2018

AP Seminar

Free-Response Questions

AP SEMINAR

Part A

Suggested time — 30 minutes

Directions: Read the passage below and then respond to the following three questions.

1. Identify the author's argument, main idea, or thesis. (*3 points*)

2. Explain the author's line of reasoning by identifying the claims used to build the argument and the connections between them. (*6 points*)

3. Evaluate the effectiveness of the evidence the author uses to support the claims made in the argument. (*6 points*)

Write your responses to Part A only on the designated pages in the Free Response booklet.

From "The Neuroscience of Your Brain on Fiction"
by Annie Murphy Paul (*The New York Times*, March 18, 2012)

Amid the squawks and pings of our digital devices, the old-fashioned virtues of reading novels can seem faded, even futile. But new support for the value of fiction is arriving from an unexpected quarter: neuroscience.

Brain scans are revealing what happens in our heads when we read a detailed description, an evocative metaphor or an emotional exchange between characters. Stories, this research is showing, stimulate the brain and even change how we act in life.

Researchers have long known that the "classical" language regions, like Broca's area and Wernicke's area, are involved in how the brain interprets written words. What scientists have come to realize in the last few years is that narratives activate many other parts of our brains as well, suggesting why the experience of reading can feel so alive. Words like "lavender," "cinnamon" and "soap," for example, elicit a response not only from the language-processing areas of our brains, but also those devoted to dealing with smells.

In a 2006 study published in the journal *NeuroImage*, researchers in Spain asked participants to read words with strong odor associations, along with neutral words, while their brains were being scanned by a functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) machine. When subjects looked at the Spanish words for "perfume" and "coffee," their primary olfactory cortex lit up; when they saw the words that mean "chair" and "key," this region remained dark. The way the brain handles metaphors has also received extensive study; some scientists have contended that figures of speech like "a rough day" are so familiar that they are treated simply as words and no more. Last month, however, a team of researchers from Emory University reported in *Brain and Language* that when subjects in their laboratory read a metaphor involving texture, the sensory cortex, responsible for perceiving texture through touch, became active. Metaphors like "The singer had a velvet voice" and "He had leathery hands" roused the sensory cortex, while phrases matched for meaning, like "The singer had a pleasing voice" and "He had strong hands," did not. . . .

The brain, it seems, does not make much of a distinction between reading about an experience and encountering it in real life; in each case, the same neurological regions are stimulated. . . . Fiction—with its redolent details, imaginative metaphors and attentive descriptions of people and their actions—offers an especially rich replica. Indeed, in one respect novels go beyond simulating reality to give readers an experience unavailable off the page: the opportunity to enter fully into other people's thoughts and feelings.

The novel, of course, is an unequaled medium for the exploration of human social and emotional life. And there is evidence that just as the brain responds to depictions of smells and textures and movements as if they were the real thing, so it treats the interactions among fictional characters as something like real-life social encounters.

Raymond Mar, a psychologist at York University in Canada, performed an analysis of 86 fMRI studies, published last year in the *Annual Review of Psychology*, and concluded that there was substantial overlap in the brain networks used to understand stories and the networks used to navigate interactions with other individuals—in particular, interactions in which we're trying to figure out the thoughts and feelings of others. Scientists call this capacity of the brain to construct a map of other people's intentions "theory of mind." Narratives offer a unique opportunity to engage this capacity, as we identify with characters' longings and frustrations, guess at their hidden motives and track their encounters with friends and enemies, neighbors and lovers.

It is an exercise that hones our real-life social skills, another body of research suggests. Dr. Oatley [an emeritus professor of cognitive psychology at the University of Toronto] and Dr. Mar, in collaboration with several other scientists, reported in two studies, published in 2006 and 2009, that individuals who frequently read fiction seem to be better able to understand other people, empathize with them and see the world from their perspective. This relationship persisted even after the researchers accounted for the possibility that more empathetic individuals might prefer reading novels. A 2010 study by Dr. Mar found a similar result in preschool-age children: the more stories they had read to them, the keener their theory of mind—an effect that was also produced by watching movies but, curiously, not by watching television. . . .

Fiction, Dr. Oatley notes, "is a particularly useful simulation because negotiating the social world effectively is extremely tricky, requiring us to weigh up myriad interacting instances of cause and effect. Just as computer simulations can help us get to grips with complex problems such as flying a plane or forecasting the weather, so novels, stories and dramas can help us understand the complexities of social life."

These findings will affirm the experience of readers who have felt illuminated and instructed by a novel, who have found themselves comparing a plucky young woman to Elizabeth Bennet or a tiresome pedant to Edward Casaubon. Reading great literature, it has long been averred, enlarges and improves us as human beings. Brain science shows this claim is truer than we imagined.

END OF PART A

GO ON TO PART B.

Part B

Suggested time — 1 hour and 30 minutes

Directions: Read the four sources carefully, focusing on a theme or issue that connects them and the different perspective each represents. Then, write a logically organized, well-reasoned, and well-written argument that presents your own perspective on the theme or issue you identified. You must incorporate at least two of the sources provided and link the claims in your argument to supporting evidence. You may also use the other provided sources or draw upon your own knowledge. In your response, refer to the provided sources as Source A, Source B, Source C, or Source D, or by the author's name.

Write your response to Part B only on the designated pages in the Free Response booklet.

Source A

From "Money, Leisure, Death: What College Students Should Be Learning About"
by Paula Marantz Cohen (*The American Scholar*, October 9, 2012)

Three subjects that are fundamental to leading an examined life go unaddressed in the college curriculum: money, leisure, and death. . . .

Money, you will say, is already taught in college. . . . But I am speaking about money in personal and philosophical ways. . . .

This means thinking about money in a larger context: How important is it to you, and how much of it do you need to lead the life you want? Tolstoy addresses these questions cogently in his short story "How Much Land Does a Man Need?" In it, a peasant farmer is told that he can own as much land as he can encircle in a day. The man sets his sights high, pushing himself to run around a very large space, and when he finishes, drops dead.

The story asks what really has value not just from day to day, but over time. . . .

Leisure connects to money, because how we spend our time depends on how much money we need. Some of my students say that they plan to work very hard at well-paying but unsatisfying jobs for a number of years to earn the money they need to retire early. Others say that they won't mind working long, tedious hours if they get adequate vacation time. . . . These students need to be encouraged to think about the value of an integrated life, to imagine returning from a luxury vacation to a job they hate. Or to have a job that never really allows for time off.

We all know people who, even on vacation, are continually on their smart phones, responding to messages. They have deleted leisure from their experience. . . .

Understanding how certain leisure activities yield more pleasure over time might also be part of the course. . . .

It is possible to *learn* to get pleasure from simpler [things, many of which] can be done alone and pursued into old age. Students should be encouraged to . . . cultivate at least a few of these simple pleasures. . . .

Death supplies the context for thinking deeply about money and leisure. I find it strange . . . to see how many students have never considered the simple fact that they will eventually die. . . . Thinking about mortality is humbling; it opens us more fully to the richness of life when we are aware of how fleeting our time on earth is. The prospect of death can help us to see more clearly how we want to spend our lives.

. . . [C]ollege is meant to be a preparation for life as they will live it, and so these subjects are crucial to a good education.

Source B

From *Adam Bede*
by George Eliot (1859)

Surely all other leisure is hurry compared with a sunny walk through the fields from "afternoon church." . . . Ingenious philosophers tell you, perhaps, that the great work of the steam-engine is to create leisure for mankind. Do not believe them: it only creates a vacuum for eager thought to rush in. Even idleness is eager now—eager for amusement; prone to excursion-trains, art museums, periodical literature, and exciting novels; prone even to scientific theorizing and cursory peeps through microscopes. Old Leisure was quite a different personage. He only read one newspaper, innocent of leaders, and was free from that periodicity of sensations which we call post-time. He was a contemplative, rather stout gentleman, of excellent digestion; of quiet perceptions, undiseased by hypothesis; happy in his inability to know the causes of things, preferring the things themselves. He lived chiefly in the country, among pleasant seats and homesteads, and was fond of sauntering by the fruit-tree wall and scenting the apricots when they were warmed by the morning sunshine, or of sheltering himself under the orchard boughs at noon, when the summer pears were falling. He knew nothing of weekday services, and thought none the worse of the Sunday sermon if it allowed him to sleep from the text to the blessing; liking the afternoon service best, because the prayers were the shortest, and not ashamed to say so; for he had an easy, jolly conscience, broad-backed like himself, and able to carry a great deal of beer or port-wine, not being made squeamish by doubts and qualms and lofty aspirations. Life was not a task to him, but a sinecure.*

* a position or office that requires little or no work but provides income or status

Source C

From "Why Are Americans So Afraid of Vacation?"
by Christopher Muther (*The Boston Globe*, April 1, 2016)

Over the past five years Briana Volk and her husband Andrew opened a popular cocktail bar in Portland, Maine, had a baby, and Briana launched her own marketing business. Despite all they achieved, there was one task the couple never found time to complete—take a vacation. . . .

If their vacation skipping tale sounds familiar, it's because the Volks represent an unfortunate and unending trend. Americans not only get less vacation than many of their European counterparts, but, even worse, they're not taking all the days they earn.

In short, we are a nation of vacation-deprived, work-obsessed, business casual-attired zombies.

"A lot of employees say their company's culture actually frowns on taking time off," said Dr. David Ballard, director of the American Psychological Association's Center of Organizational Excellence. "The US was founded on a strong work ethic. We often put our own balance and well-being aside and cave into that feeling of wanting to be productive and needing to perform." . . .

[A] study by Oxford Economics, an economics analysis firm, found that Americans are throwing away $52.4 billion in earned vacation benefits each year. [Oxford also found that Americans forfeit five vacation days a year.] . . .

According to Project: Time Off [a travel-industry-funded organization that researches vacation habits], the primary reason Americans don't take vacation is that they fear coming back to a Mount Fuji-size pile of work when they return to the office. Other workers surveyed said they skip because they fear no one else can do their job, they can't afford a vacation, taking time off could get in the way of a promotion, or they want to show dedication to their company. . . .

As vacations have gotten shorter, the work week has gotten longer. A Gallup poll from 2014 found that Americans work an average of 47 hours a week. Even when they take vacation, 61 percent of Americans still work, despite complaints from family members, and 25 percent report being contacted by a colleague with a work-related question while on vacation, according to a survey from the employment website Glassdoor. . . .

. . . The all-work-no-play mentality may help with appearances in the office, but it's not helping much else.

"Fatigue sets in, rigidity applies, and all creativity and innovation are lost—both of which need time away for other activities to increase the probability of new ideas," said Lotte Bailyn, an MIT researcher. . . . The more vacation you take, the less stressed you'll feel. . . .

According to Ellen Galinsky, president of the [Families and Work] Institute, those who take longer vacations showed fewer signs of depression. She was also quick to point out that more vacation results in better family relationships.

"I did a study called 'Ask the Children,' where I asked kids about the impact of their mother's and father's work on their lives," Galinsky said. "Their one wish was not necessarily to have more time with their parents, but that their parents would be less stressed and less tired." . . .

Vacation skipping is a topic that's often swept under the keyboard.

"If you see people you admire most in your organization taking, loving, and talking about having a wonderful time on their vacations, that's an important step toward changing the culture." . . .

"We're not machines," said Galinsky. "Think of working every day as running a marathon or weight lifting. We need time for rest and recovery. Even machines break down under pressure."

Source D

From "The Spirit of Capitalism," *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*
by Max Weber (1930)

Man is dominated by the making of money, by acquisition as the ultimate purpose of his life. Economic acquisition is no longer subordinated to man as the means for the satisfaction of his material needs. This reversal of what we should call the natural relationship, so irrational from a naïve point of view, is evidently as definitely a leading principle of capitalism as it is foreign to all peoples not under capitalistic influence. At the same time it expresses a type of feeling which is closely connected with certain religious ideas. If we thus ask, *why* should "money be made out of men," Benjamin Franklin himself . . . answers in his autobiography with a quotation from the Bible, which his strict Calvinistic father drummed into him again and again in his youth: "Seest thou a man diligent in his business? He shall stand before kings" (Prov. 22:29). The earning of money within the modern economic order is, so long as it is done legally, the result and the expression of virtue and proficiency in a calling. . . .

And in truth this peculiar idea, so familiar to us to-day, but in reality so little a matter of course, of one's duty in a calling, is what is most characteristic of the social ethic of capitalistic culture, and is in a sense the fundamental basis of it. It is an obligation which the individual is supposed to feel and does feel towards the content of his professional activity, no matter in what it consists, in particular no matter whether it appears on the surface as a utilization of his personal powers, or only of his material possessions (as capital).

Of course, this conception has not appeared only under capitalistic conditions. On the contrary, we shall later trace its origins back to a time previous to the advent of capitalism. Still less, naturally, do we maintain that a conscious acceptance of these ethical maxims on the part of the individuals, entrepreneurs or labourers, in modern capitalistic enterprises, is a condition of the further existence of present-day capitalism. The capitalistic economy of the present day is an immense cosmos into which the individual is born, and which presents itself to him, at least as an individual, as an unalterable order of things in which he must live. It forces the individual, in so far as he is involved in the system of market relationships, to conform to capitalistic rules of action. The manufacturer who in the long run acts counter to these norms will just as inevitably be eliminated from the economic scene as the worker who cannot or will not adapt himself to them will be thrown into the streets without a job.

Thus the capitalism of to-day, which has come to dominate economic life, educates and selects the economic subjects which it needs through a process of economic survival of the fittest.

STOP

END OF EXAM