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**ANALYSIS**

This student's introduction served its purpose. It probably made the admissions officers curious. What happened when she made the mistake of focusing on the technicalities of playing music rather than the enjoyment of it? It probably made them want to read more to find the answer.

As the author of this essay explains how she volunteered for Music from the Heart, she also reveals her honest feelings—how she has apprehension about performing and how she wasn't sure if the seniors were enjoying it because of their chatting during the performance. Many students think that you need to present yourself in a light that makes you appear almost perfect, but sharing these kinds of doubts actually makes the essay more interesting, personable and honest. Being perfect is not very compelling, but letting the reader know that you have minor insecurities adds some complexity. This also reveals a lot about the way that you think and how you view your own personality.

During the crux of the story, we can see the student change from focusing on how well she performs technically to sharing her enthusiasm for the music. She describes the internal dialogue that she has with herself, trying to perform with as much enthusiasm as possible when the seniors react to her playing. It's easy to understand why she enjoys playing for the seniors and how their smiles and thanks make it worth the time that she spends each month.

For essays on community service, it's critical to demonstrate that you are not just doing community service because it looks good on a resume or because a parent or your school is forcing you to, but that you actually enjoy the work and put your whole self into it. From this essay, the admissions officers could tell that this student gains as much from the experience as her audience does, and that she's likely to continue such service in college and beyond.

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**“Precious Planet”**

**Pen-Yuan Hsing**  
**Duke University**

“HELLO! WHAT’S YOUR NAME?” “PEN-YUAN HSING.” I see The Expression, then hear The Response: “What?” Starting the first grade in the US without knowing a single word of English, going back to Taiwan three years later incapable of recognizing a single Chinese character is not exactly an ideal circumstance for blending in. For many years, I



was always the quiet one sitting in the corner, the one who few people talked to, the one out of the loop. I was the “local alien.”

I opt to join the Earth Science Club during my first year in Lishan High School, as I always had an interest in astronomy, which happened to be the focus of that year’s club activities. I didn’t know the weekly gathering time of our club was also an elective Earth Science course that students from other high schools could attend. I certainly did not realize what a big impact this arrangement would have on me.

Near the end of the first semester, I was approached by a girl from a neighboring school who attended this earth science course. She asked if I wanted to join her on an environmental survey of Taiwan’s Keelung coast conducted by an organization called Taipei WetNet. For a moment I hesitated, I literally had no experience in responding to invitations. What suddenly came out of my mouth surprised me, “Sure, what time?”

For the next three years I spent in Taipei WetNet, I gained not only a close friend, knowledge about the problems our environment faced, but perhaps most importantly found a group of people who shared the same convictions, who are passionate about the same thing, the plight of our precious planet. A year after being introduced to this organization, I was its coordinator and presented my first academic paper at an environmental education conference. I learned that I don’t always have to be the quiet one in the corner, that I do and can have things to share with everyone else. I don’t have to fear.

I often think about how I managed to say yes on that fateful day. Was it just because of a pretty face? Or maybe there has always been a special part of me that wanted to get out, and she was instrumental in “flipping the switch.” This eye-opening experience and what I learned from it is what I desperately want to share with the world.

Perhaps, somewhere out there is another quiet person in the corner just waiting to be found. A switch waiting to be flipped. You just have to find it, flip it, and make the world a brighter, warmer place.

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### ANALYSIS

Pen-Yuan begins his essay with an apparent shortcoming—not being about to blend in as the “local alien,” “the quiet one sitting in the corner,” “the one out of the loop.” This introduction is reminiscent of Angelica’s essay, “No Longer Invisible,” (Chapter 7), in which she