

## Question Two

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

In the following excerpt from Joseph Heller’s war satire *Catch-22*, a superior officer is plagued by the outrageous, authority-defying exploits of a singularly zany bomber pilot named Yossarian. Read the passage carefully. Then, in a well-organized essay, analyze how the author uses language to convey Yossarian’s effect upon Colonel Cathcart.

Colonel Cathcart was not thinking anything at all about the chaplain, but was tangled up in a brand-new, menacing problem of his own: *Yossarian!*

(5) *Yossarian!* The mere sound of that execrable, ugly name made his blood run cold and his breath come in labored gasps. The chaplain’s first mention of the name *Yossarian!* had tolled deep in his memory like a portentous gong. As soon as the latch of the door had clicked shut, the whole humiliating recollection of the naked man in formation came cascading down upon him in a mortifying, choking flood of stinging details. He began to perspire and tremble. There was a sinister and unlikely coincidence exposed that was too diabolical in implication to be anything less than the most hideous of omens. The name of the man who had stood naked in ranks that day to receive his Distinguished Flying Cross from (10) General Dreedle had also been—*Yossarian!* And now it was a man named Yossarian who was threatening to make trouble over the sixty missions he had just ordered the men in his group to fly. Colonel Cathcart wondered gloomily if it was the same Yossarian.

He climbed to his feet with an air of intolerable woe and began moving about his office. He felt himself in the presence of the mysterious. The naked man in formation, he conceded cheerlessly, had (15) been a real black eye for him. So had the tampering with the bomb line before the mission to Bologna and the seven-day delay in destroying the bridge at Ferrara, even though destroying the bridge at Ferrara, finally he remembered with glee, had been a real feather in his cap, although losing a plane there the second time around, he recalled in dejection, had been another black eye, even though he had won another real feather in his cap by getting his medal approved for the bombardier who had gotten him the (20) real black eye in the first place by going around over the target twice. That bombardier’s name, he remembered suddenly with another stupefying shock, had also been *Yossarian!* Now there were *three!* His viscous eyes bulged with astonishment and he whipped himself around in alarm to see what was taking place behind him. A moment ago there had been no Yossarians in his life; now they were multiplying like hobgoblins. He tried to make himself grow calm. Yossarian was not a common name; (25) perhaps there were not really three Yossarians but only two Yossarians, or maybe even only one Yossarian—but *that really made no difference!* The colonel was still in grave peril. Intuition warned him that he was drawing close to some immense and inscrutable cosmic climax, and his broad, meaty, towering frame tingled from head to toe at the thought that Yossarian, whoever he would eventually turn out to be, was destined to serve as his nemesis...

Reprinted with the permission of Simon & Schuster, Inc., from *CATCH-22* by Joseph Heller. Copyright © 1989. All rights reserved.

**Précis and Explication of Free-Response Question Two: From Joseph Heller's *Catch-22***

As anyone who has read Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* knows, the novel provides ample opportunity to examine satire, and this passage exemplifies one of them in Colonel Cathcart's alternately perplexed, perturbed and paranoid response to the unorthodox behavior of the zany bomber pilot known as Yossarian. The language used by Heller in describing the impact of Yossarian upon Colonel Cathcart reveals just how disturbing non-conformist actions can be for someone who has been a career conformist.

The impression made by Yossarian upon the Colonel is so provocative that when he thinks of him, his name requires both italicization and an exclamation point, and he is immediately designated as a "menacing problem" (line 2). In fact, the thought of Yossarian has an adverse physical effect upon the colonel since "The mere sound of that execrable, ugly name made his blood run cold and his breath come in labored gasps" (lines 3-4). Alluding to the first time Colonel Cathcart heard Yossarian's unusual name, the speaker recalls how it "told deep in his memory like a portentous gong" (lines 4-5). This simile, which first establishes the stolid nature of the Colonel, is further enhanced by the adjective "portentous" which attaches a sinister and ominous resonance to the bomber pilot's name. Making the connection between this appellation and that of a man who had brazenly appeared naked during a troop inspection shatters Cathcart's composure as the disturbing recollection comes "cascading down upon him in a mortifying, choking flood of stinging details" (lines 6-7). Here the diction ("cascading;" "flood") describes via an implied metaphor the overwhelming nature of this unpleasant memory for the Colonel. Again the mention of the name Yossarian triggers a visceral reaction in the Colonel who begins to "perspire and tremble" (line 7). However, Heller's satire of the Colonel's dim-wittedness cuts particularly sharp with his inability firmly to deduce that this Yossarian "who was threatening to make trouble over the sixty missions he had just ordered the men in his group to fly" (lines 10-11) is the same Yossarian who earlier had "stood naked in ranks that day to receive his Distinguished Flying Cross from General Dreedle..." (lines 9-10).

Heller's diction—words and phrases such as "gloomily" (line 12), "intolerable woe" (line 13) and "cheerlessly" (line 14)—augment the sense of dejection that Yossarian's name has caused in the Colonel, though the Colonel seems torn between being depressed by Yossarian's insubordinate antics (which have been a source of humiliation for him) and being ironically grateful to him for his military actions (which have brought him credit). In the long sentence that spans lines 15-20, Colonel Catchcart is seen recounting Yossarian's insubordinate and heroic actions and using antithetical phrases such as "a real black eye" and "a real feather in his cap" to convey the human contradiction that is Yossarian. In recalling the destruction of the bridge at Ferrara, he undergoes yet another epiphany:

That bombardier's name, he remembered suddenly with another stupefying shock, had also been *Yossarian*! Now there were *three*! His viscous eyes bulged with astonishment and he whipped himself around in alarm to see what was taking place behind him. A moment ago there had been no Yossarians in his life; now they were multiplying like hobgoblins. (lines 20-24).

Heller's satire of Colonel Cathcart is relentless and unmerciful, painting him as an officer who literally cannot add  $1 + 1 + 1$  and arrive at, in this case, a very logical 1. Instead, he sees Yossarians "multiplying like hobgoblins," bogeymen bent on furthering his dread and apprehension.

So potent is the psychological impact of Yossarian upon Colonel Cathcart that even attempts to reassure himself—"Yossarian was not a common name; perhaps there were not really three Yossarians

but only two Yossarians, or maybe even only one Yossarian” (lines 24-26)—prove futile, and he perceives himself to be in “grave peril” (line 26), to be “drawing close to some immense and inscrutable cosmic climax...” (line 27). The diction here is intentionally hyperbolic, further magnifying the discomfiting sensation caused even by Yossarian’s name. The passage’s concluding sentence is rife with irony in that Colonel Cathcart, who is described as having a “broad, meaty, towering frame” (lines 27-28), is reduced to a nervous wreck, whose body “tingle[s] from head to toe” (line 28) at the mere mention of a man’s name, a man whom he foresees is “destined to serve as his nemesis....” (line 29).

**Scoring Guide for Free-Response Question Two: From Joseph Heller's *Catch-22***

- 8-9 Well-conceived, well-developed, and well-organized, these papers are marked by frequent and accurate references to the text, by an admirable ability to synthesize thought, and by a mature control over the elements of composition. Though not perfect, they clearly indicate the students' ability to discuss the traumatic effect the mere name of Yossarian has upon Colonel Cathcart and to show how the author's language conveys this effect.
- 6-7 These essays exhibit a solid understanding of the traumatic effect the mere name of Yossarian has upon Colonel Cathcart, but are less adept at responding to the question. This may be due to inconsistencies in textual understanding or to less proficiency at recognizing how Heller's language conveys Yossarian's impact upon the Colonel. Though these essays reflect their writers' abilities to convey their points clearly, they feature less fluency, less development and less cogency than 8-9 papers.
- 5 These papers respond to the question on Yossarian's impact upon the Colonel and how Heller's language conveys this in superficial, formulaic, inconsistent, or insufficiently supported ways. They may rely primarily on paraphrase, but may still convey an implicit understanding of the passage and the task. The papers are generally written in a satisfactory manner, with occasional errors in composition or mechanics that do not impede the reader's understanding. Nevertheless, these essays lack the organization, persuasiveness and development of upper-half papers.
- 3-4 These lower-half essays generally suggest an incomplete or overly simplistic understanding of the passage or of the task, an inability to demonstrate Yossarian's impact upon Colonel Cathcart, or an inability to articulate how Heller's language conveys it. Their arguments are often characterized by a misreading of the text, a failure to provide adequate support, or insufficient control over the elements of composition. In some instances they may consist entirely of paraphrase and/or feature acute problems in organization, clarity, fluency or development.
- 1-2 These essays compound the shortcomings of 3-4 papers. They often contain many serious and distracting errors in grammar or mechanics that preclude any successful response to the prompt. Though these essays may attempt to show Yossarian's impact upon Colonel Cathcart or say something about Heller's language, they are severely limited by deficiencies in organization, clarity, fluency or development.
- 0 Papers scored a zero make no more than a passing reference to the task.
- Papers given this score offer a blank or totally off-topic response.