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**Sample essays 2017**

**Reed College**

**Thinking Globally Angela Viti Beckon**

**A range of academic interests, personal perspectives, and life experiences adds much to the educational mix. Given your personal background, describe an experience that illustrates what you would bring to the diversity in a college community, or an encounter that demonstrated the importance of diversity to you.**

Recently, my family unearthed a home video on an old Beta tape from when I was three years old. In the video, I was sitting on my dad's lap with a globe in front of me, and he was asking me to point out different countries. "Where's Vanuatu?" or "Which one is Fiji?" he would ask me. Sure enough, there I was, pointing to the little island nations. Undoubtedly I promptly forgot their locations after learning them, because I certainly don't remember them now. But looking at that tape reminded of some of the unusual aspects of my childhood.

My father made sure that we learned about the most obscure societies, and vociferously denounced mainstream American culture. His theory was, if it's what everyone else thinks, it must be wrong. I can't remember a time when he was not constantly telling us how much better the Chinese do this, how much better the Russians do that, or how much more polite the Japanese are.

My sisters and I did not immediately appreciate my dad's cosmopolitan view of the world. Like most little kids we just wanted to fit in; we enjoyed eating at McDonald's and listening to pop music, not eating somewhere "interesting" (which invariably meant trying something we could not identify) and listening to Global Beat on NPR. However, our dreams of being normal were not to be realized. When I was five, we moved to Okinawa for two years so my father could do his post-doctoral research on the birds of the Ryukyu Islands. With barely two weeks notice, we had to give up all that had become normal for us and move to a place where we stood out so much that people on the streets came up to ask if we had dyed our hair and if they could take pictures with us. Even in this foreign environment where we longed for home, my father still did not allow us anything familiar or mainstream. There are lots of American restaurants in Japan, but of course we were not allowed to patronize these purveyors of Western culture. We had to eat at the tiniest mom-and-pop places my dad could find.

Through it all, my dad never stopped telling us how wonderful Japan was and what a great experience this was. Eventually, I actually started believing it. I attended local schools and made friends despite language and cultural differences. What was once foreign and scary became comfortable and sometimes even enjoyable. At the age of five I was probably not conscious of it, but Japan and my father's incessant glorification of Eastern cultures helped me form a mind that is remarkably open to other cultures.

As I have grown older, I have learned to think critically about my dad's pronouncements, and to understand that he was prone to exaggeration, whether for the sake of argument or to counter prevailing cultural chauvinism. I learned to take everything my dad said with a grain of salt, but there was almost always some truth to his tirades. The Japanese really are more polite than we are, not to mention the fact that they make better cars. If I had taken everything my father said at face value, I would have seen nothing but the flaws in American culture and the good points of Asian culture. Obviously, there are good and bad aspects in both, and avoiding looking at the whole picture leaves one with a sort of tunnel vision that is not open-minded at all.

While my childhood experiences made me particularly sensitive to and appreciative of other cultures, they failed to make me equally aware of the importance of open-mindedness within our own culture. I confess I was guilty of a similar sort of tunnel vision, but on a micro scale. In part as a result of living in a liberal college town, I assumed for a long time that being open-minded and being liberal were the same thing. I knew in the back of my mind that conservatives existed, but to me they were only this vague, non-specific entity that I assumed dwelt somewhere in "middle America." I did not have to deal with them, and thus assumed that they held their beliefs only because of ignorance. A lot of Davisites share that opinion. Liberals, myself included, often criticize conservatives for not being open-minded. But by not trying to understand the other side and instead simply writing it off as being "wrong," I made myself just as closed-minded as the most Bible-thumping of moral conservatives.

My father taught me how to be accepting and welcoming of other cultures, but I had to teach myself how to be accepting of my own culture. The perspective I share is no doubt a little bit that of the little girl pointing to the island nations on the globe, but it is also that of the Davisite who is no longer afraid to encounter differing opinions.

**Playground Pillage Daniel Dolgicer**

**Writing is an integral part of the curriculum at Reed College. Please write a detailed account of an episode from your childhood. (4000+ characters)**

I arose unusually early that morning, rather disheveled. My typically straight and stagnant hair had deteriorated into a lopsidedness that seemed to defy the laws of physics. My pajamas, generously dotted with dinosaurs of the multicolored persuasion, had been tangled by a night of twisting and turning. Nevertheless, I radiated optimism typical of a naive six-year old boy. My planned excursion to the local playground monopolized my thoughts; it rendered obsolete the childish dilemmas that constantly plagued me. On Mondays and Fridays, and every day in between, I longed to champion the seesaw and navigate the labyrinthine alleyways of the obstacle course (although I claimed to loathe the swings, it was in fact my fear of heights that limited my ability to conquer them). My eyes widened; energy and elation flowed freely through my limbs; my heart thumped volumes. I hastily outfitted myself in functional yet fashionable attire--royal purple sweatpants, a light sweater with neatly arranged blue columns, and velcro sneakers with blinding red lights on the heels. Clenching my babysitter's clammy palms, I embarked on my weekly journey to prowl through the playground.

As we trotted down the grand yet narrow boulevards of midtown Manhattan, my tranquil guise deteriorated into a fit of unregulated aspiration. I broke loose from my babysitter's clutches and gained speed with rapidity unseen since the preceding Saturday. The wind mangled my hair and ruffled my clothing. With a smirk of determination, I raced past passersby and stopped just short of the playground's entrance. I took a deep breath, and waved my hands around my face, attempting to alleviate my crimson complexion and deep sweat. I collected myself and entered the playground; the potential--both for triumph and calamity--was eternal. I employed my usual routine, and swiftly strolled passed the slides of rusted steel and the monkey bars of crawling toddlers. The sandbox, just meters away, was an alluring jungle of diversity and despotism; although little kids were as numerous as the grains of sand, this jungle was ruled by a minority of big kids--a minority of malevolent, bloodthirsty big kids.

Now just inches away from the delicate dunes of sand, I planted my two feet squarely on the asphalt surface. I amphibiously leaped from the assuring blocks of cement to the daunting swathes of sand, pebbles, and lost sandals. I was not deterred by a rough landing. I indulged in the endless mounds of sand--I sifted sand with my jittery fingers and toes, I made sand angels (snow angels adjusted for the mild weather of mid-September), I shoveled through the sand to find eternally elusive booty (although pogs and the now-defunct subway token were always in abundance). Like a sunbather basking in summer glory, I relaxed amidst the sextillion grainy particles. My stresses were relieved, my aches and pains were no more--the sandbox was the proper cure.

Such a state of ecstasy was short-lived. Narrow-eyed, narrow-lipped, towering big kids with shoelaces (as opposed to my amateurish sneakers of velcro and mesh), patrolled the sand from which I extracted such glory. Their keen eyes were relentless, the swiftness with which they acted was merciless. Before long, I caught the eye of one of the patrolmen. This particular big kid--whose name lingers in anonymity--began to plot the end of my bliss. He corralled a vile clan of delinquents, with big kids as old as nine and even ten. He ordered them to surround me in a seamlessly organized ellipsis. Demonic dialogue ensued:

"Get out of our sand, or we'll make you get out!" proclaimed one of the biggest of the big kids.

"I'm not bothering anyone..." I said, gazing at the sand.

The gang of big kids retreated into the distance at the first sign of resistance. As I descended once again into my sand-induced coma, I noticed the band of demons in some sort of satanic huddle. Affecting a guise of obliviousness, nervousness subsumed my psyche. I toiled amidst internal strife and unparalleled paranoia. I waited, and I hoped; I waited for my inevitably unfortunate fate to come to fruition, yet I hoped that the ordeal would instantly halt.

The big kids held their huddle for several minutes (minutes which to me seemed like hours). I kept to myself, and attempted to maintain both pride and invisibility (I hid amidst the dunes of sand and under my oversized baseball cap of embroidered blue and maroon). Such efforts proved futile. Shoveling frantically, as if preparing for trench warfare, I noticed a few big kids approaching me. I did not look them in the eyes. In fact, I did not look at them at all. I froze my head at a downward incline, staring at their shadows, waiting for them to act. The biggest of the big kids lunged towards me, and raised his chubby yet menacing arm. Still several meters away, he delicately pulled his arm behind his head. He paused. Like a catapult firing granite boulders, he opened his palm and lobbed an oddly shaped specimen. Although I did not look to the heavens to identify this object (a move that I know regret), I noticed its shadow tediously pinnacling near the clouds and beginning its descent. Amidst a pillage of adolescent chuckles and sneers, the object made its way towards my thickly haired and snugly hatted skull. Bracing for impact, I shut my eyes and cocooned myself in the sand. Within seconds, I felt a soft, slightly feathery thump on my head. I remained idle for several seconds, giving ear to the sea of laughs, gasps, and even the occasional yell. Craving a bubble bath and abundant sympathy, I pried my eyes open, only to find a morbid pigeon entrenched in the sand, about one foot to my left. In the domain that had previously afforded me unparalleled pleasure and comfort...I had been struck by dead fowl.

Realizing that the inanimate specimen was a product of the oft ferocious food chain, my resilience came to a halt. I cringed. My face began to swell and become numb. My tear ducts were mobilized. I descended into a state of internal strife--my howling resonated across the playground, my tears flowed down my cheeks and moistened my clothing. I idled in a teary and cross-legged position, waiting for human compassion. However, my babysitter sat by the swings, reading her Danielle Steel novel, disgustingly bored and complacent.

I needed sympathy. I needed to be absorbed by the hug of an adult. I still craved a bubble bath. I opted to slowly loft myself from the sandy doldrums. I looked over at where the big kids had been laughing. They were gone. I was safe, yet I was scarred. With my head down, with my clothing soaked and sanded, my shoes dirty and disgusting, I walked out of the sandbox. Next Saturday, I would remain on the seesaws.

**My First Flight Robin Bates**

**Describe an important experience in your life.**

"Northwest, this is La Crosse Tower. Hold-short runway three-one for Cessna on final."

Knowing that I had personally delayed a plane full of commercial passengers on my sixteenth birthday was not what I had in mind for my first solo flight. Regardless, the hold-short command, a matter of little importance to the Northwest pilot and tower operator, made it impossible to ignore the reality of my success.

Unlike the fortuitous Peter Pan, who needs only to "think of a wonderful thought," it did not take me long to reach the conclusion that more than a bit of pixie dust would be required to make my young aviation dreams come true. My quest soon brought me to Civil Air Patrol (CAP), the official volunteer auxiliary of the United States Air Force, which flies more search and rescue missions than any other organization. I joined CAP as a cadet almost four years ago, attained the Cadet Officer rank of Captain (the Amelia Earhart Award), participated in numerous national Cadet activities, and served in state and national Cadet leadership positions. Never did I abandon my dream of flying, however, and it was through CAP flight training that I found the key to my box of pixie dust.

Before I was allowed anywhere near a magical flying device, however, I attended hour upon hour (upon hour) of ground school sessions, learning the mechanics, instrumentation, physics, operation, and navigation necessary to be a safe pilot. Of course, I could never forget the joys of FAA regulations that make tax law seem like a thrilling novel. Then again, the woes of these early days were forgotten the moment I first stepped (or, rather, jumped) into the pilot seat of a Cessna 172.

It would be disingenuous to claim that my first experiences were anything but stressful and terrifying. Suddenly I was in charge of an airplane, my own life, and even the life of my instructor. Although I knew on some level that my Certified Flight Instructor (CFI) would not allow me to come to any real harm, my new responsibilities were daunting nonetheless. After months of practice, countless landings, and more than one rough day, I was prepared (at least theoretically) to take to the sky. Alone.

The weatherman was right; it was a perfect day. The sky was magnificently clear. The slight wind was perfectly aligned with the runway. The late spring afternoon merrily unfolded with dazzling brilliance. For the first time, I started the engine...alone. I taxied down the runway...alone. And then, I was flying...alone! The exhilaration immediately hit me with unimaginable force. Thousands of feet in the air, looking down on the Mississippi River and the abundant signs of spring, I realized there was no place I would rather be.

The pixie dust worked. My wonderful thought transformed into a marvelous reality. While I may have momentarily inconvenienced the passengers of that afternoon Northwest flight, I could not have had it any other way.

**Imported Culture Michelle Salman**

**Describe a personal experience that has changed your life.**

“Lower your lids!”

Gilad, my drama instructor, paced back and forth on the stage, arms folded over his belly, Israeli impatience rising in his voice. His eyes narrowed, scanned me through bushy slits, and he barked new commands.

“Let your smile raise your cheekbones… Arch your back just so slightly!”

Gilad did not enjoy dealing with the feminine dimension of my monologue. He expected me to radiate inner charm and elegance; in his opinion, these were second nature to all women. Yet my monologue could not continue before I assumed the precise pose and wore the blessed expression of a woman in full awareness of her irresistible charm. Thus, short and big-bellied Gilad flaunted an impressive repertoire of coquettish behaviors; batting his eyelashes, tossing invisible locks of lustrous hair from side to side, swinging his hips like a young girl and clicking his palate with his tongue.

I laughed and borrowed all I could from the unfortunate, big-bellied man. After we completed the lesson, Gilad reassumed his masculine authority and assigned me to write a description of the woman I portrayed in my monologue.

“A beautiful woman is not beautiful on stage unless she is something more,” he belabored “Don’t filter or edit. Once you gain momentum, your thoughts will continue by the law of inertia.”

A monologue depicts culture, not only persona. I wrote on my paper and my eyes wandered to the window next to my desk. Beyond the distant train tracks I could distinguish the hazy waters of Accra, my birth city, now a long-stagnant port. I continued:

Who am I? I’m the unapproachable older woman. No, but who am I? I am an Israeli woman. I am beautiful and yes, I am older. Israeli culture flows in the veins of my character and surfaces in her eyes; it requires no mentioning.

Two weeks later my borrowed high-heels clacked down the stage in the auditorium of Israel’s Drama School, Reoot. A ray of light quivered before settling on my frame; a pool of darkness rested ahead, breathing heavily. I imagined my judges fussing impatiently, their pens at the ready.

I began with my back to the audience, slowly turned around, already in character, and then enunciated beneath a half-teasing, Spanish smile:

“I am not afraid of men. I know all about their maneuvers….”

Lowering my lids while describing the young man I have seduced, I imagined that my lashes cast palm-tree shadows across my cheeks, which in turn rose with a condescending smile. I imagined that the audience listening to my philandering, looked at my face and saw palm-trees along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea and the mounds of sand, shaped into castles beneath them. I wished the audience to see Israel reflected in my face, their sun-beaten buildings mirrored in my slanting shape.

After all, acting is culture.

Who am I? I inquired of myself once again as I raced out of the gate toward the mailbox. Three weeks had gone by since I had lived and breathed the role of the unapproachable older woman.

“Dear Michal,

“Congratulations —-

Congratulations! That one word was enough. I was accepted. I ran toward my house, shrieking and flapping the envelope in the air. My mother stood leaning against the doorway.

“Ima!!! Ima!!!” I began in Hebrew and immediately switched to Russian as my face reached her palms. At home we only spoke Russian.

“Mama, I did it, next year I will be attending Haifa’s Drama school!”

Mother smiled at me with the first of the two smiles she reserved for such occasions. Her smile assured me, I always knew you would make it. I knew her second smile would convince me with equal candor, It’s the most prestigious school in the city, but we just tried to get you in for fun. She pressed me tightly to her chest. Behind her I could hear the echoes of the television, telling of a bomb that had recently exploded in Jerusalem. When mom let go, her eyes sparkled.

They say dreams come true if you work hard; yet never add, this happens only for a moment, just to give you a taste. Just as my dreams were born through the clumsy tearing of an envelope, they vanished with one word, with one decisive movement of the lips: America. Tired of the terrorist attacks, my mother determined that we would move there.

But Gilad was right: Once you gain momentum, your thoughts will continue by the law of inertia. Dreams carry on, much as we beg to leave them behind at the airport with that metal hairclip that we are asked to remove and hand over because of Israel’s heightened security. They masterfully evade the metal-detectors and seem to trail our émigré journeys without need of a visa.

Crossing the Atlantic, I first took notice of my imported dreams when Ms. Pape, my drama teacher for my first year in the American school, called me to her desk and explained that I would not be Jessica, the daughter of Sherlock, but rather Nerissa, the maid.

“You have an incorrect pronunciation of many words, among them “peelow” and “cookee.” She smiled at me with the concentrated warmth of a Seattle sun-break. “There are no small roles, only small actors.”

Tears stung my eyes as I walked out of class. Without the coat of Hollywood-inspired dreams, I found I was not a thick-skinned young American, but an immigrant, a foreigner with broken English, with no knowledge of the American audience.

My mother picked me up from school and we drove along silently.

“I will be playing Nerissa, the maid,” I said louder than I intended and began unweaving my braid. I wondered which smile she would pull out this time.

“You have wild hair like a gypsy.” She did not resort to the consoling smile she often wore in Israel.

“There are no small roles, only small actors.” My voice was stiff, my fingers numbly interlocked in my hair.

“Yes, Kundera said so. He must have believed it,” my mother replied absentmindedly. “And you don’t have gypsy hair. Who has ever heard of a Jewish gypsy?”

As so happens in life, disappointment gave way to insight. As a foreigner, I resolved to learn and observe. The American children, who were neither gypsy-haired nor Jewish, mingled excitedly during breaks. Acting is culture, I told myself, and brought a notebook to school. I pulled it out of my backpack during breaks and penned my observations.

At home, as the sun set on my adopted country and rose over the country of my childhood, I would pick up one of my English books and stumble over the words until bed time. In this manner, my days acquired a particular solitude, filled with dazzling characters and newly-discovered cultures.

On such an afternoon, chance dealt me The Unbearable Lightness of Being, Kundera smiling on the back cover. I read the book, but could not find the quote. I took out the notebook of cultural observations. Alongside the descriptions of the blond-haired children I wrote of my life in Israel, of unfulfilled dreams and of never finding the quote. I wrote of trading one set of dreams for another.

I wrote that creative energy can neither be created nor destroyed. It can change shapes and take different forms, but a person is born with a reservoir of creativity. From then on, it can only be unleashed.

**Why Reed? Anonymous**

**Why Reed?**

I glanced upward from my computer and saw a wall covered with posters, each displaying a beautiful computer modified image of a college campus. One of them struck me for months. It was a clear aerial view of a field of green trees dotted by multicolored buildings and rooftops. Underneath the image, a name - Reed College - sparked an interest in my head. To this day, I still do not know what caught my attention. Maybe it was the name or the trees or the majestic griffin.

I was never interested in big schools where everyday life is bombarded with Greek social activities. Reed College is the ideal size with a gorgeous campus not too far from my home. The Canyon really caught my attention because I have been dreaming to read ancient Greek literature while being engulfed by nature. I want an education to be something deeper than grades. As far as I know, most teachers would agree that grades are just efficient tools to whip students in line. Although grades definitely matter in Reed, I am more interested in the process of spending time and effort to learn new things. I have always received A’s in my classes so I am looking forward to learn in a more challenging and interactive environment surrounded by eccentric students. For a change, I want to do homework for myself, not for the instructor. I love to be surrounded by shelves of books. Knowledge is fascinating and provocative. Reed contains the students who are willing to use their brains and go beyond the ordinary. I need a place without frivolous assignments and dull teachers. I need a place to think.

I sincerely want to pursue science in college and graduate school. My goal is to obtain a M.D./Ph.D dual degree. I want to engage in scientific experiments and research where professors will treat me as a colleague, not simply as a number.

I have heard many contradictory comments about Reed. Some people concluded that it is too tough and extreme. Some say Reedies are weird and peculiar. Some say the instructor pounds you with work until you jump off a cliff. In my mind, Reed is somewhere in between. I appreciate its oddness and uniqueness because they are the characteristics that distinguish Reed from the rest. I can definitely benefit from a demanding and stimulating educational experience at Reed College.

**Life's Obstacles Anonymous**

**Disadvantage Statement**

I grew up with my grandparents in a rural town near the coast of eastern China. I have never seen my biological father. This is not an obstacle, however, because my mother has always been my source of motivation. She first introduced me to the me-to-we way of life. Her primary concern as a physician is to help as many people as possible. At first, I did not understand why she always worked fourteen hours a day and constantly checked on her patients. When I entered college, I came to realize that she is selflessly trying to provide the best care to patients with cancer. I fully appreciate her hard work’s impact on our community. Now, I embark on a long but exciting journey to use my knowledge and the power of science to benefit world citizens. I want to engage in biomedical research in an academic setting because it is a perfect synchronization of cutting edge scientific discovery and medical treatment that will enhance the lives of countless people.

I came to United States when I was nine years old. One of the most severe disadvantages I have faced is overcoming racial discrimination. Fourth grade was filled with anxiety, confusion, and embarrassment as I became accustomed to the American culture. My fellow fourth grade classmates were not the most accommodating peers. Even kids of my own ethnicity refused to talk to a foreigner. Our teacher not only did not help me learn English but also gave me negative remarks during parent-teacher conferences. Thus, I felt as if I was stuck on a lonely island. These circumstances, however, did not bring me down. Prejudice not only made me more mature than my peers but also gave me the determination to succeed throughout my academic career. My disadvantage became my advantage because it gave me a sense of unique identity in this multicultural nation. It also encouraged me to never give up until I have reached my goal. In fact, I soon surpassed others in academics and extracurricular activities. Last year, I even found high school too easy and moved on to Reed College at the age of 16. Despite the hardships I faced during my childhood, I constantly prove myself to be a diligent and efficient student, a cooperative team-worker, and an altruistic volunteer in my community.

My life took another sharp turn after freshmen year in high school. My parents suddenly decided to move from New York City to Corvallis, Oregon. We relocated from one of the most populous cities in the world to a suburban town. My surprise and frustration at their decision were ineffable. Not only would I miss all my friends and relatives, but also gave up an education in a specialized high school. After we settled in Corvallis, however, I began to reap the benefits of a small college town. I found an internship at Oregon State University through the Academy for Science and Engineering. Over the summer, I acquired many laboratory skills and became more closely acquainted with the scientific process. In addition, I continue to volunteer in the public library and Boys and Girls Club. I no longer regret moving to Corvallis because it gave me a completely different perspective of America. Now, I appreciate changes in life as positive opportunities to learn.

Life is a rollercoaster ride. I adapt to its multiple vicissitudes. One of the most important characteristics I value is flexibility. I know how to make the best out of any difficult situation by remaining confident. Nothing can bring me down. I will always try to live according to what Ghandi said, “Live like you were going to die tomorrow. Learn like you were going to live forever.”

**The Strange and The Familiar Anonymous**

**"Some questions cannot be answered./ They become familiar weights in the hand,/ Round stones pulled from the pocket, unyielding and cool." --Jane Hirshfield, poet, Princeton Class of 1973**

It was to my temporary Italian address that a package arrived in mid-November. Even though it had been only a couple of months, I had yearned for something to read as a respite from the unending flow of Italian, which inundated my still-untrained ears every night I spent with my host family. The package contained a book by Haruki Murakami. I had read some of his stuff before, so I asked my mom to get me another of his books because I wanted something familiar. The title of this one was strange, even more conspicuously and obnoxiously strange than the titles of most of his books: Hardboiled Wonderland and the End of the World.

The next morning, like all of my school mornings in Italy, my host sisters and I piled into the Italian version of a minivan: pale blue and boxy, but filled with the same dirt and daily debris as any car anywhere in the world. I started reading my new book during that ten-minute ride and finished it in the same place a week later. Once I finished it, I no longer felt such a strong need for respite. Reading it had been like “pulling round stones from my pocket,” “familiar weights.” The book provided me with a connection to someone else -- the author, the protagonist. It started a dialogue. It opened a discussion of unanswerable questions. The end of the book was not a resolution to those questions, but rather a reminder of their importance to me. The unanswerable questions we ask ourselves become part of us; they drive us to seek their answers. In a way, those same questions had brought me to Italy in search of answers. Though their weight was often a hindrance, it was also a necessity, a fuel for living.

Italy was a new, different ocean than the one I was accustomed to, and I had to learn to swim a different stroke. By November, the weight of the questions to which I had grown accustomed seemed somehow less pressing. For all of the fabulous things that study abroad has to offer, it also has a way of disorienting you. Of course, the beauty of disorientation lies in the chance to regroup and perhaps to find oneself pointed in a new direction. It was somewhat disorienting to realize that I had found comfort in a book written by a surrealist author in Japan, translated and purchased in the U.S., and sent to me in Italy. Perhaps that book was a strange place to look for a feeling of home. Perhaps it was a strange place to find it. I went abroad looking for adventure, but I also went to learn how to live in a different family and a different culture. Reading Hardboiled Wonderland and the End of the World showed me that the familiar can sometimes be found in the most unexpected places. It reminded me to open myself to the possibility of discovery. If I could find what I needed in a book from the far side of the world, I reasoned, then I could certainly find something familiar in my host family. Maybe I could even provide them with what they had hoped to get from hosting an American girl.

The rediscovery of those elusive questions restored a certain weight to me as well as the sense of purpose that I had lost in my new surroundings. Their weight gave power and direction to each stroke of my arms in this foreign ocean. I quickly learned a new efficiency. I also gained respect for how much I had left to learn, for how much I could learn in Italy, and for what I knew I could give back.

**The Garden Avril Carrillo**

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

I had never before seen a sleeping bee. Yet there it was, nestled among lavender petals. I could see the yellow pollen dusting the bee’s delicate wings. As I looked around, I could see other life in the garden settling down as well. The constant humming of bugs and rustling of the wind had faded just as the sky had turned into a dusky mix of blue, purple, and pink. The breeze is slowing down, I thought as it grazed my cheek.

The flowers were slowly nodding along with the gentle wind. The faint smell of summer hung in the air, coating everything with a sweet contentment. A tired sort of hopefulness had settled into my bones. I was 12 years old; on the edge of childhood, just beginning to venture into maturity. I didn’t feel quite like a person, more like a possibility.

My father had planted a garden, although I use the word garden loosely. The garden had started as dirt, riddled with rusty nails and old bottle caps. It felt like a malignant presence in our backyard. My father decided to change this. One day he let some seeds go free and we soon had our own field of wild flowers. They grew with an uncontained chaos, eventually overtaking our backyard.

Mexican sunflowers grow six feet high, with petals the color of the burning desert sun. They were forever hungry for the sky. On balmy afternoons I would position myself underneath the flowers, looking up and yearning to be as tall as they were.

Cosmos flowers grew in wild, violent tangles. The buds were ugly brown lumps on spindly stalks. Despite this, the flowers would bloom in the loveliest shades of lilac and pink. It was here where many of the bees would make their beds for the night.

The small, cheerful poppies were my favorite. The fresh flowers were an orange so deep and bright that it remained burned into your eyes long after you had closed them. But what drew me to the poppies were the petals. The soft silk of a poppy conveys a gentle innocence that only nature could create. These flowers had sprung forth from an unforgiving ground. Taking root amongst old pennies and broken glass, they had forged themselves into a forest where the flowers had thrived.

The other night I walked past my neighbors garden. A few poppies had begun to bloom. I sat down besides them, and felt the sleek petals.The colors in the sky had faded to an inky blue. A few stars were blinking in and out of existence. The air seemed at rest. The flowers had closed their petals for the night. They look so simple, I thought, resting on the sidewalk. I looked up at the flowers swaying, and I thought about possibilities.

**Biocentrism Anonymous**

**For one week at the end of January, Reed students upend the traditional classroom hierarchy and teach classes about any topic they love, academic or otherwise. This week is known as Paideia after the Greek term signifying “education” – the complete education of mind, body and spirit. What would you teach that would contribute to the Reed community?**

I've always had a special interest in physics, and if I could teach the Reed community anything, I'd want to talk about Biocentrism. Biocentrism is a relatively obscure theory that states that we, with our consciousness, create the universe, instead of the other way around. It argues that life isn't merely a byproduct of physics but the very thing that physics stems from. Take this scenario. You're sitting on a beach watching a beautiful sunset. You can hear the waves crashing, and can smell the salt in the breeze.

Now what if I told you that it's all in your mind? In a way, it really is. The sunset you're "watching" is the end result of your eyes picking up light waves of different frequencies, thus making different "colors," and your brain interpreting those stimuli. Your brain's interpretation is what forms the picture of the sunset. The sound of waves is merely sound waves hitting your eardrums, and your ears translating that into something your brain can process. And the smell of the salt is a sensation created by the neural pathways in your brain. So although, yes, the beach is outside of your mind, everything that you experience is processed internally, in your brain. This process is, according to biocentrism, closely tied to your consciousness. Furthermore, this idea can be extended to encompass everything—everything we have "observed" in the universe or in science is essentially open to how we choose to interpret it. Some scientists go as far as to say that the famous "Theory of Everything" will never be complete until consciousness is factored in.

I don't necessarily expect my fellow Reedies to agree with the theory. In fact, I'm not entirely sure that I do myself—since biocentrism is pretty radical for our time. However, I would hope, at least, that this would open their eyes to the possibilities of scientific inquiry. That this would inspire them to look outside the box, and take a different approach to a problem that has yet to be solved. Biocentrism is brave in that it dares to be different from the mainstream of ideas dealing with the universe.

**There are No Rules Anonymous**

**"Describe a problem you’ve solved or a problem you’d like to solve. It can be an intellectual challenge, a research query, an ethical dilemma-anything that is of personal importance, no matter the scale. Explain its significance to you and what steps you took or could be taken to identify a solution."**

The line between water and sky is two shades of black. Silence hides between the crevices of elements, and I convince myself that I can weigh the air.

I cannot see my body or my paddle or my kayak, but I am kayaking.

The trees’ shadows reflect on the lake like black pawns in a game of chess. Sky, water, darkness: a massive snow globe (give or take the snow). It is eleven p.m. in Commerce, Michigan, and it feels like Sugden Lake is the whole world.

Night kayaking falls under the category of leisure sport. There are no regulations. If I kayaked to the very end, I would not know where to go.

For the first time in my life, I do not have a drawn-out plan. I do not have ambition to reach my destination because I do not have a destination. Realizing that I am a normal teenager with normal teenage fears is not reassuring. *I am afraid of being lost*(how terrifically mundane). I have always known what I wanted; I am the girl whose greatest cognitive dissonance results from liking books on both poetry and string theory. I like psychedelic rock and greenhouses, Autism research and vintage shops, neurotransmitters and trees. I like the way words taste - like Indian spices, or air. I speak Spanish with my mom, German with my dad, and English with my friends. Opposites are my normal. I find safety in writing poetry at 4 a.m. and watering my pothos plants and listening to Pink Floyd. Yet the end of the lake is unexplored; reaching it requires approaching it, and I am not ready to try either. What am I supposed to call this fear? *Girl on kayak afraid of being lost somewhere not on kayak? Area teenager afraid of the other side of the lake?*

I should say I went out on my kayak every night and paddled harder and faster and further. I should say I finally conquered my obstacle and made it to the end and flung my arms up in the air and roared in victory to twenty-seven gods, but I didn’t.

This is what happened: the sky turned an odd shade of grey-purple. For some peculiar reason, I felt safe in this unknown strangeness. I wanted to ask questions about a shade of sky I did not understand, and for the first time, these questions were not accompanied by fear.

Color is a night sky that is somehow not-black. Color is what I noticed when I remembered there is a world outside of Sugden Lake, and I am in it.

I began to understand that I should not be afraid of change; I am assembled by change. My nature is a duality between art and science, and I am hungry for unanswered questions.

My grandmother in Mexico tells me stories of a man who healed her with Ayahuasca leaves, and so I purchase books on plant shamanism. A boy from Wyoming says dark matter and art are related. We are mountains of subatomic particles, and there is a turbulent beauty to that. My instructor at poetry camp recites the history of snail sex. Trees are weird, people are weirder, and there’s magic in this world. My palette of different interests has only been broadened by the people I have met, each one under a different color sky. I wonder: what if I would have been too afraid to go?

I still do not know my final destination. I am a girl who was born in Mexico and who now lives in Michigan, and I don’t worry about reaching the middle or the end anymore because kayaking at night is a personal sport.

There are no rules.

**Dancing 101 Anonymous**

**For one week at the end of January, Reed students upend the traditional classroom hierarchy and teach classes about any topic they love, academic or otherwise. This week is known as Paideia after the Greek term signifying “education” – the complete education of mind, body and spirit. What would you teach that would contribute to the Reed community?**

Welcome to Dancing for Terrible Dancers 101, taught by me, the world's worst dancer. Nope, this isn’t an oxymoron; it’s just me sharing what I've learned after finally coming to terms with the fact that I’m a terrible dancer. Dancing is a vital part of life, almost inescapable, but it isn't something to be afraid of. Some of us are unfortunately born with two left feet (me), but that shouldn't be the reason why we are not dancing. If I were able to teach an extracurricular class at Reed, I would give a class on my tips for appreciating the joy of dance, good, bad, and ugly.

After two years of ballet as a kid, I was kindly encouraged to come off the team -- by my mother, no less. At first, I believed it was because she thought tennis lessons were a better fit, but recently she shared that it was because the instructor kicked me off for not showing progress. After that I tried musical theatre, where I realized I couldn't do a box step to save my life; Zumba was no easier. But that didn't put me off from dancing; I just loved to do it so much that I would do it for fun. To this day, every second Saturday of the month I go down to the art district of Miami and dance from 9pm-12am at the big outdoor dance party. It is my absolute favorite day of the month.

This past weekend I went with my friend Peter; it was his first time there and he said “Deanna, although there are probably some classically trained dancers out there, you are the most soulful and happy dancer I've ever seen.” Mind you, he's kind of a hippie, but that is possibly one of the most rewarding compliments someone has ever offered me. The key to dancing when you have no rhythm is confidence. Although I may be off beat or just doing some ridiculous move, I always do it with a smile on my face, which gives off the vibe that I know what I’m doing. Then I just throw in some cheesy moves like the sprinkler or a shoulder shimmy, and do my best to not hurt myself. The key is to have fun with it. Everyone around you will, too. After my lesson, Reed students will be popping and locking with confidence all over campus.

**Paideia Anonymous**

**For one week at the end of January, Reed students upend the traditional classroom hierarchy and teach classes about any topic they love, academic or otherwise. This week is known as Paideia after the Greek term signifying “education” – the complete education of mind, body and spirit. What would you teach that would contribute to the Reed community? (200 words minimum, 500 words maximum)**

I am a wilderness survivalist. Over the years, I have found myself thriving in conditions ranging from torrential rain in the Valley of the Kings to white-out conditions on top of Mount Lassen. Some would call these situations miserable, but to me they are just another challenge to tackle. When I am at my best, I am outdoors in a high-stress situation. This could be a life-threatening injury, or a sudden storm, or even both. While the skills necessary to tackle these situations were acquired along my scouting trail, scouting is about more than just learning these skills. It is also about teaching them.

My Paideia would be a class on how to properly prepare for and thrive on an excursion out into the wilderness. The first step to any successful outing is planning. If I were to take a class out to New Mexico for a backcountry backpacking trip, ny fellow students would need to absorb quite a few skills ahead of time. A good place to start is how to set up a rain fly, in under a minute. In New Mexico, the weather is unpredictable; it can switch from a light mist to a heavy downpour very fast. Beyond physical skills, a lot of itinerary planning has to be completed. Two summers ago, I led a trip to Hawaii for a crew of twenty people. This expedition included everything from securing airfare to determining campsite locations, and was a step out of my comfort zone. By managing the group effectively, and clearly assigning roles, we could sufficiently plan. That trip was a success, because there was a scheduled plan that motivated all of us.

Sometimes, however, there are times when such plans fail. Another skill that I would focus on during my Paideia is how to respond when everything turns belly-up. The Boy Scout motto is “Be Prepared,” and often training goes unused during an outing. However, when training such as first aid or CPR is needed, lack of preparation becomes a dire risk. Indeed, last summer I was thrown into a situation that quickly escalated to life and death. While hiking in the night, one of my friends fell into a stream, fractured his leg, and was left soaking wet. While the others in my group panicked, started blaming people, and showed a lack of confidence, I calmly constructed a splint, bundled him up, treated him for shock, and called for medical assistance. Staying composed under pressure is what I do best, and if composure under stress is the only skill that I teach during my week-long course, I would be content. Every learning experience stems from stepping out of your comfort zone, and the best way to thrive is to be prepared, then take a deep breath and jump in.