

6

The Poetry Passage and Questions

INTRODUCTION

Answering multiple-choice questions on poetry passages involves the very same principles as does answering questions on prose. There are some differences, however.

First, the poetry passages tend to contain a few more questions that rely on knowledge than the prose passages do. You will certainly see a question or two on the literary devices (personification, metaphor, etc.) in the poem. You might see a question about the way a line scans, or what the rhyme scheme is called, but these are nothing to worry about: Recent tests have not included a single question on scansion or the names of classical poetic forms. ETS does, however, like to use poetry for its questions about grammar, because poets use the kind of tangled syntax that makes for challenging grammar questions.

Second, the poetry you'll see on the AP test tends to make for harder reading than the prose passages do. ETS has a style of poetry it likes to select for the AP test. In order to write questions properly ETS is limited in the kind of material it can use. As a result, you won't see poems that stretch language and meaning to its limits or poems that are open to a variety of interpretations. Nor will you see beautiful and elegant but direct and simple poems: ETS wouldn't have anything to write questions about. ETS likes poems of 30 to 70 lines that use difficult language to make a precise point. The poem below and the questions that follow should give you a good idea of what to expect on the test. This is an excellent place to practice what you've learned in previous chapters. Use all the techniques we've taught you:

- Read the poem as prose.
- Focus on the main idea.
- When answering the questions, use POE and Consistency of Answers.
- Be sure to read before and after line references.

SAMPLE POETRY PASSAGE AND QUESTIONS

ANDREW MARVELL'S "ON A DROP OF DEW"

Read the following poem carefully and choose answers to the questions that follow.

See how the orient¹ dew,
Shed from the bosom of the morn
 Into the blowing² roses,
Line Yet careless of its mansion new,
5 For the clear region where 'twas born
 Round in itself incloses:
 And in its little globe's extent,
Frames as it can its native element.
 How it the purple flow'r does slight,
10 Scarce touching where it lies,
 But gazing back upon the skies,
 Shines with a mournful light,
 Like its own tear,
Because so long divided from the sphere.
15 Restless it rolls and unsecure,
 Trembling lest it grow impure,
 Till the warm sun pity its pain,
And to the skies exhale it back again.
 So the soul, that drop, that ray
20 Of the clear fountain of eternal day,
Could it within the human flow'r be seen,
 Remembering still its former height,
 Shuns the sweet leaves and blossoms
green,
25 And recollecting its own light,
Does, in its pure and circling thoughts, express
The greater heaven in an heaven less.

¹ pearly, sparkling

² blooming

30 In how coy³ a figure wound,
 Every way it turns away:
 So the world excluding round,
 yet receiving in the day,
 Dark beneath, but bright above,
 Here disdain, there in love.
 How loose and easy hence to go,
 35 How girt and ready to ascend,
 Moving but on a point below,
 It all about does upwards bend.
 Such did the manna's sacred dew distill,
 White and entire, though congealed and chill,
 40 Congealed on earth: but does, dissolving, run
 Into the glories of th' almighty sun.

³ modest

1. Which one of the following best describes the overall content of the poem?
 - (A) The characteristics of a drop of dew are related to those of the human soul.
 - (B) The life cycle of a drop of dew is contemplated.
 - (C) The human soul is shown to be a drop of dew.
 - (D) The physical characteristics of a drop of dew are analyzed.
 - (E) The poet offers a mystical vision of a drop of dew as a spiritual entity that has all the qualities of the human soul.
2. The poem contains which of the following?
 - I. A biblical allusion
 - II. An extended metaphor
 - III. An evocation of spiritual longing
 - (A) I only
 - (B) II only
 - (C) III only
 - (D) I and II only
 - (E) I, II, and III

3. In context, "careless of its mansion new" (line 4) most nearly means
- (A) the dew drop does not understand the value of its beautiful surroundings
 - (B) the dew drop does not assist the flower in any way
 - (C) the dew drop is unconcerned with its beautiful surroundings
 - (D) the human soul does not value the body
 - (E) the human soul does not take part in the care of the body
4. Which one of the following does the poem use as a metaphor for the human body?
- (A) "the orient dew" (line 1)
 - (B) "the sphere" (line 14)
 - (C) "the clear fountain" (line 20)
 - (D) "the sweet leaves and blossoms green" (lines 23–24)
 - (E) "th' almighty sun" (line 41)
5. Which of the following is the antecedent of "its" in "Does, in its pure and circling thoughts, express" (line 26)?
- (A) "soul" (line 19)
 - (B) "day" (line 20)
 - (C) "flow'r" (line 21)
 - (D) "height" (line 22)
 - (E) "leaves" (line 23)
6. All of the following aspects of the dew drop are emphasized in the poem EXCEPT
- (A) its disregard for the physical world
 - (B) its desire to regain the heavens
 - (C) its purity
 - (D) its will to live
 - (E) its roundness
7. Lines 9–14 suggest the drop of dew is
- (A) frightened of death
 - (B) full of unhappy longing
 - (C) envious of the rose's vitality
 - (D) part of a larger body of water in the sky
 - (E) uncertain of the future
8. Lines 19–27 make explicit
- (A) the analogy between the drop of dew and the soul
 - (B) the actual differences between the drop of dew and the soul
 - (C) the true nature of the drop of dew
 - (D) the soul's need for the body
 - (E) the soul's thoughts

9. Each of the following pairs of phrases refers to the same action, object, or concept EXCEPT
- (A) "mansion new" (line 4)... "purple flow'r" (line 9)
 - (B) "globe's extent" (line 7)... "the sphere" (line 14)
 - (C) "that drop" (line 19)... "that ray" (line 19)
 - (D) "exhale" (line 18)... "dissolving" (line 40)
 - (E) "Every way it turns away" (line 29)... "It all about does upwards bend" (line 37)
10. Which of the following best paraphrases the meaning in context of "So the world excluding round, / yet receiving in the day" (lines 30-31)?
- (A) Although the dew drop evaporates in the sun, it arrives anew each day.
 - (B) The world evaporates the drop of dew when it receives the light of the sun.
 - (C) The dew drop is impervious to everything but time.
 - (D) Although the dew drop and the soul shut out the material world, they let in the light of heaven.
 - (E) The only thing that matters to the dew drop is light.
11. In line 41 the sun is symbolic of
- (A) fire
 - (B) rebirth
 - (C) the soul
 - (D) God
 - (E) time
12. Which of the following sets of adjectives is best suited to describing the poem's tone and use of symbolism?
- (A) mysterious, moody, and spiritual
 - (B) pious, proper, and academic
 - (C) intricate, delicate, and worshipful
 - (D) witty, clever, and ironic
 - (E) straightforward, impassioned, and sincere
13. In the final four lines of the poem the poet suggest that
- (A) the dew drop will ultimately be destroyed by the sun
 - (B) the cycle of life and death is continual
 - (C) the dew drop will return to earth in the form of "manna"
 - (D) souls as pure as a drop of dew will ascend to heaven
 - (E) death brings spiritual unity with God

14. Which of the following adjectives is least important to the poem's theme?

- (A) "blowing" (line 3)
- (B) "clear" (line 20)
- (C) "pure" (line 26)
- (D) "bright" (line 32)
- (E) "loose" (line 34)

ABOUT ANDREW MARVELL'S "ON A DROP OF DEW"

This poem is a challenging one, but absolutely typical of what you will find on the AP test. Marvell (1621–1678) was one of the metaphysical poets, and the previous poem an excellent example of this school of poetry's verse. The metaphysical poets were a loosely connected group of seventeenth-century poets who fashioned a type of elaborately clever, often witty verse that has a decidedly intellectual twist to it. The metaphysical poets are noted for taking a comparison—for example, "a drop of dew is like the soul"—and developing it over dozens of lines. Lots of metaphysical poetry appears on the Multiple-Choice section; this is not because metaphysical poetry is necessarily great, but because unlike most poetry, it lends itself well to multiple-choice questions. So, reading any of the metaphysicals' poetry is great practice for the AP test. Others of the metaphysical school include John Donne, George Herbert, Thomas Carew, Abraham Cowley, and Richard Crashaw.

ANSWERS AND EXPLANATIONS TO THE QUESTIONS

1. Which one of the following best describes the overall content of the poem?
- (A) The characteristics of a drop of dew are related to those of the human soul.
 - (B) The life cycle of a drop of dew is contemplated.
 - (C) The human soul is shown to be a drop of dew.
 - (D) The physical characteristics of a drop of dew are analyzed.
 - (E) The poet offers a mystical vision of a drop of dew as a spiritual entity that has all the qualities of the human soul.

Here's How to Crack It

The correct answer is (A). This is a main-idea question. Remember, you could have left it alone and come back to it if you hadn't found the main idea yet. Chances are you didn't have too much trouble. If you had any trouble eliminating choices, it was probably with choice (C). Does the poet really show that the human soul is a drop of dew? No. Marvell uses a drop of dew to speak about the human soul, but he isn't suggesting that a person's inner spirit is actually composed of condensed water. In fact, in the poem the drop of dew isn't so much a water droplet as it is a receptacle for light. This point becomes important in later questions. If choice (D) threw you, then you weren't paying attention to the word *physical*. You should have asked yourself, "Wait a minute, this dew drop trembles with fear at the thought of becoming impure: can I call that a physical analysis?" Marvell's drop of dew is a being with a personality and desires; all of these things are studied, not just its physical characteristics.

2. The poem contains which of the following?

- I. A biblical allusion
 - II. An extended metaphor
 - III. An evocation of spiritual longing
- (A) I only
(B) II only
(C) III only
(D) I and II only
(E) I, II, and III

Here's How to Crack It

The correct answer is (E). Question 2 is one of the notorious I, II, III questions. Remember to use POE and work from the easiest point to the hardest. You should see that item II is found in the passage: The dew drop is an extended metaphor for the human soul. This is also known as *conceit*. You can eliminate choices (A) and (C); they don't include item II.

Item III might send you back to the poem, where lines 11–13 ("But gazing back upon the skies,/ Shines with a mournful light,/ Like its own tear") should convince you that item III is a keeper. Eliminate choices (B) and (D). You're finished.

Only (E) is left. If you're curious about item I, the biblical allusion is the word *manna*, which refers to a kind of bread that came to the starving Israelites from out of heaven. If you had any doubts about item I (or item III) you might have reasoned that both points are consistent with the main idea and should be kept.

3. In context, "careless of its mansion new" (line 4) most nearly means

- (A) the dew drop does not understand the value of its beautiful surroundings
(B) the dew drop does not assist the flower in any way
(C) the dew drop is unconcerned with its beautiful surroundings
(D) the human soul does not value the body
(E) the human soul does not take part in the care of the body

Here's How to Crack It

The correct answer is (C). Question 3 is a straightforward line-reference question. After reading around the line reference, you can easily eliminate choices (D) and (E). The line in question discusses only the dew drop upon a rose petal. It does not refer to the human soul. Of the remaining choices, (A) and (B) both imply that in context, "careless" means that the dew drop does not take care of the rose. This is simply a misreading. Chances are you didn't have much trouble on this question.

4. Which one of the following does the poem use as a metaphor for the human body?

- (A) "the orient dew" (line 1)
(B) "the sphere" (line 14)
(C) "the clear fountain" (line 20)
(D) "the sweet leaves and blossoms green" (lines 23–24)
(E) "th' almighty sun" (line 41)

Here's How to Crack It

The correct answer is (D). To answer this question you must either trace Marvell's involved metaphor, noting that in lines 19–21 he describes the soul as being housed within the "human flow'r," or, use POE. All four correct answers refer to either a spiritual entity (the dew) or its source (the sphere, fountain, and sun) and so can be eliminated.

5. Which of the following is the antecedent of "its" in "Does, in its pure and circling thoughts, express" (line 26)?
- (A) "soul" (line 19)
 - (B) "day" (line 20)
 - (C) "flow'r" (line 21)
 - (D) "height" (line 22)
 - (E) "leaves" (line 23)

Here's How to Crack It

The correct answer is (A). Question 5 is a typical grammar question. It hinges on your knowing the term *antecedent*. That term, and other grammatical terms you need for the test, can be found in the glossary. By asking for the antecedent, the question is simply asking what the word *its* stands for in the given phrase. Analyzed grammatically, the only correct usage (and ETS will only ask about correct usage) is the soul. You might also have reasoned, "For which of the choices would it make sense to have 'pure and circling thoughts'?" Again, only choice (A) makes sense.

6. All of the following aspects of the dew drop are emphasized in the poem EXCEPT
- (A) its disregard for the physical world
 - (B) its desire to regain the heavens
 - (C) its purity
 - (D) its will to live
 - (E) its roundness

Here's How to Crack It

The correct answer is (D). Question 6 is an EXCEPT question. An excellent way to proceed is to disregard the EXCEPT; cross EXCEPT out.

Eliminate any choice that fits the remaining question: All of the following aspects of the drop of dew are emphasized in the poem.

To do this you *must* refer back to the passage. Remember: Never work from memory! "Careless of its mansion new" lets you eliminate (A). "Like its own tear/ Because so long divided from the sphere" takes care of (B). "Trembling lest it grows impure" lets you eliminate (C). The dew drop's roundness is emphasized in several places; choice (E) was easy to eliminate. This leaves only choice (D). This works on NOT and LEAST questions as well.

7. Lines 9–14 suggest the drop of dew is
- (A) frightened of death
 - (B) full of unhappy longing
 - (C) envious of the rose's vitality
 - (D) part of a larger body of water in the sky
 - (E) uncertain of the future

Here's How to Crack It

The correct answer is (B). Question 7 is a line-reference question that tests your comprehension of a set of lines. It shouldn't have posed too many difficulties; if you had trouble with this question you should practice on reading poetry for comprehension. You can eliminate choices (C) and (E) easily: They have nothing to do with the poem. The other choices can almost be justified from the poem, but *almost* means *wrong*. Choice (A) could be eliminated because of the word *frightened*. The drop of dew is perhaps frightened of earthly life (remember, it "trembles" at the thought of becoming "impure"); but as a metaphor for the soul, it is not afraid of death. Certainly no such statement can be found in the poem. Choice (D) is incorrect because Marvell treats the dew drop not only as water, but as a container of light and as a metaphor for the soul. For Marvell the drop comes from the sky, not a body of water in the sky.

8. Lines 19–27 make explicit

- (A) the analogy between the drop of dew and the soul
- (B) the actual differences between the drop of dew and the soul
- (C) the true nature of the drop of dew
- (D) the soul's need for the body
- (E) the soul's thoughts

Here's How to Crack It

The correct answer is (A). The key here is to understand the question. When something is made explicit, it is stated or spelled out. *Explicit* is the opposite of *implicit*. Your task is to see what lines 19–27 show clearly. Using POE, you should eliminate choice (C) immediately; it only talks about the drop of dew; the lines in question refer primarily to the human soul. Choice (E) is a trap answer. The lines in question do refer to the soul's thoughts, but they do not spell them out; the thoughts are not made explicit. Choice (D) is similarly wrong: The drop of dew's "true nature" is not the subject of these lines; only the likeness of the drop of dew and the soul. Choice (B) talks about differences between the soul and the drop of dew. This is the exact opposite of the lines' intent. They discuss the similarities of the drop and the soul. In fact, they make the analogy between the drop of dew and the soul explicit—hence (A) is the correct answer.

9. Each of the following pairs of phrases refers to the same action, object, or concept EXCEPT

- (A) "mansion new" (line 4)... "purple flow'r" (line 9)
- (B) "globe's extent" (line 7)... "the sphere" (line 14)
- (C) "that drop" (line 19)... "that ray" (line 19)
- (D) "exhale" (line 18)... "dissolving" (line 40)
- (E) "Every way it turns away" (line 29)... "It all about does upward bend" (line 37)

Here's How to Crack It

The correct answer is (B). This is another EXCEPT question. They're common on the AP English Literature Exam. Cross out EXCEPT and eliminate answers that satisfy the remaining statement: Each of the following pairs of phrases refers to the same action, object, or concept. Use POE. In (A), "mansion new" and "purple flow'r" both refer to the rose the drop of dew perches on. Eliminate it. In (C), "that

drop" and "that ray" seem to refer to different things, but both in fact refer to the soul—so eliminate (C). In (D), "exhale" and "dissolving" both refer to the process by which the drop of dew vanishes (evaporation, if you want to be nonmystical about it). In (B), "globe's extent" and "sphere" seem to both refer to the dew drop, but in fact, the sphere refers to the skies above—the "heavenly sphere." Thus, (B) is the correct answer.

Nit-picking? Maybe, but this question provides an excellent example of the kind of careful reading (and nit-picking) you'll be called upon to do on the actual test.

10. Which of the following best paraphrases the meaning in context of "So the world excluding round,/ yet receiving in the day" (lines 30–31)?
- (A) Although the dew drop evaporates in the sun, it arrives anew each day.
 - (B) The world evaporates the drop of dew when it receives the light of the sun.
 - (C) The dew drop is impervious to everything but time.
 - (D) Although the dew drop and the soul shut out the material world, they let in the light of heaven.
 - (E) The only thing that matters to the dew drop is light.

Here's How to Crack It

The correct answer is (D). This is probably the most common type of question on the AP test. ETS gives you a line and asks, "So, what does it mean?" As always, read around the line and then use POE. Paraphrase "the world excluding round" as "the drop that turns away from the world" and you can eliminate (A), (B), and (E). None of those choices include that idea. Choice (C) mentions that the drop of dew is impervious. That isn't a good paraphrase of "world excluding round," and you can eliminate it with confidence by reasoning that *time* is not mentioned in the lines in question at all. That leaves only the correct answer, (D).

11. In line 42, the sun is symbolic of
- (A) fire
 - (B) rebirth
 - (C) the soul
 - (D) God
 - (E) time

Here's How to Crack It

The correct answer is (D). Get used to the range of difficulty on the AP test. Some of the questions are really quite subtle, and challenge even the most experienced readers, others—like question 11—are a piece of cake. Don't freak and think you must have missed something when a question seems easy: just collect the point. Don't miss the easy questions by overthinking. And don't worry about missing the hardest questions: if those are all you miss, you're on your way to a score of five.

On this question, we hope you saw that the sun symbolized God. The word *almighty* should have been a big clue.

12. Which of the following sets of adjectives is best suited to describe the poem's tone and use of symbolism?
- (A) mysterious, moody, and spiritual
 - (B) pious, proper, and academic
 - (C) intricate, delicate, and worshipful
 - (D) witty, clever, and ironic
 - (E) straightforward, impassioned, and sincere

Here's How to Crack It

The correct answer is (C). This is a tone question. On tone questions, always use POE. On this question, remember half bad equals all bad. Every answer choice has something right in it, but only the correct answer choice has *nothing* wrong in it. In (A), yes, the poem's tone is spiritual, but is it mysterious and moody? Not really. Eliminate it. *Pious, proper, and academic* sound school-marmish, (B). That isn't right. Eliminate it. In (D), well, it's true the poem is witty and clever, but is it ironic? Metaphysical poets typically are ironic—that is, hidden messages and contradictions often lurk below the surface of a metaphysical poem's text, but "On a Drop of Dew" is an exception. Marvell says what he means, cleverly, but not ironically. Choice (E) should just sound wrong. "On a Drop of Dew" is an intensely crafted work, but it is not impassioned nor straightforward. That leaves (C), which sums things up fairly well: intricate, delicate, and worshipful.

13. In the final four lines of the poem, the poet suggests that
- (A) the dew drop will ultimately be destroyed by the sun
 - (B) the cycle of life and death is continual
 - (C) the drop of dew will return to earth in the form of "manna"
 - (D) souls as pure as a drop of dew will ascend to heaven
 - (E) death brings spiritual unity with God

Here's How to Crack It

The correct answer is (E). If you answered question 11 correctly, this one shouldn't be much tougher. If you understand that the sun symbolizes God, then you should also understand that the dew's dissolving into the sun is a metaphor for the soul's ascent to heaven. The incorrect answer choices all add extraneous points or misconstrue the emphasis of this essentially simple idea. Choice (A) suggests that the dew would be destroyed. That misses the point. The dew's evaporation is not a destruction, but a reunion with the divine. Choice (B) is extraneous: The cycle of life is not a thematic point of the poem. Choice (C) tries to trap you by confusing the manna with the dew drop. The poem suggests that the dew drop is like manna in that both are distilled from the spiritual realm. The poem does not suggest that the dew will somehow become manna. Choice (D) should have been easy to eliminate: Nowhere does the poem talk about whether souls are or are not as pure as a drop of dew.

14. Which of the following adjectives is LEAST important to the poem's theme?

(A) "blowing" (line 3)
(B) "clear" (line 20)
(C) "pure" (line 26)
(D) "bright" (line 32)
(E) "loose" (line 34)

Here's How to Crack It

The correct answer is (A). ETS is fond of asking questions about theme, despite the fact that pinning down the theme of many poems is problematic. When ETS asks about the theme, don't try to come up with an exact definition of the theme, just think about the main point, the important stuff. Again, POE is the way to work. Cross out LEAST and work with the remaining question, eliminating choices that are important to the theme. An important aspect of the poem is the metaphor of the dew drop and the soul. A good way to start would be to eliminate those choices which describe any aspect of that relationship. In this way you could eliminate (B), (C), and (D), because all are qualities of the dew drop that relate to qualities of the soul. A moment of study should tell you that (E) is also important. The dew drop is "loose," or ready to ascend; it grips this world only lightly. That is a thematic point. And (A)? Well, *blowing* means blooming. Is it important that the rose is in bloom? Does Marvell return to the fact of the rose being in bloom later in the poem? Does blooming somehow relate to the soul? No. (A) is least thematically important, and thus, (A) is the correct answer.

BONUS GRAMMAR QUESTIONS

Try these for hideous, but excellent, practice. They're harder than real AP questions, but not by much.

Nature's most secret steps
He like her shadow has pursued, wher'er
The red volcano overcanopies
Its fields of snow and pinnacles of ice

Line

5 With burning smoke, or where bitumen lakes
On black bare pointed islets ever beat
With sluggish surge, or where the secret caves
Rugged and dark; winding among the springs

Of fire and poison, inaccessible
10 To avarice or pride, their starry domes
Of diamond and of gold expand above
Numberless and immeasurable halls,

Frequent with crystal column, and clear shrines
Of pearl, and thrones radiant with chrysolite.

1. The word "inaccessible" (line 9) modifies which of the following words?

(A) "lakes" (line 5)
(B) "caves" (line 7)
(C) "springs" (line 8)
(D) "poison" (line 9)
(E) "avarice" (line 10)

The answer is (B). You should recognize that *inaccessible* is an adjective (the ending *-ible* gives it away). That means that you need to decide what noun or pronoun it modifies. Unfortunately, all of the choices are nouns. If you look carefully, you will see that *or* in (line 6) introduces an independent clause. Because of the use of commas, the participial phrase *winding among the springs* modifies *caves*. *Of fire and poison* is a prepositional phrase modifying *springs*. *To avarice or pride* is another prepositional phrase that limits *inaccessible*. The correct answer then is (B), *caves*. Nasty, eh?

Try this one:

There's a certain Slant of light,
Winter Afternoons—
That oppresses, like the Heft
Of Cathedral Tunes—

Line

5 Heavenly Hurt, it gives us—
We can find no scar,
But internal difference,
Where the meanings, are—

None may teach it—Any—
10 'Tis the Seal Despair—
An imperial affliction
Sent us of the Air—

When it comes, the Landscape listens—
Shadows—hold their breath—
15 When it goes, 'tis like the Distance
On the look of Death—

2. In line 5, "it" refers to

(A) "Cathedral Tunes" (line 4)
(B) "heavenly love" (line 5)
(C) "Slant of light" (line 1)
(D) "look of Death" (line 15)
(E) "imperial affliction" (line 11)

The correct answer is (C). Asking what a pronoun refers to is an ETS favorite. The *slant of light* is the antecedent. Do you see that this isn't so much a question of grammatical analysis as it is a comprehension question?

SUMMARY

- Don't worry about scansion (you know: iambic pentameter, dactyls, spondees, etc.). You probably won't see even one question on it.
- Remember
 - Read the poem as prose.
 - Focus on the main idea.
 - When answering the questions, use POE and Consistency of Answers.
 - Be sure to read around line references.
- Metaphysical poetry is excellent practice for the kind of poetry you'll see on the AP test. John Donne, Andrew Marvell, George Herbert, Thomas Carew, Abraham Cowley, and Richard Crashaw are all poets whose work provides excellent AP practice.
- On EXCEPT, NOT, and LEAST questions, cross out the negative word and eliminate any choice that fits the remaining question.
- Remember that grammar questions on the AP Literature exam are usually disguised comprehension questions—that is, the grammar part of the question isn't terribly difficult, but comprehending the sentence well enough to answer the question is.