

AP Language and Composition Free Response Essay

(Suggested time—40 minutes. This question counts for one-third of the total essay section score.)

The passage below is from Barack Obama’s keynote address at the 2004 Democratic Convention. Barack Obama is writing about the American Dream. Read the passage carefully then, drawing on your own reading and experiences, write an essay in which you evaluate the veracity of the American Dream.

“Tonight is a particular honor for me because, let’s face it, my presence on this stage is pretty unlikely. My father was a foreign student, born and raised in a small village in Kenya. He grew up herding goats, went to school in a tin-roof shack. His father -- my grandfather -- was a cook, a domestic servant to the British.

But my grandfather had larger dreams for his son. Through hard work and perseverance my father got a scholarship to study in a magical place, America, that shone as a beacon of freedom and opportunity to so many who had come before.

While studying here, my father met my mother. She was born in a town on the other side of the world, in Kansas. Her father worked on oil rigs and farms through most of the Depression. The day after Pearl Harbor my grandfather signed up for duty; joined Patton’s army, marched across Europe. Back home, my grandmother raised a baby and went to work on a bomber assembly line.

After the war, they studied on the G.I. Bill, bought a house through F.H.A., and later moved west all the way to Hawaii in search of opportunity.

And they, too, had big dreams for their daughter. A common dream, born of two continents.

My parents shared not only an improbable love, they shared an abiding faith in the possibilities of this nation. They would give me an African name, Barack, or “blessed,” believing that in a tolerant America your name is no barrier to success. They imagined -- They imagined me going to the best schools in the land, even though they weren’t rich, because in a generous America you don’t have to be rich to achieve your potential.

They’re both passed away now. And yet, I know that on this night they look down on me with great pride.

They stand here -- And I stand here today, grateful for the diversity of my heritage, aware that my parents’ dreams live on in my two precious daughters. I stand here knowing that my story is part of the larger American story, that I owe a debt to all of those who came before me, and that, in no other country on earth, is my story even possible.”

Question 3 Scoring Guide

9 Essays earning a score of 9 meet the criteria for a score of 8 and, in addition, are especially sophisticated in their argument, thorough in their development, or particularly impressive in their control of language.

8 Effective

Essays earning a score of 8 effectively evaluate the veracity of the American Dream. The evidence and explanations used are appropriate and convincing. The prose demonstrates a consistent ability to control a wide range of the elements of effective writing but is not necessarily flawless.

7 Essays earning a score of 7 meet the criteria for a score of 6 but provide a more complete explanation, more thorough development, or a more mature prose style.

6 Adequate

Essays earning a score of 6 adequately evaluate the veracity of the American Dream. The evidence and explanations used are appropriate and sufficient. The writing may contain lapses in diction or syntax, but generally the prose is clear.

5 Essays earning a score of 5 evaluate the veracity of the American Dream. The evidence or explanations used may be uneven, inconsistent, or limited. The writing may contain lapses in diction or syntax, but it usually conveys the student's ideas.

4 Inadequate

Essays earning a score of 4 inadequately evaluate the veracity of the American Dream. The evidence or explanations used may be inappropriate, insufficient, or less convincing. The prose generally conveys the student's ideas but may be less consistent in controlling the elements of effective writing.

3 Essays earning a score of 3 meet the criteria for a score of 4 but demonstrate less success in evaluating the veracity of the American Dream. The essays may show less maturity in control of writing.

2 Little Success

Essays earning a score of 2 demonstrate little success in evaluating the veracity of the American Dream. These essays may misunderstand the prompt or substitute a simpler task by responding to the prompt tangentially with unrelated, inaccurate, or inappropriate explanation. The prose often demonstrates consistent weaknesses in writing, such as grammatical problems, a lack of development or organization, or a lack of control.

1 Essays earning a score of 1 meet the criteria for a score of 2 but are undeveloped, especially simplistic in their explanation and argument, or weak in their control of language.