



AP* English Language and Composition

Multiple Choice Fridman's "America Needs its Nerds"

Student Packet



Multiple Choice

Leonid Fridman's "America Needs Its Nerds"

(References the 2008 AP* English Language Exam Question 2, Form B)

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Introduction

The passage below is from Leonid Fridman's "America Needs Its Nerds," originally published as an opinion-editorial piece in the *New York Times* in 1990. On the alternate, or "Form B," version of the 2008 AP* English Language and Composition exam, students were required to analyze how Fridman develops his argument.

Rhetorical strategies are the tools by which the author creates meaning. You must be able to identify such strategies as well as explain their significance. As you analyze rhetorical strategies, remember what you are looking for: structure, appeals, and devices; but you must also relate these devices to meaning.

Read the original passage below, and annotate as you would normally in an in-class essay.

There is something very wrong with the system of values in a society that has only derogatory terms like nerd and geek for the intellectually curious and academically serious.

5 A geek, according to Webster's New World Dictionary, is a street performer who shocks the public by biting off heads of live chickens. It is a telling fact about our language and our culture that someone dedicated to pursuit of knowledge is

10 compared to a freak biting the head off a live chicken. Even at a prestigious academic institution like Harvard, anti-intellectualism is rampant: Many students are ashamed to admit, even to their friends, how much they study. Although most students try

15 to keep up their grades, there is a minority of undergraduates for whom pursuing knowledge is the top priority during their years at Harvard. Nerds are ostracized while athletes are idolized.

20 The same thing happens in U.S. elementary and high schools. Children who prefer to read books rather than play football, prefer to build model airplanes rather than get wasted at parties with their classmates, become social outcasts. Ostracized for their intelligence and refusal to conform to society's

25 anti-intellectual values, many are deprived of a chance to learn adequate social skills and acquire good communication tools.

Enough is enough.

30 Nerds and geeks must stop being ashamed of who they are. It is high time to face the persecutors who haunt the bright kid with thick glasses from kindergarten to the grave. For America's sake, the anti-intellectual values that pervade our society must be fought.

35 There are very few countries in the world where anti-intellectualism runs as high in popular culture as it does in the U.S. In most industrialized nations, not least of all our economic rivals in East Asia, a kid who studies hard is lauded and held up as an example

40 to other students. In many parts of the world, university professorships are the most prestigious and materially rewarding positions. But not in America, where average professional ballplayers are much more

45 respected and better paid than faculty members of the best universities. How can a country where typical parents are ashamed of their daughter studying mathematics instead of going dancing, or of their son reading

50 Weber¹ while his friends play baseball, be expected to compete in the technology race with Japan or remain a leading political and cultural force in Europe? How long can America remain a world-class power if we constantly emphasize social skills and physical

55 prowess over academic achievement and intellectual ability?

¹ Max Weber (1864-1920) was a German political economist and sociologist, and one of the founders of modern sociology and the study of public administration.



Test Structure

Section I of the Advanced Placement* English exam is the multiple choice section. This section is 60 minutes long and consists of about 55 questions. The reading represents a variety of modes – AP Language: narration, argumentation, persuasion, description; AP Literature: poetry and prose, both fiction and nonfiction. The selections will vary in length from about 300 words to 700 words.

Each selection is followed by 12 to 15 multiple choice questions based on content and style. The line-referenced questions will follow the order of the selections, but interspersed among them will be questions which cover the entire passage. The selection will give you everything you need to answer the questions, so it’s up to you to read carefully and think critically. You are not expected to have prior knowledge about the selection’s content.

Use your knowledge of your own strengths and weaknesses to form your strategy for getting the most correct answers you possibly can. By analyzing the questions you get wrong on practice tests and by determining why you missed them, you can begin to reach some understanding:

- Do you read the stems too quickly?
- Do you misread the choices and especially the correct ones?
- Is one certain question type the hardest for you?
- Can you see why the correct answer is better than your choice of a wrong answer?

In the exercises to follow, you will answer questions designed to help “unlock the passage” in such a way that you can explain how Fridman’s techniques develop his argument.

Activity 1: Analysis

Reread the paragraphs and answer the directed questions in the spaces provided.

There is something very wrong with the system of values in a society that has only derogatory terms like nerd and geek for the intellectually curious and academically serious.

1. What assertion about American culture does Fridman make in the first paragraph?

2. What logical fallacy does he commit in making his assertion?

5 A geek, according to Webster’s New World Dictionary, is a street performer who shocks the public by biting off heads of live chickens. It is a telling fact about our language and our culture that someone dedicated to pursuit of knowledge is compared to a freak biting the head off a live chicken.

10

1. What rhetorical appeal does Fridman make in the second paragraph?
2. In line 10 Fridman compares an intellectual to a “freak.” What is the effect of this word choice?
3. In lines 7 and 10, Fridman uses the word “biting.” In each sentence, what is the grammatical function of the word “biting”?
4. The word “telling” is used in line 8. What is its grammatical function, and what does the word “telling” mean in this context?

15 Even at a prestigious academic institution like Harvard, anti-intellectualism is rampant: Many students are ashamed to admit, even to their friends, how much they study. Although most students try to keep up their grades, there is a minority of undergraduates for whom pursuing knowledge is the top priority during their years at Harvard. Nerds are ostracized while athletes are idolized.

1. What is the irony in Fridman’s choice of Harvard for his example in the third paragraph?
2. Locate three antitheses in this paragraph and explain the significance of each.
3. According to Fridman, why are students—even at Harvard—“ashamed to admit” their academic interests?

20 The same thing happens in U.S. elementary and
high schools. Children who prefer to read books
rather than play football, prefer to build model
airplanes rather than get wasted at parties with their
classmates, become social outcasts. Ostracized for
25 their intelligence and refusal to conform to society’s
anti-intellectual values, many are deprived of a
chance to learn adequate social skills and acquire
good communication tools.

1. For what reasons are intellectuals “ostracized” in U.S. elementary and high schools?
2. At the end of this paragraph, Fridman mentions what two results of social ostracism?
3. What irony is suggested in these results, given Fridman’s previous reference to “get[ting] wasted at parties”?

Enough is enough.

1. What specific type of repetition occurs in this sentence?
2. What is the effect of the brevity of this sentence?
3. Often students are told by their teachers not to use clichés in their writing. Why then does Fridman use this cliché?



30 Nerds and geeks must stop being ashamed of who they are. It is high time to face the persecutors who haunt the bright kid with thick glasses from kindergarten to the grave. For America’s sake, the anti-intellectual values that pervade our society must be fought.

1. What is Fridman’s call to action in this paragraph?
2. What stereotype does the author employ in this paragraph?
3. What metonymy occurs in the second sentence of this paragraph?
4. What is the effect of the verb in passive voice at the end of the paragraph?

35 There are very few countries in the world where anti-intellectualism runs as high in popular culture as it does in the U.S. In most industrialized nations, not least of all our economic rivals in East Asia, a kid who studies hard is lauded and held up as an example
40 to other students.

1. What is the pattern of development in this paragraph?
2. Why does Fridman use “East Asia” as his example in this paragraph?
3. What is the effect of the litotes in the phrase “not least of all our economic rivals in East Asia”?
4. Define the word “lauded” as it is used in the last sentence of this paragraph.

45 In many parts of the world, university professorships are the most prestigious and materially rewarding positions. But not in America, where average professional ballplayers are much more respected and better paid than faculty members of the best universities.

1. Define the word “materially” as it is used in the first sentence of this paragraph.
2. Analyze the effect of the rhetorical fragment in this paragraph.
3. In contrasting “average professional ballplayers” and “faculty members at the best universities,” Fridman maintains a continuity of associations. (See also the third paragraph.) Why is this effective?

50 How can a country where typical parents are ashamed of their daughter studying mathematics instead of going dancing, or of their son reading Weber¹ while his friends play baseball, be expected to compete in the technology race with Japan or remain a leading political and cultural force in Europe?
55 How long can America remain a world-class power if we constantly emphasize social skills and physical prowess over academic achievement and intellectual ability?

1. What is the effect of constructing the last paragraph entirely of rhetorical questions?
2. What particular type of repetition does Fridman employ in the two rhetorical questions of this paragraph?
3. What is the effect of Fridman’s switching from “country” in the first sentence to “America” in the second?



4. Fridman’s entire essay criticizes anti-intellectualism in the United States. How does he also, in the last paragraph, criticize gender stereotyping?

5. What rhetorical appeal is most obvious in the last paragraph?

6. What audience is Fridman addressing in his essay?

7. Briefly describe the tone of this essay. Cite concrete evidence to support your assertion.



Activity 2: Multiple-Choice Questions

Refer to the passage to answer the following questions.

1. Fridman’s assertion that “the intellectually curious and academically serious” (lines 4-5) are described in “only derogatory terms” (line 2) is an example of
 - A. syllogism
 - B. irony
 - C. litotes
 - D. paradox
 - E. pun
2. In the passage as a whole, Fridman suggests that U.S. culture errs in its
 - A. political system
 - B. social structures
 - C. cultural priorities
 - D. educational values
 - E. economic integrity
3. The second paragraph does all of the following EXCEPT
 - A. define a term
 - B. explain an etymology
 - C. judge a cultural value
 - D. condemn a cruel practice
 - E. employ a vivid image
4. The sentence “Nerds are ostracized while athletes are idolized” (lines 17-18) contains examples of
 - I. antithesis
 - II. colloquial diction
 - III. parallel structure
 - A. I only
 - B. II only
 - C. I and II only
 - D. II and III only
 - E. I, II, and III
5. The sentence “Children . . . outcasts” (lines 20-23) is characterized by which of the following?
 - A. compound subjects
 - B. elevated diction
 - C. figurative language
 - D. periodic structure
 - E. separated subject and verb
6. Which syntactical technique is employed in the sentence “Enough is enough” (line 28)?
 - A. anadiplosis
 - B. anaphora
 - C. antimetabole
 - D. epanalepsis
 - E. epistrophe
7. In the sentence “Enough is enough” (line 28) Fridman does all of the following EXCEPT
 - A. creates emphasis
 - B. incorporates figurative language
 - C. signals a shift
 - D. uses a cliché
 - E. varies sentence structure



8. Fridman’s use of stereotypes in Paragraphs 4, 6 and 9 underscores which truths regarding societal assumptions?
- I. Young people who look different or act differently are bullied.
 - II. People who defy cultural expectations are often alienated.
 - III. Parents may reinforce cultural expectations, even to the detriment of their children.
- A. I only
 - B. I and II only
 - C. I and III only
 - D. II and III only
 - E. I, II, and III
9. In the expression “the persecutors who haunt the bright kid with thick glasses from kindergarten to the grave” (lines 30-32), aside from metaphor, Fridman also employs which figure of speech?
- A. apostrophe
 - B. litotes
 - C. metonymy
 - D. personification
 - E. synecdoche
10. Which pattern of development is predominant in Paragraph 7?
- A. argument/counterargument
 - B. assertion/support
 - C. concession/rebuttal
 - D. deduction/induction
 - E. definition/exposition
11. What is the syntactical variation in Paragraph 8?
- A. complex sentence
 - B. compound-complex sentence
 - C. loose sentence
 - D. periodic sentence
 - E. rhetorical fragment
12. The construction “How... ability?” (lines 53-56) is an example of which of the following?
- I. compound sentence
 - II. loose sentence
 - III. rhetorical question
- A. III only
 - B. I and II only
 - C. I and III only
 - D. II and III only
 - E. I, II, and III



Activity 3: Justifying your answers: After checking your responses to the questions with the key, identify **two questions you missed**. For these questions, write an explanation of the correct response using text evidence in your explanation. Use complete sentences.

I missed question # _____. I thought letter _____ was the answer, but I now realize letter _____ is a better choice because:

I missed question # _____. I thought letter _____ was the answer, but I now realize letter _____ is a better choice because:

Activity 4: Appeals

These close-reading questions focus on linking specific devices to meaning. Thorough analysis requires that you also address the appeals in order to explain fully the writer’s purpose. Review the passage and discover areas wherein Fridman incorporates the three appeals to solidify his ideas about a society’s need for nerds.

Now write a thesis sentence for an essay in which you analyze how Fridman uses rhetorical strategies to make his argument.