

## Guidelines for response essays (including “Literary Encounter” reaction paragraphs)

*A reference guide to grading, with model essays.*

### NAVIGATION

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### INTRODUCTION: (about these assignments)

*The extended one-paragraph response essay (nicknamed a “microtheme” or “reaction paper”) is a common format in high school and college classrooms. Generally, such papers ask students to frame an interesting, original idea (in “response” or “reaction” to what they read) then support that idea with text. While usually a bit longer than a single body paragraph from a longer essay, these responses are still shorter than a multi-paragraph essay with several ideas (hence, “microtheme”).*

*Thinking of the five traits that make academic writing clear and purposeful, an extended paragraph succeeds to the extent that a student can:*

- *Respond to a given prompt with a **SPECIFIC**, and **ON-TOPIC** answer.*
- *Organize their paragraph, **IN ORDER** around a topic sentence, supported by 3-5 **SPECIFIC, ON-TOPIC** details from text*
- ***EXPLAIN** how each quoted detail answers the question and **SPECIFICALLY** supports the paper’s main idea*
- ***CONNECT** their ideas with well-combined, grammatical English sentences with appropriate transitions and some basic sentence variety.*

*The guide that follows uses an actual prompt from a recent English 10 and 11 classes, then illustrates English department expectations with examples of work that would earn marks of less-than-required (“D-level”), meets basic expectations (“C-level”), Shows progress towards target skills (“B-level”), and an “A-level” assignment that meets expectations for a “good” response to the prompt.*

## Grading Rubric for “Response to literature” paragraphs/ “microthemes”

Goal: stay on-topic, to provide a clear, specific answer to a question while supporting your answer fully by explaining your reasoning fluently.

(read this rubric from the BOTTOM, going up):\*

A	Moves beyond the B paper and fully meets goals in that it:	<p>“Clearly argues one, <i>SPECIFIC</i> main idea: supported, connected, &amp; explained”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+Consistently <b>CONNECTING</b> all ideas with fluent language</li> <li>+ <b>EXPLAINING</b> how all evidence supports main idea in topic sentence;</li> <li>+Very <b>SPECIFIC</b> topic sentence main idea makes compelling, interesting claim.</li> </ul>
B	Improves upon the C paper with:	<p>“Mostly-supported, <i>CLEAR</i> main idea; just not fully <b>EXPLAINED</b>”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+Topic sentence <b>CLEARLY</b> argues one idea that generally answers question asked.</li> <li>+ Offering some kind of <b>EXPLANATION</b> of all evidence</li> <li>+Evident attempts to <b>CONNECT</b> each detail to main idea.</li> <li>- Missing support for some interpretations and commentary</li> <li>- Inconsistent explanation of <i>how</i> details and evidence support main idea</li> <li>-Main idea may still need to be more specific--may sound like multiple main ideas</li> </ul>
C	Response is now at least adequate in:	<p>“Trying to answer the question and offer some interpretation, but wandering.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+Incorporate all quoted text correctly, including citations.</li> <li>+Does <i>partially</i> address the prompt with required, coherent, mostly <b>ON-TOPIC</b> examples</li> <li>+Provide basic transitions to signal some <b>ORDER</b> or organization of response.</li> <li>+Avoid vagueness to the point where <i>some</i> main idea is clear</li> <li>-Multiple main ideas may not show <b>SPECIFIC</b> direction, or answer the same prompt.</li> <li>-Offers little <b>EXPLANATION</b> of quoted text, some claims unsupported</li> <li>-Does not show <b>CONNECTION</b> between evidence and main idea;</li> <li>- Language shows a lack of connections and fluency between ideas, generally.</li> </ul>
D	goes beyond the F paper by at least:	<p>“Barely addresses the same prompt with text”:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+Contains required text examples</li> <li>+ Written in complete sentences,</li> <li>+ Begins with some attempt at a topic sentence.</li> <li>-topic sentence vague, not <b>SPECIFIC</b>.</li> <li>-Difficulty defining one main idea or putting details <b>IN ORDER</b>.</li> </ul>
F	Missing these key elements:	<p>“Incomplete”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Doesn't have enough content to complete required assignment length</li> <li>-Isn't in complete English sentences</li> <li>-<b>OFF-TOPIC</b> content fails to answer prompt</li> </ul>

### ***\*A note about performance-based grading and “tiered rubrics”***

**Clear rubrics for grading performance tasks** always seek to identify observable elements (shown in blue) that lower-performing students may have gaps in (as shown in red.) Students improve their performance not by simply including required elements, but by advancing from the more basic skills (such as staying on topic) to more challenging ones, such as answering the question specifically, explaining their reasoning, and connecting all their ideas. Grades are thus less about the “quality” of the product than about its success at growing from mastery of the lower tiers to the higher ones.

## Model papers: English 11

Silence on the Prairie: Life Without Music in “A Wagner Matinee”

/2015

**Prompt:** *Based on Willa Cather’s “A Wagner Matinee,” explain, based on what we know about her life, what may be behind Aunt Georgina’s reaction as she tells Clark, “I don’t want to go!”*

In Willa Cather’s “A Wagner Matinee”, Georgiana experiences great pain when she hears the beautiful and familiar music of the orchestra for the first time in thirty years: she is overcome with sadness for sacrificing her career in music for the Nebraska frontier, and the thought of returning to the “long struggle” of her life without music is unbearable (543). To illustrate, Georgiana leaves the city and her job at the Boston Conservatory to elope with Howard Carpenter, following him to the frontier. From the start, the newlyweds must adjust to the challenges and “primitive conditions” of prairie-life: they “[have] no money” and face Indians who steal their “slender stock” of food and resources, very much unlike modern city-life in Boston (542). Seeing her for the first time in many years, her nephew Clark takes note of her “poor old hands”, once used to make beautiful music “in other days”, now warped and “twisted” into “tentacles” from her hard frontier living (544). Clark also notices her “bent” shoulders and rough skin, “[yellowed]” from “constant exposure” to “pitiless” elements, further expressing the harshness of life on the prairie and the toll it has taken on Georgiana (542). Later, when Clark takes his aunt to a Wagner performance, he recognizes how long she has been away from the music world and wonders what “[is] left” of her “musical comprehension”: he is curious whether her appreciation for the once “beloved” instruments of the orchestra had “dissolved in soapsuds” or been “worked into bread” (544, 546). He quickly sees that Georgiana’s passion for music remains everlasting when she “clutches” his arm and weeps “quietly and continuously” throughout the concert: in many ways, the Wagner music “breaks [the] silence of the plains”, and Georgiana is reminded of everything she once left behind (544, 546). Through listening to the music, Georgiana thus faces the reality of her “[suffering]” and knows that once she leaves the concert hall, she will have to return to her “black and grim” house on the prairie, in a world far from the beauty of music (543, 544).

## **Literary Encounter #1, Man vs. Dog in “To Build a Fire”**

**Riley Nelson-Campos/ 2**

Prompt: Consider that the dog is a “Foil” (a character put in a story to contrast with the main character) for the man. Find 3 traits in which the Man and Dog are complete opposites, and that make the dog, not the man, the better “fit” for the environment.

In “To Build a Fire”, the dog serves as a dramatic foil to the man, naturally opposite of him in both behavior and ability to survive in the cold. At the beginning of the story, for instance, the dog’s inherent sense of danger greater and more precise than the man’s: it was “worried by the great cold” (66), whereas the man did not even “consider his weaknesses as a creature affected by temperature” and did not realize, unlike the animal, that “this was no time for traveling” (66). This directly affects their abilities to survive: the man’s ignorance of his status as a mortal creature and subsequent lack of fear could, and eventually does, lead to his death, whereas the dog’s apprehension (presumably) leads it to safety in the end. Another trait given by nature that increases the dog’s chance of survival beyond the man’s is actually one that is not given to it at all: intelligence. When the dog falls into water and gets ice on its paws and legs, it immediately “made quick efforts to get the ice off”, even though it “did not know” why and “merely obeyed the commands that arose from the deepest part of its being” (69). Removing the ice would prevent frostbite and tissue damage, and while the man “knew these things” due to his inherent intelligence, yet still “removed his mitten...[to help] the dog tear out the pieces of ice”, exposing himself to the cold he apparently understood yet was nonetheless “surprised to find” that it had rendered his “fingers...numb” (69). His ability to think and consider thus end up allowing him to miscalculate, with the dog’s “own feeling [being] closer to the truth than the man’s judgment” (66). The dog is also physically better equipped to handle the cold, as nature gives it thick fur and a “tail [to curl] warmly over its feet”, something that makes the man “[look] with longing at the creature” (74); surprisingly, even though the man was aware of his shortcomings and that he “must be guarded against [the cold] by the use of mittens, ear coverings, [etc.]” (65) he still removes those coverings without protection and must in turn resort to “wav[ing]his arms and hands” around to try to get the blood flowing once again (74). The story thus makes a suggestion to humanity: in harsh conditions, people may have enough sense to wear clothing to mimic the physical protections nature bestows upon animals, but perhaps humans could fare better still if they mimicked the instincts of animals as well, and avoided nature’s worst dangers in the first place.

## Papers “across the rubric”: comparing different levels of quality of the same paper:

11th-grade students responded to the following prompt, inspired by the famous early-colonial Puritan poem, “Some lines on the burning of our house, 1666,” by Anne Bradstreet:

To what extent does Bradstreet show that she accepts her Puritan faith and its explanation of her loss? Does she seem comforted to believe that this all happened for a reason? Or does she wrestle with this? How does she show either?

Note that each paper that follows draws on the same 4 text details; all the drafts vary, however, in how *effectively* they’re able to use those details to support and communicate their points.

The following 4 drafts show progress up the grading scale; each draft adds and incorporates the specific skills defined in the rubric as they would appear in typical student work.

### “1”- Level:

Barely addresses the same prompt with text”:

- +Contains required text examples
- + Written in complete sentences,
- + Begins with some attempt at a topic sentence.
- topic sentence vague, not SPECIFIC.
- Difficulty defining one main idea or putting details IN ORDER.

Anne Bradstreet, in her poem “Some verses on the burning of our house, 1666,” tries to talk about what she feels about the loss of her house. This is clearly very difficult for her to handle, but she tries her best to make it ok. She says, “And when I could no longer look, I blesst his name who gave and took.” She’s obviously a Puritan in her religious outlook, a religion that believes that everything is up to God. That’s why she says that it was ok for God to take everything. She writes: “he might of all justly bereft.” To be bereft is to lose what you have and that’s exactly what’s happened to her, so she must be struggling with this loss. She thinks that it’s not all bad, though. She thinks that things are going to be ok in the end. “There is a house on high erect,” she says. It’s “framed by that might architect, which would be God who designed it for her, she feels. That’s how she knows that there’s “glory richly furnished, stands permanent, though this be fled.” She’s come a long way by the end of the poem as she shows that she thinks that what she’ll get in heaven if she believes is way more valuable than what her house that’s strictly temporary is going to cost her now. In conclusion, she thinks that will be forever, where she can be where she feels she belongs because of how she sacrificed.

## “2”-level:

“Trying to answer the question and offer some interpretation, but wandering.

- +Incorporate all quoted text correctly, including citations.
- +Does *partially* address the prompt with required, coherent, *mostly* ON-TOPIC examples
- +Provide basic transitions to signal some ORDER or organization of response.
- +Avoid vagueness to the point where *some* main idea is clear
- Multiple main ideas may not show SPECIFIC direction, or answer the same prompt.
- Offers little EXPLANATION of quoted text, some claims unsupported
- Does not show CONNECTION between evidence and main idea;
- Language shows a lack of connections and fluency between ideas, generally.

Anne Bradstreet, in her poem “Some verses on the burning of our house, 1666,” shows through her poem that she does not fully accept what has happened to her. This is clearly very difficult for her to handle, for she asks to “let no man know” the trouble she faces. When she comes out of the house and the flames “consume her dwelling place,” she says that almost immediately, when she “could no longer look, [she] blest his name who gave and took.” As a Puritan, this seems like a typical response. Puritans believed that everything happened according to a predestined plan, so she’s blessing him as her God. That might be the reason she thinks that it was ok for God to take everything. She says exactly that: “he might of all justly bereft.” If true, that means it’s what she’d like to believe, and might even be supposed to believe. She’s trying to turn things around when she tries to believe that things are going to be ok in the end. If there’s a “house on high erect, “framed by that might architect, “heaven might be the prize that appeals to her more than just a house. She describes the house as of “glory richly furnished,” that “stands permanent, though this be fled.” Even if she’s unaware then of what happens in the end, she at least believes it, so the conclusion that she’ll get a place in heaven forever offers her some hope and consolation. This is a difference from the beginning of the poem when she cries out for help in “distress,” not knowing whether she’ll be saved or not. That puritan doubt, never confident in her election makes the poem’s ending very significant. She’s come to believe that her suffering is the sign of her salvation, earned for what she’s gone through.

“3”-level:

“Mostly-supported, CLEAR main idea; just not fully EXPLAINED”

- +Topic sentence clearly argues one idea that generally answers question asked.
- + Offering some kind of EXPLANATION of all evidence
- +Evident attempts to CONNECT each detail to main idea.
- Missing support for some interpretations and commentary
- Inconsistent explanation of how details and evidence support main idea
- Main idea may still need to be more specific--may sound like multiple main ideas

Anne Bradstreet, in reflecting on “Some verses on the burning of our house, 1666,” shows through her poem that she must work to accept what her Puritan faith asks of her.\* The poem begins with her reflecting on the terror of the fire, when her “heart did cry” to God not to abandon her in “distress.” This is consistent with Puritans, who generally believe that everything that happens is because of God, so that it makes sense for her to reach out to Him when in danger. It’s horrible for her, for she asks to “let no man know” the same loss. What shows her struggle is actually how soon after she escapes the house, she already concludes that she “blesst his name who gave and took.” This could be that she really does accept the standard Puritan belief in providence: they should accept whatever happens if God’s responsible.

While this might be the Puritan doctrine, that it was all God’s anyway, so he “might of all justly bereft” her, it still doesn’t explain all the details that follow as she continues to look at her house and reflect on all her “pleasant things” that she will not behold again. This would mean that she’s still struggling to see the possible meaning of what she’s supposed to put her faith in. Furthermore, she has to “chide” her heart to accept that she could actually accept the promise of a “house on high erect, “framed by that might architect.” That architect, God, would for Puritans be the one who frames everyone’s life, so she would have to accept this if she were a Puritan. If heaven is so great, she also shouldn’t need to convince herself so much; she describes it as full of “glory richly furnished,” that “stands permanent, though this be fled.” She’s thus even at the end reminding herself that the conflict isn’t just between things of the world and religious faith; it’s between things that are temporary and those that are permanent. She’s basically concluded throughout the whole poem that her whole goal is now to claim that “hope and treasure” in heaven. That’s where her doubt can be settled, forever, as long as she just can convince herself of it now, when the loss of her home looks like all that matters.

**“4”- level:**

“Clearly argues one, *SPECIFIC* main idea: supported, connected, & explained”

+Consistently *CONNECTING* all ideas with fluent language

+ *EXPLAINING* how all evidence supports main idea in topic sentence;

+Very *SPECIFIC* topic sentence main idea makes compelling, interesting claim.

Anne Bradstreet, as she reflects in “Some verses on the burning of our house, 1666,” struggles to accept emotionally what she has already accepted intellectually about what her Puritan faith asks of her.\* The poem begins with her memory of the terror of the fire, when her “heart did cry” to God not to abandon her in “distress,” and she signals the horror of the event, bad enough that she asks to “let no man know” the same loss. As a Puritan, she thus shows that she accepts that if God provides good things as part of a preordained plan, she must grapple with the possibility that bad things are part of the same plan. The form of the poem sheds some clues about how difficult this may be: almost immediately after she escapes the house, she already concludes that she “blesst his name who gave and took.” Her logic seems to be that as long as she escapes with her life, she *should* be grateful, for he “might of all justly bereft.”

Unfortunately, as she explains all the details that follow, and continues to look at her house and reflect on all her “pleasant things” that she will not behold again, she actually seems to be struggling more. After all, had she really accepted that “’twas just” for God to take her home, she would not be so likely to return to so much nostalgia, almost like she’s trying to move on but keeps coming back to what she’s lost. She claims, however, that these emotions can be won over, so long as she “chides her heart” to accept that the promise of a “house on high erect, “framed by that mighty architect” is far better than what is gone. As she looks forward, she seems to move back to optimism, specifically because she moves from the past to the future. She sees this future as shining, with a heaven full of “glory richly furnished,” a spiritual reward that all Puritans long for. Even more importantly, she sees this as a true home, better than the home she lost, partly because it’s spiritual, not just physical. More importantly, this home “stands permanent,” unlike her life and worldly things which will eventually “be fled.” Only through this “hope and treasure” that “lies above,” she concludes, can she part with the things of the world once and for all and pray for salvation that may come in the end.



Examples of non-text-based responses from honors 10: What if instead of responding to literature, we responded to a question about our experience? Notice that while the examples in each are based on general knowledge and experience, no longer text quotations, all the other elements of explanation and connection are the same, and have the same impact on how well the question is answered.

**Prompt:** *Identify two specific moral beliefs or virtues that you think are valuable; define them and what's good about each. Then,*

- *discuss how a **particular situation** could place these two virtues in conflict with each other: **Explain the dilemma or difficult choice this would force, including***
- ***what you would have to do to satisfy each of the virtues, but how doing so would conflict with the other.***
- ***Close with how you think that you would be likely to resolve it, including why you might end up valuing one of your competing virtues less than the other.***

### "1"- Level

Barely addresses the same prompt:

- + Contains hardly any actual examples
- + Written in complete sentences, but very choppy, lacking in transitions or connections between ideas
- + Begins with some attempt at a topic sentence. BUT
- topic sentence is vague, empty, or not saying anything about its subject
- Difficulty defining one main idea or putting details IN ORDER.

"Integrity" and "flexibility" are two valuable beliefs to have, but they can cause problems too.<sup>1</sup> Sometimes, even though they are good, they can get in the way of each other a lot. I define integrity as doing the right thing for myself.<sup>2</sup> Flexibility means being willing to change. Lots of times, these can be a problem when they're together, because you want to do the right thing, but then you have to change it. For example, lots of times, I want to do something my own way, but then someone else thinks differently.<sup>3</sup> So there's a choice: do you do it they way you would with integrity, or be flexible and change for what they want. I think I would just do something where I'm flexible about what I want in the first place, that way I can go and act in a more integrated way true to that and there's not a problem.<sup>4</sup> Virtues can be pretty hard to resolve, but this way, I can at least be true to myself.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> empty topic sentence: what kinds of problems? what do words mean (compare to topic sentence of A paper)

<sup>2</sup> notice that neither of these sentences actually says much--very vague

<sup>3</sup> note "for example": signals that there will be an example, but none follows—"lots of times" is not a specific time!

<sup>4</sup> notice how it avoids answering the 3rd question: rather than explaining the conflict, they answer: "how to pretend that there's not any conflict at all.

<sup>5</sup> note "fluff" conclusion: simply repeats the prompt itself as a statement.

## “2”- Level:

“Trying to answer the question and offer some interpretation, but wandering.

- .
  - +Does *partially* address all parts of the required prompt, including a SPECIFIC example
  - +provides *mostly* ON-TOPIC examples, may be vague
  - +Provide basic transitions to signal some ORDER or organization of response.
  - + *some* main idea is clear
  - Offers little EXPLANATION of quoted text, some claims unsupported
  - Does not show CONNECTION between evidence and main idea;
  - Language shows a lack of CONNECTION and fluency between ideas, generally.

The ideal of “integrity” I define as being consistent with my beliefs.<sup>6</sup> It can help one in lots of situations.<sup>7</sup> Another belief, flexibility, is also valuable, because it helps everyone find different ways to solve problems.<sup>8</sup> The problem comes when the two can clash. An example of this could be in my band. I’m the leader, and I’m consistent with being a strong leader, leading them the way I want.<sup>9</sup> This could conflict with flexibility when others don’t act the same way.<sup>10</sup> I’m not always going to be able to change people, because they’re not part of having integrity for.<sup>11</sup> You just have to do what you’ve got to do, so that’s why there’s going to be a problem in the conflicting of my flexibility with their integrity, or lack of it, and it’s going to be hard to choose.<sup>12</sup> Especially if I go ahead and just have to put up with what they’re doing, so maybe I have integrity with being in the virtue of flexibility as a leader overall.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> notice that this is less wordy than the “1” paper, but still not saying anything yet.

<sup>7</sup> what situations? notice vagueness

<sup>8</sup> not-very-clear definition; not particularly clear how this relates to something comparable to “integrity,” what it’s being compared to

<sup>9</sup> explain how this would be integrity, rather than selfishness

<sup>10</sup> How so: how does their inflexibility relate to your flexibility?

<sup>11</sup> Unclear wording here: needs explanation

<sup>12</sup> Cliche gives away their vagueness: why? what’s the problem? how is it a lack of integrity? Choose between what and what? (good example of “restating the question rather than answering it--see “1”paper)

<sup>13</sup> again, how so?

“3”-level:

“Mostly-supported, CLEAR main idea; just not fully EXPLAINED”

- +Topic sentence clearly, if generally, answers question asked.
- + Offering some kind of EXPLANATION of all the examples
- +Evident attempts to CONNECT each detail to main idea.
- Missing support: may need more commentary on the examples
- Inconsistent explanation of how details and evidence support main idea
- Main idea may still need to be more specific--may sound like multiple main ideas

I often find that “integrity” is a core virtue: this is when you act consistently with the things that you believe.<sup>14</sup> Integrity means different things, of course, as you can have it with anything you believe in.<sup>15</sup> One of the problems of this is flexibility, when one also wants to work with others.<sup>16</sup> You may need to “flex” or bend to what they want, to their integrity.<sup>17</sup> This could come up in a band, where I’m the leader and want to have integrity with how I lead. I could do this by making sure I’m prepared for rehearsals, or offer new music to play, email everyone with music or charts, etc. These all show integrity because I’m trying to be a good leader.<sup>18</sup> Unfortunately, suppose that someone who’s in the group, and is committed, but still isn’t doing their part. I can’t have integrity for their flexibility, only mine. I don’t want to push too hard, or they’ll be upset and not do their part, so my group won’t be flexible or with integrity.<sup>19</sup> They might then contribute less than they could.<sup>20</sup> In this situation, I see one logical way to decide--either I want them in the group, in which case I have to be more flexible and simply encourage them to do more, or I have to have the integrity to say “you need to start your own group.”<sup>21</sup> At least then I’m being honest to them and myself.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>14</sup> clear, if limited topic sentence

<sup>15</sup> compare this unclear wording to the one in the “1” paper, below.

<sup>16</sup> Choppy: needs to be combined with following sentence, which builds on the same idea

<sup>17</sup> this needs to be defined: “What Do You Mean?”

<sup>18</sup> “Good leader” is circular: needs to connect back to “consistency” in the definition already given, not just restate that I’m doing it “with integrity”--show what you tell!

<sup>19</sup> Lack of transitions in these three sentences make it hard to see how we’re getting here; compare to the same idea in the “1” paper, where the flow of the argument is clear

<sup>20</sup> missing “why”? “how so”?

<sup>21</sup> notice how the “1” paper expands this choice into two separate, clearer sentences--each has its own how and why, making the contrast clearer.

<sup>22</sup> notice the shift of the main idea--somehow we drifted from integrity to “honesty”--we can kind of see how they got here, but they should bring it back to “being consistent or true with my goals for the group,” so that it’s still on-topic with “integrity.”

**“4”-level:**

“Clearly argues *SPECIFIC* main idea: supported, connected, & explained”

+Very *SPECIFIC* topic sentence main idea makes compelling, thoughtful, and interesting claim.

+Consistently *CONNECTING* all ideas with fluent language

+*SPECIFIC* examples with rich details

+ *EXPLAINING* how all evidence supports main idea in topic sentence;

I often find that I am motivated by the ideal of “integrity,” which describes the state of being consistent with, never hypocritical about, important beliefs. This makes it an interesting virtue, in that you can have or not have integrity about any number of other beliefs, such as honesty, generosity, awareness, or many others. The problem comes when integrity creates a clash between integrity to your own moral code and how you must work with others, say in the form of “flexibility” or perhaps “compromise.” For example, I may have a strong sense of integrity as the leader of a musical group that I want to lead by example, so I’ll do things like make sure I’m prepared for rehearsals, or offer new music to play, email everyone with music or charts, etc. These all show integrity because I’m trying to practice exactly what I’m asking for from others. Unfortunately, suppose that someone who’s in the group, and is committed, still isn’t doing their part--my integrity can’t change their behavior or improve their performance, so I have to be flexible. Of course, it’s possible that they might be put-off or unmotivated because I’m being too strong as a leader in their eyes. They might then be less-motivated, letting me do all the work, in which case my integrity is actually leading them to contribute less than I could. In this situation, I see one logical way to decide--either I want them in the group, in which case I have to be more flexible and simply encourage them to do more, or I have to have the really *hard kind of integrity*:the willingness to own my decisions and actually say, “sorry; this is the way I want this group to work and you have to fit in or I’ll have to find someone else.”

## **Honors 10** response (to “Genesis”) (this is a “4”)

*Prompt: briefly summarize one interesting question that this tale, like all origin myths, seeks to answer about some specific aspect of “why things are the way they are.” Show with your choice of evidence, and explanation, how the tale does answer this, or leaves the question open because of some contradiction in the evidence that you identify and describe.*

The creation story found in “Genesis” offers a novel explanation for the nature of human “sin”<sup>23</sup>: the basic structure of the story, in which humanity “falls” from innocence and loses immortality because they disobey their creator suggests that for people, the freedom to choose right from wrong is such a challenge to blind obedience that even a good creator cannot find a way for people to have both<sup>24</sup>. The story portrays God as challenging the first people almost exclusively on their obedience<sup>25</sup>: he offers them all the “fruits of the field,” puts the rest of the natural world “under their dominion,” and encourages them to “be fruitful and multiply” with no apparent effort from them; his only demand in return,<sup>26</sup> says the story, is that they do not eat of the “tree of knowledge of good and evil.” Significantly, while the serpent interprets this as a temptation to “be like gods,”<sup>27</sup> God as portrayed in the tale never argues this: when he catches them shortly after, he challenges only that they did “eat the fruit [he] bade [them] not to,” not their reasons.<sup>28</sup> The story implies that this must then be enough to justify all the punishments and consequences that follow,<sup>29</sup> for interestingly, each consequence seems to take away the specific gifts they were given: The “fruits of the field” must now be earned by the “sweat of [Adam’s] brow,” and the once-fruitful Eve must now undergo “great pains in childbearing.” Even the tempting snake must crawl on the ground, temptation itself an “enemy” that will chase after humanity and “bite their heel.” Most importantly, though,<sup>30</sup> their banishment from the innocent garden (and tree of life) thus means that having a conscience to decide for themselves means that people can never go back to their childish ignorance. It’s as if, in the end, the tale argues that freedom to choose cannot fit with the easy eternal life they once enjoyed.

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<sup>23</sup> note gradual introduction of topic: we immediately know paper will discuss the “nature of human sin” but paper artfully allows the clause that follows to specify what that actually is.

<sup>24</sup> Topic sentence: asserts that freedom of conscience is incompatible with obedience. THIS is what paragraph will show.

<sup>25</sup> First meme is clearly about “obedience”

<sup>26</sup> connecting explanation: how these details are about “obedience”

<sup>27</sup> very short meme #2 suggests the problem of free will--the serpent is actually tempting them, writer argues, with freedom.

<sup>28</sup> If G isn’t focusing on it, it implies that he continues to be looking ONLY for their obedience.

<sup>29</sup> This is the interpretation they’re “telling” from the examples--they use the punishments, by themselves only a list of consequences, to show how HIGH the costs of disobedience are--if G makes such a big deal to take away everything he just gave them, their disobedience must be unforgivable to him.

<sup>30</sup> notice how paragraph puts the “most important”last? See that this idea finally puts BOTH together--only this detail (expulsion from paradise) caps the argument to show that the two ideas are “incompatible.”

**Variation: same text, very different model response (also a “4”)**

***(This version actually uses the same evidence to show the exact opposite idea.)***<sup>31</sup>

The creation story found in “Genesis” offers a novel explanation for the nature of human “sin”: the basic structure of the story, in which humanity “falls” from innocence and immortality because of an act of disobedience, suggests that for people, the freedom of conscience is such a challenge to blind obedience that even a benevolent creator cannot find a way for people to have both. Unfortunately, the story never defends how the two are so incompatible that a God, capable of providing these things in the first place, could not fit both in his creation. Clearly, in this story, God challenges the first people almost exclusively on their obedience: he offers them all the “fruits of the field,” puts the rest of the natural world “under their dominion,” and encourages them to “be fruitful and multiply” with no apparent effort from them; his only demand in return, says the story, is that they do not eat of the “tree of knowledge of good and evil.” Interestingly, the lack of explanation *why* he would impose such a test implies that for the people who passed down this story at least, such loyalty tests were *assumed* to need no justification. The story’s villain, the “subtil” serpent understands this, however, for he argues that the test is not of their loyalty, but of their God’s *jealousy*: he argues that the only reason to deny them the knowledge of good and evil is that this sole missing power would make them “be like gods.” When God catches them, and challenges only that they did “eat the fruit [he] bade [them] not to,” not *why they did so*, the story implies that no reason could defend them of their disobedience: indeed, the story takes as a given that he is justified in taking away all of the gifts he had just given them: The “fruits of the field” must now be earned by the “sweat of [Adam’s] brow, and the once-fruitful Eve must now undergo great pains in conception and birth. Even the tempting snake must crawl on the ground, temptation now the “enemy” that will chase after humanity and “bite their heel.” The problem is, nothing establishes this as inevitable: they could have learned their lesson, using their newfound conscience. Perhaps the story could have argued that this merciful God could give humanity a second chance. Maybe it even could have made the choice explicit that knowing better, Adam and Eve could stand at the gates and *choose* their freedom to find their own way, rather than stay in the gilded cage of the garden. Of course this defeats the whole point of the origin story itself--we are mortal, and live free to do good or bad, facing all these challenges. This story seems to imply that the punishment of death needs no more justification than the fact that we owe our lives to a jealous, all-powerful creator and must continue to pay His penalty.

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<sup>31</sup> Note: this is not a specific writing skill, but a creative opportunity common to tales and myths in the Honors 10 class--by their nature, such tales are ambiguous in meaning, which allows us to make multiple readings from the same source material.