



uses her father's comment to capture these negative sentiments with powerful dramatic effect: "We are immigrating to the United States, not to Mexico! You should spend your time learning English instead of watching that nonsense!" His criticisms only make Oana's accomplishments all the more admirable and memorable—how many other Romanian girls teach themselves Spanish through watching *telenovelas* while their family looks on disapprovingly?

Oana writes frankly of the "hardships" she encountered, first in the form of family resistance to learning Spanish and later in the form of lacking an environment for communicating in Spanish in her predominantly Romanian Los Angeles neighborhood. However, she demonstrates her dedication to Spanish during the "new era" of high school, when she studied actively for two years and astonishingly became fluent in the language.

Oana relates several amusing anecdotes from her trip to Mexico to corroborate her fluency in Spanish. We learn that she "was mistaken more than once for one of the natives." She might have chosen to tell us more from this trip in order to show ways in which she was able to "prove" to her father that Spanish was "not 'nonsense'."

In her penultimate paragraph, Oana relates her long process of learning Spanish to her "ambitious and aggressive spirit in the face of adversity" as well as to her further plans "to use [her] love and passion for Spanish to make an impact on the world." Oana could have ended her essay with this paragraph, since her final paragraph mostly reiterates what she has already said. While it can be tempting to use concluding paragraphs to recap what you have already written, it is best to end in a way that seems fresh, rather than regurgitating what has already been said.

"From Flaubert to Frisbee"

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THIS SUMMER, I WENT TO THE Governor's Honors Program, also known as GHP, a six-week intensive college-like experience where the best and brightest students in Georgia gather to learn and grow as individuals. It was the best thing that has ever happened to me. That is something of a hackneyed phrase; people cheapen the extremes of language by constantly using superlatives for everyday occurrences, making it harder and harder to actually describe the few subtle and transcendent moments of life. In *Madame Bovary*, Flaubert claims that



language is but a cracked kettle on which we play music for the bears to dance, while we dream of making the stars weep. The experiences we have never fit within the too-close confines of language; but I will try anyway. The classes that I attended were nothing like the classes that I would take normally. Nowhere else would the teachers encourage sixteen and seventeen year-olds to look for sexual imagery in Shakespeare, and then find even more than they did, without the exercise being sordid instead of literary. I attended classes named anything from Dirty Words: Clean Thoughts (a class on Profanity; the only course in which the use of profane or vulgar language was prohibited) to Teenage Female Angst: Beyond Holden Caulfield to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. All of them opened my mind to a brand-new way of looking at the world, and processing information. Thanks to the varying education that I received, I know that valuable information about life is not only in the “classics,” but even appears in seemingly mindless and trashy zombie films.

While I learned a lot in the classrooms of GHP, I feel that most of my growth occurred outside of the classroom. I met the sort of people who will change the world, who will go forth into the world and, without making a big name, will do the things that make the world a better place. My best friends there were people that I would never have met; people I would never have known existed; people that I can now not imagine life without. One was a math major, an excellent athlete in every sport, and an accomplished singer; the running joke was that the only thing that he was bad at was failing. The other was a phenomenal writer, always ready to play an endearing trick on somebody, and the former’s girl-friend. Both of them were fairly conservative Christians, and yet totally accepting of me for whom I was, despite any of my clashes with their beliefs. I did not limit myself though, and made it almost a mission to find and talk to as many of the people there, because I was sure that each and every one of them would have an interesting perspective on things. Once I was walking back from playing Frisbee, and was stopped to discuss what the ethical framework for life ought to be; just for fun. The experience that I had there has undeniably changed me forever.