

The Critical Reader

**AP[®] English Literature
and Composition**

Erica L. Meltzer

 THE CRITICAL READER
New York

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ISBN-13: 978-1-7335895-8-1

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A Few Notes About This Book

Before you get started, there are just a few points I'd like to call to your attention.

First, if you have not previously used a Critical Reader guide, then let me begin with word of explanation about the content and structure of this book: It is not designed to encourage you to simply crash through lots of practice material but rather to give you an in-depth understanding of the skills and concepts that the AP® English Literature and Composition Exam tests, and of the particular ways in which those things can be assessed. You will undoubtedly notice that the same passages appear multiple times, in different chapters. This is an intentional strategy, designed to emphasize the various angles from which particular textual features can be approached. Narrative voice, for example, can be tested in terms of point of view, but it can also be asked about in terms of tone or function. And even something as seemingly straightforward as literal comprehension can be asked about in terms of vocabulary, paraphrasing, or inference.

If you do happen to have previous experience with Critical Reader guides, you will probably notice that this book is organized in a very similar way and covers many of the same concepts—albeit with examples very explicitly tailored to the AP Literature Exam. This overlap is deliberate. The two AP English Exams essentially form a “set”: they are written according to a common template and share the same question types. The fact that one focuses on non-fiction and the other on fiction is in many ways incidental. Furthermore, both the AP exams and the SAT are developed and managed by the College Board (even if the former are still written by ETS), so there are predictable parallels between the concepts tested on SAT Reading and the AP English tests.

Unlike many other AP English Literature guides, this one does not feature long lists of advanced rhetorical devices to memorize (although it does contain a few short ones) for the simple reason that such terms are not the focus of the test. Indeed, they have not been the focus for many years, and they have become even less of one—particularly on the multiple-choice reading section—since the exam was updated in 2020. To be sure, some advanced rhetorical terminology may certainly come in handy on the Prose and Poetry Analysis Essays, but as discussed in the essay section of this book, you are under no obligation to include any particular terms, and you can score very well discussing only more common devices. In terms of essay preparation, you should focus on learning how to effectively integrate textual support into your arguments, and how to draw connections between the specific words and phrases you cite and the larger themes of the works you analyze.

Finally, although one of the hallmarks of great literature is of course that it is open to interpretation, it is advisable—particularly while studying for the reading section—to keep in mind that *literal* meaning is generally not. Passages as well as answer choices may include vocabulary that is both challenging and highly abstract, but the correct options are not subjective, and the arguments you make in your essays must be clearly supported by the specific wording of the text. Otherwise, the test would be invalid, and the College Board would not be allowed to administer it!

Unfortunately, there is no real shortcut for understanding the kind of complex language that characterizes many AP English Literature passages, or for learning to write about literature with nuance and precision. That said, the many explanations provided throughout both the Reading and Essay sections of this book are intended to serve as model textual analyses, whose features you may want to try incorporating into your own writing. Beyond that, this guide is intended to offer you a pathway through the test – to show you its internal logic and patterns, and to turn it from something perplexing and overwhelming into something manageable and perhaps even – dare I say it – interesting.

Erica Meltzer
January 2021

Part I: Reading

Chapter One

Introduction to Multiple-Choice Reading

The reading portion of the Advanced Placement® English Literature and Composition Exam is structured as follows:

- 55 questions total: typically 5 passages, each accompanied by 8-13 questions
- 60 minutes
- Prose Fiction & Poetry passages: at least 2 of each
- 45% of the total exam score

One point is earned for each correct answer, and no points for questions that are skipped or answered incorrectly. **There is no added penalty for wrong answers, so you should not leave questions blank.**

Passages are drawn from both classic and contemporary works, with the highest proportion (around 50%) drawn from 20th century works. The remaining texts are divided between pre-20th century texts and contemporary (21st century) texts.

What Does Multiple-Choice Reading Test?

The reading portion of the AP® Literature and Composition Exam asks you to go beyond *what* a text says to *how* and *why* the text says it. To that end, it tests your ability to do the following:

- Understand the significance of diction (word choice), imagery, and symbols, and how they reveal information about plot, setting, and characters.
- Understand the rhetorical role (e.g., supporting, emphasizing, criticizing) that various pieces of information play within a text.
- “Track” key words and images, and understand when a particular element (e.g., idea, character, object) is referred to in different ways.
- Identify major shifts in style and point of view, and understand their relationship to the structure of the text.
- Make reasonable inferences about meanings not explicitly stated in the text.

The essential skill that the exam requires is something called “**rhetorical reading**.” This simply means reading to understand the central idea, relationship, or conflict that a writer is attempting to convey, as well as the rhetorical role, or **function**, that various pieces of information play in conveying that impression to the reader.

You should, however, be aware that while the exam has traditionally tested the identification of advanced rhetorical figures (e.g., synecdoche, onomatopoeia, apostrophe), the focus is now on the identification of more common terms (e.g., abstract language, metaphor) and general purposes (e.g., explaining, criticizing, implying). **If you practice with older exams, keep in mind that the questions do not fully reflect the content of the current test.**

How to Read Passages

As a general rule, you should **read the passage as quickly as you can while still absorbing the content, making sure to focus on the parts you do understand and not wasting time puzzling over confusing details.** The last thing you want to do is get stuck in a loop of reading the same set of lines repeatedly while the clock ticks. (This applies to the poetry and prose essay passages as well.) While you should at least skim through everything upfront, it is usually unnecessary to read every word closely in order to grasp the basics – you can worry about the details as you work through the questions.

Note that effective skimming does not simply involve reading everything quickly, but rather knowing where to move fast and where to slow down. **You should always pay particular attention to the introduction and the conclusion as well as the beginning and end of each stanza or paragraph. These places generally provide the framework for the passage, presenting and commenting on key interactions, attitudes, and events.**

Next, writers are rarely shy about drawing the reader’s attention to key points in the action or description, and you must be able to recognize these places: **transitions such as *however, thus, and indeed*; “unusual” punctuation such as italics (used for emphasis), dashes and colons (used to signal explanations); strong language such as *only, never, and always*; and words such as *important* or any of its synonyms (*key, central, essential*) are all “clues” that tell you to pay attention.** (See the chart on p. 79 for an extensive list.)

If you are able to do so without disrupting your ability to absorb the text, you should **circle these elements as you read**; the information you need to answer many questions will typically be located nearby. That said, if you cannot focus on the meaning of the passage and pay attention to transitions/punctuation simultaneously, then you should not worry about them during your initial read-through. It is far more important that you gain a clear understanding of the text. When you go back to answer the questions, however, you will need to take these textual cues into account.

To be clear, the point is not to just hunt mechanically for transitions and punctuation. You don’t need to circle every last *and* or *but* that appears, nor should you do so. Rather, **the real goal is to read actively** – that is, to help yourself understand and think about what the passage is actually saying, not just go through the motions of looking at it line by line because that’s what you’re supposed to do. Identifying key textual elements can also help you anticipate the questions, and to identify potential answers before you have even finished reading.

Another active-reading strategy is to write 1-2 word paragraph summaries. While writing a summary for every paragraph is probably too time-consuming (unless, of course, there are only a few paragraphs, or the text is very short), you can choose a few key paragraphs and just jot down their topic to remind you of their main focus. This can be particularly useful for keeping the big picture in mind when paragraphs are very long.

Note: If you feel that you can't read the passages upfront without running out of time, you can try reading short bits and answering the questions as you go. You should, however, keep in mind that some answers may appear after the lines referenced, and that you may need to read ahead to find the necessary information.

Finally, if you are a truly exceptional reader, you may be able to start with the questions and read the passage as you answer them. The major drawback to this approach, no matter how strong your comprehension, is that you will need to jump around to different parts of the passage—not necessarily in order—to obtain the necessary context on some questions. If you are able to read in this fragmented fashion and still come away with a coherent understanding of the passage, then this may be a feasible strategy for you; otherwise, it is best avoided.

Passages drawn from fiction or poetry differ from non-fiction passages because they are not based on arguments but instead revolve around characters' emotions, actions, and relationships. They are more abstract and less straightforward—those traits, particularly when combined with complex, old-fashioned language, can make them quite challenging to follow at times. That said, **AP Literature passages generally serve to convey an essential idea, character trait, or relationship that functions as the "main point"; provided that you can identify that central focus, you should be able to answer many of the questions without too much difficulty.** Thus, it is very much in your interest to actively search for this information as you read, and to note it **in writing**. If it appears directly in the passage, you should circle or underline it; otherwise, you should take a couple of seconds and jot it down yourself. We'll look at how to do this in the following chapter.

Of course, fiction and poetry can be structured in unpredictable ways: sometimes, the main idea or central relationship/conflict will—as is common in other types of writing—be introduced towards the end of the introduction and then reiterated at the end of the conclusion. (You should always pay attention to those places just in case). In other instances, the main idea may be located somewhere else entirely or may only be suggested indirectly. That is why you should not generally skip over sections of the passage outright—the potential for missing key information is too great.

Finally, remember that while you will be asked to identify the basic purpose of symbols and other types of imagery, you cannot engage in too much speculation about their larger meaning. A question cannot be included on the exam unless its answer is directly supported by the specific wording of the passage, so what matters most is your ability to understand literal meaning and how the author's choice of words and use of specific rhetorical devices convey their ideas. If you do go looking for some larger symbolism or start to make assumptions not explicitly suggested by the text, you can easily lose sight of the basics. In fact, most students run into trouble not because there's an esoteric interpretation that can only be perceived through some sort of quasi-mystical process, but rather because they aren't being sufficiently *literal*.

How to Work Through Passage-Based Reading Questions

While the exact approach may vary somewhat depending on the particular question, I generally recommend the following strategy:

1) Read the question slowly.

Put your finger or your pencil on each word of the question as you read it. Otherwise, you may overlook key information.

When you're done, take a second or two to make sure you know exactly what it's asking. If the question is phrased in an even slightly complicated manner, rephrase it in a more straightforward way until you're clear on what you're looking for. If necessary, scribble down the rephrased version.

This is not a minor step. If, for example, the question asks you the purpose of a particular sentence, you must be prepared to reread that sentence with the goal of understanding what role it plays within the argument, or what impression the author is trying to convey. If you reread it with a different goal, e.g., understanding what the sentence is literally saying, you can't do any meaningful work toward answering the question that's actually there.

2) Go back to the passage and reread the lines given in the question. If necessary, read from a sentence or two above to a sentence or two below.

There is unfortunately no surefire way to tell from the wording of a question whether the necessary information is included in the line reference. Most of the time it will be there, but sometimes it will appear either before or after. Very occasionally, it will be located in another paragraph entirely.

Purpose (or "function") questions, which make up a large portion of the exam, often require additional context. As a result, you should be prepared to read both before and after the line reference. In contrast, other detail-based question types are more likely to involve only the information in the line reference itself.

If a line reference begins or ends halfway through a sentence, make sure you back up or keep reading so that you cover the entire sentence in which it appears. Otherwise, you may miss key information. And if a line reference begins close to the beginning of a paragraph, you should automatically back up and read from the first sentence of the paragraph because it will almost always give you the main idea.

If you read the lines referenced and have an inordinate amount of difficulty identifying the answer, or you get stuck between two options and cannot decide between them, that's often a sign that the answer is actually located somewhere other than in the line reference. Go back to the passage and make sure you have the full context for the statement in question.

Note that a long line reference is, paradoxically, often a signal that you don't need to read the entire section. The information necessary to answer the question will usually be located in the first couple of sentences, the last couple of sentences, or in a section with key punctuation (e.g., dashes, italics, colon). Start by focusing on those places; they'll almost always give you enough to go on.

3) Come up with your own answer, and write it down.

The goal is not to write a dissertation or come up with the exact answer. You can be very general and should spend no more than a few seconds on this step. A couple of words scribbled in semi-legible handwriting will suffice. The goal is to identify the essential information or idea that the answer must include, keeping in mind that the correct choice may reword that idea in an unexpected way.

It is, however, important that you write something in your own words because doing so serves to focus you. It reminds you what you're looking for and prevents you from getting distracted by plausible-sounding or confusing answer choices.

Again, make sure you're answering the question that's actually being asked, not just summarizing the passage.

You should take **no more than a few seconds** to do this. If you can't come up with anything, skip to step #4.

4) Read the answers carefully, (A)-(E), in order.

If there's an option that contains the same essential idea you put down, choose it because it's almost certainly right. If it makes you feel better, you can read through the rest of the answers just to be sure, but make sure you don't get distracted by options that sound vaguely possible and start second-guessing yourself.

When you cross out an answer, put a line through the entire thing. Do not just cross out the letter. As far as you're concerned, it no longer exists.

If you can't identify the correct answer...

5) Cross out the answers that clearly don't work; leave everything else.

Try not to spend more than a couple of seconds on each answer choice. If an option clearly does not make sense in context of the question or passage, eliminate it.

Leave any answer that could even slightly work, even if you're not quite sure how it relates to the passage or question. **Remember: your understanding of an answer choice has no bearing whatsoever on whether it's right or wrong, so you should never cross out anything simply because you find it confusing.**

When you get down to two or three answers, go back to the passage again and start checking them out. Whatever you do, do not just sit and stare at them. The information you need to answer the question is in the passage, not in your head.

There are several ways to approach the remaining answers:

First, when you go back to the passage, see whether there are any major transitions or strong language you missed the first time around; you may have been focusing on the wrong part of the line reference. If that is the case, the correct answer may become clear once you identify the appropriate section.

Very often, the correct answer will also contain a synonym for a key word in the passage, so if a remaining choice includes this feature, you should pay very close attention to it.

You can also pick one specific word in each answer to check out when you go back to the passage. For example, if the lines in question focus on a description of a natural setting, then an answer choice about a character's interior life is probably inconsistent with that emphasis. Likewise, if an answer focuses on a specific person, thing, or idea not discussed in the relevant section of the passage, there's also a reasonable chance that it's off-topic.

Remember: the more information an answer contains, the greater the chance that some of that information will be wrong. Correct answers are often shorter and more general than incorrect ones; even a few words can make a difference.

Finally, you can reiterate the main idea of the passage or paragraph, and think about which answer is most consistent with it. That answer will most likely be correct.

6) If you're still stuck, see whether there's a choice that looks like a right answer.

If you still can't figure out the answer, you need to switch from reading the passage to "reading" the test. Working this way will allow you to make an educated guess, even if you're not totally sure what's going on. Does one of the answers you're left with use extremely strong or limiting language (*universally, totally incompatible*)? There's a reasonable chance it's wrong. Does one of them use a common word (e.g., *qualify, conviction*) in its second meaning? There's a reasonable chance it's right. Is one answer very long and detailed and the other shorter and more abstract? You might want to pay closer attention to the latter.

In addition, think about whether all the answers you're left with truly make sense. Incorrect choices may sometimes consist of what is essentially sophisticated-sounding gobbledygook (e.g., "laments the dissolution of his former existence") unrelated to the actual scenario at hand. Don't assume that an answer is right just because it sounds high-minded and important.

7) If you're still stuck, skip it.

You can always come back to it later if you have time, and if you're still not sure, you won't lose extra points for guessing incorrectly. Better to focus on questions you can answer easily first.

Understanding and Marking Line References

Although line references are provided for many questions, they are not always as helpful as many test-takers assume. The most important thing to understand is that a line reference simply tells you where in the passage a particular word, phrase, or set of lines appears. It does not necessarily tell you where the answer is located.

Yes, the information you need to answer a question will frequently appear in the line(s) provided, but sometimes it will also appear in a neighboring line, either before or after. Occasionally, it may appear in a different paragraph entirely. Consider, for example, a question that reads, “The use of the dash in line 27 suggests that...” This question is telling you that a dash appears in line 27; the answer *could* be in line 27, but it could also be in line 25 or line 29 or line 33.

In one strategy, the test-taker goes through the questions and marks all the line references in the passage before reading it so that she or he will “know where to focus.” While this can be a very successful strategy for helping people whose minds would otherwise wander – and I would not discourage anyone from using it if they find it helpful – it does have some pitfalls. First, as discussed above, the answer may not actually be located in the lines cited in the question. If it doesn’t occur to you to read elsewhere when you can’t figure out the answer, you’ll often get stuck between two options and have no clear-cut way of figuring out which one is correct. And that’s a shame since often the answer will be fairly straightforward; it will simply be somewhere else.

Second, this strategy can drain significant amounts of time that could be better spent answering questions. If you have difficulty finishing sections on time, you probably shouldn’t be using it. There’s no reason you can’t go back to the passage and bracket off the lines as you come to them.

Third, this strategy is to some extent based on a misunderstanding of how the multiple-choice reading section works: **the most important places in the passage, the ones you need to pay the most attention to, are not necessarily the ones indicated by the questions.** Remember: the details are only important in context of the larger relationships or ideas that the author or poet wants to convey. Focusing excessively on a particular set of lines can therefore cause you to lose sight of the big picture – and often it’s the big picture you actually need to answer the questions. At the other extreme, only a small part of the line reference may sometimes be important. There’s no point in meticulously blocking off eight lines if all you need to focus on is the first sentence or a set of dashes.

Chapter Two

The Big Picture

Although questions asking about passages as a whole typically make up a relatively small portion of the AP Literature exam, the ability to quickly grasp the general scenario in a given passage is absolutely crucial to your success on the multiple-choice portion. Why? Because answers to many questions depend on the larger context of the passage. In fact, if you have a good sense of the passage as a whole, you may even be able to identify answers to some detail-based questions immediately, allowing you to save both time and energy.

What Is the Passage About?

Whenever you read a passage, your first goal is simply to figure out what is literally happening. To establish the essentials, you should consider questions such as the following:

- Who are the characters/narrator?
- What is happening to them, or what topic/situation does the narrator discuss?
- Is the narrator's attitude positive, negative, or neutral? The characters'?
- If there are multiple characters, do they get along, or is there a conflict?
- For poetry: what is the topic, and is there a main theme (e.g., love, longing, envy...)?

Although these are basic questions, the answers will not necessarily be obvious. For that reason, it is important that you know where to look for key information as well as how to identify it.

You must, for example, be able to identify topics of poems because correct answers may state them, either directly or in rephrased form. You also cannot determine whether an answer is off-topic unless you know what the topic is! More seriously, if you misunderstand the basic scenario in a poetry or prose passage, you risk answering multiple questions incorrectly.

You must also try to understand the general **scope** of the passage—that is, how general or specific it is. This is because some incorrect answers may contain statements far broader than what the passage suggests. To avoid this trap, you must know what is and is not discussed.

How to Write a Passage Summary

As mentioned in the previous chapter, although poetry and prose passages are not arguments and do not contain main points per se, **they are generally centered around a central idea, attitude, or relationship that may or may not be directly stated in the text.** In most cases, this information can be condensed into a very short sentence or series of phrases. You should aim to write 5-7 words/symbols at most – the shorter the better. **Note that a summary differs from a topic (e.g., flowers, spring, the sea) or a theme (e.g., love, longing, beauty) in that it expresses a complete thought.**

While this type of hyper-condensed summary can be very challenging to write at first, its usefulness in terms of keeping you focused, and of preventing you from worrying about irrelevant details, cannot be overstated.

As an example, we're going to work with this poem by the nineteenth-century poet John Keats:

To one who has been long in city pent,
'Tis very sweet to look into the fair
And open face of heaven,—to breathe a prayer
Full in the smile of the blue firmament.
Who is more happy, when, with hearts content,
Fatigued he sinks into some pleasant lair
Of wavy grass, and reads a debonair
And gentle tale of love and languishment?
Returning home at evening, with an ear
Catching the notes of Philomel,—an eye
Watching the sailing cloudlet's bright career,
He mourns that day so soon has glided by:
E'en like the passage of an angel's tear
That falls through the clear ether silently.

Although there's a lot of information here, the narrator is nice enough to give us a pretty good idea of what he's talking about, and what he thinks about it, in the first few lines (more about that in the next section). Essentially, he's saying that after being cooped up in the city (*long in city pent*), it's a relief to get away and look into the sky (*the open face of heaven*). He then expands on that idea in the following lines, making clear that he's talking about going into the country, or at least a place with green space (*Fatigued he sinks into some pleasant lair/Of wavy grass*).

What's his attitude? Well, it's extremely positive: words/phrases such as *sweet*, *happy*, *hearts content*, and *pleasant lair* indicate that escaping from an urban environment is a pretty amazing thing. And that's all we need to know to write a summary. Some options include:

- **Getting away from city = great!**
- **Country = great escape**
- **Escape to country = amazing**

Notice that we've eliminated all the details, as well as any hint of flowery language. It's the poet's job to be flowery; it's your job to figure out what they're literally saying.

Next, let's look at a prose passage.

It came like a thunder-clap on us all, that the vessel which contained our fortune had been wrecked, and gone to the bottom with all its stores, together with several of the crew, and the
5 **unfortunate merchant himself. I was grieved for him; I was grieved for the overthrow of all our air-built castles: but, with the elasticity of youth, I soon recovered the shock.**

10 **Though riches had charms, poverty had no terrors for an inexperienced girl like me.** Indeed, to say the truth, there was something exhilarating in the idea of being driven to straits, and thrown upon our own resources. I only wished papa, mamma, and Mary were all of the same mind as myself; and then,
15 instead of lamenting past calamities we might all cheerfully set to work to remedy them; and the greater the difficulties, the harder our present privations, the greater should be our cheerfulness to endure the latter, and our vigour to contend against
20 the former.

Mary did not lament, but she brooded continually over the misfortune, and sank into a state of dejection from which no effort of mine could rouse her. I could not possibly bring her to regard the
25 matter on its bright side as I did: and indeed I was so fearful of being charged with childish frivolity, or stupid insensibility, that I carefully kept most of my bright ideas and cheering notions to myself; well knowing they could not be appreciated.

30 **My mother thought only of consoling my father,** and paying our debts and retrenching our expenditure by every available means; but my father was completely overwhelmed by the calamity: health, strength, and spirits sank beneath the blow,
35 and he never wholly recovered them. In vain my mother strove to cheer him, by appealing to his piety, to his courage, to his affection for herself and us. That very affection was his greatest torment: it was for our sakes he had so ardently longed to
40 increase his fortune—it was our interest that had lent such brightness to his hopes, and that

imparted such bitterness to his present distress. He now tormented himself with remorse at having neglected my mother's advice; which
45 would at least have saved him from the additional burden of debt—he vainly reproached himself for having brought her from the dignity, the ease, the luxury of her former station to toil with him through the cares and toils of poverty.
50 It was gall and wormwood to his soul to see that splendid, highly-accomplished woman, once so courted and admired, transformed into an active managing housewife, with hands and head continually occupied with household labours and
55 household economy. The very willingness with which she performed these duties, the cheerfulness with which she bore her reverses, and the kindness which withheld her from imputing the smallest blame to him, were all
60 perverted by this ingenious self-tormentor into further aggravations of his sufferings. And thus the mind preyed upon the body, and disordered the system of the nerves, and they in turn increased the troubles of the mind, till by action
65 and reaction his health was seriously impaired; **and not one of us could convince him that the aspect of our affairs was not half so gloomy, so utterly hopeless, as his morbid imagination represented it to be.**

Because this passage is so long and contains so many details, it is exactly the type of text that students tend to get lost in. The key to summarizing it, however, is to focus on the introduction and the highlighted topic sentences, which provide the basic framework. The introduction sets up the basic scenario—the narrator's father has lost his fortune—and the various topic sentences outline the different family members' reactions: the narrator is not overly worried; her sister broods; her mother tries to make her father feel better; and her father is deeply depressed. We can take all this information and compress it further into a single statement:

Lose \$\$, narrator ok BUT family worried.

Using the Introduction

As discussed, you should always pay close attention to the beginning and the end of a passage, but you should particularly focus on the beginning during your first read-through. The purpose of an introduction, after all, is to provide the big picture: to orient the reader within a text by presenting the characters, their situations, and their attitudes. In general, you should **read the passage slowly and deliberately until you have a good sense of what it's about**—once you've established the basics, you can move more quickly through the rest of the text.

Let's look at some examples of how initial paragraphs can present key information for making sense out of a text.

Poetry Introduction #1

I acknowledge my status as a stranger:
Inappropriate clothes, odd habits
Out of sync with wasp and wren.

In just three lines, the narrator establishes a clear framework for the poem: it will focus on outsider status, someone who is slightly out of step with the world.

Poetry Introduction #2

The words are what I know,
but they are no comfort.
The comfort is in the music
that says what I cannot know.

Even though we only have four lines here, they provide quite a bit of information. They suggest that the poem focuses on the relationship between words and music, and that music will be praised for its ability to provide comfort in a way that words cannot.

Poetry Introduction #3

April this year, not otherwise
Than April of a year ago,
Is full of whispers, full of sighs,
Of dazzling mud and dingy snow;
5 Hepaticas* that pleased you so
Are here again, and butterflies.

*Flowers that bloom in the spring

In this case, the poem is not actually separated into stanzas, so we're going to work with the first sentence. It's less direct and more suggestive, but we can still get a reasonable idea of the issues at play. Essentially, the narrator is comparing April of the present year to the same month last year; that fact, combined with the direct address to a person (*Hepaticas that pleased YOU so*) and the reference to April being *full of sighs*, suggests that the person is absent and that the narrator misses them very much. The theme might be described as "longing."

Poetry Introduction #4

We **could** deny our winter, refuse to cut
our hands mining the sharp ores of grief.
Whenever the cold comes, we **could** follow

the arrowheads of geese shafting south
5 to an azure place where whales sing offshore
and otters frolic in the wanton surf.

This is a much subtler example than the others; however, if we look at the wording very closely, we can see that it provides a clue about how the poem might be structured. The key word here is *could*: it indicates that the speaker is discussing something that people *might* do to avoid difficulty or pain but will not necessarily do. This word suggests that at some point in the poem, the speaker will shift course and focus on an alternate possibility, or on the result of that decision.

Now let's look at some prose passages.

Prose Introduction #1

As I remember, Giffen's appeared at the beginning
of the twenties, and I am sure I am not alone in
associating its emergence with that change of mood
within our profession—that change which came to
5 push the polishing of silver to the position of central
importance it still by and large maintains today. The
shift was, I believe, like some many other major shifts
around this period, a generational matter; it was during
these years that our generation of butlers 'came of age',
10 and figures like Mr Marshall, in particular, played a
crucial part in making silver-polishing so central.

Although the very beginning of the first sentence provides little helpful information, the information after the dash indicates that silver polishing is of *central importance*, and the reference to *major shifts* and *our generation of butlers* in the following sentence reveals the speaker's profession and implies that the following paragraphs will focus on the impact of silver polish on the narrator's job.

Prose Introduction #2

She was one of those children possessed by a desire to have the world just so. Whereas her big sister's room was a stew of unclosed books, unfolded clothes, unmade bed, unemptied ashtrays, Briony's was
5 a shrine to her controlling demon: the model farm spread across a deep window ledge consisted of the usual animals, but all facing one way—toward their owner—as if about to break into song, and even the farmyard hens were neatly corralled. In fact, Briony's
10 was the only tidy upstairs room in the house. Her straight-backed dolls in their many-roomed mansion appeared to be under strict instructions not to touch the walls; the various thumb-sized figures to be found standing about her dressing table—cowboys,
15 deep-sea divers, humanoid mice—suggested by their even ranks and spacing a citizen's army awaiting orders.

In this paragraph—indeed, in the very first sentence—we essentially have a miniature and highly revealing psychological portrait. We learn that Briony is deeply attached to order and neatness; essentially, she is something of a control freak. We can reasonably assume that the rest of the passage will go into more detail about these qualities, and/or illustrate how they influence her interactions with others.

Prose Introduction #3

In nothing—as the expert on whose advice families moved to new neighborhoods to live there for a generation—was Babbitt more splendidly innocent than in the science of sanitation. He did not
5 know a malaria-bearing mosquito from a bat; he knew nothing about tests of drinking water; and in the matters of plumbing and sewage he was as unlearned as he was voluble. He often referred to the excellence of the bathrooms in the houses he sold. He was fond
10 of explaining why it was that no European ever bathed. Some one had told him, when he was twenty-two, that all cesspools were unhealthy, and he still denounced them. If a client impertinently wanted him to sell a house which had a cesspool, Babbitt always
15 spoke about it—before accepting the house and selling it.

Like the previous example, this paragraph reveals a lot in relatively few lines. We learn that Babbitt knows very little about sanitation but that he nevertheless takes care to present himself as a great expert on the topic. We get the impression of a person whose ignorance is matched only by his confidence, and we can expect that the rest of the passage will illustrate this quality. Let's look at how to work through a couple of big-picture questions.

Big-Picture: Poetry

We could deny our winters, refuse to cut
Our hands mining the sharp ores of grief
Whenever the cold comes, we could follow

5 the arrowheads of geese shafting south
to an azure place where whales sing offshore
and otters frolic in the wanton surf.

We could grow soft as children in the arms
of leisure, but we might never learn in time
how to stoke the cold fire of the will

10 in that winter we cannot refuse, when we must glean
from the icy fields the last scattered grains
we once disdained, with only the luminous pallor

of the moon scarfed in clouds to light our way,
rising above the outstretched arms of the trees
15 in its long slow journey through the night.

1. In the poem, the speaker is most concerned with representing the

- (A) beauty of the natural world
- (B) inability to appreciate the power of nature
- (C) desire to attain a more authentic mode of living
- (D) consequences of a life devoid of genuine challenges
- (E) dire consequences of failing to protect the environment

Explanation: Recall that when we looked at the beginning of this poem, we focused on the word *could* and the possibility that the poem might at some point address the result of *deny(ing) our winters/refus(ing) to cut our hands/mining the sharp ores of grief*—that is, refusing to deal with extreme hardship or grief.

In fact, that is what happens: in line 8, the word *but* signals a change in direction, after which the poem lays out the “consequences” of leading such a life: *we might never learn in time/how to stoke the cold fire of the will/in that winter we cannot refuse...*

Essentially, the speaker is suggesting that people whose lives have been too easy, who have always evaded genuine difficulties (“a life devoid of real challenges”), will be unprepared for serious hardship. That corresponds directly to (D).

Big-Picture: Prose

In nothing—as the expert on whose advice families moved to new neighborhoods to live there for a generation—was Babbitt more splendidly innocent than in the science of sanitation. He did not
5 know a malaria-bearing mosquito from a bat; he knew nothing about tests of drinking water; and in the matters of plumbing and sewage he was as unlearned as he was voluble. He often referred to the excellence of the bathrooms in the houses he sold. He was
10 fond of explaining why it was that no European ever bathed. Some one had told him, when he was twenty-two, that all cesspools were unhealthy, and he still denounced them. If a client impertinently wanted him to sell a house which had a cesspool,
15 Babbitt always spoke about it—before accepting the house and selling it.

When he laid out the Glen Oriole acreage development, when he ironed woodland and dipping meadow into a glenless, orioleless, sunburnt flat
20 prickly with small boards displaying the names of imaginary streets, he righteously put in a complete sewage-system. It made him feel superior; it enabled him to sneer privily at the Martin Lumsen development, Avonlea, which had a cesspool; and it
25 provided a chorus for the full-page advertisements in which he announced the beauty, convenience, cheapness, and supererogatory healthfulness of Glen Oriole. The only flaw was that the Glen Oriole sewers had insufficient outlet, so that waste
30 remained in them, not very agreeably, while the Avonlea cesspool was a Waring septic tank.

The whole of the Glen Oriole project was a suggestion that Babbitt, though he really did hate men recognized as swindlers, was not too
35 unreasonably honest. Operators and buyers prefer that brokers should not be in competition with them as operators and buyers themselves, but attend to their clients' interests only. It was supposed that the

Babbitt-Thompson Company were merely
40 agents for Glen Oriole, serving the real owner, Jake Offutt, but the fact was that Babbitt and Thompson owned sixty-two per cent. of the Glen, the president and purchasing agent of the Zenith Street Traction Company owned twenty-eight per
45 cent., and Jake Offutt (a gang-politician, a small manufacturer, a tobacco-chewing old farceur who enjoyed dirty politics, business diplomacy, and cheating at poker) had only ten per cent., which Babbitt and the Traction officials had
50 given to him for “fixing” health inspectors and fire inspectors and a member of the State Transportation Commission. But Babbitt was virtuous. He advocated, though he did not practise, the prohibition of alcohol; he praised,
55 though he did not obey, the laws against motor-speeding; he paid his debts; he contributed to the church, the Red Cross, and the Y. M. C. A.; he followed the custom of his clan and cheated only as it was sanctified by precedent; and he never
60 descended to trickery.

1. The passage primarily suggests that

- (A) when Babbitt reflects on his professional actions, he often regrets his behavior
- (B) despite his public displays of virtue, Babbitt behaves in an unscrupulous manner
- (C) although Babbitt often misleads his clients, he does so reluctantly
- (D) Babbitt's professional success is attributable to his virtuous behavior
- (E) Babbitt's tendency to distort the truth places him at odds with his colleagues

Explanation: As we saw when we looked at the introduction to this passage, Babbitt is presented as someone who happily and unapologetically presents himself as an expert on topics he knows nothing about, and indeed that characterization is confirmed in the rest of the passage, particularly the conclusion. There the narrator emphasizes the gap between the virtuous way in which Babbitt attempts to present himself (he is in favor of prohibition and against speeding; he donates to charity) and his willingness to behave dishonestly when that behavior is shared by those around him. That corresponds directly to (B); all the other answers are directly contradicted by the description of Babbitt in the passage.