AP® ENGLISH LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION FREE-RESPONSE QUESTIONS

Question 2

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

In the following passage from Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street* (1984), Esperanza, the novel's first-person narrator, recounts a story she was told by her friend Marin about Geraldo, a boy she met one night at a dance. Carefully read the passage and then write a well-organized essay in which you analyze how Cisneros uses various literary techniques—such as diction, imagery, language, and syntax—to convey different points of view and ways of understanding the life and death of someone like Geraldo.

Line

She met him at a dance. Pretty too, and young. Said he worked in a restaurant, but she can't remember which one. Geraldo. That's all. Green pants and Saturday shirt. Geraldo. That's what he told her.

And how was she to know she'd be the last one to see him alive. An accident, don't you know. Hit-and-run. Marin, she goes to all those dances. Uptown. Logan. Embassy. Palmer. Aragon. Fontana. The Manor. She likes to dance. She knows how to do cumbias and salsas and rancheras even. And he was just someone she danced with. Somebody she met that night. That's right.

That's the story. That's what she said again and again. Once to the hospital people and twice to the police. No address. No name. Nothing in his pockets. Ain't it a shame.

Only Marin can't explain why it mattered, the hours and hours, for somebody she didn't even know. The hospital emergency room. Nobody but an intern working all alone. And maybe if the surgeon would've come, maybe if he hadn't lost so much blood, if the surgeon had only come, they would know who to notify and where.

But what difference does it make? He wasn't anything to her. He wasn't her boyfriend or anything like that. Just another *brazer* who didn't speak English. Just another wetback. You know the kind. The ones who always look ashamed. And what was she doing out at three a.m. anyway? Marin who was sent home with her coat and some aspirin. How does she explain?

She met him at a dance. Geraldo in his shiny shirt and green pants. Geraldo going to a dance.

What does it matter?

They never saw the kitchenettes. They never knew about the two-room flats and sleeping rooms he rented, the weekly money orders sent home, the currency exchange. How could they?

His name was Geraldo. And his home is in another country. The ones he left behind are far away, will wonder, shrug, remember. Geraldo—he went north . . . we never heard from him again.

AP Prompt: Study Guide

1. What's the impact of repeating the one-word sentence of "Geraldo" (3,4) in the opening paragraph? How does the short sentence of "That's all" (3) establish the tone of the story? What point does Cisneros seem to be making about the life of an immigrant in this country, especially one that comes alone?

2. When Esperanza, the narrator, says, "No address. No name. Nothing in his pockets. Ain't it a shame" (17-18), whose perspective does she seem to be assuming? What appears to be the tone of these short sentences, especially the final one? Is the loss of a person's life just a "shame," or something more?

3. Even though Marin "can't explain why it mattered, the hours and hours, for somebody she didn't even know" (19-21), the reader should understand why this story is so important to Marin. What does she see in Geraldo? What does Cisneros want the reader to understand about the larger significance of this story?

4. How does the "intern working all alone" (22) and the surgeon not coming to the hospital reflect the fate of poor people in our country? Whose attitude is being expressed when Esperanza refers to Geraldo with ethnic slurs such as "[j]ust another *brazer* who didn't speak English. Just another wetback" (29-30)?

5. Who are the "they" who "never knew about the two-room flats and sleeping rooms he rented, the weekly money orders sent home, the currency exchange" (40-43)? What is implied by concluding, "How could they?" (43)? What should we understand about the importance of "home" (43, 44) from this story?