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**Sample essays 2017**

**Washington University in St. Louis**

# On Hockey and Being a Girl Linh Mai Nguyen

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

It was an ordinary game of floor hockey. My palms were soaked, my skin unbearably itchy. The droplets of sweat were rolling down my back. But I couldn’t pay any attention to that. The offensive player was approaching me with the puck, trying to find a way around. I clutched the hockey stick, took a deep breath, and lunged for it. In two seconds I had tripped, and hit the floor. My failure was mortifying. And yet, it was a successful failure, for after my angry swatting at the puck and inevitable downfall, the opposing player got caught in my flailing limbs and also fell. My teammates were delighted. They marveled that a girl could take down the third-best male player in our gym class, and the hoots and cheers of the boys were infectious. I had been unnecessarily aggressive, and it had paid off. I beamed to myself. I was worthy! Later, as the triumph waned and I came back down to earth, I realized what a fool I had been. I finally saw that I had become someone who needed to prove herself, just so she could be accepted by the boys.

I had betrayed myself. I was utterly defeated.

As I experienced this keen sense of disappointment, I started to self-analyze. For most of my life prior to this experience, I had been a very aggressive person, always preferring to do things that boys normally did. I like to fight, arm wrestle, tackle people, and do all the other things boys do. It was just recently that I figured out why: somewhere deep within my psyche I have the conviction that I must always prove myself. I firmly believed that by showing weakness, I was falling prey to the expectations of the world in which I lived. The reason for all this lies in my feelings of entrapment in a gender role. As a female, I sometimes feel like the world is against me. Society has this set of rules and expectations that dictates people’s lives. To break free of those rules, I fought and fought against the stereotypes that pursue my gender. My way of doing this was by becoming a tomboy, and denying all things girly. By escaping from girldom I thought I would also be escaping from its association of weakness. The strong drive to become my own unique individual drove me to seek the approval of men. That was my mistake: I got out of one trap and fell into another. By pursuing this approval, I was condemning myself to a dependency on what the “oppressors” thought of me. However, I was my own oppressor. By not being satisfied with just being me, I made myself unhappier as a person. As soon as I finally realized this self-deception, I decided to address it. I would not do things for the sake of another’s acceptance. From then on the only person’s approval I needed was my own.

# Colors of Life Anonymous

## Topic of Choice on the Common App.

Yellow - one of the primary colors. It is one hue; it is a million hues. Pale yellow, the color of silt in China’s River of Life; saffron yellow, the color of Chinese sovereignty for two millennia; tanned yellow, the tint of my skin.

The first day of fourth grade in America, I felt as if I stepped into an aviary full of white birds who chattered in a tongue that I could not comprehend. I began to regret and even resent my parents’ decision in moving here – nothing’s the same! From the hue of their skins and eyes, to their gestures, speech, activities, and even clothes! And so I embarked on an arduous mission toward conformity. In the second week, wearing my first Gap outfit, I strutted into my homeroom, assured that my clothes would garner acceptance and new friends. Instead, come lunchtime, I wandered amongst the throngs waiting for an invitation that never came. Likewise, I remember frantically trying to translate the deluge of English around me, and in turn, haltingly reply.

Puberty splattered crimson pimples on my face and murky shadows on my confidence. My awkwardness intensified as my family, during our first six years in America, moved six times to three cities. But to lessen my parents’ worries, I often hid my frustration. After all their efforts for my happiness, how could I appear otherwise? They also continuously reminded me that indeed one could never change her color. Inversely, the diversity present in the world actually vivifies life.

It was as I settled into my skin that I finally saw beyond the visible colors, to glimpse the vibrancy within. Through clubs, sports, music, and even the simple gestures of caring and community, I began to blend in amongst the colors of my friends. Our conversations flowed easier, and our laughs freer. Through our camaraderie in difficult times or enjoyment in simply being together, their colors began to shift before my eyes - they themselves embodied unique hues, born of a million and one moments in life. By marveling their differences and sharing their similarities, I foster a stronger confidence in myself, assured in my abilities to adapt and thrive. I now heartily appreciate my itinerant years when I have witnessed the true beauty of diversity, embellished by the inimitable colors of life I have beheld along the way.

Striking as a lone color may be, the blending of colors is breathtaking. The harmony of colors inside myself and outside in my environment gives me life. I am one color, I am a million colors: I am the yellow of China, black of certain confidence, the red of dedicated passion, the blue of invariable peace, green of newborn imagination, the pink of brisk youth, the white of hope - a full palette. I dream not of a rainbow, but of a future. Wherever I may wander, I will never be lost.

# 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.

# Unexpected Participant Anonymous

## Topic of Your Choice.

One of my greatest joys in the world is the feeling of ice crunching under my skates. I love playing ice hockey. It has been a major part of my life since I was seven years old. I started out figure skating, then one day I noticed the kids my age on the neighboring rink skating around in padded uniforms, chasing a rubber circle. It looked like fun. So, just before I was supposed to learn how to jump, I traded my figure skates in for a bag of equipment and a stick. I was a little intimidated at first because I was the only Asian kid on the ice, but once I realized how much I enjoyed ice hockey, nothing fazed me. I kept my focus firm as I worked hard to catch up with my team. Soon, I was playing on the best traveling team in Fort Wayne, and we advanced to two international tournaments in Canada. I was selected as one of the top 50 prospects in the Midwest during the USA Hockey Development Camp. For a long time, I could not imagine a future in which hockey was not the center of my life. As I matured, though, my priorities changed.

Midway through my high school career, having driven 100,000 miles and spent over 10,000 hours playing in ice hockey practices and games, I felt like I was spread too thin. I had to decide between trying to become the next Paul Kariya or focusing on my academic future. It was a difficult decision to make and a painful transition as I left the competitive travel team and moved to the high school hockey league in town, which hadn’t won a single game the prior season. During the first half of my rookie year, we struggled to even come close to winning because we had no coherence as a team. After being part of a powerful group that achieved so highly at such an elite level, this new situation was discouraging and frustrating. However, I decided that instead of complaining about it, I could make it better, so I took on the challenge of bringing my teammates together in order to close the gap.

I had always been a committed team player, but now, I felt that I had to lead the team members to believe in themselves and to show them that we could compete. I emphasized to the team that we had the ability, but we just had to work together and communicate more effectively. Slowly but surely, we began to improve, not yet winning but starting to scare the competition. We started to feel a sense of camaraderie. After working on some “creative passes” in practice, I was able to set up my line mates with passes that made us one of the top-scoring lines in the league. Finally, near the end of the season, we won five games in a row. As a result, I earned the respect of my new teammates and coaches. I received The Playmaker of the Year award, and it was the most meaningful moment of my life thusfar. I felt like I had used my skills to make a difference.

By the record, that was the worst season of my hockey “career”, but feeling of triumph and friendship at the end of the season were a greater reward than any scores or accolades. This year, as a captain, I’ve pushed the team to stay focused in practice and to keep their composure on the ice. So far, we have an unprecedented 2-0 record. Although I no longer envision myself being recruited to the NHL, my high school hockey experience has helped me develop leadership skills and understand that whatever the level of competition, it is spirit and cooperation that contribute most to both success and enjoyment in any endeavor. These invaluable lessons will continue to guide me as I pursue a career helping others through my work as a physician, contributing to the community around me.

# Of Talking Ravens and Curious Cinephiles Vikram Kejariwal

## Topic of your choice.

“Surrealism is embedded in the everyday, in the daily experience” -- Katharine Conley

It seems fitting for me to transform every moment or thought into a film screened inside my head. Cinema is my life, and guides me beyond my life. I rise from reality and I’m cast into a limitless world of my own creation. Here I am the humble king, the anxious father, or the tortured slave, the only conscious inhabitant of an otherworldly domain. Rocks don’t fall back to Earth, and instead morph into winged beavers as men in suits walk past me backwards. I leap across Norwegian fjords and land on a vibrant golden beach, but suddenly the sky cries: “Vikram, your lunch is getting cold!” Who dares to interrupt me? My canvas is left incomplete as my imagination is broken by my mother. My soul condenses and settles into reality again.

I often recite to my cousins the bittersweet tale of a boy called Vincent, who is depicted in a short film by Tim Burton. Vincent is a seven year-old who imagines himself living in a world of his own creation. In this infinite realm, he reads the poetry of Edgar Allen Poe -- finding himself particularly drawn to “The Raven” -- and practices scientific feats far ahead of a child’s intellect. Unfortunately, as he matures, he grows out of his thoughts and forgets his beloved world. My disposition feels much like a parallel of Vincent’s. My love of cinema developed because film transported me into a surreal state between the abstract and the real. It became a state of perception where I could reflect on the most intricate ideas and be elevated from the daily notions of maintaining the ideal “eight-pack” figure or tweeting about a Justin Bieber song. Without realizing it, I was soon growing alongside the classics and blockbusters of world cinema. My television became a teacher and the dingy local movie-hall became my classroom. Now, every film I begin to view sets me on a journey of deep research, exploration, and wonder.

The moment the final credits roll, I am provoked to learn what influenced the producer to couple an accurately biographical scene with a completely fabricated one, or to analyze the pioneering camerawork employed. An indirect fruit of my cinematic curiosity is the ability to investigate a subject and dissect it into its core components; I find myself using these very skills to disprove my opposition’s arguments in parliamentary debate. I have morphed from being shy to being able to connect with a variety of different people simply through everyday discussion of films and plays. As I feel the tears well during a third screening of Philadelphia, I realize that I have grown more sensitive and reflective. Often I gaze at a director’s long endeavour to perfect a production and find myself inspired to commit to challenging projects with the same rigor and perseverance.

The imaginary world of cinema has given me permission to aspire to peaks of perception that many would proclaim impossible. Perhaps I am just like Vincent, a boy who perceives dreamlike notions as his source of individuality and joy. As I grow older, I finally hear the sweet answer to an inevitable question: “When will I mature and exit my own surreal reality?” Quoth the Raven, “Nevermore.”

# In a Graveyard Anonymous

## Discuss an accomplishment or event, formal or informal, that marked your transition from childhood to adulthood within your culture, community, or family.

Of all the places to experience a pivotal moment in life, a graveyard was mine. After a week of research, my grandmother and I stepped through the old, rusty cemetery gate and were surprised to see the headstone of Moses Short a few feet from the entrance. This name had intrigued me for as long as I could remember. I had seen it almost daily as a child -- painted on a plaque, along with the title "Pharmacist" -- nailed next to the front door of my family's 1780s-era house in my former hometown just north of Boston. Ever since I was a kid, I had always wondered who Moses Short was. Did he live in this house alone, or with a large family? Did he fight in the Revolutionary War? Did he simply operate a primitive colonial pharmacy, or was he another 18th-century virtuoso, a second Ben Franklin? It wasn't until that summer, long after we'd moved out of the house, that I began searching for answers.

Since moving to Nashville, I have had a yearly tradition of visiting my grandparents, who live just a few blocks away from the Moses Short house. Walking by that old plaque one evening, I suddenly remembered all those questions I had about Moses Short. The next day, my grandmother and I set out for the genealogy section of the local library. Even after hours of combing through centuries-old ship logs and censuses, we had still not unearthed any trace of Moses Short. The local museum, a grand mansion lovingly restored and filled with yellowing portraits and antique horsehair sofas, also yielded nothing. However, the unsuccessful start of our mission didn't deter us. We were so involved in our little quest that stumbling upon Moses's grave was a poignant experience. In little more than a few days, we had both become that deeply invested.

Although it seemed like an insignificant event at the time, I would realize the importance of my find week years later, in middle school and high school. I noticed that my studies brought into play multiple viewpoints, just like my pursuit of Moses Short: combing through records, talking to local historians, and doing a little fieldwork. In Latin, studying the art and architecture of the Hellenistic world brought me a first-hand view of ancient life, offering me knowledge beyond anything in a conventional history book. In World Studies, a class I took my sophomore year, hearing my teacher talk about visiting Hindu stupas and Buddhist temples during his travels prompted me to learn more about comparative religions much more powerfully than any text could. Since my school didn't offer AP Art History, I found a way to take it online --- and found out how art from different eras is linked to historical events, people, and places. I even began to draw connections between science and math and the humanities, subjects I had previously thought were completely unrelated. In Geometry, I was reminded of Roman arches as we studied various forms in two- and then three-dimensional space; later, in Physics, I was forced to think in terms of the interaction of shapes, much as in art history, to work out problems.

It is essential that I continue to build connections like this throughout my life, that I continue to search for the architecture, people, and places that illustrate history. Although I never would have suspected that this realization would come to me in a graveyard, I couldn't be more grateful that it did. That experience aroused something in me that not only made my education more meaningful, but also permanently sparked my sense of curiosity. For all that, I have Moses Short to thank.

# The Synergy of Music Anonymous

## Recount an incident or time when you experienced failure. How did it affect you, and what lessons did you learn? Please write an essay (250-650 words) on the topic selected. You can type directly into the box, or you can paste text from another source.

My fingers pirouetted up and down the fingerboard, spiraling faster than the notes running through my head. Every white callous and bloody blister had led up to this moment, as I could feel all those hours of repetition, struggle, and stumbling finally beginning to pay off. Approaching the most difficult measures of Elgar's Cello Concerto in E minor, my body braced itself for an onslaught of notes. A tongue twister for my fingers, the menacing measure had always been a source of frustration and difficulty, a part I had always struggled to surpass in every single concert preceding this one. But even with the constant fear of my past performances needling the back of my head, I finally felt my fingers soar over the crescendo, tiptoe through the pizzicato chords, and emerge triumphant at the end of the phrase. I had done it! I had actually succeeded! But just as my heart started to slow down and relief washed over me, the unimaginable happened. I couldn't feel my fingers.

\* \* \*

IASAS was what my year of practicing the same song had been for, as I adored the pleasure of being able to spend five days with other musicians, all of whom shared my passion for music. I had chosen Elgar's cello concerto for this same reason: to display my technical skills through one of the most prominent cello concertos ever published. However, my choice had initially been received with rejection. My cello teacher claimed that the song was too risky, since its modern aesthetic could be regarded instantly with either adoration or disgust. Yet, despite this warning, I persevered. Sure, it was technically and musically challenging-but how could I turn down the piece I had fallen in love with when I had first picked up the cello? In the weeks leading up to my IASAS performance, my focus narrowed down to one section in particular. Indeed, those elusive lines kept me awake at night, possessing my fingers to dance even when I wasn't practicing. Initially, it seemed that no amount of practice could make the tunes coming out of my cello resemble the ones of Yo Yo Ma or Jacqueline du Pré. But after weeks of diligence, I became more agile, and the timbre from my cello sounded more confident. I took these signs as rewards for the almost inhumane amounts of time I had spent on those eight measures, and felt positive going into IASAS that my hard work was going to pay off.

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Shaking from shock, I stood up and calmly told the adjudicators that I couldn't finish the piece, for my hands had been seized by a cramp. As I fled the audition room, tears welling in my eyes, I reflected on what went wrong. While I'd mastered the section that plagued me most, I'd also made a cardinal error. Thinking that the rest of the piece would be a walk in the park compared to the tempest of controlling those short measures, I had neglected to practice the piece as a whole. And yet, I realized, this is how many of us approach life in general, concentrating on the smaller problems and thinking that by improving one aspect here, another there, we will become perfect. Sure, systematically improving ourselves is natural; however, it's also important to see the larger picture. Had I simply played the song to master that one section? Or had I played the song because of its overall beauty? This was the question I was forced to answer that day at IASAS. Today, I still struggle with little sections. But at the same time, I've learned to never forget the piece as a whole. Whether it's in volunteering, swimming, or toiling over a biology final, I maintain a perspective that never forgets the next note. After all, that's the only way to keep on playing.

# Playground Andrew Elsakr

## Discuss an accomplishment or event, formal or informal, that marked your transition from childhood to adulthood within your culture, community, or family.

There was one playground not too far from my grandparents' apartment in Cairo (the summer home of my childhood) where I wasn't treated like the quirky, abnormal kid that I was used to being. It wasn't your ideal picture of a playground, though. Rusty railings, monkey bars so high you'd break a bone if you fell, sharp nails everywhere that would've whispered the word "tetanus" in my mother's ear had she ever accompanied me and my cousin. It was every child's dream and every parent's nightmare, and I got to enjoy it. The kids there didn't care that I couldn't speak Arabic or that I was a Christian (and not even a Coptic but a Presbyterian -- a minority of the minority). We'd play hide-and-seek, tag, cops-and-robbers, you name it. When we'd finished, we would sit together and giggle because we were all Egyptians and there was nothing to keep us from being happy.

At the playground in Cairo I could be something I had no chance of being in Memphis: normal.

Cairo was quite a sight in its glory days, once heralded as the most beautiful city in the world. It was filled with villas and clean roads and marketplaces that brought tourists from all over to behold the city's majesty. However, through horrible governing and overpopulation, the city descended, apparently low enough to take ninth place in a 2012 CNN ranking of the "World's 10 Most Hated Cities." As for me, I never really had a golden era. Sure, when I was younger I was that kid the PTA parents adored; I was the top student in all my elementary school classes, but I was never perfect. I was never balanced. As I grew older, everyone seemed to be trying to escape Egypt except for me. Egypt was a playground that I could only visit in the summers, and my desire to keep returning never wavered. I never stopped depending on it and seeing it as not only the apotheosis of my childhood, but as my childhood in its entirety. And even after I found other playgrounds in Memphis, I still yearned for Egypt with all my heart every morning when I looked at the calendar and saw the date steadily approaching June.

Years passed. The Egyptian Revolution happened, and my grandmother died during it, so we went to Cairo in the midst of all the tear gas and riots and violence, and I had to watch from the top floor of a hotel as black smoke rose from my crumbling, dying city. That last glimpse of the moribund city that had once been my fairy godmother stuck with me, telling me that things would be different from now on, that things would never be the same. That I would never be the same.

Two years later my grandfather died as well and we had to go back again. It was the third time in a row we'd gone to Cairo for a funeral, and that was all Cairo had seemed to be at that point: a mausoleum, kind of like the Pyramids. After the funeral, having nothing else to do, I went alone to that playground I had frequented so often in my childhood, and to my dismay, I found that it had changed. The squeaky, splintery play sets had been removed, replaced by new, plastic, child-proofed swing sets and jungle gyms. It looked American. I sat down on the see-saw by myself and started reminiscing, imagining the sounds of the yelling children who had stopped coming to this place long ago, who were now my age and off in the cadaverous city, doing whatever it is that makes CNN hate Cairo so much, and I realized the truth. The truth is that when there's no one left to sit on the see-saw with, it's time for you to leave the playground. So that's what I did.

# Doodling Flowers Weiying (Annie) Zhang

## Common App Essay: Tell us more about yourself.

Whenever I’m taking notes in English, answering questions on a history test, or listening to a class discussion, I doodle flowers. Yes, flowers. You might imagine that a high school senior in AP classes would be too busy absorbing PowerPoint slides and wringing out essays to doodle. And to an extent, you are correct. Nevertheless, no matter how taxing the class, I always find time to sketch a few blossoms on my papers. Although I’ve done this since middle school, I still don’t understand why. Whatever the reason, the flowers are my personality stamp.

Maybe it’s because the flowers are symmetrical: a circle surrounded by five petals, attached to a two-leafed curvy stem. I’m a fan of symmetry and balance -- perhaps it’s the obsessive side of me. Regardless, scattering my signature flowers on schoolwork relaxes me. Likewise, the yin-yang balance in my life enriches everything I do. While I’m the science nerd who spent one summer synthesizing nanoparticles in WashU’s lab, I’m also the art junkie who makes watercolors of her backyard forest on the weekends. While I’m the stereotypical Asian scholar in class, after school, I’m the most non-competitive mini-tennis player on the JV court.

Maybe my flowers represent the exhilaration I feel when I’m coming up with a solution to a problem. I remember doodling on graph paper while trying to design a Science Olympiad project. Every time I scrapped a new idea, I defaulted to doodled flowers. Then finally, Eureka! I had sketched a viable model of the lightest tower that would hold the greatest amount of sand. Even though the tower fell apart after only two scoops of sand, I was thrilled to have figured out how to apply engineering principles to my project.

Maybe my perky little flowers represent my optimism. While I’m not the “Energizer Bunny,” people generally describe me as enthusiastic. Other people’s doubts often inspire and motivate me to solve difficult problems. A few months ago, my friends and I started talking about how great it would be to travel through Europe after graduation. Although we were joking at the time, I latched onto the idea. I knew the trip would cost a ton, but the idea of hanging out on the Riviera spurred me to work hard to earn money. Immediately, I launched into overdrive making bracelets for my online Etsy store: I made new listings, bought supplies, and dedicated weekends to weaving. My friends teased, “You’ll never earn enough for a three-week Europe trip.” Fortunately, my business plan is working well, my profits have doubled, and I’m nearing my goal.

Maybe my ever-present flowers represent my creativity. Not every student garnishes assignments with daisies! No matter what I’m doing, I’m happiest when I’m imaginative: adding ears to a tea kettle painting; wearing plastic foot ornaments and wooden clog boots to school; making up songs on the piano; designing a C++ Go Fish program; and writing a Space Elevator policy debate plan.

Or maybe I doodle just because I like flowers.

# For the Love of Hockey 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 think I was Canadian in a different life. Not because of my love of French, though strong, or my craving for maple syrup, though incessant; no, this Canadian lifestyle manifests itself through a kind of hockey mania. While my friends enjoy watching baseball and eating hotdogs or tailgating at football games on Sunday afternoons, the American sport fetish skipped me completely, leaving a puck-shaped hole in my heart.

Of course being born and raised in the South makes this love a forbidden one. As we play yet another round of h-o-r-s-e in P.E., my soul yearns for the crack of a slapshot, the whistle of a perfectly timed wrister. The coach tells us to pick up the pigskin, we're headed to the field. No, my heart screams, not another touch football game! You're smiling! How can you enjoy this? We march to the stadium anyway, the others oblivious of the superior game waiting for them on the ice. Our team gets the ball first and runs it past the blue line, ahem, the fifty yard line. Stop, start; stop, start. Fifteen minutes later and we've advanced exactly zero feet.

This madness does not exist in hockey. There is no mass-tackling, blitz-faking, backtracking nonsense. Just the smooth sound of sharpened blades gliding over polished ice, the smack-crack-clang of a deflected shot hitting the post, the deafening silence of an entire arena holding its breath during the pressure-riddled penalty shot, the blaring siren of the puck finally meeting the twine.

A certain camaraderie runs through the veins of hockey fans. Unlike the plethora of basketball/football/baseball fans running amok, the population of the hockey fan is much like that of the dwindling polar bear. Once while at a restaurant (by the beach, no less) my family had a waiter who divulged to us that he was a Flyers fan. I could have cried a) because it was like being one of those poor polar bears, wandering solo, thinking you're the last of your kind, when all of a sudden you round a snow dune to find out it is in fact not a snow dune but another polar bear and you are no longer alone in the world and b) out of pity because, come on, really, a Flyers fan? You traded your captain away to the now two-time defending Stanley Cup Champions and for what? An undisclosed draft pick? The back-seat GM in me rages like an inferno, but I digress.

The glorious, nail-biting, edge-of-your-seat turmoil of hockey stems from the setup, not the goal. Sure, the siren is a relief to hear, but convincing the P.E. coaches to try a two week street hockey unit that turns into a three month ultimate tournament is what breathes life into my pseudo-Canadian spirit. Whether the score is a zero-zero stalemate in double overtime or a seven-one blowout in regulation, the game always offers something priceless, even if that's just getting to know the kindred polar bear chanting next to you in the bleachers.

# Reading My Red Anonymous

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

I refused to leave Sedona, Arizona, home to a "spiritual vortex," without visiting at least one of the city's renowned psychics. Sharing my spirited lust for travel, my mom brought my sisters and me to "Sedona Center for the New Age," where I was convinced we would experience self-revelation.

Noting that we were first-timers, the shop owner recommended we have our auras read, a process involving a sensor that detects a person's energy field through her hands and displays it as a colorful cloud.

My sister Elise was read first. The psychic smiled, explaining that her orange and yellow aura proved her to be gregarious, witty, and independent. She could sense that Elise's best friend was a boy in her carpool and that she loved horses – eerily accurate. Lizzy volunteered next, her aura a mix of lime green and blue. Apart from the arbitrary insight that Lizzy's spirit animal was an armadillo (we joke about it to this day), the psychic's analysis of her as a serene friend, determined scholar, and stubborn athlete was spot-on.

When my turn came, I drifted into the dimly-lit room, placed my hands on the glowing sensor, and listened to the printer spit out what I believed was my destiny. The psychic scrutinized the image, then urgently told my sisters to leave the room. Confused, I glimpsed my startling aura: blood-red, darkened by black shadows. I felt my face blush to the hue of the photo as the woman informed me that I had a hole in my spiritual heart formed five years prior. Scanning my memories of fourth grade, I recalled monkey-bars, sleepovers, and nurturing teachers– nothing scarring. The woman explained that the buildup of negative energy would force one of my two best friends to betray me. It took just one more dismal prediction about my future husband (or lack thereof) for panic to set in. While I attempted to poke fun at the situation, I was deeply unsettled by my reading.

The next morning I awoke with renewed optimism. Intent on redressing my dismal future, I researched "best aura reader in Sedona." Within an hour we were on our way to "Sedona Crystal Vortex."

When my saturated photo finally spit out of the machine, I cringed, recognizing the crimson and black. The psychic lifted it up, and exclaimed "Darling, I knew it! You're one of my rare reds!", jolting me with hope. "Deeply passionate, creative, and caring. Those hands of yours can heal anything you touch – even headaches!" I received no mention of a hole in my heart, no warning of backstabbing friends, and nothing of a loveless future.

As I mature and reflect, I realize my two opposite readings prove that while a psychic may be able to assign a person a color according to the size or temperature of that person's hands, only the person decides what that color means.

For me, my red is invested; I will work for hours to develop a font and color scheme for a self-designed-website. My red is resilient; I have recovered from intense anxiety and learned to tame the perfectionist within me. My red is compassionate; I can sense when someone needs love, and never hesitate to uplift them. My red is artistic; whether it's jewelry-making, oil-painting, cake-decorating, or playing my cello, I crave my creative outlets. My red is grounded; I seek the mountains above all other places in the world, and have a goal to hike all 46 of the Adirondack High Peaks. My red is contemplative; the gears in my head are always turning, especially during a game of Bananagrams (still haven't lost a game!).

I don't need a psychic to tell me the perfect definition of my color. I understand myself, and as an invested, strong, and compassionate artist, athlete, and thinker, I'm proud of what my red has become.

Remembering Roee Haley Eagle

## 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.

Standing alone in the empty cemetery, I hear my distraught voice bounce off the headstones. “Why did you leave? I will almost never forgive you.” The cold air settles around me. The tears stain my cheeks, but I don’t stop. I can’t stop. I made a promise to my friend, Roee, that I would always be honest and speak my mind. It’s a bit harder to fulfill that promise now that he rests six feet underground and is decidedly out of earshot.

Roee was one of my closest friends, and on February 6th, 2014, he took his own life. My cemetery scolding of Roee might seem jarring, disrespectful even, but I simply delivered the truth that no one else would voice. Suicide is selfish. Things would have gotten better. I could have helped. Candid as my statements were, I knew he would have appreciated them. That’s how we were with each other, open and honest. When we talked about his plans to join the Israeli army, I told him he needed to beef-up, and when I dyed my hair platinum blonde, he told me that I had gone too far. Honesty was our unwritten promise to each other, or at least that’s what I thought.

Roee never shared the devastation he harbored inside, and I never saw his angst hiding just beneath the surface. Knowing I overlooked something so crucial haunts me every day. After Roee died, I felt a new kind of fear. How could I be sure of anything when the person I thought I had known completely had proven to be entirely different? I began to look at the world as ephemeral, losing my trust that anything around me could last forever. As time passed, however, I realized that I was stronger than my fears. I found an inner strength I didn’t know I had. I realized I couldn’t go to my parents, my rabbi, or my guidance counselor to fix what had broken. It wasn’t like when I was little, and my dad could fix my Barbie

As time passed, however, I realized that I was stronger than my fears. I found an inner strength I didn’t know I had. I realized I couldn’t go to my parents, my rabbi, or my guidance counselor to fix what had broken. It wasn’t like when I was little, and my dad could fix my Barbie boom box every time it broke. No one in my life had experienced suicide, let alone the suicide of a best friend. This was something I had to fix myself. People were counting on me. I was the one his friends sought for support and I was the one on whom Roee’s family leaned. Over the next several months, the darkness faded to gray as I began to focus on honoring Roee’s memory and living out his life through mine. My first task involved junior prom and the

My first task involved junior prom and the canceled Powderpuff game. You see, Roee had worked tirelessly to organize the male-cheerleading performance for our school’s Powderpuff game. When the game was cancelled, Roee outright pouted. To say he was disappointed is an understatement. Months later, even though he was gone, I knew what would make him smile, and it wasn’t a tearful tribute with sad music by Sarah McLachlan. So, at the prom I organized a group of his buddies to dance to his favorite songs wearing their Powderpuff costumes in tribute to our never-forgotten friend. I am certain Roee was looking down and laughing.

On that day in February, Roee’s life was not ready to be over. I’ve made a promise to live mine in a way that would make him proud. Unlike the broken boom box, fixing this is going to take time, but I have the strength and the honesty to carry on. When I stand in front of Roee’s headstone now, I let him know that I’m going to be okay. Before I leave, I lay a seashell by his side and make sure he knows that I’m bringing his ridiculous Powderpuff outfit with me to college.

# 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.

# Good Game, Frank Christopher Walleck

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

There he is, clad in his “World’s Biggest Fish Fry” baseball cap, neon orange diabetic footsoles, and multicolored top hat à la Dr. Seuss. Four hundred and twenty pounds, bound to his high-backed leather armchair (driven with tender care all the way from humble Cincinnati), and a powerful, scruffy beard eclipsing his oxygen plug: this is Frank Lee, my final opponent at the National Scrabble Championship.

As the result of my transformation from mild-mannered schoolboy to board game connoisseur and Scrabble junkie, I had been feverishly studying until this very moment: the climax of my amateur Scrabble career.

The score is 386 to 326, my favor, and there is only one tile left in the bag. The board has practically become a New York Times Crossword, and not a meager Tuesday or Thursday; this is a full-fledged Sunday. Words like “IXIA” (defined as an African plant with sword-shaped leaves), “LEKU” (a monetary unit of Albania) and “UNAI” (a two-toed sloth) permeate our board; are we truly playing what some Merriam or Webster considered English words?

As I gaze down at my score sheet, attempting to card-count the tiles and ascertain which ones are left, Frank warily examines his side of the chess clock, which reads 1:37, and he nervously plays a W to form “EWE” and “WE” for twenty points. The bag is now empty, and this great, grey grizzly bear of a man now has one minute and thirty seven seconds left, out of his original 25 minutes, in order to gain forty more points.

By the time Frank apprehensively announces “twenty” as his score, I had figured out that the remaining tiles were I, O, N, P, R, S, and another W, an intimidating rack. To block the final Triple Word Score, I play the perfectly pleasant word “URIC,” meaning derived from urine. I announce my meager six-point gain and wait with trepidation for Frank to make his final move. Something is out of place.

After I play my word, Frank’s eyes grow large under his Technicolor bifocals. The clock is ticking down, 37, 36, 35, and soon Frank utters a mammoth sigh and places his S next to the U of “URIC,” forming “US.” I smile; Frank is almost definitely going to play “OWNS” or “WINOS” and I will handily win the game. But then, I see it: an E. I look frantically down at the results of my tile counting again and again, but still do not see an E in what I had calculated. Soon, all of his letters come onto the board at once, forming “ORPINES,” a plant with purple flowers also called a ‘live-forever.’ It dawns on me that I had miscounted the tiles and forgotten to cross off Frank’s W from “EWE.”

My jaw drops almost to table level. Frank had used all of his letters at once, thereby getting a 50-point bonus to his score. He wins the game 425-392. The perfect irony of the situation… the perfect irony of the word itself! I had arrogantly thought that I was the one who would be celebrating, but humble Frank Lee is the one who remains standing (sitting) with the single word that would ‘live forever’ in my mind.

My head hits the table, one of the ubiquitous pieces of folding plastic that dominate the room. How could I be so idiotic? How could I make such a critical mistake? How, how how? But as I sit, silently berating myself to no end, Frank looks up at me and says, “I take no pleasure in that win Christopher.”

I slowly lift my head to see his weathered blue eyes looking genuinely back at mine. He pauses, and it seems to me as though the whole room had gone silent. He looks at me more sincerely than ever before, an impenetrable, wholehearted gaze into my eyes. “I hope you can leave knowing that you’ve come away from this tournament with a better prize than anyone could have given you Christopher, because you deserve to be happy, and you deserve to be happy with what you’ve become.”

The words, the points, and the money all disappear. I look around the room and realize that I am not surrounded by diehard competitors who play this odd game for fame and glory, but by people just like me who had wanted to join this eccentric subculture, who had wanted to finally be accepted in their lives. For us, Scrabble is not about satisfying a vain addiction to competition, but rather about the heartfelt players like Frank Lee who have come together to support one another and their love for the game, foibles and all. I am not playing this game for dollars and cents; I am playing it for a sense of family.

Across the table is not just a man with a striped hat, an oxygen tank, and orange diabetic footsoles; this is a man who had been taken under the wing of our minuscule clique of players, and accepted just the way he is: as a lover of language and a man of honor. Good game, Frank.

# From America with Russian Love Fiona Jenna Blumin

## 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.

A vivacious and carefree four-year-old, I dropped my paintbrush, splattering globs of blue paint all over my t-shirt and classmates nearby. Immediately, my thin lips transformed into an enormous grin. My grandpa, or as we say in Russian, my dedashka, was finally here to pick me up. Flailing, I ran into his arms screaming, “Deda Vova!” My grandpa’s warm arms embraced my little four-year-old body. He enthusiastically said, “Preevet Fionachka," calling me by my Russian name and pointing his always-ready video camera towards me. I was ecstatic to start my fun-filled Friday afternoon with my grandfather. Hurriedly, I pulled away from his embrace and packed up my belongings. With my tiny and soft hand in his rough and wrinkly one, we left the building and began our weekly adventure.

Years later, I was helping my grandparents clean out their basement and stumbled upon a cardboard box of dusty cassettes. I found a tape labeled “Preschool 2003 – Fionachka.” I excitedly ran upstairs and asked my grandpa to start up the VCR. Video after video, I watched my preschool Fridays come back to life as my four-year-old self dropped anything and everything in hand and jumped into my grandpa’s arms. After a while of watching documentaries of our mini adventures, it was only then that I realized the extent to which my life had changed. Instead of rejoicing as I watched some of my favorite childhood memories, I silently watched my tiny lips make out Russian words so naturally and so effortlessly, an ability that, sadly, I had since lost.

Once the epitome of a girl with Russian immigrant parents, I wondered how I had allowed myself to stray so far from my Russian identity. My weekly adventures with my grandpa transformed into bi-monthly empty phone conversations in his broken English and my broken Russian. I wanted nothing more than to once again form a close connection with my grandpa and the Russian language that united us.

At first, it was extremely difficult. Though I could always understand Russian, I had a very limited vocabulary and often botched the pronunciation. However, I made every effort to watch Russian movies and converse with my parents in Russian. I even worked with a Russian tutor to learn the written language.

After two years, on my 15th birthday, I received my usual birthday card from my grandparents written in Russian. All previous years, I was unable to read their cards on my own. This year was different. Slowly, I made out the chicken scratch on the pink card that pictured a dog in a birthday hat holding balloons. After about five minutes of staring at the various Russian letters, I closed the card and gave my grandparents a long and tight hug, thanking them for their kind words. When I pulled away, I saw that my grandpa had a tear rolling down his cheek. He then proceeded to tell me that he was very proud of me.

In my re-learning of the language, I again became proficient and closer to my family – exactly my goal. My grandparents and I began to carry on more substantial and intellectual conversations in Russian. I learned more about my family’s past. I even began to read short Russian stories. Although my ability to converse in Russian has become better, there is still much more to learn. I want to become fluent enough to visit my grandparents' and parents’ hometowns. I want to sing along to the Russian songs that play in my parents’ cars. I want to read Russian literature and discover Russian texts. But for now, I am proficient enough to spend an entire day with my grandfather and solely converse in Russian. Whether it is listening to his childhood stories, hiking in the park, or grabbing breakfast at our favorite pancake place, it feels as though nothing has changed since my preschool days.