Teaching Analytical Writing through the SQuEES Model

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The AP Tasks

AP Multiple Choice: 53-55 Questions, 60 minutes

Free Response Questions: 3 “Cold Prompt” Essays, 2 hours
  ▶ Poetry FRQ: Style Analysis
  ▶ Prose FRQ: Style Analysis
  ▶ Theme FRQ: Open-ended, always driving toward central theme(s)
AP English Literature: Poetry FRQs (Q1)

2013 “The Black Walnut Tree” (Mary Oliver): Prompt: Carefully read the following poem by Mary Oliver. Then write a well-organized essay in which you analyze how Oliver conveys the relationship between the tree and family through the use of figurative language and other poetic techniques.

2014 “For That He Looked Not Upon Her” (George Gascoigne): The following poem is by the sixteenth-century English poet George Gascoigne. Read the poem carefully. Then write an essay in which you analyze how the complex attitude of the speaker is developed through such devices as form, diction, and imagery.

2015 “XIV” from Midsummer (Derek Walcott): In the following poem by Caribbean writer Derek Walcott, the speaker recalls a childhood experience of visiting an elderly woman storyteller. Read the poem carefully. Then, in a well-developed essay, discuss the speaker’s recollection AND analyze how Walcott uses poetic devices to convey the significance of the experience.

2016 “The Juggler” (Richard Wilbur): 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.
AP English Literature: Prose FRQs (Q2)

2013 D. H. Lawrence’s 1915 novel, *The Rainbow* [...] focuses on the lives of the Brangwens, a farming family who lived in rural England during the late nineteenth century. [...] write an essay in which you analyze how Lawrence employs literary devices to characterize the woman and capture her situation.

2014 *The Known World* by Edward P. Jones. […], 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.

2015 *The Beet Queen*, a 1986 novel by Louise Erdrich. […] 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.

2016 Thomas Hardy’s *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), Michael Henchard and his daughter Elizabeth-Jane are reunited after years of estrangement. During this separation, Henchard has risen from poor seasonal farmworker to wealthy mayor of a small country town, while Elizabeth has supported herself by waiting on tables at a tavern.[…] Paying particular attention to tone, word choice, and selection of detail, compose a well-written essay in which you analyze Hardy’s portrayal of the complex relationship between the two characters.
AP English Literature: Theme FRQs (Q3)

2013: A bildungsroman, or coming-of-age novel, recounts the psychological or moral development of its protagonist from youth to maturity, when this character recognizes his or her place in the world. Select a single pivotal moment in the psychological or moral development of the protagonist of a bildungsroman. Then write a well-organized essay that analyzes how that single moment shapes the meaning of the work as a whole (theme).

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 (theme).
AP English Literature: Theme FRQs (Q3)

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 (theme) *AND* what the cruelty reveals about the perpetrator and/or victim.

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 (theme).
Weaknesses in Student Writing

► Disorganized, insufficiently organized, or formulaic (by device)
► Trying to “cover ground” (grocery shopping, laundry list)
► No clear connection between device and how it works to reveal attitude/character
► Summary and/or paraphrase
► Lacking analysis: the how and the why
► No connection to overall theme or purpose
Critical Reading, Thinking, and Writing

► Effective writers are effective readers
► Students must be taught how to read
► Only when students read critically can they begin thinking critically.
► Critical reading and thinking breeds analytical writing
► Analytical writing is persuasive, insightful, and meaningful analysis
Practice with Milton’s *Paradise Lost*

As we read, think about *how* you are reading and processing the passage

- What kinds of decoding are you doing? What notes do you make?
- What kind of engagement do you have with the text?
- What kind of connections are you making and *how*?
- What kind of judgments are you making?

To teach students to read, we must take a metacognitive approach to understanding reading (and writing…)

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Practice with Milton’s *Paradise Lost*

Prompt:

Arguably the most beautiful imagery in all of *Paradise Lost* appears in Book 9 when Adam discovers Eve’s trespass and his subsequent reaction. In a well-organized essay, analyze how Milton reveals Adam’s character and fatal flaw. Consider such elements as imagery, selection of detail, and tone.
Practice with Milton’s *Paradise Lost*

Adam the while
Waiting desirous her return, had wove
Of choicest Flours a Garland to adorne
Her Tresses, and her rural labours crown,
As Reapers oft are wont thir Harvest Queen.
Great joy he promis'd to his thoughts, and new
Solace in her return, so long delay'd;
Yet oft his heart, divine of somthing ill,
Misgave him; hee the faultring measure felt;
And forth to meet her went, the way she took
That Morn when first they parted;
……………………………..

Adam, soon as he heard
The fatal Trespass don by Eve, amaz'd,
Astonied stood and Blank, while horror chill
Ran through his veins, and all his joynts relax'd;
From his slack hand the Garland wreath'd for Eve
Down drop'd, and all the faded Roses shed:
Speechless he stood and pale, till thus at length
First to himself he inward silence broke.

O fairest of Creation, last and best
Of all Gods works, Creature in whom excell'd
Whatever can to sight or thought be formd,
Holy, divine, good, amiable, or sweet!
How art thou lost, how on a sudden lost,
Defac't, deflourd, and now to Death devote?
Rather how hast thou yeelded to transgress
The strict forbiddance, how to violate
The sacred Fruit forbidd'n! som cursed fraud
Of Enemie hath beguil'd thee, yet unknown,
And mee with thee hath ruind, for with thee
Certain my resolution is to Die;
How can I live without thee, how forgoe
Thy sweet Converse and Love so dearly joyn'd,
To live again in these wilde Woods forlorn?
Step One: Critical Reading

4 Critical Reading Levels

- **Observation**: one considers the vocabulary, grammar, syntax, figurative language, literary devices, and other stylistic features of the text; nothing is happening beyond merely noting what is in the text and labeling parts for possible use later. The challenge is that some students never get beyond this step.

- **Semantics**: one defines words to determine their denotative and connotative importance to the work and reflects upon the implications of the language and how it is used. Identifying and defining meaning.

- **Structural**: one assesses the relationships and connections between words and ideas, including patterns, repetitions, contrasts, juxtapositions, symbols, figurative language. At this stage, readers are evaluating the function of the language and the author’s purpose for expressing it in this manner. Assessing, examining, evaluating.

- **Associative**: one draws on prior knowledge and connects the theme of a text to ideas beyond it, arguing for a particular reading of a text. Some areas for consideration: the author’s biography; other works of literature; socio-historical or politico-historical connections; ancient or pop culture; other academic disciplines such as psychology, science, philosophy, history, religion, mythology, among many others. Providing judgments based on prior knowledge, synthesizing, and making claims (thesis).
Step Two: Critical Thinking

Critical reading means paying close attention to and thinking about

► *what* the individual words, figurative language, structural elements are,
► *how* the nuances and connotations of language affect the meaning,
► *the function* of the author’s stylistic choice in the context in which they are being used,
► *the purpose* the author intends by choosing a particular mode of expression, and
► *the theme* the author conveys when one considers it as a whole.

Each of these formulates a question that is asked

► What?
► How?
► Why?
► So what?
Step Three: SQuEES

**Compositional elements of analytical writing:**

- **Statement**—claim or argument you will be making (thesis, topic sentences)
- **Quote**—specific textual evidence that illustrates your thesis’ topic; theme FRQ will be specific events
- **Explain**—*what* is it? *how* is the evidence connected to your claim?
- **Elaborate**—*how* does the evidence function within the context of your argument? *why* or *for what purpose* is the author using the evidence you’ve provided?
- **Synthesize**—*so what?* Tie back to the theme cited in the thesis.

*These elements are fluid and organic—they may change order, depending upon the argument.*
Statement

Claim or argument the writer posits after reading and analyzing. Without this, essays ramble and likely summarize since there is no argument to prove. *Assert a provable claim.*

Every thesis is three-pronged and should answer these questions

I) What is your topic of discussion?
II) What is the author’s purpose?
III) What is the author’s theme?
Statement

For example, let’s use these thesis statements about Milton:

“John Milton is a fantastic poet who uses brilliant imagery and powerful symbols to describe Adam and Eve’s marriage.”

“Milton suggests that God intended Man and Woman to be equals and co-partners in marriage when he illustrates the domestic content and matrimonial love evident through their epithets of affection and bucolic tone and imagery of the Garden.”

What are the differences between these two statements?
Statement

I) What is my topic?
   1. “Milton is a fantastic poet who uses brilliant imagery and powerful symbols”
   2. “Adam and Eve’s epithets of affection and bucolic tone and imagery”

II) What is the author’s purpose?
   1. “to describe Adam and Eve’s marriage”
   2. “illustrate the domestic content and matrimonial love”

III) What is the theme?
   1. no theme offered
   2. “to suggest that God intended Man and Woman to be equals and co-partners in marriage”

Which is the more effective thesis?
Which naturally will result in a more effective essay?
Quote and Explain

Quotes:
- words, figurative language, structural elements you annotated while reading
- specific textual evidence that illustrates your thesis’ topic; theme FRQ will be specific events

Explain:
- *what* the words, figurative language, structural elements are
  (Observation: noting what is in the text and labeling parts for possible use later)
- *how* the language/evidence is connected to your statement
  (Semantics: identifying and defining meaning, and then tying back to claim)
Elaborate and Synthesize

Elaborate:

► *the function (or how)* of the evidence of the author’s stylistic choice(s) within the context of the argument

► *the purpose* the author intends by a particular mode of expression or *why* the author uses the evidence being discussed

(Structural: assesses, examining, evaluating the relationships and connections between words and ideas, including patterns, repetitions, contrasts, juxtapositions, symbols, figurative language)

Synthesis:

► *connections* beyond or outside the text that enhance or clarify the meaning

(Associative: connects background/prior knowledge, synthesizes, and argues for a particular reading)
Lest you be fearful…

This is *not* a formula for an essay…

These are *compositional elements of an essay*
- Each element is fluid and organic
- May be revisited or deferred as needed for a specific argument

While we do not seek to create writers of AP essays, each of these critical reading levels corresponds to a SQuEES element, which then corresponds to an AP score (generally speaking…)
Sample A:

Throughout Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, Milton skillfully uses imagery, detail, and tone to develop Adam’s character and reveal his fatal flaw. He shows Adam shouldn’t have trusted Eve to go by herself because she was basically a newborn plus a woman on top of that. Bad combo.

Milton gives a deeper understanding of Adam’s emotions about Eve through the images he creates with his words. He writes “her tresses” and “great joy” to show Adam loves Eve and is happy with her. Also he is “desirous her return” and wants to crown her like his “harvest queen.” But when he finds out she did what every woman does and listened to a snake with a apple, he dropped the garland and “horror chill” made him “slack.”

Milton also uses tone to show how Adam is disappointed in Eve. At first, he is all happy and excited. It says he was “desirous” and felt “great joy.” Later in the poem, he even calls her “holy, divine, good, amiable, or sweet.” But the tone changes when he feels “horror chill” and calls her “defaced, deflour’d.” Instead of dropping her right then like he did the garland, he messes it up for the rest of us by “my resolution is to Die” because he can’t live without her. Adam loves Eve way too much. Who knows? God could have made him an even hotter chick if he made the right choice.

The last thing Milton uses is imagery to compare Eve to a queen and Adam to a worker. He writes “as reapers oft are wont thir harvest queen.” Adam serves her like he is a field worker (which I guess he is since they are working in the garden and he is picking flowers for her) and he is a slave to her “harvest queen” lovin. Later he says “my resolution is to Die” like a slave would die for his queen. Then Milton writes “these wilde woods forlorn” instead of it being a garden anymore to show there is no order or sense if Eve isn’t there with him. This shows Adam loves Eve and thinks his life would be chaotic if she wasn’t there.

Milton uses diction, tone, and imagery to show that Adam was too needy for his women and that maybe he shouldn’t have listened to his wife (that’s why men watch football now and ignore their wife).
Sample B:

In *Paradise Lost* by John Milton, Milton tells the story of Adam and Eve and their fall from grace. Throughout the novel he portrays Adam as a husband who would do anything for his wife, even if it brought on the fall of man. Milton uses imagery and symbolism to convey his attitude about marriage and the fall of man.

When Eve is away from Adam is the image of a loving, doting husband. He makes Eve a wreath of “choicest flowers a garland, to adorn her tresses.” Milton uses this image to show that though he believes a husband should be the protector of his wife, he should still have an undying love for her and treat her as if she were a queen. Adam shows his love towards Eve all throughout the novel, almost to the point of idolizing her. It does not prove to be a problem until Adam finally does eat the fruit that was given to him by Eve. His love for Eve runs so deep that he chose Eve over God and followed her to their demise.

When Adam learns of Eve eating from the Tree of Knowledge, Milton uses both imagery and symbolism to show how he believed their fall affected them morally. When Eve tells Adam what she has done, Adam drops the wreath, a symbol of Eve’s fall and the loss of her beauty. The image of “the garland wreath’d for Eve down drop’t” is a direct symbol of Eve’s fall. Eve was the wreath and when she ate from the Tree, she dropped from God’s graces just as the wreath dropped from Adam’s hand. It is also said that “all the faded roses shed,” symbolizing how Eve has shed her innocence through her fall. Milton shows how Eve was a creature that was beautiful and whole, much like how the wreath was when Adam first made it. After the fall, Eve lost her beauty by losing her innocent and become tainted by sin.

Milton’s ideas of marriage and the fall of man are shown in the various symbols and images that he uses in *Paradise Lost*. He shows how men should pamper and take care of their wives, but not to the point where they choose their wives over God and forsake him like Adam did. He also portrays how the fall of man destroyed Adam’s innocence that was beautiful and cursing mankind with sin.
In the ninth book of Paradise Lost, Adam yearns for Eve and longs for her return after a brief separation. During the separation, the floral and earthly imagery of Eve as the Harvest Queen shows her to be symbolic of Adam’s life in the garden, yet after her transgressions were told, the imagery of life lost is evident in Adam’s thoughts. The first floral imagery illustrates Adam’s adoration of his wife and co-partner, yet the lifeless imagery afterwards demonstrates that Adam’s uxoriousness leads to blind acceptance and ultimately his demise.

While Adam is waiting for the return of his beloved Eve, he weaves “flours [into] a garland” to dignify her as the Harvest Queen. Adam is portrayed as venerating her as the Queen of his life in Paradise. The symbolism of the garland made from the flowers of the verdant Garden makes Eve the symbol not only of the bounty of a Harvest but also as Queen, she is the overseer of sustenance and life in her kingdom. The significance of the crown of flowers is two-fold: she is bountiful, productive, and beautiful as are the Garden’s flower, as well as the ruler and sovereign of the Garden and of Adam. As the “reaper” in Eve’s Garden, Adam debases himself to servitude and elevates Eve above all, which may be considered his fatal flaw. She provides Adam with sustenance through love and their separation, even for a few hours, depresses him and distracts him from his duties. This relationship between Adam and Eve illustrates the pre-lapsarian marriage: a loving husband and an adored wife, not full of hatred and despair (as it later becomes) but of the true belief of a loving bond.

When Adam discovers that Eve has eaten the forbidden fruit from the Tree of Knowledge, the imagery changes from an earthly tone to one of life lost. Like the garland he drops, Adam believes that Eve is “defac’t, deflour’d and now to Death devote.” Eve has lost her eternal life and her sovereignty as she is no longer the “Harvest Queen.” The imagery ties in with the symbolism of the roses falling from the garland. She no longer encompasses life; the roses fall and fade to signify that her role has now changed and she will be associated with death instead of bountiful life. This leads to Milton’s assertion that, while Man and Woman are supposed to love, respect, and adore one another, misplaced allegiances and love will lead to death. Adam’s fatal flaw then results from his elevation of Eve to the status of Queen, perhaps even to the status of his goddess, which misplaces his love for and obedience to God. Therefore, Adam fell because of love, not because of guile and trickery. Milton shows us that a love so strong that even sin cannot break it may be too much, may even be a sin in itself.

Although Milton shows signs of the special bond that a marriage should entail with true love and devotion, the obvious attitude towards love taken too far is that it leads to man’s demise. Adam was blinded by Eve’s beauty and should have been swayed by his devotion to his authoritative God. Therefore, Eve is seen as the death of man with the capability of causing Adam to sin with something so endearing as love.
Teachers as Writers

The very best method to teach writing is *to write in front of your students.*

- They understand that writing is an organic process
- They see that good writing isn’t always the *first* writing
- They understand how to articulate the connections they make
- They learn how to extend their analysis beyond the obvious
- They learn new vocabulary
- They learn how to tie their essay together coherently
Teachers as Writers

Some strategies:

► Model the entire writing process (even better—do it in one class period!)
► Mini-essays
► “Paper doll” essays
► Above all, opportunity, opportunity, opportunity
Take Away

Many students experience anxiety when approaching an unfamiliar passage, which may lead them to summarize, provide superficial analysis, or simply “cover ground” by listing devices and quotes.

• The SQuEES model is NOT a formula for writing—it is a tool for writing instructors to model the elements found in analytical writing.

• SQuEES is a tool that compels students toward the depth and complexity of critical thinking and writing.

• Provides students with a tool that breeds confident writers by offering a sound structure
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