|  |
| --- |
|  |

**Sample essays 2017**

**Bryn Mawr College**

**It's Not My Age That Matters Anonymous**

**Pick your own topic**

"Angelina, you're 18 going on 45" - that's my best friend, Bailey's, favorite expression. What most people don't understand, though, is that those qualities of mine that make me seem older are simply the result of a rather unusual upbringing. Of course, saying that usually brings on the ever-popular phrase of "You didn't have a childhood, did you?" No, I did have a childhood; it just wasn't the typical childhood.

While most ten-year-olds were in bed by 9 on a Friday evening after watching their favorite Disney movie, I was at the Metropolitan Opera House with my father and about 1000 bejeweled widows. After a two-hour car ride, I would sit in the front row of our box, my eyes never leaving the stage, trying to make sense of Puccini's La Boheme. The Met wouldn't be putting in subtitle boxes for a few more years, so any translation I made had to be solely drawn from the variations in the music. Even if I didn't catch on to every detail of the story, I was completely taken in, and ever since then my parents haven't been able to kick me out of "my" seat at the opera.

When not at the Met, I spent my free time watching foreign films with my mother - Cyrano de Bergerac, Cinema Paradiso, The Seventh Seal, and Breathless were our favorites. Being surrounded by all these languages combined with taking French at school since I was ten years old allowed me to quickly pick up on what the characters were saying. By the time I was 13, I would, somewhat cheekily, tell her that the subtitles weren't translating the French correctly, and subsequently give her the "real" translation. Even today, I'll be watching a French film by myself and suddenly my parents will hear me from the next room shout, in true movie-critic fashion, "Nope, translated that wrong, too!"

Now that I'm 18, my friends all get a good laugh when I say that I like to sit in smoke-filled hotel lounges, listening to piano players with my dad for kicks. Well, I've been doing it for years, so why stop now? I remember sitting on my dad's lap listening to "Piano Man" countless times in bars around the world - it is still the one song that makes me think of home. Of course, when I was little, I thought the song was more amusing than it really is, because the line about "putting bread in my jar" always invoked the image of someone stuffing a roll in a shot glass. If you know the song, I'm sure you can figure out where else I may have perked a confused brow. Either way, being able to just sit there, totally relaxed, surrounded by the swingin' over 40 crowd, listening to songs I grew up with makes me happier than going to any party ever could.

So maybe I didn't have the typical childhood; maybe I do enjoy activities people my age usually fight against experiencing, but that has never hindered me from finding my niche in school, nor has it stopped me from getting my friends to at least appreciate the things I love. Moreover, I know that I only evolved into what I am today because of the opportunities my parents offered me. Without their trust in my maturity, I may just have had that type of childhood my friends are so aghast that I lacked - and sometimes I really wonder if I would have been better off playing with Barbies and watching cartoons. But I can't change who I am now, and I really wouldn't if someone gave me the chance; I can only change what I will become. Therefore, no matter where I end up in college, I want to be able to continue to experience things outside of the norm and share what I've grown to love with others. Wherever I can do that will be the perfect place for me, be I 18, 45, or anywhere in between.

**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.

**I Can Change It Chang Qiu**

**Topic of your choice**

“Get out, and never return to this family.”

Again, Dad caught Mom with her secret lover. It is even more unacceptable in China, a rather conservative country, to have extra-marital affairs. Mom said nothing. An hour later, she walked out with four big bags.

It was her birthday.

My parents were not a harmonious couple, but I never thought they would separate so suddenly. After Mom’s moving out, every afternoon, when I got home, the empty room chilled me. But I could not tell Dad how shocked I was, and burden him; nor could I share this family tragedy with anyone else. I threw myself into scary movies, and looked for stronger feelings to cover my sorrow, and through which to escape. Yet Dad unintentionally wrote all his pain on his face. Every glimpse of that face dragged me back to the truth.

It was a little stray smile that changed all this.

One day after school, a supermarket’s on-sale bread attracted me. I bought a lot. When I told my father, “Dad, tomorrow’s breakfast is ready”, I saw a tiny sigh of delight on his wrinkled face. That was the smile long lost.

I realized then that something so small could make my dad happy, and could lighten the atmosphere. I started to fetch vegetables and fruits more often. Squeezing into a group of housewives, picking and comparing vegetables in a pile of choices, and liquidating all the items in my shopping car—when I put down all the packages in my home, I was filling the emptiness of my family. I also learned to cook. From boiling corn, steaming fish, to frying chicken, my cooking skills bettered with each foray. It always amazed me that, when mixing dumpling sauce, the flavor shifted dramatically just because of a few more teaspoons of salt or several more drops of vinegar. Mom’s moving out took away much of my free time for entertainment. But I found joy in sharing my family’s responsibility, and in taking more control of my own life.

Now, as white steam hovers over my soup and fills the dining room, I know that no matter how hard life is, I don’t need to escape----I can change it!

**Modesty. Simplicity. Practicality. Anonymous**

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

I could not understand. There was no sign of trash on the streets. There was no trace of graffiti on the benches or walls. Everything was impeccably clean and simple in the middle of Stockholm, Sweden, with its 780,000 inhabitants. It is still a wonder how the country looked like a beautiful dollhouse, kept in the utmost condition by its caretaker. Every room in the dollhouse had only exactly what it needed and the nostalgia seeping from the images, created a distinct peace and happiness. Little did I know that stepping into this life-size dollhouse would open many new windows and doors.

These windows and doors were opened when I stayed in the magnificent capital of Sweden. Among the eighty other choir members on the school trip with me, and the natural bustle of the city, it would have been so easy to concentrate on souvenir shopping and gourmet eating like any other tourist; however, that was not the course my mind took. Inside the elegant and empty-feeling theater, we rehearsed my favorite song, “O Magnum Mysterium” by Morten Lauridsen, as it rang, bouncing off the four walls gracefully. My favorite dissonance chord sounded more beautiful than ever. Why did it sound so good compared to all the other times we had sung it? Was it the space? Sure, the gloriously simple theater might have contributed to the fact that the music flowed through my ears so peacefully, but something else was brewing inside of me.

After the concert, we went to a cozy restaurant with the Swedish choir with whom we sang in the theater. Consequently as one of the best yet accidental choices of my life, I sat down next one of the members. Naturally, it first seemed like a game of get to know you questions, but soon after, it became a much more of an enlightening discussion for me. The student told me that all he wanted to do was play his flute, piano, and study diligently. He chose not to mention that his music academy was world renowned and filled with the most talented musicians in the country. He could have sounded like any other student bragging about his accomplishments, but something was really different: I was prompted to speak about my own participation in school activities and other life experiences. Why did he care to hear more about me than to talk about himself? I then realized some people in this world live in such a humble way that no one even notices. There were no superficial concerns existing in these two hours of conversation. Such modesty in words led me to find fascination and I knew I wanted to strive for a simple, minimalist lifestyle.

People often ask others or themselves, “How do you want to live your life?”. We are often swayed by the pressures of our friends and family to think a certain way, but when do you realize how you really want to live? At least for me, it was just a matter of time. I was waiting for an inspiration. After that one night, it all came to me. It was not just meeting one person that impressed me with his lifestyle or my admiration of the country. It was about discovering a philosophy of life and the values that are developed along with it. It was no Odyssey-scale journey, but just a quiet awakening. Everything has the capability of being simple and practical, just like the formations of highways with traffic-reducing juggernauts to the layout of streets in the Swedish towns. There is never any need for superfluities or superficiality that just makes life that much more unnecessarily complicated. Given the necessities, living life modestly will lead to a down-to-earth lifestyle and happiness is sure to come.

Modesty. Simplicity. Practicality. These words are values in everyday culture, but they come alive to me now. It was an epiphany of the way to live my life, springing from the most unimaginable source. Tears fell down my face as we drove away from Stockholm, a little out of sadness but mainly out of happiness. I had never felt so confident with my future, nor had I ever felt so happy about truly confirming my individual values in life. I walked out of the dollhouse with a new light shed on me and the doors and windows wide open.

**Bryn Mawr Anonymous**

**In no more than one page tell us what you think you would gain from the educational experience at Bryn Mawr and what you would contribute to the community.**

It had been raining and windy all morning. The conditions were not ideal for a college tour, but off I went to see Bryn Mawr. Upon my arrival on campus, I was captivated by the women at Bryn Mawr. These women looked confident, focused, and creative, but most of all, they are individuals. This is exactly the kind of woman I strive to be.

After taking the tour, I realized that discussing current events is a very common thing at Bryn Mawr, everything from politics to religion. This provides me with the perfect opportunity to develop my personal ideas, opinions, and ambitions as a young woman and learn to support my own beliefs. From what I saw, Bryn Mawr is also a place where women are not afraid to speak their minds, but they do so with great modesty and respect. There is an undeniable strength and confidence in every single one of these women that will create a uniquely empowering college experience and prepare me to grow into the independent young woman that I so long to become.

In the next four years, I hope not just to develop my own voice but also to feed my passion for learning. I have a strong interest in psychology and cognitive sciences. Bryn Mawr’s psychology department, containing a diverse collection of concentrations, would be perfect for pursuing these interests. Bryn Mawr has a competitive program that prepares its students with the skills and strength for life and work after college. However, it is also perfectly balanced with the nurturing support of the college community. Professors are entirely dedicated to teaching undergraduates, providing the guidance and attention that every student needs to succeed. Furthermore, if I find another interest in the course of my four years in college, Bryn Mawr, one of the top liberal arts colleges in the nation, can provide me with the chance to explore other subjects without difficulty. I can even extend this exploration by studying abroad and adding a cultural aspect to this educational experience.

In return for everything that Bryn Mawr would give me, I would also have the chance to contribute to the community in my own way. For the past two years, I have been leading a community service called A.R.T.E., standing for Artistically Reviving the Earth. By raising money at local craft fairs and organizing a mural for our school, my group and I were able to raise hundreds of dollars to send to villages in third world countries. The children in these villages were supplied with educational materials which helped improve their lives one bit at a time. I also participate in the I.D.E.A.S. Center at my high school, tutoring fellow students while also making new friends. For the next four years in college, I plan to continue giving back to the community by helping those around me and also those in various parts of the world by joining some of the many student organizations in Bryn Mawr. Being a student at Bryn Mawr would be perfect for fulfilling these plans, as Bryn Mawr is an institution in which there is a common goal to use our education to help those around us.

I can also contribute to the college’s community by bringing my eclectic mix of interests. As the co-leader of an a cappella group and an amateur composer of piano and vocal songs, I can bring a passion for music that I can share with others. Throughout high school, I have also been very involved in sports, especially as a captain of the tennis team. At Bryn Mawr, I would also be thrilled to be part of the athletic community and participate in the varsity sports program or the student recreational sports clubs. With so many possibilities, I can extend myself and contribute to the Bryn Mawr communities with all of my passions. I am ready and eager for the Bryn Mawr experience, one that emphasizes learning or taking, as well as giving.

**First Year Supplemental Essay Anonymous**

**Why Bryn Mawr?**

“Where did you go to college, Ms. Jennifer?” is a question I get often at lunch mentoring. The kids I work with are less focused at times with why I’m there and instead want to know everything about me. Instead of giving them a long spiel about deferring enrollment and reapplying to colleges during this gap year, I say, “I am going to an all-women’s College in Philadelphia.”

Attending Bryn Mawr would create an extension of the community I’ve found in City Year. Every college has a unique community, but it is hard to find one that is reciprocal in nature and focused on philanthropic pursuits. Visiting campus, hearing students' experiences and learning about the myriad clubs and internships available confirmed this thought. Getting direct feedback from students on Praxis and 360° courses proves to me that Bryn Mawr has the experiential learning I require to be a well-rounded and knowledgeable adult.

Reciprocity is important to me in more than one aspect. At Bryn Mawr women are homogenous in gender, but that’s really where our commonalities end; beyond it, the women are diverse. Coming to Bryn Mawr as a first generation Dominican and college attendee would broaden the perspectives of both me and my peers. Bryn Mawr creates a venue for me to have an open dialogue with women who are driven and passionate both in and out of classrooms. Bryn Mawr’s location and connections in the consortium make it an epicenter of critical thinking and dynamic learning.

Being a freshman after living alone, working multiple jobs and gaining a year of real world experience in the frontiers of educational reform adds to the variance in my perspective. Knowing that I can revisit the Career Development Office after graduation makes me confident that I can be successful and knowing that I can continue to have lunch buddies through the Civic Engagement Office makes me excited to influence future students.

I want to be a Mawrter because all of the women I have met have shown a demeanor that is powerful, compassionate and proud — qualities are crucial in achieving anything.

I want to be invested in a college that will forever give me the courage and the tools necessary to attack public policy in educational reform or become a scientific researcher in neuroscience or have a solo show in a gallery in Philadelphia. When the students I work with ask me where I went to college, I dream with them a little.

**Why I Belong at Bryn Mawr Julia Debski**

**Please attach an essay of no more than one page telling us what you think you would gain from the educational experience at Bryn Mawr and what you would contribute to the community.**

I hate sitting in a classroom and sensing the hesitation and self-consciousness of the other girls, something I fight against feeling myself. The silence continues until a male peer speaks, and the conversation continues between him and his comrades. My female classmates and I remain quiet, sometimes glancing at each other, but not interjecting as the boys debate the topic. I try and step in, to forge the path for the others, but I'm cut off. After the fourth try, I lean back in my chair and fall silent, angry as the tension in the room dissipates at my surrender. I can't help but wonder what a discussion of just women would be like.

Bryn Mawr prides itself in a rigorous education, encouraging its students to think and develop into better human beings. Not only does it demand education above the regular standards for all, but also offers opportunities tailored to each student's interest. As a writer and future English major, the Creative Writing Program Reading Series is naturally of great interest to me.

I hope to challenge myself at Bryn Mawr, to push myself to learn more of the things I am curious about, and to go deeper into the subjects I already know and love, such as English, Film Studies, French, and Gender Studies. I hope to find my voice among my peers so my thoughts and opinions can be heard properly. I hope to indulge my love of learning and take it to the next level.

As for contributing to the community, I believe my experience of living in different countries such as France and Poland would be an asset when getting to know and living with people from all over the country, not to mention the world. I am highly creative, and will help facilitate a creative atmosphere for myself and other students thrive in. Lastly, I believe I have an open minded, accepting personality, and I have the ability to see people beyond our disagreements. I have friends whose opinions concerning politics or religion are nearly polar opposites to mine, yet we get along because we accept our differences and put them aside. This is a quality I have found essential when interacting with people outside the sanctuary of high school.

**The Power of Reading Lillian Pearl Potter**

**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 cannon-balled into reading in first grade and have not emerged to catch my breath yet. Reading is the medium through which I grow. Books have swept me light years and alternate realties away, but have always returned me with more understanding of my world and others than when I left.

There is always a book tucked in my purse, backpack, or under my arm. Reading is my simplest, most adored pleasure. I love when a combination of words is so fresh that you look at the topic with a different understanding. I love when I pick up a book that articulates the singularities of the teenage experience so perfectly. I love when an author writes my own fears, challenges, or corroborates my ideals, and stretches my imagination to push breath and color into characters. With a strong imagination and a good book I can slip out of my skin and into any life I want, no matter how improbable. Books can also be a connection to and a celebration of life, not necessarily an escape from it. I read with the intent of learning. Books expand my world, every description coloring my view of a person, place, or way of life. When I read about a Jewish girl confined to her neighbor’s attic, it is not because I don’t want to be Lilly; it is because I want to understand Anne and her world. I want to explore every experience, understand every point of view, no matter how different from my own. My world is never dulled or muted after reading; it is only enhanced by my new knowledge and the fresh perspective I have to view it through.

I realize that even though there is a lot of inequity in this world, with books I have a powerful ally as I try to influence change. At Banneker Elementary, a local school, I participated in *Reading Under the Stars*. My friends acted out the scenes of children’s books while I narrated. We saw little, rapt faces staring up at us from pillows and heard the screams of “Again! Another!” Seeing how much our young audience enjoyed it, I wanted to help others have the same opportunities to grow and learn through reading. I walked with my friends in a charity event to support the organization *A Room to Read*, and we raised enough funds to build a library at a small all-girls school in Africa. I researched different nonprofits that supplied books to underprivileged schools, women’s shelters, prisons, and homeless shelters. I organized a book drive at my school and scoured thrift stores and church sales for inexpensive books. Through donations of books and money (and the painful gutting of my own shelves) I was able to surpass my original goal of 500 books, ultimately donating 1,300 books to Books for America.

While I will never know what happened with the books I donated, I do know that each book has the possibility of pivoting someone’s life in a different direction. I take something away from every book I read. The more knowledge I accumulate through reading, the more powerful I feel. It is my hope that the recipients of the donated books are sparked with the same confidence and continue to return to books as I do for fun, adventure, wisdom, and especially the pursuit of knowledge.

**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.

**Experiencing Bryn Mawr Sophie Lis**

**The Bryn Mawr Honor Code and Self-Government Association affirm the importance of our academic and social communities. In what ways do you see yourself contributing to the Bryn Mawr community and how will these experiences shape your time at the College?**

Think about a neighborhood. The clumsy, haphazard houses are chock-full of individual life and experience. The cars whiz busily down the street, past gargantuan rows and corners of houses and apartments brimming with families, stories, and people. They all live in the same community, but many are unconnected, divorced from neighbors and communities, the jagged rectangular puzzle split at the corners. Much like a whole cannot be a whole with the individual components lost, so a community cannot in itself be complete with its little pieces scattered in their private shells. The question of community asks whether you will be an island, quietly lost, or part of a continent, shouting and pulling to shore at the yank of the tectonic plate?

For me, inside my own tiny neighborhood right now, the exhilaration of contributing to the Bryn Mawr community means not only taking part in traditions such as May Day and Lantern Night, but by becoming an engaged member of the campus. Aside from getting an education, during my time at Bryn Mawr I want to be a part of the college: contribute to the *Kaleidoscope*, participate in women’s rights activism, and make connections with other students. Particularly activism, the basis of feminism is not very different from the standard of community, encouraging women to succeed and make positive change in the world. As put by poet laureate Maya Angelou: “I am a feminist. I’ve been female for a long time now. I’d be stupid not to be on my own side”. Bryn Mawr, at its root designed to offer higher education to women, is the epitome of the feminist empowerment.

Furthermore, going to college is not only defined by the degree received, but also by the experiences, memories, and opportunities that highlight it. The continent, like the neighborhood, community, and finished puzzle, subsists only with the aid of its individual fragments. In a time of challenge, if it is littered with rifts, it will collapse. Altogether, this is defined not with words, but with actions. An example being the College’s Honor Code, like the close-knit neighborhood, a community that trusts its members with the responsibility of integrity, self-governance, and honesty exists on a platform of respect, and in the long run, thrives. In contributing to it, one must only continue to follow it, as a system of trust; it has proven that it works. Not unlike the neighborhood, it endures as an organized system, flourishing on the basis of mutual participation and commitment. In this, Bryn Mawr women succeed through personal veracity and truthfulness to themselves and to their peers. In essence, it is community at its finest.

Altogether, with the breadth and depth of a college education, women have the power to bring about change in the world, in one example; Bryn Mawr alumna Dorothy Klenke Nash, the first woman neurosurgeon in United States. Not only in the terms of the lengthy list of the famous alumni, but in the sense of an open-minded attitude and enhanced perspective, the education and experience of Bryn Mawr grants students the select tools that give graduates the opportunity and background to make positive revolution and to help better understand others--in my neighborhood, across the world, and at Bryn Mawr.