

# SESSION TWO

The University of the State of New York

REGENTS HIGH SCHOOL EXAMINATION

## COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION

IN

ENGLISH

SESSION TWO

Friday, August 13, 1999 — 8:30 to 11:30 a.m., only

The last page of this booklet is the answer sheet for the multiple-choice questions. Fold the last page along the perforations and, slowly and carefully, tear off the answer sheet. Then fill in the heading of your answer sheet. Now circle "Session Two" and fill in the heading of each page of your essay booklet.

This session of the examination has two parts. For Part A, you are to answer all ten multiple-choice questions and write a response, as directed. For Part B, you are to write a response, as directed.

When you have completed this session of the examination, you must sign the statement printed at the end of the answer sheet, indicating that you had no unlawful knowledge of the questions or answers prior to the session and that you have neither given nor received assistance in answering any of the questions during the session. Your answer sheet cannot be accepted if you fail to sign this declaration.

**DO NOT OPEN THIS EXAMINATION BOOKLET UNTIL THE SIGNAL IS GIVEN.**

## Part A

**Directions:** Read the passages on the following pages (a prose poem and an essay). Write the number of the answer to each multiple-choice question on your answer sheet. Then write the essay in your essay booklet as described in **Your Task**. You may use the margins to take notes as you read and scrap paper to plan your response.

### Your Task:

After you have read the passages and answered the multiple-choice questions, write a unified essay about mother-daughter relationships, as revealed in the passages. In your essay, use ideas from **both** passages to establish a controlling idea about mother-daughter relationships. Using evidence from **each** passage, develop your controlling idea and show how the author uses specific literary elements or techniques to convey that idea.

### Guidelines:

#### Be sure to

- Use ideas from **both** passages to establish a controlling idea about mother-daughter relationships
- Use specific and relevant evidence from **each** passage to develop your controlling idea
- Show how each author uses specific literary elements (for example: theme, characterization, structure, point of view) or techniques (for example: symbolism, irony, figurative language) to convey the controlling idea
- Organize your ideas in a logical and coherent manner
- Use language that communicates ideas effectively
- Follow the conventions of standard written English

## Passage I

Ah, Momma,

Did the house ever know the night-time of your spirit: the flash and flame of you who once, when we crouched in what you called “the little room,” where your dresses hung in their pallid colorings—an uninteresting row of uniforms—and where there  
5 were dusty, sweet-smelling boxes of costume jewelry that nevertheless shone like rubies, gold, and diamonds, once, in that place where the secondhand mirror blurred the person, dull, that place without windows, with doors instead of walls, so that your small-space most resembled a large and rather hazardous closet, once, in there you told me, whispering, that once, you had wanted to be an artist: someone, you  
10 explained, who could just boldly go and sit near the top of a hill and watch the setting of the sun.

Ah, Momma!

You said this had been your wish when you were quite as young as I was then: a twelve- or thirteen-year-old girl who heard your confidence with terrified amazement: what had happened to you and your wish? Would it happen to me too?

Ah, Momma:

“The little room” of your secrets, your costumery, perfumes, and photographs of an old boyfriend you did not marry (for reasons not truly clear to me as I saw you make sure, time after time, that his pictures were being kept as clean and as safely as  
20 possible)—“the little room” adjoined the kitchen, the kitchen where no mystery survived, except for the mystery of you: woman who covered her thick and long, black hair with a starched, white nurse’s cap when she went “on duty” away from our home into the hospital I came to hate, jealousy, woman who rolled up her wild and heavy, beautiful hair before she went to bed, woman who tied a headrag around the waving,  
25 kinky, well-washed braids, or lengthy, fat curls of her hair while she moved, without particular grace or light, between the table and the stove, between the sink and the table, around and around and around in the spacious, ugly kitchen where she, where you, never dreamed about what you were doing or what you might do instead, and where you taught me to set down plates and silverware, and even fresh-cut flowers  
30 from the garden, without appetite, without excitement, without expectation.

It was not there, in that obvious, open, square cookery where you spent most of the hours of the days, it was not there, in the kitchen where nothing ever tasted sweet or sharp enough to sate the yearnings I began to suspect inside your eyes, and also  
35 inside the eyes of my father, it was not there that I began to hunger for the sun as my own, legitimate preoccupation; it was not there, in the kitchen, that I began, really, to love you.

Ah, Momma,

It was where I found you, hidden away, in your “little room,” where your life and the power, the rhythms of your sacrifice, the ritual of your bowed head, and your  
40 laughter always partly concealed, where all of you, womanly, reverberated big as the whole house, it was there that I came, humbly, into an angry, an absolute determination that I would, one day, prove myself to be, in fact, your daughter.

Ah, Momma, I am still trying.

— June Jordan

## Passage II

“Who else can hurt you as much as someone that you care about so very deeply?” Janet asks, speaking from the pain in her heart, which is reflected back in her daughter’s eyes.

5 If, as it is often said, love and hate are flip sides of the same coin, then Janet and Michelle should be millionaires. They are either smoldering with anger or attached like Velcro. Both complain they’re sick to death of fighting, but they’ve become so skilled at hurting each other, they don’t know how to break the pattern.

10 In one breath Michelle can say, “I have always been afraid of my mother. Nothing I ever did is good enough. She can tell me my dress is too short or too tight, and I come completely undone. Anything I do or say is taken the wrong way. Sometimes I feel I have to pay for her miserable childhood the rest of my life.”

15 “Ever since I became a teenager, there’s been this competition, like she didn’t want me to be attractive or popular. I remember when my parents divorced, I had graduated from college and we went out together and guys my age were dancing with my mom. She’s a very attractive woman. And she was like, hey, they like me better than they like you. I felt so cut by that. It was so mortifying that I stopped going out with her. The last thing I’m going to do is give her more opportunity to hurt me. I’m just going to go away. That’s how I am.”

20 But then Michelle will flip-flop and lovingly say, “My mother was the only person who supported my going to college. I was very shy and I was scared to death and I only got through it because I knew she loved me. Mom’s had a really hard life. She didn’t have my opportunities in terms of being able to make her own choices, like going to nursing school the way she wanted. But I’m so proud of her. She started back to college when she was almost 50, and I thought that was great. I feel  
25 so sorry she’s been through so much and I want to make up for that. Nobody has really taken care of Mom, really loved her the way she deserves. I want to make her not hurt anymore.”

Janet is equally mired in contradiction. “When we’re not hurting each other, I consider Michelle my best and dearest friend,” she says. “We have a lot of similar  
30 interests. We enjoy spending time together. But she has the power to wound me just as I have the power to wound her. She can deliver some cutting or demeaning put-down, and after she’s dropped this bombshell, she’ll flounce out of the room and doesn’t want to deal with it. She runs away from confrontation, and I don’t know how to overcome that.”

35 *Michelle’s Florida story:* “There are many times when I just need to hear my mother’s voice and I can’t get hold of her and I get really upset.” With her hand, she swabs the tears that keep interfering with her words. “Like the time I was in Florida for my brother’s wedding. It was wonderful, but when it came time to leave, there was a big confusion around checking out of the hotel, and by mistake, my mom was  
40 waiting somewhere else to say goodbye to me before I went to the plane. I kept waiting and trying to call her and she didn’t come. She didn’t come! She didn’t come! What I didn’t know was that the hotel told her we’d already checked out. Here I am thinking my mother has abandoned me. She doesn’t love me enough to say goodbye and I was hysterical crying. Where is my mother? Where is my  
45 mother? And the whole time she is somewhere else thinking: How could my daughter leave without saying goodbye to me?”

*Janet’s funeral story:* “My father was a very important figure to all of us—more like a father than a grandfather to Michelle. When he died, I don’t think I ever felt

50 so alone in my life. There wasn't anybody to hug me and I was afraid to be alone. I knew Michelle was grieving, too, but I needed her and she wasn't there for me. I couldn't take any comfort in her. It was like she had a sign on her that said: Keep off; don't touch me. And when I wanted to hug her, she didn't put her arms back around me. And then she delivered this really cutting remark about it being my fault the airline reservations got screwed up, and I went crazy. Just ballistic."

55 Janet is softly weeping as she speaks. "I was so disappointed because I needed her so much then. I just felt that moms never do anything right. No matter what I do, where I go, I'm supposed to be this wonderful, loving person who never makes mistakes. That's a really high pedestal to be put on. Nobody can exist up there. I was angry, upset, grieving for my dad. And I just cracked. And after all this, Michelle tells  
60 me she wants me to make plane reservations for her to come home for Christmas. Well, I didn't want to see her. I hated her at that moment. I couldn't stand to look at her. What kind of relationship do we have if, at a time like this, we hurt each other so much? I'm too old to play this game. We have these continual, perpetual misunderstandings. Whatever is making us crazy with each other has to stop."

65 Can a fifty-one-year-old mother and her thirty-year-old daughter put down their verbal weapons and make the peace they both desperately want? On this sunny afternoon, they've agreed to unpack their emotional baggage and examine it. Michelle rifles among her old stuff and digs out the recurring nightmare of her childhood. Sobbing almost uncontrollably at the memory, she tells her mother, "It was so horri-  
70 ble, I was afraid to go to sleep at night. In the dream, I guess I'm eleven or twelve—not old enough to drive—and you and my brothers and me are driving somewhere on a big interstate. We go under a road and come up on the right—and you're not there. I don't know where you are, but you're gone. And I'm driving. I don't know how to drive and we're going to crash and I can't make us not crash. *I can't take care of us.*  
75 I'm so frightened. So scared. You're not there and I want you. I want my mother."

Janet is visibly shaken. She gathers her daughter in her arms and strokes her silky hair. "You never told me that dream. I can't imagine you'd think I was going to disappear from your life. I love you. I know you need me. I'm so sorry you felt so alone and abandoned. I can identify with that. I had the same feelings when I was  
80 a child. I was afraid of my own shadow. Somewhere along the way, I learned to fake it. To pretend in uncomfortable situations. I think that's what we do with each other. Instead of saying what's really important, we pretend everything is okay when underneath it isn't."

Michelle cuddles in her mother's arms like a child. "We have these big fights  
85 and we don't talk about it and it just lays there and we go on hurting each other instead of saying I'm sorry. Sometimes I'm so amazed I've hurt you, because I had no idea. You know it was really neat this morning when we had to shower at the same time and do our hair together. When I was a kid, I thought you were the most beautiful person I'd ever known."

90 "I think you're gorgeous," Janet says. "And very special and I'm very proud of who you are."

Michelle sighs deeply. "Well, I am my mother—and that scares me. I look like you. My body is like yours. I talk like you. My voice is the same. My face. My hair." And caught in the eternal dilemma of a daughter, she asks the unanswerable ques-  
95 tion. "And if I'm *you*, how can I be *me*?"

— Carol Saline

## Multiple-Choice Questions

**Directions** (1–10): Select the best suggested answer to each question and write its number in the space provided on the answer sheet. The questions may help you think about the ideas and information you might want to use in your essay. You may return to these questions anytime you wish.

**Passage I** (the prose poem) — Questions 1–5 refer to Passage I.

- 1 The narrator implies that Momma uses “the little room” to
  - 1 store unfulfilled dreams
  - 2 plan a richer life
  - 3 hold family meetings
  - 4 avoid kitchen work
- 2 The word “pallid” (line 4) most nearly means
  - 1 painful
  - 2 pale
  - 3 limp
  - 4 lovely
- 3 The word “sate” (line 33) most nearly means to
  - 1 explore
  - 2 define
  - 3 satisfy
  - 4 save
- 4 The narrator seems to regard her mother with feelings of admiration and
  - 1 curiosity
  - 2 sadness
  - 3 fear
  - 4 suspicion
- 5 The repetition of the words “Ah, Momma” helps to reinforce the
  - 1 sequence of events
  - 2 tone of the passage
  - 3 experience of the mother
  - 4 youthfulness of the narrator

**Passage II** (the essay) — Questions 6–10 refer to Passage II.

- 6 The relationship between Michelle and Janet could best be described as
  - 1 contradictory
  - 2 polite
  - 3 honest
  - 4 impersonal
- 7 The word “demeaning” (line 31) most nearly means
  - 1 angry
  - 2 humiliating
  - 3 outrageous
  - 4 truthful
- 8 As a daughter, Michelle tends to
  - 1 smother her mother with affection
  - 2 talk out problems as they occur
  - 3 deny her pride in her mother
  - 4 avoid her mother when she has been hurt
- 9 The closing lines suggest that Michelle wonders if
  - 1 her mother is responsible for the problems in their relationship
  - 2 her difficult childhood influenced the way she treated her mother
  - 3 she is so much like her mother that she will lose her own identity
  - 4 she really needs her mother at this stage in her life
- 10 Which literary technique does the author rely on to portray Michelle and her mother?
  - 1 direct quotation
  - 2 extended metaphor
  - 3 vivid details
  - 4 figurative language

After you have finished these questions, turn to page 2. Review **Your Task** and the **Guidelines**. Use scrap paper to plan your response. Then write your response to Part A, beginning on page 1 in your essay booklet. After you finish your response for Part A, go on to page 7 of your examination booklet and complete Part B.

## Part B

### Your Task:

Write a critical essay in which you discuss **two** works of literature you have read from the particular perspective of the statement that is provided for you in the **Critical Lens**. In your essay, provide a valid interpretation of the statement, agree **or** disagree with the statement as you have interpreted it, and support your opinion using specific references to appropriate literary elements from the two works. You may use scrap paper to plan your response. Write your essay in Part B, beginning on page 9 of your essay booklet.

### Critical Lens:

“Good literature substitutes for an experience which we have not ourselves lived through.”

— Alexander Solzhenitsyn (adapted)

### Guidelines:

#### Be sure to

- Provide a valid interpretation of the critical lens that clearly establishes the criteria for analysis
- Indicate whether you agree **or** disagree with the statement as you have interpreted it
- Choose **two** works you have read that you believe best support your opinion
- Use the criteria suggested by the critical lens to analyze the works you have chosen
- Avoid plot summary. Instead, use specific references to appropriate literary elements (for example: theme, characterization, setting, point of view) to develop your analysis
- Organize your ideas in a unified and coherent manner
- Specify the titles and authors of the literature you choose
- Follow the conventions of standard written English

**COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION IN ENGLISH  
SESSION TWO**

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**ANSWER SHEET**

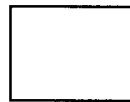
Student ..... Sex:  Male  Female

School ..... Grade ..... Teacher .....

**Write your answers for the multiple-choice questions for Part A on this answer sheet.**

**Part A**

- |         |          |
|---------|----------|
| 1 _____ | 6 _____  |
| 2 _____ | 7 _____  |
| 3 _____ | 8 _____  |
| 4 _____ | 9 _____  |
| 5 _____ | 10 _____ |



**HAND IN THIS ANSWER SHEET WITH YOUR ESSAY BOOKLET,  
SCRAP PAPER, AND EXAMINATION BOOKLET.**

**Your essay responses for Part A and Part B should be written in the essay booklet.**

I do hereby affirm, at the close of this examination, that I had no unlawful knowledge of the questions or answers prior to the examination and that I have neither given nor received assistance in answering any of the questions during the examination.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

Tear Here

Tear Here