Sample essays —Bernard college 14 pieces (6 out of 14)

1. Harmony

Anonymous

**Describe a creative work (as in art, music, science, etc.) that has had an influence on you, and explain that influence.**

Entering the music room in LaGuardia Community College for the first time, I sit down before the upright piano and take out Mozart's Fantasy in D Minor. It is a simple piece, but one of my favorites. It consists of three parts, the first with a slow tempo that allowed me to get used to the keys. My fingers stretch from one chord to another, regaining their flexibility after months of idleness. As I step on the pedal, the melodious pattern of notes produces a heavenly harmony. It was then that I forgot the aggravations of piano, remembering only why I found peace in the mellifluous sounds of classical music.

I remembered that it was only six short months ago. I watched with a growing grin as the U-Haul truck headed down the road, carrying my piano to its new home. After ten years of playing, I gleefully thought to myself that the vexation was finally over. I would no longer have to practice for two hours everyday; nor would I have to play one or two lines of music repeatedly, only to give up in complete frustration and force myself to try again the next day. With an almost intense hatred of the piano back then, who would have thought that I would begin to miss the music? Yet there was an aching in me that kept growing stronger. I had felt the piano calling to me, tugging at me with stubborn hands.

I dismiss my thoughts in a split second, realizing that the second part of the fantasy is approaching. The melody slows and becomes waltz-like, with bounces of high notes that immediately walk back down to the lower keys. My heart pounds with the music, and the feelings that had been forever restrained spill across the piano in vibrant colors. I absorb the music as I never had before; I find myself in a world between feelings and sensations, between the imagined and the real.

Soon after, I begin the third and last part of the piece. Its gaiety seems ready to bring a delightful end to the composition; the dance that my hands perform atop the keyboard was happy and uplifting. To finish, there are four chords, played forte - loud - that produce an abrupt yet final effect on the entire piece. Keeping my fingers on the piano after the last note, I feel the vibrations of the music traveling through my hands.

Surprised that I finished the fantasy so quickly, I do not want to stop playing. I realize my reluctance to leave the piano is more than a momentary whim. It is the resurgence of a love of music that I developed as a child, but failed to recognize. The piano always produced a strong sense of comfort and peace in me. Its music flows as glistening spring water from a waterfall, creating images that are crystal bright and blinding in my mind's eye. Now, each time I play, I am amazed that beauty and grace have been captured in the few pages before me.

Every since I played Mozart's piece a few months ago, I have eagerly anticipated each piano class. Weekends, when I have leisure time, I travel to the college for a few extra hours of practice. My love for the piano has rejuvenated and is stronger than ever. Certainly, the piano can sometimes be frustrating; being unable to play a few lines after hours of continuous practice is extremely discouraging. Yet there are also those days when my fingers have minds of their own. They race up and down the keyboard, creating harmony, melody, and rhythm of the utmost perfection. Those are the days that keep me going. Those are the days that make me feel alive.

**The Summer Volunteer**

**Anonymous**

**Talk about a topic of your choice.**

Ping! The elevator doors opened on Floor Nine, and I was in another world. Leaving the chaos of panicking patients and bustling doctors in the floors below, I found myself walking down a deserted hallway.

This was my first day volunteering at the Children's Psychiatric Department in Elmhurst Hospital. I was to tutor children in the After School Program, which was normally only open to college students. However, the Director of Volunteer Services noted my interest in psychology and interacting with patients and accepted me. Tutoring was something I had experience with and had enjoyed in the past, but this was going to be different.

As I knocked on the door, doubts swirled through my head. However, I was jolted awake when Ms. Marisol came out. She led me into a vibrant room filled with cabinets, books, games, and tables. At one of those tables was a tiny boy, quietly coloring. This was Quinn, a seven year old with shiny blond hair and vivacious blue eyes.

I was told that Quinn had Attention Deficit Disorder, but that he was a delightful child. Apprehensively, I introduced myself; he looked up, stared for a moment, and then went back to coloring. Getting Quinn to talk was not going to be easy. I thought by playing a game with him, he might open up to me. As I was getting Connect Four, Quinn ran into the hallway, to his room, and then slammed the door shut.

Great, I thought; I had lost him already. I knocked and asked him to come out, but there was no answer. I hoped the rest of the summer would not be like this. As I desperately thought of something to say, an attendant came by and told me it was hopeless. However, determined not to fail, I stood there pleading with Quinn for twenty minutes. I told him I was his friend and that I was not leaving. But still, he did not come out. When I made it clear to him that I would be here until eight if I had to, I heard shuffling footsteps get closer. Finally, after all my efforts, the door unlocked, and Quinn came out.

"Do you know how to play Sorry?" he asked. "If you do your work, then yes, I do," I laughed. We walked back to the playroom, and spent the rest of the time doing schoolwork, playing, and talking. When it was time to leave, I found myself wanting to stay longer and was glad when Quinn asked if I was coming back tomorrow. Of course I said yes, and as I was riding down the elevator, I realized that this was not going to be as difficult as I had thought it would be. Ping! As the elevator doors opened and the rush of people became present once more, I knew I was going to enjoy coming to the hospital and tutoring for the rest of the summer - and I did.

A Newfound Nostalgia

Katherine Perry

Describe an aspect of your childhood/upbringing that shaped the person you are today.

In a navy blue Volvo station wagon my entire childhood evolved. Inside, memories rested alongside the hardened French fries and squashed fruit snacks that lined the plastic leather interior.

Growing up I had two older brothers. Brian was two years my senior, and we flat out did not get along. At the root of our constant fighting were our intrinsic similarities - we repelled each other like two homologous poles. Michael, two years older than Brian, was extraordinarily aloof. He was always a spectator during our petty battles, never taking sides or responding to the action. I often pondered how it was possible for him to ignore Brian's and my constant quarreling. In time I realized this trait was simply part of who Mike was, and we all loved him for it.

During family car trips we’d find ourselves playing our Gameboy consoles for ten minutes before breaking into complete sibling warfare. My father would try to overwhelm the cacophony with his newest Bruce Springsteen cassette, but his attempts were always futile.

Through the constant combat, my parents’ personalities shone through. My mother’s solution to all sibling-related problems involved an incredible amount of yelling. My father wasn't as vocal. Once the Boss had failed him, he'd opt to jerk the car to the side of the road and coolly stand outside until the battle ceased. This technique usually worked. Brian would direct his negative anger at his game of Tetris, Michael would lose himself in his Walkman, and I would stare out the window and daydream.

The car changed with the family, and as we acquired parts, so did it. When the Volvo approached its second birthday, my sister Erica was born. The meager five-seater could no longer hold our family and a fold-up trunk seat was added as a result.

The years passed, and like us, the Volvo began to age. The navy paint lost its luster and small regions of rust developed. Inside, empty juice boxes and X-Men trading cards lay preserved beneath the floor mats, creating an unintentional scrapbook of memories shared by my family in the car.

One subzero February day our car began its dissent to death. As we pulled out of our driveway something felt awry. The Volvo was making strange noises - it had finally trekked its last mile.

A short time later, we purchased a spacious new Honda minivan. No longer crammed in the backseat, arguments between Brian and I dissipated and finally ceased. We pretended to love the newfound maturity, yet in our hearts we all wanted to go back to the days of pulling hair and bickering to no end.

The Volvo represented our youth, and when it died, our childhood went along with it. From gummy bears and Gameboys had somehow evolved four children who had just about grown up. Now as I stand at the cusp of adulthood, I’d give anything to relive those days — yet I know this is an unreachable desire. Childhood is a one-way street, and there is no turning back.

**Crack & Grow Up**

**Grace Anzalone**

**Evaluate a significant experience and the effect it had on you.(Common Application, Prompt 1)**

I firmly believe that antidrug campaigns whose values instill the “just say no” attitude in elementary school children should be extended to encompass the wretched habit of knuckle cracking. I have done it since I was a young tot, I am told, which seems to make sense since I could rattle off about fifteen variations of the harrowing warnings that my peers and superiors are inclined to give when they hear my signature bone crunching. For instance, “You’re going to get arthritis, you know. My great uncle cracked his knuckles, Grace, and now he has to hire a scribe to put his mental pen to paper.” But I was a brave little thing, or else just hard headed, and would respond with a flippant retort regarding the godly strength of my family’s bones, but thank you for the concern. And so it looked as if I was destined for a life of displaced synovial fluid and gradual knuckle swelling which could very well ruin a far off proposal that some brave man would make.

But, even after years of practiced cracking, came a new manipulation of my fingers which proved to produce the same symptoms in a week as would several decades of relentless cracking. I would grasp the top joint, between my first and second knuckle, and twist, until a faint yet supremely satisfying pop could be heard. It was less disruptive and not unpleasantly masculine, and, before the symptoms hit, I imagined it to be less harmful, due its pleasant pop that exemplified the new, ladylike, twenty first century knuckle pop. And I stuck with the method until that fateful day when, in twelve hours time, both of my fifteen year old hands went from dexterous and flexible, to two swollen lumps of flesh incapable of writing, eating, or moving with any precision at all. For all intents and purposes, I was powerless and, consequently, miserable; the helplessness which characterized my condition did not suit me in the least.

And so I sat that day, coincidentally on the day I turned sixteen, my hands elevated and sausage-like, sitting in my room as I watched the minutes tick by. Undoubtedly, it was my most depressing birthday to date, as it signaled the end of any notion of invincibility which I had clung to for so long in my childhood. Though my fingers gradually returned to a normal size and I cannot claim that the eye opening experience has rid me of the habit completely, the time when I truly believed nothing could harm me had come to a close. I was no longer the fifteen year old who had never seen a lasting consequence of her actions but now a sixteen year old who could wrap her mind around aging, consequence, and the values of foresight.

**A Fork**

**Rose Tran**

**Write page 217 of your 300-page autobiography. (UPenn's application)**

I have encountered a fork. Should I again submit to my father’s demands as I am sent to the kitchen to serve or should I refuse and risk tainting my role as the ideal Vietnamese daughter? I succumb, and fetch a repulsive-smelling platter of duck, over-roasted with a gross crunchy charcoal skin. As I politely weave through the throng of guests, most of whom look at me for a daughter-in-law, I consider dropping the dish, hoping that my father’s cultural inflexibility would shatter along with the porcelain. Gripped by this evanescent desire to rebel, I consider discarding all items that might as well have been labeled “another expectation.” The Rich Dad, Poor Dad Bible of financial success is tossed in the overfilled pail of extracted duck bones, and the piano is broken into kindle. As the ivory keys crumble to ash, the ballet ribbons, the swim meet medals, the forty-dollar SAT guides, the TI-89 calculators, and the fencing foils are all thrown into those flames as well. Maybe, I could seek relief and liberation from my father’s standards that have churned me as if I just dizzily stepped out of the washing machine.

But who would I be without those heartening expectations of his? Along with scheduled college Open Houses and weekly issues of Time magazine, I would toss out canoeing excursions down the Naugatuck River, family hikes up Mount Washington, and camping trips to Lake George, all eagerly planned by my father for our simple pleasure. I would also mistakenly toss out the birthday cakes of ice cream, his clichéd yet memorable lines from his Life’s Little Instructions book, a visit to Disney World when fifteen, and a kiss on the head every time he came home late at night, tired from work. These parts are essential to my existence; they have granted me the priceless qualities comprising who I am.

Even if, in frustration, I tried to sacrifice the good with the bad, could I? While abandoning all the pressures that my father has placed on me, I would likely try to regain this role of Atlas. Remaining this muscleman in the compact body of five feet, I realized my father’s expectations shape me into a determined competitor in a race for success. I am left with a desire to overcome obstacles, of which athletics, recitals, and SAT’s are ultimately building blocks. Maybe, striving is part of me, where the successes I earn boost my confidence. In the back of my mind, this assurance is enhanced by the realization that my father truly cared. Through all the enrichment programs and camaraderie of new acquaintances, he has given to me friendships and the ability to cope with any conflict.

Only recently able to comprehend the traits he developed within me, I recognize that it is due to my father’s expectations that I am prepared for my future. Processing this realization, I successfully reach the dining room table and place the main course slightly off center so the men at the far end could reach more easily. I sit down next to my father and pick up my chopsticks after all my elders have.

**Walking My Dog**

**Anonymous**

**Describe a routine that you participate in daily.**

**Every morning before I go to school, I take my dog, Buxton, on a walk around the neighborhood. It is a very mundane task, but because of the struggle I faced to finally own Buxton, the time I spend with him each morning is special to me. I had wanted a puppy ever since I was very young, but my parents always said I had siblings instead of pets. I tried every possible ruse to change their minds -- took care of fish, sat for neighbors' pets, did research on dog training -- but my efforts were all for naught until Fate stepped in. One day, my family was at the pet store when all of our hearts melted at the sight of an adorable black-and-white cocker spaniel: our Buxton. We bought him that very day. Now every morning when I walk him, whether it is rainy and miserable or sunny and warm, I think back to that moment and appreciate the little push of Fate that brought me a puppy.**

**"We've Done It." Wong Jia Yi Geraldine**

**Evaluate a significant experience, achievement, risk you have taken, or ethical dilemma you have faced and its impact on you.**

**I wish I could do it all but I’m no superwoman; I’m just an ordinary girl with 24 hours a day. Deciding to write and direct for DramaFest, an intra-school Drama competition, meant sacrificing other clashing commitments including leading in Orientation and dancing for a national competition. Having acted in DramaFest, I was fully aware of the huge commitment it demands; I knew that shouldering too many commitments would be unfair to my teammates and equivalent to committing academic suicide. Above all, I wanted to give as much of my time, mind, body and soul to DramaFest as possible. Although rejecting those opportunities was painful, I do not regret anything I did for DramaFest.**

**In fact, I wish I could relive DramaFest’11 from conception to reception. My inspiration for our play was born in my bathtub weeks after DramaFest‘10. “Pop”, the sound of a bubble bursting by my ear, the dramatization of an idea entering my head: twins. I find twins absolutely adorable and anticipated exploiting some of the many probable comic complications. As I observed the bubbles floating gleefully about me then suddenly disappearing, I felt myself sinking. I missed the feeling of going home late, utterly exhausted after an intense rehearsal. I missed the fun I had with the people I’d come to love and I couldn’t imagine doing DramaFest’11 without my graduating seniors.**

**Then, I experienced a burning desire to ensure that the ideologies that my team held on to were passed on: the joy of creating Drama because of the love for it and the satisfaction of putting up a moving and thought-provoking play. I stared at the water for some time before I told my reflection, “I’ll take up the challenge of writing and directing for DramaFest’11.”**

**I’ve written plays for pleasure and for playwriting competitions but never for performance. With the benefit of feedback from many and using my actors’ improvisations, I repeatedly revised my script to make it more visually compelling and to play to the strengths of my cast. I was, of course, not a sponge that absorbed all comments. I stood by my vision of having an ensemble despite my teacher’s advice against it; where he saw problems, I saw possibilities. Receiving the ‘Best Ensemble’ award affirmed my belief that with courage comes hope, and with hope comes beauty.**

**I also regularly sought feedback on my direction to improve myself and give my team a most memorable and enriching experience. It was my first time directing a play on my own and I am grateful to them for helping me develop as an artist and a leader.**

**My favourite part of my DramaFest journey was not standing on stage receiving the ‘Best Director’ award, but sitting and watching the actual performance. Tears welled up as I watched our play unfold on stage, relished the laughter that erupted around me and savoured the intense silence from the captivated audience. Wiping away a tear, I thought to myself, “We’ve done it.”**