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ACAD EMIC PASSION

“Bacon”

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THE ALARM CLOCK IS, TO MANY high school students, a wailing monstrosity whose purpose is to torture all who are sleep-deprived. Those who believe this are misguided, and are simply viewing the situation from a twisted perspective. For when these imprudent early-risers blearily rub their eyes each morning, and search in vain for whatever is making that earsplitting noise, they are, without a doubt, annoyed. Why?

It isn't because the only thing they desire is to sleep a few extra hours, as many would presume. No, these kids are groggy and irritable because they are waking up to what they think will be another horribly boring day of school. If one of these foolish Sallys or Joes were, say, sleeping comfortably on a *Saturday* morning, I could certainly see something different happening. A beautiful breakfast of tantalizing vittles—eggs, hash browns, and the like—would be ready and waiting for them on their kitchen tables. But the scrumptious delight to outshine them all would be a slab of bacon, piled proudly for the taking. It



would be that wafting, wondrous bacon smell that would draw dear, sweet Sally abruptly from her slumber—long before an alarm clock has the chance to pierce the air.

Oh, bacon: what a marvelous, glorious thing! I live for those heart-stoppingly good strips of succulence, so crispy and crunchy, so packed with perfection. The thought of having a plate of bacon every day, perhaps every school day, sends me into sheer waves of ecstasy!

To be sure, many others would also wax poetic about this lovely breakfast food. But precious few would share this same zeal for learning. I, however, can smugly decree that I do regard both very highly. I brightly waken every morning to the mellifluous joy that sounds from my alarm clock, a huge smile plastered on my face, and the yearning to learn in my heart.

When I board my school bus Monday through Friday, it is still pitch black outside. Busmates will groan about how even the day has not yet dragged itself out of bed; I only chuckle through their thirty-minute rant fest as we chug down the freeway. Opting to be part of a far-away Magnet school, after all, has its benefits. My peers may still not look forward to waking up earlier, but when we are all together in a classroom, we take on the “bacon mentality.” I have the opportunity to choose from a wealth of diverse classes, and love arriving to school each day with the prospect of having a new Spanish History lesson—taught to me in Spanish, for a change. Teachers, driven by the enthusiasm of their Magnet students, are inspired to create new classes for advanced students, including those who have completed AP Spanish Literature and are still eager to learn more, or those who want to learn about a specific aspect of a subject—we now have a Middle Eastern History class. Not to be outdone, the post-AP exam period of my English Language class included an intensive literature study, where we laughed at good ol’ Yossarian in *Catch-22*, and developed a strong attachment to Jay Gatsby. I’d like to think that *The Great Gatsby*’s pursuit of Daisy is not unlike my own pursuit of bacon. I’ve gobbled up new knowledge rapidly, hankering after it like any elusive bacon strip, and happily digesting any new bits of information.

But six classes a year are simply not enough to satisfy my hunger for knowledge. Just as I eat bacon all three meals of the day (when possible), I attempt to learn all days of the week. Rather than make another trip to some lackluster movie theatre on the weekend, I dedicate my



time to reading another good book, or reviewing Economics with my friends. But high school is starting to smell like leftovers to me now; I want fresh, new, crisp learning. I want not to read a textbook written by a renowned professor: I want to hear him speak directly. I'm ready for the university, and hunger for all the new opportunities waiting for me! I've finished my breakfast, and now it's time to get going to school.

ANALYSIS

Mariam's essay "Bacon" uses lively language and plenty of humor to tell a story that highlights her eagerness to go to school. Her writing is casual and funny, and it conveys in a personal and genuine way her enthusiastic attitude. "Bacon" reminds us that topics do not have to be serious to be sincere.

The metaphor of bacon is a very memorable one in image, smell, texture, and taste. Mariam capitalizes on these features in her beautiful—and mouthwatering!—descriptors of a Saturday morning breakfast of eggs. With a touch of humor and a hint of parody, she writes, "Oh, bacon: what a marvelous, glorious thing! I live for those heartstoppingly good strips of succulence, so crispy and crunchy, so packed with perfection. The thought of having a plate of bacon every day, perhaps every school day, sends me into sheer waves of ecstasy!"

Just when this celebration of bacon begins to appear over-the-top, and readers are beginning to worry that Mariam swapped a food magazine piece with her college admissions essay, she links the succulent bacon metaphor with school: "To be sure, many others would also wax poetic about this lovely breakfast food. But precious few would share this same zeal for learning." Though Mariam takes a risk in waxing poetic over bacon, she does so with carefully calculated dramatic effect that ultimately pays off. We are convinced that the "yearning to learn" is deeply engrained in our bacon-lover and early-riser author.

Mariam's narrative also shows us the sacrifices she makes for attending a Magnet school far from home. Her use of the phrase "bacon mentality" is original and creative. Mariam's descriptions of her classes are specific enough to prevent them from reading like a list. Rather, she demonstrates the depth of her commitment in her classes by citing specific details like Yossarian in *Catch-22*. Mariam's essay demonstrates how she is able to fit impressive details of her life into a narrative framework, a strategy that can avoid the pitfall of sounding like bragging. Mariam follows the "show, don't tell" mantra when she mentions the Magnet school in the context of her long early-morning bus ride, and in celebrating her Spanish history class, which is impressively taught in Spanish.



At the end of the essay, the bacon metaphor may seem overdone to some readers, as Mariam has “gobbled up new knowledge rapidly, hankering after it like any elusive bacon strip” and has expressed a desire for “fresh, new crisp” learning to satisfy her “hunger for knowledge.” She might have reduced the number of mentions of bacon and hunger. However, Mariam’s essay ultimately stands out for its originality and unpredictable connections, like linking *The Great Gatsby* to—what else?—bacon.

“Beyond Plug-and-Chug Math”

Anonymous

MIT

I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN A MATH-SCIENCE girl. I sighed and sulked through classes on US History and French in eager anticipation of the formulas and applications I would be learning later in the day. I believe there are many factors which attribute to my success, two being my fascination and persistence.

When I was seven I once asked what math was good for and why I should learn it. The answer I received simply does not do math justice, “One day when you’re in line at the grocery store the cashier will give you too little change and you’ll be glad you learned this.” Now in calculus I see the application of all these once foreign symbols, formulas, and letters. I am often amazed by the calculations I am able to do using the cumulative information acquired from nearly 12 years of education, such as how to maximize the volume of a box given a certain surface area. Math is not just plug and chug as many view it but it requires creativity and thinking out of the box to solve the problems encountered in the real world. Beauty lies in its simplicity and in the fact that proofs and observations are what brought the golden rectangle from ancient Greece, Pascal’s triangle, and the Pythagorean Theorem as well as a host of other theorems, equations, and postulates. Math has made the impossible possible and the once long and tedious, simple and quick. The genius of it is amazing as well as the fact that any person is capable of applying and discovering it. I draw graphs and try to make shapes from functions for fun, count to 10 to calm down, and save money at the store, too. For all of these reasons and many more, I am fascinated by math.