

1996 AP English Language and Composition

Free Response Essay Questions

Question 1

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

In the following, passage from a letter to her daughter, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689-1762) discusses the education of her granddaughter. Read the passage carefully. Then write an essay in which you analyze how Lady Mary uses rhetorical strategies and stylistic devices to convey her views about the role knowledge played in the lives of women of her time.

5 True knowledge consists in knowing things, not words. I would wish her no further a linguist
than to enable her to read books in their originals, that are often corrupted, and always injured, by
translations. Two hours' application every morning will bring this about much sooner than you
can imagine, and she will have leisure enough besides to run over the English poetry, which is a
10 more important part of a woman's education than it is generally supposed. Many a young damsel
has been ruined by a fine copy of verses, which she would have laughed at if she had known it
had been stolen from Mr. Waller. I remember, when I was a girl, I saved one of my companions
from destruction, who communicated to me an epistle she was quite charmed with. As she had a
natural good taste, she observed the lines were not so smooth as Prior's or Pope's, but had more
15 thought and spirit than any of theirs. She was wonderfully delighted with such a demonstration of
her lover's sense and passion, and not a little pleased with her own charms, that had force enough
to inspire such elegancies, in the midst of this triumph I showed her that they were taken from
Randolph's poems, and the unfortunate transcriber was dismissed with the scorn he deserved. To
say truth, the poor plagiarist was very unlucky to fall into my hands; that author being no longer in
20 fashion, would have escaped any one of less universal reading than myself. You should
encourage your daughter to talk over with you what she reads; and, as you are very capable of
distinguishing, take care she does not mistake pert folly for wit and humour, or rhyme for poetry,
which are the common errors of young people, and have a train of ill consequences. The second
caution to be given her (and which is most absolutely necessary) is to conceal whatever learning
25 she attains with solicitude ...; the parade of it can only serve to draw on her the envy, and
consequently the most inveterate hatred, of all he and she fools, which will certainly be at least
three parts in four of all her acquaintance. The use of knowledge in our sex, besides the
amusement of solitude, is to moderate the passions, and learn to be contented with a small
expense, which are the certain effects of a studious life; and it may be preferable even to that
fame which men have engrossed to themselves, and will not suffer us to share.