deeply into the reader’s consciousness. Chief of these is a highly suggestive and even symbolic language which permeates the entire story. . . . In *The Turn* there is a great deal of recurrent imagery which powerfully influences the tone and the meaning of the story; the story becomes, indeed, a dramatic poem, and to read it properly one must assess the role of the language precisely as one would if public form of the work were poetic. For by his iterative imagery and by the very unobtrusive management of symbols, which in the organic work co-function with the language, James has severely qualified the bare narrative; and, if he has not defined the evil which, as he specified, was to come to the reader as something monstrous and unidentified, he has at least set forth the mode and the terms of its operation with fullness.

23. Which is by a feminist critic?
24. Which is by a psychoanalytic critic?
25. Which is by a reader-response critic?

Answers

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|-------|-------|
| 1. D | 14. D |
| 2. A | 15. C |
| 3. E | 16. E |
| 4. A | 17. E |
| 5. C | 18. D |
| 6. C | 19. A |
| 7. A | 20. D |
| 8. C | 21. C |
| 9. E | 22. B |
| 10. C | 23. D |
| 11. D | 24. A |
| 12. D | 25. C |
| 13. E | |



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