

Question 1

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

Directions: The following prompt is based on the accompanying six sources.

This question requires you to synthesize a variety of sources into a coherent, well-written essay. When you synthesize sources you refer to them to develop your position and cite them accurately. *Your argument should be central; the sources should support this argument. Avoid merely summarizing the sources.*

Remember to attribute both direct and indirect citations.

Introduction

Some nations have a defined national school curriculum, while others, such as the United States, do not. As a result, students in high school English classes in the United States can read texts that vary widely from school to school, while students in other countries may all read the same books in high school.

Assignment

Read the following sources (including the introductory information) carefully. **Then write an essay that develops a position on whether or not there should be specific texts that all students of high school English must read. Synthesize at least three of the sources for support.**

You may refer to the sources by their titles (Source A, Source B, etc.) or by the descriptions in the parentheses.

- Source A (Landow)
- Source B (Table)
- Source C (Greer)
- Source D (Book cover)
- Source E (Pirofski)
- Source F (Fowler)

Source A
Landow, George P. "The Literary Canon." The Victorian Web. 3 Sept. 2004
<<http://www.victorianweb.org/victorian/canon/litcanon.html>>.

The following excerpt is from an online reference source.

The American Heritage Dictionary has eleven separate definitions of the term **canon**, the most relevant of which is "an authoritative list, as of the works of an author" and "a basis for judgment; standard; criterion." . . . To enter the canon, or more properly, to be entered into the canon is to gain certain obvious privileges. The gatekeepers of the fortress of high culture include influential critics, museum directors and their boards of trustees, and far more lowly scholars and teachers. Indeed, a chief enforcer of the canon appears in middlebrow anthologies, those hangers on of high culture that in the Victorian period took the form of pop anthologies like **Golden Treasury** and today that of major college anthologies in America. To appear in the Norton or Oxford anthology is to have achieved, not exactly greatness but what is more important, certainly—status and accessibility to a reading public. And that is why, of course, it matters that so few women writers have managed to gain entrance to such anthologies.



Source B
 Table adapted from a 1992 publication of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE).

The following table is based on data gathered from schools in the United States.

Table 1
Most Frequently Required Titles, Grades 9–12
Title and Percent of Schools

Public (non-tuition-charging) Schools		Independent (tuition-charging) Schools	
Romeo and Juliet	84%	Macbeth	74%
Macbeth	81	Romeo and Juliet	66
Huckleberry Finn	70	Huckleberry Finn	56
Julius Caesar	70	Scarlet Letter	52
To Kill a Mockingbird	69	Hamlet	51
Scarlet Letter	62	Great Gatsby	49
Of Mice and Men	56	To Kill a Mockingbird	47*
Hamlet	55	Julius Caesar	42*
Great Gatsby	54	Odyssey	39
Lord of the Flies	54	Lord of the Flies	34

*Percentage significantly different from public school sample, $p < .05$.



Source C

Greer, Michael. "New NCTE Book Stirs Debate on Poetry Canon." The Council Chronicle Feb. 1996.

The following excerpt is taken from an academic journal.

Clayton Eshleman, who edits the poetry journal *Sulfur* and teaches English at Eastern Michigan University, agrees with . . . criticism of the major anthologies, arguing that . . . "teachers have to make their own decisions" about what to include in an introductory poetry course, and that they "can't trust anthologies" to answer students' questions about the nature and significance of poetry.

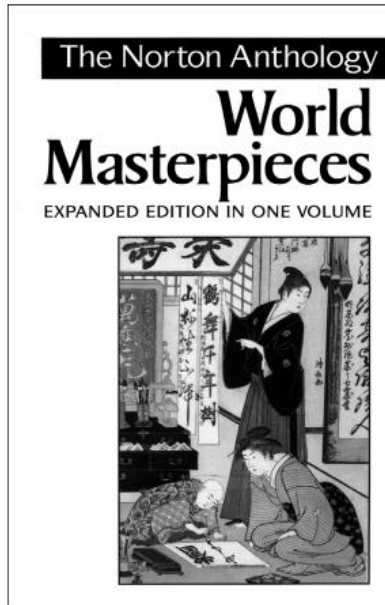
Eshleman's strategy is to teach anthologies alongside other poems—sometimes by the same poets—that the editor(s) chose not to include. In one instance, he provided his class with portions of Whitman's "Song of Myself" that had been edited out of a particular anthology. Because the passages in question (which Eshleman had to photocopy and provide to the class in handout form) were highly charged with homoerotic energy and sexual imagery, the discussion shifted to the question of what subject matter was "appropriate" in poetry and why a particular editor might have chosen a small selection as "representative" of Whitman's work.

FREE-RESPONSE QUESTIONS (Form B)

Source D

Mack, Maynard, ed. The Norton Anthology: World Masterpieces. New York: Norton, 1999.

The following is the cover of a widely used literature textbook.



Teiri Kiyomasa, Shigezaki Executing Calligraphy, Philadelphia Museum of Art: Gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., 1946

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Source E

Pirofski, Kira Isak. "Multicultural Literature and the Children's Literary Canon." 23 Oct. 2006
<<http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/papers/literature.html>>.

The following is taken from an online article about using multicultural literature in the classroom.

This paper presents a historical overview of research and reading programs which have found that multicultural literature is a valuable learning tool as well as research which documents the longstanding lack of multicultural literature in the children's literature. Reasons for the exclusion of culturally authentic reading materials in the canon are discussed as well.

Pioneer researcher, Florez-Tighe (1983), was one of the first educators to advocate the use of multicultural literature in school curriculum. Her research indicated that culturally authentic children's literature enhances language development and thought processes of African-American children (Florez-Tighe, 1983). Florez-Tighe (1983) believes that use of African-American folktales by teachers in the classroom can teach respect for African-American culture and affirm a child's feeling of self worth (Florez-Tighe, 1983).

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Source F

Fowler, Robert M. "The Fate of the Notion of the Canon in the Electronic Age." *Forum* 9 (1993).

The following is the introduction to a discussion about how reading changes when it occurs online.

What happens when text moves from page to screen? First, the digital text becomes unfixed and interactive. The reader can change it, become writer. The center of Western culture since the Renaissance—really since the great Alexandrian editors of Homer—the fixed, authoritative, canonical text, simply explodes into the ether. (Lanham, *The Electronic Word*, 31)

In the world of electronic writing, there will be no texts that everyone must read. There will only be texts that more or fewer readers choose to examine in more or less detail. The idea of the great, inescapable book belongs to the age of print that is now passing. (Bolter, *Writing Space*, 240)

The idea of a relatively stable [literary] canon made sense in a culture dominated by printed books. The canon was also appropriate to a centralized educational system, in which everyone studied the same subjects and the same texts in order to be introduced into the standards of cultural life. But the notion of a standard has now collapsed, and the collapse is mirrored in the shift from the printed to the electronic writing space, in which a stable canon of works and authors is meaningless. (Bolter, *Writing Space*, 237)

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