

2010 AP[®] ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND COMPOSITION FREE-RESPONSE QUESTIONS

Question 2

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

Benjamin Banneker, the son of former slaves, was a farmer, astronomer, mathematician, surveyor, and author. In 1791 he wrote to Thomas Jefferson, framer of the Declaration of Independence and secretary of state to President George Washington. Read the following excerpt from the letter and write an essay that analyzes how Banneker uses rhetorical strategies to argue against slavery.

Line Sir, suffer¹ me to recall to your mind that time in
5 which the arms and tyranny of the British Crown were
exerted with every powerful effort in order to reduce
you to a State of Servitude, look back I entreat you on
the variety of dangers to which you were exposed;
reflect on that time in which every human aid
appeared unavailable, and in which even hope and
fortitude wore the aspect of inability to the conflict
and you cannot but be led to a serious and grateful
10 sense of your miraculous and providential
preservation; you cannot but acknowledge that the
present freedom and tranquility which you enjoy you
have mercifully received and that it is the peculiar
blessing of Heaven.

15 This sir, was a time in which you clearly saw into
the injustice of a state of slavery and in which you had
just apprehensions of the horrors of its condition, it
was now, sir, that your abhorrence thereof was so
excited, that you publickly held forth this true and
20 valuable doctrine, which is worthy to be recorded and
remembered in all succeeding ages. “We hold these
truths to be self-evident, that all men are created
equal, and that they are endowed by their creator with
certain unalienable rights, that among these are life,
25 liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”

Here, sir, was a time in which your tender feelings
for yourselves had engaged you thus to declare, you
were then impressed with proper ideas of the great

30 valuation of liberty and the free possession of those
blessings to which you were entitled by nature; but,
sir, how pitiable is it to reflect that although you were
so fully convinced of the benevolence of the Father of
mankind and of his equal and impartial distribution of
35 those rights and privileges which he had conferred
upon them, that you should at the same time
counteract his mercies in detaining by fraud and
violence so numerous a part of my brethren under
groaning captivity and cruel oppression, that you
40 should at the same time be found guilty of that most
criminal act which you professedly detested in others
with respect to yourselves.

Sir, I suppose that your knowledge of the situation
of my brethren is too extensive to need a recital here;
neither shall I presume to prescribe methods by
45 which they may be relieved, otherwise than by
recommending to you and all others to wean
yourselves from those narrow prejudices which you
have imbibed with respect to them and as Job²
proposed to his friends, “put your souls in their souls
50 stead,” thus shall your hearts be enlarged with
kindness and benevolence towards them, and thus
shall you need neither the direction of myself or
others, in what manner to proceed herein.

² In the Bible, Job is a righteous man who endures much suffering.

¹ allow