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**Sample essays 2017**

**Pitzer College**

**Pitzer Essay**

**Anonymous**

**Pitzer’s educational objectives (intercultural understanding, social responsibility, interdisciplinary emphasis and student autonomy regarding breadth of knowledge courses) create a distinctive educational experience and community of learners. Please tell us why these objectives are a good match for you**

My high school is unique. It breeds a caliber of student that is both intellectually hungry and incredibly compassionate. This is, of course, high praise, yet this atmosphere has challenged me to remarkable ends throughout my four years here. My teachers and classmates have pushed me to do my best in all areas of my life - not simply academics. I owe much of who I am to Henry M. Gunn High School, but I also realize that I, too, have made contributions to life at Gunn.

It's just before first period: the upper-classmen jockey for parking spots, mothers drop off their younger kids out front, and still more students whip up the paths on bikes, their hair poking through the air slits of their helmets. It’s the morning rush, and I soak in the energy that radiates from all corners of the quad. Every morning, walking from my car to my first class, I prepare myself for the day ahead — the tests I'll take, the questions I'll ask, and the discussions I'll have. There is nothing that I look forward to more.

All my life I’ve felt more mature than my age. Since the age of six, I have helped my mother with my older half-sister, who was paralyzed from the chest down in a childhood accident. At a time when most of my friends were experimenting with mom’s makeup and setting up fantasy weddings, I was helping seat my sister in the car, or reaching for places that required the mobility she lacked. I didn't complain about this — I loved helping her — but it did accelerate my maturation. Even when she moved out of our house and it wasn’t necessary for me to help on a daily basis, I visited as often as I could. Her disability has challenged her both physically and emotionally, and from an early age I was aware that someone close to me was suffering from profound loneliness and despair. That understanding has probably shaped me more than I know. I realize I can only do so much to alleviate her pain, but I know how much being there for her means. This knowledge has instilled in me a sense that I can always do something for other people, and that the mere fact of my presence can often be enough.

Because of my experiences with my sister and my resulting sense of responsibility, I sometimes wonder whether I have done enough for myself. School has always been the gateway to my own aspirations. It is a place where my teachers are mentors and my fellow students are both teachers and collaborators. At school, I am free to explore many different subject areas, excelling at some while struggling with others. I do not get easily discouraged, as some might when perfection eludes them. I know I will always have another opportunity, as my learning will never end.

As I exit the parking lot, I become a part of the rush of students flowing into the school. It’s a rush of friendly faces, many of which I greet with a quick glance, a smile, or a momentary embrace. Nearing the entrance to my classroom, there is a crush of foreign faces speaking in Chinese, Korean, Spanish, Tagalog...there must be close to 30 different languages spoken on campus. Because of these friends, I have experienced events as diverse as Passover Seders and Bonga dances. This is my school, and I am proud to contribute to its diversity. When I graduate in June and take my final walk to my car, I know I will be ready for the next step into college, into Pitzer. I am eager for new steps, new experiences, and a new place that will empower me to learn, and in turn prepare me for the steps to follow. A place with people who will teach me, but also with people who, like my older sister, need me.

**The Surfer and the Seal**

**Anonymous**

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

I stared deep into the dark green eyes of the seal that was lying on my surf board. She looked as if she were trying to tell me something. Her glossy grey coat glowed in the moonlight, and her whiskers twitched in the sea breeze. I could only wonder what she was thinking. Was she confused or just curious? Was this a threat or just a hello? Shocked and confused myself, I couldn’t decide whether to pet or push her. But before I could do either, she gave one big snort and scooted off my board into the sea. I looked around wanting to tell someone of this phenomenon, but I was all alone on this moonlit night.

Sifting my hands through the cold water and the slimy kelp, I paddled out towards the waves that were imploding off Santa Cruz’s Pleasure Point. Every full moon I go night surfing, sometimes with a friend, sometimes by myself. This time I was alone. As I paddled out, I calmly observed my surroundings. Off in the distance, the fog horn resonated in the harbor. To my left, waves smacked up against the rocky cliffs that were covered in muscles. I looked out into the Pacific, watching the reflection of the moonlight bob up and down with the incoming swell. I felt very purified and appreciative. This was my designated time away from home, time for me and the environment I love. Splash! There she was again, the seal surfaced just feet away. I began jokingly talking to her. “What do you want, buddy?” But before she could respond, she gently submerged into the water. The seal made me feel comfortable; I was the only surfer out, but at least I wasn’t alone. I caught a few waves and paddled out to the point to be welcomed by the seal again. This time she had her pup with her. Knowing how territorial seals can be with their young, I kept my distance, observing them from far. The mother dove down while the pup just floated looking very chubby and fluffy. I felt honored to be witnessing such a display of nature. They seemed so innocent and gentle. I wanted to talk to them, know more about them and their world. What were their lives like? How did they survive? What were their concerns?

I’ve been around the ocean my whole life. I’ve studied biology and marine life for years. I’ve watched seals play and sea lions fight. But as I observed these seals that night I became enlightened. I realized that I may know a lot about this mammal, where it’s from, how it sleeps, what it eats. But all this information is useless without an appreciation for existence. I constantly find myself swirling around in a madness of academics, sports, and commitments, rarely taking the time to appreciate what God has given me - family, friends, school, health.

As a surfer and as a student, it’s very humbling to know that I could spend a lifetime studying animals and reading textbooks, but I will never be able to capture complete knowledge or complete understanding without complete appreciation. Observation may lead to knowledge, but knowledge is wasted without gratitude.

**Where do I belong? Jeffrey**

**Alexander Nagel**

**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.**

At age 13, I had it all planned out. Having taken my passport from my mother's desk, I prepared to purchase my ticket to freedom from the place I'd been held hostage all those years: Florence, Italy. My mother discovered the theft quickly, however, and my plan was foiled. This wasn't the first time I'd plotted an escape. While Florence is many people's ideal vacation city, it was far from the ideal home for me. Neither was Bonn, Germany four years prior. With each change of country, my longing for my old home, America, only intensified.

While parting with my friends, my home, and American culture was difficult, the loss of these previously unappreciated aspects of my life paled in comparison to the challenges I faced in Germany. My father was often away on business trips, and I found that whenever he was gone, I was pushed to mature faster than I would have liked to. I can still vividly recall one occasion when I was seven and he was traveling. My mother, bedridden with the flu, asked me to read my three siblings a bedtime story and tuck them into bed. I was proud that I could help but I felt like it wouldn't have happened if we were still in America.

While I missed my father a lot when he was away, I missed America even more. I felt my lost childhood was somehow preserved there, out of reach and waiting for me. Every time he returned from a business trip there, he brought back candy, snacks, and American memorabilia, which appealed to my childish image of the perfect utopia I had left behind. Although I had little contact with America when I lived abroad, I always considered it superior to Germany and Italy.

When my father broke the news that we would be moving back, I jumped to my feet ecstatically, screaming "YES-YES-YES!" until I nearly lost my voice. In the months preceding my transition back to America, my anticipation grew; I was ready to return to the utopian society that would restore my happiness. I couldn't have been more wrong.

When I moved to Long Island, I came prepared to be the new student again. At Cold Spring Harbor High School, where most of the students had been living in the area their entire lives, I anticipated being the talk of the whole school. I thought I would be "the cool kid from Italy," but in reality, I was the furthest thing from it. From day one, I started realizing I wasn't really "American" anymore. I didn't know a thing about American sports, customs, pop culture references, and most of all, it seemed that I knew nothing about American high school culture. While I came into the school expecting immediate popularity, as I had attained in the warm and welcoming foreign communities, I was set apart from my peers in ways from which I didn't know how to recover. For the remainder of 8th grade, I kept to myself, isolated and wondering what went wrong. The problem wasn't the country. The problem was me.

I changed schools freshman year to Friends Academy. I felt that the kids were nice, but I didn't reach out and remained fairly anonymous for the first semester. However, I auditioned for the play and soon found my niche in the theater department, which immediately gave me a new group of friends. Although I withdrew from my academics for the first two years, I continued to gain social confidence and self-worth, which propelled me to be a leader in clubs and in the theater by junior year.

Looking back, my problem was never finding to which culture I "belonged," or where I considered home - it was about holding my own and being grounded in who I am and who I want to be, independent of where I live. That is a foundation that I can build off of in college and beyond.