

Question 2

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

The following excerpt is from C. E. Morgan’s novel *All the Living*, published in 2009. This passage describes a young girl’s experience moving away from her extended family in rural Appalachia. Read the passage carefully. Then, in a well-written essay analyze how Morgan uses literary elements and techniques to convey Aloma’s complex responses to her changing environment.

In your response you should do the following:

- Respond to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible interpretation.
- Select and use evidence to support your line of reasoning.
- Explain how the evidence supports your line of reasoning.
- Use appropriate grammar and punctuation in communicating your argument.

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Line She was sent to the mission school the month
before she turned a thankless twelve, not because her
aunt and uncle couldn't handle her anymore, but
5 because there were nine in the house now—the
adults, their five children, one foster child, and
Aloma. Her aunt and uncle had always been fine to
her, they possessed a kind of hollow-headed decency
that couldn't be disparaged. When they told her of the
school, they were gentle as doctors, and their voices
10 said, This won't hurt a bit, and in fact, it had not
really, at least not that Aloma could recall. Only that
first night she found that her eyes stung and to make
them stop she turned facedown into her pillow and let
them tear with her mouth open ragged against the
15 cotton ticking, but in the morning her eyes were better
and she did not cry again, at least not over that.

It was not that her aunt and uncle hadn't cared for
her—they had never made her feel guilty for their
taking her in when they had no money—but they'd
20 cared in a middling, impersonal way that instinctively
reserved their best for their own. During her first year
at the school, they made their small familial efforts,
they phoned her once a month on Sunday afternoons
and sent little cartooned magazines from their church
25 about crossing a wide river in a phalanx of other
refugees or about Ruth and her numerous losses. Until
she began to play piano, Aloma read these again and
again, carefully, stacked them in neat piles under her
steel-framed bed. She wondered what it meant to
30 uncover a man's feet, to sleep in his bed, to travel to a
far country, to see enemies drowned. She wondered
what kind of luck was required to be someone other
than the person you were born to be.

The school carried her into a deeper cleavage of the
35 mountains than the one she had known at her uncle's
trailer, which jagged out like an aluminum finger
from a limestone wall topped by firs, bone out of
bone. There the night carried on and on until ten in
the morning, then the tip of the finger finally burned
40 with its first sun. When she arrived at the school,
Aloma shared a small concrete room with two other
girls and here too the mountain walls staggered and

threatened up over them all. The sun did not appear in
the wound of the holler* until long past eleven where
45 it remained until Spar Mountain, like a curtain of
earth, cut the light before it could naturally sputter
out. It was a chasmed world without the twin
ceremonies of morning and evening.

Aloma lived in this dark place, a dark county in a
dark state, and it pressed on her ceaselessly as a girl
until she finally realized in a moment of prescience
50 that someday adulthood would come with its great
shuddering release and she would be free. Then she
would leave and find a riseless place where nothing
impeded the progress of the sun from the moment it
55 rose in the east until it died out easily, dismissed into
the west. That was what she wanted. That more than
family, that more than friendship, that more than love.
Just the kind of day that couldn't be recalled into
60 premature darkness by the land.

The only thing she remembered fondly from her
years at her uncle's trailer was a piano, old with a
tiger-eye top, its weight causing the linoleum floor to
sag. Her aunt played on Sundays after church and the
65 children were made to sit, the restless grappling mass
of them, and sing along. But the churchy songs soon
bored Aloma, hymns were not enough, they contained
the sound in a too-small box of predictable chords.
She wanted to see her aunt's fingers spider up and
70 down the length of the keyboard, from the woody
lows to the tiny baby sounds of the upper register. She
always wanted more than she was given and secretly
wished her aunt's hands would slip and press two
neighbor keys at once. It was always dissonance that
75 she liked best.

*holler: hollow; a small valley

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