Tackling the Prose Passage Prompt (Q2)

Directions: Below you will find the Q2 prompts from the last five years of the AP Lit. exam. Read them and underline the MAIN task. Then discuss with your group what the prompts have in common.

2015: The following excerpt is from the opening of The Beet Queen, a 1986 novel by Louise Erdrich. Read the passage carefully. Then write a well-developed essay in which you analyze how Erdrich depicts the impact of the environment on the two children. You may wish to consider such literary devices as tone, imagery, selection of detail, and point of view.

2014: The following passage is from the novel The Known World by Edward P. Jones. Read the passage carefully. Then, in a well-organized essay, analyze how the author reveals the character of Moses. In your analysis, you may wish to consider such literary elements as point of view, selection of detail, and imagery.

2013: The following passage is from D. H. Lawrence’s 1915 novel, The Rainbow, which focuses on the lives of the Brangwens, a farming family who lived in rural England during the late nineteenth century. Read the passage carefully. Then write an essay in which you analyze how Lawrence employs literary devices to characterize the woman and capture her situation.

2012: Carefully read the following excerpt from the novel Under the Feet of Jesus by Helena María Viramontes. Then write a well-organized essay in which you analyze the development of Estrella’s character. In your analysis, you may wish to consider such literary elements as selection of detail, figurative language, and tone.

2011: The following passage is from the novel Middlemarch by George Eliot, the pen name of Mary Ann Evans (1819–1880). In the passage, Rosamond and Tertius Lydgate, a recently married couple, confront financial difficulties. Read the passage carefully. Then write a well-developed essay in which you analyze how Eliot portrays these two characters and their complex relationship as husband and wife. You may wish to consider such literary devices as narrative perspective and selection of detail.

Now circle any “literary devices” or “literary elements” suggested in the individual prompts. What else do you think would be considered a literary device/element worth analyzing? Make a list below:
In order to answer one of these prompts, you’ll need to do a close reading of the passage provided. We are going to practice with a passage from *Pride and Prejudice*.

**Tips for a Close Reading**

1. **WHAT:** Read the passage in its entirety focusing on its literal content. **WHAT** is actually happening here?
   - Take brief, shorthand notes in the margins.
   - Divide into sections when you see a clear shift of topics.
   - Summarize the passage in your mind.

2. **HOW:** Now begin analyzing **HOW** the author put this passage together. Mark any and all literary devices or elements you can find.
   - If the prompt suggests considering certain elements/devices/techniques, note these first!
   - Find and mark any and all others during this second read:
     - Tone
     - Narrative perspective or point of view
     - Pairs and patterns (where they exist; where they break)
     - Juxtaposition
     - Characterization
     - Diction
     - Syntax
     - Figurative Language
   - Mark connections between different elements

3. **WHY:** Finally consider the deeper meaning of the entire passage. Summarize **WHY** the author created the passage this way. Use the following questions to guide your thinking:
   - What thematic idea(s) emerge in just this passage?
   - Are these ideas complete? Or is the author beginning to explore something?
   - From this passage, what can the reader learn about the character(s)? Their situations? Their relationships?
   - What other purpose(s) does this passage seem to have?

At this point, the passage should be covered in detailed annotations. Be sure not to skip any sections, even if some are more difficult to understand! Your response should include an insightful analysis of the entire passage: beginning, middle, and end.

Looking back at the prompt and considering your what-how-why analysis, now decide the organization you will use for this essay.
   - Chronological analysis to show development through the passage (the “what” pieces)
   - Analysis by literary elements (the “how” pieces)**
   - Analysis by purposes of the passage, beginning with the most significant (the “why” pieces)

**Students tend to be most comfortable with this choice; however, you must choose your labels wisely! Too specific, you’ll miss some major analytical points. Too broad, you’ll have trouble deciding where to put your evidence because of overlap. This choice also tends to lead to the predictable 5-paragraph essay—not always the best choice.**
An invitation to dinner was soon afterwards dispatched; and already had Mrs. Bennet planned the courses that were to do credit to her housekeeping, when an answer arrived which deferred it all. Mr. Bingley was obliged to be in town the following day, and, consequently, unable to accept the honour of their invitation, etc. Mrs. Bennet was quite disconcerted. She could not imagine what business he could have in town so soon after his arrival in Hertfordshire; and she began to fear that he might be always flying about from one place to another, and never settled at Netherfield as he ought to be. Lady Lucas quieted her fears a little by starting the idea of his being gone to London only to get a large party for the ball; and a report soon followed that Mr. Bingley was to bring twelve ladies and seven gentlemen with him to the assembly. The girls grieved over such a number of ladies, but were comforted the day before the ball by hearing, that instead of twelve he brought only six with him from London—his five sisters and a cousin. And when the party entered the assembly room it consisted of only five altogether—Mr. Bingley, his two sisters, the husband of the eldest, and another young man.

Mr. Bingley was good-looking and gentlemanlike; he had a pleasant countenance, and easy, unaffected manners. His sisters were fine women, with an air of decided fashion. His brother-in-law, Mr. Hurst, merely looked the gentleman; but his friend Mr. Darcy soon drew the attention of the room by his fine, tall person, handsome features, noble mien, and the report which was in general circulation within five minutes after his entrance, of his having ten thousand a year. The gentlemen pronounced him to be a fine figure of a man, the ladies declared he was much handsomer than Mr. Bingley, and he was looked at with great admiration for about half the evening, till his manners gave a disgust which turned the tide of his popularity; for he was discovered to be proud; to be above his company, and above being pleased; and not all his large estate in Derbyshire could then save him from having a most forbidding, disagreeable countenance, and being unworthy to be compared with his friend.

Mr. Bingley had soon made himself acquainted with all the principal people in the room; he was lively and unreserved, danced every dance, was angry that the ball closed so early, and talked of giving one himself at Netherfield. Such amiable qualities must speak for themselves. What a contrast between him and his friend! Mr. Darcy danced only once with Mrs. Hurst and once with Miss Bingley, declined being introduced to any other lady, and spent the rest of the evening in walking about the room, speaking occasionally to one of his own party. His character was decided. He was the proudest, most disagreeable man in the world, and everybody hoped that he would never come there again.