**11AP**

**Diction & Syntax**

Assignment: Read the next paragraph from Ellison’s essay, then answer the following questions about its diction and syntax, using specific evidence from the text.

**From *On Bird, Bird-Watching and Jazz***

RALPH ELLISON

Mimic thrushes, which include the catbird and brown thrasher, along with the mockingbird, are not only great virtuosi, they are the tricksters and con men of the bird world. Like Parker, who is described as a confidence man and a practical joker by several of the commentators, they take off on the songs of other birds, inflating, inverting, and turning them wrong side out, and are capable of driving a prowling ("square") cat wild. Utterly irreverent and romantic, they are not beyond bugging human beings. Indeed, on summer nights in the South, when the moon hangs low, the mockingbirds sing as though determined to heat every drop of romance in the sleeping adolescent's heart to fever pitch. Their song thrills and swings the entire moonstruck night to arouse one's sense of the mystery, the promise, and the frustration of being human, alive, and hot in the blood. They are as delightful to eye as to ear, but sometimes a similarity of voice and appearance makes for a confusion with the shrikes, a species given to impaling insects and smaller songbirds on the points of thorns, and they are destroyed. They are fond of fruit, especially mulberries, and if there is a tree in your yard, there will be, along with the wonderful music, much chalky, blue-tinted evidence of their presence. Under such conditions be careful and heed Parker's warning to his friends—who sometimes were subjected to a shrike-like treatment—"you must pay your dues to Bird."

I. Diction

1. What type of words draw your attention? Do they tend to be a particular part of speech, such as verbs, nouns, adjectives, or adverbs? Is the language general and abstract or specific and concrete?

2. Is the language formal, informal, colloquial, or slang?

3. Are some words nonliteral or figurative, creating figures of speech such as metaphors?

4. Are there words with strong connotations? Words with a particular emotional punch?

II. Syntax

5. What is the general order of the parts of the sentences in the text? Is it the usual order (subject-verb-object), or is it inverted (object-subject-verb, or any other pattern that is out of the ordinary)?

6. What are the sentences like? Are they periodic (moving towards something important at the end) or cumulative (beginning with an important idea and then adding details)?

7. Are many of the sentences simple? Complex? Compound? Are the sentences on the long side, or are they short?

8. Does the writer ask questions?

9. How does the writer connect words, phrases, and clauses?