



that we feel we are also participants in the process as the phone “rang off the hook,” the living room became “like a zoo” and the project “took the Bay Area by storm.” It is impressive that this storm has hardly abated six years later. Admissions officers often admire stories about long-term commitment, especially when the author can demonstrate continual growth throughout this process. As Anastasia’s third paragraph shows, this growth has certainly occurred: personally, Anastasia has learned management skills as her organization has expanded internationally, having donated 25,000 stuffed animals. Anastasia gives a face to this statistic by relating the story of Simon with his gray koala and the girl in Oakland who chooses the big black dog. This is concrete proof that this idea does “lift children’s spirits.”

The link to Anastasia’s website is an excellent way to distinguish her from other prospective students. The website demonstrates her professionalism, much as the business card in Jason’s story, “Birthing a Business” (Chapter 14) shows his willingness to go above and beyond expectations. Anastasia wraps up her essay nicely by noting, “I have learned how to follow through on an idea, how to champion a cause and how to deal with setbacks,” skills she can apply as she pursues her education after high school.

“Best Reader”

Manika

University of Pennsylvania

THE GIANT BROWN BEAR WAS CREEPING quietly behind the blissfully pink duck ready to wring his bare paws around her neck and throw her into a pot of boiling stew.

We turned the page.

While I chuckled at the impracticality of a bear boiling water to eat a duck, especially a pink duck, I lifted my head to find Matthew tip-toeing about the room exhibiting the meanest, most ferocious look his cute face could conjure. All the while, little Monica sat huddled next to my arm honestly afraid to turn the page and find her favorite pink creature in a bear’s “tummy.”

It was one of those moments of my hours spent reading with children at the library when it dawned just how much, as a “grown up,” I was missing.

I remembered the Thursday when Victoria bounded into the Reading Room showcasing in her small hands a golden certificate from school.



“Best Reader,” it glistened. A smile came across my face as I looked into the eyes of the petite 7-year old who just last year had been held back in first grade because her reading was not up to par.

It was the same smile that had filled my face six months prior, when Victoria joined the reading program and I saw the other volunteers instantly point at me. Our supervisor had agreed with them, knowing I would use my patient disposition and friendly way with children to motivate our new student. I had nodded vigorously, smiling, not only because I was proud of the confidence they had in me, but because nothing would make me happier than taking on the challenge of helping Victoria improve her reading.

After spending the first session responding to an unrelenting stream of questions, I recognized that Victoria’s talkative nature and impatience for answers overshadowed her desire to sit down and read. I treasured her energy and insatiable curiosity and fueled it with my own enthusiasm. Yet, for every interest she presented, I took her to scan the library shelves in search of a related book. I watched her eyes grow with excitement as I tirelessly helped her press through the stories, a journey in search of her answers. Some of the books I chose were difficult for her, but we read through them together, challenging limits and quenching the thirst for knowledge. In books, I told her time and again, she would find all she wanted to know.

Taking her certificate in my hands, I couldn’t help but be proud that part of this glittering piece of paper was likely my doing.

My thoughts were interrupted by Victoria’s chant. “I got best reader!” she exclaimed over and over jumping between feet as her arms waved from side to side. Without hesitation, I followed. Holding her certificate up for all to see, I matched my footing with hers as we hopped the length of the room giggling.

Whether it is victory celebrations or talking in different voices, whenever I am with these kids, I find myself being pulled into their childhood world—a world of simplicity, of undying curiosity, and of pure innocence. It is a world in which if everything is not perfect, it definitely can be. And with a simple “prayer to God” or “kiss on the boo-boo” it will be.

Though I go in each week to be these kids’ teacher, I come out, having been their student. They have introduced me to a side of me I never realized existed.



As I enter college, it is not only my intelligence or my accumulated knowledge, but also the kid in me who will bring success. This child will jump to try every new activity with an enthusiasm that cannot fade. She will ask questions of everything she sees, of everything she hears and of everything she reads. She will dream big and for every step she stumbles upon towards that dream, she will get right back up and step again, this time, a little more carefully. And she will do all this, approach every life hurdle or triumph with a smile- a big contagious smile.

ANALYSIS

The unconventional first sentence of this essay grabs the reader's attention and creates a double-take effect with its absurd and comical juxtaposition of giant bear, pink duck, and boiling stew.

"We turned the page," the even shorter paragraph that follows, reveals the context of the first sentence—a children's book. Such child-like and active language makes us feel that we are in the room, reading over Manika and Monica's shoulders. These sentences create a sense of whimsy and wonder that help us see the reading room from the perspective of a child.

Manika next contrasts childhood curiosity with a young adult's perspective on life. Observing Matthew and Monica, she reflects, "It was one of those moments of my hours spent reading with children at the library when it dawned just how much, as a 'grown up,' I was missing." This single sentence feels a little choppy, even after the first two short paragraphs. While using short sentences to indicate a change in mood or pace is often an effective writing tool, it is best to use it sparingly. Manika draws upon this style several times, including the single-sentence paragraph that begins "taking her certificate in my hands" that is set off by yet another new paragraph with the note, "my thoughts were interrupted by Victoria's chant." In some ways, the short sentence structure has limited Manika's avenue for sharing details. For example, Manika writes about all she is missing out on as a "grown up." She might have used more complex sentences at this point to elaborate on her feelings and to give us a better sense of what the significance of that moment meant to her.

Manika does an excellent job of explaining her volunteer work in this essay. She manages to include other people's perceptions of her through her supervisor's knowledge that she had a "patient disposition and friendly way with children." She also includes her person reaction: "I had nodded vigorously, smiling, not only because I was proud of the confidence they had in me, but because nothing would make