

Commonapp Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.

In 1910, philosophers Bertrand Russel and Alfred Whitehead set out to prove that one plus one does in fact equal two, and that we were not all previously mistaken. The tome that answers this question spans seven hundred pages. After providing a satisfactory proof, the authors remark that 'the above result may occasionally prove useful.'

I am setting out to prove a similar hypothesis: that two halves – a homeland and a diaspora – might make a whole.

On my seventh birthday, my life was no longer evenly bisected. My native country of Venezuela – an otherworldly place, possessing the most inconceivably beautiful landscapes Earth has provided its inhabitants – no longer claimed an equal half of my years as America. At three, my parents judged on account of the spiraling violence, decades of political instability and accompanying riots, that Venezuela would no longer prove a suitable setting for my recently-imparted life. To a maternal grandmother in Virginia, we hastily immigrated, and I turned four in America. Then five. Then six. Now seven; and as four years here outnumbered three years there, it became apparent to me that the future would write its pages bearing on the surface of this new nation. And what a weak surface I found it; the place that my classmates took for granted was to me a remote habitat, inhospitable to humans and possessing no lifeforms similar to myself (the land I'm referring to is a sweet and quaint town tucked into the foothills of Appalachia with which all my heart I have grown to love).

I slowly assimilated, but even after an upbringing full of friendship, joy and love, I am not unoccupied by a feeling of deep isolation, like my soul is composed of a different substance than my companions'. Venezuela remains in my heart but slowly and painfully faded from my mind, and I can barely recollect the place which I know to hold the happiest stage of life, and an insurmountable beauty I cannot recall ever having witnessed. My full name even, that sanctifies my direct lineage, I learned only as a teenager.

But with the image of my early childhood paling, the curtain of nostalgia was lifted, and I slowly began to comprehend the place I found myself in. Language, and the world of thought, of analysis and discovery, completely enveloped me. I experienced America with an outsider's eyes, and this place I had only begun to call home was suddenly alive and rich with knowledge to be had. The big questions began to occur to me, and contemplation occupied (and still does) a great deal of my time; I found myself deeply identified with those who articulated feelings like my own in literature, art, and philosophy. Camus served as a gateway into philosophy: in *The Stranger*, Mersault's existentialism put words to an isolation I had never been able to articulate but had felt my whole life. Alongside him, Benjamin Labatut, a Chilean writer, has accompanied me: books like *The MANIAC* are not only masterpieces of storytelling and creativity but cross-sections of society that include both STEM elements and their philosophical implications:

entities like the atom bomb, and the Schwarzschild black hole intrinsically contain ethical dilemmas with which his work grapples. Additionally, Žižek's theories on identity, politics, and social ethics have been my introduction to social theory and have been a great support in assimilation.

My Venezuelan background has given me a mindset attuned to subtle cultural nuances that often go unnoticed by my peers, as well as a deep sensitivity to the pathos of the world. This upbringing has guided me toward wellsprings of philosophy, art, and literature, and I hope, through my higher education, to contribute a verse to the powerful play that is the canon of Western thought, and in doing so to join the two halves of my identity into a fulfilled whole.

The above result may occasionally prove useful.