



her to serve the community and the other allowed her to form a bond with it. She then applies this connection to her future plans. This is an effective way to conclude the essay because Lauren illustrates her ability to analyze her accomplishments and further explains how she will apply what she's learned to future opportunities.

“Looking Beyond the Castle”

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One of Stanford's essay prompts is to provide a photo and explain its significance.

IONCE BELONGED TO ROYALTY, STROLLING along the lush pastures of grass and enormous spires of Renaissance structure. Unfortunately, I was not given a crown on my voyage, even though I felt the crown when visiting the grand castle in Spain. The picture shown is important to me not only because of the spectacular view, but it also represents my passions for the study of Spain's cultural history and literature as well as how those subjects offer clues to discovering my individuality.

Traveling to Spain gave me the chance of a lifetime to explore its history with respect to my personality. In the photograph, the castle in the background once belonged to the great royal unifiers of Spain named Ferdinand and Isabella. With their process of unification came the exploration of the Americas. Explorers such as Christopher Columbus established Spanish territories in the New World, such as Colombia, which is the country my parents are from, and I was born. From this chain of causality, Spain's history essentially created my existence. Pondering about my historical background from Spain, perhaps I would have never been born if the king and queen never unified Spain. I could be speaking Arabic if the expulsion of the Moors never occurred under the hands of the Spanish monarchs. Curiously,





I could have been born as an Indian native, because the New World would have never been explored. Perhaps, I wouldn't be looking at the same photo, explaining its significance! Frankly, exploring Spain's history has enabled me to discover my origins. When viewing the picture through my point of view, I see myself returning the roots of my creation.

Spain also offers a vibrant history of literary works and significant innovations in Hispanic literature. Similar to the exploration of history leading to a clue for learning about myself, I have the ability to explore the literature the Hispanic culture has to offer. Knowing two languages allows me to discover the essence of ideas authors such as Gabriel García Márquez, Jorge Luis Borges, and Cervantes wanted to convey to their audience. Since language is to a code for ideas, I can decipher two different kinds of codes, English and Spanish, to understand the author's emotions placed into his or her literature. Spanish literature also enhances Hispanic culture as a positive influence in the world. Reading literature in Spanish and English consequently has allowed me to further search for clues about my cultural origins, since Spanish literature is considered a voice among the people.

Perhaps my interest in these two subjects came from knowing I come from a Colombian family. I am the first in our family to be born in the United States, and as a result, I represent two different cultures. Knowing I come from a culturally different family, I feel passionate about exploring my family's cultural roots because it is a method to discover clues about my individuality, as well as the origins of my family. In the USA, the last names of Aguado or Granados are rarely found among common Americans. When I traveled to Spain, I purchased wooden plaques showing the coat of arms from my ancestors bearing the Aguado and Granados names. When I found these plaques commemorating my family, I had felt I found yet another clue to my personality, since my last names were found from Spain (similar to finding a needle in a haystack). Finding my coat of arms on my trip proves my origins lie within the history and culture of Spain. The trip to Spain gave me the opportunity to explore my existence as a human being, as well as knowing from where I came.

Based on my perceptions, my picture represents to me the complex evolution of my personality, since I am constantly finding new clues leading to the understanding of who I am. This picture is a part of my



constant search for my individuality and is a reminder of the beginning of my personal exploration. This is my crown.

ANALYSIS

Brian's essay opens with a sentence that piques our curiosity, a trend seen in several other essays, including Oana's "A Different Kind of Love" (Chapter 3) and Sarah's "Unshakable Worth" (Chapter 7). A first sentence that invokes a question in the reader—in Brian's case, the question is "How does Brian belong to royalty?"—is an effective way to engage your audience right from the beginning.

Brian reveals the key to this mystery in the second paragraph by tracing the history of Spain back to his family's origins. As he explores the "chain of causality," Brian demonstrates his "passion for the study of Spain's cultural history" by making references to Christopher Columbus and the expulsion of the Moors. He also shows his skills in imaging: "I could be speaking Arabic . . . I could have been born as an Indian native" and, playfully, "Perhaps I wouldn't be looking at the same photo, explaining its significance!"

These details also relate to Brian's interest in finding "clues to discovering [his own] individuality." The term *individuality* can have several possible meanings. Brian might have shared his personal interpretation of the term in order to give us a better sense of what the "constant search for [his] individuality" means to him. Remember to define the key terms in essays if they are potentially ambiguous. Clarifying important terms brings personal interpretation to the written words and also helps reduce redundancy. For example, Brian writes several sentences that seem related to discovering his individuality and heritage. "Frankly," he explains, "exploring Spain's history has enabled me to discover my origins." We gain other clues in these sentences: "Reading literature in Spanish and English consequently has allowed me to further search for clues about my cultural origins" and "I feel passionate about exploring my family's cultural roots because it is a method to discover clues about my individuality, as well as the origins of my family." These might be more powerfully condensed into one concise statement placed at the beginning of the essay.

Brian's essay provides strong examples of his passion for Spanish history and literature using the memorable metaphor of royalty, finding his coat of arms, and discovering his metaphorical "crown." Using a single photograph, Brian was able to share about his heritage and his personal passions. Many strong essays highlight one's individual interests and talents within the broader framing of a group. In Brian's case, his passion is Spanish history and literature, and the "group" is comprised of his ancestors and the Spanish culture they represent.