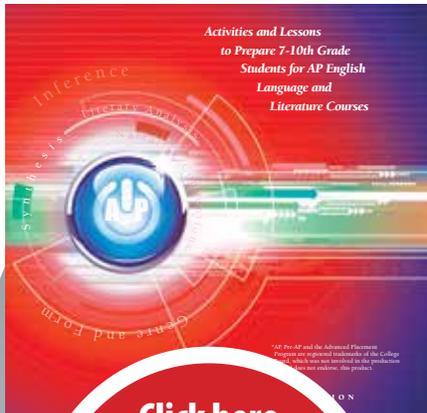




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BY DOUGLAS GRUDZINA



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Prestwick House Pre-AP* Readings and Exercises



BY DOUGLAS GRUDZINA



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Prestwick House Pre-AP: Readings and Exercises



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Prestwick House Pre-AP: Readings and Exercises



Introduction: What is Pre-AP?

AP (ADVANCED PLACEMENT) IS A PROGRAM of the College Board, the group that brings you the SAT, PSAT, and a number of other infamous exams. While the College Board does not offer an Advanced Placement *course* or *curriculum*, there are currently no fewer than thirty-four Advanced Placement exams offered to high school students each year. Based on a student's overall score on a particular exam and the college he or she chooses to attend, an AP student may receive college credit in that subject.

(Exam scores are usually reported on a range from 1 to 5 with 1 being low, 5 high, and 3 and 4 being the typical target scores.)

Indeed, that's where the name, *Advanced Placement*, comes from. A student's high school work (and AP exam score) might net him or her advanced placement or standing when he or she arrives in college. Some students manage to take so many AP exams and score high enough on them that they enter college with a full semester's worth of credit or more.

Students typically take their AP English exams in either the eleventh or twelfth grade. The College Board offers *two* AP English exams: *Language and Composition* and *Literature and Composition*. Typically, students take their *Language* and *Composition* exams in the eleventh grade and their *Literature* and *Composition* exams in the twelfth. The courses they take during those school years may actually be designated as Advanced Placement Courses, and preparing to take the exam is a significant component of the course.

Central to the idea of a designated AP course, the material on an AP exam, and the possibility of receiving college credit is the assumption that the AP student has taken a college-level course in high school.

An "AP course," then is more than a challenging or accelerated course; it is intended to be a *college-level course*.

Pre-AP is based on the idea that a student, even a good student, is probably



Prestwick House Pre-AP: Readings and Exercises

Dealing with Meaning (not theme)

CHAPTER 1

IF YOU'RE READING THIS SENTENCE, you're probably planning to take an Advanced Placement English exam (Advanced Placement in English Language and Composition or Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition) in a year or two. Since an Advanced Placement course is, theoretically, a college-level course, preparing for an AP exam requires you to build a pretty extensive body of knowledge and develop some new mental skills, habits, and attitudes.

The first of those mental attitudes is the realization that reading is as much about—probably *more* about—determining what the author intended than it is about expressing what the reader finds. Consider the following sentences, from Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address:

It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this. But in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead who struggled here have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract.

The *this* is the dedication of part of the Gettysburg battlefield as a national cemetery for fallen Civil War soldiers. What Lincoln is saying (using two rhetorical devices, *anaphora* and *climax*) is that (1) it is right for them to dedicate this land as a cemetery, (2) but the persons gathered at this occasion are not really able to make the ground any more holy than (3) the soldiers who fought there already did.

When Lincoln first delivered this speech, it was criticized for being too brief and too "ineloquent." Critics thought its language was too simple. If there were any Southern sympathizers in Lincoln's audience, they would most likely have listened, bitterly recalling the devastating Confederate defeat that occurred at this battlefield. Those who had lost loved ones in the battle might have felt Lincoln's

- *to impute* can mean both “to accuse or blame” and “to give credit for”;
- *parsimony* means “stinginess” (if you guessed, perhaps, poverty, you would actually have been wrong);
- *close* (probably the easy one you thought you didn’t have to look up!) means “reluctant to give up money or possessions” (not “near” or “precise” or anything like that).

So, a quick glance at a dictionary to make sure we know what the words in the story *really mean* tells us that the person in the above quoted “sentence” is embarrassed (her cheeks are burning) because the grocer, butcher, and vegetable man are silently *accusing* her of being *stingy* because she is so obviously *unwilling to part with her money*.

She’s not embarrassed that she’s poor.

If you were writing an essay for an AP exam, that would be an important distinction to be able to make. Let’s look at the entire story and see how an appreciation of a word’s *denotation* is often an essential first step toward really understanding the story.

After the story, you’ll find some sample multiple-choice and free-response questions similar to the ones that could be on an AP exam. Because we’re focusing on word meanings at this point, that will also be the focus of the questions—but, on the actual exam, questions will not be grouped thematically or topically like that.

(Just so you know.)

The Gift of the Magi

O. HENRY (1862 – 1910)

1 ONE DOLLAR AND EIGHTY-SEVEN CENTS. That was all. And sixty cents of it was in pennies. Pennies saved one and two at a time by bulldozing the grocer and the vegetable man and the butcher until one’s cheeks burned with the silent imputation of parsimony that such close dealing implied.¹ Three times Della counted it. One dollar and eighty-seven cents. And the next day would be Christmas.

2 There was clearly nothing to do but flop down on the shabby little couch and howl. So Della did it. Which instigates² the moral reflection³ that life is made up of sobs, sniffles, and smiles, with sniffles predominating.

3 While the mistress of the home is gradually subsiding⁴ from the first stage to the second, take a look at the home. A furnished flat at \$8 per week. It did not exactly

Sample Student Commentary

¹ You already know that Della is embarrassed by her perceived stinginess, not her perceived poverty.

² To instigate is to “goad or urge.” Its negative association, to instigate trouble, is a connotation.

³ Since “instigate” is not denotatively a negative word, it can be used to “goad or urge” something positive like deep, moral consideration.

⁴ Dictionary entries for “subside” include “to settle oneself.” Notice that it is Della who is “subsiding,” not her sorrow.

beggar⁵ description, but it certainly had that word on the lookout for the mendicancy squad.⁶

- 4 In the vestibule⁷ below was a letter-box into which no letter would go, and an electric button from which no mortal finger could coax a ring. Also appertaining⁸ thereunto was a card bearing the name “Mr. James Dillingham Young.”
- 5 The “Dillingham” had been flung to the breeze during a former period of prosperity when its possessor was being paid \$30 per week. Now, when the income was shrunk to \$20, though, they were thinking seriously of contracting to a modest and unassuming D. But whenever Mr. James Dillingham Young came home and reached his flat above he was called “Jim” and greatly hugged by Mrs. James Dillingham Young, already introduced to you as Della. Which is all very good.
- 6 Della finished her cry and attended to her cheeks with the powder rag. She stood by the window and looked out dully at a gray cat walking a gray fence in a gray backyard. Tomorrow would be Christmas Day, and she had only \$1.87 with which to buy Jim a present. She had been saving every penny she could for months, with this result. Twenty dollars a week doesn’t go far. Expenses had been greater than she had calculated. They always are. Only \$1.87 to buy a present for Jim. Her Jim. Many a happy hour she had spent planning for something nice for him. Something fine and rare and sterling⁹—something just a little bit near to being worthy of the honor of being owned by Jim.
- 7 There was a pier-glass¹⁰ between the windows of the room. Perhaps you have seen a pier-glass in an \$8 flat. A very thin and very agile person may, by observing his reflection in a rapid sequence of longitudinal¹¹ strips, obtain a fairly accurate conception of his looks. Della, being slender, had mastered the art.
- 8 Suddenly she whirled from the window and stood before the glass. Her eyes were shining brilliantly, but her face had lost its color within twenty seconds. Rapidly she pulled down her hair and let it fall to its full length.
- 9 Now, there were two possessions of the James Dillingham Youngs in which they both took a mighty pride. One was Jim’s gold watch that had been his father’s and his

Sample Student Commentary

⁵ You may feel you know what a *beggar* (noun) is, but in this sentence, “*beggar*” is used as a verb. As a verb, it can mean “to be beyond one’s ability or capacity.” O. Henry is saying that the apartment is not exactly beyond his ability to describe, but its appearance is *beggarly*. His use of the word here is a sort of pun.

⁶ A mendicant is a beggar; the mendicancy squad would be the authorities charged with arresting unlicensed beggars. So, while O. Henry’s use of the word *beggar* had nothing to do with poverty, he fully establishes his pun by saying the apartment looked like the home of beggars.

⁷ The vestibule is the lobby.

⁸ To belong or be connected to.

⁹ While it is not one of the top entries, one of the definitions of “*sterling*” is “conforming to the highest standard, of the highest quality.” The denotation that best applies to the word’s use in something you are reading will often come late in the definition. Resist the temptation to look at the first or second definition and assume you’ve “got it.”

¹⁰ A tall and thin mirror, usually placed on the wall between two windows.

¹¹ “Placed or running lengthwise.” The word’s association with length (versus width) came long before its association with maps.



On an actual AP exam, you would never write two essays about the same passage, or even the same piece of literature. We offer these two essays for an example only.

Sample free-response item one (text-based):



Carefully read O. Henry's famous short story, "The Gift of the Magi." Then write an essay in which you analyze how O. Henry uses careful and specific word choice to communicate his narrator's attitude toward the characters.



Do not be misled. This prompt is not inviting you to discuss O. Henry's condescension or sense of amusement at Della and Jim's behavior and attitudes. The scorers of this essay will be looking for an essay about how O. Henry uses language. Let's see how a reasonably good student would answer this question. (Remember that the response is supposed to be an essay.)

Sample Student Essay

In addition to its surprise ending, O. Henry's story "The Gift of the Magi" is famous for the warm-hearted and amused tone that he uses to describe his two characters, James (Jim) and Della Dillingham Young. It is clear that the narrator likes this young couple and that he approves of the sacrifices they make for each other (even though he claims not to and calls them "foolish").¹ O. Henry communicates this friendly approval to his reader by the specific words and phrases he uses.² He creates irony by using overly formal words when simpler ones might be expected, and he uses vivid images and precise shades of meaning to specify exactly what he wants his reader to notice and to feel.³ "The Gift of the Magi" is an excellent story to study for the importance of careful and purposeful word choice.

From the first paragraph, O. Henry uses highly formal words and expressions to explain simple ideas.⁴ Della is not thrifty, cheap, or stingy, she is parsimonious. The name card is not simply attached to their mailbox, it is described as "appertaining" to the mailbox.⁵ Such formal words to describe plain, poor, and simple Jim and Della is ironic. This irony is not criticism, however. It is almost humorous. O. Henry is

Scorer Commentary

¹ While the prompt does not invite you to describe or analyze O. Henry's attitude, it would be difficult to analyze how he communicates that attitude without mentioning what that attitude was.

² Here's where the student begins to address the assigned topic.

³ After a general repetition of the topic in the prompt, the student provides a more specific introduction to what he is going to discuss in his essay.

⁴ First sub-point as promised in the introduction.

⁵ Specific, textual evidence. You simply cannot expect a top score on your essay without it.

Sample free-response item two (independent):



You will find that this prompt is not terribly different from Sample one. On the actual exam, you will never be asked to write two essays on such similar topics, nor will there be two Free-Response Questions on the same piece of literature. These are offered simply as examples of the two types of question you will face.

The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and the lightning bug.

In addition to these large rules, there are some little ones. These require that the author shall:

- Say what he is proposing to say, not merely come near it.
- Use the right word, not its second cousin.

—Mark Twain

Consider the above reflections about the writer’s obligation to choose his words carefully. Then select a novel, story, or play in which tone, mood, and meaning are created by the writer’s careful and intentional word choice and write an essay analyzing how the author’s “using the right word [and] not its second cousin” creates the tone and contributes to the piece’s overall meaning.



Again, be careful. If you are tempted to mention O. Henry’s tongue-in-cheek humor or mild mockery, do not devote more than a sentence to tone. The prompt is inviting you to write about word choice—how the author creates tone.

You may choose a work from the list that follows or another novel or play of comparable literary merit.



Most of the independent Free-Response questions will provide a list of “suggestions” on which you might choose to write. You are not obligated to write about any of the “suggestions.” They are merely provided to help you think of an appropriate story to write about. Our model student has chosen to write about “The Gift of the Magi.”

5. Which of the following best accounts for the overall mood of this story?

- A. narrative intrusion
- B. indirect dialogue
- C. first-person narration
- D. limited omniscience
- E. stream-of-consciousness

Free-Response Question One (text-based):

Carefully read Katherine Mansfield's short story "Miss Brill." Then, write an essay in which you analyze the various ways Mansfield uses language to communicate her view of the title character to the reader.

Before you write your essay:

1. **Make sure you understand exactly what you're being asked to write about.** A typical Advanced Placement prompt will contain two or three direct verbs, one of which will almost always be to "read" the selection provided.

In this prompt, you are directed to

- read "Miss Brill,"
- write an essay,
- analyze...uses of language.

Be especially aware of **the verb that describes the essay** you are to write (e.g., *Write an essay in which you analyze...* or *Write an essay that analyzes...*). There is a very important difference between *analyze*, *describe*, *argue*, *evaluate*, and so on. Make certain you do what the prompt tells you to do.

Also be aware of **the direct object of that verb** (e.g., *analyze the author's choice of words*, *evaluate the effectiveness*, *argue whether the character can be considered...*, and so on).

Most of the time, even if your test booklet is collected, it will never be used again, so underline any key words or write any margin notes that will help you understand the topic and what exactly you are asked to do with it.

Exercise Two:



Questions 6–10. Read the following passage and then choose the best answer to the multiple-choice questions that follow.

“A Mad Tea Party” from *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*

LEWIS CARROLL (1834–1898)

THERE WAS A TABLE SET OUT under a tree in front of the house, and the March Hare¹ and the Hatter² were having tea at it: a Dormouse³ was sitting between them, fast asleep, and the other two were using it as a cushion, resting their elbows on it, and talking over its head. “Very uncomfortable for the Dormouse,” thought Alice; “only, as it’s asleep, I suppose it doesn’t mind.”

The table was a large one, but the three were all crowded together at one corner of it: “No room! No room!” they cried out when they saw Alice coming. “There’s *plenty* of room!” said Alice indignantly, and she sat down in a large arm-chair at one end of the table.

“Have some wine,” the March Hare said in an encouraging tone.

Alice looked all round the table, but there was nothing on it but tea. “I don’t see any wine,” she remarked.

“There isn’t any,” said the March Hare.

“Then it wasn’t very civil of you to offer it,” said Alice angrily.

“It wasn’t very civil of you to sit down without being invited,” said the March Hare.

“I didn’t know it was *your* table,” said Alice; “it’s laid for a great many more than three.”

“Your hair wants cutting,” said the Hatter. He had been looking at Alice for some time with great curiosity, and this was his first speech.

“You should learn not to make personal remarks,” Alice said with some severity; “it’s very rude.”

The Hatter opened his eyes very wide on hearing this; but all he *said* was, “Why is a raven like a writing-desk?”

“Come, we shall have some fun now!” thought Alice. “I’m glad they’ve begun asking riddles.—I believe I can guess that,” she added aloud.

“Do you mean that you think you can find out the answer to it?” said the March Hare.

“Exactly so,” said Alice.

¹ A hare is a rabbit-like rodent. To be “mad as a March hare,” was a common English expression presumably derived from the hare’s apparently strange behavior during the March breeding season.

² Notice that Carroll does *not* call this character “the Mad Hatter.” “Mad as a hatter” was another common expression in England. The exact origin of the expression is not known, but two possible explanations are that the mercury often used in making men’s hats occasionally resulted in madness and early death for men who followed the hatter’s trade and that the verb *hatter*, meaning “to harass or to make weary,” may have come to be used as a noun, a process known as “nominalization.” In an earlier chapter, the Cheshire Cat told Alice that the Hatter and the March Hare were both mad.

³ A very small rodent, mostly found in Europe, and known for its long periods of hibernation

Multiple-Choice Questions 6-10:



6. In this passage, the March Hare's and the Hatter's "madness" is primarily the result of a/n

- A. lack of commonly-accepted social manners.
- B. inattention to dialectical differences.
- C. application of cultural stereotypes and archetypes.
- D. strict adherence to literal meanings.
- E. total disregard for denotation and accepted convention.

7. In this passage, Lewis Carroll uses language primarily to

- A. clarify and defend.
- B. instruct and enlighten.
- C. challenge and dispute.
- D. confuse and perplex.
- E. amuse and delight.

8. On a thematic level, this passage most likely illustrates the

- A. basic incivility of people.
- B. insufficiency of language.
- C. willfulness of young girls.
- D. comic possibilities of caricature.
- E. complexities of human emotion.

9. The play on the word *draw* in the Dormouse's story is based on the words' being

- A. homonyms.
- B. homophones.
- C. homographs.
- D. synonyms.
- E. antonyms.

10. All of the following contribute to the comedy of this passage EXCEPT

- A. stereotype.
- B. misperception.
- C. slapstick.
- D. non sequitur.
- E. word play.