**Name your favorite books, authors, films, and/or artists. (50 word limit):**

Ready Player One, An Abundance of Katherines, John Green, Jennifer Lawrence, Rainbow Rowell, Bellwether, 13 Going on 30, Double Indemnity, Legally Blonde, The Hunger Games books, Ally Condie, Matched, Rent, Kristin Cashore, Divergent books, Josh Gad, A Tale for the Time Being, Dale Chihuly

**What newspapers, magazines, and/or websites do you enjoy? (50 word limit)**

I enjoy the website Upworthy because the articles are uplifting and there are great quotes, such as the amazing quote from John Green about nerds. I also like the website Goodreads as a resource to research and keep track of my books.

**What is the most significant challenge that society faces today? (50 word limit)**

Selfishness is society’s greatest challenge. We need to care about other humans on an individual basis and have empathy for those we know, and those who may live a world away. If we see the humanity in all people, we will be motivated to improve the world for everyone.

**How did you spend your last two summers? (50 word limit)**

I spent three weeks last summer at the Academic Connections program at UC San Diego learning about Cognitive Science from amazing graduate students. The previous summer I went to the Maccabi Games in Boca Raton, Florida and played volleyball on a team of Jewish teens from Texas, Milwaukee and California.

**What were your favorite events (e.g., performances, exhibits, competitions, conferences, etc.) in recent years? (50 word limit)**

Attending the She’s Geeky un-conference with my mom, where I led my own session about books; playing in the NCVA Regional Championship with my club volleyball team and helping to move up to the silver division; playing the motherly lead role in the short play Merry Christmas, Strega Nona.

**What historical moment or event do you wish you could have witnessed? (50 word limit)**

The first taping of the Mary Tyler Moore Show was a catastrophe. However, the show went on to be influential. Mary represented an independent woman who did not need a man, a revolutionary concept in the 70s. I would have been proud to witness this seemingly inconsequential moment.

**What five words best describe you?**

Positive, Enthusiastic, Athletic, Kind, Inquisitive

**Stanford students possess an intellectual vitality. Reflect on an idea or experience that has been important to your intellectual development. (250 word limit)**

AP Physics was a roller coaster ride for me. After taking Physics Honors I felt prepared and excited. However, I soon realized that AP Physics was completely different. The complexity of the problems and the attention to detail required was overwhelming, but the topics were more fascinating than ever! The harder the problems were, the more exciting and satisfying it was to work through them. I loved learning about new concepts, such as torque and rotation, and applying them to everyday life. I went to see Cirque du Soleil with my family, and all I could think about was physics. I went on to do a project about it, explaining to the class the amazing mechanics behind the performance. I would sit in the car and discuss the rolling of the wheels with my dad, or I would explain why opening a door far from the hinge creates a bigger radius so it takes less force. This class was a stimulating intellectual experience and I reveled in every moment of it, even the ones that tested my personal strength. It was a daunting undertaking, but pushing through it yielded a rewarding end result. It gave me perspective and a renewed fervor. Now, I bring all the lessons I learned from that experience to my other classes, especially the passion for physics and intellectual challenges.

**Virtually all of Stanford's undergraduates live on campus. Write a note to your future roommate that reveals something about you or that will help your roommate -- and us -- know you better. (250 word limit)**

Dear New Roommate,

I am a happy, positive person! I also consider myself a nerd, because I become engrossed in a variety of topics, and find myself referencing them in all situations. I do this with books a lot, because I tend to reread my favorites incessantly. I will also watch (and rewatch) The Simpsons with you any time.

If you want to take a trip, we can go to the beach. When I went to The Girls’ Middle School I learned how to surf and stand-up paddleboard, which I really enjoyed because I love to swim and go in the ocean! But my favorite activity is volleyball, and I would love to share it with you! Maybe we can play intramural or club volleyball together during the year.

Don’t be shocked if you see me randomly writing notes to myself in cursive. It’s my kind of doodling. I started after reading the book Matched, where the characters try to save the art of cursive. I use that and juggling as ways to de-stress.

If you ever need scrapbooking supplies for anything, I’ll definitely bring some along with me, because I like making cards with them! It’s nice to give people something unique.

I look forward to hearing about your favorite things and getting to know you (note 2 musical theatre references there :).

Sincerely,

Ashley Helfinstein

**What matters to you, and why? (100 to 250 words)**

Volleyball is my passion. If it were possible, I would play constantly. My connection with volleyball seems innate and inexplicable to me, but there are profound reasons that I connect so genuinely with this sport. From middle school onward, I have been shy and agreeable with most people, making limited deep connections. Volleyball has forced me to break through this timidity to articulate what I need, and be confident in myself. Working with such varied groups of girls, I learned how to be a good, supportive teammate to each of them. To be part of the team, I had to find my role in the group, do my part, and communicate what support I needed from my teammates to be successful. I learned to rely on them, and allow them to rely on me. I built a habit of hard work. I learned not to be fazed by anything, to keep things in perspective. I gained a form of simultaneous tranquility and enthusiasm. Volleyball matters to me because these lessons I learned resonate deep within me as I see myself becoming a better person, and a better volleyball player. Volleyball has allowed me to become who I am today, which is a more confident and engaged person, student and member of society than I ever could have been without it. I am grateful for the development, and the true connection that I have shared with the sport for so many years.

**Briefly elaborate on one of your extracurricular activities or work experiences. (150 max)**

Sophomore year I was talking to my friend Hannah about books, and our voices rose as we became enthusiastic and invested. I loved the conversation and wondered why there wasn’t an opportunity to have this kind of excited discussion with other avid readers at Homestead. Thus began my idea for the Homestead Book Club. Getting the club approved and started over the next year was a challenging process at times, but rewarding. It has been a great experience to get recommendations for books that I might never have chosen for myself from other club members. We are able to make time to read more by having suggested books, we talk about what excites us about them, and we get to know some of the reading community at Homestead. Our common experience of being book lovers in high school connects us.