**The Century Quilt Poem** by Marilyn Nelson Waniek

Directions: Read the following poem and complete a SOAPS Tone Chart.

2010 AP® ENGLISH LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION FREE-RESPONSE QUESTIONS

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ENGLISH LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION

SECTION II

Total time—2 hours

Question 1

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

Read carefully the following poem by Marilyn Nelson Waniek. Then write an essay analyzing how Waniek employs

literary techniques to develop the complex meanings that the speaker attributes to The Century Quilt. You may wish

to consider such elements as structure, imagery, and tone.

The Century Quilt

for Sarah Mary Taylor, Quilter

My sister and I were in love

with Meema’s Indian blanket.

We fell asleep under army green

issued to Daddy by Supply.

5 When Meema came to live with us

she brought her medicines, her cane,

and the blanket I found on my sister’s bed

the last time I visited her.

I remembered how I’d planned to inherit

10 that blanket, how we used to wrap ourselves

at play in its folds and be chieftains

and princesses.

Now I’ve found a quilt1

I’d like to die under;

15 Six Van Dyke brown squares,

two white ones, and one square

the yellowbrown of Mama’s cheeks.

Each square holds a sweet gum leaf

whose fingers I imagine

20 would caress me into the silence.

I think I’d have good dreams

for a hundred years under this quilt,

as Meema must have, under her blanket,

dreamed she was a girl again in Kentucky

25 among her yellow sisters,

their grandfather’s white family

nodding at them when they met.

When their father came home from his store

they cranked up the pianola

30 and all of the beautiful sisters

giggled and danced.

She must have dreamed about Mama

when the dancing was over:

a lanky girl trailing after her father

35 through his Oklahoma field.

Perhaps under this quilt

I’d dream of myself,

of my childhood of miracles,

of my father’s burnt umber2 pride,

my mother’s ochre3 40 gentleness.

Within the dream of myself

perhaps I’d meet my son

or my other child, as yet unconceived.

I’d call it The Century Quilt,

45 after its pattern of leaves.

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from Mama’s Promises by Marilyn Nelson Waniek.

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Footnotes:

1 A quilt is a type of bedcovering often made by stitching together varied pieces of fabric.

2 Burnt umber is a shade of brown.

3 Ochre refers to a shade of yellow.