

2016 Question 3—OPEN QUESTION
STUDENT ACTIVITY

PROMPT—The Open Question/Question 3: Many works of literature contain a character who intentionally deceives others. The character’s dishonesty may be intended either to help or to hurt. Such a character, for example, may choose to mislead others for personal safety, to spare someone’s feelings, or to carry out a crime. Choose a novel or play in which a character deceives others. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze the motives for that character’s deception and discuss how the deception contributes to the meaning of the work as a whole.

What do you have to do to fully address this prompt? Identify the individual tasks of the prompt, that is, what you have to know and to write about to address this question. Here are some ideas. What else?

- The understanding of “deception” and “dishonesty” and ways in which such behaviors are recognized in both real life and fiction
- Possible motives for deception and dishonesty
- A thorough recall of characters, setting, plot events, and theme of a novel or play
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Here are some dictionary definitions:

Deception: *an act that willfully or knowingly misleads or falsely persuades others* (merriam-wester.com)

Dishonesty: *a disposition to lie, cheat, or steal; fraud* (merriam-wester.com)

What are some examples from imaginative literature, movies and TV, or current events that illustrate these definitions of Deception and Dishonesty?

For each example, consider these questions as they apply:

- Which character deceives others?
- What form does the deception take? What is the context for the action?
- How does the author present the act of deception? Does the author remain neutral or does he/she seem to offer judgment of the action?
- What are the character’s motivations for the deceptive action? Are these motivations understandable?
- What other personality traits of the chosen character might make the deception surprising? Ironic? Expected?
- What are the consequences for the chosen character, once he/she commits the deception?



- What are the consequences for other characters?
- How might the deception perpetrated by the chosen character reveal the author’s main idea or theme?

In a small group, complete this next activity with a work you have studied in class – a work you all know well. Be prepared to share your ideas with your classmates.

Choose a novel or play that includes an act or acts of deception that are important to the theme of the work. Title and author of work: _____ Briefly describe the act(s) of deception: How does the deception depicted in this literary work relate to one of the themes in the work?		
Who is the character who deceives others? What is the actual deception?	What are the motivations behind these intentional deceptive acts?	Who is affected by the deception? What are the ultimate consequences for everyone?
Choose a novel or play that includes an act or acts of deception that are important to the theme of the work. Title and author of work: _____ Briefly describe the act(s) of deception: How does the deception depicted in this literary work relate to one of the themes in the work?		
Who is the character who deceives others? What is the actual deception?	What are the motivations behind these intentional deceptive acts?	Who is affected by the deception? What are the ultimate consequences for everyone?

Introductory Paragraphs— High-scoring essays for the Open Question (Question 3) generally have introductions of just one to three well-developed sentences. Lengthy introductions are ineffective for this essay. Regardless of how long the introduction is, however, it must **answer** the questions of the prompt, not merely restate the prompt. Examine the following introductions from two high-scoring essays and identify what the student writer has done well in the introduction. Notice that these introductory paragraphs not only identify a deceptive action but also imply a thematic idea revealed through that deception.



from *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne

In Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* Dimmesdale’s dishonesty towards his religious followers and his town is primarily utilized to develop the themes of the work. Dimmesdale’s deception of his religious followers is used by Hawthorne in order to reinforce his attitude towards religion and its contradictions as well as his motif of sin and redemption.

from *Othello* by William Shakespeare

In William Shakespeare’s play *Othello*, the character Iago deceives Othello into believing that his wife has betrayed him by having sex with another man. Through this deception Shakespeare is able to reveal that mankind is driven with a powerful desire for revenge and that man has a dangerous tendency to believe the worst about those closest to him.

Now write an introductory paragraph for the two works you identified and discussed in the previous activity. Remember, introductory paragraphs should answer—not just repeat—the questions of the prompt.

Introductory Paragraph #1 Title of work:	Introductory Paragraph #2 Title of work:

Body Paragraphs—Body paragraphs of the essay must contain more than mere plot summary. A good rule to remember is always to include a reference to the abstract idea and the meaning of the work as a whole after describing or retelling each specific detail of the plot. **So as you build a body paragraph around one detail of the work, you must make sure to draw a strong connection to the abstract idea within the same paragraph.**



Collaborate with your group members to write 3-5 sentences describing two events or incidents in each novel and then connect them to the abstract idea of deception. These sentences could become one body paragraph in an essay.

Novel or Play #1	Novel or Play #2

Student Samples—Plot summary and description of events in the book make up the evidence. Analysis or commentary ties the plot details to the abstract idea(s) and the theme of the work. Underline words/phrases of evidence and place brackets around [words/phrases of **analysis**.]

from *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne

Dimmesdale's role as a prominent religious leader in his Puritan society is significant when analyzing the aftermath of his affair with Hester Prynne. Although Hester is punished for her crime in the form of social humiliation and alienation, Dimmesdale never reveals himself to be her accomplice in their sin of adultery. Dimmesdale's motive for his dishonesty stems from his unrealistic expectations as a religious role model. He becomes worried that no one will trust him to purify their soul since his isn't perfect. In addition Dimmesdale's hubris clouds his judgment as his honesty will ruin his spotless reputation. Therefore, instead of revealing his ignominy to his town, Dimmesdale seems to redeem himself by performing good works for others. However, Dimmesdale finds his mind and body deteriorating as he becomes guilt ridden. In other words, the longer Dimmesdale keeps a secret from society, the worse his internal torment gets. This notion is persistently developed as Dimmesdale continues to disappoint Pearl, his daughter that he won't claim, and allow Hester to socially bear both his and her punishment for their sins. Additionally his extreme feelings of guilt and dishonor do not fade even when he plans to escape his town with Hester and Pearl. Dimmesdale's failure to redeem himself is



evident when he eventually dies on account of his overwhelming spiritual and physical destruction.

from *Othello* by William Shakespeare

Iago decides to plot and deceive his general after believing he was slighted by Othello for having not received a promotion. Iago's motivation is revenge, a powerful emotion that he understands fully. He appreciates the influence of revenge which is why his deception revolves around Othello feeling that his wife has wronged him and thus that he must extract some punishment from her. Othello plays directly into this trick, and thus with the same motive of revenge as Iago, kills his wife. In having both characters act cruelly out of a desire for revenge, Shakespeare is able to expose the oppressive power of revenge as it can come to dominate an individual's life and lead him to commit horrible crimes against those people they love most. Additionally, by having Iago's reason for causing the death of Desdemona, suicide of Othello, and murder of Iago's own wife be something as petty as a promotion, Shakespeare reveals that revenge can spring from seemingly insignificant events yet have devastating results on others. Othello falling for this revenge laden deception also demonstrates the blinding impact of revenge, as the desire to avenge oneself often becomes so overwhelming that they can become blind to the truth, reason, or love. Just as Othello was.

What does an upper-half essay look like?

*insight and
understanding*

Deception is a major focal theme of Ralph Ellison's novel *The Invisible Man*. The novel traces the journey of a nameless narrator as he overcomes a blindness to the deceptive reality of his world and is able to finally clearly see the true motives of those who are around him. The theme of deception in the novel serves as an obstacle the narrator faces before he is able to complete his journey of seeking clarity and self-discovery.

Throughout the novel the narrator is betrayed by many of the characters whom he looked up to and trusted. The first betrayal was that of his college professor Dr. Bledsoe. A firm believer of education and peaceful social reform, the narrator admired Dr. Bledsoe and his contributions to colored college education in the south. When he discovers that Dr. Bledsoe's sub motive as president of the university is to gain power and the lengths that he would go to retain it, the narrator is disgusted. Not only does he realize that he had wrongly been led to believe that Dr. Bledsoe truly cared about colored education, he also realized his own vulnerability to deception. It is here that he also acknowledges that he would need to find a new community and new effort for him to continue fighting for his beliefs, thus starting the narrator's journey to find himself and the place where he belonged.

When Brother Jack approaches the narrator after a riot in Harlem a short couple of days after the narrator had traveled to the North, the



narrator was reasonably dubious. But driven by a need for financial independence and an outlet to serve a purpose to the community, the narrator becomes convinced that the Brotherhood was where he belonged. He admires and aspires to be like his mentors and earnestly looks forward to the day where he can create change in the African American community with his own speeches. This notion, however, is quickly realized to be too good to be true. Whereas Brother Jack originally brought the narrator in under the pretense of a speaking, the reality was that his sole purpose was to relay the brotherhood's scripted ideas to manipulate the community for their personal motives. The narrator was prohibited from creating speeches that could have a potentially dangerous effect. Instead he could only communicate with the audiences under the brotherhood's close watch and scrutiny. He realizes that he was only one chess piece played by the Brotherhood who was absorbed in a game of their own, one that he didn't wish to be a part of. The game had major consequences and with regret he realizes them as a result of mistakes of his own.

Towards the end of the novel, the narrator, hoping to find an escape from the chaos of reality, puts on a pair of sunglasses as a disguise. Curiously, the people of Harlem mistake the narrator as Rinehart, a legal pimp. Through the sunglasses he learns about the complex character of Reinhart and is also able to make the realization that he was used as a tool in the Brotherhood Revolution. Through this he realizes what he really wants is the common societal growth to be equal between and irrelevant to the black-and-white of skin. He is firm in his belief that he does not want to be in the control of others any longer but rather to make progress for racial equality by means of his own. Though he is deceiving others of his identity under the sunglasses, he is finally able to clearly see himself.

Though there are more betrayals and deceptions in the novel, like that of Dr. Norton or Young Emerson, that of Bledsoe and the Brotherhood, as well as that of his own serve as the marking points for the three stages of the narrator's journey to self-discovery.

