

2004 AP[®] ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION
FREE-RESPONSE QUESTIONS (Form B)

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION

SECTION II

Total time—2 hours

Question 1

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

In 1962, the noted biologist Rachel Carson published *Silent Spring*, a book that helped to transform American attitudes toward the environment. Carefully read the following passage from *Silent Spring*. Then write an essay in which you define the central argument of the passage and analyze the rhetorical strategies that Carson uses to construct her argument.

Line
5 As the habit of killing grows—the resort to
“eradicating” any creature that may annoy or
inconvenience us—birds are more and more finding
themselves a direct target of poisons rather than an
6 incidental one. There is a growing trend toward aerial
applications of such deadly poisons as parathion to
“control” concentrations of birds distasteful to
farmers. The Fish and Wildlife Service has found it
7 necessary to express serious concern over this trend,
10 pointing out that “parathion treated areas constitute a
potential hazard to humans, domestic animals, and
wildlife.” In southern Indiana, for example, a group of
farmers went together in the summer of 1959 to
engage a spray plane to treat an area of river
15 bottomland with parathion. The area was a favored
roosting site for thousands of blackbirds that were
feeding in nearby cornfields. The problem could have
been solved easily by a slight change in agricultural
practice—a shift to a variety of corn with deep-set
20 ears not accessible to the birds—but the farmers had
been persuaded of the merits of killing by poison, and
so they sent in the planes on their mission of death.

The results probably gratified the farmers, for the
casualty list included some 65,000 red-winged
25 blackbirds and starlings. What other wildlife deaths
may have gone unnoticed and unrecorded is not
known. Parathion is not a specific for blackbirds: it is
a universal killer. But such rabbits or raccoons or
opossums as may have roamed those bottomlands and
30 perhaps never visited the farmers’ cornfields were
doomed by a judge and jury who neither knew of their
existence nor cared.

And what of human beings? In California orchards

35 sprayed with this same parathion, workers handling
foliage that had been treated a *month* earlier collapsed
and went into shock, and escaped death only through
skilled medical attention. Does Indiana still raise any
boys who roam through woods or fields and might
40 even explore the margins of a river? If so, who guarded
the poisoned area to keep out any who might wander
in, in misguided search for unspoiled nature? Who
kept vigilant watch to tell the innocent stroller that the
fields he was about to enter were deadly—all their
vegetation coated with a lethal film? Yet at so fearful
45 a risk the farmers, with none to hinder them, waged
their needless war on blackbirds.

In each of these situations, one turns away to ponder
the question: Who has made the decision that sets in
motion these chains of poisonings, this ever-widening
50 wave of death that spreads out, like ripples when a
pebble is dropped into a still pond? Who has placed
in one pan of the scales the leaves that might have
been eaten by the beetles and in the other the pitiful
heaps of many-hued feathers, the lifeless remains of
55 the birds that fell before the unselective bludgeon of
insecticidal poisons? Who has decided—who has the
right to decide—for the countless legions of people
who were not consulted that the supreme value is a
world without insects, even though it be also a sterile
60 world ungraced by the curving wing of a bird in flight?
The decision is that of the authoritarian temporarily
entrusted with power; he has made it during a moment
of inattention by millions to whom beauty and the
ordered world of nature still have a meaning that is
65 deep and imperative.