

**2021 AP® ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION FREE-RESPONSE
QUESTIONS (Form B)**

Question 2

(Suggested time—40 minutes. This question counts for one-third of the total essay section score.)

Trevor Noah wrote his premier novel, *Born a Crime*, to highlight some pivotal moments in his life. In the final chapter, Trevor Noah ponders the moment he must decide whether to pay the exorbitant cost of his mother’s hospital and intensive care bill. Read the passage carefully. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze Noah’s rhetorical choices and explain how he uses language to dramatize this choice and his conflicted thoughts.

“Sir, there’s a problem. Your mother was speaking a bit at first. She’s stopped now, but from what we’ve gathered she doesn’t have health insurance.”

“What? No, no. That can’t be true. I know my mom has health insurance.”

She didn’t. As it turned out, a few months prior, she’d decided, “This health insurance is a scam. I never get sick. I’m going to cancel it.” So now she had no health insurance.

“We can’t treat your mother here,” the nurse said. “If she doesn’t have insurance we have to send her to a state hospital.”

“State hospital?! What—no! You can’t. My mom’s been shot in the head. You’re going to put her back on a gurney? Send her out in an ambulance? She’ll die. You need to treat her right now.”

“Sir, we can’t. We need a form of payment.”

“I’m your form of payment. I’ll pay.”

“Yes, people say that, but without a guarantee—”

I pulled out my credit card.

“Here,” I said. “Take this. I’ll pay. I’ll pay for everything.”

“Sir, hospital can be very expensive.”

“I don’t care.”

“Sir, I don’t think you understand. Hospital can be really expensive.”

“Lady, I have money. I’ll pay anything. Just help us.”

“Sir, you don’t understand. We have to do so many tests. One test alone could cost two, three thousand rand.”

“Three thousand—what? Lady, this is my mother’s life we’re talking about. I’ll pay.”

“Sir, you don’t understand. Your mother has been shot. In her brain. She’ll be in ICU. One night in ICU could cost you fifteen, twenty thousand rand.”

“Lady, are you not listening to me? This is my mother’s life. This is her life. Take the money. Take all of it. I don’t care.”

“Sir! You don’t understand. I’ve seen this happen. Your mother could be in the ICU for weeks. This could cost you five hundred thousand, six hundred thousand. Maybe even millions. You’ll be in debt for the rest of your life.”

I’m not going to lie to you: I paused. I paused hard. In that moment, what I heard the nurse saying was, “All of your money will be gone,” and then I started to think, Well...what is she, fifty? That’s pretty good, right? She’s lived a good life.

I genuinely did not know what to do. I stared at the nurse as the shock of what she’d said sunk in. My mind raced through a dozen different scenarios. What if I spend that money and then she dies anyway? Do I get a refund? I actually imagined my mother, as frugal as she was, waking up from a coma and saying, “You spent how much? You idiot. You should have saved that money to look after your brothers.” And what about my brothers? They would be my responsibility now. I would have to raise the family, which I couldn’t do if I was millions in debt, and it was always my mother’s solemn vow that raising my brothers was the one thing I would never have to do. Even as my career took off, she’d refused any help I offered. “I don’t want you paying for your mother the same way I had to pay for mine,” she’d say. “I don’t want you raising your brothers the same way Abel had to raise his.”

My mother's greatest fear was that I would end up paying the black tax, that I would get trapped by the cycle of poverty and violence that came before me. She had always promised me that I would be the one to break that cycle. I would be the one to move forward and not back. And as I looked at that nurse outside the emergency room, I was petrified that the moment I handed her my credit card, the cycle would just continue and I'd get sucked right back in.

People say all the time that they'd do anything for the people they love. But would you really? Would you do anything? Would you give everything? I don't know that a child knows that kind of selfless love. A mother, yes. A mother will clutch her children and jump from a moving car to keep them from harm. She will do it without thinking. But I don't think the child knows how to do that, not instinctively. It's something the child has to learn.

I pressed my credit card into the nurse's hand.

"Do whatever you have to do. Just please help my mom."