

English IV AP – Literature and Composition
In-Class Essay - Prose

Name _____

Period _____

The following excerpt is taken from a letter by George Bernard Shaw on the death of his mother. Read the passage carefully. Then write an essay in which you describe Shaw's attitude toward his mother and her cremation and analyze how he conveys that attitude to reveal his intent. Consider such elements as diction, syntax, imagery, and selection of detail.

At the passage "earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust" there was a little alteration of the words to suit the process. A door opened in the wall: and the violet coffin mysteriously passed out through it and vanished as it closed. People think that door is the door of the furnace, but it isn't. I went behind the scene at the end of the service and saw
5 the real thing. People are afraid to see it, but it is wonderful. I found there the violet coffin opposite another door, a real unmistakable furnace door this time; when it lifted there was a plain little chamber of cement and fire-brick. No heat, no noise. No roaring draught. No flame. No Fuel. It looked cool, clean, sunny. You would have walked in or put your hand in without misgiving. Then the violet coffin moved again and went in, feet first. And
10 behold! The feet burst miraculously into streaming ribbons of garnet coloured lovely flame, smokeless and eager, like Pentecostal tongues, and as the whole coffin passed in, it sprang into flame all over; and my mother became that beautiful fire... The door fell; well, they said that if we wanted to see it all through to the end, we should come back in an hour and a half. I remembered the wasted little figure with the wonderful face, and said, "Too
15 long" to myself -- but off we went... When we returned, the end was wildly funny; Mama would have enjoyed it enormously. We looked down through an opening in the floor. There we saw a roomy kitchen, with a big cement table and two cooks busy at it. They had little tongs in their hands, and they were deftly and busily picking nails and scraps of coffin handles out of Mama's dainty little heap of ashes and samples of bone. Mama herself
20 being at the moment leaning over beside me, shaking with laughter. Then they swept her up into a sieve and shook her out; so that there was a heap of dust and a heap of bone scraps. And Mama said in my ear, "Which of the two heaps do you suppose is me?"...and that merry episode was the end, except for making dust of the bone scraps and scattering them on a flower bed...O grave, where is thy victory? ...And so good night, friends, who
25 understand about one's mothers.

English IV AP – Literature and Composition
“Death of His Mother”– ESSAY C
Scoring Rubric

(8 / 9) 49-51:

In these well-written essays, students will deal effectively with the broader implications of the primary Idea of the essay. These essays persuasively describe the author’s attitude toward the situation. These students identify with clarity and precision the stylistic elements (such as diction, syntax, imagery, and selection of detail) that convey the narrator’s tone, which reflects his attitude. The writing need not be flawless, but it does demonstrate the student’s ability to read with mature and sensitive comprehension and to write with skill and control. Essays scored a 9 are typically more sophisticated in interpretation, richly detailed, and /or more impressively written than essays scored an 8.

(6 / 7) 43-48:

In these competent essays, the students will offer a plausible discussion of the Idea of the essay and demonstrate clear understanding of the author’s attitude toward the situation. While their basic argument is effective, their analysis of the author’s attitude is likely to be less attentive to techniques. Additionally, their correct assertions about the author’s commentary may be less convincing or based on fewer examples from the passage. These essays express ideas clearly but lack the maturity, development, and control of the very best essays.

(5) 38-42:

In these essays, students convey a general understanding of the Idea of the essay and of the author’s attitudes and his style. However, the discussion may be pedestrian, more superficial, and/or less convincing than that of the upper-half essays. Though not inaccurate, the discussion tends to be inadequately supported by references to the text and may even tend toward summary without any real analysis. The writing is adequate to convey ideas, unmarred by distracting errors, but it may be immature or inconsistently controlled. The organization may be ineffective or not fully developed. Typically these essays reveal simplistic thinking and writing that is not as well conceived, organized, or developed as upper-half essays.

(3 / 4) 30-37:

These lower half essays may show an attempt to discuss the author’s attitude, but they do so in accurately or ineffectively, perhaps evidencing an incomplete or oversimplified understanding of the text. Their assertions about the author’s attitude may be implausible or irrelevant, or they may be inaccurate and ineffective. The discussion of techniques may be vague, limited, or lacking apt examples, or they may paraphrase rather than analyze. Though the writing may be sufficient to convey the student’s ideas, it may be wordy and repetitious, lacking in control and often marred by stylistic errors. Generally, these essays fail to analyze appropriately, misinterpret the text or prompt, lack effective organization, or are especially weak in grammar and style. Essays that contain significant misreading and/or unusually inept writing will be scored a 3.

(1 / 2) 1 – 29 points:

These essays fail to respond adequately to the question and compound the weaknesses of those in the 3-4 range. Often they demonstrate confused thinking and/or consistent weakness in grammar or other basic elements of composition and/or are unacceptably brief. Although the student may have made some attempt to answer the question, the ideas have little clarity or coherence or support. Essays that are especially inexact, vacuous, or mechanically unsound should be score a 1.