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## **Literacy Narrative**

### **Learning Outcomes:**

- Define a literacy event in which to critically analyze experience as readers and writers;
- Demonstrate ability to describe significant and detailed experiences in the writer's life;
- Analyze those experiences to make meaning about personal and collective literacy practices;
- Develop a framework for semester-long discussions of writing and reading.

### **Introduction:**

This assignment asks you to think about yourself as a writer and learner. It provides you the opportunity to reflect on and further explore your experiences with literacy (defined as writing and reading).

### **Purpose:**

The purpose of this assignment is to get you to reflect on your experiences with reading and writing. You will explore and analyze how these experiences have shaped and continue to shape your education, learning process, and writing process.

### **Genre:**

The literacy narrative genre does not simply tell a story; rather, it allows writers to think critically about and question their history and experiences with an eye toward the future. Literacy narratives examine the stories we tell ourselves, rather than recounting them; it is writing that allows for writers to question what they think they know even if they don't necessarily have answers to those questions. For this reason, literacy narratives are not thesis-driven; rather, they find focus and direction through the implementation of a controlling idea. One could think of the literacy narrative not necessarily as "proving a point" but exploring complex ideas or thoughts about oneself and the relationships one has to knowledge, progress, writing, and learning. They present and explore experiences through the lens of a specific theme or controlling idea.

### **Writing Center:**

While you can use the Writing Center during any point of the brainstorming and writing process, in past semesters, writers working on this assignment have found it useful to have sessions about:

- Ensuring experiences are reflected upon and not simply recounted
- Generating more in-depth insight into the conclusions about literacy and learning
- Brainstorming possible controlling themes for the narratives about reading and writing

### **Requirements:**

- Develop a controlling idea (focused idea/experiences);
- Create a clear organizational pattern/structure;
- Articulate experiences (through details and events);
- Critically analyze these experiences (through self reflection);
- Delivery: MLA format (double-spaced, 12-point font, 1" margins, and Times New Roman font);
- Cite according to MLA if using outside sources;

- 750-1000 words in length (3-4 pages).

**Audience:** Classmates, Professor, Writing Center, You. As we advance in our writing projects, our conceptions of audience will become more dynamic and complex.

## SPRING 2019 110 UNIT 1 LITERACY PERSONAL NARRATIVE ESSAY RUBRIC

The following rubric reflects the assignment priorities. Please refer to the assignment for further details.

	EXCEEDS EXPECTATIONS (A)	MEETS EXPECTATIONS (B)	EMERGING (C)	ATTEMPTED (D)
<b>CONTENT/PURPOSE/AUDIENCE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Selects literary experiences significant to student.</li> <li>Writer discovers and addresses complex ideas consistently through essay.</li> <li>Written to an audience of classmates and instructor (as evident in engaging intro, appropriate background and stylistic choices)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Writes about personal literary experiences, but ideas could be more specific.</li> <li>Clarified purpose, but not always revisited through details, analysis; lacks depth in complexity</li> <li>Audience awareness proficient, could be enhanced, such as with intro and/or style and/or appropriate background).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Controlling idea is underdeveloped, simplistic; ideas are emerging.</li> <li>Minimal development of ideas beyond surface narrative.</li> <li>Minimal audience awareness; POV not refined or consistent for audience (intro and style generic, background minimal)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mostly simplistic and unfocused ideas; little or no purpose or controlling idea.</li> <li>Reveals little grasp of appropriate tone or POV for given assignment and audience.</li> <li>Does minimum work to address prompt.</li> </ul>
<b>SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Depth of ideas supported by <i>specific</i> narrative experiences and concrete details</li> <li>Analysis explores complex ideas about self and literacy.</li> <li>Advanced critical reflection; shows implications of experiences beyond self.</li> <li>Master of balance of show and tell</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ideas supported, yet lack consistent and engaging narrative experience and concrete details (or has gone off topic).</li> <li>Analysis somewhat addresses experiences, but more develop needed</li> <li>Critical reflection indicated, but could developed further for meaning.</li> <li>Balance of showing and telling could be enhanced for purpose and audience.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ideas are mainly telling or showing/or generalized.</li> <li>Ideas are minimally connected to a controlling idea.</li> <li>Analysis of experiences is underdeveloped; could be mostly summary or recounting of events.</li> <li>Significance of experiences unclear.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Insufficient, non-specific and/or irrelevant support</li> <li>Ideas lack to connection to a controlling idea</li> <li>Little analysis</li> <li>No critical reflection.</li> </ul>
<b>ORGANIZATIONAL PATTERN</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Writer's ideas work together as a unified whole (<i>narrative progresses</i>).</li> <li>Sequenced organization advanced;</li> <li>Ideas are linked, purposeful and in support of the controlling idea.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Competent organization pattern without sophistication;</li> <li>Ideas are proficiently organized, linked and in support of controlling idea.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited attempts to use organization in support of controlling idea.</li> <li>Ideas are minimally unified; mostly stand-alones with weak or non-evident transitions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organization, while attempted, no clear organization pattern;</li> <li>ideas are disconnected.</li> </ul>

<b>STYLE and MECHANICS:</b> sentence structure, word choice, tone, grammar, spelling, punctuation,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sentences are dynamic, varied and <u>well constructed</u>.</li> <li>Tone and word choice are precise, fresh, and vivid.</li> <li>There are virtually no errors in grammar, punctuation, spelling, or usage.</li> </ul> (instructor can add: ____ or less grammatical errors)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Most sentences are varied and <u>well constructed</u>; competent without sophistication.</li> <li>Word choice is generally appropriate.</li> <li>Minor errors in grammar, punctuation, spelling, or usage, none of these problems is glaring or highly distracting.</li> </ul> (instructor can add: ____ - ____ grammatical errors).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sentence structure can be repetitive or awkward and word choice imprecise or inappropriate.</li> <li>Errors in grammar, punctuation, spelling or usage may distract the reader.</li> <li>(instructor can add: ____ - ____ grammatical errors).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sentence structure and word choice may be inaccurate, confusing, or awkward.</li> <li>Many grammar, punctuation, spelling, and usage errors.</li> </ul> (instructor can add: ____ - ____ grammatical errors).
<b>PRESENTATION:</b> sources, revision documentation, MLA style	Exceeds expectations for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MLA format,</li> <li>Word count</li> <li>Response to assignment prompt</li> <li>Dynamic and significant revision</li> <li>Incorporates elements from class and class work</li> </ul>	Meets requirements for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MLA (mostly correct)</li> <li>Word count</li> <li>Assignment prompt</li> <li>evidence of some elements from class work,</li> <li>Proficient revision</li> </ul>	Some requirements met: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Little awareness of MLA</li> <li>Does not meet word count</li> <li>Minimally responds to assignment prompt</li> <li>Minimal evidence of incorporating elements from class</li> <li>Little evidence of revision beyond surface errors.</li> </ul>	Minimal requirements met: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No awareness of MLA</li> <li>Does not respond to assignment prompt</li> <li>No evidence of evidence from class</li> <li>No evidence of revision</li> </ul>

## UNIT 1: 110 LITERACY NARRATIVE RUBRIC

### Learning Outcomes:

- Define a literacy event in which to critically analyze experience as readers and writers;
- Demonstrate ability to describe significant and detailed experiences in the writer's life;
- Analyze those experiences to make meaning about personal and collective literacy practices;
- Develop a framework for semester-long discussions of writing and reading.

The following rubric reflects the assignment priorities. Please refer to the assignment for further details.

Aspects of the assignment that work well:

Considerations for future work:

Grade:



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## Narrative Essays

### What is a narrative essay?

When writing a narrative essay, one might think of it as telling a story. These essays are often anecdotal, experiential, and personal—allowing students to express themselves in a creative and, quite often, moving ways.

Here are some guidelines for writing a narrative essay.

- **If written as a story, the essay should include all the parts of a story.**

This means that you must include an introduction, plot, characters, setting, climax, and conclusion.

- **When would a narrative essay not be written as a story?**

A good example of this is when an instructor asks a student to write a book report. Obviously, this would not necessarily follow the pattern of a story and would focus on providing an informative narrative for the reader.

- **The essay should have a purpose.**

Make a point! Think of this as the thesis of your story. If there is no point to what you are narrating, why narrate it at all?

- **The essay should be written from a clear point of view.**

It is quite common for narrative essays to be written from the standpoint of the author; however, this is not the sole perspective to be considered. Creativity in narrative essays oftentimes manifests itself in the form of authorial perspective.

- **Use clear and concise language throughout the essay.**

Much like the descriptive essay, narrative essays are effective when the language is carefully, particularly, and artfully chosen. Use specific language to evoke specific emotions and senses in the reader.

- **The use of the first person pronoun 'I' is welcomed.**



Do not abuse this guideline! Though it is welcomed it is not necessary—nor should it be overused for lack of clearer diction.

- **As always, be organized!**

Have a clear introduction that sets the tone for the remainder of the essay. Do not leave the reader guessing about the purpose of your narrative. Remember, you are in control of the essay, so guide it where you desire (just make sure your audience can follow your lead).

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Open SUNY Textbooks

# Writing in College: From Competence to Excellence

License: [Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike CC BY-NC-SA](#)Author(s): [Amy Guptill](#)

Writing in College is designed for students who have largely mastered high-school level conventions of formal academic writing and are now moving beyond the five-paragraph essay to more advanced engagement with text. It is well suited to composition courses or first-year seminars and valuable as a supplemental or recommended text in other writing-intensive classes. It provides a friendly, down-to-earth introduction to professors' goals and expectations, demystifying the norms of the academy and how they shape college writing assignments. Each of the nine chapters can be read separately, and each includes suggested exercises to bring the main messages to life.

Students will find in Writing in College a warm invitation to join the academic community as novice scholars and to approach writing as a meaningful medium of thought and communication. With concise discussions, clear multidisciplinary

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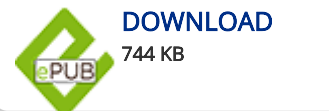
examples, and empathy for the challenges of student life, Guptill conveys a welcoming tone. In addition, each chapter includes Student Voices: peer-to-peer wisdom from real SUNY Brockport students about their strategies for and experiences with college writing.

While there are many affordable writing guides available, most focus only on sentence-level issues or, conversely, a broad introduction to making the transition. Writing In College, in contrast, provides both a coherent frame for approaching writing assignments and indispensable advice for effective organization and expression.



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Steps to Success: Crossing the Bridge Between Literacy Research and Practice »

# The Inspired Writer vs. the Real Writer

by Sarah Allen

This essay is a chapter in *Writing Spaces: Readings on Writing*, Volume 1, a peer-reviewed open textbook series for the writing classroom, and is published through Parlor Press.

The full volume and individual chapter downloads are available for free from the following sites:

- Writing Spaces: <http://writingspaces.org/essays>
- Parlor Press: <http://parlorpress.com/writingspaces>
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# The Inspired Writer vs. the Real Writer

*Sarah Allen*

Several years ago, in a first year writing course, a student nervously approached me after class, asking if we could talk about her latest draft of a formal paper.\* She was worried about the content of the draft, about the fact that in writing about her writing process (the assignment for the paper), she found her tone to be at best frustrated, at worst grumbling and whiney. “I don’t really like writing. Is that okay?” she asked.

This is the first time that I remember a student confessing aloud (to me) that she did not like writing, and I remember struggling for an appropriate response—not because I couldn’t fathom how she had the gall to admit this to me, a writing teacher, but because I couldn’t understand why admitting to not liking writing worried her. In the next class, I asked my students if they liked writing. I heard a mixed response. I asked them if they assumed that someone like me, a writing teacher/scholar, always liked writing. The answer was a resounding “yes.” I rephrased, “So you believe that every day I skip gleefully to my computer?” Again, though giggling a bit, my students answered “yes.” And, at last, one student piped up to say, “Well, you’re good at it, right? I mean, that’s what makes you good at it.”

My student, quoted above, seems to suggest that I am good at writing because I like doing it. But I’d have to disagree on at least two points: First, I wouldn’t describe my feelings toward writing as being a

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“like” kind of thing. It’s more of an agonistic kind of thing. Second, I am not “good” at writing, if being good at it means that the words, the paragraphs, the pages come easily.

On the contrary, I believe that I write because I am driven to do so—driven by a will to write. By “will,” I mean a kind of purposefulness, propensity, diligence, and determination (which, I should mention, does not lead to perfection or ease . . . unfortunately). But, I should qualify this: the will to write is not innate for me, nor is it always readily available. In fact, the common assumption that a will to write must be both innate and stem from an ever-replenishing source never ceases to surprise (and annoy) me. I’ve worked with a lot of enviably brilliant and wonderful writers—teachers, students, scholars, and freelancers. I’ve yet to meet one who believes that she/he is innately and/or always a brilliant writer, nor have I met one who says she/he always wants to write.

And yet, I confess that I find myself to be genuinely surprised when some well-respected scholar in my field admits to struggling with his writing. For example, David Bartholomae (a very successful scholar in the field of Rhetoric and Composition) confesses that he didn’t learn to write until after he completed his undergraduate studies, and that he learned it through what must have been at least one particularly traumatic experience: his dissertation was rejected for being “poorly written” (22–23).

If at first glance the rejection of a dissertation means little to you, let me explain: imagine spending years (literally, years) on a piece of writing (a very long piece of writing), for which you’ve sacrificed more than you ever thought you’d sacrifice for anything (your time, your freedom, sleep, relationships, and even, at times, your sanity), only to have it rejected. And worse, it’s rejected for being “poorly written,” which is like being booted off of a pro-league baseball team for not being able to tie your shoes properly. We’re talking basics here, or so we (writers) like to think. And yet, if writing were nothing more than “practicing the basics,” why’s it so hard—hard even for one of the best of the best in my field?

It’s alarming how many great scholars have admitted to struggling with writing. Bartholomae is not the only one. In a rather famous admission, one of the “fathers” of the field of Rhetoric and Composition, Peter Elbow—the guy who put freewriting on the map, wrote one of the first book-length studies of the writing process, and has been the

virtual MLK, Jr. for voice-in-writing (yeah, that guy)—dropped out of graduate school because he suffered so badly from writer's block.<sup>1</sup>

My own story of my frustrated struggle with writing is not nearly so heroic as Elbow's or Bartholomae's. I did not fight the dragon beasts of poor writing skills or writer's block, return to the (writing) field as the victorious knight, and then settle in for a long, successful reign as one of the rulers of the land of Rhetoric and Composition. Rather, mine was (and, sometimes, still is) more Hamlet-like, more like a battle with a ghost—the ghost being the “Inspired Writer.”

The Inspired Writer, as I understand her/him, is a figure for whom writing comes easily—the sort of Romantic hero who writes purely out of an awe-full state, generating perfect prose without the frustrated process of revision (or failure). This Inspired Writer is everywhere, in all the great stories of great writers who were so full of “writerliness” that they were tormented by their need to write; they were relentlessly pursued by their muses . . . as was evidenced by their inked hands, tangled hair, ringed eyes, and profoundly watchful stares. They did not have to go crawling about in the muck of what-everybody's-already-written, across the desert of what-could-I-possibly-say, and over the mountain of an-audience-who-probably-knows-a-lot-more-than-I-do.

Of course, the great irony of this figure's story is that the Inspired Writer is really the transcendent distortion of real-life writers. It's much more likely that most of those great, real-life writers got their inked hands from gripping too hard their quills or pens in frustration, as they hovered over pages with more slashes, margin-notes, and edits than clean, untouched sentences set in perfect lines. They probably got their tangled hair from wrenching it; their ringed eyes from spending too many hours staring at black squiggles over white pages; and their profoundly watchful stares from their consequent, bad eyesight.

The fact is that they, too, had to answer to the great works that had been written before them; they, too, had to struggle with their own fears about sounding stupid; and they, too, had to answer to an often discerning and demanding audience. Yet, despite reality, the awesome figure of the Inspired Writer still holds sway, hovering over us like bad lighting, blinding us to our own work.

The pervasiveness of this myth of the Inspired Writer and the continued celebration of her/him works against us, as writers, for we often assume that if writing does not come easily, then our writing is not good—and in turn, that we cannot be good writers. Consequently,

we believe that the writing that comes easily is the only good writing, so we will turn in papers that have been drafted quickly and without revision, hoping for the best (grade).

Now, in the days when I was clawing my way through classes as an English major, literature teachers didn't spend much time on revision. I don't ever remember being told anything about strategies for revision. I remember doing peer reviews, where we read each other's drafts and marked punctuation problems, having no idea how to examine—much less comment on—structure and analysis. Other than the five-paragraph formula I'd learned in high school, I had no idea what a paper should or could look like. In other words, when I was learning to write college papers some fifteen years ago, I was totally on my own. The most useful strategy in my bag of tricks? Trial and error. And believe me, good grades or no, having had the opportunity recently (thanks to my mother moving and insisting, "take your STUFF!") to look at the papers I wrote back then, I see an awful lot of the latter.

You see, the awful, honest truth is that I'm no rabbit, no natural digger, no lover of thick, tangled messes, and I had no idea how to find my way through the knotted ideas at work in any first drafts, much less how to dig my way into more root (e.g. to go further with my claims, to push the analysis, to discover the "so what" of my work). I didn't find this place (the page) to be a comfy, hide-out-worthy home. In fact, I confess that I still don't. I have always loved to read, but writing has been much more work than I ever anticipated. And even after so many years of graduate school, and even more years of teaching writing and of writing scholarship, when one might think I should have fully embraced and embodied the status of "veteran" digger, I still, very often feel like I'm trudging through some thick of hard branches and harder roots to find my way down a page.

After years of reflecting on this trudging and of talking with students about how they, too, often feel as though they are trudging down a page—through ideas, among the cacophony of words (our own and others')—I've come to this (admittedly, unimpressive) realization: this is, for many of us, an alien discourse. I'm not like my two closest friends from graduate school, whose parents were academics. We didn't talk at breakfast about "the problematic representations of race in the media." Instead, my father told racist jokes that my sisters and I didn't recognize—until later—were racist. We didn't talk at dinner about "the mass oppression of 'other(ed)' cultures by corporate/



national tyrants.” My sisters and I talked about how the cheerleaders were way cooler than we were because they had better clothes, cars, hair, bodies, and boyfriends, and that we would, consequently, be losers for the rest of our lives.

Again, this is an alien discourse, even now. Well, not this. This is more like a personal essay, but the papers I was supposed to write for my literature classes, those were strange. I didn’t normally think in the order that a paper would suggest—first broadly, then moving to specifics, which are treated as isolated entities, brought together in transitions and at the end of the paper. I didn’t understand, much less use, words like “Marxism,” “feminism,” or even “close reading.” I didn’t know that Shakespeare may not have been Shakespeare. I didn’t know that Hemingway was a drunk. I didn’t know that really smart people spent their entire careers duking it out about who Shakespeare really was and whether Hemingway’s alcoholism influenced his work.

I didn’t know the vocabulary; I didn’t know the issues; I didn’t think in the right order; I didn’t quote properly; and I was far too interested in the sinking, spinning feeling that writing—and reading—sometimes gave me, instead of being interested in the rigorousness of scholarly work, in modeling that work, and in becoming a member of this strange discourse community. Consequently, when a teacher finally sat me down to explain that this was, in fact, a community—one that occurred on pages, at conferences, in coffee shops, and over listservs—and that if I wanted to stay on the court, I’d have to learn the rules of the game, I was both intrigued and terrified. And no surprise, writing then became not just a way to induce the sinking, spinning thing of which I spoke earlier, but a way to think, a way to act—e.g. a way to figure out little things, like who “Mr. W.H.” is in Shakespeare’s dedication to his Sonnets, as well as big things, like how we can better fight the “isms” of this world.

No doubt, the sinking, spinning feeling that I experience when I write or read comes and goes now, but it always did. I feel it alternately, as it shares time with the “trudging” feeling I described earlier. But, please don’t think that this trudging comes from having to learn and practice the writing conventions of an alien community. Rather, the feeling of “trudging” is a consequence, again, of that haunting specter, the Inspired Writer. The feeling comes from the expectation that writing should come from “the gods” or natural talent, and it is a consequence, too, of the expectation that this inspiration or talent should

be always available to us—always there, though sometimes hidden, in some reservoir of our beings.

Thus, even now, when I hit a blank spot and the sentence stumbles off into white space, I feel . . . inadequate . . . or worse, like a fraud, like I'm playing a game that I've got no business playing. The reader is gonna red-card me. And what makes it worse: I have to write. Writing teacher and scholar or not, I have to write memos and emails and resumes and reports and thank you notes and on and on.

But the upshot of all of this is that you'd be amazed what talking about this frustration (and all of the attendant fears) will do for a writer, once she/he opens up and shares this frustration with other writers, other students, teachers . . . with anyone who has to write. For example, once my students see that everyone sitting in this classroom has a gnawing fear about their work failing, about how they don't have "it," about how they don't feel justified calling themselves "writers," because most of them are "regular folks" required to take a writing class, well . . . then we can have ourselves a getting-down-to-it, honest and productive writing classroom. Then, we can talk about writer's block—what it is, what causes it, and what overcomes it. We can talk about how to develop "thick skins"—about how to listen to readers' commentaries and critiques without simultaneously wanting to rip our writings into tiny pieces, stomp them into a trashcan, and then set fire to them. And most importantly, then, we can talk about writing as a practice, not a reflection of some innate quality of the writer.

My work, for example, is more a reflection of the scholarship I spend the most time with than it is a reflection of me, *per se*. One strategy I learned in graduate school (and I swear, I picked it up by watching my first year composition students) is to imitate other, successful pieces of writing. By "imitate," of course I don't mean plagiarize. I mean that I imitate the form of those texts, e.g. the organization, and the ways that they engage with, explore, and extend ideas.

For example, a Rhetoric and Composition scholar named Patricia Bizzell has written scholarship that I use a lot in my own work. In fact, even when I don't use her work directly, I can see her influence on my thinking. A couple of years ago, after reading one of her books for about the hundredth time (seriously), I noticed that her articles and chapters are organized in predictable kinds of ways (not predictable as in boring, but predictable as in she's-a-pro). She seems to have a formula down, and it works. Her work is consistently solid—i.e. con-

vincing, important—and using that formula, she’s able to tackle really dense material and make it accessible to readers.

To be more specific, she tends to start with an introduction that demonstrates, right away, why the coming work is so important. For example, in “Foundationalism and Anti-Foundationalism in Composition Studies,” she starts off the article by reminding us, basically (I’m paraphrasing here), that everybody’s down with “the social,” that we are all invested in examining how language—and writing—occurs in a context and how that context dictates meaning. So, for example, the word “we” in the previous sentence is a reference to Rhetoric and Composition teachers and scholars; however, in this sentence, it’s not a reference to a group of people, but to the word “we,” as it occurs in the previous sentence. See? Meaning changes according to context.

So, Bizzell starts with this premise: that everybody’s down with the social, that we’re invested in examining contexts, that we know that meaning happens in those contexts. Then, she introduces the problem: that we still want something pre-contextual (e.g. I know what “we” means because I can step outside of any contexts—including this one—and examine it objectively). Then, she gives two in-depth examples of where she sees the problem at work in the field. She then examines how we’ve tried to address that problem, then how we’ve failed at addressing it, and then she poses another/new perspective on the problem and, consequently, another/new way of addressing it.

This is her formula, and I imitate it, frequently, in my own work. It’s rigorous, thorough, and like I said earlier, accessible. It works. But, sometimes I’m working on something totally different, something new (to me), and that formula starts to box me in too much; the formula becomes a tomb instead of a foundation. That’s when I turn to outside readers.

Now, this one, actually, is a tougher strategy to use . . . because it requires that you share a piece of work that looks like a train wreck to you with another human being—ideally, another smart, patient, open-minded human being. I have four people I send my work out to consistently. One is my boss; one my mentor; one a (very successful) peer; and the other, a senior colleague I come dangerously close to worshipping. In other words, I don’t send my stuff to my mom. I don’t give it to my best friend, my boyfriend, my dance teacher, or my sisters. I only send my stuff to people who seem to be a lot better at writing scholarship than I feel like I am.

Again, it's hard to do, but I can't tell you how many students I'll see in my office over the course of a semester who will say, "But my mom read my paper, and she says it looks great"—while gripping a paper marked with a D or F. Mom may have been the final authority when you were negotiating curfews and driving and dating, but unless Mom's a (college-level) writing teacher, she'll be no more of an expert in college-level writing than your dentist will. Send it to her if you want an outside reader, but don't expect her final word to be similar to your teacher's final word. And while I'm on my soapbox . . . don't let anyone edit your papers . . . including your mom. It's called "collusion"—a kind of plagiarism—and it's really easy to spot, especially if you were the Comma Splice King in the first paper and use commas flawlessly in the second.

More importantly, keep in mind that if you only use your mom, or your coach, or some other person who's not in the same class, then you may be making the revision process (and the reading for that person) more difficult than necessary, since that reader will have no idea what you've read in class, what you've talked about in class, or what the assignment guidelines and grading criteria are. Writing occurs—and is assessed—in a context, remember?

The best strategy for finding and using readers is to start with the teacher (no, it's not cheating). Ask him/her to read a draft before you submit the final. Then, share the paper with a classmate, as well as someone who's not in the class. That way, you'll get an "insider's" perspective as well as an "outsider's."<sup>2</sup> I've heard students say that using anyone but the teacher for feedback seems to be a waste of time. However, I find that when a student brings me a draft, I (and most writing professors) read it in terms of how it should be revised, not how I'd grade it. So, after you revise based on the teacher's feedback, get other readers to take a look, again, at the newly revised version and have them read it as a finished product. This will help you get a better sense of how it's working as a text that will be graded.

The best piece of advice I can give you, though, is to tell the Inspired Writer to shut up and let you write. If you have to, find out about a few of your favorite writers. I guarantee that they struggle, too. If not them, try talking to your classmates and/or your teacher. Again, if they have written anything in their lives worth writing, then it took some effort to do so. And, once the insecurities are out there, so to speak, and not trapped in Pandora's little box to drive us mad

with their “what if” whispers, you may discover that there’s more to the writing process than just getting lost in branches and stumbling over roots.

There’s nothing quite like finding that the black squiggles you typed onto that white page actually invoke a feeling in or change the mind of your reader(s). Of course, too, there’s the emotion, revelation, clench of teeth, slackening of shoulders, or any other response, that a text elicits from even its own writer. The latter is, for my part, the biggest reason why I write—even now, and even and especially as I write scholarship. For me, the text is like a fire in the room. And I am often awed by the way it moves, sleeps, devours, and sustains, while I am simultaneously trying to master it (knowing full well that if I let it go, it will run riot, but knowing, too, that I can’t push too hard or it will disappear altogether).

For what I’ve found in my own relationship to writing, and in talking to my students about theirs, is that it’s about the connection, really—even if the connection is an antagonistic one. We like to think that thinking isn’t for nothing; that communicating with another (even and especially with ourselves) is never entirely in vain; that what we have to say is perhaps/probably not brilliant but is, still, worth the attempt of saying, of writing, and of considering/being considered. No doubt, a whole lot of practice can give us the means to write in such a way that not only we, the writers, but others will want to listen, will want to read. And in that listening-talking, reading-writing relation, a collision, the inevitable momentary connection, happens.

Maybe we smack the dirt and roots; maybe we smack white space. Maybe a reader’s jaw drops at the “gets it” insight of some obscure line in your paper that you don’t even remember writing because you spent forty-five minutes working on the line right after it. Maybe you make someone stop and think for just a moment about something they’ve never considered before. Maybe you make friends with a bunch of classmates because of that story you wrote about the roadtrip you took last summer to a music festival. Maybe you inspired a heated class debate because of that paper you wrote about your personal project for saving the world.

But for all the misunderstandings, all the fears and so-called failings that happen among writer and paper and reader, there’s always another white page, and there’s always more to say. This is why we must write, why we must continue to practice: to keep talking, keep

thinking, keep revising. Nobody's ever got the final word, not even on the page. We've all got the will to write: it's called "communication." Maybe you do so in music or in paint or in graphics or, even, in gossip. But here, in these black squiggles on this white page, you've listened to something I've had to say. Maybe you've not listened closely; maybe you're yawning or rolling your eyes. But if this is a decent piece of writing, you're giving some response right now—a smile? An exasperated sigh? A tensed shoulder? A clenched fist? Whatever the case, here, response is happening. And that's at least a (good) start.

## DISCUSSION

1. What are you most anxious about, when writing? For example, do you worry most about grammar and mechanics? About organization? About the deadline? About page length? Why?
2. No doubt most students are at least peripherally, if not entirely, concerned with what grade they get on a paper. Given that pressure and/or in addition to that pressure, what are you most anxious about, when sharing your writing with others—e.g. classmates and/or the teacher? For example, do you worry most about your audience thinking your ideas are stupid? About readers misunderstanding your argument? About your peers/teacher judging you according to how well you write?
3. How are your answers to numbers 1 and 2 related? For example, does your anxiety about the deadline have anything to do with your anxiety about readers misunderstanding your argument? If so, how and/or why?
4. What, if any, strategies do you use to address these anxieties? Do they work?

## NOTES

1. See his "Autobiographical Digression" in the second chapter of *Writing without Teachers*.

2. Most universities have a Writing Center, too, and that can be a valuable resource, since the staff are trained to read papers and often allot as much as an hour to focus on your draft.

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# “I need you to say ‘I’”: Why First Person Is Important in College Writing

by Kate McKinney Maddalena

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# “I need you to say ‘I’”: Why First Person Is Important in College Writing

*Kate McKinney Maddalena*

At this point in your development as a writer, you may have learned to write “I-less” prose, without first person.\* I-less-ness is fine; writing habits, like all habits, are best simplified when first learned or re-learned. Jazz pianists learn strict scales before they are allowed to improvise. Someone might go on a strict diet and then return to a modified menu after the desired weight is lost, and the bad eating habits are broken. Constructing arguments without using “I” is good practice for formal “improvisation” at higher levels of thinking and writing. Avoiding personal pronouns forces you to be objective. It also “sounds” more formal; you’re more likely to maintain an appropriate tone if you stay away from the personal.

But writing in various academic and professional contexts needs to be more flexible, sophisticated, and subtle than writing for high school English classes. In college, you should start using first-person pronouns in your formal academic writing, where appropriate. First person has an important place—an irreplaceable place—in texts that report research and engage scholarship. Your choices about where you place yourself as subject are largely determined by context and the

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conventions of the field in which you're writing. The key is making sure that your choices are appropriate for the context of your paper—whom you're writing it for, and the kind of information it's meant to communicate. Here I'll list some ways in which first person improves written argument and show you some examples of the ways scholars use first person, and then I'll propose places where it might be used appropriately in your own writing.

### WHY “I”?

First person can support the following characteristics of good written argument (and good writing in general).

#### 1. Objectivity and Integrity

The main reason most teachers give for the discipline of I-less-ness is that it keeps your writing “objective.” They want to make sure that you don't rely on personal experiences or perspectives where you should be providing concrete, researched support for your arguments. Your best friend at summer camp doesn't “prove” a sociological theory. Your memory of a “fact”—the average rainfall in a town, the actions of a character in a film, the tendencies of groups of people to behave in certain ways, or the population of Kenya—is not a reliable source in academic contexts. You shouldn't write, “because I think so,” or “I know that . . .” But if you consider some of the higher-level implications of perspective's effects on argument, there are some well-chosen places where “I” can give your argument more objectivity and intellectual integrity.

Take scientific writing, for example. Up until very recently, when writing observational and experimental reports, scientists, as a rule, avoided first person. Methodology was (and is still, in many cases) described in the passive voice. That is, instead of writing, “We took measurements of ice thickness on the first and 15<sup>th</sup> day of every month,” scientists wrote, “Measurements of ice thickness were taken on the first and 15<sup>th</sup> day of every month.” Taking out the “we” focuses the reader's attention on the phenomenon (object) being observed, not the observer taking the readings (subject). Or at least that was the reasoning behind passive voice in science writing.

But during the last half of the last century, mostly because of developments in physics, scientists have talked a lot about a thing called the “observer effect”: while observing or experimenting with a social or even physical system, the scientist watching can affect the system’s behavior. When particle physicists try to measure the motion of something as tiny as an electron, their very observation almost certainly changes that motion. Because of the observer effect, the passive voice convention I’ve described above has been called into question. Is it really honest to act like “measurements are taken” by some invisible hand? Is the picture minus the researcher the whole picture? Not really. The fact is, someone took the measurements, and those measurements might reflect that observer’s involvement. It’s more truthful, complete, and objective, then, to put the researchers in the picture. These days, it’s much more common to “see” the researchers as subjects—“We measured ice thickness . . .”—in methodology sections.

That same kind of “whole picture” honesty applies to you making written claims, too. When you first learned to write an essay, you were probably taught to make claims as though they were true; write “The sky is blue,” not “I think that the sky is blue.” That second claim isn’t arguable—who can disprove that you think something? But a much more sophisticated claim includes your perspective and implies the effect it may have on your stance: “From my position standing on the earth’s surface in the daytime, I see the sky as blue.” You can make that claim without using first person, of course, and in some contexts (i.e. for a scientific argument), you probably should. When you’re taking a stance on an issue, though, first person just makes sense. Defining your perspective gives your reader context for your stance: “As a volunteer at a bilingual preschool, I can see that both language immersion and individualized language instruction have benefits,” or “As a principal at an elementary school with a limited budget, I would argue that language immersion makes the most sense.” Consider those two positions; without the “whole picture” that the statement of perspective implies, you might assume that the two claims disagree. The subtlety of the subject—who the writer is—lets you see quite a bit about why the claim is being made. If you asked the second writer to take a stance on the immersion/bilingual instruction issue with only learning objectives in mind, she might agree with the first writer. The “truth” might not be different, but the position it’s observed from can certainly cast a different light on it.

## 2. Clarifying Who's Saying What

A clear description of your perspective becomes even more important when your stance has to incorporate or respond to someone else's. As you move into more advanced college writing, the claims you respond to will usually belong to scholars. Some papers may require you to spend almost as much time summarizing a scholarly conversation as they do presenting points of your own. By "signification," I mean little phrases that tell the reader, "This is my opinion," "This is my interpretation." You need them for two big reasons.

First of all, the more "voices" you add to the conversation, the more confusing it gets. You must separate your own interpretations of scholars' claims, the claims themselves, and your argument so as not to misrepresent any of them. If you've just paraphrased a scholar, making your own claim without quite literally claiming it might make the reader think that the scholar said it. Consider these two sentences: "Wagstaff et al. (2007) conclude that the demand for practical science writing that the layperson can understand is on the rise. But there is a need for laypeople people to increase their science literacy, as well." Is that second claim part of Wagstaff's conclusion, or is it your own reflection on the implications of Wagstaff's argument? By writing something like, "Wagstaff et al. (2007) conclude that the demand for practical science that the layperson can understand is on the rise. I maintain that there is a need for laypeople to increase their science literacy, as well," you avoid the ambiguity. First person can help you express, very simply, who "says" what.

Secondly, your perceptions, and therefore your interpretations, are not always perfect. Science writing can help me illustrate this idea, as well. In the imaginary observation report I refer to above, the researchers may or may not use first person in their methodology section out of respect for the observer effect, but they are very likely to use first person in the discussion/conclusion section. The discussion section involves interpretation of the data—that is, the researchers must say what they think the data means. The importance of perspective is compounded, here. They might not be right. And even if they are mostly right, the systems scientists study are usually incredibly complex; one observation report is not the whole picture. Scientists, therefore, often mark their own interpretations with first person pronouns. "We interpret these data to imply . . ." they might say, or, "We believe

these findings indicate . . . ,” and then they go on to list questions for further research. Even the experts know that their understanding is almost always incomplete.

### 3. Ownership, Intellectual Involvement, and Exigency

Citing scholarship contextualizes and strengthens your argument; you want to defer to “experts” for evidence of your claims when you can. As a student, you might feel like an outsider—unable to comment with authority on the concepts you’re reading and writing about. But outsider status doesn’t only mean a lack of expertise. Your own, well-defined viewpoint might shed new light on a topic that the experts haven’t considered (or that your classmates haven’t considered, or that your professor hasn’t mentioned in class, or even, quite simply, that you hadn’t thought of and so you’re excited about). In that case, you want to say, “This is mine, it’s a new way of looking at the issue, and I’m proud of it.”

Those kinds of claims are usually synthetic ones—you’ve put information and/or interpretations from several sources together, and you’ve actually got something to say. Whether your new spin has to do with a cure for cancer or an interpretation of Batman comics, pride in your own intellectual work is important on many levels. As a student, you should care; such investment can help you learn. Your school community should also care; good teachers are always looking for what we call “critical thinking,” and when students form new ideas from existing ones, we know it’s happening. On the larger scale, the scholarly community should care. Having something new to say increases the exigency of your argument in the larger, intellectual exchange of ideas. A scholarly reader should want to pay attention, because what you say may be a key to some puzzle (a cure for cancer) or way of thinking about the topic (interpreting Batman). That’s the way scholars work together to form large bodies of knowledge: we communicate about our research and ideas, and we try to combine them when we can.

An emphatic statement like “Much discussion has addressed the topic of carbon emissions’ relationship to climate change, but I would like to ask a question from a new perspective,” will make your reader sit up and take notice. In I-less form, that might look like: “Much discussion has addressed the topic of carbon emissions’ relationship to climate change, but some questions remain unconsidered.” In this

case, second sentence still sounds like summary—the writer is telling us that research is incomplete, but isn't giving us a strong clue that his or her (new! fresh!) argument is coming up next. Be careful, of course, not to sound arrogant. If the writer of the sentences above was worried about his or her lack of expertise in an assignment involving scholarly sources, he or she could write: "What scholarly discussion I have read so far has addressed the topic of carbon emissions' relationship to climate change, but I would like to ask a question from a new perspective." He or she can use first person to employ both deference and ownership/involvement in the same sentence.

#### 4. Rhetorical Sophistication

Some writing assignments focus on one simple task at a time: "Summarize the following . . ." "Compare the readings . . ." "analyze," or "argue." When you write a simple five-paragraph essay, your mode rarely changes—you can write an introduction, thesis, body, and conclusion without explaining too many shifts in what the paper is "doing." Writing at the college level and beyond often has to "do" a few things in the same text. Most involved writing assignments expect you to do at least two things. You may need to summarize/report and respond, or (more likely) you'll need to summarize/report, synthesize, and respond. A good introduction, as you've learned, needs to anticipate all of it so the reader knows what to expect. Anticipating the structure of a complex argument in I-less mode is tricky. Often, it comes out as a summary of the document that follows and is redundant. First person can clear that problem right up. Consider the introduction to this article; when I come to the part where I need to tell you what I'm going to do, I just . . . tell you what I'm going to do! My writing students usually find this rhetorical trick (or is it an un-trick?) refreshing and liberating. The same concept can be applied to transitions between sections and ideas: "Now that I've done this thing, I'd like to move into this other part of my argument . . ." I'll use this type of transition, myself, when I move into the section of this text called, "When, and When not?"

#### Academic Examples

The fact is, using first person for rhetorical clarity and to ease transitions isn't just easier—it's common in many academic contexts. It's

accepted, even expected, in some cases, for scholarly writing such as abstracts, position papers, theses, and dissertations in many fields to employ first person in the ways I've just described. In almost all genres, formats, and fields, the scholarly writer is expected to describe the research done thus far by her peers and then make her own claims—a structure that lends itself to first person.

Robert Terrill, a cultural studies scholar, begins his article, "Put on a Happy Face: Batman as Schizophrenic Savior," with an evaluation of Tim Burton's movie's box office success, and then spends several paragraphs discussing other scholars' applications of psychological frameworks to film studies. Throughout the literature review section, Terrill's own voice stays remote; he uses third person. But look at what happens when he is ready to begin his own argument:

Because much of my analysis is grounded in the theories of Carl C. Jung, I will begin by outlining relevant aspects of that theory. Then I suggest that Gotham City is a dream world, a representative projection of image-centered dreams. Within the framework of Jung's model, I show the principal characters to be archetypal manifestations that erupt from Gotham's unconscious. Wayne/Batman is a splintered manifestation of a potential whole; his condition represents the schizophrenia required of a hero dedicated to preservation of the shattered psyche of Gotham. (321)

Terrill's move to first person separates his own claims from the scholars he's summarized in his introduction, and it allows him to take ownership of his main claim. The way he "maps out" his article is also typical of academic argument.

First person is used similarly in the sciences. Unlike Terrill, who argues for a certain interpretation of a text, psychologists Jennifer Kraemer and David Marquez report research findings in their article, "Psychosocial Correlates and Outcomes of Yoga or Walking Among Older Adults." Much like Terrill, however, their introduction consists of a review of literature in the third person. For almost three pages, Kraemer and Marquez describe studies which have explored health and injury patterns in old age, as well as studies which have investigated various fitness programs for the elderly. When it comes time for

Kraemer and Marquez to describe their own study, they shift into first person:

We hypothesized that an acute bout of yoga would be more effective at improving mood and reducing state anxiety among older adults when compared with acute bouts of walking. We further hypothesized that older adults who practice yoga would have lower levels of depression and higher quality of life when compared with those who walk for exercise. We did not make direct hypotheses for exercise barriers and barriers self-efficacy because, to date, there is no research that has examined those variables in this population. (393)

Kraemer and Marquez continue in first person as they describe their methodology. “We recruited a total of 51 participants (8 men, 43 women)” they write, “through classes at local yoga studios and mall walking groups” (393). The researchers themselves, in first person, are the subjects who “do” every action in the methods: “We asked questions on . . . We measured state anxiety by . . . We measured mood using . . .”(393–4). By putting themselves in the picture, Kraemer and Marquez acknowledge themselves as variables in their own study—a key aspect of any scientific methodology, and especially those which involve human subjects and use interviews to collect data.

On the other hand, some academic communities and genres stay away from first person. Susan Clark, a professor at Yale who writes about the communication and implementation of sustainable forestry practices, describes her study without putting herself in the picture. Where Kraemer and Marquez describe themselves “doing” the methods of their study, Clark has her article as the agent in her description of analysis:

This article (a) describes the intelligence function in conceptual terms, including its sequential phases (as described by McDougal, Lasswell, & Reisman, 1981); (b) uses examples to illustrate the intelligence activity from Reading and Miller (2000), *Endangered Animals: A Reference Guide to Conflicting Issues*, which gives 70 cases by 34 authors in 55 countries



that focus on species, ecosystem, and sustainability challenges; and employs a “problem-oriented” look at intelligence activities across all these cases (Lasswell, 1971). It does so by asking and answering five questions . . . (637)

Clark’s methods are to analyze others’ processes—hers, then, is meta-analysis. It’s appropriate for her to remove herself rhetorically as she deals with many actions and many, diverse actors. She is more a describer than a “do-er.”

At the very end of her article, in a “call to action” that directly applies her findings, Clark does finally use first person. “We can increase the possibility of better biodiversity and ecosystem conservation, and better sustainability overall,” she writes, “if we choose to use an effective intelligence activity. Success is more likely if we increase the rationality of our own directed behavior” (659). Clark’s “we” is different from Kraemer and Marquez’s “we,” though. It refers to Clark’s audience—the community of sustainable forestry as a whole—and predicts future action in which she will be active.

#### WHEN (AND WHEN NOT) TO USE FIRST PERSON?

Now that I’ve convinced you to try first person in some of your academic writing, I should talk about how to use it appropriately. (See? I just used “I” for a clear transition to a new idea.) The key is: don’t go “I” crazy. Remember the self-discipline you practiced with I-less writing.

Probably the best way to approach first person in an academic context is this: use it to make yourself clear. You’ll need “I” for clarity when one of the ideals I described above is in question. Either 1) you’ll need to describe an aspect of your personal perspective that will help the reader see (your) whole picture; 2) you’ll need to make the divide between your voice and the scholars’ as clear as possible in order to avoid misrepresenting the scholars’ claims; 3) your own claim will need to stand apart from the other perspectives you’ve presented as something new; or 4) you’ll need to guide your reader through the organization of your text in some way.

Below, I’ve listed a few common writing situations/assignments that first person can potentially support.

Try “I” when . . .

. . . the assignment asks you to. Personal position papers, personal narratives, and assignments that say “tell what you did/read and provide your reaction,” all explicitly ask you to use first person.

. . . you’re asked to “Summarize and respond.” You might transition into the response part of the paper with “I.”

. . . you’re introducing a paper with a complicated structure: “I will summarize Wagstaff’s argument, and then respond to a few key points with my own interpretation.”

. . . you are proud of and intellectually invested in what you have to say, and you want to arrange it in reference to others’ voices: “Many scholars have used psychological frameworks to interpret the Batman movies, but I would argue that a historical perspective is more productive . . .”

. . . you are unsure of your interpretation of a source, or you feel that the claim you’re making may be bigger than your level of expertise: “If I read Wagstaff correctly, her conclusions imply . . .”

“I” Is a Bad Idea When . . .

. . . you use it only once. You don’t want to overuse the first person, but if you’re going to assert your position or make a transition with “I,” give the reader a hint of your voice in the introduction. An introduction that anticipates structure with “I will,” for instance, works well with transitions that use “I” as well. If you use first person only once, the tone shift will jar the reader.

. . . The assignment is a simple summary. In that case, you need only report; you are “eye,” not “I.”

. . . you’re writing a lab report for a science class, as a general rule. But you might ask your teacher about the issues of objectivity I’ve addressed above, especially in terms of objective methodology.

## DISCUSSION

1. Can you remember a writing task during which you struggled to avoid using the first person? What about the nature of the content made “I” hard to avoid? Can you link the difficulty to

one of the four values that first person “supports,” according to this essay?

2. McKinney Maddalena claims that scientists use “I” more often in research reports, nowadays. Find a scientific article in your school’s research databases that employs first person: “I” or “we.” In what section is first person used, and how? Does its usage reflect one of the values this essay points out?

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# Storytelling, Narration, and the “Who I Am” Story

by Catherine Ramsdell

This essay is a chapter in *Writing Spaces: Readings on Writing*, Volume 2, a peer-reviewed open textbook series for the writing classroom.

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# Storytelling, Narration, and the “Who I Am” Story

*Catherine Ramsdell*

*Green Eggs and Ham was the story of my life. I wouldn't eat a thing when I was a kid, but Dr. Seuss inspired me to try cauliflower!*

—Jim Carrey

*It's all storytelling, you know. That's what journalism is all about.*

—Tom Brokaw

*People have forgotten how to tell a story. Stories don't have a middle or an end any more. They usually have a beginning that never stops beginning.*

—Steven Spielberg

## INTRODUCTION

Are stories just a form of entertainment—like movies, television shows, books, and video games? Or are they something more? This chapter takes the stance that stories are a fundamental and primary form of communication, and without them, we would lose an important way to teach our children, to train our employees, to sell our products, and to make information memorable to those of any age.

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Consider a Jewish story Annette Simmons references in her book *The Story Factor: Inspiration, Influence, and Persuasion Through the Art of Storytelling*:

Truth, naked and cold, had been turned away from every door in the village. Her nakedness frightened the people. When Parable found her she was huddled in a corner, shivering and hungry. Taking pity on her, Parable gathered her up and took her home. There, she dressed Truth in story, warmed her and sent her out again. Clothed in story, Truth knocked again at the doors and was readily welcomed into the villagers’ houses. They invited her to eat at their tables and warm herself by their fires. (27)

Certainly stories can be a form of entertainment—a book to curl up with on a cold rainy afternoon, a movie to share with a best friend, a video game to conquer—but stories can also be much more and, as will be discussed at the end of the chapter, today stories can be found just about anywhere. Furthermore, because stories can be found anywhere from a movie theatre to a corporate boardroom, everyone should know how to tell a good story.

In her book, *The Story Factor: Inspiration, Influence, and Persuasion Through the Art of Storytelling*, Simmons talks about seven different kinds of stories everyone should learn how to tell. One of them is the “Who I Am” story. Simply put, a Who I Am story shows something about its author, and this type of story fits into the genre of memoir or creative nonfiction. Here is an example from Simmons’ book:

Skip looked into the sea of suspicious stockholders and wondered what might convince them to follow his leadership. He was 35, looked 13 and was third generation rich. He could tell they assumed he would be an unholy disaster as a leader. He decided to tell them a story. “My first job was drawing the electrical engineering plans for a boat building company. The drawings had to be perfect because if the wires were not accurately placed *before* the fiberglass form was poured, a mistake might cost a million dollars, easy. At 25, I already had two masters’ degrees. I had been on boats all my life and frankly, I found drawing these plans a bit . . . mindless. One morning I got a call *at home* from a \$6/hour worker asking me ‘are you sure this is right?’ I was incensed. Of course I was *sure*—‘just

pour the damn thing.’ When his supervisor called me an hour later and woke me up *again* and asked ‘are you sure this is right?’ I had even less patience. ‘I said I was sure an hour ago and I’m still sure.’

It was the phone call from the president of the company that finally got me out of bed and down to the site. If I had to hold these guys by the hand, so be it. I sought out the worker who had called me first. He sat looking at my plans with his head cocked to one side. With exaggerated patience I began to explain the drawing. But after a few words my voice got weaker and *my* head started to cock to the side as well. It seems that I had (being left-handed) transposed starboard and port so that the drawing was an exact mirror image of what it should have been. *Thank God* this \$6/hour worker had caught my mistake before it was too late. The next day I found this box on my desk. The crew bought me a remedial pair of tennis shoes for future reference. Just in case I got mixed up again—a red left shoe for port, and a green right one for starboard. These shoes don’t just help me remember port and starboard. They help me remember to listen even when I think I know what’s going on.” As he held up the shoebox with one red and one green shoe, there were smiles and smirks. The stockholders relaxed a bit. If this young upstart had already learned this lesson about arrogance, then he might have learned a few things about running companies, too. (1–2)

This example shows some of the reasons why people tell Who I Am stories. Chances are that if Skip had gone into this meeting and said “Look, I know I’m young, but I’ve got a lot of experience, I know what I’m doing, I’ve learned a lot from my mistakes. Just trust me,” he would not have won over his audience.

Please keep this example and the basic definition of the Who I Am story in mind while reading through the next section, which provides a little background and theory about the fine art of narration and storytelling.

## NARRATIVE THEORY

Roland Barthes was arguably one of the most important literary theorists of the twentieth century. To begin, we’ll look at his thoughts on narrative:

The narratives of the world are numberless. Narrative is first and foremost a prodigious variety of genres, themselves distributed amongst different substances—as though any material were fit to receive man’s stories. Able to be carried by articulated language, spoken or written, fixed or moving images, gestures, and the ordered mixture of all these substances; narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting (think Carpaccio’s *Saint Ursula*), stained-glass windows, cinema, comics, news items, conversation. Moreover, under this almost infinite discovery of forms, narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative. All classes, all human groups, have their narratives, enjoyment of which is very often shared by men with different even opposing, cultural backgrounds. Caring nothing for the division between good and bad literature, narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself. (qtd. in Abbott 1–2)

In the forty-five years since Barthes penned this passage, nearly every book on storytelling or narrative theory has referenced this quote. Even if this quote is not referenced directly, often authors simply make a similar statement in their own words. For example, twenty-one years after Barthes voiced his thoughts on narrative, Luc Herman and Bart Vervaceck, authors of *The Handbook of Narrative Analysis*, stated:

No single period or society can do without narratives. And, a good number of contemporary thinkers hasten to add, whatever you say and think about a certain time or place becomes a narrative in its own right. From the oldest myths and legends to postmodern fabulation, narration has always been central. Postmodern philosophers . . . also contend that everything amounts to a narrative, including the world and the self. If that is correct, then the study of narrative . . . unveils fundamental culture-specific opinions about reality and humankind, which are narrativized in stories and novels. (1)

Whether authors quote Barthes directly or voice the same sentiment in their own words, one of the few things almost all authors, scholars, and critics can agree on is that narrative is part of humankind, it always has been, and it always will be.



Of course, what Barthes and Herman call narration, many, myself included, call story. H. Porter Abbott notes in *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, “Many speakers of English grow up using story to mean what we [Abbott and Barthes among others] are referring to here as a narrative” (16). Technically, however, there are some differences between the words “story” and “narrative.” In his book *The Classical Plot and Invention of Western Narrative*, N. J. Lowe talks about these differences using the terms *fabula* and *sjuzhet*:

This distinction is a cornerstone of modern narrative theory, even though there has been huge disagreement over the precise definition of the two terms and the boundary between them, and scarcely less over how to present them in English. *Fabula* (in English, usually ‘story’) is the series of events the work recounts, but imagined stripped of all the artifices of storytelling: a series of actual events in their natural order, in what merely happens to be a fictional world. In contrast, *sjuzhet* is the account of those same events that we actually get, reordered and reshaped in the process of telling to reach and affect the audience or reader in a particular and deliberate way. (5)

As Lowe mentions, scholars and writers have disagreed over the exact meaning of words like story and narrative. Abbot, for example, talks about “three distinctions: narrative is the representation of events consisting of story and narrative discourse; story is the event or sequence of events (the action), and narrative discourse is those events as represented” (16). In this chapter, we’ll use these definitions: a story (or *fabula*) encompasses the events or action in the story, and narrative discourse (or *sjuzhet*) is the way these events or actions are related. For example, all stylistic choices or organizational strategies, such as flashback, are part of the narrative discourse. Narrative discourse can encompass numerous things, but story almost always includes two primary parts: events and characters. After all, what story does not have these two characteristics? A story by its very nature includes events, and as Abbott contends, “what are events but the actions or reactions of [characters]?” (17).

Characters and events (or actions) may seem inextricably linked, but which is more important has been debated since Aristotle’s time. Aristotle took the stance that action was most important. In *Poetics*, he states: “Now character determines men’s qualities, but it is by their

actions that they are happy or reverse. Dramatic action, therefore, is not with a view to the representation of Character: character comes in as a subsidiary to the actions" (62–63). Still, character was important to Aristotle; he believed it was the second most important element in a drama and that character brought morality to a text (64). In the twentieth century, however, many authors started to think character was more important. For example, as author Andrew Horton notes, "Flannery O'Connor says 'it is the character's personality that creates the action of the story' and not the other way around." Horton goes on to state that usually the characters connect an audience emotionally to a story (2).

Because the purpose of a Who I Am story is to illustrate something about oneself, some might assume that character is the most important aspect of the Who I Am story, but in truth, as novelist Henry James asserts, both character and action are important in this type of story. James believes: "What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character? . . . It is an incident for a woman to stand up with her hand resting on the table and look out at you in a certain way; or if it be not an incident I think it will be hard to say what it is. At the same time it is the expression of character" (qtd. in Abbott 124).

Granted, thinking of the people in a Who I Am story as characters may seem odd because most likely they will be real people. However, consider Theodore A. Rees Cheney's thoughts:

Traditional nonfiction, particularly journalistic nonfiction, never concerned itself with developing characters. Fiction writers worked at characterization; nonfiction writers concentrated on events. Creative nonfiction writers say that because so many events occur as the result of human interactions, the event cannot be fully understood without also understanding something of the people (characters) surrounding it. (134)

So while thinking of yourself, friends, or family as characters may not feel completely natural, remember some similarities do exist between characters and real people in that the people/characters in a Who I Am story need to be developed, interesting, and understandable, just like characters in a fiction work. Of course, some differences exist as well. Since the characters in a Who I Am story are real people,

you will not be creating characters, as a fiction writer does; instead, as Cheney notes, you will be revealing them:

When I write about character development, I'm talking about how the writer goes about revealing a person's character . . . The creative nonfiction writer does not 'create' characters; rather, he or she reveals them to the reader as honestly and accurately as possible. Like most contemporary fiction writers, creative nonfiction writers reveal character much as it happens in real life—bit by bit. (134)

Generally speaking, authors reveal their characters in two ways: direct and indirect characterization. With direct characterization, the author simply tells the audience something about a character. The line “He was 35, looked 13 and was third generation rich” from the *Who I Am* story at the beginning of this chapter is an example of direct characterization. With indirect characterization, the audience learns about characters by watching or listening to them. Indirect characterization can also include descriptions of characters. The *Who I Am* story at the start of this chapter primarily utilizes indirect characterization. The entire story Skip tells about his first job, the mindless drawing, being upset about an hourly worker calling him at home—all indirect characterization. Since indirect characterization shows what a character does, indirect characterization often directly relates to the sequence of actions, again showing how character and action can intertwine.

Another important piece of a story and narrative discourse is the difference between real time and narrative time. Consider the following passage:

Amy dropped a mug of coffee. It shattered on the kitchen floor. Coffee and shattered glass were everywhere. Amy got a towel and began cleaning up the mess.

This is real time, but if a few details are added, we get narrative time:

Amy dropped a mug of coffee. It shattered with a loud crash onto the kitchen floor. She felt the hot liquid burn through her socks into her feet. Coffee and shattered glass were everywhere. Amy sighed; there was no more coffee in the pot, and she had really needed a caffeine burst. Moving carefully through the mess, Amy grabbed an old towel out of the drawer and began cleaning up the remains of her breakfast.

Abbott explains the difference between real (or clock) time and narrative time:

Clock time . . . always relates back to itself, so that one speaks in terms of numbers or seconds or their multiples (minutes, hours) and fractions (nanoseconds). Narrative time, in contrast, relates to events or incidents. And while clock time is necessarily marked off by regular intervals of a certain length, narrative time is not necessarily any length at all. (4–5)

Abbott adds that writers can slow the “whole sequence down by simply adding details” and “conversely, we can make narrative time go like the wind” by using phrases like “in the following months” or “a few weeks later” (5).

The universality of narrative, *fabula* and *sjuzhet*, character and action, indirect and direct representation, real time and narrative time are just a few aspects of narrative theory, but these terms and this information will provide a solid foundation as we begin thinking more specifically about the Who I Am story.

### STARTING THE “WHO I AM” STORY

Your Who I Am story should start to answer the question “who are you?” However, this story should only focus on one characteristic or aspect of your personality. Think back to Skip and the Who I Am story from the beginning of this chapter. His story helped prove he was ready to be a leader and ready to run a corporation.

As with most other types of writing, brainstorming can be a useful tool. To begin, you might just think about all the ways to finish the sentence “I am . . .” The word you choose to finish this sentence then becomes the subject of your Who I Am story. If a subject is not jumping out at you, think about the way your mother, best friend, significant other, or pet might describe you. Think about a characteristic that only the people closest to you see—for example, has anyone ever told you “when I first met you, I never would have guessed that you were so funny (or competitive or happy)”?

Once you have a characteristic in mind, keep brainstorming and think of one specific example or event that illustrates this characteristic. This example will become your story. Again, much like a topic, sometimes an example, or story, will just jump to mind. However, if

you cannot think of an example right away, look through some old pictures, scrapbooks, or yearbooks. Reread journals or listen to favorite songs. All of these things can spark memories, and one of these memories can become the example or event on which your Who I Am story will focus. This event does not have to be exciting or flamboyant. Simple but heartfelt stories often are the most effective. Many things can be faked in life, but sincerity is generally not one of them.

### Writing the “Who I Am” Story

Once you have the topic, just start writing. Writing a story is not like baking a cake—there is no formula or recipe that guarantees a perfect story. But here are some steps to consider:

**1. Ask some questions about the event you are going to write about.** When did this event take place? What are the starting and ending points? Where did this event take place? Who was there? Was there a conflict? A resolution?

**2. Write down everything you remember.** Of course, there are numerous ways to write a first draft, but for a Who I Am story, simply writing down everything you remember about the event is a good place to start. Usually, it is better to have more writing than what you need. So start by writing everything down in chronological order. Do not worry about any rhetorical strategies or making it sound good. Think about the concept of *fabula* and just write down the entire series of events or actions.

**3. Go do something else.** Once you have the entire story written down, set it aside. Go take a nap or play with your dog, and come back to the story later. Then reread it and see if you left anything out. Time permitting, go through this process of putting the story aside and then rereading it several times.

**4. Summarize the main point of the story in one or two sentences.** Go through the story and eliminate everything that does not relate to this main point. Do not worry about length right now. Focus on quality and creating a unified story.

**5. Think about creating a dominant impression.** Is the story sad, thoughtful, sarcastic, or humorous? If you have trouble deciding on

a dominant impression, think about setting the story to music. What song would you pick—Mozart’s “Moonlight Sonata,” something by the Violent Femmes, a sultry jazz tune—and what emotion does this song conjure up?

**6. Keeping the main point and dominant impression in mind, add details and expand the most important parts of your story.** Real time should now become narrative time. Add concrete details and imagery. Imagine the different senses to which the story could appeal. We are a very visual culture, but go beyond describing what things look like—consider incorporating smells or sounds. Think about the way something feels when touched. Also think about how these details can help draw a reader in. Consider this an example from a student’s Who I Am story:

At the beginning of every school year, I am obligated to introduce myself to a new sea of adolescent hormones swimming with impulsiveness, curiosity, and unfiltered tourette-like verbal ejaculations. Sure, I could stand before the little urchins, and with trident in hand, I could dictate the rules of my class and cast off a long list of life experiences that made me the immortal that stands before them or I could let them place their expectations upon me creating an environment of perceived equality. Being a believer in a democratic classroom, I always opt for the latter.

Look at the way this student builds on the details: the words “sea,” “swimming” and “trident” work beautifully together. And look at the choices the student made: using the words “adolescent hormones” and “urchins” instead of students; “unfiltered tourette-like verbal ejaculations” could have simply been opinions or obnoxious comments. The story includes a lot of visual elements, but the phrase “verbal ejaculations” also appeals to the ears. These words, phrases, and ideas all work together to, as clichéd as it sounds, paint a picture of the author of this story.

The author of this story is a student, but she is also a middle-school teacher. The main point of the story is to show who she is as a teacher. Everything in this paragraph relates to that main point. We do not know the color of her hair, whether she is wearing a shirt or a sweater, or if she is tall or short. After all, none of these things relate to the

point of this story. Great detail and description and emotions are very important to the Who I Am story. But they need to be the right details, descriptions, and emotions, and they need to be used at the right time.

**8. Make certain the story shows and does not tell.** The ultimate success of the Who I Am story depends on how well you show, not tell, who you are (i.e. use more indirect characterization than direct characterization). Have faith in your words and in the story you are telling. Trust that the story works and do not end the story with a statement like “clearly this event shows that I am a trustworthy person.” Let the story do its job. Consider two more paragraphs from our middle-school teacher’s story:

On the first day of class last year, I allowed students to take seats at their leisure. I sat on my desk and when everyone was settled, I quietly commanded their attention by placing a large black top hat upon my head. Conversations abruptly stopped as my curious audience took notice. ‘If I were to say that hats are a metaphor for the different roles we play in our lives, what do you think that means?’ I was met with blank stares. ‘What if I said that I play many roles every day? I am a teacher, a mother, a daughter, a coworker, and a friend. Are the expectations for those different roles the same or different?’ A hand raises and a girl with pale skin, lively eyes and thick auburn hair answers, ‘Of course they’re different. I don’t act the same around my friends as I do in front of my parents!’ She has a smug ‘as if’ expression.

‘You’re absolutely right,’ I acknowledge. ‘Now what if I were to ask you to define the expectations of my role as your teacher?’ Eyebrows rise as the class considers this. ‘I’m going to pass out sticky notes and I want each of you to write down a word or phrase that describes what my job is as your teacher. When you are done, I want you to place your note on the strip of blue paper that runs up the wall in the back of the room. Each of you should place your note above the note of the person that went before you so that we create a column of sticky notes. Does everyone understand?’ A thin-faced, black boy with large eyes and bright teeth pipes up, “So we get to tell you how to do your job?” I thoughtfully pause before answering, ‘Well . . . yah!’

What do we learn about the author from reading this passage? What kind of teacher is she? We could describe her as creative, brave, caring, and dedicated. We could decide that she is not afraid to take some risks. We know that she loves her job. Does she directly state any of these things? No. But her story shows that she is all of these things.

**9. Look at the introduction of your story.** Will it grab a reader’s attention? Think about sitting in a doctor’s office or waiting for your car to be repaired. You pick up a magazine and start to thumb through it. How long do you give an article to grab your attention before turning the page? Some people flip to the next page if the title of the article does not interest them; other more generous readers will read the first sentence or two before deciding to continue reading or to move on to the next page. Something in the opening paragraph, hopefully in the first sentence or two, should grab the reader and make him or her want to read on. Here is an example from another student’s Who I Am story:

I thought by the time I was thirty I would know what I wanted to be when I grew up. But here I am on the eve of my thirty-first birthday, and I am still searching, searching for where I fit into the world, amidst all the titles I have been given such as Sydney’s Mom, Tripp’s Wife, and Janice’s Daughter. Then there are all the roles I play: maid, chef, bookkeeper, personal shopper, and teacher. Of course that’s just what I do and who I do it for. The real question remains, when you take all of that away, who am I?

This is the first paragraph of the student’s Who I Am essay, and it does several things nicely. The conversational tone draws us in. We almost feel as if we are getting to peek inside the author’s head. “Tripp’s Wife,” “Janice’s Daughter,” “chef,” “personal shopper” are lovely specifics, and equally important, these are specifics to which most people can relate. Perhaps we are Bob’s son or Suzie’s boyfriend instead of a daughter or a wife, but we can still see the similarities between the author’s life and our own. And because of that, we want to know how she answers the question “who am I?”

**10. Treat this story like any other paper.** Have a solid organizational scheme (chronological often works well), keep one main idea per paragraph, use transitional phrasing, vary the sentence structure, and make sure the ideas flow into each other. Reflect on word choice and



particularly verb choices. Just think, for example, of all the different synonyms for the word walk. A character could strut, saunter, stroll, sashay, or skip. She could mosey, meander, or march. Powerful verbs are a great way to add panache and detail to a story without making it wordy or slowing the pace.

**11. Proofread, edit, and proofread again.** Give the story to a friend and ask them to read it. Do not tell them what the paper is about or what you are trying to accomplish. Instead just ask them what they learned or what three words they would use to describe your story.

**12. And the last bit of advice—have fun.** The best storytellers enjoy telling stories. When you are telling a story, pick a story that matters to you and a story that you really want to share. Let your love for that story come through, and let others see you through your story.

### LOOKING FORWARD: STORYTELLING IN THE PROFESSIONAL WORLD

As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, storytelling is not just for entertainment anymore. It's not just a mindless academic exercise either; storytelling is quickly becoming a cornerstone of the non-profit and corporate worlds. Storytelling can be a part of corporate training, public relations, politics, journalism, and of course, the two industries we are going to focus on: grantwriting and advertising.

Cheryl Clarke's book *Storytelling for Grantseekers: A Creative Guide to Nonprofit Fundraising* has been highly praised by both grantwriters and grant readers. For decades grants have been notoriously boring—both to write and to read. Clarke's book is starting to change all that.

Clarke begins by noting the similarities between grantwriting and storytelling:

Storytelling is a powerful art form. Stories entertain, educate, and enlighten. They have the ability to transport an audience to another location and teach them about issues and people they may know nothing about. The same is true of grantwriting. (xv)

Clarke continues by breaking down the different parts of the grantwriting process. She relates that often the grantwriting process starts with a letter of intent, a one to two page letter summarizing the request

that is sent to the funding organization. If the funding organization thinks your request has merit, they will ask you (or your organization) to submit a full grant proposal. Clarke likens the letter of intent to a short story and the full grant proposal to a novel.

Like short stories and novels, grants should also have heroes, villains (or antagonists) and a conflict. The hero is, of course, the non-profit agency. As Clarke notes,

Nonprofit agencies do heroic work, and they are the heroes of every proposal we write. Throughout the world today, non-profits are working diligently to feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, heal the sick, teach children, conserve the environment, save endangered species, and present music performances and art exhibitions, among other important activities. . . . As grantwriters, we have the opportunity to tell others these amazing stories. (52)

The antagonist is simply the need or problem. Hunger, global warming, abused animals, disease—any one of these could be the villain of the grant proposal. The nonprofit and the need become the characters in the story and supply the conflict and tension. Clarke suggests giving these characters a voice, stating “quotes are especially powerful because through them the proposal reviewer ‘hears’ directly from your agency’s clients in their own words” (81). These quotes become the dialogue in the story. Grant proposals often include other elements traditionally seen in novels, such as setting, back stories, and resolutions.

Clarke clearly shows the advantages of using storytelling techniques in grantwriting, and many believe storytelling is an equally important part of advertising as a close examination of the “1984” Macintosh commercial will indicate. In 1984, Apple was in trouble. As Richard Maxwell and Robert Dickman note in their book *The Elements of Persuasion: Use Storytelling to Pitch Better, Sell Faster and Win More Business*:

at that time the computer industry was in transition . . . Apple had been a major player when computers were seen as expensive toys for hobbyists or learning platforms for children. But when corporations began seriously going digital, they naturally turned to a name they had come to trust—IBM. IBM PC computers became ‘industry standard,’ with all the purchasing and advertising muscle that implied. (11)

In response, Apple's CEO Steve Jobs created the Macintosh computer, but he needed an advertisement that would bring attention to this computer. The "1984" commercial did just that. The "1984" commercial (available on YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OYecfV3ubP8>) shows a dystopia: a dismal gray world where Big Brother is seen (and heard) on every television screen. Row after row of people stare mindlessly at huge television screens, watching propaganda. A woman in red shorts runs through the crowd and hurls a hammer at the largest screen, destroying it and silencing Big Brother. The commercial closes with the tagline "On January 24, Apple Computer will introduce Macintosh. And you'll see why 1984 won't be like 1984."

The commercial ran only once nationally (during the 1984 Super Bowl) and is generally credited with two things. The first is saving Apple. As Maxwell and Dickman note, "The result of this ad was explosive. Seven days later there wasn't a Macintosh left unsold on any store shelf in America, and back orders were beginning to stretch out for months" (12). Second, many advertising gurus believe that the "1984" commercial was one of the first advertisements to use a story.

Much like the stories Clarke talks about, the "1984" commercial has a hero: the Macintosh computer, which is personified by the attractive blonde in the short red shorts. The villain is the status quo and corporate America, both of which are supposed to symbolize IBM. The smashing of the television screen ends the conflict and provides resolution. This story also has something else: passion. As Maxwell and Dickman note: "But at its cohesive core, what made this ad white-hot was Steve Job's passionate belief that a computer was meant to be a tool to set people free" (12). And Maxwell and Dickman believe passion is another essential element of story.

This is, of course, only one example; today most commercials tell a story, and we can certainly see why. Maxwell and Dickman explain "A good story plays as well on TV as it does whispered to a guy in the back of a union meeting hall. It's as powerful in the powder room as it is in the boardroom. People love a good story. We can't get enough of them. And a good story is infectious. It spreads like wildfire" (46).

Again, storytelling now appears in many forms of professional and workplace communication; grantwriting and advertising are only two examples. So have fun telling your stories, enjoy them, learn to make them come alive. At the same time, you'll be developing a marketable

skill because, appropriately enough, storytelling has become a valuable commodity in corporate America.

### DISCUSSION

1. Maxwell and Dickman believe that “a story is a fact, wrapped in an emotion that compels us to take an action that transforms our world.” How would you define the term story? What do you think are the most important elements of a good story? What examples help support your thoughts?
2. How could stories and storytelling fit into your major field of study? What types of stories do you think professionals in your field might find useful?

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## CHAPTER VII

I lived in Master Hugh's family about seven years. During this time, I succeeded in learning to read and write. In accomplishing this, I was compelled to resort to various stratagems. I had no regular teacher. My mistress, who had kindly commenced to instruct me, had, in compliance with the advice and direction of her husband, not only ceased to instruct, but had set her face against my being instructed by any one else. It is due, however, to my mistress to say of her, that she did not adopt this course of treatment immediately. She at first lacked the depravity indispensable to shutting me up in mental darkness. It was at least necessary for her to have some training in the exercise of irresponsible power, to make her equal to the task of treating me as though I were a brute.

My mistress was, as I have said, a kind and tender-hearted woman; and in the simplicity of her soul she commenced, when I first went to live with her, to treat me as she supposed one human being ought to treat another. In entering upon the duties of a slaveholder, she did not seem to perceive that I sustained to her the relation of a mere chattel, and that for her to treat me as a human being was not only wrong, but dangerously so. Slavery proved as injurious to her as it did to me. When I went there, she was a pious, warm, and tender-hearted woman. There was no sorrow or suffering for which she had not a tear. She had bread for the hungry, clothes for the naked, and comfort for every mourner that came within her reach. Slavery soon proved its ability to divest her of these heavenly qualities. Under its influence, the tender heart became stone, and the lamblike disposition gave way to one of tiger-like fierceness. The first step in her downward course was in her ceasing to instruct me. She now commenced to practise her husband's precepts. She finally became even more violent in her opposition than her husband himself. She was not satisfied with simply doing as well as he had commanded; she seemed anxious to do better. Nothing seemed to make her more angry than to see me with a newspaper. She seemed to think that here lay the danger. I have had her rush at me with a face made all up of fury, and snatch from me a newspaper, in a manner that fully revealed her apprehension. She was an apt woman; and a little experience soon demonstrated, to her satisfaction, that education and slavery were incompatible with each other.

From this time I was most narrowly watched. If I was in a separate room any considerable length of time, I was sure to be suspected of having a book, and was at once called to give an account of myself. All this, however, was too late. The first step had been taken. Mistress, in teaching me the alphabet, had given me the *inch*, and no precaution could prevent me from taking the *ell*.

The plan which I adopted, and the one by which I was most successful, was that of making friends of all the little white boys whom I met in the street. As many of these as I could, I converted into teachers. With their kindly aid, obtained at different times

and in different places, I finally succeeded in learning to read. When I was sent of errands, I always took my book with me, and by going one part of my errand quickly, I found time to get a lesson before my return. I used also to carry bread with me, enough of which was always in the house, and to which I was always welcome; for I was much better off in this regard than many of the poor white children in our neighborhood. This bread I used to bestow upon the hungry little urchins, who, in return, would give me that more valuable bread of knowledge. I am strongly tempted to give the names of two or three of those little boys, as a testimonial of the gratitude and affection I bear them; but prudence forbids;—not that it would injure me, but it might embarrass them; for it is almost an unpardonable offence to teach slaves to read in this Christian country. It is enough to say of the dear little fellows, that they lived on Philpot Street, very near Durgin and Bailey's ship-yard. I used to talk this matter of slavery over with them. I would sometimes say to them, I wished I could be as free as they would be when they got to be men. "You will be free as soon as you are twenty-one, *but I am a slave for life!* Have not I as good a right to be free as you have?" These words used to trouble them; they would express for me the liveliest sympathy, and console me with the hope that something would occur by which I might be free.

I was now about twelve years old, and the thought of being *a slave for life* began to bear heavily upon my heart. Just about this time, I got hold of a book entitled "The Columbian Orator." Every opportunity I got, I used to read this book. Among much of other interesting matter, I found in it a dialogue between a master and his slave. The slave was represented as having run away from his master three times. The dialogue represented the conversation which took place between them, when the slave was retaken the third time. In this dialogue, the whole argument in behalf of slavery was brought forward by the master, all of which was disposed of by the slave. The slave was made to say some very smart as well as impressive things in reply to his master—things which had the desired though unexpected effect; for the conversation resulted in the voluntary emancipation of the slave on the part of the master.

In the same book, I met with one of Sheridan's mighty speeches on and in behalf of Catholic emancipation. These were choice documents to me. I read them over and over again with unabated interest. They gave tongue to interesting thoughts of my own soul, which had frequently flashed through my mind, and died away for want of utterance. The moral which I gained from the dialogue was the power of truth over the conscience of even a slaveholder. What I got from Sheridan was a bold denunciation of slavery, and a powerful vindication of human rights. The reading of these documents enabled me to utter my thoughts, and to meet the arguments brought forward to sustain slavery; but while they relieved me of one difficulty, they brought on another even more painful than the one of which I was relieved. The more I read, the more I was led to abhor and detest my enslavers. I could regard them in no other light than a band of successful robbers, who had left their homes, and gone to Africa, and stolen us from our homes, and in a strange land reduced us to slavery. I loathed them as being the meanest as well

as the most wicked of men. As I read and contemplated the subject, behold! that very discontentment which Master Hugh had predicted would follow my learning to read had already come, to torment and sting my soul to unutterable anguish. As I writhed under it, I would at times feel that learning to read had been a curse rather than a blessing. It had given me a view of my wretched condition, without the remedy. It opened my eyes to the horrible pit, but to no ladder upon which to get out. In moments of agony, I envied my fellow-slaves for their stupidity. I have often wished myself a beast. I preferred the condition of the meanest reptile to my own. Any thing, no matter what, to get rid of thinking! It was this everlasting thinking of my condition that tormented me. There was no getting rid of it. It was pressed upon me by every object within sight or hearing, animate or inanimate. The silver trump of freedom had roused my soul to eternal wakefulness. Freedom now appeared, to disappear no more forever. It was heard in every sound, and seen in every thing. It was ever present to torment me with a sense of my wretched condition. I saw nothing without seeing it, I heard nothing without hearing it, and felt nothing without feeling it. It looked from every star, it smiled in every calm, breathed in every wind, and moved in every storm.

I often found myself regretting my own existence, and wishing myself dead; and but for the hope of being free, I have no doubt but that I should have killed myself, or done something for which I should have been killed. While in this state of mind, I was eager to hear any one speak of slavery. I was a ready listener. Every little while, I could hear something about the abolitionists. It was some time before I found what the word meant. It was always used in such connections as to make it an interesting word to me. If a slave ran away and succeeded in getting clear, or if a slave killed his master, set fire to a barn, or did any thing very wrong in the mind of a slaveholder, it was spoken of as the fruit of *abolition*. Hearing the word in this connection very often, I set about learning what it meant. The dictionary afforded me little or no help. I found it was "the act of abolishing;" but then I did not know what was to be abolished. Here I was perplexed. I did not dare to ask any one about its meaning, for I was satisfied that it was something they wanted me to know very little about. After a patient waiting, I got one of our city papers, containing an account of the number of petitions from the north, praying for the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia, and of the slave trade between the States. From this time I understood the words *abolition* and *abolitionist*, and always drew near when that word was spoken, expecting to hear something of importance to myself and fellow-slaves. The light broke in upon me by degrees. I went one day down on the wharf of Mr. Waters; and seeing two Irishmen unloading a scow of stone, I went, unasked, and helped them. When we had finished, one of them came to me and asked me if I were a slave. I told him I was. He asked, "Are ye a slave for life?" I told him that I was. The good Irishman seemed to be deeply affected by the statement. He said to the other that it was a pity so fine a little fellow as myself should be a slave for life. He said it was a shame to hold me. They both advised me to run away to the north; that I should find friends there, and that I

should be free. I pretended not to be interested in what they said, and treated them as if I did not understand them; for I feared they might be treacherous. White men have been known to encourage slaves to escape, and then, to get the reward, catch them and return them to their masters. I was afraid that these seemingly good men might use me so; but I nevertheless remembered their advice, and from that time I resolved to run away. I looked forward to a time at which it would be safe for me to escape. I was too young to think of doing so immediately; besides, I wished to learn how to write, as I might have occasion to write my own pass. I consoled myself with the hope that I should one day find a good chance. Meanwhile, I would learn to write.

The idea as to how I might learn to write was suggested to me by being in Durgin and Bailey's ship-yard, and frequently seeing the ship carpenters, after hewing, and getting a piece of timber ready for use, write on the timber the name of that part of the ship for which it was intended. When a piece of timber was intended for the larboard side, it would be marked thus—"L." When a piece was for the starboard side, it would be marked thus—"S." A piece for the larboard side forward, would be marked thus—"L. F." When a piece was for starboard side forward, it would be marked thus—"S. F." For larboard aft, it would be marked thus—"L. A." For starboard aft, it would be marked thus—"S. A." I soon learned the names of these letters, and for what they were intended when placed upon a piece of timber in the ship-yard. I immediately commenced copying them, and in a short time was able to make the four letters named. After that, when I met with any boy who I knew could write, I would tell him I could write as well as he. The next word would be, "I don't believe you. Let me see you try it." I would then make the letters which I had been so fortunate as to learn, and ask him to beat that. In this way I got a good many lessons in writing, which it is quite possible I should never have gotten in any other way. During this time, my copy-book was the board fence, brick wall, and pavement; my pen and ink was a lump of chalk. With these, I learned mainly how to write. I then commenced and continued copying the Italics in Webster's Spelling Book, until I could make them all without looking on the book. By this time, my little Master Thomas had gone to school, and learned how to write, and had written over a number of copy-books. These had been brought home, and shown to some of our near neighbors, and then laid aside. My mistress used to go to class meeting at the Wilk Street meetinghouse every Monday afternoon, and leave me to take care of the house. When left thus, I used to spend the time in writing in the spaces left in Master Thomas's copy-book, copying what he had written. I continued to do this until I could write a hand very similar to that of Master Thomas. Thus, after a long, tedious effort for years, I finally succeeded in learning how to write.



The School Days of an Indian Girl  
Zitkala-Sa

<https://courses.lumenlearning.com/suny-readinganthology/chapter/the-school-days-of-an-indian-girl-by-zitkala-sa/>

## I. THE LAND OF RED APPLES.

There were eight in our party of bronzed children who were going East with the missionaries. Among us were three young braves, two tall girls, and we three little ones, Judéwin, Thowin, and I.

We had been very impatient to start on our journey to the Red Apple Country, which, we were told, lay a little beyond the great circular horizon of the Western prairie. Under a sky of rosy apples we dreamt of roaming as freely and happily as we had chased the cloud shadows on the Dakota plains. We had anticipated much pleasure from a ride on the iron horse, but the throngs of staring palefaces disturbed and troubled us.

On the train, fair women, with tottering babies on each arm, stopped their haste and scrutinized the children of absent mothers. Large men, with heavy bundles in their hands, halted near by, and riveted their glassy blue eyes upon us.

I sank deep into the corner of my seat, for I resented being watched. Directly in front of me, children who were no larger than I hung themselves upon the backs of their seats, with their bold white faces toward me. Sometimes they took their forefingers out of their mouths and pointed at my moccasined feet. Their mothers, instead of reproving such rude curiosity, looked closely at me, and attracted their children's further notice to my blanket. This embarrassed me, and kept me constantly on the verge of tears.

I sat perfectly still, with my eyes downcast, daring only now and then to shoot long glances around me. Chancing to turn to the window at my side, I was quite breathless upon seeing one familiar object. It was the telegraph pole which strode by at short paces. Very near my mother's dwelling, along the edge of a road thickly bordered with wild sunflowers, some poles like these had been planted by white men. Often I had stopped, on my way down the road, to hold my ear against the pole, and, hearing its low moaning, I used to wonder what the paleface had done to hurt it. Now I sat watching for each pole that glided by to be the last one.

In this way I had forgotten my uncomfortable surroundings, when I heard one of my comrades call out my name. I saw the missionary standing very near, tossing candies and gums into our midst. This amused us all, and we tried to see who could catch the most of the sweetmeats.

Though we rode several days inside of the iron horse, I do not recall a single thing about our luncheons.

It was night when we reached the school grounds. The lights from the windows of the large buildings fell upon some of the icicled trees that stood beneath them. We were led toward an open door, where the brightness of the lights within flooded out over the heads of the excited palefaces who blocked our way. My body trembled more from fear than from the snow I trod upon.

Entering the house, I stood close against the wall. The strong glaring light in the large whitewashed room dazzled my eyes. The noisy hurrying of hard shoes upon a bare wooden floor increased the whirring in my ears. My only safety seemed to be in keeping next to the wall. As I was wondering in which direction to escape from all this confusion, two warm hands grasped me firmly, and in the same moment I was tossed high in midair. A rosy-cheeked paleface woman caught me in her arms. I was both frightened and insulted by such trifling. I stared into her eyes, wishing her to let me stand on my own feet, but she jumped me up and down with increasing enthusiasm. My mother had never made a plaything of her wee daughter. Remembering this I began to cry aloud.

They misunderstood the cause of my tears, and placed me at a white table loaded with food. There our party were united again. As I did not hush my crying, one of the older ones whispered to me, “Wait until you are alone in the night.”

It was very little I could swallow besides my sobs, that evening.

“Oh, I want my mother and my brother Dawée! I want to go to my aunt!” I pleaded; but the ears of the palefaces could not hear me.

From the table we were taken along an upward incline of wooden boxes, which I learned afterward to call a stairway. At the top was a quiet hall, dimly lighted. Many narrow beds were in one straight line down the entire length of the wall. In them lay sleeping brown faces, which peeped just out of the coverings. I was tucked into bed with one of the tall girls, because she talked to me in my mother tongue and seemed to soothe me.

I had arrived in the wonderful land of rosy skies, but I was not happy, as I had thought I should be. My long travel and the bewildering sights had exhausted me. I fell asleep, heaving deep, tired sobs. My tears were left to dry themselves in streaks, because neither my aunt nor my mother was near to wipe them away.

## II. THE CUTTING OF MY LONG HAIR.

The first day in the land of apples was a bitter-cold one; for the snow still covered the ground, and the trees were bare. A large bell rang for breakfast, its loud metallic voice crashing through the belfry overhead and into our sensitive ears. The annoying clatter of shoes on bare floors gave us no peace. The constant clash of harsh noises, with an undercurrent of many voices murmuring an unknown tongue, made a bedlam within which I was securely tied. And though my spirit tore itself in struggling for its lost freedom, all was useless.

A paleface woman, with white hair, came up after us. We were placed in a line of girls who were marching into the dining room. These were Indian girls, in stiff shoes and closely clinging dresses. The small girls wore sleeved aprons and shingled hair. As I walked noiselessly in my soft moccasins, I felt like sinking to the floor, for my blanket had been stripped from my shoulders. I looked hard at the Indian girls, who seemed not to care that they were even more immodestly dressed than I, in their tightly fitting clothes. While we marched in, the boys entered at an opposite door. I watched for the three young braves who came in our party. I spied them in the rear ranks, looking as uncomfortable as I felt. A small bell was tapped, and each of the pupils drew a chair from under the table. Supposing this act meant they were to be seated, I pulled out mine and at once slipped into it from one side. But when I turned my

head, I saw that I was the only one seated, and all the rest at our table remained standing. Just as I began to rise, looking shyly around to see how chairs were to be used, a second bell was sounded. All were seated at last, and I had to crawl back into my chair again. I heard a man's voice at one end of the hall, and I looked around to see him. But all the others hung their heads over their plates. As I glanced at the long chain of tables, I caught the eyes of a paleface woman upon me. Immediately I dropped my eyes, wondering why I was so keenly watched by the strange woman. The man ceased his mutterings, and then a third bell was tapped. Every one picked up his knife and fork and began eating. I began crying instead, for by this time I was afraid to venture anything more.

But this eating by formula was not the hardest trial in that first day. Late in the morning, my friend Judéwin gave me a terrible warning. Judéwin knew a few words of English; and she had overheard the paleface woman talk about cutting our long, heavy hair. Our mothers had taught us that only unskilled warriors who were captured had their hair shingled by the enemy. Among our people, short hair was worn by mourners, and shingled hair by cowards!

We discussed our fate some moments, and when Judéwin said, “We have to submit, because they are strong,” I rebelled.

“No, I will not submit! I will struggle first!” I answered.

I watched my chance, and when no one noticed, I disappeared. I crept up the stairs as quietly as I could in my squeaking shoes,—my moccasins had been exchanged for shoes. Along the hall I passed, without knowing whither I was going. Turning aside to an open door, I found a large room with three white beds in it. The windows were covered with dark green curtains, which made the room very dim. Thankful that no one was there, I directed my steps toward the corner farthest from the door. On my hands and knees I crawled under the bed, and cuddled myself in the dark corner.

From my hiding place I peered out, shuddering with fear whenever I heard footsteps near by. Though in the hall loud voices were calling my

name, and I knew that even Judéwin was searching for me, I did not open my mouth to answer. Then the steps were quickened and the voices became excited. The sounds came nearer and nearer. Women and girls entered the room. I held my breath and watched them open closet doors and peep behind large trunks. Some one threw up the curtains, and the room was filled with sudden light. What caused them to stoop and look under the bed I do not know. I remember being dragged out, though I resisted by kicking and scratching wildly. In spite of myself, I was carried downstairs and tied fast in a chair.

I cried aloud, shaking my head all the while until I felt the cold blades of the scissors against my neck, and heard them gnaw off one of my thick braids. Then I lost my spirit. Since the day I was taken from my mother I had suffered extreme indignities. People had stared at me. I had been tossed about in the air like a wooden puppet. And now my long hair was shingled like a coward's! In my anguish I moaned for my mother, but no one came to comfort me. Not a soul reasoned quietly with me, as my own mother used to do; for now I was only one of many little animals driven by a herder.

### III. THE SNOW EPISODE.

A short time after our arrival we three Dakotas were playing in the snowdrift. We were all still deaf to the English language, excepting Judéwin, who always heard such puzzling things. One morning we learned through her ears that we were forbidden to fall lengthwise in the snow, as we had been doing, to see our own impressions. However, before many hours we had forgotten the order, and were having great sport in the snow, when a shrill voice called us. Looking up, we saw an imperative hand beckoning us into the house. We shook the snow off ourselves, and started toward the woman as slowly as we dared.

Judéwin said: “Now the paleface is angry with us. She is going to punish us for falling into the snow. If she looks straight into your eyes and talks loudly, you must wait until she stops. Then, after a tiny pause, say, ‘No.’” The rest of the way we practiced upon the little word “no.”

As it happened, Thowin was summoned to judgment first. The door shut

behind her with a click.

Judéwin and I stood silently listening at the keyhole. The paleface woman talked in very severe tones. Her words fell from her lips like crackling embers, and her inflection ran up like the small end of a switch. I understood her voice better than the things she was saying. I was certain we had made her very impatient with us. Judéwin heard enough of the words to realize all too late that she had taught us the wrong reply.

“Oh, poor Thowin!” she gasped, as she put both hands over her ears.

Just then I heard Thowin’s tremulous answer, “No.”

With an angry exclamation, the woman gave her a hard spanking. Then she stopped to say something. Judéwin said it was this: “Are you going to obey my word the next time?”

Thowin answered again with the only word at her command, “No.”

This time the woman meant her blows to smart, for the poor frightened girl shrieked at the top of her voice. In the midst of the whipping the blows ceased abruptly, and the woman asked another question: “Are you going to fall in the snow again?”

Thowin gave her bad password another trial. We heard her say feebly, “No! No!”

With this the woman hid away her half-worn slipper, and led the child out, stroking her black shorn head. Perhaps it occurred to her that brute force is not the solution for such a problem. She did nothing to Judéwin nor to me. She only returned to us our unhappy comrade, and left us alone in the room.

During the first two or three seasons misunderstandings as ridiculous as this one of the snow episode frequently took place, bringing unjustifiable frights and punishments into our little lives.

Within a year I was able to express myself somewhat in broken English. As soon as I comprehended a part of what was said and done, a mischievous spirit of revenge possessed me. One day I was called in from my play for some misconduct. I had disregarded a rule which seemed to me very needlessly binding. I was sent into the kitchen to mash the turnips for dinner. It was noon, and steaming dishes were hastily carried into the dining-room. I hated turnips, and their odor which came from the brown jar was offensive to me. With fire in my heart, I took the wooden tool that the paleface woman held out to me. I stood upon a step, and, grasping the handle with both hands, I bent in hot rage over the turnips. I worked my vengeance upon them. All were so busily occupied that no one noticed me. I saw that the turnips were in a pulp, and that further beating could not improve them; but the order was, “Mash these turnips,” and mash them I would! I renewed my energy; and as I sent the masher into the bottom of the jar, I felt a satisfying sensation that the weight of my body had gone into it.

Just here a paleface woman came up to my table. As she looked into the jar, she shoved my hands roughly aside. I stood fearless and angry. She placed her red hands upon the rim of the jar. Then she gave one lift and stride away from the table. But lo! the pulpy contents fell through the crumbled bottom to the floor! She spared me no scolding phrases that I had earned. I did not heed them. I felt triumphant in my revenge, though deep within me I was a wee bit sorry to have broken the jar.

As I sat eating my dinner, and saw that no turnips were served, I whooped in my heart for having once asserted the rebellion within me.

#### IV. THE DEVIL.

Among the legends the old warriors used to tell me were many stories of evil spirits. But I was taught to fear them no more than those who stalked about in material guise. I never knew there was an insolent chieftain among the bad spirits, who dared to array his forces against the Great Spirit, until I heard this white man's legend from a paleface woman.

Out of a large book she showed me a picture of the white man's devil. I looked in horror upon the strong claws that grew out of his fur-covered



fingers. His feet were like his hands. Trailing at his heels was a scaly tail tipped with a serpent's open jaws. His face was a patchwork: he had bearded cheeks, like some I had seen palefaces wear; his nose was an eagle's bill, and his sharp-pointed ears were pricked up like those of a sly fox. Above them a pair of cow's horns curved upward. I trembled with awe, and my heart throbbed in my throat, as I looked at the king of evil spirits. Then I heard the paleface woman say that this terrible creature roamed loose in the world, and that little girls who disobeyed school regulations were to be tortured by him.

That night I dreamt about this evil divinity. Once again I seemed to be in my mother's cottage. An Indian woman had come to visit my mother. On opposite sides of the kitchen stove, which stood in the center of the small house, my mother and her guest were seated in straight-backed chairs. I played with a train of empty spools hitched together on a string. It was night, and the wick burned feebly. Suddenly I heard some one turn our door-knob from without.

My mother and the woman hushed their talk, and both looked toward the door. It opened gradually. I waited behind the stove. The hinges squeaked as the door was slowly, very slowly pushed inward.

Then in rushed the devil! He was tall! He looked exactly like the picture I had seen of him in the white man's papers. He did not speak to my mother, because he did not know the Indian language, but his glittering yellow eyes were fastened upon me. He took long strides around the stove, passing behind the woman's chair. I threw down my spools, and ran to my mother. He did not fear her, but followed closely after me. Then I ran round and round the stove, crying aloud for help. But my mother and the woman seemed not to know my danger. They sat still, looking quietly upon the devil's chase after me. At last I grew dizzy. My head revolved as on a hidden pivot. My knees became numb, and doubled under my weight like a pair of knife blades without a spring. Beside my mother's chair I fell in a heap. Just as the devil stooped over me with outstretched claws my mother awoke from her quiet indifference, and lifted me on her lap. Whereupon the devil vanished, and I was awake.

On the following morning I took my revenge upon the devil. Stealing into

the room where a wall of shelves was filled with books, I drew forth *The Stories of the Bible*. With a broken slate pencil I carried in my apron pocket, I began by scratching out his wicked eyes. A few moments later, when I was ready to leave the room, there was a ragged hole in the page where the picture of the devil had once been.

## V. IRON ROUTINE

A loud-clamoring bell awakened us at half-past six in the cold winter mornings. From happy dreams of Western rolling lands and unlassoed freedom we tumbled out upon chilly bare floors back again into a paleface day. We had short time to jump into our shoes and clothes, and wet our eyes with icy water, before a small hand bell was vigorously rung for roll call.

There were too many drowsy children and too numerous orders for the day to waste a moment in any apology to nature for giving her children such a shock in the early morning. We rushed downstairs, bounding over two high steps at a time, to land in the assembly room.

A paleface woman, with a yellow-covered roll book open on her arm and a gnawed pencil in her hand, appeared at the door. Her small, tired face was coldly lighted with a pair of large gray eyes.

She stood still in a halo of authority, while over the rim of her spectacles her eyes pried nervously about the room. Having glanced at her long list of names and called out the first one, she tossed up her chin and peered through the crystals of her spectacles to make sure of the answer “Here.”

Relentlessly her pencil black-marked our daily records if we were not present to respond to our names, and no chum of ours had done it successfully for us. No matter if a dull headache or the painful cough of slow consumption had delayed the absentee, there was only time enough to mark the tardiness. It was next to impossible to leave the iron routine after the civilizing machine had once begun its day’s buzzing; and as it was inbred in me to suffer in silence rather than to appeal to the ears of one whose open eyes could not see my pain, I have many times trudged in the day’s harness heavy-footed, like a dumb sick brute.

Once I lost a dear classmate. I remember well how she used to mope along at my side, until one morning she could not raise her head from her pillow. At her deathbed I stood weeping, as the paleface woman sat near her moistening the dry lips. Among the folds of the bedclothes I saw the open pages of the white man's Bible. The dying Indian girl talked disconnectedly of Jesus the Christ and the paleface who was cooling her swollen hands and feet.

I grew bitter, and censured the woman for cruel neglect of our physical ills. I despised the pencils that moved automatically, and the one teaspoon which dealt out, from a large bottle, healing to a row of variously ailing Indian children. I blamed the hard-working, well-meaning, ignorant woman who was inculcating in our hearts her superstitious ideas. Though I was sullen in all my little troubles, as soon as I felt better I was ready again to smile upon the cruel woman. Within a week I was again actively testing the chains which tightly bound my individuality like a mummy for burial.

The melancholy of those black days has left so long a shadow that it darkens the path of years that have since gone by. These sad memories rise above those of smoothly grinding school days. Perhaps my Indian nature is the moaning wind which stirs them now for their present record. But, however tempestuous this is within me, it comes out as the low voice of a curiously colored seashell, which is only for those ears that are bent with compassion to hear it.

## VI. FOUR STRANGE SUMMERS.

After my first three years of school, I roamed again in the Western country through four strange summers.

During this time I seemed to hang in the heart of chaos, beyond the touch or voice of human aid. My brother, being almost ten years my senior, did not quite understand my feelings. My mother had never gone inside of a schoolhouse, and so she was not capable of comforting her daughter who could read and write. Even nature seemed to have no place for me. I was neither a wee girl nor a tall one; neither a wild Indian

nor a tame one. This deplorable situation was the effect of my brief course in the East, and the unsatisfactory “teenth” in a girl’s years.

It was under these trying conditions that, one bright afternoon, as I sat restless and unhappy in my mother’s cabin, I caught the sound of the spirited step of my brother’s pony on the road which passed by our dwelling. Soon I heard the wheels of a light buckboard, and Dawée’s familiar “Ho!” to his pony. He alighted upon the bare ground in front of our house. Tying his pony to one of the projecting corner logs of the low-roofed cottage, he stepped upon the wooden doorstep.

I met him there with a hurried greeting, and, as I passed by, he looked a quiet “What?” into my eyes.

When he began talking with my mother, I slipped the rope from the pony’s bridle. Seizing the reins and bracing my feet against the dashboard, I wheeled around in an instant. The pony was ever ready to try his speed. Looking backward, I saw Dawée waving his hand to me. I turned with the curve in the road and disappeared. I followed the winding road which crawled upward between the bases of little hillocks. Deep water-worn ditches ran parallel on either side. A strong wind blew against my cheeks and fluttered my sleeves. The pony reached the top of the highest hill, and began an even race on the level lands. There was nothing moving within that great circular horizon of the Dakota prairies save the tall grasses, over which the wind blew and rolled off in long, shadowy waves.

Within this vast wigwam of blue and green I rode reckless and insignificant. It satisfied my small consciousness to see the white foam fly from the pony’s mouth.

Suddenly, out of the earth a coyote came forth at a swinging trot that was taking the cunning thief toward the hills and the village beyond. Upon the moment’s impulse, I gave him a long chase and a wholesome fright. As I turned away to go back to the village, the wolf sank down upon his haunches for rest, for it was a hot summer day; and as I drove slowly homeward, I saw his sharp nose still pointed at me, until I vanished below the margin of the hilltops.

In a little while I came in sight of my mother's house. Dawée stood in the yard, laughing at an old warrior who was pointing his forefinger, and again waving his whole hand, toward the hills. With his blanket drawn over one shoulder, he talked and motioned excitedly. Dawée turned the old man by the shoulder and pointed me out to him.

“Oh, han!” (Oh, yes) the warrior muttered, and went his way. He had climbed the top of his favorite barren hill to survey the surrounding prairies, when he spied my chase after the coyote. His keen eyes recognized the pony and driver. At once uneasy for my safety, he had come running to my mother's cabin to give her warning. I did not appreciate his kindly interest, for there was an unrest gnawing at my heart.

As soon as he went away, I asked Dawée about something else.

“No, my baby sister, I cannot take you with me to the party tonight,” he replied. Though I was not far from fifteen, and I felt that before long I should enjoy all the privileges of my tall cousin, Dawée persisted in calling me his baby sister.

That moonlight night, I cried in my mother's presence when I heard the jolly young people pass by our cottage. They were no more young braves in blankets and eagle plumes, nor Indian maids with prettily painted cheeks. They had gone three years to school in the East, and had become civilized. The young men wore the white man's coat and trousers, with bright neckties. The girls wore tight muslin dresses, with ribbons at neck and waist. At these gatherings they talked English. I could speak English almost as well as my brother, but I was not properly dressed to be taken along. I had no hat, no ribbons, and no close-fitting gown. Since my return from school I had thrown away my shoes, and wore again the soft moccasins.

While Dawée was busily preparing to go I controlled my tears. But when I heard him bounding away on his pony, I buried my face in my arms and cried hot tears.

My mother was troubled by my unhappiness. Coming to my side, she

offered me the only printed matter we had in our home. It was an Indian Bible, given her some years ago by a missionary. She tried to console me. “Here, my child, are the white man’s papers. Read a little from them,” she said most piously.

I took it from her hand, for her sake; but my enraged spirit felt more like burning the book, which afforded me no help, and was a perfect delusion to my mother. I did not read it, but laid it unopened on the floor, where I sat on my feet. The dim yellow light of the braided muslin burning in a small vessel of oil flickered and sizzled in the awful silent storm which followed my rejection of the Bible.

Now my wrath against the fates consumed my tears before they reached my eyes. I sat stony, with a bowed head. My mother threw a shawl over her head and shoulders, and stepped out into the night.

After an uncertain solitude, I was suddenly aroused by a loud cry piercing the night. It was my mother’s voice wailing among the barren hills which held the bones of buried warriors. She called aloud for her brothers’ spirits to support her in her helpless misery. My fingers Grey icy cold, as I realized that my unrestrained tears had betrayed my suffering to her, and she was grieving for me.

Before she returned, though I knew she was on her way, for she had ceased her weeping, I extinguished the light, and leaned my head on the window sill.

Many schemes of running away from my surroundings hovered about in my mind. A few more moons of such a turmoil drove me away to the eastern school. I rode on the white man’s iron steed, thinking it would bring me back to my mother in a few winters, when I should be grown tall, and there would be congenial friends awaiting me.

## VII. INCURRING MY MOTHER’S DISPLEASURE.

In the second journey to the East I had not come without some precautions. I had a secret interview with one of our best medicine men, and when I left his wigwam I carried securely in my sleeve a tiny bunch

of magic roots. This possession assured me of friends wherever I should go. So absolutely did I believe in its charms that I wore it through all the school routine for more than a year. Then, before I lost my faith in the dead roots, I lost the little buckskin bag containing all my good luck.

At the close of this second term of three years I was the proud owner of my first diploma. The following autumn I ventured upon a college career against my mother's will.

I had written for her approval, but in her reply I found no encouragement. She called my notice to her neighbors' children, who had completed their education in three years. They had returned to their homes, and were then talking English with the frontier settlers. Her few words hinted that I had better give up my slow attempt to learn the white man's ways, and be content to roam over the prairies and find my living upon wild roots. I silenced her by deliberate disobedience.

Thus, homeless and heavy-hearted, I began anew my life among strangers.

As I hid myself in my little room in the college dormitory, away from the scornful and yet curious eyes of the students, I pined for sympathy. Often I wept in secret, wishing I had gone West, to be nourished by my mother's love, instead of remaining among a cold race whose hearts were frozen hard with prejudice.

During the fall and winter seasons I scarcely had a real friend, though by that time several of my classmates were courteous to me at a safe distance.

My mother had not yet forgiven my rudeness to her, and I had no moment for letter-writing. By daylight and lamplight, I spun with reeds and thistles, until my hands were tired from their weaving, the magic design which promised me the white man's respect.

At length, in the spring term, I entered an oratorical contest among the various classes. As the day of competition approached, it did not seem

possible that the event was so near at hand, but it came. In the chapel the classes assembled together, with their invited guests. The high platform was carpeted, and gaily festooned with college colors. A bright white light illumined the room, and outlined clearly the great polished beams that arched the domed ceiling. The assembled crowds filled the air with pulsating murmurs. When the hour for speaking arrived all were hushed. But on the wall the old clock which pointed out the trying moment ticked calmly on.

One after another I saw and heard the orators. Still, I could not realize that they longed for the favorable decision of the judges as much as I did. Each contestant received a loud burst of applause, and some were cheered heartily. Too soon my turn came, and I paused a moment behind the curtains for a deep breath. After my concluding words, I heard the same applause that the others had called out.

Upon my retreating steps, I was astounded to receive from my fellow-students a large bouquet of roses tied with flowing ribbons. With the lovely flowers I fled from the stage. This friendly token was a rebuke to me for the hard feelings I had borne them.

Later, the decision of the judges awarded me the first place. Then there was a mad uproar in the hall, where my classmates sang and shouted my name at the top of their lungs; and the disappointed students howled and brayed in fearfully dissonant tin trumpets. In this excitement, happy students rushed forward to offer their congratulations. And I could not conceal a smile when they wished to escort me in a procession to the students' parlor, where all were going to calm themselves. Thanking them for the kind spirit which prompted them to make such a proposition, I walked alone with the night to my own little room.

A few weeks afterward, I appeared as the college representative in another contest. This time the competition was among orators from different colleges in our State. It was held at the State capital, in one of the largest opera houses.

Here again was a strong prejudice against my people. In the evening, as the great audience filled the house, the student bodies began warring



among themselves. Fortunately, I was spared witnessing any of the noisy wrangling before the contest began. The slurs against the Indian that stained the lips of our opponents were already burning like a dry fever within my breast.

But after the orations were delivered a deeper burn awaited me. There, before that vast ocean of eyes, some college rowdies threw out a large white flag, with a drawing of a most forlorn Indian girl on it. Under this they had printed in bold black letters words that ridiculed the college which was represented by a “squaw.” Such worse than barbarian rudeness embittered me. While we waited for the verdict of the judges, I gleamed fiercely upon the throngs of palefaces. My teeth were hard set, as I saw the white flag still floating insolently in the air.

Then anxiously we watched the man carry toward the stage the envelope containing the final decision.

There were two prizes given, that night, and one of them was mine!

The evil spirit laughed within me when the white flag dropped out of sight, and the hands which hurled it hung limp in defeat.

Leaving the crowd as quickly as possible, I was soon in my room. The rest of the night I sat in an armchair and gazed into the crackling fire. I laughed no more in triumph when thus alone. The little taste of victory did not satisfy a hunger in my heart. In my mind I saw my mother far away on the Western plains, and she was holding a charge against me.

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Eve's Diary  
Mark Twain

<https://courses.lumenlearning.com/suny-readinganthology/chapter/eves-diary-by-mark-twain/>

*Translated from the Original*

**SATURDAY.**—I am almost a whole day old, now. I arrived yesterday. That is as it seems to me. And it must be so, for if there was a day-before-yesterday I was not there when it happened, or I should remember it. It could be, of course, that it did happen, and that I was not noticing. Very well; I will be very watchful now, and if any day-before-yesterdays happen I will make a note of it. It will be best to start right and not let the record get confused, for some instinct tells me that these details are going to be important to the historian some day. For I feel like an experiment, I feel exactly like an experiment; it would be impossible for a person to feel more like an experiment than I do, and so I am coming to feel convinced that that is what I **AM**—an experiment; just an experiment, and nothing more.

Then if I am an experiment, am I the whole of it? No, I think not; I think the rest of it is part of it. I am the main part of it, but I think the rest of it has its share in the matter. Is my position assured, or do I have to watch it and take care of it? The latter, perhaps. Some instinct tells me that eternal vigilance is the price of supremacy. [That is a good phrase, I think, for one so young.]

Everything looks better today than it did yesterday. In the rush of finishing up yesterday, the mountains were left in a ragged condition, and some of the plains were so cluttered with rubbish and remnants that the aspects were quite distressing. Noble and beautiful works of art should not be subjected to haste; and this majestic new world is indeed a most noble and beautiful work. And certainly marvelously near to being perfect, notwithstanding the shortness of the time. There are too many stars in some places and not enough in others, but that can be remedied presently, no doubt. The moon got loose last night, and slid down and fell out of the scheme—a very great loss; it breaks my heart to think of it. There isn’t another thing among the ornaments and decorations that is comparable to it for beauty and finish. It should have been fastened better. If we can only get it back again— But of course there is no telling where it went to. And besides, whoever gets it will hide it; I know it because I would do it myself. I believe I can be honest in all other matters, but I already begin to realize that the core and center of my nature is love of the beautiful, a passion for the beautiful, and that it would not be safe to trust me with a moon that belonged to another

person and that person didn’t know I had it. I could give up a moon that I found in the daytime, because I should be afraid some one was looking; but if I found it in the dark, I am sure I should find some kind of an excuse for not saying anything about it. For I do love moons, they are so pretty and so romantic. I wish we had five or six; I would never go to bed; I should never get tired lying on the moss-bank and looking up at them.

Stars are good, too. I wish I could get some to put in my hair. But I suppose I never can. You would be surprised to find how far off they are, for they do not look it. When they first showed, last night, I tried to knock some down with a pole, but it didn’t reach, which astonished me; then I tried clouds till I was all tired out, but I never got one. It was because I am left-handed and cannot throw good. Even when I aimed at the one I wasn’t after I couldn’t hit the other one, though I did make some close shots, for I saw the black blot of the cloud sail right into the midst of the golden clusters forty or fifty times, just barely missing them, and if I could have held out a little longer maybe I could have got one.

So I cried a little, which was natural, I suppose, for one of my age, and after I was rested I got a basket and started for a place on the extreme rim of the circle, where the stars were close to the ground and I could get them with my hands, which would be better, anyway, because I could gather them tenderly then, and not break them. But it was farther than I thought, and at last I had to give it up; I was so tired I couldn’t drag my feet another step; and besides, they were sore and hurt me very much.

I couldn’t get back home; it was too far and turning cold; but I found some tigers and nestled in among them and was most adorably comfortable, and their breath was sweet and pleasant, because they live on strawberries. I had never seen a tiger before, but I knew them in a minute by the stripes. If I could have one of those skins, it would make a lovely gown.

Today I am getting better ideas about distances. I was so eager to get hold of every pretty thing that I giddily grabbed for it, sometimes when it was too far off, and sometimes when it was but six inches away but seemed a foot—alas, with thorns between! I learned a lesson; also I made an axiom, all out of my own head—my very first one; **THE SCRATCHED**

**EXPERIMENT SHUNS THE THORN.** I think it is a very good one for one so young.

I followed the other Experiment around, yesterday afternoon, at a distance, to see what it might be for, if I could. But I was not able to make out. I think it is a man. I had never seen a man, but it looked like one, and I feel sure that that is what it is. I realize that I feel more curiosity about it than about any of the other reptiles. If it is a reptile, and I suppose it is; for it has frowzy hair and blue eyes, and looks like a reptile. It has no hips; it tapers like a carrot; when it stands, it spreads itself apart like a derrick; so I think it is a reptile, though it may be architecture.

I was afraid of it at first, and started to run every time it turned around, for I thought it was going to chase me; but by and by I found it was only trying to get away, so after that I was not timid any more, but tracked it along, several hours, about twenty yards behind, which made it nervous and unhappy. At last it was a good deal worried, and climbed a tree. I waited a good while, then gave it up and went home.

Today the same thing over. I’ve got it up the tree again.

**SUNDAY.**—It is up there yet. Resting, apparently. But that is a subterfuge: Sunday isn’t the day of rest; Saturday is appointed for that. It looks to me like a creature that is more interested in resting than in anything else. It would tire me to rest so much. It tires me just to sit around and watch the tree. I do wonder what it is for; I never see it do anything.

They returned the moon last night, and I was SO happy! I think it is very honest of them. It slid down and fell off again, but I was not distressed; there is no need to worry when one has that kind of neighbors; they will fetch it back. I wish I could do something to show my appreciation. I would like to send them some stars, for we have more than we can use. I mean I, not we, for I can see that the reptile cares nothing for such things.

It has low tastes, and is not kind. When I went there yesterday evening in the gloaming it had crept down and was trying to catch the little speckled fishes that play in the pool, and I had to clod it to make it go up

the tree again and let them alone. I wonder if THAT is what it is for? Hasn’t it any heart? Hasn’t it any compassion for those little creature? Can it be that it was designed and manufactured for such ungentle work? It has the look of it. One of the clods took it back of the ear, and it used language. It gave me a thrill, for it was the first time I had ever heard speech, except my own. I did not understand the words, but they seemed expressive.

When I found it could talk I felt a new interest in it, for I love to talk; I talk, all day, and in my sleep, too, and I am very interesting, but if I had another to talk to I could be twice as interesting, and would never stop, if desired.

If this reptile is a man, it isn’t an IT, is it? That wouldn’t be grammatical, would it? I think it would be HE. I think so. In that case one would parse it thus: nominative, HE; dative, HIM; possessive, HIS’N. Well, I will consider it a man and call it he until it turns out to be something else. This will be handier than having so many uncertainties.

**NEXT WEEK SUNDAY.**—All the week I tagged around after him and tried to get acquainted. I had to do the talking, because he was shy, but I didn’t mind it. He seemed pleased to have me around, and I used the sociable “we” a good deal, because it seemed to flatter him to be included.

**WEDNESDAY.**—We are getting along very well indeed, now, and getting better and better acquainted. He does not try to avoid me any more, which is a good sign, and shows that he likes to have me with him. That pleases me, and I study to be useful to him in every way I can, so as to increase his regard. During the last day or two I have taken all the work of naming things off his hands, and this has been a great relief to him, for he has no gift in that line, and is evidently very grateful. He can’t think of a rational name to save him, but I do not let him see that I am aware of his defect. Whenever a new creature comes along I name it before he has time to expose himself by an awkward silence. In this way I have saved him many embarrassments. I have no defect like this. The minute I set eyes on an animal I know what it is. I don’t have to reflect a moment; the right name comes out instantly, just as if it were an inspiration, as no

doubt it is, for I am sure it wasn’t in me half a minute before. I seem to know just by the shape of the creature and the way it acts what animal it is.

When the dodo came along he thought it was a wildcat—I saw it in his eye. But I saved him. And I was careful not to do it in a way that could hurt his pride. I just spoke up in a quite natural way of pleasing surprise, and not as if I was dreaming of conveying information, and said, “Well, I do declare, if there isn’t the dodo!” I explained—without seeming to be explaining—how I know it for a dodo, and although I thought maybe he was a little piqued that I knew the creature when he didn’t, it was quite evident that he admired me. That was very agreeable, and I thought of it more than once with gratification before I slept. How little a thing can make us happy when we feel that we have earned it!

**THURSDAY.**—my first sorrow. Yesterday he avoided me and seemed to wish I would not talk to him. I could not believe it, and thought there was some mistake, for I loved to be with him, and loved to hear him talk, and so how could it be that he could feel unkind toward me when I had not done anything? But at last it seemed true, so I went away and sat lonely in the place where I first saw him the morning that we were made and I did not know what he was and was indifferent about him; but now it was a mournful place, and every little thing spoke of him, and my heart was very sore. I did not know why very clearly, for it was a new feeling; I had not experienced it before, and it was all a mystery, and I could not make it out.

But when night came I could not bear the lonesomeness, and went to the new shelter which he has built, to ask him what I had done that was wrong and how I could mend it and get back his kindness again; but he put me out in the rain, and it was my first sorrow.

**SUNDAY.**—It is pleasant again, now, and I am happy; but those were heavy days; I do not think of them when I can help it.

I tried to get him some of those apples, but I cannot learn to throw straight. I failed, but I think the good intention pleased him. They are

forbidden, and he says I shall come to harm; but so I come to harm through pleasing him, why shall I care for that harm?

**MONDAY.**—This morning I told him my name, hoping it would interest him. But he did not care for it. It is strange. If he should tell me his name, I would care. I think it would be pleasanter in my ears than any other sound.

He talks very little. Perhaps it is because he is not bright, and is sensitive about it and wishes to conceal it. It is such a pity that he should feel so, for brightness is nothing; it is in the heart that the values lie. I wish I could make him understand that a loving good heart is riches, and riches enough, and that without it intellect is poverty.

Although he talks so little, he has quite a considerable vocabulary. This morning he used a surprisingly good word. He evidently recognized, himself, that it was a good one, for he worked in it twice afterward, casually. It was good casual art, still it showed that he possesses a certain quality of perception. Without a doubt that seed can be made to grow, if cultivated.

Where did he get that word? I do not think I have ever used it.

No, he took no interest in my name. I tried to hide my disappointment, but I suppose I did not succeed. I went away and sat on the moss-bank with my feet in the water. It is where I go when I hunger for companionship, some one to look at, some one to talk to. It is not enough—that lovely white body painted there in the pool—but it is something, and something is better than utter loneliness. It talks when I talk; it is sad when I am sad; it comforts me with its sympathy; it says, “Do not be downhearted, you poor friendless girl; I will be your friend.” It IS a good friend to me, and my only one; it is my sister.

That first time that she forsook me! ah, I shall never forget that—never, never. My heart was lead in my body! I said, “She was all I had, and now she is gone!” In my despair I said, “Break, my heart; I cannot bear my life any more!” and hid my face in my hands, and there was no solace for me.



And when I took them away, after a little, there she was again, white and shining and beautiful, and I sprang into her arms!

That was perfect happiness; I had known happiness before, but it was not like this, which was ecstasy. I never doubted her afterward. Sometimes she stayed away—maybe an hour, maybe almost the whole day, but I waited and did not doubt; I said, “She is busy, or she is gone on a journey, but she will come.” And it was so: she always did. At night she would not come if it was dark, for she was a timid little thing; but if there was a moon she would come. I am not afraid of the dark, but she is younger than I am; she was born after I was. Many and many are the visits I have paid her; she is my comfort and my refuge when my life is hard—and it is mainly that.

**TUESDAY.**—All the morning I was at work improving the estate; and I purposely kept away from him in the hope that he would get lonely and come. But he did not.

At noon I stopped for the day and took my recreation by flitting all about with the bees and the butterflies and reveling in the flowers, those beautiful creatures that catch the smile of God out of the sky and preserve it! I gathered them, and made them into wreaths and garlands and clothed myself in them while I ate my luncheon—apples, of course; then I sat in the shade and wished and waited. But he did not come.

But no matter. Nothing would have come of it, for he does not care for flowers. He called them rubbish, and cannot tell one from another, and thinks it is superior to feel like that. He does not care for me, he does not care for flowers, he does not care for the painted sky at eventide—is there anything he does care for, except building shacks to coop himself up in from the good clean rain, and thumping the melons, and sampling the grapes, and fingering the fruit on the trees, to see how those properties are coming along?

I laid a dry stick on the ground and tried to bore a hole in it with another one, in order to carry out a scheme that I had, and soon I got an awful fright. A thin, transparent bluish film rose out of the hole, and I dropped everything and ran! I thought it was a spirit, and I WAS so frightened! But

I looked back, and it was not coming; so I leaned against a rock and rested and panted, and let my limbs go on trembling until they got steady again; then I crept warily back, alert, watching, and ready to fly if there was occasion; and when I was come near, I parted the branches of a rose-bush and peeped through—wishing the man was about, I was looking so cunning and pretty—but the sprite was gone. I went there, and there was a pinch of delicate pink dust in the hole. I put my finger in, to feel it, and said OUCH! and took it out again. It was a cruel pain. I put my finger in my mouth; and by standing first on one foot and then the other, and grunting, I presently eased my misery; then I was full of interest, and began to examine.

I was curious to know what the pink dust was. Suddenly the name of it occurred to me, though I had never heard of it before. It was FIRE! I was as certain of it as a person could be of anything in the world. So without hesitation I named it that—fire.

I had created something that didn’t exist before; I had added a new thing to the world’s uncountable properties; I realized this, and was proud of my achievement, and was going to run and find him and tell him about it, thinking to raise myself in his esteem—but I reflected, and did not do it. No—he would not care for it. He would ask what it was good for, and what could I answer? for if it was not GOOD for something, but only beautiful, merely beautiful— So I sighed, and did not go. For it wasn’t good for anything; it could not build a shack, it could not improve melons, it could not hurry a fruit crop; it was useless, it was a foolishness and a vanity; he would despise it and say cutting words. But to me it was not despicable; I said, “Oh, you fire, I love you, you dainty pink creature, for you are BEAUTIFUL—and that is enough!” and was going to gather it to my breast. But refrained. Then I made another maxim out of my head, though it was so nearly like the first one that I was afraid it was only a plagiarism: ***“THE BURNT EXPERIMENT SHUNS THE FIRE.”***

I wrought again; and when I had made a good deal of fire-dust I emptied it into a handful of dry brown grass, intending to carry it home and keep it always and play with it; but the wind struck it and it sprayed up and spat out at me fiercely, and I dropped it and ran. When I looked back the blue spirit was towering up and stretching and rolling away like a cloud,

and instantly I thought of the name of it—SMOKE!—though, upon my word, I had never heard of smoke before.

Soon brilliant yellow and red flares shot up through the smoke, and I named them in an instant—FLAMES—and I was right, too, though these were the very first flames that had ever been in the world. They climbed the trees, then flashed splendidly in and out of the vast and increasing volume of tumbling smoke, and I had to clap my hands and laugh and dance in my rapture, it was so new and strange and so wonderful and so beautiful!

He came running, and stopped and gazed, and said not a word for many minutes. Then he asked what it was. Ah, it was too bad that he should ask such a direct question. I had to answer it, of course, and I did. I said it was fire. If it annoyed him that I should know and he must ask; that was not my fault; I had no desire to annoy him. After a pause he asked:

“How did it come?”

Another direct question, and it also had to have a direct answer.

“I made it.”

The fire was traveling farther and farther off. He went to the edge of the burned place and stood looking down, and said:

“What are these?”

“Fire-coals.”

He picked up one to examine it, but changed his mind and put it down again. Then he went away. NOTHING interests him.

But I was interested. There were ashes, gray and soft and delicate and pretty—I knew what they were at once. And the embers; I knew the embers, too. I found my apples, and raked them out, and was glad; for I am very young and my appetite is active. But I was disappointed; they

were all burst open and spoiled. Spoiled apparently; but it was not so; they were better than raw ones. Fire is beautiful; some day it will be useful, I think.

**FRIDAY.**—I saw him again, for a moment, last Monday at nightfall, but only for a moment. I was hoping he would praise me for trying to improve the estate, for I had meant well and had worked hard. But he was not pleased, and turned away and left me. He was also displeased on another account: I tried once more to persuade him to stop going over the Falls. That was because the fire had revealed to me a new passion—quite new, and distinctly different from love, grief, and those others which I had already discovered—FEAR. And it is horrible!—I wish I had never discovered it; it gives me dark moments, it spoils my happiness, it makes me shiver and tremble and shudder. But I could not persuade him, for he has not discovered fear yet, and so he could not understand me.

***Extract from Adam’s Diary***

*Perhaps I ought to remember that she is very young, a mere girl and make allowances. She is all interest, eagerness, vivacity, the world is to her a charm, a wonder, a mystery, a joy; she can’t speak for delight when she finds a new flower, she must pet it and caress it and smell it and talk to it, and pour out endearing names upon it. And she is color-mad: brown rocks, yellow sand, gray moss, green foliage, blue sky; the pearl of the dawn, the purple shadows on the mountains, the golden islands floating in crimson seas at sunset, the pallid moon sailing through the shredded cloud-rack, the star-jewels glittering in the wastes of space—none of them is of any practical value, so far as I can see, but because they have color and majesty, that is enough for her, and she loses her mind over them. If she could quiet down and keep still a couple minutes at a time, it would be a reposeful spectacle. In that case I think I could enjoy looking at her; indeed I am sure I could, for I am coming to realize that she is a quite remarkably comely creature—lithe, slender, trim, rounded, shapely, nimble, graceful; and once when she was standing marble-white and sun-drenched on a boulder, with her young head tilted back and her hand shading her eyes, watching the flight of a bird in the sky, I recognized that she was beautiful.*

**MONDAY NOON.**—*If there is anything on the planet that she is not interested in it is not in my list. There are animals that I am indifferent to, but it is not so with her. She has no discrimination, she takes to all of them, she thinks they are all treasures, every new one is welcome.*

*When the mighty brontosaurus came striding into camp, she regarded it as an acquisition, I considered it a calamity; that is a good sample of the lack of harmony that prevails in our views of things. She wanted to domesticate it, I wanted to make it a present of the homestead and move out. She believed it could be tamed by kind treatment and would be a good pet; I said a pet twenty-one feet high and eighty-four feet long would be no proper thing to have about the place, because, even with the best intentions and without meaning any harm, it could sit down on the house and mash it, for any one could see by the look of its eye that it was absent-minded.*

*Still, her heart was set upon having that monster, and she couldn’t give it up. She thought we could start a dairy with it, and wanted me to help milk it; but I wouldn’t; it was too risky. The sex wasn’t right, and we hadn’t any ladder anyway. Then she wanted to ride it, and look at the scenery. Thirty or forty feet of its tail was lying on the ground, like a fallen tree, and she thought she could climb it, but she was mistaken; when she got to the steep place it was too slick and down she came, and would have hurt herself but for me.*

*Was she satisfied now? No. Nothing ever satisfies her but demonstration; untested theories are not in her line, and she won’t have them. It is the right spirit, I concede it; it attracts me; I feel the influence of it; if I were with her more I think I should take it up myself. Well, she had one theory remaining about this colossus: she thought that if we could tame it and make him friendly we could stand in the river and use him for a bridge. It turned out that he was already plenty tame enough—at least as far as she was concerned—so she tried her theory, but it failed: every time she got him properly placed in the river and went ashore to cross over him, he came out and followed her around like a pet mountain. Like the other animals. They all do that.*

**FRIDAY.**—Tuesday—Wednesday—Thursday—and today: all without seeing

him. It is a long time to be alone; still, it is better to be alone than unwelcome.

I HAD to have company—I was made for it, I think—so I made friends with the animals. They are just charming, and they have the kindest disposition and the politest ways; they never look sour, they never let you feel that you are intruding, they smile at you and wag their tail, if they’ve got one, and they are always ready for a romp or an excursion or anything you want to propose. I think they are perfect gentlemen. All these days we have had such good times, and it hasn’t been lonesome for me, ever. Lonesome! No, I should say not. Why, there’s always a swarm of them around —sometimes as much as four or five acres—you can’t count them; and when you stand on a rock in the midst and look out over the furry expanse it is so mottled and splashed and gay with color and frisking sheen and sun-flash, and so rippled with stripes, that you might think it was a lake, only you know it isn’t; and there’s storms of sociable birds, and hurricanes of whirring wings; and when the sun strikes all that feathery commotion, you have a blazing up of all the colors you can think of, enough to put your eyes out.

We have made long excursions, and I have seen a great deal of the world; almost all of it, I think; and so I am the first traveler, and the only one. When we are on the march, it is an imposing sight —there’s nothing like it anywhere. For comfort I ride a tiger or a leopard, because it is soft and has a round back that fits me, and because they are such pretty animals; but for long distance or for scenery I ride the elephant. He hoists me up with his trunk, but I can get off myself; when we are ready to camp, he sits and I slide down the back way.

The birds and animals are all friendly to each other, and there are no disputes about anything. They all talk, and they all talk to me, but it must be a foreign language, for I cannot make out a word they say; yet they often understand me when I talk back, particularly the dog and the elephant. It makes me ashamed. It shows that they are brighter than I am, for I want to be the principal Experiment myself—and I intend to be, too.

I have learned a number of things, and am educated, now, but I wasn’t at first. I was ignorant at first. At first it used to vex me because, with all my

watching, I was never smart enough to be around when the water was running uphill; but now I do not mind it. I have experimented and experimented until now I know it never does run uphill, except in the dark. I know it does in the dark, because the pool never goes dry, which it would, of course, if the water didn’t come back in the night. It is best to prove things by actual experiment; then you KNOW; whereas if you depend on guessing and supposing and conjecturing, you never get educated.

Some things you CAN’T find out; but you will never know you can’t by guessing and supposing; no, you have to be patient and go on experimenting until you find out that you can’t find out. And it is delightful to have it that way, it makes the world so interesting. If there wasn’t anything to find out, it would be dull. Even trying to find out and not finding out is just as interesting as trying to find out and finding out, and I don’t know but more so. The secret of the water was a treasure until I GOT it; then the excitement all went away, and I recognized a sense of loss.

By experiment I know that wood swims, and dry leaves, and feathers, and plenty of other things; therefore by all that cumulative evidence you know that a rock will swim; but you have to put up with simply knowing it, for there isn’t any way to prove it—up to now. But I shall find a way—then THAT excitement will go. Such things make me sad; because by and by when I have found out everything there won’t be any more excitements, and I do love excitements so! The other night I couldn’t sleep for thinking about it.

At first I couldn’t make out what I was made for, but now I think it was to search out the secrets of this wonderful world and be happy and thank the Giver of it all for devising it. I think there are many things to learn yet—I hope so; and by economizing and not hurrying too fast I think they will last weeks and weeks. I hope so. When you cast up a feather it sails away on the air and goes out of sight; then you throw up a clod and it doesn’t. It comes down, every time. I have tried it and tried it, and it is always so. I wonder why it is? Of course it DOESN’T come down, but why should it SEEM to? I suppose it is an optical illusion. I mean, one of them is. I don’t know which one. It may be the feather, it may be the clod; I

can’t prove which it is, I can only demonstrate that one or the other is a fake, and let a person take his choice.

By watching, I know that the stars are not going to last. I have seen some of the best ones melt and run down the sky. Since one can melt, they can all melt; since they can all melt, they can all melt the same night. That sorrow will come—I know it. I mean to sit up every night and look at them as long as I can keep awake; and I will impress those sparkling fields on my memory, so that by and by when they are taken away I can by my fancy restore those lovely myriads to the black sky and make them sparkle again, and double them by the blur of my tears.

### **After the Fall**

When I look back, the Garden is a dream to me. It was beautiful, surpassingly beautiful, enchantingly beautiful; and now it is lost, and I shall not see it any more.

The Garden is lost, but I have found HIM, and am content. He loves me as well as he can; I love him with all the strength of my passionate nature, and this, I think, is proper to my youth and sex. If I ask myself why I love him, I find I do not know, and do not really much care to know; so I suppose that this kind of love is not a product of reasoning and statistics, like one’s love for other reptiles and animals. I think that this must be so. I love certain birds because of their song; but I do not love Adam on account of his singing—no, it is not that; the more he sings the more I do not get reconciled to it. Yet I ask him to sing, because I wish to learn to like everything he is interested in. I am sure I can learn, because at first I could not stand it, but now I can. It sours the milk, but it doesn’t matter; I can get used to that kind of milk.

It is not on account of his brightness that I love him—no, it is not that. He is not to blame for his brightness, such as it is, for he did not make it himself; he is as God make him, and that is sufficient. There was a wise purpose in it, THAT I know. In time it will develop, though I think it will not be sudden; and besides, there is no hurry; he is well enough just as he is.

It is not on account of his gracious and considerate ways and his



delicacy that I love him. No, he has lacks in this regard, but he is well enough just so, and is improving.

It is not on account of his industry that I love him—no, it is not that. I think he has it in him, and I do not know why he conceals it from me. It is my only pain. Otherwise he is frank and open with me, now. I am sure he keeps nothing from me but this. It grieves me that he should have a secret from me, and sometimes it spoils my sleep, thinking of it, but I will put it out of my mind; it shall not trouble my happiness, which is otherwise full to overflowing.

It is not on account of his education that I love him—no, it is not that. He is self-educated, and does really know a multitude of things, but they are not so.

It is not on account of his chivalry that I love him—no, it is not that. He told on me, but I do not blame him; it is a peculiarity of sex, I think, and he did not make his sex. Of course I would not have told on him, I would have perished first; but that is a peculiarity of sex, too, and I do not take credit for it, for I did not make my sex.

Then why is it that I love him? MERELY BECAUSE HE IS MASCULINE, I think.

At bottom he is good, and I love him for that, but I could love him without it. If he should beat me and abuse me, I should go on loving him. I know it. It is a matter of sex, I think.

He is strong and handsome, and I love him for that, and I admire him and am proud of him, but I could love him without those qualities. He he were plain, I should love him; if he were a wreck, I should love him; and I would work for him, and slave over him, and pray for him, and watch by his bedside until I died.

Yes, I think I love him merely because he is MINE and is MASCULINE. There is no other reason, I suppose. And so I think it is as I first said: that this kind of love is not a product of reasonings and statistics. It just

COMES—none knows whence—and cannot explain itself. And doesn’t need to.

It is what I think. But I am only a girl, the first that has examined this matter, and it may turn out that in my ignorance and inexperience I have not got it right.

### **Forty Years Later**

It is my prayer, it is my longing, that we may pass from this life together—a longing which shall never perish from the earth, but shall have place in the heart of every wife that loves, until the end of time; and it shall be called by my name.

But if one of us must go first, it is my prayer that it shall be I; for he is strong, I am weak, I am not so necessary to him as he is to me—life without him would not be life; now could I endure it? This prayer is also immortal, and will not cease from being offered up while my race continues. I am the first wife; and in the last wife I shall be repeated.

### **At Eve’s Grave**

ADAM: Wheresoever she was, THERE was Eden.

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## **Student Sample 1**

Growing up, writing has always been one of my strengths. Whether it was writing essays or poems, I always found myself capable of writing with a sense of creativity. I wouldn't write voluntarily in my free time, but it was never something I struggled with throughout school. I never thought anything of it because I was always writing about things that I never truly had an emotional attachment to. This all changed my sophomore year when I had to write a narrative on an obstacle I overcame that changed the person who I am. That year I faced the most difficult challenge of my life, and I found that writing and expressing my feelings through this experience became a therapy to release every positive, negative, and mixed emotion I was feeling. This essay changed my outlook on the situation, even after it ended. The power of writing has an art itself.

In November of 2015, my mom was diagnosed with stage 2 breast cancer. I felt her pain through everything I did. I started losing focus of how to properly balance my outside life and my new life. I lost my drive to do almost anything. I lost all my appetite which almost backlashed on me after malnourishing myself for a week straight, my grades were falling below my standard, and I always wanted to lock myself in my room. I couldn't bear to see my mom in the condition she was in, and I knew I couldn't show my weakness in front of the person who needed the most strength. I was always there to assist her, but behind closed doors I fell into a state of depression. I tried to occupy my mind elsewhere considering most of my day were spent in school, at practice, or with my friends. I used distraction as my coping mechanism. If I were to sit and think about the situation for too long, I would find my mind lost in negative and depressing thoughts. I was unable to keep myself positive, but I could put on a face of happiness around her. The physical part of her battle was evidently challenging, but the mental aspect put

more of a bearing on the outcome. Pretending to be happy gave her clarification that everything was going to be okay. Through time, this became a habit and I was stuck in this state without even realizing it.

After everything was said and done, the treatments were over, and I could gratefully know my mom had beaten cancer, I was able to regain a healthy mentality. Although her battle left an impact on me that will follow me for the rest of my life, knowing the worst part was over was the heaviest weight lifted off my chest. I thought I was back on track until this narrative approached. I thought this would be a simple topic to write about after what I had just gone through, but I was soon to realize I was in for more than I expected.

I started writing about my full experience, every detail and emotion from one end of the spectrum to the other. I wrote about how I had to keep the house spotless at all times of the day, taking care of the dog, cooking, and practically filling in the place of being the mother figure in my home. I then advanced to the emotional portion of the narrative. While writing about everything I felt, I looked back on how I acted and felt through everything and instantly filled with regret. Once the words were written, I realized that I was subconsciously masking all my pain and forming a habit of letting everything bottle up until I broke down. Not only did I realize that, but I then realized I was too afraid to face the reality of the situation, so I hid from it instead. I looked back on all my free time I had, and that I had spent that time in the wrong places. I escaped my house every time I could, when I should've been staying in with her. I should have given up my weekends to watch movies, or simply just keep her company. I grew frustrated while writing, but I soon understood it was for the best.

I have never been one to enjoy talking about how I feel to others, so I would always push my emotions aside and carry on with my life. This was the source of all my mental pain, until I

became aware of the power of writing. I should have taken my problems as they came, assessed the situations, and faced them in that moment to achieve the most logical and efficient outcome. By writing, I found myself able to do this. When everything is in words, blatantly front of me, I release all of the thoughts that I bottle up in my head. This forces me to break down every aspect, good or bad, and brainstorm every outcome, something we are taught to do in school through almost every subject. By writing about something I was emotionally attached to, the power of the writing was far more significant than any other work I've done.

Ever since 10<sup>th</sup> grade, I've taken this knowledge and used it to my advantage for personal reasons. Rather than allowing myself to build a normalcy out of the viscous cycle of bottling up my problems until a break down, then finding a distraction to hide from them, I discovered I could use writing as my new coping mechanism in life. Whenever life gets tough and I have to face one or several obstacles that I'm stuck on, I write about it. I've found this to be beneficial and therapeutic. My mind can only handle so many racing thoughts at once, and as opposed to talking about it with a therapist or someone I trust, I can independently conquer my own problems. Several elders who have read my writing commented on my outlook on life. A teacher that I respect for his knowledge and judgment told me that I have the wisdom of someone who has lived 100 years, and I use this as additional credibility for trusting my own decisions. Although talking about problems with another person is a wise thing to do, I only do so when I fully hit a wall. When I write about problems and evaluate solutions, I can enjoy my solitude and have a sense of pride that I'm self sufficient. Writing has opened a whole new door to opportunities that are positively impacting and helping me build instead of break down. I highly cherish and appreciate this learning experience.



## When Nothing Goes Right Go Left

Have you ever thought of what it would be like to be forced to write with your opposite hand? I hadn't either until a few weeks before the start of kindergarten.

I was playing on a swing set with my little sister Alyssa, I was going down the slide, and I fell off and landed right on my arm. Immediately I felt pain and as tears streamed down my face, I knew something was wrong. I found out my arm was broken. Unfortunately for me my right arm was the arm I did everything with. Tasks that were everyday nature became torturous. Everything I had just learned to do was switched up on me.

When I started school, my teacher Mrs. B told me that I should start to write with my left hand and since I was so young it wouldn't make a difference. This was an extremely difficult challenge. Tasks that were once natural for me were no longer simple. Although I had the help of Mrs. B I really had to learn to write with an opposite hand all by myself. I remember that writing my letters and numbers was the worst part of the school day. During recess, I had to sit inside my kindergarten classroom and read books. During class time, my letters looked deformed and the lines were sloppy. Even though I was five, I knew my work was not the best it could be. I would look around at other students work and see them writing full sentences—meanwhile, I couldn't even write two full words. I could tell that I was behind everyone else and it troubled me.

Frustration would build and I would come home exhausted and unhappy.

During school I noticed that my inability to write was affected by reading. As the other students were writing words over and over again it was strengthening their reading skills too! My reading skills were not growing as a normal kindergarten student should because I could not write. This was frustrating to me because I knew that I was way behind all of the other students on all levels. This truly shows how reading and writing do indeed go hand in hand.

My frustration extended into homework time at home. Although my mom helped me, I still felt like I was not able to do anything “right”. Eventually I started doing things on my own again. I could write small words and almost every number. I remember the straighter letters were easier for me, letters like A, T, and V were much easier than G, S, or B. I gradually began to start coloring again since my self esteem was coming back. I then got rid of my cast and only had a sling. This made simple day to day functions much simpler. It felt bizarre to have my arm back. At home, I remember practicing on printer paper writing simple words like cat, bat, and ball.

Six weeks later, I was so excited when my cast finally came off! But, a new challenge arose for me. As I became more accustomed to writing with my left hand, I realized I could go back to doing all the things I did before with my right hand. I started brushing my hair with my right hand. I remember it feeling more natural to use that hand over my left. I would hold a fork, open doors, and even use scissors with my right hand!

However, something was different. When I tried to write with my right hand again, things did not go as smoothly. Now, letters with my right hand started to look mixed up and misshapen. The pencil felt funny in my hand and I could see my writing looked wobbly and not at all like everyone else’s. I remember the tears falling all over again. I was extremely upset and began to cry in my kindergarten class. Mrs. B came over and comforted me, I remember her telling me that if it felt funny to write with my right hand, to not do it. When I would write with my left hand letters looked more smooth and holding a pencil felt natural. Thankfully, with a little practice, I remember how happy I was when I finally completed an activity and I knew it was good!

Growing up I never even noticed that I wrote with the opposite hand. In the fifth grade, a girl named Ariana pointed it out. I remember her saying how weird it was that I did that. That



really stuck with me because nobody had ever called me weird before. However, I did not let that get me down like I would have in kindergarten. I think it is an interesting quirk about me! I remember saying back to her that it wasn't weird, it was what made me myself! It is bizarre to me that at one point in my life I was so taken back by the struggles of having to do things with my left arm.

Currently in my own life, tasks are once again natural like they were before the injury. However, I finally now see the lessons I learned from this experience. When writing now, I struggle with sitting down and starting an essay, I often experience writers block. I can connect the same struggle I had in kindergarten with struggling to write again to my current writing experience. When I find myself not being able to write, it can take a toll on my self esteem too. Just as I struggled to learn to write with my opposite hand I now struggle with finding the write words to use in essays. I now know that if I put in hard work, practice, and time I'll be able to make it become more natural!

## Puerto Rican't

“Are you Dominican?”

Is a common question I'm asked. My blood pressure starts to rise as soon as I realize where the rest of the conversation is about to go. “You're one of those Puerto Rican's who don't speak Spanish!” The tone of their sympathetic voice irritates me. I would always ask my parents why they never taught me Spanish if they're both Puerto Rican and speak Spanish and their answer would always be a dismissive response to me just so I won't be in their hair over something little to them but major to me. This problem has and is currently still effecting my life.

Growing up in Spanish Harlem obviously meant other Hispanic kids would be attending the same public school I would be attending. “You're not Hispanic.” “You're a typical Puerto Rican.” Phrases like these would be told to my other Puerto Rican friends and myself. I was done with everything. I had to learn Spanish somehow-someway and be brave enough to speak it to other Spanish speakers.

It was not until middle school I was offered Spanish as a class and boy let me tell you I was extremely excited for class. It's the first day of class and my Spanish teachers says, “There has been an error in the scheduling and this will actually be a French class”. Imagine how sad a child would be after they dropped their ice cream. That's how sad I was but one-hundred levels above that. So not only my parents couldn't teach me Spanish, but my elementary and middle school couldn't teach me Spanish either. I remained optimistic hoping three years of French wouldn't be as bad as I imagined it. Boy was I wrong.

Luckily I was placed in Spanish as a freshman in high school. I have never been more excited to read, write, and learn a whole new language. Of course learning a whole new language would come with obstacles and challenges and I faced those obstacles and challenges by asking

my desk neighbor for help whenever I needed help. It turns out she is Puerto Rican and already spoke Spanish. Her name was Karina.

Of course I had to ask her if she learned Spanish on her own or grew up in a household learning two languages. Karina was fortunate enough to grow up learning two languages. I expressed my thoughts to her about my trouble with not speaking Spanish and dealing with the hate and asked her if she had any advice. She told me she always gets asked if she knows how to speak Spanish just because she is Puerto Rican. The thrill she gets when she replies yes while watching their face turn blank in shock is my everyday motivation. I want to experience that thrill and feel like I accomplished something I thought was impossible.

Every chance I had on learning how to speak, read, or write in Spanish I immediately took that opportunity. Growing up in New York City meant riding along in public transportation, which isn't always the best. Once I step onto the train, my eyes immediately starts scanning everything I see which helps me where I want to devote my attention. Usually if there is something in another language, I would tend to keep my eyes glued on it to the point I would notice people around me looking at what I'm looking at too. Sometimes I even use other resources such as apps called "Duolingo" to learn how to write Spanish or I would put a Spanish song on repeat and just listen to that song over and over until I can repeat a verse. I sat on my bed and would put on some headphones and start to scream out " something something something GASOLINA". This is a common known Hispanic song and that is what I say because I don't know the actual words. I would push myself to translate the whole song in english so I can recognize the same phrase next time I hear the song.

You would think having an issue would lead you to being consistent to fix your problem but I was wrong again. Fighting with myself to take initiative to actually learn another language

on my own is another obstacle I have to face along with many others. I mean who wouldn't get annoyed by learning a whole new language on their own? Sometimes I would totally forget about self teaching because life as a teenager isn't easy. At points I would become extremely irritated while in the middle of a lesson because if I would have grown up listening and mocking everything I heard in Spanish, I would not be struggling right now and I'd have one less problem in life. Quitting and giving up always crossed my mind. I wonder how defeated and broken I would have to be, to consider accepting the fact that i'm just another Puerto Rican who doesn't speak spanish. Luckily i haven't gotten to that point.

When I was younger I mainly grew up listening and speaking english. The only person who would talk to me in Spanish growing up was my grandmother. She tried to teach me the word *abuela* but I couldn't pronounce it and grew up calling her bella. Thanks to her I strive to master a language to prove to myself that no matter what obstacles you encounter, you can overcome it with determination. I will be so proud of myself when I read a whole book in spanish. Hopefully in the future I'll have kids and can pass my knowledge of languages down to them to protect them from all the discrimination.

I have always felt that I needed to say a bigger goodbye. I never know if I've said "I love you" enough or too little, so I always end up saying it again. I have felt for the longest time that goodbyes hold a gravity that can only be described as heavy and dark. Only until very recently have I discovered that although it isn't always apparent, saying goodbye doesn't mean anything. It's the time that we spent together that matters the most, not how we left it. This, being only one of the many realizations that I have made over the past few months, leads me to believe that literacy, and knowledge brought about as a result of reading has helped me not only recover, but also prosper.

On Sunday April 9th, and the weeks following, I felt that my life had changed forever. I was on the bus home from a twelve-day trip to Europe. It was a school trip, and by the time we landed, my friends and I were all exhausted and ready to be home. I had just hung up the phone with my mom to let her know that we were twenty minutes away and that I couldn't wait to see her. Not even three minutes later, the chattering bus was filled with an ear shattering sound and everything went dark. I heard the screams of the chaperones and my friends, but I looked around and saw nothing and no one. I started begging for help, hearing the familiar voices of the people that I had just spent days with, making countless memories, screaming as well. I slid out of my seat and started to crawl, not knowing which direction would lead me out, not even know what just happened. As the glass and rubble punctured my hands and knees, I heard my best friends voice. Blood poured from her head as she begged for me to stay with her. She was being crushed

by something and I could see her skull. Her face was so swollen it was almost unrecognizable. She told me that she didn't want to die alone. Still unsure to what happened, I sat there with her screaming for help for what felt like an eternity. But as the smell of smoke filled the air I knew that I had to get out in fear that the bus might explode. I said goodbye to Sam. I didn't know if I would ever see her again, so how could I ever say goodbye big enough for this situation? I said that I loved her and that I was sorry but it didn't feel like enough. I managed to climb out through the roof of the bus and jump down. Waiting for the ambulances to arrive I saw images that continue to replay in my head still to this day. My friends covered in blood, screaming, my favorite teacher having a trauma induced seizure on the side of the highway and the bus driver running away in fear. Without answers, I was taken away in an ambulance. Eventually, I did find out what happened. While in the hospital a nurse informed me that on our way home from the airport, on the southern state parkway, the driver attempted to drive the thirteen foot tall bus under a seven foot overpass. The entire roof of the bus was sheared off and had caved in on all of us. All forty-four people on the bus were hospitalized. "It's a miracle that no one died," she said. Nobody died, but the guilt that I had leaving Sam, wholeheartedly thinking she was going to die, ate me alive, and the fear of ever being in a situation so terrifying again left me paralyzed.

The weeks following the accident I was petrified of everything. I had irrational fears of loud noises, small spaces and anything else even slightly related to the accident. I would think of every conceivable bad outcome that could happen and eventually it altered my perception of life. I no longer wanted to do anything. I struggled with the idea that I have no control over what

happens to me. One second I could be laughing and having fun with my friends and then the next second it could all be over. I started to have panic attacks and it felt as if every little thing was a trigger for my anxiety. This all changed when I started to see a therapist. She recommended that I start to look up stories of other people's trauma and recovery and see how I could relate. She would give me little quotes to write down and remember, and as I would go about my day I started to find myself reciting quotes. "Every moment matters," and "don't lose your present to your past." Although these quotes may seem small, they helped me get through the first few weeks of coping with what we had all gone through. This spiraled into reading books about positivity, recovery and trauma. The more I read, the more I realized that I was not alone. My reaction and symptoms that spurred from the trauma was, in fact, normal. For the first time in my life I felt a connection to the words I was reading and I truly felt that with every chapter I read a piece of me came back. I started to have a whole new outlook on life and the experiences I have faced and will continue to face. Reading these books challenged me to look at situations in a new light, and understand that if something seems as though it is unable to be overcome, try it a different way. Before the accident, I wasn't a big reader. However, I found it to be the best way to get out of my head and focus on something more positive. Instead of being fearful of the future I felt privileged to be here and excited for what was to come. I was able to read the words from a book about positivity and happiness and bring them into my day to day life, for the first time.

Eventually, this positivity and drive trickled into my school work, and now my college

career in working to become a nurse. I am excited to experience things that will enhance my learning and positivity. Through nursing, I will never stop learning, and growing. This humbling experience made me realize that my goal in life is to give back and assist those around us.

Nursing defines what it means to give back to society, whether it is in my community or around the world and I am looking forward to having the opportunity to help countless people. My goal for the future is to no longer take things for granted and to always strive to better the things around me and in doing so, bettering myself. I give credit for these realizations to literacy.

Sam, and everyone else from the bus accident has since made a full recovery, but the experience will be with us forever. In ways I am grateful for this to have happened. I have gained the knowledge that words hold a power that I have never known before. I have gained the positivity and confidence that I will continue to experience new things that are exciting and fun, and live a life with no regrets, as long as I allow myself to do so. Literacy has taught me that no longer is it about the goodbyes, but it is about the time spent together, and what you do with it, that means everything.



## Portfolio Checklist

Portfolio submission will include the following:

- **Idea generation (reflection):** Discuss your initial approaches to the prompt, how your ideas for your paper came into being, and the processes you used to brainstorm.
- **Drafts:** All drafts, including your final product.
- **Revision process (reflection):** Discuss how workshops, conferences, writing center visits helped you develop, evolve, and refine your ideas into a fully realized piece of writing.
- **Cultivation of voice as an individual (reflection):** Discuss how the process of this unit helped you to articulate your ideas, increase your own self-knowledge or reaffirm your agency, to develop your individual voice as a writer. Consider moments of challenge, when you pushed through tension or took for granted something you thought to be true, in order to produce new knowledge.
- **Cultivation of voice as a community (reflection):** Discuss moments during the process of this unit when you offered your voice to the collective, in order to come to deeper understandings together. Consider moments of challenge, where discussion and disagreement created evolution in your community.

## PORTFOLIO RUBRIC

	Exceeds	Meets	Emerging	Attempted
<b>PROCESS</b>  Engaged in the writing process and gained an awareness of writing options and effects	Student has: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Made significant changes (reworked order, changed ideas, moved or reworded sentences)</li> <li>Engaged with peer and instructor responses</li> <li>Played with various technical options and devices</li> </ul>	Student has: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Completed drafts</li> <li>Either made significant changes in each draft or engaged with peer response and teacher response</li> </ul>	Student has: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Completed most drafts</li> <li>Made some changes between drafts</li> <li>Engaged with either peer review or teacher response</li> </ul>	Student has: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not completed most drafts or made changes in between</li> <li>Has not engaged with peers or instructor</li> </ul>
<b>ORGANIZATION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Portfolio is organized into specific section. Work samples are arranged in a sequence to highlight progression over time. Each section contains a clear header. The overall organization of the portfolio is excellent.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Portfolio is organized into specific sections. Most sections contain a header. The overall organization of the portfolio to show progress is clear.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Portfolio contains work not organized in specific section. Little thought is given to progress over time. The overall organization of the portfolio is confusing and/or incomplete.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>N/A Not enough work.</li> </ul>
<b>CONTENT</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Portfolio contains all assignments requested. Supplemental material included (annotations of work as it relates to the outcomes and reflection).</li> <li>Artifacts give a precise picture of progress and attention to unit details.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Portfolio contains most of the assignments for the unit, completed, and most of the supplemental materials (some annotations as it relates to the outcomes and reflection).</li> <li>Artifacts presented give a general picture of progress in the course and attention to unit details.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Portfolio contains some completed work and some supplemental material (minimal annotations).</li> <li>Artifacts show an incomplete picture of progress and do not reflect unit details.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Portfolio lacks most work. No annotations of content.</li> <li>Artifacts are minimal and do not show a picture of progress or elements of course.</li> </ul>