ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION
SECTION II
Total time—2 hours

Question 1

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

The passage below is an excerpt from Jennifer Price's recent essay "The Plastic Pink Flamingo: A Natural History." The essay examines the popularity of the plastic pink flamingo in the 1950s. Read the passage carefully. Then write an essay in which you analyze how Price crafts the text to reveal her view of United States culture.

When the pink flamingo splashed into the fifties market, it staked two major claims to boldness. First, it was a *flamingo*. Since the 1930s, vacationing Americans had been flocking to Florida and returning home with flamingo souvenirs. In the 1910s and 1920s, Miami Beach's first grand hotel, the Flamingo, had made the bird synonymous with wealth and pizzazz. . . . [Later], developers built hundreds of more modest hotels to cater to an eager middle class served by new train lines—and in South Beach, especially, architects employed the playful Art Deco style, replete with bright pinks and flamingo motifs.

This was a little ironic, since Americans had hunted flamingos to extinction in Florida in the late 1800s, for plumes and meat. But no matter. In the 1950s, the new interstates would draw working-class tourists down, too. Back in New Jersey, the Union Products flamingo inscribed one's lawn emphatically with Florida's cachet of leisure and extravagance. The bird acquired an extra fillip of boldness, too, from the direction of Las Vegas—the flamboyant oasis of instant riches that the gangster Benjamin "Bugsy" Siegel had conjured from the desert in 1946 with his Flamingo Hotel. Anyone who has seen Las Vegas knows that a flamingo stands out in a desert even more strikingly than on a lawn. In the 1950s, namesake Flamingo motels, restaurants, and lounges cropped up across the country like a line of semiotic sprouts.

And the flamingo was *pink*—a second and commensurate claim to boldness. The plastics industries of the fifties favored flashy colors, which Tom Wolfe called "the new electrochemical pastels of the Florida littoral: tangerine, broiling magenta, livid pink, incarnadine, fuchsia demure, Congo ruby, methyl green." The hues were forward-looking rather than old-fashioned, just right for a generation, raised in the Depression, that was ready to celebrate its new affluence. And as Karal Ann Marling has written, the "sassy pinks" were "the hottest color of the decade." Washing machines, cars, and kitchen counters proliferated in passion pink, sunset pink, and Bermuda pink. In 1956, right after he signed his first recording contract, Elvis Presley bought a pink Cadillac.

Why, after all, call the birds "pink flamingos"—as if they could be blue or green? The plastic flamingo is a hotter pink than a real flamingo, and even a real flamingo is brighter than anything else around it. There are five species, all of which feed in flocks on algae and invertebrates in saline and alkaline lakes in mostly warm habitats around the world. The people who have lived near these places have always singled out the flamingo as special. Early Christians associated it with the red phoenix. In ancient Egypt, it symbolized the sun god Ra. In Mexico and the Caribbean, it remains a major motif in art, dance, and literature. No wonder that the subtropical species stood out so loudly when Americans in temperate New England reproduced it, brightened it, and sent it wading across an inland sea of grass.

The American Scholar, Spring 1999

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2006 Jennifer Price

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BEGIN YOUR ANSWER TO QUESTION 1 HERE.

In her 19 essay, "The Plastic Flamingo: A Natural History," Jennifer Price does provide a brief history of the flamingo, both plastic and live. Yet she does more than merely describe a bird. Rather, her word choice, tone, and use of examples create a far more significant insight — analysis of American culture and the American mindset.

The essay begins with a sense of excitement, created by the very active verb "splashed" and an equally striking adjective, "bothers." Indeed, she begins the piece in a bold way. However, her analysis becomes anti-climatic when she states the two major claims. Essentially, at face value, she argues that the pink flamingo was popular because it was a flamingo and because it was pink. This intentional use of the obvious established by the second line, even emphasized with italics, already lays the foundation for her opinions on American culture. The fact that this object became popular for these reasons reveals the ways in which the collective American mind forms its desires.

The remainder of the opening paragraph simply establishes background about the flamingo. After that, though, the author continues to give indications of what she thinks of culture in the United States. Her argument that Americans used flamingos to reveal prosperity (a point that she raises with more very active language — the flamingo "inscribed" the lawns "emphatically"), and especially important notion following the Great Depression, appears to be a valid interpretation. The examples used are important. Price does appeal to authority in some ways by quoting from two well-known authors,

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ADDITIONAL PAGE FOR ANSWERING QUESTION 1

Her other examples are more telling. She cites a gangster, Benjamin Bugsy Siegel, and his hotel, as basis for the striking nature of the flamingo. And when explaining the popularity of pink, she brings up Elvis. Thus, flamingos became popular across the U.S. — or, to use her "cropped up like a line of Semiotic spoors" — because of these sights with which Americans were familiar. While there may be a sound basis for this movement, such as post-Depression affluence, Price goes beyond that. These examples show that American culture is trendy, that American purchasing patterns are based on those of public figures. Even the Ann Marlings quote she chose reflects that Americans bought pink because it was the cool thing to do.

Even more telling that Price's selection of quotes and examples is the tone she uses selectively but effectively. Her sarcasm is quite strong in the stand-alone fragment in line 15, "But no matter." The Americans nearly wiped out this bird, but that was unimportant to them. This surely contrasts with both generic sentiment and especially her scholarly audience. It therefore reflects what she thinks Americans find important. Things that defied conventional wisdom and morality were non-issues. Later in the essay, she asks a rhetorical question (lines 46-47). Besides entertaining the reader, she uses this device to further underscore the importance of the color pink. Price then illustrates the further absurdity of making the plastic bird unnecessarily brighter than the real one. This leads her to the conclusion that it is "no wonder" that the bird stood out in a brighter form outside of its natural environment. Once again she is playing on the obviousness of what she is

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1A
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describing.

Through these various techniques, Price is thus able to comment on both a specific phenomenon and its more general implications. Example, word choice and especially tone help reveal that she finds flaws in the American thought process, ~~especially when~~ This is most true when it comes to the basis for the American trends. She is able to get this message across not specifically through her words, but the implications that occur on a second level.

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AP® ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION
2006 SCORING COMMENTARY

Question 1

Overview

This question called for interpretation and analysis of contemporary prose. Students read an excerpt from "The Plastic Pink Flamingo: A Natural History," an article originally published in the *American Scholar*. In this piece, the author, Jennifer Price, examines the emergence of the plastic pink flamingo as a cultural icon in the United States during the 1950s. Students were asked to analyze how Price crafts the text to reveal her view of United States culture.

Sample: 1A
Score: 1 1 1 T 4 E 3 Score?

Here is an essay that writes itself into meaning. The introductory paragraph identifies three elements of craft but not Price's view about United States culture. As the essay evolves, the student shifts the order in which the three elements are discussed; in analyzing the craft, the student discovers Price's views. Throughout, the student weds craft and cultural perspective and blends explicit and implicit evidence. The student skillfully integrates quotations and paraphrases to show Price's emphasis on Americans' superficiality, desire to show off wealth ("reveal prosperity"), and occasional moral shadiness ("Bugsy" Siegel as cultural icon, too). The essay moves smoothly, with clear transitions and an increasingly refined understanding of tone. Although the conclusion essentially summarizes, and although some missteps in diction and syntax occur, the essay overall is full, gaining momentum as it goes. It earned a score of 8.

Sample: 1B
Score: 6

That this essay begins by stepping back from the passage itself suggests that the student has a perspective on the passage and a plan for the development of the essay. The thesis identifies both Price's strategies—how Price crafts the text—and Price's view of United States culture. The body paragraphs offer implicit evidence of Price's strategies and views, with a good summary sentence at the end of paragraph two and a simple transition into paragraph three. The fourth paragraph highlights the connection between Elvis and the flamingo as cultural icons and mentions a logos appeal. Although perhaps promising more than it delivers, this 6 essay adequately discusses Price's craft and views.

Sample: 1C
Score: 3

This essay attempts, unsuccessfully, to use a formulaic organization built around facts, diction, and syntax. For "facts," the student cites "case study" without apparently understanding the term. In paragraph two, the essay offers a nod to irony, noting the italicized "pink" and "flamingo," but the student decontextualizes these words and then misreads by stating that Price regards United States culture as being ironic. The third paragraph begins with a quotation (no context), then goes on to discuss the propaganda device of "bandwagon" unsuccessfully. The quotation in this paragraph does not support the announced propaganda device. The fourth paragraph, devoted to syntax, offers a misreading in suggesting that the United States's view of the flamingo has influenced the view of other cultures. Although the essay attempts analysis of craft and view, the analysis is not perceptive. The score for this essay is 3.

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