

2010 AP[®] ENGLISH LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION
FREE-RESPONSE QUESTIONS (Form B)

Question 2

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

The following passage is taken from the story “Cherry Bomb” by Maxine Clair. Read the passage carefully. Then write an essay in which you analyze how Clair uses literary techniques to characterize the adult narrator’s memories of her fifth-grade summer world.

Line It was two summers before I would put my thin-
penny bus token in the slot and ride the Fifth Street
trolley all the way to the end of the line to junior high.
5 Life was measured in summers then, and the
expression “I am in this world, but not of it” appealed
to me. I wasn’t sure what it meant, but it had just the
right ring for a lofty statement I should adopt. That
10 Midwest summer broke records for straight over-one-
hundred-degree days in July, and Mr. Calhoun still
came around with that-old-thing of an ice truck. Our
mother still bought a help-him-out block of ice to
leave in the backyard for us to lick or sit on. It was
the summer that the Bible’s plague of locusts came.
15 Evening sighed its own relief in a locust hum that
swelled from the cattails next to the cemetery, from
the bridal wreath shrubs and the pickle grass that my
younger cousin, Bea, combed and braided on our side
of the alley.
I kept a cherry bomb and a locked diary in the
20 closet under the back steps where Bea, restrained by
my suggestion that the Hairy Man hid there, wouldn’t
try to find them. It was an established, Daddy-said-so
fact that at night the Hairy Man went anywhere he
wanted to go but in the daytime he stayed inside the
25 yellow house on Sherman Avenue near our school.
During the school year if we were so late that the
patrol boys had gone inside, we would see him in his
fenced-in yard, wooly-headed and bearded, hollering
things we dared not repeat until a nurse kind of
30 woman in a bandanna came out and took him back
inside the house with the windows painted light blue,
which my mother said was a peaceful color for
somebody shell-shocked.

If you parted the heavy coats between the raggedy
35 mouton that once belonged to my father’s mother,
who, my father said, was his Heart when she died, and
the putrid-colored jacket my father wore when he got
shipped out to the dot in the Pacific Ocean where, he
said, the women wore one piece of cloth and looked
40 as fine as wine in the summertime, you would find
yourself right in the middle of our cave-dark closet.
Then, if you closed your eyes, held your hands up
over your head, placed one foot in front of the other,
walked until the tips of your fingers touched the
45 smooth cool of slanted plaster all the way down to
where you had to slue your feet and walk squat-
legged, fell to your knees and felt around on the floor
—then you would hit the strong-smelling cigar box.
My box of private things.
50 From time to time my cousins Bea and Eddy stayed
with us, and on the Fourth of July the year before,
Eddy had lit a cherry bomb in a Libby’s corn can and
tried to lob it over the house into the alley. Before it
reached the top of the porch it went off, and a piece
55 of tin shot God-is-whipping-you straight for Eddy’s
eye. By the time school started that year, Eddy had a
keloid* like a piece of twine down the side of his face
and a black patch he had to wear until he got his glass
eye that stared in a fixed angle at the sky. Nick,
60 Eddy’s friend, began calling Eddy “Black-Eyed Pea.”
After Eddy’s accident, he gave me a cherry bomb.
His last. I kept it in my cigar box as a sort of memento
of good times. Even if I had wanted to explode it, my
mother had threatened to do worse to us if we so
65 much as looked at fireworks again. Except for
Christmas presents, it was the first thing anybody
ever gave me.

* a thick scar