

2014 AP® ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION FREE-RESPONSE QUESTIONS

Question 2

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

In the following letter, Abigail Adams (1744–1818) writes to her son John Quincy Adams, who is traveling abroad with his father, John Adams, a United States diplomat and later the country’s second president. Read the letter carefully. Then, in a well-developed essay, analyze the rhetorical strategies Adams uses to advise her son. Support your analysis with specific references to the text.

12 January, 1780.

MY DEAR SON,

I hope you have had no occasion, either from enemies or the dangers of the sea, to repent your second voyage to France. If I had thought your reluctance arose from proper deliberation, or that you were capable of judging what was most for your own benefit, I should not have urged you to accompany your father and brother when you appeared so averse to the voyage.

You, however, readily submitted to my advice, and, I hope, will never have occasion yourself, nor give me reason, to lament it. Your knowledge of the language must give you greater advantages now than you could possibly have reaped whilst ignorant of it; and as you increase in years, you will find your understanding opening and daily improving.

Some author, that I have met with, compares a judicious traveller to a river, that increases its stream the further it flows from its source; or to certain springs, which, running through rich veins of minerals, improve their qualities as they pass along. It will be expected of you, my son, that, as you are favored with superior advantages under the instructive eye of a tender parent, your improvement should bear some proportion to your advantages. Nothing is wanting with you but attention, diligence, and steady application. Nature has not been deficient.

These are times in which a genius would wish to live. It is not in the still calm of life, or the repose of a pacific station, that great characters are formed. Would Cicero have shone so distinguished an orator if he had not been roused, kindled, and inflamed by the

tyranny of Catiline, Verres, and Mark Anthony? The habits of a vigorous mind are formed in contending with difficulties. All history will convince you of this, and that wisdom and penetration are the fruit of experience, not the lessons of retirement and leisure. Great necessities call out great virtues. When a mind is raised and animated by scenes that engage the heart, then those qualities, which would otherwise lie dormant, wake into life and form the character of the hero and the statesman. War, tyranny, and desolation are the scourges of the Almighty, and ought no doubt to be deprecated. Yet it is your lot, my son, to be an eyewitness of these calamities in your own native land, and, at the same time, to owe your existence among a people who have made a glorious defence of their invaded liberties, and who, aided by a generous and powerful ally, with the blessing of Heaven, will transmit this inheritance to ages yet unborn. Nor ought it to be one of the least of your incitements towards exerting every power and faculty of your mind, that you have a parent who has taken so large and active a share in this contest, and discharged the trust reposed in him with so much satisfaction as to be honored with the important embassy which at present calls him abroad.

The strict and inviolable regard you have ever paid to truth, gives me pleasing hopes that you will not swerve from her dictates, but add justice, fortitude, and every manly virtue which can adorn a good citizen, do honor to your country, and render your parents supremely happy, particularly your ever affectionate mother,

A. A.

2014 Abigail Adams

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Write in the box the number of the question you are answering on this page as it is designated in the exam.

In 1780, eight years before the ratification of the ¹⁷⁸⁷constitution, Abigail Adams wrote to her son, the future president of the United States, while he was travelling overseas with his father who was ~~travelling~~ ^{acting} a US diplomat before he was elected president. Unaware that her son would become president, she writes to convince her son of ~~the~~ travel and of diligence. Adams ~~uses~~ ^{employs} ~~flattery~~ ^{metaphors}, ~~but a tone of~~ ^{is} a concerned, maternal, historical allusions, ~~but~~ ^{and} ~~frank~~ ^{frank} fighting patriotic appeals, and lists to impart the importance of maximizing on natural talent by applying oneself.

Adams encourages her son to be diligent by ~~appealing to his affection~~ ^{appealing to his affection} for her. She ~~opens the letter with~~ ^{opens the letter with} "my dear son" to establish that she does not intend to scold him but to guide him. Her first concern she next establishes that her primary concern is his safety, appealing to his emotions so that he will be receptive to her advice. ~~she ends~~



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complimenting his language skills in hopes that he will continue to improve. Qualifying her compliments with by asserting his need to improve, her reference to a discussion with an author legitimizes her argument as a form of employing the "older and wiser" claim. Her reference to the author's metaphor intends to assure her son of the importance of the trip ~~and~~ ^{on} which she encouraged him to embark. She again flatters him ⁱⁿ by emphasizing his vast natural talent, but again qualifies the assertion by highlighting the necessity of employing his God-given gift ~~and~~ ^{by} showing effort. She instills a sense of guilt in him for not capitalizing on ~~the~~ his blessings in hopes that he will become more diligent and mature.

Adams employs historical allusions and invokes a sense of patriotism in her son in the second half of the essay letter in order to instill in her son a sense of



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responsibility. In line 27, she implies that he is a genius like Cicero, proceeding to allude to his writings about the tyranny of Caligula, Nero, and Marc Anthony. ~~The~~ The compliment flatters while the historical allusion provides examples to legitimize her point that "the habits of a vigorous mind are formed in contending with difficulties" (lines 32-34). The present difficulties to which she refers ~~are~~ involve the American revolution from Great Britain and the birth of a new nation. Adams invokes a sense of patriotism to call her son to action and out of his current lethargic state by listing "war, tyranny, and desolation" (line 41) experienced by the country. She encourages her son to go to conduct his life aiding the country from the aforementioned ills which are the "scourges of the almighty" (line 42). By invoking God's name, she intensifies the need for her son to change himself so that he can change the shape of the future of the nation. Additionally, Adams implies



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that, as his mother, she has invited her life in him, and by ~~dis~~ disregarding her advice, he will prove her life a waste and a failure. She manipulates by evoking guilt once again. She closes the letter with a charge, strong maternal tone that by becoming more diligent, he might, stating her hope that he will become more diligent not only for his country but also for his parents, motivating him through patriotism and maternal love.

The time in which this letter ~~was~~ Abigail Adams wrote this letter in a very uncertain time in American history. ~~She~~ She ~~was~~ was unaware not only that her husband and son would one day become president but also that the office of president would even exist. She wrote to her son in desperate hope that by raising him well, she could ensure a bright future for her beloved homeland.

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7/4/18