

AP ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION FREE-RESPONSE QUESTION

Question 2 – Rhetorical Analysis

Representative John Lewis, an American politician and civil rights leader, died on July 17, 2020, after a battle with pancreatic cancer. Lewis, who served 17 terms in the U.S. House of Representatives on behalf of the state of Georgia, is known for organizing the 1963 March on Washington and leading the first Selma to Montgomery march across the Edmund Pettus Bridge on Bloody Sunday in 1965. Shortly before his death, Lewis wrote the following essay, asking that it be published on the day of his funeral. His essay appeared in the Opinion section of *The New York Times* on July 30, 2020. Read the passage carefully. Write an essay that analyzes the rhetorical choices Lewis makes to convey his message about the importance of standing up for what is right.

In your response, you should do the following:

- Respond to the prompt with a thesis that analyzes the writer’s rhetorical choices.
- Select and use evidence to support your line of reasoning.
- Explain how the evidence supports your line of reasoning.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the rhetorical situation.
- Use appropriate grammar and punctuation in communicating your argument.

5 While my time here has not come to an end, I want you to know that in the last days and hours of my life you inspired me. You filled me with hope about the next chapter of the great American story where you used your power to make a difference in society. Millions of people motivated simply by human compassion laid down the burdens of division. Around the country and world you set aside race, class, age, language, and nationality to demand respect for human dignity.

15 That is why I had to visit Black Lives Matter Plaza in Washington¹, thought I was admitted to the hospital the following day. I just had to see and feel it for myself that, after many years of silent witnesses, the truth is still marching on.

20 Emmett Till² was my George Floyd. He was my Rayshard Brooks, Sandra Bland, and Breonna Taylor³. He was 14 when he was killed, and I was only 15 years old at the time. I will never ever forget the moment when it became clear that he could easily have been me. In those days, fear constrained us like an imaginary prison, and troubling thoughts of potential brutality committed for no understandable reason were the bars.

25 Though I was surrounded by two loving parents, plenty of brothers, sisters and cousins, their love could not protect me from the unholy oppression

30 waiting just outside that family circle. Unchecked, unrestrained violence and government-sanctioned terror had the power to turn a simple stroll to the store for some Skittles or an innocent morning jog down a lonesome country road into a nightmare. If we are to survive as one unified nation, we must discover what so readily takes root in our hearts that could rob Mother Emanuel Church in South Carolina⁴ of her brightest and best, shoot unwitting concertgoers in Las Vegas⁵ and choke to death the hopes and dreams of a gifted violinist like Elijah McClain⁶.

40 Like so many young people today, I was searching for a way out, or some might say a way in, and then I heard the voice of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on an old radio. He was talking about the philosophy and discipline of nonviolence. He said we are all complicit when we tolerate injustice. He said it is not enough to say it will get better by and by. He said each of us has a moral obligation to stand up, speak up and speak out. When you see something that is not right, you must say something. You must do something. Democracy is not a state. It is an act, and each generation must do its part to help build what we called the Beloved Community, a nation and world society at peace with itself.

55 Ordinary people with extraordinary vision can redeem the soul of America by getting in what I call

good trouble, necessary trouble. Voting and participating in the democratic process are key. The vote is the most powerful nonviolent change agent you have in a democratic society. You must use it because it is not guaranteed. You can lose it.

You must also study and learn the lessons of history because humanity has been involved in this soul-wrenching, existential struggle for a very long time. People on every continent have stood in your shoes, through decades and centuries before you. The truth does not change, and that is why the answers worked out long ago can help you find solutions to the challenges of our time. Continue to build union between the movements stretching across the globe because we must put away our willingness to profit from the exploitation of others.

¹ a two-block-long section of 16th Street NW in Downtown Washington, D.C., renamed by Mayor Muriel Bowser on June 5, 2020, after the Department of Public Works painted the words “Black Lives Matter” on the road in 35-foot yellow capital letters as part of the George Floyd protests

² a 14-year-old African American boy who was lynched in Mississippi in 1955, after being accused of offending a white woman

³ Floyd, Brooks, Bland, and Taylor are all Black Americans who died under questionable circumstances while in police custody.

Though I may not be here with you, I urge you to answer the highest calling of your heart and stand up for what you truly believe. In my life I have done all I can to demonstrate that the way of peace, the way of love and nonviolence is the more excellent way. Now it is your turn to let freedom ring.

When historians pick up their pens to write the story of the 21st century, let them say that it was your generation who laid down the heavy burdens of hate at last and that peace finally triumphed over violence, aggression, and war. So I say to you, walk with the wind, brothers and sisters, and let the spirit of peace and the power of everlasting love be your guide.

⁴ the site of a mass shooting on June 17, 2015, in which nine African Americans engaging in Bible study were killed by a white supremacist

⁵ the deadliest mass shooting in the Western hemisphere, during which 58 people died and 413 were wounded, with the ensuing panic bringing the injury total to 869

⁶ a 23-year-old Black man who died following an encounter with Aurora, Colorado police after they received a report that an unarmed man in a ski mask was acting “sketchy” but did not appear to be a threat