

On the 1998 AP exam, the following prompt served as the prompt for Essay #1:

Carefully read the following letter from Charles Lamb to the English romantic poet William Wordsworth. Then, paying particular attention to the tone of Lamb's letter, write an essay in which you analyze the techniques Lamb uses to decline Wordsworth's invitation.

CHARLES LAMB (1775–1834)

Extract from a letter to William Wordsworth,
The Letters of Charles Lamb to William Wordsworth, ed. T. N. Talfourd

London, January 30, 1801

I ought before this to have reply'd to your very kind invitation into Cumberland. With you and your Sister I could gang anywhere. But I am afraid whether I shall ever be able to afford so desperate a Journey. Separate from the pleasure of your company, I don't much care if I never see a mountain in my life. I have passed all my days in London, until I have formed as many and intense local attachments, as any of your *Mountaineers* can have done with dead nature. The Lighted shops of the Strand and Fleet Street, the unnumerable trades, tradesmen and customers, coaches, waggons, playhouses, all the bustle and wickedness round about Covent Garden, the very women of the Town, the Watchmen, drunken scenes, rattles;—life awake, if you awake, at all hours of the night, the impossibility of being dull in Fleet Street, the crowds, the very dirt & mud, the Sun shining upon houses and pavements, the print shops, the old *Book* stalls, parsons cheap'ning books, coffee houses, steams of soup from kitchens, the pantomimes, London itself a pantomime and a masquerade, all these things work themselves into my mind and feed me without a power of satiating me. The wonder of these sights impells me into night walks about the crowded streets, and I often shed tears in the motley Strand from fulness of joy at so much *Life*.—All these emotions must be strange to you. So are your rural emotions to me. But consider, what must I have been doing all my life, not to have lent great portions of my heart with usury to such scenes?—My attachments are all local, purely local.—I have no passion (or have had none since I was in love, and then it was the spurious engendering of poetry & books) to groves and vallies.—The rooms where I was born, the furniture which has been before my eyes all my life, a book case which has followed me about (like a faithful dog, only exceeding him in knowledge) wherever I have moved, old tables, streets, squares, when I have sunned myself, my old school,—these are my mistresses. Have I not enough, without your mountains? I do not envy you, I should pity you, did I not know, that the Mind will make friends of any thing. Your sun & moon and skies and hills & lakes affect me no more, or scarcely come to me in more venerable characters, than as a gilded room with tapestry and tapers, where I might live with handsome visible objects.