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**Sample essays 2023**

**Bernard college**

**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.**

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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.”

**The Backyard Anonymous**

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

I remember when the flowers stopped blooming.

All throughout my childhood there was always one thing that would instantly make me happy. I had a beautiful backyard in my childhood home. The smell of the ripe red mango trees and the chirping of the blue birds always roused my senses. I lived for the freshly cut green grass and the lovely white orchids hanging by the patio. What really made my backyard stand out was the majestic fountain carefully crafted in the center. My favorite memories are when I would bathe in the large limestone fountain and my parents would be watching me from a distance. Those are the days that are so vivid in my memory.

Routinely, my father always made sure the fountain would continually spout water from its elegant pores, and my mother would always plant exquisite flowers of deep fuchsia and subtle orange. I would contentedly watch them work in the background on the long summer days as the horizon of my wooden fence began to swallow the sun in its entirety. I was surrounded by bliss as the fragrance of the sweet peas lingered in the new light, and the sky was a picturesque shade of purple. One day, however, the beauty began to collapse. The decay of my backyard mirrored the decay of my own parents’ marriage. My heart began to beat slower and slower each day with this harrowing consciousness.

When my father left, the regal fountain I had always admired came to a halt, and water has never sprouted out from it again. The sweet peas and the white orchids, even the daisies, refrained from smiling, yet the poor soul of my backyard kept fighting for its beauty, yearning to be nurtured. Sadly, that dream never came for my backyard or me, as the long grass and weeds of foreclosure consumed my house. Once situated in our new, quaint apartment, I decided to make my own garden.

From then on, I decided never to depend on my parents’ marriage or any force in the world to construct my own happiness. I realized that I must create my own pleasure, and it must stem from the roots within me. I filled my balcony with tulips, lilies, daisies, even cactuses, and most importantly the white orchids I everlastingly enjoy. The fresh self-beauty within me spread out onto all the plants and creatures on my balcony and ricocheted into my attitude towards life. Without the establishment of my own happiness, I could never reach my dream of helping others reach theirs. Now, I can positively say I am at peace with myself.

From gloom to bloom, my happiness reawakens as I look out onto my balcony and see the orchids in the radiance I’ve always known.

**Augusta, Nice to Meet You Najaad Dayib**

**Pick one woman in history or fiction to converse with for an hour and explain your choice. What would you talk about?**

With as much grace as I can summon, I'd begin a conversation with Augusta Savage by thanking her. I’d tell her, “Thank you. Thank you for being a warrior in the Civil Rights Movement, for following your passion and being a great educator, artist, and leader.”

Within that hour, I’d want to know Augusta, the woman. One who was resilient, who suffered for her art, but never let her faith falter. I’d want to know how she found such resolve to believe in humanity and love people, the good and the bad. I’d ask her how she learned to love the color of her skin although it so often served to hold her back. I’d want to know her greatest obstacle in being a self-taught artist, and how she stayed inspired through hard times.

But I’d also want Augusta to know that she influenced me to take a sculpture course and how, despite finding that art was not my niche, I wouldn't give up. How I kept a small photo of her sculpture *The Harp* as motivation. How I earned a B- that I was more proud of than any A I’ve ever received. I’d tell her, “Because of you, I left with an open mind and excitement for new things.”

In that hour, I want to hear her insist that self-confidence reigns supreme over others’ opinions. I’d want her to tell me how to maintain passion and curiosity. I’d hope that Augusta Savage would remind me that, in order for great things to happen, I must make myself vulnerable yet remain optimistic at all times.

**Fighting Sexism with Lightsabers Loie Plautz**

**Reflect on a time when you challenged a belief or idea. What prompted you to act? Would you make the same decision again?**

“This Jedi is female, so she’s not as smart.” The young man, Max, chortled this to his scene partner as our improvised *Star Wars* play came racing towards its climax. I stood backstage, suddenly feeling jarred. My character throughout the play had been a hero, a rebel, strong and intelligent. All of this suddenly was erased because she was a woman. I felt stung and invalidated, but most of all I wanted revenge.

The problem was this: I couldn’t launch into my regular rhetoric, explaining how comments like this one were obviously unnecessary, untrue, and hurtful, because we weren’t two teenagers in the real world in this moment. We were Jedi, evil bounty hunters, and aliens. My retaliation had to be in character, something to bring the evil bounty hunter Max to his final defeat. I knew what I had to do. I slew him with my purple lightsaber. Our improvised play came to its close and, as the finale music began, sensations assailed me from opposing sides of my brain. The good improviser knew that it had been the right time to end the scene, and a classic image of good trumping evil just made sense. The woman in me, the stronger side, was hurt, angry, and just tired. This sort of sexism is everyday in the life of a woman, any woman, coming from both peers and the media. The message of “DUMB WOMAN” isn’t shocking to me anymore. It didn’t leave me standing backstage, naively stunned that someone might try to devalue me as a woman. It made me want to act.

Normally, I have to take a moment to deal with this anger and compose myself, because in the real world you have to explain why something is offensive before you can slay someone with a rhetorical lightsaber. This wasn’t the real world, though. The Jedi would not explain to her enemy why his comment was hurtful and oppressive. She just had to show him how wrong he was, which felt far more satisfying than any verbal victory. Although my answer might not have explained to Max why his sexism was not tolerable, he certainly learned never to invade another scene with it. The message was clear in my closing line for the play: “Sexism is dead in space.” It was dead in space and dead in our improv class. I felt immensely relieved as I stepped off the stage and out of the skin of my Jedi persona.

Then we were back to the real world; I wondered if Max even understood the weight of his comment. Improv has always been a place of happiness and empowerment for me, a place where I always get to define myself, and he had threatened to let the reality of sexism taint this whole realm in only a few simple words. Maybe Max left that class with deeper resentment of women. Maybe, by not answering his ignorance with intelligence, I justified his comment within his own mind. My response in the scene may not have changed his perspective, but it preserved a space of empowerment for me.

As an outspoken woman, I’m exhausted at times by the need to debate; though people who normally gloss over women's problems may often benefit from explanations, *I* often don't. Explaining is draining, and offers no outlet for the strong feelings that can build up over time. Plus, an explanation of feminist theory would be a pretty boring end to a space drama. Today, sexism is dead in space. Tomorrow, maybe it will be dead on Earth.

**Feminist Photographer Anonymous**

**Describe a place or environment where you are perfectly content. What do you do or experience there, and why is it meaningful to you?**

Behind the camera’s shutter, I am never calm or collected. I am, more often than not, trying to figure out my next shot, my eyes darting from my subject to the light source to a detail of the scene. However, I am perfectly content.

When taking photos, I am enveloped by my camera, and I am removed from whatever social setting I might find myself in. I stop engaging in conversation and, even as my thoughts accelerate, I focus on getting what I want out of the moment. From behind a camera, I feel as though I have a purpose. My camera gives me the space to figure out what I want to say.

Ever since I was a little girl, I have been bombarded with oppressively idealized images of women everywhere I look. Take, for instance, an average ride on the subway. There are ads for breast augmentation in the cars; magazine stalls on the platform with airbrushed celebrities on every cover; images of scantily-clad models bouncing around on every billboard by every exit. These images beg women to find endless faults that need fixing, often with the goal of appealing to men. If what we see most in the media is a display of women as objects for the male gaze, it’s no surprise that the industry that creates images — photography — has historically been dominated by men.

I’m a girl photographer. I don’t let myself forget this. The first camera I ever owned was a plastic Cheetah Girls digital camera from the supermarket, which I got when I was around six. I used to run up to women on the street and ask if I could photograph their outfits when I saw someone who looked like she needed a confidence boost. Actually, I still do that.

In my sophomore year, I saved up and bought myself a semi-professional DSLR camera. I began carrying it with me everywhere I went. As I shot more and more, I noticed that I focused most on the kind of outgoing girls I like to surround myself with. I focused on the art they were making, what they were talking about, their ideas, their passions, and their self-expression. Over time, I became less interested in taking pretty pictures, and instead felt compelled to tell these girls’ stories and share our collective narrative through my art. My photographs are a collaboration between me and my subjects, part of a bigger conversation with my peers about who we are and who we are trying to be.

Recently, I have concentrated solely on photography projects that explore the empowerment of women. For the international “Who Needs Feminism?” campaign I created a series of photos in which I projected texts based on my classmates’ experiences of gender bias onto their bare backs. While taking a pre-college photography course at the School of Visual Arts this summer, I developed “The Sweat Project,” a series of saturated color portraits which depict teenage subjects, gross and sweaty after perspiring in the summer’s heat, the opposite of the romanticized representation of summertime teens in the media. I am currently working on a series called “Free the Nipple,” in which I photograph shirtless boys and girls engaging in everyday, de-sexualized behaviors in an effort to try to show what it might be like to normalize female nudity and view it as not inherently sexual.

As Berenice Abbott said, “Photography helps people to see.” The goal of my photographs is to make others take a closer look at what it means to grow up as a girl today. Even though I am a ball of energy when I am creating images, I am also in my most contented state. I know I am centered on achieving my objective. I am fulfilled.

**A Place in the Sky Anonymous**

**Describe a place or environment where you are perfectly content. What do you do or experience there, and why is it meaningful to you?**

There’s something oddly comforting about sitting in an airplane and barreling through the sky at 37,000 feet. Granted, the food could be better and the seats a little bigger, but I’ve never been able to find a place quite like this one. When I’m up in the sky, it doesn’t feel like I’m traveling at almost 600 miles per hour. I can slow down and relax -- a rare experience today, with everyone always rushing around, desperately trying to get everything done in the shortest amount of time. The sensation is strange: moving so fast but feeling motionless. There’s a blissful absence of chaos, a pure displacement from the pressures of every day. The plane pushes over currents, past sunsets, into the black void of the night sky. Every once in a while a bump of turbulence jolts me out of my thoughts, reminding me of my precarious position in the limbo between space and ground.

I look outside. I watch the switchboard cities and jagged mountains pass beneath me. I cruise over bands of highway with cars clustered together like tiny beetles on a tile floor. It’s like I’m staring down at someone’s toy model of the world. Farm fields look like patchwork, stitched edge-to-edge by hand. Rivers are sewn into the rough green of the landscape like strips of ribbon. The sky around me seems to go on forever, broken up by clusters of rolling clouds, punctuated by flocks of birds. For a few hours, I get to see everything from a new perspective. I’m not forced to participate in the real world: I can just sit back and observe.

Often, we get so wrapped up in our lives that we forget the whole other world just outside of our little bubbles. I’ve always loved travelling because I get to step into someone else’s universe -- even if only for a short while. I pass by each scene of life like I would pass a window display. I cross streets where teenagers like me once played as children, but centuries ago, wars and revolutions ago. I eat in cafes where people fell in love or experienced heartbreak, in distant history or perhaps in just the past few hours. I stare up at ancient ruins that were once someone’s newest achievement and study paintings that artists once labored over. When I travel, my world begins to expand past the usual boundaries, into endless possibilities.

On the plane, it is not so different. Sometimes I watch the passengers of all different sizes, ages, and origins who are sitting around me. Faces are illuminated by tablet screens. Old married couples bicker in hushed voices. A child runs down the aisle, followed by her bleary-eyed parent. Businessmen type on their slim new laptops. A baby starts screaming in the back. Every few minutes there’s that crisp sound of a page being turned in a book. I can’t help but wonder what the stories of these people would be if I just leaned over and asked -- though in the alluring silence of the racing plane, I am content to keep wondering.

At 37,000 feet, I feel like I have all the time in the world, the dull monotony of life now thousands of miles behind me. Giddiness and anticipation bubble up inside me as the captain’s voice crackles over the intercom. There’s a new world waiting for me at the end of the runway; suddenly, I can’t wait to touch down.

**A Meaningful Place Sophie Lis**

**Common App (Describe a place or environment where you are perfectly content. What do you do or experience there, and why is it meaningful to you?)**

The soft reminder of warm light, the neat rows of novels and biographies and volumes of poetry against mahogany shelves back to back in a literary continuum… I walk further into Barnes and Noble. Swim in circles around the small brown tables in the center, feel the raised letters of the titles wedged under ‘Books That Make You Think’. I’ve been here a thousand times before and yet still feel the exhilarating serenity of the quiet hum of people, the stacks of unread books, the particular excitement of the aroma of anticipated coffee, each trip a unique euphoria and different exhilaration. I have been here since I was five years old, since my mom let me loose in the children’s section, still jumping and peering and feeling the hard indention of the unbent spines stacked definitely on same, if not higher, wooden shelves.

I walk diagonally and make zigzags, crane my neck, peering curiously at the fresh copy of *Harry*Potter; experience the illumination of the Great Hall, the swish and flick of wands, the heavy familiarity of the white waiting pages. Jump to get at Sylvia Plath’s evasive *Ariel*, perched high on the top shelf where only the tips of my fingers graze. *Ariel* is especially important to me. When I first came pushing home with it, red-cheeked and adolescent-awkward, I was fourteen. Feeling my way, blindly, through the frightening reality of high school and coming of age, I leafed through it at night, my small lamp perched precariously in the dark. I discovered very new, and very different ideas. The idea of the radical housewife, inherent feminist, I saved dog-eared and bookmarked, the poem *Lesbos* a new and interesting perspective. I didn’t understand what feminism was and was shocked and stimulated to see it so bluntly manifested in the poem.

Only later, after the catalyst of *Ariel* did I render its full significance, unaware of the importance activism and equality would have for me later on. This kind of literature ushered me past the quiet, safe teenage fiction I had been engrossed in, leading dangerously and provocatively into new territory. For me, books like *Ariel* are important not only as a result of their convincing stories but also because they shaped me in all my totality and complexity as a human being. It is important to be able to understand others, a skill that is typed and sealed in the form of a novel. Since then, when I discovered history, literature, and poetry, and then history and literature and poetry in the same book, I have not left. Literature, engrained in my life as enduringly as the lines on the back of my hands, has changed and bettered me, causing me to be not only more aware, but significantly better-rounded. It has introduced me to history, philosophy, bettered my vocabulary, made me a more adept writer, and become my most luxurious pastime. What’s more, I found my safe haven, away from the loud and running world in my two hundred pages of print, bound, typed, and delivered in the form of an escape and a passion that has wholly transformed my interests and personality.

I feel that books are a universal medium of understanding, connecting people of all denominations, creeds, and ideas. They incite the excitement and security not exclusive only to myself but those in all history of readers who have enjoyed and reveled in the same literary comforts as I, and experienced the very similar ache and desire for understanding and learning.

**Virginia Woolf Sophie Lis**

**Pick one woman in history or fiction to converse with for an hour and explain your choice. What would you talk about?**

The thick aroma of yellowed pages wafting in and out the small library room, I sit on the small stool, knees hunched together nervously, my back bent over in a style that would render Rodin pleased. In the first glimpse of the tip of the large shoe, I feel my hands lightly quake with anticipation. “Mrs. Virginia Woolf”, she announces, a figure proud and aware. I clumsily stand; give her my hand. The warmth of her fingers wakes me, the real woman who gave life to *Mrs. Dalloway* and *Waves* beckons me to sit. She is especially important to me not only in the shadow of her professional accomplishments, but in the distinct sensitivity that with which she describes the world around her.

In her fiction--and in my vision--Woolf is not only eloquent, but accurate. Her voice; regal, echoes around the cavity of the library, powerful and sure, mentioning ideas, prose, her hatred of photography. I tell her about the progress we have made, both in feminism and in the sphere of mental illness. Access to higher education for women, Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique,*The Equal Pay Act, and Roe vs. Wade, as well as the many mental health prevention organizations all spark her attention, the picture of her impact, how her life could have been made different had she been born a century later. This literary figure, the continuing wave of 20th century feminism speaks on, ebbing in and out of thought like a spirit shaking with futurity.

# Majoring in Unafraid Anonymous

## Alumna and writer Anna Quindlen says that she “majored in unafraid” at Barnard. Tell us about a time when you majored in unafraid.

“There is a one percent chance of rain,” my camp counselors told us as we packed for our overnight. We threw in just what we needed, leaving our raincoats behind.

The next day, after a trek through the beautiful Yosemite backcountry, it began to rain, starting with harmless raindrops but intensifying as the night progressed. As we headed to bed, it started to pour. I noticed that the tarp, our sole protection from the rain, had holes. A few hours later, our sleeping bags were soaked. We were so cold that we couldn’t feel any parts of our bodies. We watched as the river beside our campsite flooded and saw lightning flashes in the distance. I was miserable and afraid, but I knew that crying or complaining would not make the morning come any faster. I thought to myself, “What is the most important thing to do right now?” I knew what I had to do. I helped lead us through happy songs, breathing exercises, and sharing our warmest memories.

Rather than letting the night become as terrible as it could be, I found the strength to do what I needed to do to survive and help others do so, too. This trip showed me that I am powerful, and that if I survived this night, I can “major in unafraid” in so many more ways than I ever imagined possible.

# Tea with a Trailblazer Anonymous

## Pick one woman in history or fiction to converse with for an hour and explain your choice. What would you talk about?

If given the opportunity to sit down with any woman and converse for an hour, I would select Jeanine Tesori, the first woman to win the Tony Award for Best Original Score. Tesori is credited with composing the musicals Fun Home, Thoroughly Modern Millie, Shrek, and Violet, among others. These stories of coming of age, discrimination, and sisterhood have little in common with one another, yet Tesori has translated their messages through music with grace and sophistication.

Each stage of my life has been dominated by the soundtrack of a Tesori musical. The princesses and dragons of Shrek were a fixation of my fourth grade year, while the Thoroughly Modern Millie album defined my transition to high school as I dreamt of college and creating my future in New York City. As the women of Fun Home and Violet overcame their dark pasts and found their ways, I began to confront my own fears and anxieties, all while memorizing the soundtrack.

The unconventional source materials from where Tesori’s works originated - ranging from ogres to televangelists to LGBT to Civil Rights issues- faced scrutiny from the “Boys Club of Broadway”, whom Tesori threatened. If granted the opportunity to speak with Ms. Tesori, I would ask her about her trailblazing journey that opened the door for women in writing on Broadway and how she manages to hold her own in a male-dominated field, in addition to thanking her for the impact that her work has made on my adolescence.

# Why Barnard? Anonymous

## What factors influenced your decision to apply to Barnard College and why do you think the College would be a good match for you?

When I was in eighth grade, during the 2012 Presidential Election, I ran to represent President Obama in my American History class’ mock election. Despite the obvious differences between the President and myself, I believed that with preparation, competitive campaigning, and an intellectual speech that I could be elected. However, when the votes were counted, it was not my speech or campaign that held me back, but my gender and the fact that my class did not feel that a girl could be president.

Since that day, I have been an unapologetic feminist, driven and passionate about politics and government. My devotion to female empowerment and commitment to grassroots organization and politics led me to apply to Barnard, where I will not only have the opportunity to make an impact, but the education that will give me the preparation to win any election.

Barnard Alumni are, undoubtedly, at the top of their fields and, during my campus visit, it was not hard to see the foundations of future leaders around me. Within just 15 minutes of sitting in the Diana Center, an impromptu Fight For $15 Rally broke out and students vigorously answered the questions of a prospective student with such interest and spirit that their pride for Barnard shone through each word. The hustle and drive of New York did not end at the entrance to campus and the passion of Barnard students powered the atmosphere; I immediately felt at home.

# The American Dream in All Its Flavors Anonymous

## 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. (650 words max).

My childhood included everything from waking up to my mom’s dramatic wake up calls in the mornings, eating ice cream from the carton with my siblings, rough-and-tumble play with my father, to family dinners at our Chinese restaurant, filled with boisterous laughter. However for my parents, who had the stress of managing a business, life was not as carefree. In 1995, they immigrated from China with my two older siblings and committed to a life of working fourteen hours a day for their children. Despite their financial struggles of trying to achieve their American Dream by starting a Chinese restaurant in Mount Vernon, New York, they provided all the tools for me to lead a different, better life than theirs.

Although I tried my best to advance their American Dream by doing well in school, I grew up to become a carefree ice cream binge-eater who would frequently finish their favorite ice cream flavor before they could even get a scoop. I guess I was like the pecans I would pick out of the butter pecan ice cream. My short height, endless chattiness, and habit of stuttering only added more pecans to the mix.

At the age of twelve, my family’s Chinese restaurant was sold off, just as my older siblings had left home for college and work. I thought of it as a new beginning, motivating myself to be more articulate and stutter less because now I was in charge of communicating on behalf of my parents, who never fully grasped the English language. I felt independent when I began walking to school alone and stopped letting my parents micromanage my affairs for me. I thought I had finally gotten rid of a few unwanted pecans in my mix but in actuality, I realized I was not even close. In April 2012, my father suffered a life-threatening stroke at the age of forty-seven. Fast forward two months later at a rehabilitation center, I saw the man who used to cook for fourteen hours a day at the restaurant, now with a limp and droopy eyes, trying to learn to walk and speak again.

Despite my father’s serious health concerns, my parents’ biggest worry was how my dad’s unemployment would affect me and my future. After seeing my mother—the strong woman I always depended on—cry, I had to make a choice: to live in a bubble, pretending my only responsibility was school and my friends or to use those tears to grow a backbone in my household.

I chose the latter. I knew my parents deserved the comfort of eating the good ice cream flavors from the carton. Taking initiatives in family matters, I worked hard to make sure my father got his social security benefits, which became a big part of our income now since he could no longer work. Despite my young appearance, I learned to pay house bills. I did not let my stuttering stop me from communicating with doctors about my dad’s health. I swooped in to cook quinoa for my father and used my chattiness to translate for my parents at doctor’s appointments. With a smile on my face, I learned to balance my schoolwork and my father’s trips to the physical therapist’s office, being his chaperone in my mother’s place. It was difficult to grow up so quickly, but I knew I was working to give my parents something priceless—reassurance.

I still have a few unwanted pecans, but I realized some pecans can be good. Although I haven’t done nearly enough to repay my parents for the sacrifices they made when they left China, I will fulfill their American Dream. Mei Xiu Amy Zhang is the name of the baby—and ice cream monster that is starting to share—of the Zhang family that shall, in 2021, give her college diploma to her parents as a proud, confident college graduate, equipped with her trademark smile.

**Being the Next Generation Role Model Anonymous**

**This is my answer to Barnard's second supplement question: Pick one woman in history or fiction to converse with for an hour and explain your choice. What would you talk about? (100-250 words).**

Reshma Saujani, the founder of Girls Who Code, awed me when I first met her at Fashion Institute of Technology. Originally a politician who became the first Indian American woman to run for Congress, Mrs. Saujani had no technological skills to create an organization about science, technology, engineering and mathematics (“STEM”). And yet she did it.

Despite the obstacles she faced in Congress, she still strived for success and did not let it stop her from believing in herself, making her the perfect role model for young women. If I had a chance to speak with her, I would ask “how can Girls Who Code alumnae move us all forward?” What can young women today do to aid Mrs. Saujani’s mission of helping girls change the world?

As an alumna of Girls Who Code, I am a strong advocate for young women, like myself, to pursue STEM careers. As the President of National Honor Society at my school, I want my peers to experience the power of learning and mentorship. I was extremely fortunate to have experienced this empowerment from my teachers, mentors, and fellow sisters at Girls Who Code. I want to create a similar network at my high school. Because my intentions are very similar to those of Mrs. Saujani’s, I would ask for any advice she may have in this campaign. After all, we both believe girls should not be afraid of gender barriers in STEM careers because women can make many outstanding contributions to this field.

**K-Pop Blooms a Thousand Stories Anonymous**

**Our families and communities often define us and our individual worlds. Community might refer to your cultural group, extended family, religious group, neighborhood or school, sports team or club, co-workers, etc. Describe the world you come from.**

It was my turn to speak.

The Korean girl across the table and I had spent the past hour in a back-and-forth of stilted conversation. Our pre-collegiate institute had demanded that all disciplines “mingle,” and the silence told a story of two strangers--both in residence, one international and one domestic, one whose first language was not English and one whose was.

One of us would ask a question, the other would answer, and then it’d switch. From what I’d gained of our conversation so far, she was from a school in Seoul, she liked studying, and her concentration was in math. Mine was in writing. I’d tried talking about what I expected everyone at an academic institute to talk about: the commercialization of education, the increasing reliance of society on technology, destroying the patriarchy, but all those had proved to be unsuccessful. She’d tilt her head, which I’d come to understand meant that I either had to 1) repeat the question, or 2) forget it altogether.

There was a last resort. I’d been hesitant to use it, but it looked like I’d have no other choice.

“Do you know BTS?” I ventured.

At the mention of the South Korean boy band, her eyes lit up. “Yes. Yes! Who’s your bias?” The use of K-Pop jargon convinced me: we finally spoke a common language.

My interest in the nature of communication stems from the idea of connection, where the intersection of a Venn diagram is more important than the places where they differ. As an assistant on my mother’s trips abroad planning global symposiums, I’ve encountered many people who were vastly different in not only their occupations but their stories: the architect in Amsterdam who designed buildings for the environment, the engineer in Moscow who enjoyed frequent visits to the Tolstoy Museum, the taxi driver in Herzliya whose wife liked studying Chinese culture.Yet when you speak a word of their language--even if it’s only please or thank you or sorry, I don’t speak the language very well--you establish a connection, however vulnerable--a grounds for empathy across disciplines and continents.

Through understanding the impact of linguistic unity, I became fascinated by the development of communities in urban spaces. With mentorship from the Concord Review, I started researching the development of Koreatown in New York, curious as to how public space could serve as a microcosm for social formation.

As time passed, I expanded my research to other communities, not just the Koreatown in New York, but others across the nation. In South Bronx, I interviewed the primarily black and Latino neighbors in the area to write an article on how hip hop served as a language in forming collective identity. At YoungArts Los Angeles, I wrote and performed a piece in homage to Chinatowns everywhere, not united by merely race or ethnicity, but language and culture. This summer, after receiving a scholarship from the Mercury News to spearhead my own journalistic project, I spotlighted San Jose Japantown’s arts community, specifically how keeping the arts alive in the area could in effect, combat gentrification and reinforce cultural identity.

Through establishing relationships with others, I’ve discovered that sometimes the best conversations come from the simplest beginnings. Without commenting on the weather during an Uber ride in Paris, I would never have come to discuss the implications of climate change on the human environment. Without speaking up to a Japanese shopkeeper about buying his art posters, I would never have gained his insight into art’s role as propaganda in Japan’s colonization of Korea.

Behind statistics, there are stories. In a world that is becoming global, serving as a stranger in residence as a journalist, diplomat, and storyteller has helped me acknowledge the role language plays. For me, international communication is less a subject of politics and economics than connections, stories that demand to be heard. And a story is our turn to speak.

# Jaggery Shyla Singh

## "The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience? (Common App essay)

The alarm heralding the dawn becomes redundant as a mix of dread and excitement has kept me up all night. It’s 5 am. Today I will compete in my third Junior National Equestrian Championship in Pune at the National Defence Academy.

I’ve determined that today will be different. My first Junior National in Kolkata in 2014 began and ended catastrophically. I leased a horse, Legal Steps, who I rode for the first time a day before the championship. It was an unwise step, as I didn’t have the chance to connect with him. The day of the competition, Legal Steps bolted towards the surrounding woods. Did he sense my fear? Despite managing to get control of him, I realised the futility of continuing as he would remain uncooperative. Withdrawing from the event, I lost all confidence.

Yet, when peers suggested that I was fearful, that perhaps this transpired because I was a girl, I found these explanations unsatisfactory. I began recognising the root cause of the catastrophe: I had forgotten my primary motivation for riding, my love of horses. Perhaps my Kolkata debacle stemmed from overlooking this true essence of equestrianism? Riding the leased horse, I had felt like a novice. I had forgone establishing a connection with Legal Steps, focusing only on competing rather than understanding him. The Kolkata experience led to the realisation that I was riding mechanically, simply to win.

Seeing this from the sidelines, my coach, Mrs Sodhi, told my father that to move forward, I had to rekindle my bond with horses. The initial step in the rehabilitation process was buying my own horse, Lodrino, a gorgeous dark bay Holsteiner gelding. Lodrino was crucial in my return to winning ways.

I first met him with a welcome gift of jaggery (unrefined sugar) in my outstretched palm. He not only accepted it with unbridled enthusiasm but also butted my shoulder for more. I was besotted! The first time I rode him, I knew he was special. Every movement bespoke a perfect balance between elegance, power and control. Trust is the key element in controlling a 1200-pound animal with just leg pressure or a rein-tug. I sensed that I could trust Lodrino. But could he trust me? I spent the first few months intuitively understanding his responses and his endearing idiosyncrasies: that he would never advance in a lesson without a “jaggery inducement,” for example. I also discovered him to be the quintessential thespian, invariably putting on a show before an audience. He started responding to my aids and taught me to love horses and competing again. This happened only once our relationship blossomed into a close bond.

Together we enjoyed pre-competition rituals, such as my braiding his hair the night before competitions. Lodrino knows when he is competing and is a prima donna in the show arena. Even if a laggard during practice, the chime of the start bell in the competing arena brought out the actor in him! Often, when I was unable to give an aid fast enough, he preempted it and began executing the movement. And as I saluted the judges after a dressage competition, Lodrino bobbed his head, thanking the judges and stealing my thunder! My deepening relationship with Lodrino had me focus on something beyond technique or peer opinion: on the profound truth that there is no bond stronger than that between a horse and its rider.

Today, pre-show jitters dissolve into thin air as I sit on Lodrino. He reassures me. Much has changed over the eight years I’ve been competing. In Pune, I focus on winning to affirm my progress from someone too afraid to compete to someone whose passion drives her to excel in equestrianism.

My third Junior Nationals culminates in victory. Lodrino and I win together: our amazing bond is the overarching reason for my tasting success again!

# How Grief Helped Me Recognize My Vulnerability Anonymous

## Common App Essay—Describe an obstacle or challenge and how you overcame it.

I search “how to grieve properly” in the naive but hopeful belief Google knows the answer. An article tells me “broken crayons still color.” This strikes me as not only condescending but false. I am in pain and I am healing, but I am not broken. My father’s death does not define me; I control what defines me. I have always liked having control. But it took losing control to recognize its limitations.

Throughout high school, I wanted to be the girl who did it all: academics, ballet, extracurriculars, and eight hours of sleep. So I controlled what traits I put on display. I could, with some sleep deprivation and Quizlet-making, manipulate my grades to serve as a tangible means of control. I brandished novels like Jane Eyre around my English teacher and spent hours studying pages of notes to impress my history teacher in class the next morning. I created an environmental club, accepted the role of yearbook editor, and ran for Student Body President all to prove I wasn’t just a good student— I was perfect. I attempted to do it all while appearing charming, hardworking, and in control.

With a high degree of internal conflict, I felt myself becoming the overachieving golden girl I had envisioned. I can’t say I didn’t enjoy the image I formed. But I projected a single dimension of myself. No one saw the rash, the stupid, the out of control and not at all put together side of me. I bottled up the exhaustion of attaining five hours of sleep, the pressure to receive the highest grades in my class, and the stress of deviating from the persona I had invented. In my efforts to control how people perceive me, I allowed others’ perception to control me. I covered up the cracks.And there were always cracks. But when my dad died, my image shattered. I lost the source of control I took for granted. At his funeral, I wanted so desperately for people to point and say, “How resilient! She hasn’t shed a tear!” I wrote his eulogy and busied myself in ACT prep, ballet, and extracurriculars in the weeks after all to prove I wasn’t just okay—I was great.

And this wasn’t unwarranted. Upon seeing familiar faces their smiles dropped to pitiful frowns, their arms closed around me, and they whispered, “How are you doing?” I was no longer the prowling lioness. I was a desperate gazelle, shaking on willowed legs, and no one could see me otherwise. I feared his death would take away the control I spent years culminating. I could not see how my controlled image could coexist with that of a grieving daughter. So I rejected vulnerability. Against my own will, I revealed another dimension—that of someone lacking control and struggling. I accepted help—whether that be pans of baked mac and cheese or grief counseling. Months after his death, I take pleasure in this. I have become more human in the process. I cannot control how others perceive me, and I cannot always be the golden girl. The cracks in my identity are what make me whole. I do not have complete control, but I am not totally lacking it. Sometimes I am a wounded gazelle, but sometimes I am a prowling lioness.

My father’s death does not define me— it is a part of me. In grief, I accepted the complexity of my identity. I’ve always considered myself strong. But with a prior lack of adversity, I could never prove it. Now, I know. Not because I have control, but because I don’t always need it. Not because I am okay, but because I will be. I am a daughter, a student, a dancer, and a human being. I am the sum of all my parts. I am not broken; I am resilient.

# Barnard as a Catalyst for Self-Discovery Audrey Pettit

## Why do you want to attend Barnard College?

In childhood, amid Barbies and pink wallpaper, I had the privilege of ignorance. But when I was catcalled by a man twice my age, the uncomfortable reality came into focus. At age thirteen, I realized my gender influences how others perceive me. For my catcaller, my womanhood reduced me to an object. But at Barnard College, my femininity makes me powerful. I would be surrounded by women at the top of their fields who prove this—whether that’s professors researching Ntozake Shange’s archives or peers pioneering a social justice workshop. Around every corner lies a source of inspiration. The college provides a diverse environment based on female empowerment rather than competition.

Barnard would embrace every part of my identity: the unapologetic feminist, the English nerd, and the perfectionist ballerina. The college’s versatility would allow me to explore my passions by utilizing its high-ranking English, Dance, and Political Science programs. I can write for Echoes, voicing my beliefs, or join the Emerging Leaders Program, surrounding myself with people motivated for change. I can cultivate personal growth while improving the world around me.

In my career, I want to work towards a future where women are judged for their passions rather than physical appearance. At Barnard, I can learn to cope with obstacles every successful woman faces so eventually I can help dismantle them. While I have lost ignorance, I have gained something far more powerful: vision. This vision, supported by a Barnard education, will help me change the world.

# The Incredible Barnard Community Anonymous

## What factors influenced your decision to apply to Barnard College and why do you think the College would be a good match for you?

“We’re so close... We can just talk on and on,” the Barnard tour-guide said to our group, laughing. To my surprise, she wasn’t talking about a relationship with a faculty member, as was customary on college tours. She was actually talking about her favorite Barnard desk-attendant, a friendly woman who checked her in and out of her dorm everyday.

Her words resonated with me; they epitomized the close-knit community I wanted in a college. Attending a girl-school since sixth-grade, I’ve been lucky enough to have a school community that not only empowers women, but is bonded in every way possible. I’ve forged incredible relationships in the classroom, on the volleyball-court, and just through day-to-day interactions. Like the tour-guide, it’s these small interactions I especially value: chatting with friends in the Senior Room in-between classes, fifteen-minute breakfasts with my advisory, or life-advice sessions with my bus-driver when I’m the last one left to be dropped-off.

This easy camaraderie I have with my school community is something I’ve come to truly appreciate. Researching Barnard beforehand, I was excited by its NYC location and research opportunities in the social sciences. I was further intrigued by Bold Brilliant Beats, a diversity-celebrating concert which had recently featured one of my idols, Awkwafina. But the tour-guide’s words revealed the vibrant community behind the website. Barnard is a place where I can form meaningful relationships at every turn, whether through crazy campus traditions like Big Sub, or like the tour-guide, just a key-card swipe into a dorm.

# Blood Letters and the Woman Who Fought for Change Anonymous

## Pick one woman in history or fiction to converse with for an hour and explain your choice. What would you talk about?

My parents grew up in the shadow of Maoist China, a country fraught with censorship, crackdowns, and conformity. I’ve always been curious about their childhoods, so starkly different to my life in America. So, last summer, I picked up the book Blood Letters by Lian Xi. I learned about Lin Zhao, a courageous writer who wholeheartedly opposed the Mao administration, even as her resistance caused her execution.

Lin Zhao was a stubborn woman who used shrewd, sharp words to critique the regime. Even during her imprisonment, she refused to stop writing, pricking her skin with hairpins and using her own blood (!) to author hundreds of pages of political commentary. She wasn’t just a writer; she was a fighter, and I’m in awe of her sheer resolve to resist the dictatorship. I want to weaponize my words against injustice and corruption like she did, but focus on modern Chinese society and the debilitated Chinese mental-healthcare system.

I’d want to discuss with Lin Zhao the China I know from visits every other year during the summer. While it’s evolved since the Mao-era, censorship is still widespread, political critique limited, and social conformity emphasized. These are issues I want to combat, along with the corrupted, underfunded, and stigmatized mental-healthcare system I observed firsthand during my work at the Xi’an Mental Health Center. Some people say the country’s beyond help. But I think while Lin would recognize China’s continued shortcomings, like me, she’d be ardent about our continued ability to fight for change.