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**Sample essays 2017**

**University of Chicago**

**Fall Down Seven Times, Stand Up Eight Anonymous**

**UChicago Supplement Prompt: Winston Churchill believed "a joke is a very serious thing." From Off-Off Campus’s improvisations to the Shady Dealer humor magazine to the renowned Latke-Hamantash debate, we take humor very seriously here at The University of Chicago (and we have since 1959, when our alums helped found the renowned comedy theater The Second City).Tell us your favorite joke and try to explain the joke without ruining it.**

I was wandering down a typically busy hallway at my high school feeling like death. The burden of academic hardship weighed down on the shoulders of even the brightest young scholars. However, in an honest attempt to bolster the ever-thinning optimism of the student body, an irritatingly cheerful group had decided to plaster motivational quotes and messages all over the otherwise regular campus walls and structures. This was when—oddly enough—I discovered my favorite joke.

I turned my head by chance to find a trifling piece of pink copy paper strung up on the wall by a single piece of blue tape. As a lone ornament on an otherwise regular stretch of white paint and drywall, it looked quite ridiculous—or at least fearlessly minimalistic. The paper’s faded black text unabashedly spelled out an old Japanese proverb in what looked to be Comic Sans: “Fall down seven times, stand up eight.” I gawked dumbly at the message and read it several times over as other students passed me by in the hallway. I had heard the saying before, and I knew the message it tried to convey as well. It all amounted to a slightly more rustic version of “If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again.” I mused over the page for another moment or so until the punch line hit me. My pupils shrank as I stood, perpetually frozen in disbelief.

“What? How is it possible to stand up eight times after falling down only seven times? This must be a joke, right? At first glance the proverb’s message is crystal clear, but could the details have been overlooked for so long? There’s no way.” I thought with a fright.

Let’s think this through logically. One must have fallen down in order to stand up. If this is true then one may postulate that the number of times an individual stands up must be equal to or less than the number of times an individual falls down. It is a physical impossibility to stand up without having fallen down. Thus, for all intents and purposes, we can conclude that classic Japanese proverb—which may I remind you has lasted through countless generations of oral tradition—makes no sense whatsoever. Picking oneself up for that triumphant eighth time would only be possible after a decisive fall, also for the eighth time. And to think, perfectly unsuspecting individuals decorate their walls, their cubicles, their classrooms with this broken proverb as a source of inspiration all the time! “These people are being cheated!” I concluded.

Back in the hall, I was hysterical. My discovery seemed so fundamental in nature that I could not allow myself to be the only one in the loop. Frantically, I exercised the scientific method and shared my research with everyone around me. Then, the joke went viral. Some students took turns repeatedly laying on the ground and standing back up while counting the actions like some asinine dance routine. They were always flustered in the end, unable to get up for a definitive eighth time without falling once more. Others debated among each other. Small crowds gathered in hallways and around bulletin boards where printouts of the proverb were taped up. The students dissented and scowled in front of the printouts like they were wanted posters.

Ultimately, everyone conceded to the error made by the nameless Japanese sage ages before our time, as well as the carelessness of those who let this fallacy go unnoticed since then. Even the most stubborn students, those who would recount arbitrary moments in Japanese history or squabble over the significance of the numbers seven and eight, eventually admitted defeat to the public enemy with a humble giggle. The mistake was far too grave to overlook. But soon, the calamity dissipated to complacency. What we were then left with was an entire school spattered with the printouts now deemed moot and ineffectual to an abhorrently humorous degree. Now, destitute and thoroughly undistracted, all we were left with was laughter. And while we laughed and paraded the proverb’s message through hallways and classrooms, our voices gleeful with facetiousness and irony, my thoughts floated back to the nameless club director who put the proverb on the display in the first place. The printouts had served their purpose. Our spirits had finally been lifted, albeit for all the wrong reasons.

**Inspired by Susannah Nadler, a graduate of The Spence School, New York, NY Anthony Haddad**

**Storytelling is an integral part of the formation of our identities. The stories that our parents and our communities tell us about themselves and the world form our first map of the universe. At some point, we begin to tell our own stories to ourselves and to others. Tell us a story you tell. Your story does not have to be either true or a story you would think to tell anyone but yourself; but the story must be your own, and its telling should have significance to you. Your story should also be significant to a listener who might tell a story about you.**

France is a European fusion of culture, claiming diversely mastered specialties in its many regions and provinces. Crpes, dentelle Bretonne, languedoc, and fromages-mania are all constituent to this cultural synthesis, until you come down to Marseille. Of all things to be celebrated for, what is their specialty? "Les histories Marseillaises", or "tall tales". As it is told, the people of Marseille are notorious for their especially keen powers of exaggeration-sort of like me. I contest, minor embellishment must find its way in several stories I tell for audience appeal (as long as such embellishment remains consistent!). Whenever I tell this particular one though, I start off by saying "the story I shall tell you in itself is too colorfully absurd to require any ornamentation. This is exactly how it happened":

Five years ago, when I was about twelve or thirteen, still on the steps of teenagehood in Saudi Arabia, the whole family decided to go shopping at the gaudiest of places to buy anything in Riyadh! This little center had a good hardware store, and an adjacent clothes shop where you can buy anything for about a tenth of the price! Calvin Klein becomes Calvin Clein, GAP BAP, Lacoste Locaste, and several such pirated variations. My parents decided to go to the hardware shop, and told me that I could stay at the clothes shop alone. What freedom! A statement of my maturity, my independence! I went in and casually browsed through the items. Such nonchalance I felt, such joviality. Simultaneously, good thoughts gyrated the edges of my brain: I had great friends, a great school life, good grades, great family...I had the teenage dream...until I turned around. "Intah ya walah" screamed someone behind me. I turned to find that the proprietor of this voice was an overbearing man wearing the traditional Saudi thobe and ghutra, but with some black skinned coating with golden embroidery over his corpulent being, screaming muffled commands at me through his deviously twisted and untamed beard. To his sides were two policemen, awaiting their command to action. Now, mind you, I am Lebanese, and I do speak Arabic-but Saudi Arabic is so much more different than any Arabic I had heard! I could not discern one word the man was saying, until he got to the last sentence: "Yalla 3al gims"-"You're coming with us to the gims". "Gims" was the mispronounced GMC truck, thought to be a one-word acronym. Instantly, I knew who this man was. A matawah-a religious official with unchecked authority out to impose his interpretation of Islam on the world, with a stick. I had heard horrible tales of boys being whipped in these preferred matawah "gims" vehicles, and other such abuses. I shuddered in fear and trepidation. I had held my arm so close to my body in panic that the six shirts that I had casually draped over my arm became an attached, sweaty, crumpled mass appendage of my lower side. What law had I infringed upon to deserve this punishment? So I asked, trembling, and making an enormous effort to be understood. His stick rose and hit my shorts. My shorts?! That was my infraction?! I could not wear shorts?! My mind was in a panicked, confused conundrum: Was I to consent, or scream helplessly hoping my parents would hear from the adjoining hardware store? In an anxious spontaneity, I chose option three: I signaled with my hand for the matawah to wait, as I needed to finish my shopping! What a stupid resort, but it was the only thing I could think of. As the nonchalance that once possessed me and the trepidation that currently consumed me battled over the control of the state of my body, I mustered the courage to continue shopping. As I moved toward the trousers, my pursuers followed. As I had feigned to lose interest in this section and moved toward the belts, they swiftly entailed. The insides of my body were being shaken vigorously. Where were my mother and father?

Finally, as if a prayer answered, the pursuing mob lost interest momentarily. Apparently, an older Saudi teenager was talking to his girlfriend on his cell phone, a way more significant violation than mine! This was the chance. I scurried like a madman towards the exit desperately. I entered the hardware store, my temples bursting with the hypnotic beating pulse of my heart. Where were my parents?! I rummaged the store frantically, running around aimlessly until I found my mother. I quickly informed my mother of the situation, frenetically attempting to communicate with her between my gasps for breath. My father had left the store to buy ice cream for my sisters she told me, and he had the car. This is where my friends start crying hysterically, although I think what happens is quite sad. Apparently more than a hardware store, my mother took me to the planting section. There she found a large, empty terra cotta pot. "Sit in here and hide, until I come back with your father" she said. This is material for the movies, I tell you! So I did just this, attempting to recapture my calm. My eyes peered cautiously over the rim of the pot awaiting the signal. In came my mother through the sliding doors of the hardware store. "He's here, he's here! He's parked right outside here! He's started the car, he's waiting for you, c'mon!" I lifted my right leg out of the pot, then my left, and dashed towards the exit. Simultaneously, the mattawah came in with the policemen. But before he could say or do anything, my mother had already opened the back door of the car, and we trailed off...

Who would have thought that I could have made an adventure out of wearing shorts? Mind you, this is not a statement against Saudi Arabia or its peoples. I have lived here for eight years and have learned to love it. But for a little closure, it goes without saying: "Only in Saudi Arabia".

**Me, Myself and Chicago Anthony Haddad**

**1. How does the University of Chicago, as you know it now, satisfy your desire for a particular kind of learning, community, and future? Your response should address with some particularity your own wishes and how they relate to Chicago; 2. Tell us about a few of your favorite books, poems, authors, films, plays, music, paintings, artists, magazines, or newspapers. Feel free to touch on one, some, or all of the categories listed or add a category of your own.**

1. Although I have a very vague understanding of the University of Chicago, from what I know, I believe it truly satiates all my learning desires. My wishes and anticipations for higher education are mirrored in even the most obvious aspects of Chicago. I am an uncommon kid. Nothing would do me more disservice than to wake up one day and find out that I was normal. Your "Un-Common Application" struck a chord of harmony with me, and ever since I was hooked. Furthermore, it is no joke to say that I get more e-mails from teachers than from my friends. This is not because I am socially inept, but because the several extracurricular leadership and service activities I am involved in necessitate heavy teacher-student communication. Naturally, I have grown quite fond of my teachers, and consider them to be my friends before my educators. In my opinion, it is essential to have a strong rapport between faculty and student for success. Your listed 2.3 student to faculty ratio must be conducive to this liking. Moreover, as I have read, your biological and political science programs are among the best in the nation. While my vocational goals are currently volatile, I find myself leaning toward one of these two domains. For all of these reasons which seem quite obvious to me, the University of Chicago seems ideal for my self-fulfillment.

2. I am not a passionately avid reader, but there are several books that I love to examine over and over again. Albert Camus' L'Etranger, or The Stranger is one of my absolute favorites. I assure you I am far from existentialist, but the beautiful subtlety with which this book is written excites me. I enjoy television a little too much, and I am an admirer of all shows and sitcoms (although I still don't quite understand Seinfeld), but especially: Dharma and Greg, Everybody Loves Raymond, Friends, and Frasier. The one movie that I truly enjoy above any other must be The Sixth Sense. The richness and quality of this film permeates every single aspect of its production. In general, I like just about anything in the arts (even pseudo-arts, as in several current pop artists); however, I believe there are few true works of art, and it is to these that I assign my artistic reverence.

**A Battle for Insight Shannon Maene**

**Topic 5 from Common Application: Personal Topic Describe a character-defining instance of strength in the face of adversity. (Submitted as supplemental essay to some schools)**

"Kai houtos manthano."\* To most, they are meaningless words, incomprehensible and bizarre. But to me, their meaning is legion: secrecy, silence, concealment. They are Greek, and they mean subversive. I am a subversive, of the Greek persuasion, and, having become such, I shall never go back.

For three years, I have taken Greek with Mr. King. Our initial pace was astonishing, learning almost every element of Greek grammar in six months. However, this was only the means to an end. We have since translated several books of the Odyssey, and one of the Iliad. We have translated lyric poems by authors such as Sappho, Solon, Alcaeus, and high-minded Xenophanes. We recently finished Plato's Apology, and are now working through Herodotus; we will do Aristophanes next. All that I say is true, although there are no other Greek students to attest to this.

There were three others the first year: one graduated, the other two abandoned the endeavor. The reason was not that they lacked intelligence - they are dedicated in their own arenas. They simply could not conceive of devoting two hours a night for a class that promised no recognition; not even class credit.

Greek, taught by Mr. King, has been a tradition in my school for nineteen years. However, a "simplifying mentality" has in recent years come to oppose this, asserting that what is not simple is often not good; Greek was never simple. When Mr. King wanted to reinitiate the Greek program, he anticipated no problems. The former principal happily permitted such things, vehemently defended them in the face of Guidance's pleas for order. I admit that I spurn the arbitrary guidelines that they dictated we now follow, that favored simplicity at the expense of a child's education. Nevertheless, we fought arduously to resurrect the former Independent Study program, mysteriously erased from all records. We invited observation on any day, without notice, and attended school board meetings, hoping the Greek issue would finally be addressed. Despite our entreaties, we were denied input when they established a new Independent Study program.

It was shortsighted and wrong. What was easily the most demanding class in the school became its only pass/fail, offering minimal credit and no incentive for future students to join. However, we soon ceased our struggle to defy the administration and prove that my right to learn was being denied. It was not. Whether they supported us, they could not stop me from learning Greek, and that was what we had truly endeavored to do. So we forsook their proposal, but settled down, cloistering ourselves in a corner far from roaming eyes, and continuing to explore and enjoy bold, poetic Greek.

I am in Greek III now, and try not to complain anymore. I like to think of myself as a subversive, acquiring forbidden wisdom behind closed doors. Truthfully, it seems that I am part of a minority of students who learn purely for learning's sake. I seek insight, and am driven by an insatiable thirst to know, as if I one day awoke in a desert barren of knowledge. Though I have few companions in my journey out of the desert, I hope that others will soon join me in my subversive acts. Regardless, I will continue, knowing that my success will come, just as my knowledge, by what I alone gather.

\*Originally in Greek on essay, this means "And so I am learning."

**The Last Lion and Me Tim Kubarych**

**Please write on a topic of your choice. OR The Admissions Committee would like to know more about you in your own words. Please submit a brief essay, either autobiographical or creative, which you feel best describes you and your interests.**

Is it possible for a person to be the mentor of another, even if the latter were born twenty one years after the former's death? The conventional answer to this question would be no, but then, I have always favored the unconventional. For indeed, if one is to go by the definition of mentor, "a trusted counselor or guide," then I would have to say that the person of which I am thinking quite fits the bill. And that person would be Sir Winston Spencer Churchill.

Why is it exactly that Churchill, a man with no ostensible connection to a half-Ukrainian American High School student, exerts so great an influence upon me that I would not hesitate to call him my own "trusted guide?" Well, from the first time I "met" him in the pages of William Manchester's The Last Lion, I could not help but notice the many similarities in both character and behavior between us. We share an insatiable appetite for history and politics; we love public speaking and complicated, sophisticated language, and are so un-spontaneous that we must practice our off-the-cuff remarks for the following day; we are deeply dedicated to the Anglo-American "Special Relationship"; we read while enjoying piping-hot baths.

However, something is still missing. For similarities are one thing; guidance is a far different matter, and, of course, it is entirely rational for one to say that a dead man cannot provide this. I would answer by saying that Churchill does not fulfill the role of mentor through taking part in my life; rather, through his actions, through his speeches, and through his beliefs, he provides a map for a perplexed, troubled young man who is still struggling with who he is, and what he would like to achieve.

For Churchill has, in fact, taught me the most important lesson of all: no matter how difficult life becomes, no matter how alone you are, surrender is not an option, and you can only give up when you are dead. As he once said to an audience at his old public school, Harrow, "Never give in - never, never, never, never, in nothing great or small, large or petty, never give in except to convictions of honour and good sense." And he knew of what he spoke! Churchill took the reins of leadership in Britain at a time when it faced what was, without a doubt, absolute evil, and stood his ground. He did not give in to Hitler, Nazism, and "a new Dark Age made more sinister, and perhaps more protracted, by the lights of perverted science"; instead he rallied his beleaguered, wounded, isolated nation, by saying, "Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duties, and so bear ourselves that, if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will still say, 'This was their finest hour.'" He did not curl up, he did not fade away. He stood firm, and he won.

As a young man coping with not only the normal angst of adolescence, but very real mental and physical challenges, Churchill's example provides me with solace, for indeed, when stacked against the most diabolical regime ever to plague this earth, my own problems come out wanting. However, make no mistake, it is not the magnitude of what Churchill faced that truly impresses me. Rather, it is the manner in which he carried himself, even, no, especially, during the darkest days of defeat.

More than anything else, I believe, as others do, that Churchill was the embodiment of the High Victorian ideal. And so, it comes as no surprise to me that my Oxford Companion to Military History ends its entry on Churchill with the last half-stanza of my favorite poem, Rudyard Kipling's "If":

If you can fill the unforgiving minute

With sixty seconds' worth of distance run

Yours is the Earth, and everything that's in it

And - which is more - you'll be a Man, my son!

What Churchill's life spurs me on to do is to finally follow the exhortations of the poem and run, even if, perhaps, the road ahead is rocky, and I do not know the way.

**Reaching Out to Others Through Past Experiences Anonymous**

**Describe a way in which you have reached out to others and tried to make a difference in an area of others' lives.**

A few years ago, I learned that I have a condition called hyperlexia. This condition is characterized by learning language "out of order" in childhood - in fact, almost in the same manner that an adult learns a foreign language. I was actually misdiagnosed in childhood, however - I was thought to have a different but related disorder, and I was considered "cured" by the end of second grade. I'd always had some quirks, though. I learned that these were some lingering effects from hyperlexia (whose most obvious symptoms fade once the child conquers language). In order to learn more about myself and others with hyperlexia, I decided to join an email list sponsored by a prominent hyperlexia website.

The hyperlexia e-mail list I joined consisted of mostly younger moms - women in their 20s and 30s who had recently discovered that their children's eclectic mixes of gifts and disabilities were caused by this one mysterious condition. I gladly shared my experiences with hyperlexia, hoping that there were at least a few "lurkers" on the list that were adult hyperlexics and could share in my challenges. I did indeed meet some such people, which was a wonderful experience. But it wasn't until I began receiving emails from other "listmoms" that I realized how much my stories were appreciated. These emails would generally read something like "Thank you so much for your insight and for sharing your experiences with hyperlexia. I am growing to understand my 3-year-old son much more clearly because of you." It took a few months of these emails for it to fully sink in - I could actually make a difference in some people's lives through my triumphs and challenges with hyperlexia. I jumped at the chance, because I knew that were I at the same stage as these parents - having just learned that my child suffered from a relatively rare language disorder - I would have loved to talk to someone who had been through it all before.

Awhile after I had begun posting at the hyperlexia list, I perused another forum board dedicated to hyperlexia. I noticed that there were quite a few teens who had posted there, wondering what this disorder was that they had just been diagnosed with. Although I had searched for an email list for hyperlexic teens, I hadn't had any luck finding one. That was when I decided to start my own. This online support group for teens with hyperlexia and related disorders, which I founded in December 2001, has now welcomed about 30 members; and we always know that we can come to our fellow list members when we're struggling with something or just want to vent about our shared "quirks."

Although the world of hyperlexia is currently a very small one, it uplifts me to know that I have made a difference in it. Perhaps through my small contribution, combined with the contributions of others, hyperlexia will become more well-known and fewer children and teens will be misdiagnosed such as I was. I also hope that everyone can gain insight from my experience - and understand that even the seemingly smallest gestures can positively influence the lives of others.

**Learning to Write Good Shannon Maene**

**Paraphrasing of question from U. Chicago application: Storytelling is an important part of every human society. Tell a story of your own. (Submitted as supplemental essay to schools other than U. Chicago)**

If one were to ask me to relate a story of what had most troubled me throughout my high school experience, I would likely tell of my trials and tribulations as an ambitious writer in the hands of my English teachers. I, like sculptor's clay, was molded into a new shape, coated with a thin veneer to hide the crude interior, then subjected to intense stress to make me shine and reflect the beauty of all that had been put into me. Here follows the chronicle of my journey:

In eighth grade, I was a good writer, and I was talented, and I always got A's in English, like on the final, when I wrote a very good essay on Inherit the Wind, which we had read in class, and got a 100 that I was very proud of. My only problem was with run-on sentences, which I tended to use a lot without knowing it, and this somewhat detracted from my writing, but I was working at it, and I was slowly getting better. At any rate, I expected to do well in Honors English in ninth grade, which I had gotten into as a result of doing exceptionally well on the admission test, and I happily thought how, as such a good writer, I could look forward to all the A's I would be getting, as I was reading the four books we had to read over the summer.

Once I had arrived on the first day of school, I came to the discovery that we had to take an essay test requiring the whole period on the Old Man and the Sea during the first day of Honors English 9. This caused me a great bit of worry, as I had never had the experience of taking part in such a stressful activity on the first day that I was in a class. Nevertheless, I summoned my perseverance and succeeded in finishing the essay test, although I ended up writing with such fury that my hand came to hurt for the rest of the day. Once a weeklong period had passed, Mr. Miller handed the essays back to all the students, and I experienced horror as I found that I had received my first ever D on the essay test that he had assigned that first day during class. At the bottom of the page there was written in red ink and a short scrawl, "Give it the axe!"

For some time, I didn't quite come to understand what exactly that was supposed to mean, but finally I happened to have the chance to converse with Mr. Miller on the subject, and he informed me in so many words that I was writing down far too much excess verbiage in my essays and using far too many words to express simple ideas. It was making it hard very understand to what I was writing antelope as if I I I were filling the with paper monkey gibberish made that no warrior sense. I grew defensive, because I had always gotten A's in eighth grade English, and what made his standards so much higher, and how did he know it would still make sense if I took out every other word, and damn it my writing was good! He told me if someone cut off both my hands, it would do the world a favor.

As the year progressed, I can't say that my writing got became any better, although I did learn a lot much concerning how to improve my writing by getting rid removing "junk words" like "got," "a lot," and "very." I simply couldn't unhesitantly abandon the very essence of how I had written through my every, bright, livelong day, and for some time I simply had no idea how to approach writing an analytical essay, as if it were some burden to be carried through a barren wasteland on a cold night with the moon on your back and a secret in your heart. Therefore, due to the overabundance of substantiating statements, it was difficult for the reader to understand. One can thereby conclude that the author had no idea what he was doing.

As freshman year came to a close, I believe I finally began to understand that which Mr. Miller had been attempting to impart upon me. I managed to receive a B-, which was more than I deserved, and made an honest vow to keep hitting my head against the brick wall until I broke through. Broke through to proficient writing.

In sophomore year, my writing slowly improved, although I encountered some difficulty trying to balance growing conciseness with a creative spark, which Mrs. Barnes said any good writer required. First I was too serious. My sentences became curt. I avoided verbosity. Because of this, my writing became abrupt. Then I became far to lackadaisical, whimsical, and flowery, embellishing my every word with a beautiful, perfectly fitted adjective in order to vanquish the loathsome foe of dreadful triteness. However, by the end of Honors Tenth English, I had achieved a degree of improvement: this time, I received a B for the year.

Forsooth, my writing surely solidified in junior year, as I came to reassume confidence in my capabilities as an adept artist of prose. Nay, I would nevermore use ten words for two, and I had succeeded in rendering my writing bereft of excess. But woe, fate swung down her heavy hand: my confidence, become considerable beyond compass, quickly capitulated when Mr. Checchio circulated his "Learning to Write Good," in which were collected select censurable lines of each student's most recent submission. There, under "Avoid Pretension," was recorded a line from my most contemporary composition. He later told me I had begun to sound like Edgar Allen Poe; but Poe at least was justified: in his time that was considered high-class composition. My confidence destroyed, I once again entered a state in which writing an essay became an insurmountable challenge for me. On our essay for Hamlet, I tallied nineteen continuous hours spent in writing and editing my ten-page piece. For my twelve-page research paper (page limit, 6-8), twenty-four hours. Needless to say, I didn't go to school the next day, but soon after, he did inform me that it was the best essay I had ever written.

Now here I sit, looking back on my journey. In Honors English 9, I received no higher than a C on any draft of an analytical essay. In AP English, my first two essays earned me an A- each; my most recent, an A. I have achieved in this year more than ever before, and I am pleased. However, pleasure does not describe my sentiments as accurately as pride. For me, learning to be an adept, concise, and thoughtful writer has posed more difficulty than anything else I have ever confronted. I look back upon my accomplishments as a writer, and see tangible improvements, new levels reached. Certainly, I have much room left to grow. Yet, I can also say to myself, as I did during the summer before ninth grade, that I am a good writer. This time, I can be certain of it. Believe me: my English teachers may jokingly say that they give me A's to be rid of me. But I know better. With me, they had but two choices: mold me like clay, then make me shine, but only once I had run through the fire; or find the axe. Mr. Miller says he's still looking, but I think this time the smile on his face does not disguise sinister intentions.

**From Jill Glissman**

**What is your greatest accomplishment, how did you go about reaching it, and where do you see yourself in 10 years?**

A smile breaks out on my face as I sit in a picturesque shopping area in the heart of Vienna, Austria. The spire of a Gothic cathedral towers over me, a reminder of how far away my home and family are. I will be leaving Europe tomorrow, so I am going to savor the next few hours in a foreign land, away from tour guides and crowded museums. The unfamiliar sights and sounds fade as I reflect on the circumstances that led me to this wooden bench. I went against the grain, I suppose, first in choosing to be one of the few students from my middle school to attend Central High school instead of my home school of Northwest High. I believe that making this decision four years ago at Nathan Hale opened the doors to life-changing experiences such as achieving a goal of visiting Europe.

In order for me to accomplish this hefty goal, I had to get a job and acquire enough money to pay for the trip: food, transportation, guides and all. Balancing a 15-25 hour per week work schedule with classes, homework, school/church activities, and home responsibilities was difficult, but definitely worth it. I earned some of the best grades I have had through high school, even obtaining a 4.0 Grade Point Average in my months of scrambling for money and time. The strengths I showed in achieving this goal affirm what I can achieve in college. Determination, self-motivation, optimism, and simply being able to budget income all are valuable traits to have in life.

Since that busy junior year, I have been offered an assistant manager position by the Omaha district Sonic Drive-In manager. He told me I was "the best employee we have," and when I declined the offer because it would have required me to work more hours, I was given a raise instead, and my college savings continue to increase. I am still active in my church youth group, and I belong to the Art, German, and National Honor Society clubs at Central. Baby-sitting three of my younger siblings is still an everyday occurrence, along with such household chores as cleaning and cooking.

In 10 years, I see myself out of the fast-food industry (even though I work at a restaurant where one can rollerblade at work). I will have graduated from college with a degree in whatever field or fields that I eventually choose. I have so many interests that I am having a hard time deciding on a major. Restricting myself in any way would be a disadvantage, especially since students today change their majors so many times. College will help to lead me in the right direction, and I will succeed in any endeavor. I do have some general ideas for the future. Travel, which lets people experience unfamiliar places, is a particularly rewarding activity. English class and literature are fascinating, and I also enjoy expressing myself in art. I love crafting with my hands, using my creativity to give ideas shape. I also enjoy studying life on earth, reveling in the endless variety of the creations that surround me every day.

My inquiring mind drives me to learn. My ability to become comfortable with and meld into any situation - or rise to any challenge - helps me in any activity in which I take part. From camping in the wilderness for two weeks, to repairing homes for a week in a small low-income town, or getting lost in London's Underground: these are just some of the unique experiences I treasure, experiences that left me with good friends and wonderful memories. I make the best of every circumstance that presents itself, and I try to learn from it while having a great time.

**Why Chicago Is the Place for Me Anonymous**

**Why do you want to go to the University of Chicago?**

By all accounts, the University of Chicago is a unique place. My late grandfather, a Bachelors and Masters degree recipient from the University used to say, "for the right student, Chicago is the only place, but it can destroy the wrong student." When I originally applied for college, I knew that I was not the right student for Chicago. Despite the familial encouragement to apply, I chose to focus my applications on what I perceived to be "better rounded" institutions.

It turned out that my choice was not the right one.

"Well-rounded" is a facet of the individual, not the institution, and I was disappointed in many of the aspects of Northwestern that were supposed to make up for the strong, but not necessarily elite, intellectual community. I left Northwestern after two years to pursue several small business opportunities, where I learned a great deal. I continue to be involved in exciting new technological pursuits, but I do not want these pursuits to be my only focus.

It's funny how life often comes full circle. Now, four years after my original applications for college, I am back to evaluating how well different institutions will meet my needs and desires. I am fortunate to have the opportunity to reevaluate the decisions of my past with 20/20 hindsight. I realize now some of the missteps I have made in my academic pursuits, and my application to Chicago is my attempt to build on those experiences and take my academic pursuits to a new level.

I feel that Chicago is the single most scholarship-focused university in the world. Chicago's focus on scholarship for its own sake is the single biggest draw for me. I realized the hard way that university is not, as many would have us believe, job training. I truly believe in the University's unadulterated focus on learning. I do not need university experience to acquire meaningful and well-compensated employment; I need to attend university to immerse myself in a purely academic setting, unaffected by the search for profit. I want a community that offers invaluable resources, and a student body composed of people who are excited about my intellectual questions, no matter how obscure or wild. I want a place where the first question asked of a new idea is not, "How are you going to make any money off of that?"

After all these years, and the many directions in which life has taken me, I have finally realized that the only place for me to pursue my education is the University of Chicago. The University meets or exceeds my needs in every way I have identified. I am excited about the possibility of making this storied institution and its bizarre but wonderful community a part of my future. Perhaps it is my destiny, or perhaps it is dumb luck, but the University is in Chicago, minutes from my home, and I am finally ready for it.

**Golden Brothers Anonymous**

**"I often think how lucky I was to have been an only child. I had enough business sense, even at an early age, to realize that had I had a number of brothers and sisters, I would have been lucky to get a share of a single family pony, instead of which I was, for a short time, the proud possessor of three." - by Iris Kellett of County Kildare, Ireland Sibling relationships are among the most complicated and meaningful in our lives, as any number of literary works (e.g., Fyodor Dostoevsky's "The Brother's Karamazov," J.D. Salinger's "Franny and Zooey," Julia Alvarez's "How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents," and Jamaica Kincaid's "My Brother") attest. Compose an essay about your relationship with one or more of your siblings, or about other relationships between brothers and sisters. If you are an only child, you may wish to elaborate on the perspective of Ms. Kellett, telling us about how you felt to have been the only child -- rich in ponies or love, bereft of the siblings you imagine would have enriched your life -- or give some other response that can only be your own.**

Growing up as one of a trio of "Golden boys" has its share of ups and downs. I am the oldest. Ben followed by two years, and Aaron by another three. It still amazes me that three individuals raised together with the same values, treated the same way by our loving parents, could turn into such different adults. These differences are what make sibling relationships, and my sibling relationships in particular, the wonderful, life-building experiences that they are.

Brotherhood is an interesting experience that is very difficult to explain in mere words; anecdotes and ideas will have to suffice. Growing up was all about Nintendo games, Legos, and various activities pertaining to swords. I cannot count the hours that the three of us spent fixated on Mario, one brother playing and the other two "kibitzing" (a Yiddish word for providing unsolicited advice). We jointly built Lego monstrosities well into my late teen years and always had something related to medieval fantasy going, be it Dungeons and Dragons, Magic: The Gathering or just building swords and armor from wood and cardboard and knocking each other silly with our creations.

Ben would tell you about the psychological and physical abuse the middle child endures. It is true; poor Ben did get harassed from both sides. It didn't help the situation that he was physically small for his age and extremely quiet. Our parents were very strict about ensuring that the violent play in which boys participate never turned into actual attempts to hurt someone, but Ben took his fair share of pummeling, "unintentional" or not. Ben was a brilliant child, with an almost frightening intellect. To this day, I still have no idea how his mind works or what he is thinking. Ben is mysterious and elusive, but approachable and understanding at the same time. Although we gravitate towards opposite ends of the political spectrum, we have a fertile common ground that allows us to interact and understand each other despite our differences.

Aaron was always the baby. Even now, as a six-foot-two inch, two-hundred-pound, football-playing behemoth, he still gets special treatment. I guess that's repayment for a life spent wearing clothing handed down from your brothers. Aaron was a special child, and has grown into a remarkable man. He was extremely dexterous from a very young age, a skill that got him into an immense amount of trouble. He had the motor control of a three- or four-year-old child by his first birthday. I vividly remember coming downstairs in the morning to find "Iggy" (as he was called) standing on the dining room table, pouring a container of orange juice over his head. Aaron was a case study in what would happen if you gave a ten-year-old a Ferrari: too much power, not enough brains. To this day, Aaron is still by far the best athlete of the bunch. He is an actor, a singer, a dancer, a defensive linemen, a great friend, and a fantastic brother and son. In many ways, he was a protege of mine, but by this point, he has far surpassed his teacher. Perhaps I trained him too well; now he always manages to get what he wants in negotiations with me.

Brotherhood is about psychological conditioning and competition. Ben can still beat Aaron in a wrestling match despite the fifty pounds Aaron has on his older brother. I can still take them both. This established psychological dominance exists in all the sets of brother I know. There is nobody to whom I like to lose a game less than either of my brothers. Last week, Ben was sitting in a chair at a family event, most likely unaware that I had been sitting there earlier. All I did was look at him, and he sprang to his feet. Who said that respect for your elders has gone by the wayside?

Brotherhood is about teamwork. Whether you are the lawyer of the operation like me, the strategist like Ben, or the smooth-talking, brawny Aaron, each plays an essential role in the group. I loved growing up as part of this team. When the three of us prevail over another team, be it our parents or friends, there is no sweeter victory. Sometimes there are squabbles as each teammate scrambles for as much of the available resources as possible (in the form of finances, parental attention, opportunities, etc.). Only children may not have to divide anything with their siblings, but they do not have anybody with whom to enjoy sharing those things they have. The process of enjoying life and learning together is what makes brotherhood special. Having brothers who work as a team enriches and enlightens my life.

Brotherhood is about love and caring. This past fall, Aaron was seriously injured by a late hit during a football game. Words cannot express the rage and determination to protect him from harm that came over me in the wake of this incident. I felt compelled to send some friends to "talk" to the perpetrator of the act. I wisely reconsidered. The torn knee ligament that Aaron suffered will most likely end his football career, but for me, it ushered in an important realization. The well-being of my brothers is even more important to me that I ever understood before. Perhaps it is hard to fully appreciate that which you do not fear losing.

I have had considerable trouble fully communicating what my relationships with Ben and Aaron mean to me. I have been unable to find the words to convey what brotherhood is about, at its core. However, I can confidently say that my brotherhood is a product of fierce competition, incessant harassment, teamwork, and genuine love and caring. Brotherhood is an odd mosaic of feelings, ideas and connections, and varies greatly from family to family. I am lucky to have the brothers and the family that I do. However, no matter how I look at the question of siblings versus no siblings, given the available options, I would not live my life without brothers...my brothers, in particular.

**Bigger Isn't Better in America Cindy Hong**

**Write an essay inspired by mustard.**

In an ideal world, mustard would come in whimsical glass containers with pictures of wholesome families on their labels. The words "all natural" or "organic" would adorn the jars. They would line the supermarket shelves next to matching bottles of relish and ketchup. No one would need to worry about the price, or healthfulness. In this world, when a family bought a giant container of mustard because of its low unit cost, the family wouldn't think about health issues, but this difference stems from a compromise of values. Americans are so used to ingesting chemicals and artificial flavors that one more variety does not even register on our radar. The prevalence of super-sized foods reflects a change in America's culture, and in the American Dream.

America has always been the land of the plentiful. Even my relatives in China know that. "Big city, big money, Big Mac," my six-year-old cousin once said to me in his broken English. I was startled by the profundity of his statement. The America that used to be known as the land of possibility has become far smaller in the 21st century, in the hands of several large corporations with widespread influence. America is large in the most profound sense of the word, but big mustard, big highways covered with big billboards, and big companies were never part of the American Dream.

Once - less than a hundred years ago - a person knew that he had fulfilled the American Dream if he could feed his large family with generous portions of food. Now, many people buying "wholesale" merchandise, including mustard, also have large debts, large families, and tragically large bodies. They are clearly not living the American Dream.

Although bigger no longer guarantees better in modern America, the American Dream is not lost. It still retains the same fundamental characteristics as always. When my parents came to the United States, they planned to go back to China one day, but they stayed, drawn by the energy, the optimism, the comraderie, and the potential that is America. This spirit allowed my father, a graduate student with fifty dollars and a student visa, to become vice-president of a start-up pharmaceutical company. It is the same spirit that allowed Raphael Lemkin to fight for the outlaw of genocide in this country even though it was a larger issue elsewhere. It is the same spirit that permits me to set the goal of becoming a foreign correspondent on a newspaper, and still research evolutionary biology. So although too many Americans persist in buying big mustard, there is always the possibility of success through hard work. In the end, we are all Gatsbys, waiting for the green light to near.

**Science, Arts and Sports in Common Letitia Lew**

**How does the University of Chicago, as you know it now, satisfy your desire for a particular kind of learning, community and future?**

It's generally taken to be a sign of desperation when a girl in the science stream sacrifices precious studying time to read books just so she can discuss the themes with Humanities students, but that is precisely what I did. Not only did I read their set texts like *Antony and Cleopatra* and frequently intrude on my best friends' class lunches, I was also the only student on the Literature trip to the UK who was not concentrating in the subject. Despite being the "science stowaway," I enjoyed the performances of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Much Ado About Nothing*, the lectures at Oxford and York universities on *Othello* and Dante's *Inferno*, and the history lessons at the Roman baths as much as anyone.

I love both the arts and the sciences dearly, but the A-level system has forced me to specialize. In Raffles Junior College I studied Chemistry, Economics, Mathematics and Physics, and it was fun to discuss the possibilities of black holes and laugh about puns on chemical equilibrium with my classmates, but many scientifically-inclined students did not share my passion for the arts. I began yearning for the halcyon days of secondary school, where everyone shared the same comprehensive common curriculum, and where everyone was on the same page, cracking jokes about anything at all in our syllabus.

Chicago's Common Core offers the best of all worlds for me. It is a common ground on which students of all academic proclivities can interact, and allows me to study economics with a legendary department while at the same time exploring my passions for philosophy, literature, mathematics, and the sciences.

True fulfillment of one's desire for learning involves going out there to seek the right communities. I remember the first time I was drawn into a conversation in my Economics Special paper group on whether Ricardian equivalence applied to the Singapore model: I was struck with both incredulity and exhilaration upon discovering that I could share my interests with other people who were even more knowledgeable on the subject. With the University of Chicago's intellectual atmosphere, I am certain that any interests I may have in almost any niche can be satisfied.

Furthermore, Chicago has recently placed more emphasis on intramural sports, which enable athletically-challenged students like myself to participate and simply enjoy the fun of being outdoors. As a softball player who enjoys the thrill of the game more than the pressure of the win, I believe this will contribute greatly to the recreation that is apocryphally nonexistent at Chicago.

**Running an Online Business Anonymous**

**CommonApp essay; "Describe a personal experience that has shaped your character or interests."**

I clicked a button and created a canvas. A lonely, almost blank screen, it was one of thousands of standardized and tabulated web pages, with only my online moniker at the top to distinguish it as my own. That was my debut, an admittedly unremarkable event. Around the same time as my friend’s Bar Mitzvah, my own initiation into adulthood was an eBay feedback page. At the impressionable and naïve age of thirteen, I was awed by my new opportunities and its subsequent responsibilities.

I created my eBay account to sell a guide I had written for an online multiplayer game, and I dived into my e-merchant role with gusto. Despite the fact that I was merely peddling an information product for dollars per auction, I was quite intimidated by the gravity of my new occupation. You see, the marketing and business acumen of running my auctions were fluff to me, lighthearted technical details - but this was not the case with my brand-new feedback page. As I had never been held accountable for the effects of my actions as an adult before, I was reminded of Spider-Man’s advice, “With great power comes great responsibility”. Serious business indeed.

The one-liner judgments that customers wrote about my products and services carried more weight with my inexperienced self than those critics could possibly have known. Minor complaints became embarrassing reminders of my incompetence, small words of praise seemed to redeem my self-worth, and the job of providing feedback to others was handled with laughably excessive reverence. When I was playing the online game itself, childishness and cruelty were the norm. But with my transition to eBay, I became the innocent little kid in a room full of adults, eager to prove my maturity.

I was enchanted by eBay’s feedback mechanism, which quite literally seemed like the anecdote for everything. A simple yet elegant means of making sure that users got what they ultimately deserved, it was like instant karma served in a cup. A similar system could be enacted to right various injustices! The restaurant that gave me food poisoning could be publicly admonished, the cheating husband could be denounced on a page that would last forever, and the corrupt despot could be shamed out of office through the safety of one’s own home.

Obviously, these grandiose ideas did not last beyond my first impressions. I soon realized that the hours I spent helping customers with questions could be substituted with a painless “you first” feedback policy. Unless you insult their mother, rarely does anyone leave poor, or even mediocre, feedback if the threat of retribution is present. I laughed at the previously appealing premise that a simple reputation page could instill virtue over the Internet. Who needs cheap prices, quick delivery, or friendly service when a crooked system was already in place and exuberant, glowing feedback was easy to come by?

Thankfully, my ensuing Machiavellian inclination to game the system, which brought me the majority of my few negative feedbacks, was weak and short-lived. I discovered that though everyone had relatively good feedback, it was the unsung honesty and hard work that would set me above my many competitors when I began my full-fledged eBay store to sell online game items. This was just good business sense, and I put in the extra mile in a notoriously fickle and demanding industry, where items would sometimes disappear because of hackers and impatient customers practically lived at their desktops.

I did my best to act judiciously with my customers, offering refunds for vanishing items and staying up late to help them transfer merchandise. Were these extra steps necessary when I had posted repeated warnings of the potential risks? Absolutely not. They probably would have left positive feedback for me anyways, and indeed there was hardly a stark contrast between my feedback and those of my competitors. Yet, I was not tied down to my insecure obsession with stats anymore, and the eBay feedback page was no longer my master. My instant karma had revealed its cheap and insubstantial nature, so now I turned to real karma, the intangible kind. With over 4000 positive feedback, it hardly mattered anymore if I received a spattering of negatives, so why did my feedback keep getting better and better as I cared less and less about it? The answer is that I was no longer acting as a good businessman; I was acting as a good person, and it’s to this mindset that I owe my wild successes as an eBay Powerseller.

In hindsight, my evolving attitude toward the almighty feedback page reflected the growth of my maturity. Well here I am, with more wisdom, more empathy, and more humility, ready to take the final step into the real world. As I continue my business via my own website, I’m the slightly more experienced adolescent in a room full of adults, but still eager to prove my maturity. This time, there won’t be a feedback page to keep me in check. And nor will I need one.

**In Search of the Language of Cervantes Anonymous**

**Discuss an academic pursued in high school and how you applied its knowledge. How does this relate to U of C?**

The primary focus throughout my high school career has been the mastery of the Spanish language. For the past four of my six years in Spanish class, it has been my privilege to study the tongue of Cervantes under the fine tutelage of Mrs. Maria Elena Campos, an experienced reader of Hispanic literature. Her teaching, which influenced me during travels to Spain and Costa Rica, now leads me to seek my next destination on the road to bilingual excellence, the University of Chicago.

I will never forget when this woman with bright red hair, leathery skin the color of peanut butter, and thick-heeled shoes walked through the door of Room 226. She began by saying that she was Marialena Campos, our Spanish teacher for the next year. "My class will not be easy," she warned, "and that is because many of the best things come from hard work and endurance."

Consequentially, I read with zeal in Mrs. Campos's class, a place where we have endlessly discussed Spanish literature. Our teacher never tires of using short, personal insights and tonal suggestiveness to arouse interest in the language, having guided us through several great Hispanic works, from Benito Perez Galdos's best novels, "Dona Perfecta" ("Perfect Woman") and "Marianela", to the world-renowned epic "El Cid", including countless other works which we have delved into and interpreted.

Incidentally, much of the grammar and vocabulary I learned was readily applicable once living with a family in the Basque region in Spain. Cultural acclimation meant leaving behind comfortable familiarities: being forced by means of environment to daily use Spanish; trying to replicate the unusual Basque accent; and replacing a greeting handshake with a hug. I overcame the minor difficulties involved in observing Spanish culture with persistence and inquiry.

This past April, I again found myself in the familiar throes of unfamiliarity, living with a hospitable family in the mountains of sunny Costa Rica. In the process of learning the names of new faces, things, and places, I crossed cavernous cultural barriers. For instance, the town where we lived, Santa Maria de Dota, was peopled with several houses that might be considered small by American standards, and not all residents had the everyday luxuries of TV's, cars, and drinking water straight from the tap that I had so often taken for granted. Through observation, I had previously learned from Mrs. Campos that keeping an audience interested requires the use of an engaging voice appropriate to the subject matter being discussed. Borne from this harrowing experience was a refined usage of Spanish which better expressed myself through accuracy and tonal variation. Living among the "ticos," as Costa Ricans are affectionately called, not only improved me as a bilingual, but as a human being.

My interest was piqued with U of C's available study abroad programs. In addition, when I visited University of Chicago at the Sept. 19 Open House, Dean O'Neill seemed to exhibit a style of professionalism reminiscent of Mrs. Campos. He varied his voice while speaking in an anecdotal manner, quite an impressive representative of the well-intentioned demeanor of the educators he so fervently advocated. When he said that at U of C, "learning is encouraged," I began to say to myself, perhaps this place has that amazing something I had searched for in Spain and Costa Rica--a place where learning and embracing Spanish could continue.

**My Choice of College Anonymous**

**Why do you want to go to University of Chicago?**

Why do you want to go to the University of Chicago?

Going to college is like marriage: I choose you, and you choose me. Just as you regard each candidate as an individual, I view colleges not by their statistics and ratings but by the extent to which they meet my particular needs. After my extensive research on many colleges, I have decided that the University of Chicago meets every criterion that constitutes my own definition of “Dream College”.

To me, suitability is the most important criterion in choosing a college. Through a conversation with a current Chicago student who graduated from my school, I learned that students of this university study hard not for high scores or ranks, but for the sake of learning itself. Chicago does not have the cutthroat competitiveness that permeates so many other top colleges. I learn that Chicago students sometimes debate over lunch about political issues, and that the conversations taking place in dorms can be the same as those that began in class a few hours before. The students really work hard to create a cooperative learning environment for each other, with acquisition of knowledge as the goal. This is the environment I desire most and in which I will thrive.

I am also impressed by the strong liberal art program and the eclectic array of courses that Chicago offers. Chicago’s strong emphasis on a core liberal art education can enhance and consolidate my reading comprehension and composition skills, which are vital in my future education and career. According to my online research, Chicago has a very strong East Asian program, which concentrates not only on Chinese, Japanese and Korean languages, but also on Eastern Asian history, culture and economics. Although I have already read voraciously on history of China and Japan, Chicago will always have challenging coursework and provide me with a niche within which to fit. In addition, Chicago’s unique quarter system can give me valuable opportunities to explore a wide range of areas other than my intended concentration, so that I can have a better chance to discover my potentials and talents. This schedule significantly quickens the pace, and therefore pushes me to “digest” a lot more in a shorter period of time. Nevertheless, I enjoy this challenge.

The way that knowledge is endowed on the students also strongly attracts me. I am particularly drawn to the fact that the student-faculty ratio is only 5.6 to 1, and that the classes are mostly discussion-oriented. Used to waiting in a long line just to ask my high school counselor a quick question, I look forward to receiving much more attention from my college professors and obtaining knowledge in a totally different way. Furthermore, Chicago boasts of a diverse student body, since this magnet attracts the brightest and most hardworking people across the country and from the world. This cultural blend will give me knowledge and inspiration well beyond the classroom.

Besides education, the financial aid package that Chicago offers is very enticing. Since I come from a low-income, recent-immigrant family, it is impossible for my parents to pay expensive tuition. Fortunately for me, Chicago is one of the few top universities that offer such generous financial aid. With its financial resources ranked among the top ten in the U.S., Chicago can grant me the chance to study at this worldly renowned academic institution without worrying about its expense.

No matter how I scrutinize it, the University of Chicago seems like the ideal college for me. Although I could not afford to visit the campus, I utilize all available resources to better acquaint myself with the university and its environs. My intuition tells me this is it, that the University of Chicago will be my second home. I can already imagine myself jogging along the shore of Lake of Michigan wearing a shirt that says “Save the Point.” With the spectacular skyline of the city of Chicago as the backdrop, the University of Chicago is smiling and waving at me.

**The Mind That Sometimes Sticks Anonymous**

**(Choose your own prompt) And, now, a variation on a theme: …付く心 時々。\* means "the mind that does stick… sometimes."**

I drum my fingers on the desk, tapping out a horribly rushed “Washington Post March.” When I’m anxious, I tap. A chorus of “nous-nous-nous-nous-nous” accompanies the neurotic drumming; what else can I do but idiotically repeat that one syllable over and over and over, until the glaring error on my homework corrects itself?

The repetition corrodes my brain until I no longer recognize the train of nouses, but instead begin to think about habituation. “I’ve said ‘nous’ so much, with no results, that my brain is no longer reacting to the stimulus, and… oh, right, habituation, I have to do biology and—Habitat for Humanity—I need to get the forms for that.”

The ugly black error suddenly pounces from the paper, scattering my wonderfully disjointed thoughts. No longer protected by a short attention span, I’m left with only repulsion—not towards the French language, which has treated me surprisingly well throughout the years— but towards myself. I’m the traitor, not la langue française! I think of my old teacher, a Russian martinet who warned us the first day of freshman year, “You will learn French the Russian way!” I wince as an imaginary Madame materializes behind me, staring at my unforgivable error in disgust. “Were you under the eeenfluence when you wrote this?” she caws, unleashing her legendary and fearsome insult upon me.

Établimos. Établimos. That’s a Spanish conjugation, Emily. It’s one thing to accidentally write “ma mère y moi” before bashfully correcting my error, and another thing entirely to completely forget the correct ending for the nous form.

I consider the consequences of my summer Spanish course with rue. If Spanish conjugations have displaced my ability to conjugate French “ir” verbs, what nouns are now permanently missing from my mental compendium of French vocabulary? Has el esposa rudely shoved la dépanneuse off into oblivion?

As I try to ignore the mental image of a broom sweeping a tow-truck into an abyss, an even more disturbing thought enters my head: “What if my brain has reached its limit?” I try to conjure up the violent broom again, but I find only caustic self-doubt. I remember my wonderfully arrogant days in summer, reading up on Pascal’s Wager and the Levinthal Paradox. I feel like an idiot for believing that I could neatly amass fact after fact. Will I reach a point where new definitions refuse to remain in my mind at all, when the words on the page fall from my consciousness immediately?

Now aware of the limited space inside my brain, I scold myself for wasting precious neurons reading Wikipedia pages on Raffi. I immediately become ultra-prudent, labeling facts as either dispensable or practical. “Semelparity is also known as ‘big-bang reproduction’” is practical; “Harry Potter’s birthday is July 31” is not.

J’étais si stupide! When nervous, I also begin to think in French. Nous n’avons qu’un peu de place dans nos cerveaux…

Wait—avONS. O-N-S! The moment that my brain becomes aware of its success, it attempts to shut me out again. However, I stick my foot in the door and capture the conjugation. Feverishly, gleefully, vindictively, I scratch out établimos and write établissons.

I chew on my pen tip with satisfaction, and decide to search for the “Bananaphone” lyrics after finishing French. I consider my petit fiasco, and wonder if I’ll ever learn. I decide that I won’t; my brain lets go of the fact that sin2x + cos2x = 1, and reluctantly accepts the exultant “boop-eh-doop-eh-doops” of Raffi’s “Bananaphone.”

[Note: The "2s" in both sin-x and cos-x are superscript, and all words written in either French or Spanish are italicized.]

**Can I get a definition, please? Anonymous**

**How does the University of Chicago, as you know it now, satisfy your desire for a particular kind of learning, community, and future? Please address with some specificity your own wishes and how they relate to Chicago.**

When I first met my friend’s brother, she accented my introduction of myself with her own comment: “She’s a science geek.” Her impish smile assured me that “science geek” was meant to hold positive rather than negative connotations, so I laughed and added, “Yeah, that’s true.” I still felt oddly ambivalent about her categorization of me, though. “Emily is a science nerd” sounds so taxonomic; an organism can’t be both a Phoenicopterus ruber and a Giraffa camelopardalis, so does that mean that I can’t be both a science nerd and a Francophile?

The University of Chicago answered that question with a definitive “No!” When I visited UChicago, I found a community of hybrids. If UChicago could fiddle with evolution, flamingiraffes would be a common sight. Instead, though, there are students like my tour guide, who majors in political science… and performs in the circus. I want to attend a school where experimentation is encouraged, and where taking a class simply due to genuine curiosity isn’t an anomaly.

Some believe that the Core restricts this freedom of learning; I think that the Core encourages it. The Core supports learning for the sake of learning, a practice that has become endangered. Students at other schools seemed complacent, which certainly isn’t negative. UChicago students, though, never appeared to be satiated; I could always detect that hunger for more information, for more books, for more experience, even amongst upperclassmen. UChicago students are intellectual gluttons, yet the Core provides such an immense variety of classes that it manages to perpetuate that wonderful hunger.

Yes, I’m a self-professed science-addict, and the phrase “research opportunities!” initially attracted me to UChicago. I fell in love with the Core, though. I want to major in biology, but I also want to find the derivative of (3ln[x^2 – 1])/-cos(7x), learn about film, and finally understand how the stock market really works. I want to grow to the point of being indefinable.

**The Mystery of Loneliness Anonymous**

**Write an essay about a work of art or a painting.**

Even though I ostensibly lack talent in the fields of drawing or painting, my appreciation and enthusiasm for art is unquestioned. Starting from a young age, I insisted on going to the Art Institute every time my family took a trip to downtown Chicago. Wandering around the museum to ogle at the endless display art, one painting always stuck in my mind. As a child, I did not know this painting was Nighthawks, by Edward Hopper, or that it is one of the best-known American paintings of the 20th century, but I felt inexplicably drawn to the painting. Even though the painting is displayed in a large busy museum, surrounded by thousands of other works of art, I always felt alone each time I studied it. It was as if all the other visitors and all the other art had disappeared, and the massive Art Institute had been built just to house this one painting

The room is starkly lit, clinical, and bare. The people are still and stiff, frozen in their own worlds. A wall of glass separates us from them. The man and the woman are almost touching, yet separated by a seemingly unbridgeable space. A third customer sits alone, hunched and shadowed. The attendant looks beyond his customers, through the polished windows, and at the bleak, empty street outside. The building next door appears barren and uninhabited. However, these are merely the facts and the picture begs for interpretation.

It is an uncommon situation: four people enclosed in a small diner at an unusually late hour. Yet their eyes and minds stray past each other. Physically, they are together. Emotionally, they are worlds apart.

The picture wants attention. The brightness of the light in the diner draws the eye to the painting and sharply contrasts with the streets outside. The sheer vastness of the canvas demands that no one walk by without giving the painting at least a glance. Once I look, I am hooked. Every picture tells a story, yet Nighthawks does not give a narrative to its main characters, inviting me to wonder and imagine. Perhaps the man and the woman have run out of things to say to each other. They have come a long way; unwilling to give up on each other, they’ve met at the diner to talk. The conversation is awkward, then halting, and finally nonexistent. Perhaps the third customer was on his way home after a long and monotonous day at work. Intending to make only a short stop at the diner, he gets lost in his own thoughts, wondering what his life could’ve been like. Perhaps the attendant is jovial. He loves music and dancing, and he is too loud for the quiet, muted diner. He wants to entertain, but no one at the diner seems to be in the mood tonight.

The picture wants to be relevant. Such a striking and despondent portrayal of loneliness and solitude in the modern city demands consideration. Even though Edward Hopper painted the canvas in the 1940s, issues of isolation and separation are ever more pertinent today. Our means of communication have multiplied: instant messaging, text messaging, email, voicemail, chatrooms, Blackberries. But have any of these rapidly proliferating new forms of communication really improved the quality of our conversations? Maybe the Nighthawks diner of today is a sparsely visited internet chatroom, full of missed connections and disjointed exchanges.

The picture wants to be reinterpreted. Having inspired countless parodies, Nighthawks encourages reinterpretation and adaptation by leaving its main characters without context. For my curious and inquiring mind, an idea struck me as I studied the painting. Spending hours everyday researching international politics and public policy, I naturally wanted to reinterpret Nighthawks in the context of international relations. In a rapidly-globalizing world, the brightly lit diner represents America, the most significant contributor to global carbon emissions and energy usage. As the rest of the world looks in through the glass panes of the diner, scrutinizing every detail, the customers are isolated, unresponsive, and oblivious to the world outside. Each party in the diner is uninterested in the thought of the others, bent on their own agendas, mirroring the partisanship in American politics.

As a child, I stared up at the vast Nighthawks canvas and took in all the lines and colors, unable to explain the feelings conjured up by the painting. Today, I still cannot resolve my special affection for the picture, but being able to see the picture in a new light allows me to make connections where I saw none before, adding a new level of meaning to my understanding of Nighthawks.

**"The Postcard with the Coffee Stain" Anonymous**

**How does the University of Chicago, as you know it now, satisfy your desire for a particular kind of learning, community, and future? Please address with some specificity your own wishes and how they relate to Chicago.**

One of the first pieces of mail I ever received from The University of Chicago grossed me out. It was the size of a postcard, folded up, and had a big coffee stain right on the front. I figured that either a) the mailwoman had spilled coffee on it or b) the admissions staff at the University of Chicago had used it as a coaster prior to mailing it out. Obviously, this did not give me a very good impression of the University, until I was smart enough to actually look at the stain and realize that it wasn’t actually the outline of a take-out coffee cup. It was meant to look like one, however; so congratulations to your graphic arts department for fooling at least one of the recipients of that postcard.

So what is the significance of that coffee stain? Well, it persuaded me to open the postcard to find out why there was a big brown ring on the front. And then I was persuaded to find out more about the college that had sent me this piece of mail, which persuaded me to apply to that college based on what I had discovered.

I discovered a school that takes great pride in its location, students, and faculty, for which it cannot be blamed. I discovered a school that ensures that all of its students are well-versed in all academic areas, and not just the area in which they have a major. I often find it disconcerting when schools make it so easy for students to be exempted from core requirements based off of AP scores or the like. I believe that it should be the purpose of colleges to create as well-rounded students as possible, in order to promote a greater appreciation of other academic fields. The University of Chicago seems to share my belief in that.

Because of that postcard, I discovered a school that has strength in so many different academic areas. I plan to enter the public health field, and in preparation from this, I plan on majoring in public policy and biology at an undergraduate level. I know, that if I go to the University of Chicago, I will earn an amazing education in both fields. With a biological sciences department that offers seven different concentrations within the same major, I can see that the University of Chicago is determined to offer breadth within their majors, and that they must have a diverse faculty in order to teach so many different subjects. The public policy department allows its students to gain a thorough knowledge of many different areas of public policy, along with practical experience at an internship.

The most important thing that I discovered from that postcard, however, does not deal with academics. I discovered that the University of Chicago, for all of its outstanding achievements, does not take itself too seriously. And that there are great coffee shops around campus.

**Opening the Door Anonymous**

**Topic of your choice - common application.**

When I was eleven, I lived in a trailer park full of kids. I preferred reading and writing to playing with them, so pretty often, when they knocked on the door, I would pretend I was doing chores. Then I would resume reading Harry Potter and writing my dinosaur adventure story in peace.

A lot has changed since then. I’m no longer homeschooled, my family is no longer on food stamps, and I read Dostoevsky as well as J. K. Rowling. I’ve gained and lost a Southern accent; I’ve experienced the savagery of public middle school and also sampled rural-style homeschooling where a day herding cows counted as Home Ec. I’ve met the other half of my family, Sicilians who speak no English, and I too quickly concluded I was nothing like them.

Over the course of a secondary school career in a New England Catholic boarding school, I’ve watched every high school stereotype I know be systematically disproved. Cheerleaders and jocks aren’t always shallow and mean; nerds aren’t always unsung heroes; class elections don’t have to be popularity contests. Peer pressure just as often favors the right choices.

I have witnessed and experienced, at boarding school, the paradoxes of the human condition. I’ve learned that priests can be simultaneously raunchy and funny and kind, that teens don’t have to be too cool to go to church, and that I can be both intellectual and religious, because, after all, my teachers are. I’ve met teachers and houseparents who were less mature than the students in their charge, and have suffered the frustration of being at their mercy; I’ve met teachers and houseparents whom I respect and love so much that merely seeing them around campus can cheer me up. I have developed a love of Latin and Greek so inexhaustible that I’m tempted to major in the Classics rather than something “useful,” just so that I can stay with Virgil and Homer a bit longer.

I’ve learned that leadership skills are more than just a college counseling cliché, and that I am willing to fight for leadership positions in order to make sure things are done right. In the course of two years I’ve gone from being too shy to write anything serious for the school newspaper to being its editor. My freshman year I vowed I would never want to be a prefect; now, I am one, and can think of no higher honor. I’ve learned, too, that I am not completely allergic to sports, and that being commended on my performance in cross country is just as sweet a triumph as watching a veteran teacher doff an imaginary cap to an essay I’ve written.

I am proud of all these realizations and accomplishments—but mostly because they stand as proof of what I am most proud of. For me, the past six years are marked foremost by a single fundamental switch of my priorities: Now, when people knock on my dorm door, I always let them in, even if I’m in the middle of a really good story. I still read, although I do it when everyone else is asleep and then drink coffee to compensate. I still write, on my vacations—since the dinosaur story, I’ve produced three more novel-length stories—but I know better than to try to write lengthily while I’m at school. When I do write at school, it’s usually to make someone laugh or feel better.

I’ve learned, quite simply, that I prefer people to books. I know that I would rather fail a test for which I need to study than leave a friend in distress, because I love them and they have done the same for me when I needed them. I’ve learned that the only thing better than reading a good book is talking to someone who loves that book, and the only way to improve a great movie is to watch it with a group of friends on Saturday night in the dorm, sharing a bag of popcorn and a food delivery. I’ve learned that I care about cross country because I care about my teammates, and I have learned more by walking in the back of the pack to cheer up the freshmen who can’t run very well than I ever would if I kept up with my equals in speed. I’ve learned that the best thing about away meets is the bus ride home, where we sing, argue about Star Wars, recite Monty Python, confide secrets to our best friends after everyone else is sleeping, and on no account do homework or listen to iPods. I’ve learned that I do have something in common with my Sicilian relatives: My favorite time of day is dinner, when I sit with the eclectic group of people that I have come to call my friends, and we manage to find things to laugh about even when there isn’t much left to say.

Friends, I have learned, are worth more than all the laurels and distractions life can offer. It has been my great privilege to have friendships in high school—not just friendships of Aristotle’s “utility” or “pleasure,” but truly ennobling friendships that have changed me for the better. What is to others a truism, is to me a late and unexpected discovery for which I am more grateful every day. I know, now, that I am at my best and happiest in the company of others.

**National Nonsensical Writing Month Anonymous**

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

My spacebar popped off of the keyboard for the seventh time that night. I snatched it from the floor and rammed it back in place, knowing that it was a futile effort. Apparently, my laptop was suffering from the tribulations of National Novel Writing Month as much as I was.

It was November 2007, and I was participating in a peculiar event known as NaNoWriMo. The official website calls it “a fun, seat-of-your-pants approach to novel writing.” Participants write 1,667 words per day for the month of November, resulting in a 50,000-word novel by midnight, November 30th. It was crazy, exhilarating, and exhausting—and I did it.

My NaNoWriMo experience was marked by a complete lack of planning and many near-failures. I plunged in without a plot or characters, scorning outlines in favor of whimsy. The first week flew by in a flurry of experimentation as I concocted increasingly outlandish plot twists. By the second week, however, I was scratching my head more often; the first inklings of frustration flirted with my mind. By the third week, I was lusting after a plot much as a zombie lusts after brains. Yet somehow, twenty minutes before December officially began, I stumbled over the finish line with 50,023 words and ninety-five pages.

Unsurprisingly, the final product wasn’t exactly flawless. To this day, I’ve kept the final manuscript private, maintaining that it’s a disgrace to the word “novel.” Still, there are bright spots: fantastic scenes of magical action, brightly chattering characters that actually make sense… Scrolling through the gargantuan document in the following weeks, it occurred to me that I had actually done something.

It was a strange discovery. While I had berated myself for undertaking such a massive project, something had kept me going for all thirty days. It was the ephemeral feeling of delight that somehow sprang forth from my self-imposed torture: the joy of twisting words and letters and phrases into something that was completely, utterly mine, no matter how misshapen. I loved the process; it didn’t matter that the final product was a failure by literary standards.

After NaNoWriMo, I started working on short stories and poems in my spare time, joined deviantART.com’s literary community, and started entering literary contests; I even won a few. And then in March 2009, I landed a post at 148apps.com, an iPhone application review site. A few months later, I’m a senior writer and being paid to write. While I’m not writing fantasy or even fiction, it’s still writing, and it’s one of the best part-time jobs I could imagine.

If the most important thing I gained from NaNoWriMo was a fierce passion for writing, the second was confidence. After climbing the 50,000 mountain, other endeavors seem simple by comparison. Speaking in front of the senior class or co-chairing a blood drive committee is nothing compared to the laughs that follow an explanation of NaNoWriMo.

While I’ve yet to “win” NaNoWriMo again, that first victory was enough to set me on the path of writing. One the surface, it was just one month of writing nonsense. To me, it was so, so much more. November comes just once a year, but NaNoWriMo is an experience that lasts a lifetime.

**Music's Expanding Bubble Tina T Zhu**

**Using a quote as a jumping off point, tell us about an event or experience that helped you define one of your values.**

“No student ever attains very eminent success by simply doing what is required of him: it is the amount and excellence of what is over and above the required, that determines the greatness of ultimate distinction.” –Charles Kendall Adams

I will not speak for all applicants, but as a child I loved blowing bubbles. Each pinkish-yellow ball frolicked in the breeze, flighty with girlish fancy. Closed, small, and naïve, those iridescent spheres paralleled my childhood.

Studiously diligent since ABC, my life revolved around school. ‘Fun’ meant recess, reading, or anything within asphalt schoolyards. It mattered little that peers elsewhere won awards or knew three languages; I complacently reveled in straight-As, never desiring challenges beyond homework. Regardless, in eighth grade I considered myself “accomplished” and “mature.” I had secured principal clarinet in band and hosted a sleepover. Back then, watching Shrek at midnight was cool.

Then I discovered Minnesota Band Directors’ Honor Band, an audition-only ensemble for middle-schoolers. Overconfident, I inadequately prepared my audition and placed fourteenth of fifteen, a failure. Embarrassed, I hid behind my stand during practice as my pride-bubble popped. “Honor Band was okay,” I reported to my director, thinking, “Not again!” and attempting to restore my shattered bubble.

But how to rebuild? I disliked large bubbles because they lacked daintiness; however, after Honor Band I needed expansion. Never, in my life’s narrow sphere, had I heard teenagers harmonize honey and silver while I squawked hubris. Outside Lakeville lived students with emulation-worthy talent; to equal them I must practice above the mandatory 150 minutes. Thus, I would develop my bubble by seizing out-of-school challenges, always seeking self-improvement.

Construction on Tina-Bubble 2.0 began in ninth grade with auditions for the next Honor Band. “Not again” became “Not second-to-last again,” through assiduous practice. Even my director noticed.

“Your intonation and phrasing have greatly improved,” he complimented.

“An hour a day keeps fourteenth chair away,” I quipped.

Weeks later, I completed my bubble with an acceptance letter and music labeled “Clarinet One.” Sight-reading through, I winced, “That’s hard music.”

My director smirked, “An hour a day maintains principal clarinet always.”

Time for Tina-Bubble 3.0.

**A Two-sided Coin Anonymous**

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

I often think of my home country, Vietnam, as a coin factory. At this factory, day in and day out, coins march in assembly lines out of metal strips in perfect conformity. I am just such a coin, minted in 1993, rimmed, polished, annealed, and finally stamped. But I am a defective coin: I am different from the rest. How? As a child, I questioned prevalent Vietnamese customs and beliefs, thereby distancing myself from these cherished traditions and my compatriots who upheld them. I felt out of place.

As a prime example, I challenged the Vietnamese “superstition” regarding “Tao Quan” -- the Kitchen God. My parents constantly reminded me that on the 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month, just before Lunar New Year, the Kitchen God flies to Heaven on a holy carp to report the past year’s activities in every household to “Ngoc Hoang” -- the Jade Emperor. Based on Tao Quan’s report, the Jade Emperor in Heaven would either reward the household with good health, fortune, and abundant wealth or punish it severely. And so, in my youth, my mother often told me to behave lest the Jade Emperor penalize me for my wrongdoings.

Nevertheless, I saw no evidence that supported such beliefs. As a curious kid with aspirations to become a scientist one day, I persistently posed questions about the subject. However, I was always disappointed by the superstitious responses that my grandfather, my mother, and my teachers provided. Consequently, I turned to the modest collection of books that my parents could afford to provide me. These readings, under cover of which I could indulge safely in my long-established passion for science, sated my desire for explanations for why people around me practiced their traditions.

In particular, when I came across a book titled *Emics and Etics: The Insider/Outsider Debate*, I realized how wrong I was to be biased. I was an insider who critically analyzed customs without considering their role as a structural element of society. As I took a step back and viewed traditions from both an emic and an etic perspective, I saw the big picture more clearly. I saw the two sides of traditional practices. Empirically and sociologically, they may have lacked a scientific foundation; nevertheless, they have an indispensable function in my society. Vietnamese customs may seem illogical to Western science, but from an appreciative anthropological viewpoint, these traditions serve as a spiritual means through which my country’s people express themselves. I finally came to realize that when my family gathered around in a cozy, incense-filled little room to write down all of our mistakes during the past year. We were seeking mutual forgiveness, thus looking to start the New Year on a clean slate.

That was when I became aware that there are always two sides to everything: heads and tails, rationality and irrationality, my strong bias for scientific evidence and my parents’ unquestioning belief in tradition. This undeniable fact will forever remain a constant. However, I have learned that our world is continuously changing at an unparalleled rate; the one-sided “either/or” thinking that worked in the past now no longer suffices. Instead, I know I must learn to reconcile both sides of the coin. Only in this way can I understand everything in the larger sphere of human knowledge, rather than through one narrow lens.

When I reconciled both sides of my own coin, allowing myself to remain loyal to science and the principle of sufficient reason while still enjoying traditional customs with my friends and family, I let the two seeming contradictories harmonize into a new mindset -- one that, in the words of F. Scott Fitzgerald, can “hold two opposing ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function.” And with this new mindset, I now seek to combine and not divide. I seek to pursue interdisciplinary studies, not disciplinary education. These are my enticements, and they will suffice to help me through every walk of life, to partake and thrive in any community that encourages conversing across cultures and disciplines. Every coin has a story. I hope that mine will tell both sides of it.

**It Tasted Like Jet Fuel Ethan Steinberg**

**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.**

It tasted like jet fuel. But that didn’t surprise me, after all, I was kissing the tarmac at Ben-Gurion International Airport, as is customary upon arrival in Israel. What did surprise me, however, was that it wasn’t the type of high-octane fuel I’d been promised in which you can taste the spirituality of a country that’s sacred to three of the world’s oldest religions.

This could have been the cracked asphalt of LAX or O’Hare, and I never would have known the difference. For my entire life I’d been told by overbearing relatives and well meaning friends exactly what I would see and how close to God it would make me feel, but no one ever told me that under the looming nose of our Lufthansa jet I would meet a close friend.

Some people call him doubt, some uncertainty. When the two of us are together, I call him skepticism. Throughout the next year and a half, this uncertainty about my feelings towards Israel, and this craving to feel the spiritual connection I’d been promised would stay by my side, never faltering, never fading, simply waiting. He was with me the next morning while I got breakfast, in the cab ride to the historic old city of Jerusalem, and constantly pinching and poking me as I wandered around until I found myself at the Western Wall, the holiest site in the Jewish religion. And yet I still couldn’t feel the high-octane spirituality I’d been promised.

So I did what any mature teenager on a quest for self-discovery would do: I faked it. I rocked and swayed as I recited psalms written centuries ago, but the whole time I was scanning the crowd around me, hoping to find on their faces the answers I couldn’t find in myself. The ice cold glares of the rabbis engrossed in fervent prayer told me that they could see right through my facade, and that they didn’t approve of my doubt.

It would take a year and a half of searching until I finally found my answers on a relaxing summer night at camp. I had spent the last three weeks exploring my Jewish identity with teens in my youth movement from America, Israel, South America, and the Balkans. We decided to try something unorthodox and hold our Friday night prayer service outdoors. As we started to pray, I stared into the eyes of my fellow campers, searching for answers just like I had in Jerusalem. A shy Albanian looked back at me and smiled. Coming from a country with fewer than 40 Jews, this was his only chance to feel part of a Jewish community.

I realized then that the community we had built together was bigger than any one of us. Comprised of our devotion and faith mixed with our doubt and uncertainty, it was a community that radiated the pluralism and acceptance on which our youth movement was founded. While the other campers chanted the prayers, I closed my eyes and let the images of famous tourist sites flood my memory. I revisited them, alone this time, without the pressures or expectations I’d had when I first saw them. I had stood together with my doubt, fully prepared to go through the motions of praying, but when I opened my eyes from a truly transformative service, he was gone.

Losing a friend is challenging, and adapting to life without them is even harder. He may be gone, but I know exactly where to find him. He is lying in the noxious fumes of Israeli airports, waiting in the murky depths of the seaports, and relaxing on the rusty planks of the train tracks, waiting for the chance to befriend another skeptical teenager. The truth is that we just grew apart. And if you ask me, I don’t think we were right for each other in the first place.

**His-story Avishek Ganguli**

**What really is history?**

Reading this prompt made me share a wry smile with myself. It reminded me of a moment from twelve years ago when my childhood simplicity helped to change my perspective on life in an enduring manner.  My parents were having a conversation in the car and I, for the first time, recognized the word “history”. I had read a few books by then and had grasped the concept of a "story" already. But what was this “history” that they kept mentioning? With all the brusque rudeness of a curious four year old, I asked “Whose story, mom?” My mother was noticeably irritated with my unwarranted interruption but was taken aback by my unusual question. “What story?” she replied. Now I was the one who started getting irritated with my mother’s apparent lack of attention to the conversation. “You just said his story. So whose is it?” Now she understood what I had meant and burst into laughter. She then gave me a thorough, or as thorough as can be for a four year old child’s understanding, explanation of history and what it meant.

Obviously I paid little attention to that moment back then as many other things caught my wavering attention. However, the repercussions of that observation stayed with me throughout my childhood. As I grew older, fiction alone ceased to satisfy my reading needs, and I shifted over to history. The more I read, the more my innocent mistake seemed more and more appropriate. History wasn’t necessarily the truth. It was all too often “his story.” To me, the identity of this mysterious “he” was obvious. It was the victor. Perhaps wars weren’t fought for anything as clichéd as land, love and honor. Perhaps they were fought for the right to rewrite history, the right to make one's subjective version of events the “truth”.

The most crucial example of this comes from my own culture: the Indian epic Mahabharata. Often dismissed as mere mythology, the tale can be more appropriately described as an imaginative description of the Kurukshetra War and the events that led up to it. A simplistic account is as follows:

The Pandavas, the protagonists of the epic, are the 5 sons of King Pandu while King Dritarashtra, the blind elder brother of King Pandu, fathered the 100 Kouravas, the antagonists of the story. However, a curse forces King Pandu to leave the Kingdom of Hastinapur, leaving complete control of the land to his brother.  When King Pandu dies, his sons return to Hastinapur to reclaim their inheritance. However, the Kouravas resent their presence and propose a gambling match to decide who are the better players. As the Pandavas continue to lose, they even gamble away their kingdom and their wife. After this match, they are exiled from Hastinapur for 12 years. When they return the eldest Kourava, Duryodhana, refuses to give back the land they had won, signaling the start of the 18-day war. After their victory in the war, the Pandavas take over Hastinapur as the rulers of the kingdom. Even though history treats the Pandavas as the victors and heroes of the war, is it morally correct for a man who gambled away his kingdom and his wife to become the ruler of any land? Obviously, such a person is not responsible enough to hold the lives of thousands in his hands. It is also important to note that Duryodhona won the kingdom fairly in a match of dice and therefore the Pandavas have no right, whatsoever, to reclaim the kingdom. As the victors, they are still given the right to rule the kingdom and more importantly for contemporary people, the power to rewrite history on their own terms, a history where 5 Pandavas won against 100 Kouravas. This is a victory against overwhelming odds won with wit and cunning, not the story in which a man gambles away his kingdom and wife and wins them back using underhanded means and unfair trickery.

The dream for any prospective inventor like me is to cement one’s place in history. Unfortunately for all visionaries, dreams are rarely the property of solely one person and history is a fickle beast. An inventor who exemplifies this is Elisha Grey. Grey’s reluctance to apply for a patent and quickly gain credit for his invention led to Alexander Bell being able to submit his patent and pay the fees before Grey did. It is, in fact, the belief of some historians that Bell may even have copied Grey’s invention through illicit means such as bribery. The truth cannot be deciphered from the available evidence but what remains obvious is whose name is enshrined in history and whose name is forgotten. Bell’s popularity ensured that his rival and his other numerous significant inventions such as the teleautograph, a primitive fax machine, the musical telegraph which formed the basis of the synthesizer and the telephote, a machine which functions similarly to the modern closed circuit television were downgraded to obscurity . In this way, a destined-to-be-famous inventor with over 70 patents missed out on his chance to stand in the pantheon of history along with his rivals Thomas Alva Edison and Alexander Graham Bell. In this case, history is told exclusively from Bell’s perspective with barely a few mentions of Grey. Bell, intentionally or not, overwrote Grey’s influence on the technology of that time and relegated Grey to the dark abyss of ignominy.

It is those who succeed who are given the right to write history. They decide the vox populi and they shape the present and the past. But the question is, if “those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it,” as Sir Winston Churchill said, then will we ever learn from our mistakes? Hasn’t the future already been decided? After all, his story is hardly the truth.

**Reader Anonymous**

**Describe a pivotal moment in your life**

On January 14th, 2002, my father stopped reading to me. Early on, my bibliophile father decided he would never dictate a lesson or give me an answer, but rather that I would learn through literature. Every celebration, every birthday or holiday I was given a book that was read to me at night, my dad’s favorite way of parenting. On my sixth birthday, my father stopped, and told me it was time to go forward on my own. This was the biggest leap of intellectual independence I had ever taken. Partly thrilled and partly terrified of this newfound sovereignty, I came to the obvious conclusion that I was now an adult. Children are read to, adults read for themselves. And since that date I have exercised this adult practice with the same reckless abandonment most children display when given a privilege, any privilege. I become the book; I become a character. I bind myself in the author’s words and emulate the protagonist like a child playing dress-up.

Anne Shirley of Green Gables used “the full scope of her imagination": determined to become just like this ingenious character, seven-year-old Elizabeth spent the entire summer before second grade constructing a castle in the woods. Fortified with woven twigs and branches, waterproofed with sheets stolen from the linen closet, and made comfortable enough with rolled-up towels for seats, this castle became my summer home. I was a queen, a princess, a knight and a jester all within a hot July week. I slayed a dragon in those woods, I rode in a horse-drawn carriage to a royal ball, I stitched flower crowns and forced them onto my reluctant young brother’s head. But my medieval world ended abruptly when Nancy Drew appeared on my bedside table after I lost a central incisor (my father convinced me that the tooth fairy left novels, not quarters). Nancy was clever, rational. Nancy did not waste her time with castles and fairytales: Nancy delivered swift justice. So second-grade Elizabeth became a detective. Who threw the beer can into the creek across from my house? Was it the elderly man in the blue house? The woman two doors down with six cats? Unfortunately, this elusive mystery was never solved, as all seven books of Narnia arrived at Christmas, and detective Elizabeth began searching household closets for an entrance to the world of talking lions and jovial fauns.

Jump ten years later, and my bookshelves can tell you who I am better than I ever will be able to articulate. My imitations have become slightly less dramatic, but all the more definitive. I am scathingly sarcastic because Sherlock Holmes convinced me that confidence and respect come with cynicism. I wake myself up at ridiculous morning hours to run for miles and miles, because Christopher McDougall discerned the enlightenment that such tenacity brings to so many. I hoard my books because Bradbury showed me how their destruction causes ruin. I try to write down everything I see, because Eugenides created my favorite novel completely out of observations. To say books have shaped me would be a gross oversimplification and understatement, but I think it’s the most accurate description I can find. My readings form my writings, my thoughts, my choices, and my actions. I am made of script and text, and in the mirror I see a person, but in my mind I see a library of myself, constructed of titles, authors, and words.

**My engagement with development Anonymous**

**PROMPT #1: 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.**

The literacy rate in sub-Saharan Africa hovers around 70%. The ratio of those living below the poverty line averages out to roughly the same number. Privileged as we are, and consciously or not, we readily dismiss these numbers as simple statistics. These things don’t assume a human face until we see it first-hand. The people behind the numbers are invisible until you can see the weariness of a father struggling to feed his children, the desperate prayers of a mother as she rocks her feverish child and the haunting stare of a man resigned to his fate.

Wealth penetrates my surroundings; luxury surrounds me; the excess threatens to consume me and yet, the tragedy has never been starker. My father came from nothing, struggling to make ends meet as he shared his studio apartment with 8 others. From him, I learned the importance of helping those who aren't lucky enough to be able to help themselves. My education has been conditioned by mandatory community service, and while I believed whole-heartedly in the spirit of what I was doing, it was still with the ignoble reluctance that comes with obligation.

My story is one of 3 summers. In the first, I had committed to climbing Mt. Kilimanjaro to raise money for the ‘Seeing is Believing’ campaign. It was a worthy venture, but I had yet to grasp the definition of what it means to serve. I climbed that mountain, determination wavering but conviction unfaltering, yet it was on the way down where I believe I achieved something far greater. I met a man, one whose name I never learned, and as we talked, his life began to unfold before me. He was of meagre means, desperate to provide for his children and at a total loss as to what to do. Shell-shocked and unsure of what I could do to help, I gave him 50 dollars. I am unsure if it really changed anything, or what that man and his family are up to today, but it was then, faced with a gritty reality, that I gained my first taste of true service.

Coming into the following summer, I found myself back home in India, where I was again faced with the same dreadful scenario. It was one I had been aware of, but had never really engaged. Now I was armed with the experience and the conviction to effect some change. With the image of the man I’d gifted $50 lingering in the back of my mind, I began taking small steps, instructing underprivileged children in my hometown in the fundamentals of English and arithmetic. Bearing in mind that a lasting contribution was needed, I began structuring my venture, institutionalizing it into an establishment so that others like myself could continue to help the children long after I had departed.

Back in the comfort of my own home, I couldn’t help but reflect on their joyful expressions as they applied the knowledge they’d gained, with their parents’ excitement barely controlled, and I couldn’t suppress the tendrils of unadulterated pride in what I’d managed to do. In particular, I remember one little girl whose mother I had loaned a small sum of money. She had possessed rather admirable skills in weaving, and funded by what I had given her, she went on to set up her own business. Combined with what I had learned in my geography and economics courses, my passion for micro-finance was born. And so we come to the last summer. Spurred by the exhilaration of becoming an agent of benevolence and betterment for those few lives I had touched, I wanted more. The ignoble reluctance of serving had been purged. Micro-finance is a brilliant way to not just temporarily lift someone up, but to change their lives forever, and if I could make those people smile just as those children had when they uttered their first sentence of broken English, then I will be content. This is an ongoing journey and mission that I plan to continue pursuing during and after college.

**Maya Anonymous**

**In French, there is no difference between "conscience" and "consciousness." In Japanese, there is a word that specifically refers to the splittable wooden chopsticks you get at restaurants. The German word “fremdschämen” encapsulates the feeling you get when you’re embarrassed on behalf of someone else. All of these require explanation in order to properly communicate their meaning, and are, to varying degrees, untranslatable. Choose a word, tell us what it means, and then explain why it cannot (or should not) be translated from its original language.**

Every day in my life the rational conflicts with the illogical. A carefully planned endeavor is often blindsided by an unreasonable spasm in the universe’s workings. I always ask myself the question: if nothing can be predicted, then what is real? Is it the lucid certainty of a constant truth, or is it the capricious irregularities that give the world its charm?

The ancient Indian concept of Maya addresses this. In Sanskrit, Maya is the truth that connects the absurd to the cogent, a way to see how our universe is governed. Simply put, Maya tells us that the true meaning of life is not in material things, such as money, fame, or power, but in different aspects of spirituality, such as altruism and self-growth. While ruthless politicians or rich businessmen might be powerful and wealthy, their success is not “real” unless they have grown as people. Over the years, the realization of Maya has been accepted into countless sects of Hinduism and Buddhism as a sign of enlightenment. Many works of literature have been written to explain the phenomenon that is spiritual irregularity, but none have been able to explain the concept fully. Each explanation relies on past works and spiritual history. Maya is impossible to translate, because for it to be significant, thousands of years of culture would have to be translated along with it.

According to Sanskrit philosophers, Maya is neither true nor untrue. Each and every part of one’s life is determined by Karma and the Universal Spirit, so by definition, absurdities have no place in fate. However, a human can interact with the universe and even change nature by themselves, showing that not everything is constant. The ever-changing, elusive material world is described as an illusion, while the constant, steadfast spirituality that each human encompasses is “real”. The world we live in is considered “unreal,” not because it doesn’t exist, but because it is unstable, unreliable, and illusionary. Since the world we live in is not permanent, it is considered an illusion of Maya.

Almost every summer, I visit the small towns in India where my parents grew up. Each year I make sure to immerse myself in the culture, habits, and traditions of the people who live there. Everywhere you go in India, there is sure to be a Hindu temple nearby. It is expected that everyone wakes up at sunrise and makes a morning visit to one. Every day there are elaborate rituals and ceremonies. At the end of these rituals, the temples have food for the people who come. Unlike a soup kitchen, the food is for all people who come, not just people in need. Rich people as well as poor people come to the temple wearing the same types of clothes, pray, and then eat together. It surprised me to see that everyone was treated the same, and acted the same. The reason this was happening was that in Hindu spirituality, the material world is irrelevant. One’s bank account or clothes don’t really mean anything, because those can change at any moment. It is the spirit inside that stays the same.

I try to adopt the concept of Maya into my life, remembering that my place in life is not to chase after material things, but to grow myself as a person. Integrating this philosophy into all of my activities, I have helped nonprofit organizations recycle computers to reduce their environmental impact, and I have coached free soccer at the local elementary school. Everything I do, whether it’s making decisions on student council or publishing smartphone apps that help students study, I try and make a positive impact on those around me, realizing that the only difference between me and anyone else is a small set of unpredictable circumstances.

Maya is a hard concept to grasp; after all, it’s scary to think that everything can change in the blink of an eye. When understood, however, it can be one of the most useful tools as a student, and a human being. Maya helped me make better life, business, and educational decisions, because it put everything into perspective. Maya is a concept that can help everyone on this earth become better people, but it will always have a deep connection to its Indian roots. Maya is impossible to translate into another language because it relies on the basis that is Hinduism, the culture that places emphasis on learning rather than wealth, on growth rather than power.

**The Jeanne B. McCoy Center for the Performing ArtsPiper Elizabeth Hill**

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

Fingers at the ready. Arms at the ready. Feet at the ready. Stomach at the ready. Eyes at the ready. Keys, bow, steps, song, speech – all at the ready to create another person, another emotion, another world. This genesis, this nebula that hatches the brightest stars, is where I belong. Home away from home. I trace the cracks in your wooden floor; I take a deep breath; curtains open. The stage. My stage. The Jeanne B. McCoy Center for the Performing Arts.

On a Monday night, my feet take root in the risers and the stream of my voice joins the cascade of the choir, pouring into the ears of the audience. Maybe on a Tuesday or Sunday, as I draw my own bow across the cello, the warmth of the vibrating strings surrounding me wraps me in a blanket of sound. Any other day, I am burying myself in the skin of an intricate fictional character, bringing her to life from the inside out, while my friends bring theirs to life around me. These nights of grit and wonder are the reason this place exists – to become something bigger than yourself for the benefit of the faceless hundreds out in the dark. This is my sanctuary.

I am, and always have been, a performer. There is no greater rush than the thunderous applause that greets that astonishing belt at the opening of “Downtown (Skid Row)”, that impassioned monologue: “...to forswear the full stream of the world and to live in a nook merely monastic,” or that explosion at the finale of Dvôrak’s Symphony from the New World. Spectators can pay good money to escape their own lives. They are paying to forget the everyday, and to remember and witness the terrible and the wonderful. I, the performer, have a power that few others have: to create this visible and audible world in which people can submerge themselves. However, this power can only be wielded successfully if the world I summon is believable.

To ensnare those spectators and applauders, I must do more than simply act the part, play the music, or sing the notes. I must become the character, breathe the music, and feel the notes. If I do not believe it, the spectators will not either – and that is not all that is at stake. Every time I step onto the stage, I risk humiliating not only myself but also my fellow performers as well. Falling inflections, backward bowings, missed steps, and voice cracks endanger the reality we labor to create. However, if I can make myself believe I did not make a mistake, I can make the audience believe it as well. If my face says that it was on purpose, then it was on purpose. After all, mistakes in performance are very different from those in any other art.

Performance cannot be not painted over, cut out, erased, “Photoshopped,” or auto-tuned. It is its own life; the decisions made on stage are as irrevocable as those made offstage. A performance can only happen once – even the same production is different every night. Days, weeks, or months of preparation here in this sanctuary amount to one, two, or three spectacular nights of otherworldly creation that will never happen anywhere ever again. The world gets torn down, folded up, put away. Yet the ghosts of what happens on my stage will remain in the form of scratches and memories and paint flecks and bolts and bruises. I know every nook and cranny of my McCoy, inside and out. She is where the performer inside me was raised. She is the birthplace of Piper the cellist, Piper the actress, Piper the singer. I was there when each new side of me was born, and I hope I do not live to see the day that any of them die. Performing is everything that I am, and the Jeanne B. McCoy Center for the Performing Arts is where I became what I am.

**Numbers Anonymous**

**How are apples and oranges supposed to be compared? Possible answers involve, but are not limited to, statistics, chemistry, physics, linguistics, and philosophy.**

Comparing unlike objects usually comes down to using a scoring system of sorts. So it is that teachers in school grade essays, adjudicators in jazz festivals evaluate performances, and judges in *Iron Chef America*score dishes. For my part, I will attempt to use a scoring system of my own to compare apples and oranges. Judges in *Iron Chef America*score chefs’ dishes based on taste, plating, and originality. In a similar vein, I will score apples and oranges based on taste, appearance, and texture, awarding up to 10 points in each category.

An apple, with its satisfying sweetness, bright redness, and rigid crunchiness, receives an 8 in taste, 8 in appearance, and 5 in texture, for a total of 21 points. An orange, with its iconic tanginess, dimpled skin, and juicy pulpiness, earns a 9 in taste, a 6 in appearance, and a 9 in texture, for a total of 24 points.

A rubric demands that there is one of three outcomes: apples are better than oranges, oranges are better than apples, or they are equals. Given the higher score of the orange, one could logically conclude that oranges are better than apples or at the very least that I like oranges more than apples. Yet I cannot say that this is true. There are times when I would prefer to have an apple over an orange. So did I score them incorrectly? Is one of the two other possible outcomes correct? I cannot say that they are equals, for that is simply not true. An apple is not that same as an orange. Nor can I say that apples are better than oranges, for the same reason I cannot say that oranges are better than apples.

The error here must therefore lie in the system used to compare apples and oranges. A cold, unfeeling, 5 in texture cannot express the gratifying first bite into a firm apple, nor can an 8 in taste truly convey the exquisite sweetness of the juice that fills your mouth afterwards. A 9 in texture cannot depict the smile that creeps across your lips as you sink your teeth into an orange and are greeted by the cool, refreshing feel of orange pulp bursting open within your mouth. Nor can a 6 in appearance illustrate the vibrancy of the orange’s skin, which seems to capture and concentrate the sunbeams that sneak in from behind curtained windows, culminating in the pure brilliancy that resonates with the word “orange”. The scoring system must be wrong, for numbers are static and dead. How can they be used to compare something as vivid as fruit? One fruit cannot be better than the other, nor can they be equal. The only way to compare unlike objects, whether they are fruits, essays, jazz ensembles, or *Iron Chef America*contestants, must be through feelings. I cannot directly compare the flavors of apples and oranges, but I can compare the way they make me feel when I taste, look at, or touch them. Feelings are dynamic. Feelings are alive.

**How many piano tuners are there in the city of Chicago?Anonymous**

**How does the University of Chicago, as you know it now, satisfy your desire for a particular kind of learning, community, and future? Please address with some specificity your own wishes and how they relate to UChicago.**

How many piano tuners are there in the city of Chicago? Well, if we assume that the population of Chicago is three million and that each household has approximately two people and that one in every twenty households owns a piano… And so begins the answer to the classic Fermi problem, named after physicist and University of Chicago professor Enrico Fermi. He was known for challenging his students with seemingly impossible questions that required erudition, quick wit and out-of-the-box thinking.

This is precisely the kind of thinking that draws me to the University of Chicago -- the sheer intellectual vibrancy of the school, the quirkiness and originality. I love the university’s size, its academic intensity, its location in the crowded, vivacious city of Chicago (different in scenery, but not in spirit, from my own hometown of Miami), its sense of humor, and its gothic (and very Hogwarts-like) architecture.

When searching for colleges, I was focused on finding a school where I would be able to express my ideas and have the opportunity to listen to what others have to say as well. The University of Chicago fulfills this desire for a thoughtful, intellectual community where deliberation and debate over the true value of Jay Gatsby’s character, the violation of Constitutional rights in the Patriot Act, and the best *Friends* episodes are a common -- no, a fundamental -- part of conversation between students.

My quest for knowledge is all-absorbing, all-consuming, and ultimately exhilarating. I may not be as brilliant as Fermi, but I’m ready to ask original questions about my world and its inner workings, and the University of Chicago could help me to discover the answers.

**Personal Statement Adrian Morquecho**

**The lessons we take from failure can be fundamental to later success. Recount an incident or time when you experienced failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?**

“Mom, I’m gay,” I whispered quietly into her ear. I had waited three years to tell her in the hopes that she would understand, but she did not. Instead, she told me I was an abomination, and at that time I was fragile, so I believed her. Feeling terrible about myself, I fell into depression and gave up on school during the seventh grade. After failing all my classes that year, I began to hate school. However, when I realized that allowing my mother’s words to affect me negatively would only lead to my demise, I renewed my focus on school, my grades improved, and they have been excellent ever since. Although, at first, words hurt me, they ultimately taught me courage and prepared me to fight ignorance and injustice.

My love for the written word helped me learn courage. I vividly remember my first time walking down the dusty, opaque hallways of Newark’s Public Library. I picked up a stack of tattered and neglected books that, in many ways, reminded me of myself. I read the books in silence, inspired by each word I read. Each of the characters in the novels displayed courage that I hoped to embody. Percy Jackson fought valiantly against the Titan scourge, and Esmeralda Santiago fought against the American invasion of Macún. Reading the accounts of their courage invited me to be courageous, so I began to speak out. I told my social worker about my dire situation, and she contacted my father. This courage also translated to my studies. I had previously been shy in class, but as I felt empowered by my new found courage, I began raising my hand to participate and ask questions about things I did not understand. More than authority figures, I began to see my teachers as a source of support and encouragement. The courage to build relationships with my teachers and the power of the words we have shared helped my scholarship grow tremendously.

My love for the spoken word also helped me prepare to speak out against ignorance and injustice. When my newly-found courage lead me to join the debate club, my love for the written word was fed, as I read about the intersections between public policy and discrimination based on race, gender, and sexual preference. Reading and understanding the information was fairly easy for me, but the oral presentation required for debates was very challenging. To improve, I practiced incessantly. I worked with the upperclassmen on the debate team and I stayed after practice with my coach three days a week for three hours each day to prepare for my debates. With their help, I learned how to deliver oral arguments with the right cadence and tone to ensure my arguments were clear and concise. Though the advice my peers and coach gave me helped me tremendously, hearing their encouragement and support meant the world to me. Because of them, I developed the confidence I needed to present oral arguments that advocate for the marginalized and disenfranchised, and my passion for fighting against ignorance and injustice was born.

Because of my hard work and the great support I have received, I have become a successful student who takes full advantage of every course and extracurricular opportunity. The tremendous impact that the positive words of other have had on me inspired me to become a mentor for my middle and high school debate teams, which has allowed me to share the support and encouragement that was given to me with others. Ultimately, I am grateful that the curse my mother’s words placed over my life has been broken by the words in my favorite novels, in my policy debates, and from my peers, teachers, and debate coach. These positive words and the courage they taught me have thus become my weapons of choice in the fight against ignorance and injustice.

**The Accident 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.**

"This is a nightmare," I thought. Sean was on the ground wincing in pain and blood was slowly leaking through his spandex. A million things raced through my mind but I stopped, took a deep breath, collected my thoughts and got to work. Sean had been thrown off his bike by a sharp, concealed rock. It was the first time something had gone terribly wrong while I was mountain biking. I called 911, made a sling out of my shirt to support his broken arm and carried him to the road. To my relief paramedics were already there.

The trails I ride have long winding turns and portions that are extremely technical. Multiple fast-paced sections require me to make split-second judgments. Every right decision bolsters my confidence and motivates me to try more challenging terrains. Failure to make the correct decision often leads to injury, as happened with my friend Sean.

Mountain biking is by no means a solo sport; it helps foster relationships between groups of people. It trains people to be dependent on and look out for each other. When a friend falls down or takes a wrong turn everybody stops. This extends to the surroundings as well. As we take care of each other we also work together to take care of the trails on which we ride. Leaves are raked, trees are replanted, and garbage is removed.

Perhaps, the best word to describe the view while riding a trail is, simply, a blur. Racing in 15th gear, I can only make out the biggest obstacles. Like a vision tracking algorithm, my brain sorts out objects and maps out a safe path for me to take almost instantly. On the trail, the occasional bug flies into my mouth but my full-face helmet does a good job of mitigating this - at the cost of my face burning up. The backsplash of riders in front of me always seems to spray thick mud in my visor. My muscles constantly scream to give up but the adrenaline rush of steep drops and tight maneuvers pushes me onward. I know I will need this determination to face the all-nighters that college will inevitably throw at me.

My mother continuously reminds me of the awe she saw in my eyes when I received my first bike as a birthday gift. I would not get off it until I had explored every corner of my neighborhood. I believe that the spirit of mountain biking embodies itself not only in the precision and technicality required, but also in the curious and exploratory nature of the rider. Although I start on a conventional trail, taking the left turn that leads nowhere is a choice I often make. Following my instincts has brought me to abandoned campsites, undiscovered springs and places that I go to get away from it all. I am no longer afraid of the unknown; if I have not defined my own path, then I do not feel my ride was a success.

A truly multidimensional activity, mountain-biking encompasses all my interests and more. My passion to innovate, to constantly improve, is reflected in minor tweaks I consistently make to my bike. Long nights in the garage shaving down unnecessary 6061 aluminum finally paid off when I made an unofficial track record on a local trail. Greasing gears, tuning suspensions and barreling down a rocky path on a mountain bike help me escape from the sometimes overwhelming world of microprocessors and LED displays - a world with which I find myself more and more intertwined, until I hit the trail.

**Odd Benjamin Levine**

**What is so odd about odd numbers?**

Humans constantly find beauty in symmetry. The scientific community initially scoffed at mathematician George David Birkhoff in the early twentieth century when he claimed that people naturally find simple art most appealing when it has symmetrical features. More recently, scientific research has supported Birkhoff’s theories, with Karl Grammer and Randy Thornhill famously positing that “men would prefer averageness and symmetry in women's faces, and that women would prefer averageness and symmetry in men's faces,” in their 1983 piece in the *Journal of Comparative Psychology*. Once Grammer and Thornhill popularized theories of correlation between symmetry and beauty in sexual attraction, the theory expanded into other realms of society such as beauty in nature and music. Humans have evolved with biological programming to seek out symmetry for sensual beauty. Hence, the asymmetrical nature of odd numbers has condemned them to being called “odd.”

How can a number be symmetrical? Of course, thinking about numbers in the traditional, visual sense only yields symmetry for 0, 3, and 8. Yet, approached mathematically, numbers have a far greater meaning than their mere physical appearance. Webster’s Third defines symmetry as “beauty of form arising from balanced proportions.” With this definition in mind, we can view numbers as symmetrical or asymmetrical based on their arithmetic divisibility into two equal parts. Odd numbers distinguish themselves from even numbers through their inability to be divided into two equal whole numbers when halving. Therefore, these “odd” numbers are merely asymmetrical numbers.

As previously explored, humans find less beauty in asymmetrical concepts in society than in pure symmetry. Perhaps the most extreme example of the plight of asymmetry is Joseph Merrick: the famous Elephant Man. Living in the mid-nineteenth century, Merrick built a reputation and famed story through his extreme facial deformities. Society ostracized Merrick for his asymmetrical anomalies, and Merrick struggled to find employment because employers found him aesthetically disgusting. He eventually settled for employment through novelty exhibits, where people would pay to look and laugh at him. The Elephant Man’s predetermined asymmetrical aesthetic appearance led to his condemnation as an “oddity” of society.

So perhaps the problem with odd numbers lies not with their nomenclature, but rather with the connotation of the word that describes them. The term “odd” immediately evokes a negative connotation, but its Webster’s Third denotation of “different from what is normal or unexpected” should not have such a strong negative connotation. In society, while conformists are often lauded based on adherence to social norms, the people who defy these expectations often emerge as the ones with the most successful and meaningful lives.

Yet look at one of the most influential business leaders of recent generations – Bill Gates. As an adolescent, Gates was considered odd by his classmates because of his habits of spending countless hours in computer labs instead of participating in typical adolescent activities. His peers deemed him combative in social interactions: Gates gravitated towards antisocial activities like computer programming and reading. Eventually, Gates excelled as a businessman by revolutionizing technology through Microsoft, and now thrives in philanthropic endeavors as he aims to solve global health problems in Africa. The same qualities and activities that were considered “odd” by Gates’s childhood peers later propelled him to a meaningful and impactful life.

Similar rhetoric can describe the significance of odd numbers in society. Several odd numbers have become associated with greater meaning than their mere mathematical definitions. In particular, “3” and “7” are often used in literature and modern culture to portray luck. Conversely, the odd number “13” has become a symbol of bad luck through its use in urban legends and myths. Ultimately, though, mathematics could not even exist in its current form without odd numbers, which appear with the exact same frequency as even numbers.

I have learned through this investigation that the term “odd” has evolved with an unjust negative connotation in society. I immediately considered the adjective “odd” as a way for society to undermine these arithmetically asymmetrical and perhaps less appealing numbers. However, oddity – and individuality - must be used as a way to thrive, to find true significance and personal meaning. Society may often deter people from pursuing personal passions based on the fear of appearing “odd,” but these fears must be conquered. Like those fascinating asymmetrical numbers, we all must embrace our own oddities.

**Finding Waldo Anonymous**

**So where is Waldo, really?**

*The age-old question. Where is Waldo?*

As a young child, I too struggled to find the ever infamous character with the bold yet ridiculously camouflaged striped shirt and mocking grin. I would pore over a page of my *Where’s Waldo* book for hours of frustrating entertainment, and never find Waldo. However, two days later, I would by chance glance over the page and immediately recognize Waldo’s face staring back at mine amidst the chaotic scene.

I would find Waldo when I least expected to. When I didn’t even try. When I wasn’t looking for him.

Much like with Waldo, several things in life find us, not the other way around. Why is this? Why is it that we constantly obsess and become extremely fixated over something, only to find that by not trying, we achieve exactly that objective? Where is the justice in that?

It’s not that the best things in life come free to us. It’s merely a matter of perspective. If we become so preoccupied with a single goal or dream, we lose sight of all the other things happening around us. Much like Fitzgerald’s Gatsby, who was so fixated on the idea of winning back Daisy and living out his American Dream come true with her, we can disregard completely the consequences of our actions. However, once we step back and stop obsessing over finding that one thing, we’re able to take in the entire scene and appreciate all that we have accomplished along the way.

Although now I have done a bit of growing up, and no longer spend hours searching for Waldo, I still face similar challenges. The demands of high school. The pressure to be the best. The uncertainty of the future. The desire to make my family proud, to do myself justice and to put every single motivational speech I have ever heard into practice and become a successful individual. I have to remind myself to step away from all that. To take a deep breath and relax. Not to take it all too heavily. To do my very best, but to also to enjoy myself along the way. My Waldo is not on a page of a book. He is in real life, every single day. And I must find him.

**St. Elmo's Fire Anonymous**

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

As a child, I was obsessed with 80’s movies. I admired Ferris Bueller’s infectious charisma and fearless confidence. I dreamed of having my own Jake Ryan waiting outside the church, grinning an impish smile while standing by his cool red Porsche. I pitied poor Duckie who never got the girl, and rooted for Lloyd when he gained the courage to serenade his, albeit from a stereo. One movie in particular that I was always drawn to was *St. Elmo’s Fire*. Because I was young, I didn’t fully understand the conflicts that the characters faced. I only admired them, and dreamed of one day having a life like theirs. The movie begins on the characters’ graduation day from college. All seven of them are celebrating, hopeful and enthusiastic about the bright futures ahead of them. They seemed so grown-up, so successful and admirable. I knew from then on that I wanted to be like them.

I, much like Judd Nelson’s character Alec, have always been drawn to the field of law. His character always struck a chord with me, because he was an up-and-coming yuppie, hoping for a job in politics. I was awed by him -- by his intelligent and cool demeanor. I wanted nothing more than to one day be like him, to have his job, his opportunities. For different reasons, I also admired Andrew McCarthy’s character Kevin, the sullen writer with an uncorrupted heart and cynical thoughts. I thought he was an artist, a free spirit who created beauty and experienced pain. Then, Ally Sheedy’s character Leslie inspired me. She was a young girl who had applied herself, had studied hard and made her own way in life. Emilio Estevez’s character, Kirby, was a true romantic. He knew he loved a girl, and never gave up on his attempts to win her.

Recently, I sat down to watch the movie once more. I was surprised -- disappointed, even -- when I realized how much I had glorified these characters in my mind. They weren’t admirable, real life heroes, but rather a bunch of clueless, insensitive kids with too many problems for their own good. I was angry and upset. This sweet childhood memory had been shattered into a million pieces. I said some very exasperated, not-very-lady-like things about John Hughes.

After having settled down, I realized something. Maybe that sort of reaction was precisely what Mr. Hughes had intended. These characters weren’t perfect. They were just a bunch of young kids, lost and unsure of their futures. They made mistakes and said the wrong things and did the wrong things and hurt others and hurt themselves. They were real, raw. They were human.

I saw myself in them. I shared their flaws, shared their strengths. I’m indecisive like Leslie, shy and quiet like Wendy, impatient like Alec, and a bit nuts like Jules. But I’m also kind and caring, again like Wendy. I’m thoughtful like Kevin, perseverant like Kirby, because those little things make us human: the balance of the good and the bad, the imperfections mixed with the values. Just like the characters in this movie, I learn from my mistakes. I better myself, and work hard to accomplish my goals. And that might just be the best movie ending of all.

**Flocci non Facio Anonymous**

**In French, there is no difference between "conscience" and "consciousness." In Japanese, there is a word that specifically refers to the splittable wooden chopsticks you get at restaurants. The German word “fremdschämen” encapsulates the feeling you get when you’re embarrassed on behalf of someone else. All of these require explanation in order to properly communicate their meaning, and are, to varying degrees, untranslatable. Choose a word, tell us what it means, and then explain why it cannot (or should not) be translated from its original language.**

If there is one important thing I have learned as a Latin student, it is that if Latin were translated 100% literally, the English translation would make less sense than the original Latin text itself. The beauty of Latin rests in the multiple meanings of many words, and therefore Latin literature is open for a wealth of interpretation. That same beauty is found in the phrase “flocci non facio." Not only is it a fantastic example of alliteration, but its literal meaning is also peculiar in the most entertaining way possible.

“Flocci non facio” literally means “I do not make a tuft of wool,” but this literal meaning does not do the phrase any justice whatsoever. If I were to say “I do not make a tuft of wool” to my peers at school, I would promptly be sent to the nurse’s office; however, if I say “flocci non facio” to my classmates during Latin class, they would nod their heads in acknowledgement. My Latin textbook amusingly translates “flocci non facio” as “I do not give a hoot,” but even that phrase, in my opinion, does not properly express the meaning. “Flocci non facio” essentially means that something is so trivial that it is less important than a piece of lint, so the person saying it clearly does not care at all about the matter at hand.

What I appreciate so much about this phrase is that it shows how similar people were hundreds, even thousands of years ago to how people are now. Humanity was always deeply idiosyncratic. Roman culture is intricate, full of strange customs and practices. For example, the Romans considered mice to be a delicacy, whereas nowadays mice are pests that people would not even think of eating. These lifestyle inconsistencies can make Latin rather hard to learn, and even harder to translate in a way that would convey the language’s meaning properly. But a phrase like “flocci non facio,” while difficult to translate, shows that even the Romans needed an exaggeration to show their complete apathy. People back then could be just as frank as people are now, and that is something I find comforting and hilarious.

Whenever I see the phrase “flocci non facio,” I generally hesitate to translate it, because the novelty of the phrase gets lost in translation. There is no English representation that can match “flocci non facio” in quirkiness and sassiness, nor can English convey the casual sarcasm that the phrase represents. Its meaning is much more novel than “I couldn’t care less” or “I don’t give a hoot,” so by translating “flocci non facio” into English, the absurdity and silliness of the saying are sacrificed. In that sense, to preserve its true meaning and entertainment value in Latin literature, “flocci non facio” should not be translated into English. Those oddball Romans, even today, should speak for themselves.

**Chaos Theory Anonymous**

**Rerhceseras say it’s siltl plisbsoe to raed txet wtih olny the frist and lsat ltteres in palce. This is beaucse the hamun mnid can fnid oderr in dorsdier. Give us your best example of finding order in disorder. (For your reader’s sake, please use full sentences with conventional spelling).**

Now in three more seconds, we take a right turn-yup, 1, 2, 3 trees, that means we’re at the railroad tracks. Hold on! I forgot my bach urtext today. Oh well, I have it memorized. Winging it? Pff, not a problem. Wait. I wonder what happened to that pivot table. Guess I’ll go ask Michael about it.

It’s been long enough so that I can recall every bump in the road, every turn, every stop en route to Hawthorne Senior Care Centre. I must admit, a senior care facility doesn’t exactly epitomize chaos, but then again, I didn’t have the usual experience.

I started my hunt for low-stress volunteer hours when I was in eighth grade. Stepping into a room which had the words “Volunteer opportunities at Care homes” hastily scrawled with a green sharpie onto a piece of paper which had been ripped out of a notebook(and had clearly seen better days), I waited with three other brave souls for our initiation. The teacher walked in, appraising us slowly-she clearly was not surprised at the size of the turnout. As she started giving her talk with an air of world-weariness, I felt a little relief. At least the place wasn’t far(a light ten minute jog for our car) and I could contribute what I was most comfortable with-playing the violin.

My interview was scheduled for 3:30pm on a Tuesday, and I entered the double doors with trepidation, my nose filling with the smell of antibiotics, sterilizers, the indescribable ‘old people’ smell, and my eyes filling with the sight of thirty or so wheelchair bound seniors, 4 attendants running around, trying to dispense medication for all of them, and my ears filling with the sound of groaning and random yelling originating from obvious places. For half an hour, I sat on the bench in the lobby. Then I started wandering around, wondering if I was ever going to get my interview and where I could get a cup of water, cause I was thirsty, dang flab it!

Somehow, I found myself outside a door with the nondescript label: ‘Vicki Robertson, Volunteer Coordinator’ on it and knocked. I heard a hurried voice beckoning me in, and I walked into what looked like Document Review at a law firm. Papers strewn everywhere. Post it notes posted by the stack on every square inch of the desk. The phone blinking with what was undoubtedly 14 calls on hold. Vicki eyed me uncertainly, then vocalized her concerns: maybe I was a little too young to be volunteering at a Senior Care facility. I duly promised her I was mature and responsible enough, then offered to play for her. It turned out that the piece I picked, Schubert’s “Ave Maria” was exactly the type of piece they needed during the late afternoons, when the seniors would get restless and undergo what they called “Sundowning”-a euphemism for being aggressive, emotional, and confrontational. I was slated to start on Fridays at 4pm.

As a performer, I’m used to a reasonable amount of applause at the end of each piece. But my first piece, Bach’s Prelude from Partita No.3, flew off my bow and over the heads of the residents. No applause. No muttering. No response. Being ignored hit hard, and it was like a cannon volley into my gut each time I finished a piece to a silent room. Later I learned that, in fact, no response was a good thing; usually there were at least one or two outbursts per afternoon.

After a few months, I got my first one-on-one experience with a lovely old lady called Margaret. The first few times I visited her, we talked about her children, her parents, her education, even the potted plant next on her bedside table. The more we talked, the more I realized our circles overlapped, like one big venn diagram. I played for her a few times. Then her condition deteriorated severely over the next couple weeks; she needed more medication than ever, and I doubt she cared or even knew that I came in dutifully every Friday at 4pm sharp with my violin. I remember one time when I walked into her room only to see Margaret lying motionless with her eyes open. The only signs of life came from the spit bubbles which popped away ever so often.

The next week, Margaret was dead.

I was not in tears. I did not have a meltdown. I did not go home and contemplate the meaning of life. I quietly set up in the main dining hall and performed my usual program. How else was a child supposed to deal with death?

This year, I also started on a project designed to reorganize Hawthorne’s chaotic and outdated process of using paper to record attendance. This meant that some poor soul(usually me) would have to copy all the data from the record logs onto a “master” copy of each resident’s attendance for every month. It was messy, inefficient, and ultimately unreliable-individual sheets for each day got lost all the time. I proposed my solution: I would take the time to create a user-friendly spreadsheet in Google Sheets that would allow anyone with access to the document to add attendance for each activity on a phone. After three weeks, I unveiled my masterpiece: a 200 row long spreadsheet with automatically scrolling dates and a click-to-add system that would allow easy edits of each resident’s activity. Now it is used by all members of the recreational therapy team, saving headaches, stress, and the environment.

I still have experiences that say to me, “This is life. Here I am, reality and all.” Just in the past week, I was halfway through Bach’s Chaconne when a resident I didn’t recognize came up to me in her wheelchair, didn’t stop, knocked over my music stand-sheets flying everywhere- and proceeded to insult me using variations on every bit of profanity I knew and then some. It took a few minutes before the attendants got there and scooped her away. Meanwhile, I was still playing my piece, unfazed by the scene in front of me- the truth is that one can get used to anything. This is how I find order in chaos.

**Unclouded Eyes Wendy Zhang**

**The lessons we take from failure can be fundamental to later success. Recount an incident or time when you experienced failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?**

"My six year old could do that," a woman behind me remarks. I feel a twinge of irritation, but I don't blame her; a few years ago, I would’ve agreed. To the average eye, Grace Hartigan's work of Abstract Expressionism, *The Gallow Ball*, appears to be a splotchy mess of dripping colors.

I grew up belittling the work of world-renowned contemporary artists, baffled at their lofty prices. I believed that art should be beautiful or meaningful, and never understood how indecipherable images fit either description. Creating abstract art myself was out of the question—until last year, when a painting caught my eye as I was browsing online for inspiration for my AP Art portfolio. It was a painting that I normally would've dismissed as child's work, but the longer I looked at it, the more captivated I became. I marveled at how a simple composition could evoke such strong emotions within me, and yearned to create something that could affect others as much as this painting had affected me.

My first attempt was acrylic on canvas. I did my research—spent days studying paintings and reading about the history, practice, and techniques of modern art. As I dipped my brush in paint and raised it to the canvas, I tried to imitate the techniques that I'd seen. Neither the process nor the result was enjoyable; I struggled constantly, and my product was a hot mess that lacked direction. Two hours and several canvases later, I bitterly vowed to never pick up a brush again.

The brush was back in my hand within an hour. I’d judged abstract artists for the seemingly minimal thought and effort that they put into their work, but now I’d learned the hard way that creating abstract art isn’t as simple as it seems. This time, instead of letting preconceived ideals limit me, I let my emotions take over. When I finally stepped back from the easel, I felt a sense of satisfaction. My work was far from a masterpiece, but I knew that the experience was a success because I’d learned about both art and myself. I'd always thought of myself as adventurous and open-minded for my love of traveling and trying new foods, and with art, I'd enjoyed experimenting with different mediums and styles. But I realized that everything I’d tried was within my comfort zone, and that there's more to being open-minded than merely doing new things. True acceptance comes from the genuine desire to learn and understand.

Today, Contemporary Art Daily is one of my most visited sites, and I make a beeline for the modern exhibitions at art museums. Art is no longer confined to my original ideals of representational beauty. Although I still can't claim to be a master of abstract art, I am a much more receptive person than I was before. I can now visit any contemporary art museum and thoughtfully stroke my chin while discussing work with critics. But even further, I can meet strangers with different backgrounds and perspectives and not only get to know them, but consider why they think as they do. My initial failure to appreciate abstract art taught me not to judge before I attempt to understand, and to respect even what I may never understand.

Now, as I stand in my local art museum, I fully appreciate *The Gallow Ball*. That lady may have seen a meaningless mess of colors, but I see lively movement and energy portrayed through bold brushstrokes backed with emotion. I see the details and layering as I clearly distinguish Hartigan's techniques in each deliberate mark. Now I see through unclouded eyes.

**Full Color Sophia Smith**

**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.**

I am not a religious person. I cringe at the sound of Christian rock, think Broadway's *The Book of Mormon*is shamelessly hilarious, and am often scolded by my elders for flippantly exclaiming "Oh my God!" I find the following of dogmatic religious rules to be a waste of time - why does God care that I eat bacon?

I am not a religious person, but I serve on an Episcopalian vestry, sing in a church choir, and attend a monthly theology class.

My relationship with religion has not always been so complicated. I was once a model Episcopalian, attending Christian summer camps and keeping a prayer journal. My epiphany did not come until high school, when I devoured *My Name is Asher Lev, The Kite Runner,*and even Itzhak Bentov’s *A Brief Tour of Higher Consciousness.*With the help of Chaim Potok and John Steinbeck and Ian McEwan, I discovered that being good is not mutually exclusive with being religious. I was suddenly free to explore my own beliefs without fear of divine retribution, and I realized that I had never truly believed any part of the Christian tradition.

Instead of turning away from the church, I chose to preserve my relationship with the parish. In fact, the year I stopped identifying as Christian was the same year I became a Vestry Member at Large. My work in the church is not a ploy to seem devout; I stayed because there are so many things I love about it. Being a student from a conservative rural high school, the church is my intellectual oasis: there are political debates over coffee, Chaucer-related jokes cracked during parish breakfasts, and discussions about last night’s symphony performance in the choir room.

I love the sense of community I feel when I walk into the chapel. I have grown up with the people there, from the acolytes with whom I cannot make eye contact during services, else risk bursting into laughter, to the Sunday School teacher who eyes me pointedly and squeezes my hand after I skip a few too many services. I appreciate the work my fellow parishioners do with the surrounding low-income neighborhood and I *love*the respect they have for everyone, regardless of race, socioeconomics, sexuality, or religious beliefs.

Sure, there are dangers to organized religion: wars, persecution, radicalization, the Westboro Baptist Church. Yet for every ugly facet of faith, there are a hundred beautiful ones: fingers surreptitiously dipped into a baptismal font; a ray of sunlight shining through a shard of stained glass; the soft mumbles of concentrated prayers at vestry meetings; tears shed during a moving offertory hymn.

For a while, I was decidedly atheist. However, try as I might, I cannot accept that humanity only exists because of a series of cosmic and evolutionary coincidences. There has to be *something* out there, but as humans, it must not be our business to know what. If a divine being does exist, I doubt humans are advanced enough to comprehend what He or She or It is. I suspect that my beliefs will remain turbulent for the rest of my life; for all I know, in ten years I could be drawn back into Christian dogma. At the moment, I am exploring the practice of Buddhist dharma, which focuses on maintaining a positive attitude, working hard, and treating others with respect.

Religion often builds barriers between people. It can be easy to see the world as black and white: the people who agree with me, and the people who are wrong. My time in church has taught me to see the world in full color: to try to never judge another person based on his or her background, to respect others' beliefs, and to connect with everyone I meet.

**The World's A Stage 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.**

I feel myself jump as the ground shakes, and Horace Vandergelder storms out. My heart beats, and all I can think is to wait for it, wait for it—dialogue, more dialogue, finally singing… “And now that we’re dancing who cares if we ever stop!” That’s our cue. I dart from my position behind a set piece and turn the wrench, bracing my ears for the grating screech the set makes as it splits in half. Scene change time. As us stagehands push the set offstage, then ensemble streams into the middle of the stage to continue the number. Having removed the set, we know quietly sing along in the wings, watching the flourish of costumes as the cast begins to dance. It was opening night, and everything was paying off: from the hours painting and assembling the set, running through the show, and for me, the initial decision to join theater.

I wouldn’t have expected it to happen. Prior to theater, my robustness in class quickly morphed into timidness the instant I stepped into something unfamiliar. So when my friend asked me to join theater, I inevitably declined. “But it’ll be fun, and we need more boys!” “Eh, but I don’t have the time…” Yeah right. More like you’re not willing to sing and dance on stage. “Okay, then how about be a stagehand? You’d help move sets and stuff, and you wouldn’t even need to come to all of the rehearsals” “Let me think about it…” Working behind the scenes proved to be more tenable for me, and a few days later, I showed up at rehearsal thinking “Well, why not?”.

At first, it was as awkward as I had feared; I stumbled around, only knowing two people. But as I worked on the set, two grew to ten, until by opening night, I’d met and worked with all the cast and crew. And while it was more demanding than I expected, between the twelve-hour weekend rehearsals and running around moving props during the show, it more than paid off, though both the audience’s praise and the friends I made. I acclimated to the environment—and I loved it. What’s more, after hanging out with enthusiastic thespians, I become more willing to explore the performing arts. When the show ended, I ended up joining chorus half-way through the year, and next year, I actually auditioned for the musical, getting several small roles. I’d found an activity, totally different from the math and computer science that I was used to, that I thoroughly enjoyed.

After moving to Oregon though, I could not longer participate; my classes at Portland State conflicted with rehearsals, so my theatrical activities were limited to playing improv games during lunch, or acting out “Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead” with friends. Yet, though I haven’t recently reveled in the thrill of singing and dancing on the stage, I nevertheless consider theater to be one of my most valuable experiences. Though I was initially reticent, the way that ultimately bloomed into enthusiasm has helped me find confidence and a willingness to try new things. It’s the reason why, whether competing in Academic Decathlon or rising to speak during Debate, I’m filled with self-confidence. It’s what allowed me to easily adapt to the new, and very different environment in Portland. And it’s the root of my confidence that no matter what happens in the future, I will approach new opportunities fearlessly, and thrive.

**X is the Missing Variable Aris Raj Agarwala**

**Find x.**

Throughout life, we are constantly learning and applying our knowledge to our world. In second grade, we matured from sneakers with Velcro to laces and learned the lifelong skill of tying our shoes. In seventh grade, we devoutly began pursuing our own interests, practicing sports, art, and computer science in what many consider to be the critical development point in children’s lives. In eleventh grade, we graduated from passenger to driver, taking on the responsibilities of operating a vehicle and running our own errands.. These are only a few milestones of students in our senior year, learning all of these things while building upon fundamental concepts like Algebra and Creative Writing to truly craft our livelihoods. Yet, as a student at a Catholic high school who was rigorously trained in the humanities, I feel as though there is an inherent flaw in contemporary curricula: the neglecting of the human aspect of life.

So, what is “x” and what does it do?

To me, “x” symbolizes a missing variable in our lives, reflecting an inherent gap in our philosophical essence and being that many schools have not addressed. A grave fault, this hole leaves many feeling empty, unable to experience the theological metanoia of the heart and the greatness of true humanity. These subjects which denote human emotion and ethics that establish contemporary thought and also serve to nurture the soul cannot be described by disciplines like Calculus and Spanish. Of course, this is not to diminish the importance of these two as Calculus introduces us to Physics, which enlightens the worldly sciences, and Spanish, which broadens a person’s ability to seek out social interactions as per our natural inclination to socialize. However, it is to suggest that a reevaluation is necessary to train our posterity in the Subject of Logic and perhaps the Subject of Love: Philosophy and Theology respectively. These are the two fields delineated by the missing variable “x.”

In my bedroom lays a poster of Muhammad, Abraham, Jesus Christ and Thales of Miletus above a lit candle with Buddha’s quote that, “Just as a candle cannot burn without fire, men cannot live without a spiritual life,” written beneath. However, as I ponder this quote and extend it to the material I learned at public school, I find that it has merit, elucidating me to the reality that spirituality was never emphasized at these institutions. Instead of classes where I could be taught the ethics of daily life, the school’s limited humanity courses caused many to pursue electives deemed to simply be a “fun class” and nothing more, thereby neglecting the reason for academia: to enlighten and teach. So, based upon Buddha’s teachings, can any of the students in those public institutions be deemed “alive?” After all, without a background in Philosophy and Theology, how can one’s soul flourish and thrive?

As we progress through life, it is necessary to ask ourselves these thought-provoking questions, not only to self-reflect but also to encourage deeper spiritual growth. Interestingly, Pope John Paul II writes about the ideology of *fides et ratio*, the essential connection between two concepts deemed paradoxical: faith and reason. How faith without reason is the start of superstition, casting away all other facts and disciplines to only follow Theology. And how reason without faith leads to nihilism and relativism, ignoring faith to only follow what are deemed worldly truths. The latter sentiment of this doctrine characterizes how I feel the majority of humanity perceives life at the moment, seeing the world as devoid of spiritual sustenance and meaning due to not being introduced to Philosophy and Theology.

Thus, in this equation of contemporary curricula, I firmly assert that the addition of “x” will revitalize intellectual vitality in educational institutions and inspire students with Ethics, Metaphysics and God to pursue humanitarian initiatives for the betterment of the world. As a Catholic in a world with much strife, I think that Theology and Philosophy will lead to greater harmony in the overall world, giving people perspectives devoted to love so that they many transcend beyond selfish materialism and contribute to society through faith and good works.

So, what is “x” to me?

While many would attest that “x” is simply a letter or the alphabet or the solution to a quadratic equation, I see the inherent symbolism in its representation as something missing from our world. Thus “x” to me describes Theology and Philosophy as the fulfillment of the spirit and catalyst for metanoia so that individuals may turn to their own spirituality with *fides et ratio*, acknowledging their own humanity while seeking to please their God or improve their Virtue.

**The Core of UChicago Aris Raj Agarwala**

**How does the University of Chicago, as you know it now, satisfy your desire for a particular kind of learning, community, and future? Please address with some specificity your own wishes and how they relate to UChicago.**

As a devout Catholic, I have passionately embraced my spirituality by reading and adhering to the moralities outlined in Theology and Philosophy which I hold so close to my identity. Taking thirty minutes out of my daily routine, I always find myself starting the day with a few verses on the nature of Virtue or a glance at Christianity’s Beatitudes and ending it with a reading of Dr. Osler’s “Aequanimitas,” feeling the spiritual comfort that these works bring to my life. To be able to shut out the burdens of everyday life and meditate on these works is a salubrious exercise to me, mentally preparing me for school or nightly prayer.

Many people in my family don’t understand my obsession, but I feel as though they too can benefit from simply taking thirty minutes to embrace something that isn’t the tedium of our daily routines. Intellectual vitality, which is found in abundance at the University of Chicago, has always been important to me, and I feel that these allotted thirty minutes transcend the mental health aspect and truly is representative of a passion in my life. However, as a Philosopher and Theologian in high school, I became cognizant of an inherent flaw in contemporary curricula: a lack of emphasis in the humanities and its associated fields.

With an emphasis on the importance of education that solely teaches of developing one’s technical ability, there is a failure in addressing the human aspect of life, underscoring the inherent flaw of contemporary curricula. Thus, in my opinion, The Core prompted by the University of Chicago provides a holistic education that caters to the twofold nature of learning, teaching the humanities that stress rational thought and morality and the specialized sciences that stress technical ability, an attribute that has been missing in many schools since the inculcation that practical expertise eclipses a developed spirit.

At this instructional oasis in Chicago, I wish to study Philosophy and Religion for the moral preparation to pursue Immunotherapy and Gene Splicing Technologies and to evaluate their moral dilemmas. With the University of Chicago’s global network and numerous research opportunities, I know that I will be able to one day obtain a PhD and achieve my overall goal of researching Immunotherapy and its oncological applications.

In the spirit of science, I wish to pursue research opportunities to give me the experience necessary to fulfill my dream of working at The Doudna Laboratory, the founder being one of my inspirations for pursuing medicine in the scope of the humanities. After visiting the university during the summer, I was informed by my admissions counselor, Ms. Neeti Jain, of the wealth of resources that the University of Chicago has to support this passion of mine, providing students with the tools to achieve whatever they have their hearts set upon. In fact, following the university’s breakthroughs in science, I have seen the school progress the oncological applications of Immunotherapy to combat cancers thought to be an instant death sentence for many. With the improvement of checkpoint blockade treatment, once considered to be the pinnacle of modern medicine as it produced stellar results in some cancers while also failing with others, the University of Chicago truly is one of the top schools on the forefront of medicine and I wish to join that army devoted to mankind. The ingenious light-sensitive nanoparticle cocktail that the researchers employed in conjunction with the checkpoint blockade treatment is an absolute testament to the intellectual wonders of students at the school. As a Philosophy and Religious Studies major with scientific coursework through The Core and pre-medical path, I firmly believe that I may assist in these laboratories while also providing a fresh perspective on ethics from my humanities courses.

Thus, I believe The Core of The University of Chicago sets a precedent of what education should be: a full-body experience that edifies the entirety of the self and nurtures both the spiritual and physical person by honing both rational thought and technical ability. Thus, to study at an elite institution where intellectual vitality is encouraged and sought by students, I believe that I can utilize my coursework to make a difference in the university’s research, driving it forward which, in turn, gives back to mankind.

**Smelly Onions Anonymous**

**Why Uchicago?**

The city of Chicago derives its moniker from the Algonquin word for “smelly onion”. Accordingly, the University of Chicago translates to the “University of Smelly Onion”. Although a somewhat unbecoming name for one of the world’s premier universities, no other educational institute could wear it with the nonchalance that UChicago does.

My first view of the UChicago campus came on the day before the 2015 Columbus Day open house. While my dad and I were driving around campus, we saw the men’s cross country team jogging down South Ellis Avenue, shirtless and sweating profusely. Just as the traffic light in front of our car turned red, the team decided, unfortunately, to take a brief respite directly in front of our freshly rented out Hyundai Accent. As the smell of exhausted-college-student perspiration wafted through our lowered car windows, I couldn’t help but eavesdrop in on the team’s conversation. *“Yeah man, I’m telling you”*, said one stocky and out of breath athlete, *“the idea of increasing marginal utility is completely false. No matter what we do, we’ll always end up being unsatisfied.”* *“Okay, I get your point”,*replied another lanky runner, *“But I’m saying that there’s a difference between ending up unsatisfied and increasing utility. It’s only when you stop gaining happiness do you start getting diminished returns.”* Curious to hear more, I turned down the radio and leaned closer to my window, head tilted towards the group. But just as the stocky runner began to respond, the traffic light turned green, and our car sped off.

It was this conversation that really jogged (pun intended) my interest in UChicago. I was struck that a group of athletes were discussing economics - my intended field of study - while they were on a workout. As a trombone player, prospective economics student, and self-proclaimed pun savant, I was thrilled that, like these athletes, my interests and activities could all be simultaneously accommodated at the university. To me, economics is a fascinating field because, in many ways, it explains how the world fundamentally works. Topics like allocative efficiency and marginal utility don’t just apply to our economy, but to human nature and behavior as well. For example, one’s actions in weighing opportunity costs of certain actions and ultimately trying to increase their utility can be measured in happiness economics. An example of this is seen when people choose multicolored pasta over plain pasta. Although this fact on its own may seem unrelated to economics, it is actually related to the concept of diminishing marginal utility. The conversation that occurred about economic theory during something as routine as a run made me wonder,*what kind of erudite discussions would evolve in the classroom?* That question was answered the next day during the Open House, when I sat in on an Economics class taught by Harald Uhlig, who was lecturing on whether the European Central Bank guarantees fiscal or monetary policy. I was suitably impressed by Professor Uhlig’s anecdote about the time he was personally invited to the German congressional court over such an issue; as someone who is particularly interested in the real world applications of economic theory, the fact that an international issue such as this was being discussed in the classroom was remarkable.

A key mandate of economic theory is that there is always a reason as to why humans make the choices they do. My reason for applying early to UChicago is just as pragmatic. No other school offers such a storied department on the cutting-edge of research and new directions in the field, besides providing the opportunity to pursue diverse extracurricular interests. Sure, the unofficial motto of UChicago might indeed be “Where fun goes to die”, but as someone with a broad range of interests and academic curiosities, I know that UChicago will be a place where I can simultaneously enjoy myself and flourish. If the University of Chicago really does translate to the University of Smelly Onions, I would be proud to count myself among one of those onions.

**The Portal Anonymous**

**Alice falls down the rabbit hole. Milo drives through the tollbooth. Dorothy is swept up in the tornado. Neo takes the red pill. Don’t tell us about another world you’ve imagined, heard about, or created. Rather, tell us about its portal. Sure, some people think of the University of Chicago as a portal to their future, but please choose another portal to write about. -Inspired by Raphael Hallerman, Class of 2020**

I am standing there on the threshold. The air is different. It’s lighter with a touch of lavender. The Ivory marble is glistening. It feels cool. It soothes me. In front of me, I see the beckoning white chair. I proceed. The cool dark mat smoothly soothes my feet, tickling me just a bit. The chair is eerie but welcoming. It has a large back but no arm support, which makes it strange for a throne. I sit.

The throne feels as if it’s a part of me. I feel close to the ground through its base. I rest my back and look around. A pond is next to me, empty. On the opposite side, there is a large mirror and a fountain oozing out of its base. The sound of trickling water reminds me of nature: it reminds me of the world I was born into.

I look down on the marble. The reddish veins on the marble etch out my people, my cavalry, my suzerainty. This enclosed place is my kingdom and being the king I have a special kind of control over this world, my world. Ensconced here on the throne, I cast a looming shadow on the marble, which reminds me of my responsibility, my responsibility to my own world, to my own self.

This throne is not only a portal to my future but also a gateway to my past and present. It is a gateway to my own self, my conscience, which I cannot access in the outside world. When I sit on it, it ascertains my liminal space, where only I make the choices, where only I make the decisions of my life. It enables me to think. The fact that makes this enfolded cosmos so special is that it pertains to no one else but me. This is my space. It’s a portal to my own world, my own self. And I respect it.

Whenever I feel low or sad, this is the place I like to be in. This enclosed space transcends me and dissolves all the facades that I put on to tackle the outside world. It brings out the naked me, without any exterior dimensions that I may wear in the external world. Here, the smile does not hide the tears; the clothes do not hide the bruises. Here, I am just the person who I am. And that is precisely what this portal enables me so to do.

I am a frequent this place. Sometimes twice or thrice in a day and often for solace, for privacy. And, perhaps, that is why I know every corner of this place and it knows me.

While I am just ‘sitting over the John’, the tub (pond) needs a filling. I don’t want to get up as I am enthroned.