

AP[®] ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION

2015 SCORING COMMENTARY

Question 2

Overview

The “Analysis” prompt was intended to test students’ abilities to articulate their understanding of a short, argumentative text as an intentional “speech act” — that is, not merely as words on the page but as words in action, words intended to have a social impact. This year’s text was an excerpt from a magazine article by Cesar Chavez detailing how nonviolence works not simply as a strategy but as a moral principle of the farm workers’ movement. The prompt supplied contextual information about the occasion of the article (the 10th anniversary of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.), the identity of the author (Cesar Chavez, a labor union organizer and civil rights leader), and the publication venue (the magazine of a religious organization devoted to helping the poor). From this information students had to infer the original audience and something of the rhetorical purpose of Chavez’s “argument about nonviolent resistance.” From their reading of the text, students had to understand the particularities and the overarching point of Chavez’s argument, discern its logic and appeals, and further infer the intentionality behind it. This year’s analysis question directed students’ attention not to “rhetorical devices” or even “rhetorical strategies” but to “rhetorical choices” made by Chavez. This terminology was selected to emphasize the primacy of authorial agency and communicative purpose over the implementation of formal tropes in the text.

Sample: 2A Score: 8

This essay effectively identifies and analyzes three of Cesar Chavez’s rhetorical choices — striking diction, juxtaposition, and appeals to reader’s fundamental moral beliefs — to argue that “nonviolence is the best and most moral way to bring change.” Providing convincing evidence and analysis (for example, “Chavez uses Ghandi [*sic*], a famous and highly respected advocate of nonviolence, to allude to the success peace can bring since Ghandi [*sic*] managed to win India back from an empire”), the essay builds its case through a well-developed structure, moving from the analysis of how Chavez’s diction works (“less than 10 words into his request, [Chavez] has already tied ‘nonviolence’ to ‘power’”) to end with a broader point about how Chavez appeals to the audience’s beliefs (“He also appeals to readers’ sense of humanity and virtue, portraying nonviolence as something for those who dont [*sic*] want to exploit the weak or poor”). Although not flawless (sometimes the student overstates the case: “By depicting violence as deplorable and vile, he convinces those with even a shred of decency or humanity”), the essay clearly demonstrates its control over a wide range of the elements of effective writing. For its well-developed rhetorical analysis and effective prose style, this essay earned a score of 8.

Sample: 2B Score: 6

This essay adequately argues that Cesar Chavez “expresses his unwavering support of Dr. King’s method of nonviolence through logical support and contrast.” The essay analyzes how Chavez develops his argument with logic (nonviolence attracts support while history shows that violence results in the further oppression of the poor, the workers). Then the essay turns to consider “another powerful tool: contrast,” observing that the “overall organization of [Chavez’s] article follows [*sic*] a certain format; he first supports nonviolence and then follows that support with a hypothetical ‘if.’” This claim is supported with appropriate and sufficient explanation: “‘If we webeat [*sic*] the growers at the expense of violence, victory would come at the expense of injury and ... death.’ ... The readers have this continued comparison in their minds as they read, nonviolence — good results, violence — bad results.” The essay concludes by quickly summarizing its two main points, contending, “According to Chavez, it’s not even a choice. Nonviolence is the only way to go.” Despite its rather rushed conclusion and occasional lapses, this essay earned a score of 6 for its adequate rhetorical analysis and generally clear prose.