

# **SHORT ESSAY QUESTIONS RUBRIC**

## **Sample Short Answer Test Questions & Answers**

Short essay questions on a unit exam in my class are typically grading on a scale from 0-5. The following rubric explains how I arrive at the point assessment for each question:

### **5**

Responses receiving a 5 are characterized by most or all of the following:

1. Response is written in complete sentences that form a well-crafted paragraph.
2. Response directly addresses the question or prompt and uses a thesis statement.
3. Response refers to specific examples, directly to the text of the story, to support the thesis.
4. Response provides explication of the text.
5. Response does not use *extensive* quotations or quotations that are neither explained nor obviously relevant to responding to the prompt.
6. Response identifies characters and specific settings by their proper names.
7. Response uses proper punctuation, spelling, and grammar – it counts.

### **4**

Responses receiving a 4 are characterized by the following:

1. Response is written in complete sentences but falls short of forming a well-crafted paragraph.
2. Response directly addresses the question or prompt.
3. Response refers to specific examples but may not refer directly to the text
4. Response identifies characters and specific settings by their proper names.
5. Response generally uses proper punctuation, spelling, and grammar – it counts.

### **3**

Responses receiving a 3 are characterized by the following:

1. Response is written in complete sentences but does not form a well-crafted paragraph.
2. Response does not directly address the question or prompt but provides some relevant or related information that indirectly addresses the question.
3. Response fails to offer specific examples but provides a generalized example
4. Response may contain minor errors in punctuation, spelling, and grammar.

### **2**

Responses receiving a 2 are characterized by the following:

1. Response may not be written in complete sentences but does not form a well-crafted paragraph.
2. Response does not directly address the question or prompt but provides some relevant or related information that indirectly addresses the question.
3. Response does not refer to specific examples from the text.
4. Response contains minor errors in punctuation, spelling, and grammar – or is illegible

\*Responses receiving a 1 or a 0 do not properly answer the question posed.

**The following sample questions include exemplary student responses. Again, this should give you a good idea about what I expect from your answers.**

1. **Simile and metaphor** are two ways of making a comparison of two dissimilar things – either by using the verb "to be" (metaphor) or "like" and "as" (simile). In *Fahrenheit 451* Ray Bradbury often uses similes and metaphors to compare ordinary (or extraordinary) objects to animals or insects. Identify three instances of this and explain the effect of the similes/metaphors. In other words, why does Bradbury use them?

One example of an object being compared to an animal is the terrifying Mechanical Hound. This hound can be programmed to track and kill a person. It has some characteristics of a real dog; for example, it "sniffs" and "growls." Another example is the snakelike machine that saves Mildred's life. This invention slides down into her stomach and sucks out poison. It even has an "eye" that allows its operator to see inside the stomach. A third example is Mildred's radio earpieces. These tiny devices are compared to a wasp hidden in its nest. Bradbury uses these similes and metaphors to show what the technology has become. People's lives are ruled by their machines, rather than just using the technology, people depend on it entirely. It is almost as if the machines have life within them. The comparison to animals/insects shows us that the technology almost has a life of its own.

2. **Symbol** is using an object or action that means something more than its literal meaning. What is the "White Clown" and what does he represent or symbolize in *Fahrenheit 451*?

The "White Clown" is a symbol of superficial happiness in the dystopia of *Fahrenheit 451*. He is a vacuous television character in a program of the same name. People throughout this society seem to love him and his show to the point that anyone who willingly misses viewing the program on his parlor walls becomes suspect. In one particularly tense domestic moment in the Montag household Mildred and Guy are in the midst of a serious conversation when the phone rings. It is one of Mildred's vacuous lady friends and they're talking about getting together to watch the White Clown. After the phone conversation, Mildred is dismayed that Guy will not be watching the White Clown with her. He asks his wife if she "loves" the White Clown. She does. Then Guy asks Mildred if the White Clown loves her. Mildred is stunned by the question and speechless. Although Bradbury never describes the White Clown or explains what the program is about, he gives the reader the sense that it really doesn't matter, and Mildred doesn't seem to be able to define why she likes the show; she just knows it makes her "happy." Since the character is a "clown," the reader likely pictures the character as an oaf or buffoon. And since the "clown" is white, he's some sort of innocent buffoon – certainly not evil, just a vacuous saphead who would never cause anyone any heartache, and never make the viewer think deeply or reflect on anything beyond the White Clown himself. Overall the White Clown is arguably the best single representation of the dystopia as a whole.

3. **Allegory** is a form of extended metaphor, in which objects, persons, and actions in a narrative, are equated with the meanings that lie outside the narrative itself. Although the narrator of *Billy Budd* rarely alludes to the Bible explicitly, the novel contains many implicit allusions to the imagery, language, and stories of the Bible, creating a sustained parallel between Billy's story and Christ's Passion, the story of Christ's suffering and death on the cross. Explain how *Billy Budd* can be read as a Christian allegory.

*Billy Budd* can be read as a Christian allegory when compared to Christ's Passion. Billy is the Christ-like figure, Claggart a Judas, and Captain Vere a sort of Pontius Pilate. Billy is a fine specimen of manhood, described by Melville as the perfect

sailor. He willingly accepts injustices, such as being impressed into service in the British Navy, and he refuses to be a party to evil when tempted to take part in the planning of a mutiny. Claggart, however, is jealous of Billy, and falsely accuses him of a capital crime. Like Jesus, Billy is falsely accused; he is innocent of wrongdoing. Because of a reflexive tick, Billy accidentally kills Claggart with a blow to the head. In the end, through an unjust trial, Captain Vere - like Pontius Pilate - sentences Billy to death. Billy not only dies for the sins of others, he willingly accepts his unjust punishment.

**4. Setting** involves the time and place in which a story takes place. Explain the role of the Pyncheon house in *The House of the Seven Gables*. What is it like and how does it contribute to the overall mood and the central themes?

The Pyncheons' house is covered in the shadows of its past. The house was built on land which was taken from a man convicted of wizardry. Colonel Pyncheon, who had the house built, may have brought false charges against the supposed wizard in order to procure his land. Also, the house was built over the grave of the hanged wizard. Thus, the house has a gloomy and ghostly ambience. This is one leading factor in the gloomy and apprehensive mood of the whole novel. The house also plays a part in the theme of how the past influences the present and the future.