1. The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?

Invisible to Invincible

“No, it's a waste of time”.

Growing up my existence felt unsettled. I've never really fit in anywhere, split between geeks in the anime cliques or the athletes in my swimming team. Self described as a social floater, I tended to jump from group to group depending on my moods. Everytime I would move schools, I'd just brush it off as if it was nothing, and I moved a lot. It’s not that the feeling was absent but rather the numbness of change finally caught up to me.  Whether it was because of commuting or new academic opportunities, every 3 years my parents would assign me to a new school. Being a relatively introspective person, I would mostly break off contact with whoever I hung out with prior to my move. Maintaining past relationships seemed to be a bore and the new first impressions became almost instantaneous to me. There wasn’t really an urge to keep up with other people's lives, preferring to cradle in my own comfort spot (being alone). Standing out was a great fear that leveraged the way I handle situations and it inhibited me from achieving what my heart yearned for.

To add fuel to fire, my whole life was encapsulated with a bombardment of activities. A typical day of mine would spread out to an early morning swimming practice at 5am and ending the day on an English lesson with a side of biology revision to finish me off; It engulfed my energy and soon enough I had run out of “social battery” unable to really talk with anyone. I never knew exactly what I wanted, this feeling of despair and confusion was consuming me inside out. No one is to really blame but me. My refusal to participate in social pastimes has labelled me as borderline antisocial. This flaw of mine gleamed even brighter during my high school years. Shyness emerged on top of everything else. I enkindled my own weaknesses and would rather stay alone than put on a general facade towards my peers. I had grown to be too comfortable and sheltered from staying away from the dramas of school life and much preferred lingering at home with my hot cocoa and piles of manga.

I didn't want this to last. Staying as an observer wasn't an option, just watching the world unfold around me in third person evoked a compulsion inside me. If an opportunity arose, I’d continuously attempt to make connections with everyone; my goal was to understand others and how they process the present moment. Quickly I realised the absolute elucidation of my life; it sought interactions with others to begin with. The thing that gives meaning to my closed off approach to life was actually the utter impact I'd bring to someone. Regret towards my past self should not influence the way I seek future prospects. I took upon projects that had been deserted and managed to form a team where we helped underprivileged orphans learn maths every Tuesday. I volunteered in competitions where it would require more group efforts, something I loathed doing in the past. Free myself from the unhealthy fixations on invisibility but actually shaping my whole life to leave footprints in other people's lives.

To others my image felt stagnant, but inside I was like a wanderer slowly reaching new heights no matter how cloudy they were. I have yet to know what future lies for me, but for one thing I knew I had to find out for myself.

Dear Amos:

Your story is no doubt relatable to many. You seem to have many things you can learn from, which is a great starting point!

In your essay I see that you mentioned a few things that were problems, including:

* Not fitting in
* Moving schools
* Maintaining relationships
* Too many activities
* Being shy

I think those problems are very common and relatable, however it also means that you need to make it stand out. The first thing to pay attention to is the wording of the prompt. The prompt is very helpful because it guides you to focus on a certain topic. By having a focused topic and story it allows you to express yourself clearly to your reader. In this case, the prompt asks to ‘recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure’. This means you want to focus on *one occasion or event* when you were facing one of those things.

Breaking down the prompt, I suggest you focus on the following as guidance to structuring the essay:

1. What you wanted to achieve.

To experience challenge, failure or setback you need to have a goal that lead you to them. What exactly did you want to achieve? Did you have a certain goal? What were you working on? From the beginning, you need to showcase that you have a goal that you want to achieve to show the failure. You mentioned that you wanted to ‘understand others’ and ‘leave footprints in other people’s lives’. Those are very good starting points. However, you need to be specific. How did you want to achieve those? Did you have a specific group you wanted to target?

1. A challenge, setback, or failure (could be from one of the above but stick to one specific event).

For example, you explained that the way you handled your situation inhibited you from achieving what your heart yearned for. Can you recall one specific event that was so devastating it caused you to fail in achieving your goal? By being more specific, you tell a story that only you might have experienced.

1. How that challenge, setback, or failure affected you.

What did you feel? What was going through your mind? Did you bounce back from it? How? What did you do?

1. What you learned from the challenge.

Reflect on that event. What is the key takeaway? Did you do anything about the situation? Did it motivate you to do something? Go back to your initial goal and failure. Did you finally achieve that goal in the end? Or if not, did you find a new perspective? A new goal, perhaps?

To make your essay stand out to the reader, you need a specific and authentic story that is unique to you. The more general you are in telling your story and the more elements you mix in, it’s harder for you to focus and to make your essay stand out to your reader. If you focus and be specific in your story, you will definitely inspire many. Be bold! Own your story :)

All the best!

Thalias