

COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION SAMPLE QUESTIONS

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

1. Compare and contrast the Present Day English inflectional system to that of Old English. Make sure your discussion covers the lexical categories of nouns, verbs, and adjectives. How did Present Day English end up having only eight inflectional morphemes?
2. Describe and discuss the similarities and differences of the following language

2. People often think that theory and practice have nothing to do with each other, especially when they think of studying writing in professional or nonacademic settings. Defend or criticize the claim that theory and practice are totally separate by explaining the relationship between the two and offering examples taken from research, theory, and/or experience to support your argument.

RENAISSANCE AND 17TH-CENTURY BRITISH LITERATURE

1. Make an argument about how the writers of Renaissance and 17th century Britain inherited, borrowed from, adapted, and/or manipulated materials (plots, characters, mythology, and imagery, for example) from the classical past for their own thematic and formal purposes for their own audiences. In your response, discuss at least three works from at least two genres.
2. Discuss characteristics of Renaissance tragedy by examining a play by Christopher Marlowe, a play by William Shakespeare, and a play by a late Renaissance playwright such as Webster. How does each writer implicitly or explicitly define tragedy as a genre? How does each writer handle features like plot and characterization? Discuss not only differences between the tragic writers but also significant common values and techniques.

RESTORATION AND 18TH-CENTURY BRITISH LITERATURE

1. In the long 18th century, the lyric poem, celebrated by Renaissance writers and then rehabilitated by the Romantics, tended to recede into the background as poets used it for rhetorical purposes. Treating in detail at least three representative poems from the age, discuss the use of poetry as rhetoric: How do the poets use their verse for political, social, satirical, and/or philosophical purposes? What cultural values or pressures inform this conception and use of verse? What particular challenges face the poets who use their verse for rhetorical purposes, and how do they negotiate these challenges? Finally, how effectively do they use their poetry as a rhetorical vehicle (try to make an argument here rather than merely speculate)?
2. Consider how literature of the 18th century responds to, reflects, or defines an emerging middle-class ethos. In your discussion, cite at least three works from at least two different genres.

AMERICAN LITERATURE BEFORE 1800

1. Drawing upon the work of at least three early American writers, discuss the influence of European ideas, habits of thought, and, as applicable, literary genres in American literature before 1800. At what point, if one can be located, does a distinctly American literature emerge that reflects a distinctly American identity?
2. Considering at least three early American authors and drawing upon at least two genres of literature, test the following claim made by historian Christopher Hill: Puritanism provoked many radical social and political changes; however, a revolution in gender relations was not one of them. Rather, despite the fact that Puritanism pushed for the individual to have the liberty to worship God as he saw fit, Puritans were still so patriarchal that they could not even imagine a world in which women would enjoy greater access to this or any of the other new rights engendered by Puritan thought.

spiritual, and psychological pressures/changes. Use at least three works from at least two different genres to support your argument.

2. Beginning with a brief description of Modernist poetry in Britain, give a broad overview of 20th century. Your overview should comprise concise chronological discussions, which should be given texture and support through references to specific poets and poems.

20TH-/21ST-CENTURY AMERICAN LITERATURE

developed essay, show how modern and contemporary American fiction exposes the hypocrisy of the American dream. Use at least three representative works of 20th and/or 21st-century fiction.

2. Test the thesis that reading a piece of short fiction by a writer can help us better read a novel by the same author: Select a short story and a novel by a 20th/21st-century American writer on your reading list who works in both genres and explain how the story can serve as a guide for reading the novel in terms of such things as (though not limited to or necessarily including all of) theme, style, and literary techniques. If time permits, close with a discussion of which genre the short story or the novel better serves to present what you see as the essence of the author.

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