

2006 AP[®] ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION
FREE-RESPONSE QUESTIONS

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION

SECTION II

Total time—2 hours

Question 1

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

The passage below is an excerpt from Jennifer Price’s recent essay “The Plastic Pink Flamingo: A Natural History.” The essay examines the popularity of the plastic pink flamingo in the 1950s. Read the passage carefully. Then write an essay in which you analyze how Price crafts the text to reveal her view of United States culture.

Line When the pink flamingo splashed into the fifties
market, it staked two major claims to boldness. First,
it was a *flamingo*. Since the 1930s, vacationing
5 Americans had been flocking to Florida and returning
home with flamingo souvenirs. In the 1910s and
1920s, Miami Beach’s first grand hotel, the Flamingo,
had made the bird synonymous with wealth and
pizzazz. . . . [Later], developers built hundreds of
10 more modest hotels to cater to an eager middle class
served by new train lines—and in South Beach,
especially, architects employed the playful Art Deco
style, replete with bright pinks and flamingo motifs.

15 This was a little ironic, since Americans had
hunted flamingos to extinction in Florida in the late
1800s, for plumes and meat. But no matter. In the
1950s, the new interstates would draw working-class
tourists down, too. Back in New Jersey, the Union
Products flamingo inscribed one’s lawn emphatically
20 with Florida’s cachet of leisure and extravagance. The
bird acquired an extra fillip of boldness, too, from the
direction of Las Vegas—the flamboyant oasis of
instant riches that the gangster Benjamin “Bugsy”
Siegel had conjured from the desert in 1946 with his
Flamingo Hotel. Anyone who has seen Las Vegas
25 knows that a flamingo stands out in a desert even
more strikingly than on a lawn. In the 1950s,
namesake Flamingo motels, restaurants, and lounges
cropped up across the country like a line of semiotic
sprouts.

30 And the flamingo was *pink*—a second and
commensurate claim to boldness. The plastics
industries of the fifties favored flashy colors, which

Tom Wolfe called “the new electrochemical pastels of
the Florida littoral: tangerine, broiling magenta, livid
35 pink, incarnadine, fuchsia demure, Congo ruby,
methyl green.” The hues were forward-looking rather
than old-fashioned, just right for a generation, raised
in the Depression, that was ready to celebrate its new
affluence. And as Karal Ann Marling has written, the
40 “sassy pinks” were “the hottest color of the decade.”
Washing machines, cars, and kitchen counters
proliferated in passion pink, sunset pink, and
Bermuda pink. In 1956, right after he signed his first
recording contract, Elvis Presley bought a pink
45 Cadillac.

Why, after all, call the birds “pink flamingos”—as
if they could be blue or green? The plastic flamingo is
a hotter pink than a real flamingo, and even a real
flamingo is brighter than anything else around it.
50 There are five species, all of which feed in flocks on
algae and invertebrates in saline and alkaline lakes in
mostly warm habitats around the world. The people
who have lived near these places have always singled
out the flamingo as special. Early Christians
55 associated it with the red phoenix. In ancient Egypt, it
symbolized the sun god Ra. In Mexico and the
Caribbean, it remains a major motif in art, dance, and
literature. No wonder that the subtropical species
stood out so loudly when Americans in temperate
60 New England reproduced it, brightened it, and sent it
wading across an inland sea of grass.

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