

# 2019 AP<sup>®</sup> ENGLISH LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION FREE-RESPONSE QUESTIONS

## Question 2

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

Carefully read the following excerpt from William Dean Howells' novel *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885). Then, in a well-constructed essay, analyze how the author portrays the complex experience of two sisters, Penelope and Irene, within their family and society. You may wish to consider such literary elements as style, tone, and selection of detail.

Line They were not girls who embroidered or  
abandoned themselves to needle-work. Irene spent her  
abundant leisure in shopping for herself and her  
5 mother, of whom both daughters made a kind of idol,  
buying her caps and laces out of their pin-money,<sup>1</sup>  
and getting her dresses far beyond her capacity to  
wear. Irene dressed herself very stylishly, and spent  
hours on her toilet<sup>2</sup> every day. Her sister had a  
10 simpler taste, and, if she had done altogether as she  
liked, might even have slighted dress. They all three  
took long naps every day, and sat hours together  
minutely discussing what they saw out of the window.  
In her self-guided search for self-improvement, the  
elder sister went to many church lectures on a vast  
15 variety of secular subjects, and usually came home  
with a comic account of them, and that made more  
matter of talk for the whole family. She could make  
fun of nearly everything; Irene complained that she  
scared away the young men whom they got  
20 acquainted with at the dancing-school sociables.  
They were, perhaps, not the wisest young men.

The girls had learned to dance at Papanti's;<sup>3</sup> but  
they had not belonged to the private classes. They did  
not even know of them, and a great gulf divided them  
25 from those who did. Their father did not like  
company, except such as came informally in their  
way; and their mother had remained too rustic to  
know how to attract it in the sophisticated city  
fashion. None of them had grasped the idea of  
30 European travel; but they had gone about to mountain  
and sea-side resorts, the mother and the two girls,  
where they witnessed the spectacle which such resorts  
present throughout New England, of multitudes of  
girls, lovely, accomplished, exquisitely dressed,  
35 humbly glad of the presence of any sort of young  
man; but the Laphams had no skill or courage to make  
themselves noticed, far less courted by the solitary  
invalid, or clergyman, or artist. They lurked helplessly

about in the hotel parlors, looking on and not knowing  
40 how to put themselves forward. Perhaps they did not  
care a great deal to do so. They had not a conceit of  
themselves, but a sort of content in their own ways  
that one may notice in certain families. The very  
strength of their mutual affection was a barrier to  
45 worldly knowledge; they dressed for one another;  
they equipped their house for their own satisfaction;  
they lived richly to themselves, not because they were  
selfish, but because they did not know how to do  
otherwise. The elder daughter did not care for society,  
50 apparently. The younger, who was but three years  
younger, was not yet quite old enough to be ambitious  
of it. With all her wonderful beauty, she had an  
innocence almost vegetable. When her beauty, which  
in its immaturity was crude and harsh, suddenly  
55 ripened, she bloomed and glowed with the  
unconsciousness of a flower; she not merely did  
not feel herself admired, but hardly knew herself  
discovered. If she dressed well, perhaps too well, it  
was because she had the instinct of dress; but till  
60 she met this young man who was so nice to her at  
Baie St. Joan,<sup>4</sup> she had scarcely lived a detached,  
individual life, so wholly had she depended on her  
mother and her sister for her opinions, almost her  
sensations. She took account of everything he did and  
65 said, pondering it, and trying to make out exactly  
what he meant, to the inflection of a syllable, the  
slightest movement or gesture. In this way she began  
for the first time to form ideas which she had not  
derived from her family, and they were none the  
70 less her own because they were often mistaken.

<sup>1</sup> pin-money: money used for small expenses and incidentals

<sup>2</sup> toilet: dressing and grooming

<sup>3</sup> Papanti's: a fashionable social dance school in nineteenth-century Boston

<sup>4</sup> Baie St. Joan: a Canadian resort