

# What to Teach and When to Teach It: Structuring Your AP English Literature Class

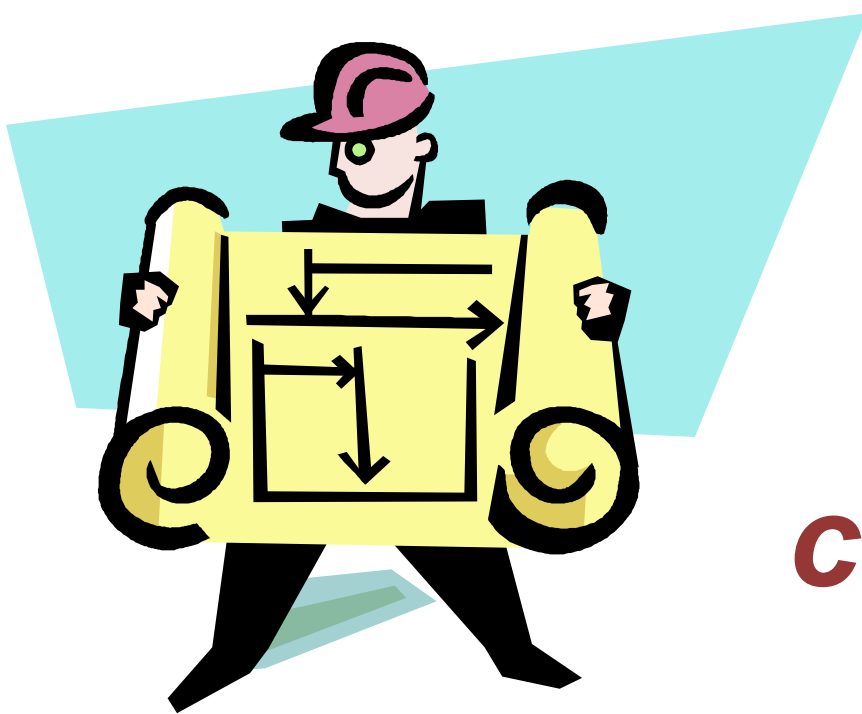


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***Use data  
to build your  
class blueprint.***

- AP Exam grade distribution
- AP English Literature course description
- College Board student performance Q & A
- AP Exam poetry, prose, and open prompts
- College Board school report data
- your own pretest information

# AP English Literature Exam Grade Distribution

year	2010	2009	2008	2007	2006	2005	2004	2003	2002
3 or higher	57.4	58.7	60.3	61.2	62.2	62.0	64.8	62.6	66.1
5	8.1	7.4	6.5	7.0	7.1	8.1	9.2	8.3	9.5
4	19.1	20.5	19.9	20.9	20.8	20.1	21.3	20.1	22.3
3	30.2	30.8	33.9	33.3	34.3	33.8	34.3	34.2	34.3
2	32.6	31.3	30.6	30.2	29.8	29.7	27.4	30.7	26.9
1	10.0	10.1	9.1	8.7	8.1	8.4	7.7	6.7	7.1
mean score	2.83	2.84	2.84	2.87	2.89	2.90	2.97	2.93	3.00
<i>total testers</i>	<i>353,781</i>	<i>332,352</i>	<i>320,358</i>	<i>298,478</i>	<i>281,111</i>	<i>260,958</i>	<i>229,367</i>	<i>229,367</i>	<i>215,313</i>

# Reading Goals

(from College Board Course Description)

- **R1:** The student reads works from several genres and periods—from the sixteenth to the twenty-first century.
- **R2:** The student understands a work's complexity.
- **R3:** The student analyzes how meaning is embodied in literary form.
- **R4:** The student engages in close reading involving the *experience of literature* (precritical impressions and emotional responses); *interpretation of literature* (analysis to arrive at multiple meanings); and the *evaluation of literature* (assessment of the quality and artistic achievement as well as consideration of their social and cultural values).

# Reading Goals

(from College Board Course Description)

- **R5:** The student makes careful observations of textual detail, establishes connections among observations, and draws from those connections a series of inferences leading to an interpretive conclusion about a piece of writing's meaning and value.
- **R6:** The student demonstrates an understanding of Biblical and Classical mythology and how the concepts and stories have influenced and informed Western literary creation.

# Writing Goals

(from College Board Course Description)

- **W1:** The student produces writing that focuses on the critical analysis of literature and includes expository, analytical, and argumentative essays.
- **W2:** The student composes pieces in response to well-constructed creative writing assignments that allow students to see from the inside how literature is written.
- **W3:** The student develops and organizes ideas in clear, coherent, and persuasive language.
- **W4:** The student attends to matters of precision and correctness in writing.

# Writing Goals

(from College Board Course Description)

**W5:** The student produces writing with stylistic maturity, characterized by

- a wide-ranging vocabulary, using words with denotative accuracy and connotative resourcefulness;
- a variety of sentence structures, including appropriate use of subordinate and coordinate constructions.
- logical organization, enhanced by specific techniques of coherence such as repetition, transitions, and emphasis.
- a balance of generalization with specific illustrative detail.
- an effective use of rhetoric, including controlling tone, maintaining a consistent voice, and achieving emphasis through parallelism and antithesis.

# Writing Goals

(from College Board Course Description)

**W6:** The student engages in numerous opportunities to write and rewrite, producing writing that

- is informal and exploratory and that allows students to discover what they think in the process of writing about their reading;
- involves research, perhaps negotiating differing critical perspectives
- entails extended discourse in which students develop an argument or present an analysis at length;
- encourages students to write effectively under the time constraints they encounter on essay exams in college courses in many disciplines.
- **W7:** The student prepares for the essay questions of the AP English Literature exam through exercises analyzing short prose passages and poems and through practicing with “open” analytical questions.



# Listen to the architects from College Board.



## ***Notes from 2009 Student Response Q & A:***

- “The most common error was a tendency toward oversimplification and superficiality. . . . students who earned scores in the middle range did not perceive any complexity in the passage, seeing only one facet.”
- “A common flaw was the failure to connect *what* with *how* and *why*, identifying literary elements but not their contribution to meaning. . . . to move beyond enumeration to analysis.”
- Students “drift into plot summary or description, attempting to move toward the analysis of meaning through the process of re-narrating the events of a novel or play—but never arriving at analysis.”

# Listen to the architects from College Board.



## ***Advice for teachers from 2009 Student Response Q & A:***

- “Teach students to write articulate and persuasive statements on the meaning of texts and passages. The ability to interpret details linked to large themes or ideas will thrive if students have an eye and a vocabulary for meaning.”
- “Teach a wide range of texts, from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as well as from more recent times, and from English, American, and world literature.”
- “Give students ample practice with close reading, both verbally and in writing, so that they can move from summary of a [text] to its broader meaning and the way meaning is revealed by symbols, tone, and figurative language.”

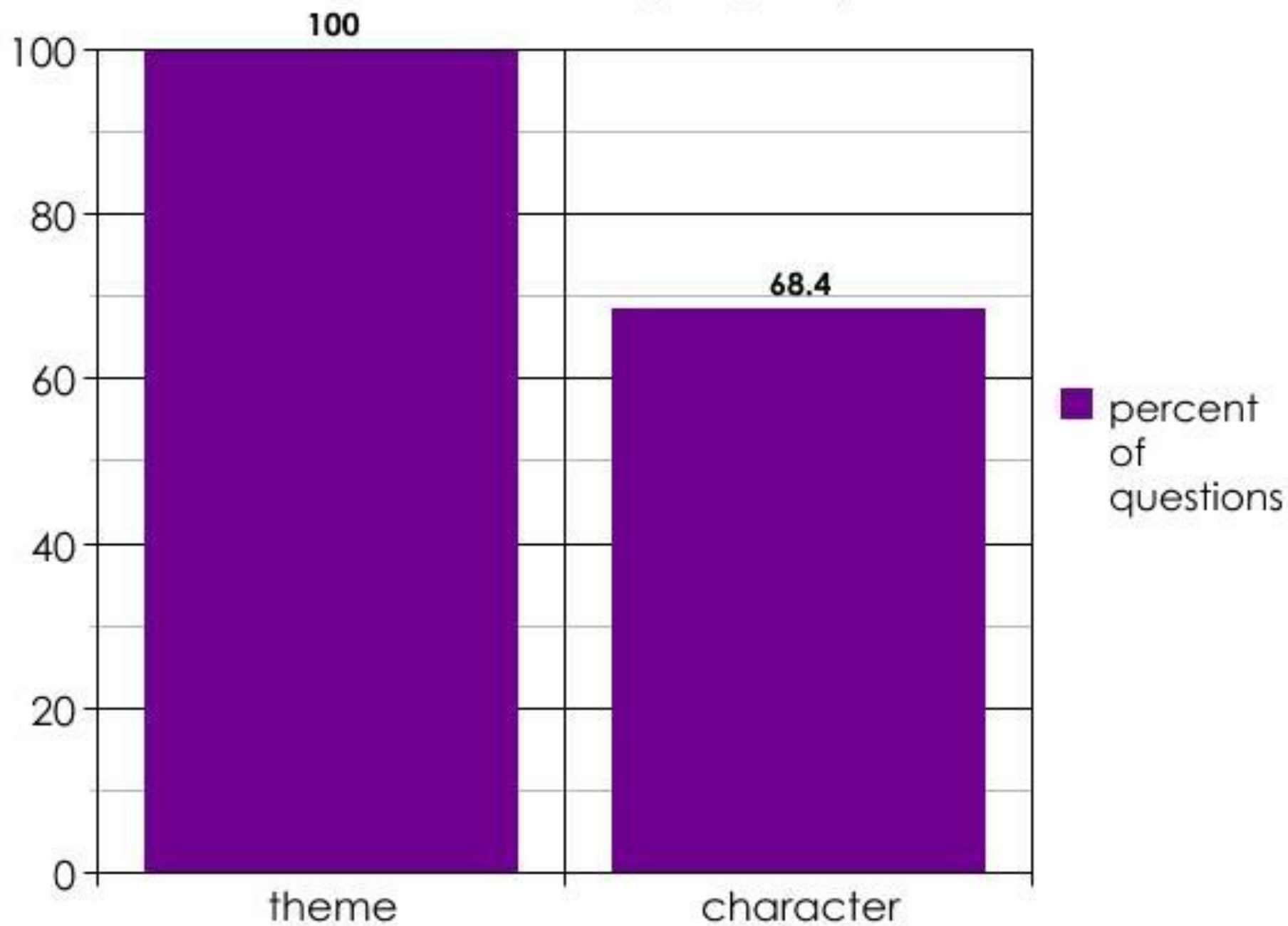
# Listen to the architects from College Board.



## ***Advice for teachers from 2009 Student Response Q & A:***

- “Teach students to write with confidence about literary elements and devices *and also* to write articulate arguments about what these elements contribute to the meaning of the text as a whole.”
- “Encourage research on words in dictionaries (including the OED), reward growing vocabularies, and emphasize the importance of language.”
- “Teach students to think, make notes, and prewrite before they begin to answer the question. . . . Ask them to revise first drafts to expand and deepen their argument about the meaning of a passage.”

AP English Literature open prompts 2001-2010



# Emphasize theme in the class's structure.

- Consider thematic units as your organizing principle.
- Link literary works (novels, plays, poetry) through essential questions that require students to make connections to meaning.
- Create analysis assignments that focus on meaning first, literary elements second.
- Assign a variety of texts that offer students a rich reading experience and provide them resources for the open prompt.



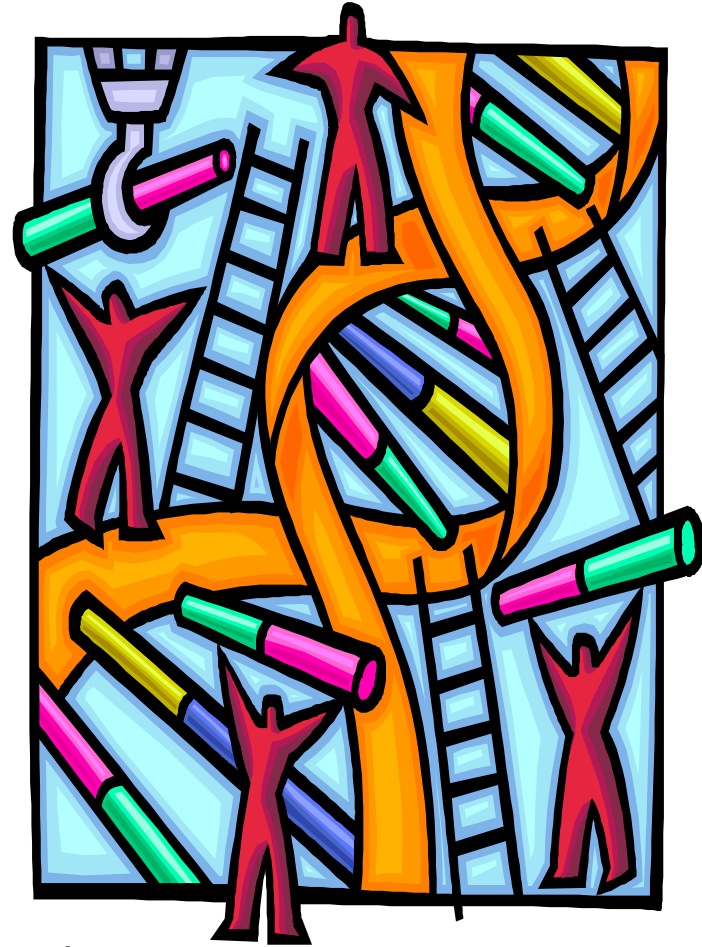
# Construct a syllabus of thematic units.

## Unit Title

*Truth and Lies: the Thin Line Between Civilization, Savagery, and Hypocrisy*

## Literary Texts

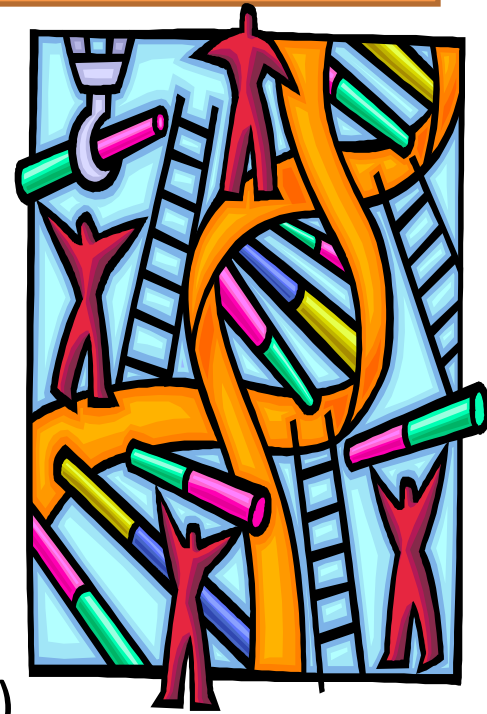
- *Heart of Darkness* (Conrad)
- *The Misanthrope* (Molière)
- “Billiards” (Gibson)
- “Richard Cory” (Robinson)
- “Tell All the Truth” (Dickinson)
- “The Darkling Thrush” (Hardy)
- “How Beastly the Bourgeois Is” (Lawrence)
- “The world is too much with us” (Wordsworth)



# Construct a syllabus of thematic units.

## Essential Questions

- Why is civilization important, and what factors support or destroy its fabric?
- In the face of the savage reality of human behavior, why do people continue to pursue the concept of civilization?
- Who defines civilization and savagery? (And, how do they become hypocrites in the process?)
- Do absolute or universal truths exist? How does perspective shape or alter truth?
- Why are human beings hesitant to face the truth? Is there any hope for humanity?
- How does the individual face the truth of his or her own savagery and hypocrisy?

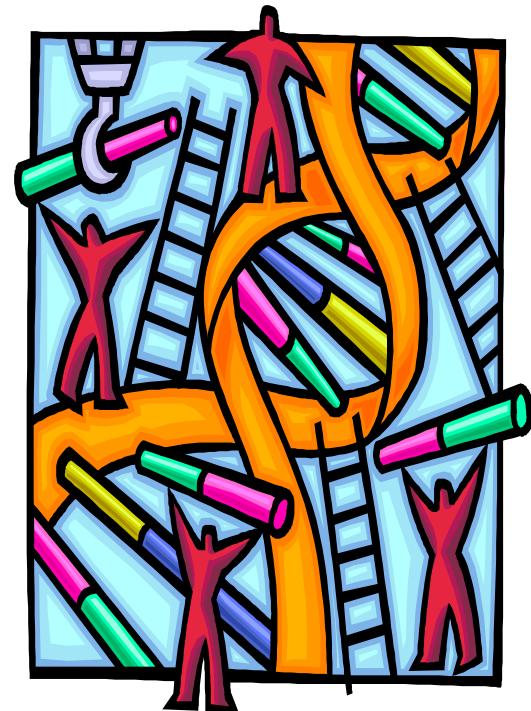




**Constructing a syllabus of thematic units allows students to focus on meaning and complexity across genres and time periods.**

## **Contemplate your own thematic unit.**

- Choose a primary text?
- What text(s) from other genres and time periods convey related ideas?
- What questions about the human condition could guide the unit?
- What creative assessment would link the themes and texts?
- Which AP exam questions fit this theme?





# Assess with AP Exam open prompts.

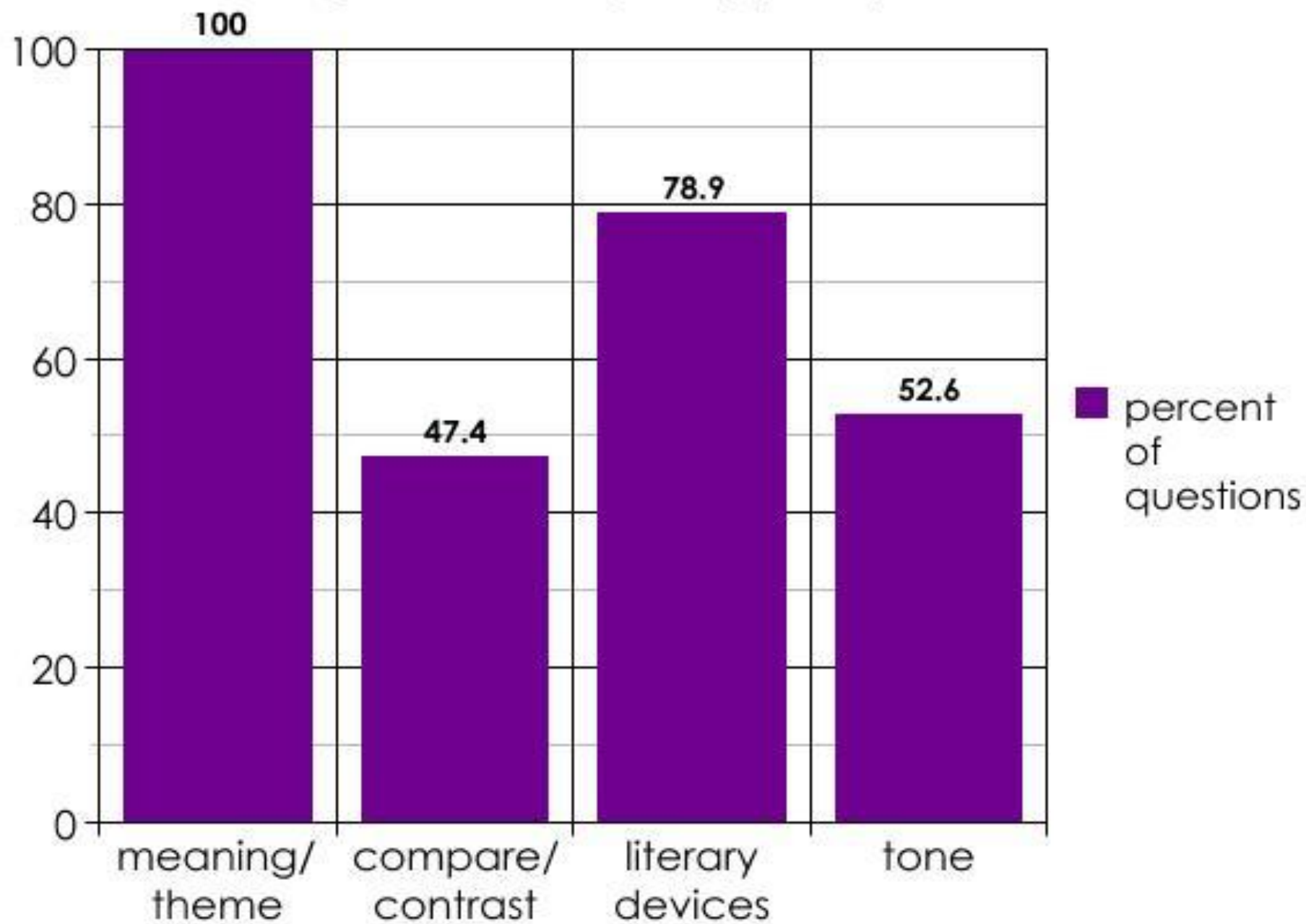
- An effective literary work does not merely stop or cease; it concludes. In the view of some critics, a work that does not provide the pleasure of significant “closure” has terminated with an artistic fault. A satisfactory ending is not, however, always conclusive in every sense; significant closure may require the reader to abide ambiguity and uncertainty. Discuss the ending of *Heart of Darkness* or *The Misanthrope*. Explain precisely how and why the ending appropriately or inappropriately concludes the work. Do not merely summarize the plot; instead discuss the significance of the ending to the theme and meaning of the work.
- Writers often highlight the values of a culture or a society by using characters who are alienated from that culture or society because of gender, race, class, or creed. Discuss how Marlow’s or Alceste’s alienation reveals the surrounding society’s assumptions and moral values.

# Allow students to frame their interpretation with precise vocabulary.

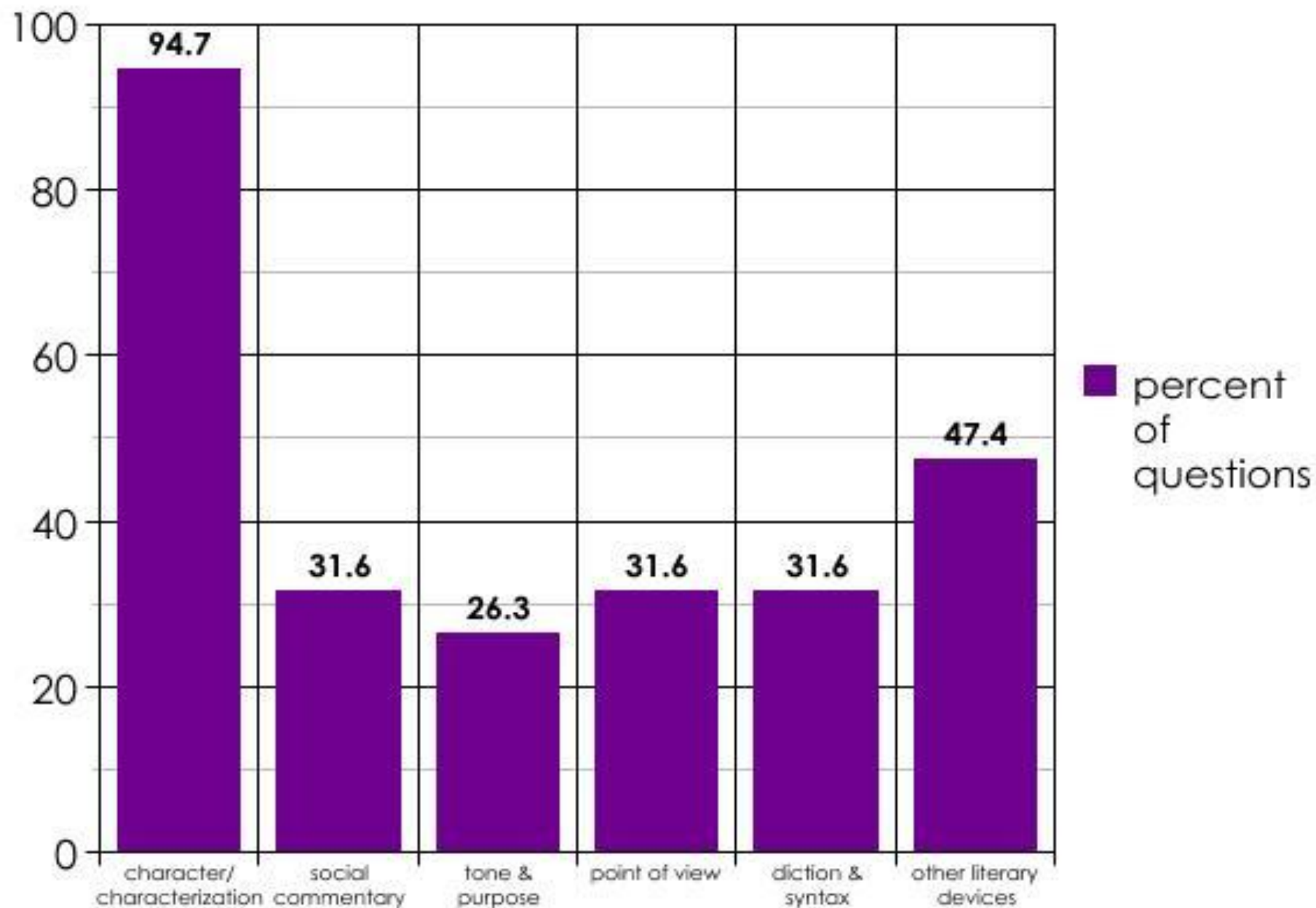
- Include vocabulary instruction throughout the year.
- Teach vocabulary that will enhance students' literary analysis, especially tone.
- Require students to build on their vocabulary—adding a certain number of words each week.
- Write assignments to insure that students use the new vocabulary in analysis.



AP English Literature poetry prompts 2001-2010



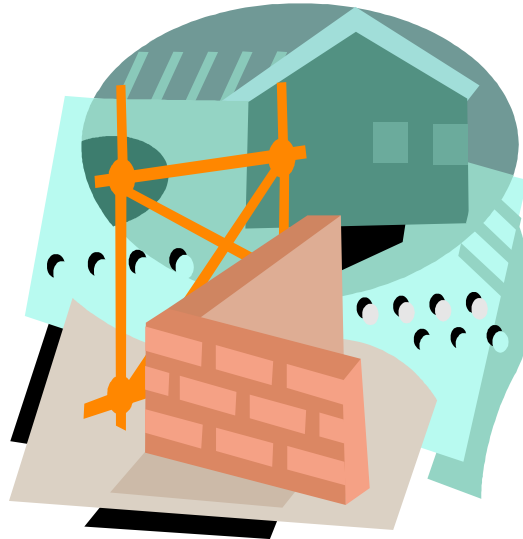
## AP English Literature prose prompts 2001-2010



# Construct a strong foundation of literary concepts for students.

## Prose

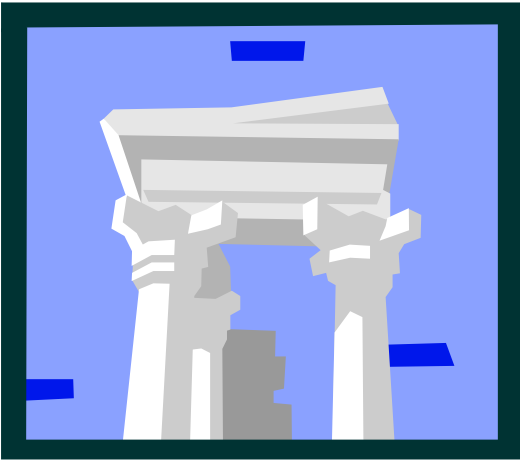
- characterization
- point of view
- social commentary & satire
- tone
- author's purpose
- diction & syntax
- selection of detail
- setting
- figurative language & imagery



## Poetry

- meaning/theme
- tone
- figurative language
- imagery
- structure
- point of view
- speaker
- allusion
- title

# Erect scaffolding for the AP Exam.



- **5 minutes (small group or individual):**  
Use *Mab Lib* structure to create thesis.
- **5 minutes (small group or individual):**  
Compose theme statement and rank two most significant literary devices employed.
- **5 minutes (small group or individual):**  
Write thesis statement that includes theme.
- **10 minutes (small group or individual):**  
Mark prompt, underline evidence, make notes in margin of prose passage or poem, and compose thesis.
- **10 minutes (small group or individual):**  
Write thesis statement and list of four specific supporting details, identifying literary devices.
- **10 minutes (small group or individual):**  
Craft a *MadLib* thesis formula for prompt.

# Building a thesis for an AP Exam open prompt

## 1979 prompt:

Choose a complex and important character in a novel or a play of recognized literary merit who might, on the basis of the character's actions alone, be considered evil or immoral. In a well-organized essay, explain both how and why the full presentation of the character in the work makes us react more sympathetically than we otherwise might. Avoid plot summary.

## Thesis that parrots the prompt:

The Commander is highly immoral in *The Handmaid's Tale*, yet Atwood makes him sympathetic.

# Assemble a strong *Mad Lib* response.

In \_\_\_\_\_'s \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_,  
(author) (genre) (title)

the character \_\_\_\_\_ is \_\_\_\_\_ for his or her  
(name) (synonym of *evil*)

\_\_\_\_\_; however, he or she is developed  
(explain immoral behavior)

more sympathetically through \_\_\_\_\_.  
(describe author's technique)



# Building a thesis for an AP Exam open prompt

## 1982 prompt:

In great literature, no scene of violence exists for its own sake. Choose a work of literary merit that confronts the reader or audience with a scene or scenes of violence. In a well-organized essay, explain how the scene or scenes contribute to the meaning of the complete work. Avoid plot summary.

## Parrot prompt response:

In *Life of Pi*, the reader is confronted with scenes of violence that contribute to the novel's meaning.

# Assemble a strong *Mad Lib* response.

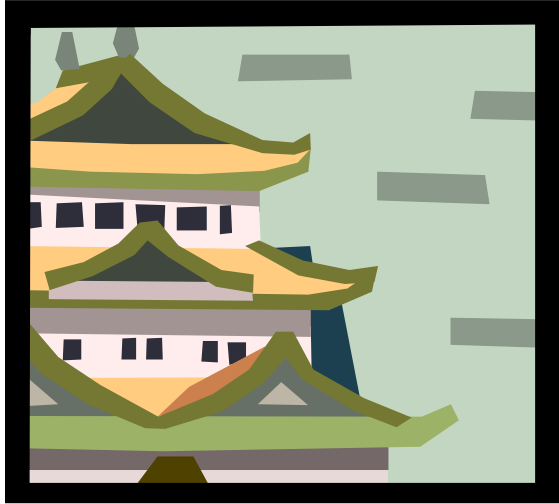
In \_\_\_\_\_'s \_\_\_\_\_, the  
(author) (genre) (title)

\_\_\_\_\_ scene(s) of \_\_\_\_\_  
(synonym for *violent*) (describe event or recurring type)

emphasizes the work's theme of \_\_\_\_\_

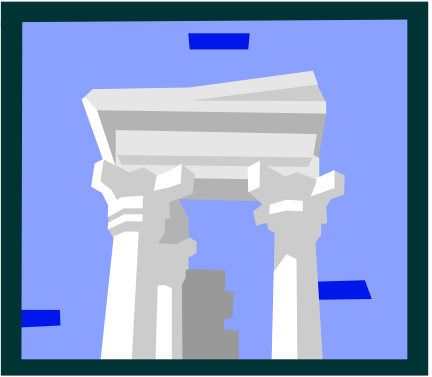
\_\_\_\_\_.  
(statement about humanity or human condition)

# Build in punctual prompt practice.



- **15 minutes (small group or individual):**  
Plan and compose one unified body paragraph with topic sentence connected to thesis.
- **20 minutes (small group or individual):**  
Create thesis statement, two body-paragraph outline including topic sentences and evidence, and concluding thematic statement.
- **20 minutes:**  
Pre-write with essay prompt organizer.
- **25 minutes:**  
Rewrite/revise graded AP prompt essay.
- **40 minutes:**  
Write an entire essay—15 minutes with only prompt, 25 minutes with essay paper.

# Manufacture multiple-choice practice.



- **2 minutes (small group or individual):**  
Read questions and mark one passage.
- **5 minutes (small group or individual):**  
Read and mark passage only.
- **12 minutes (individual):**  
Answer questions for one passage.
- **10 min. (individual) + 10 min. (small group):**  
Answer questions for one passage. Then, come to consensus as to best answer.
- **20 minutes (small group or individual):**  
Reexamine questions. Find evidence in passage to prove that correct answer is best.
- **20 minutes (small group):**  
Choose a passage from current text and write twelve AP questions, including tone and literary devices.



# Construct a bridge to the AP Exam.

- Expose students to AP prompts (poetry, prose, and open) on a bi-weekly basis all year through various tasks.
- Increase frequency and independence-level of tasks as year progresses.
- Consider offering Saturday practice exams during spring semester to build students' confidence in test-taking.

