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**Sample essays 2017**

**William and Mary College**

# Ready for the Future Because of My Background Anonymous

## 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.

I never knew when I was speaking Farsi, Chinese, or English. After all, I would flit back and forth from my Taiwanese mother to my Persian father, rapidly translating words between them. Then, I'd settle into bed for my regular Dr. Seuss bedtime story.

Having parents from not only different ethnic backgrounds, but from opposite ends of the socio-economic spectrum, has really helped create and shape my unique perspective on life. For example, this year I'm taking a semester history class, America and the World Since 1945. We began the year discussing the current situation in the Middle East along with the history of terrorism. While discussing the definition of a terrorist, I raised my hand and stated that our characterization would include George Washington in the category of a terrorist. He did terrorize the Loyalist Tories who supported the King during the American Revolution in the name of liberty. After I spoke the class went into an uproar, wondering how could I have had the gall to even suggest such a thing. How could I defile an integral and cherished man in the history of our country? I was not trying to be controversial; I was just looking at the issues from a different perspective. I consider myself a loyal and proud American citizen; however, I cannot look at life through a solely American viewpoint. I was taught to be open-minded and I value open dialogue between cultures.

In addition to a unique viewpoint, my parents have each taught me important lessons in life that have factored into my personality. My mom grew up in a poor family with six children in Taiwan, yet each of her siblings went through college and most went to graduate school in the U.S. Thus, she never takes anything for granted and values integrity and hard work. She has instilled in my sister and me these same values. She used to embarrass me all the time with her so-called lessons. For example, whenever we went to the grocery store and the cashier totaled up our receipt incorrectly, whether in our favor or theirs, my mom would insist on going back and correcting this mistake. I would try to hide behind rows of chips and candy bars, hoping that no one would realize she was my mother. She would interrupt the line, forcefully speaking in a loud voice demanding the fair change or giving back what she was not owed. After realizing she had completely embarrassed me, she would explain to me that it "wasn't the money, but the principle" of the matter. Nowadays, not only do I look on proudly as she attempts to correct the wrongs of the world one receipt at a time, I follow in her footsteps. My father, on the other hand, had an advantaged childhood. His father was the vice president of the B.F. Goodrich tire company in Iran, he attended a prestigious all-boys private school, and he rarely wanted for anything. He came to the U.S. to go to college and fully expected to return after four years. The political climate changed everything, however. The 1979 Iranian Revolution brought the fundamentalist Ayatollah Khomeini into power, a man who had little tolerance and patience for non-Muslims. My father's family were all Bahai's, the newest world religion, so much of their land was confiscated and many of them had to escape to various countries such as England, Germany, and the U.S. If they had recanted their religious beliefs and converted to Islam, my father and his family would have immediately regained their status and property. However, they stood up for their beliefs and suffered for it. Yet, they never wavered.

My dad constantly tells me, and has shown me by his actions, that it is necessary to be strong, know your true values and stand up for them regardless of the situation. I have always believed that you have to "stand up for something or you'll fall for anything". Equipped with this belief, my distinct mix of cultures, and all the lessons my parents have taught me, I am fully ready to tackle with confidence the next step of my life: college.

# Lost In (which is "en" in Greek, "in" in Latin, but "en" again in Latinates) Thought Shannon Maene

## William and Mary Common Application supplement: Tell us a little more about yourself. Submit anything you like -- an additional essay, a collage, a photo album -- that will give us a better idea of who you are.

I have been told I am a thinker: one who is commonly lost in thought - which arises as a result of the interactions between the various parts of the brain, according to one theory, as the logical center in the front left hemisphere attempts to make sense of the various stimuli it receives from the other centers of the brain, such as the sensual stimuli centers that are on either side of the brain - except the vocal areas and several other nuclei, which usually are centered in one side or the other - as well as the amigdala and other parts of the so-called "primary mammalian" brain, though they are more responsible for primary emotions such as fear, pleasure, and aggressiveness. I think this is true, but I find it discouraging that it is often said as a criticism rather than a complement.

I am unsure why excessive thought would be such an undesirable thing. After all, it is thinking that separates our race from many otherwise adept organisms, although it has been argued that opposable thumbs were the most important adaptation. Or perhaps speech, which was first proposed to have arisen biologically by Noam Chomsky (who is still alive but seems to have temporarily given up sparking whole revolutions in historical linguistics) in what is now known among linguists as The Event. Additionally, it is certainly our propensity for thought - insatiable, profuse, and boundless exploration - which has created our modern world, although it is arguable whether our culture itself, with its aptitude and unfettered curiosity, fostered such developments, or if it were simply the culmination of several environmental phenomena, such as the presence of pack-animals, high-protein staple grains, and the latitudinal migration potential that existed across the Eurasian continent. Despite this, I do understand that sometimes, I just do not realize how much I am missing while I am busy in thought.

You see, I've always been a curious and inquisitive individual, prone to examining anything and everything in an attempt to deduce its inner workings. I certainly prescribe to what Aristotle set down, man's desire to "know by nature" - although of course it is quite difficult to trace it directly to him, as it could have just as easily been the teaching of his master Plato, or perhaps the product of one of the Pre-Socratics, Thales, or even Anaxagoras. They were more concerned with natural philosophy, but nevertheless explored their area of interest as much as any other philosopher, as Socrates with his world of wisdom, Plato, with his world of universals and perfection, or Pythagoras, who technically is called a Pre-Socratic, but only for the time period in which he lived. Overall, I just can't help it.

At least I will say I am working on it. I try not to become lost in thought so often, like last year when I would miss whole periods attempting to visualize the effects of the theory of special relativity if one were to map the movements of Jupiter in relation to the sun, and which was ultimately moving more quickly, although in order to declare either of them as truly moving would require some means of acceleration, which perhaps could exist based on the elliptical nature of Jupiter's orbit, but then again, does it actually speed up, being closer to the sun, or is the change in distance insignificant considering the some 775 million meters, give or take about 6 million meters, separating the two massive bodies? But then again, what about the other planets' pull on Jupiter, or vice versa, as Jupiter is in fact the size of a small sun, and would certainly be able to affect the orbit of another of the planets, in quantitative acceleration, given a close enough distance? And what about the wave nature of Jupiter's movement, which would certainly -

What was I saying?

# 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."

# "All That Matters" Anonymous

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

No matter how old I grow, the meaning of friendship has always remained the same - loyalty, sympathy, understanding, and unwavering support. I learned this lesson early in life, back when my best friend's trampoline was the cornerstone of my social life. It was there that I learned the value of friendship and the understated importance of simply "being there."

For something we depended on so much, the four of us certainly abused that trampoline. Its face had been scorched by summer days, caked in pollen, covered in leaves, and buried in snow. It had even tolerated a sticky rainbow of popsicle drips from days when we would lie on our stomachs, lazing in the sun.

That trampoline heard its share of secrets, and it managed to keep them all. It stayed updated on who had crushes on whom, and kept quiet when the aforementioned boys jumped on with us. It served as our meeting place for devious plan-making, as well as our drawing board when we went back to square one. More importantly, it was a place to lie there together and do nothing - sweet, blissful nothing.

One summer, the trampoline played an even more important role than usual - the summer that Elizabeth's father died. The week before he passed we sat on the trampoline in silence, broken only by the crying of the suffering springs, indistinguishable from the crying of suffering girls. We offered Elizabeth our support, with minimal success. The only thing that helped was our presence on the trampoline, together, as we had been a million times before.

That was also the summer I moved away - away from popsicles and secret plots. Although there was nothing I could do about it, I felt guilty for leaving my childhood friends, especially when it felt as if they needed me most.

So I came back. Last year I revisited the trampoline (and, of course, the friends), and we remembered the giggles, the smiles, and the gossip. When we had finished catching up, we found ourselves in a reverent silence, like we had been years before. Looking down at that trampoline, I realized one very important detail: sometimes simply "being there" is all that matters.

# I Am: A French-American Charlotte Amanda Martin

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

Had someone asked me my nationality four years ago, I would have said American.

My father, unlike many fathers, is a stereotypical French man. He emigrated to the U.S. three years before I was born, yet worked hard to retain his culture, the same culture I chose to reject. Americans seem to have a deep-seated animosity towards the French because of France’s refusal to aid them in the War in Iraq. America’s antagonistic attitude and the unpleasant stereotypes associated with the French, such as being rude and arrogant, made me suppress any trace of French culture around me. An entire half of who I am slowly disappeared and remained hidden until I was able to gain the wisdom that comes with perspective.

From the age of five, I’ve spent every summer in the tiny village of Brusque in the South of France. The most exciting thing to have ever happened there was a town celebration of their first ATM machine. During my first few summers there, I quickly picked up the language. My cousins and I would entertain ourselves by performing skits (in French), playing the organ for the elderly at Mass, and floating down the Dourdou River in “Le Petit Titanic”, a boat my uncle built. I initially loved the trips because of all the attention I received — I was known as “The American” and was still oblivious of any cultural differences.

After entering high school, I started noticing those differences and things quickly changed. The unusual foods I ate, the strict French lifestyle my father made me abide by, and the foreign language I spoke at home were all things I tried hard to hide from my friends. I had convinced myself that people who would come into my home, meet my family, and not understand our French conversations would dissociate themselves from me. When it would come time for the next trip to France, I would beg my parents to let me stay home and go to summer camps like normal American girls; I would have done anything to just be normal.

Over time, I realized that denying my French heritage was a bigger struggle than simply accepting it. To be normal in America, which is such a diverse country, is to be different, and so I embraced both of my nationalities as one. A quote I read in Amy Tan’s The Opposite of Fate comes to mind. Her grammatically incorrect mother says it best: “You must be proud you different. You only shame is be ashamed.”

Four years ago, looking out of the classic French style windows of my grandmother’s 120-year-old house, I sat there with crossed arms and a bitter attitude. The village’s lack of modern, American-sized buildings bored me. But, gradually, something in me changed. Now, when I sit among the remains of a castle at the highest point of Brusque, I gaze affectionately down at the village. The countless cafes and bakeries filled with warm croissants and fresh baguettes have never before seemed so appealing. I now know who I am. I am the best of both worlds, a French American, whose French father just became an American citizen this year.

# My Passion for Literature Anonymous

## Students at the University of Notre Dame are passionate! Their passion gives direction and definition to campus academic, community, and spiritual life. Recognizing that you have already provided us with a list of your extracurricular activities, please briefly describe your greatest passion and tell us how it defines and directs you.

I stood on my tiptoes, clapping furiously, my mouth open in a joyous scream. The White Sox, my favorite baseball team, had won a critical game while I was in the audience. As the furor of victorious shouts died down, I noticed my friends’ faces; like mine, they were filled with glee. “How lucky I am,” I thought, “to be at this winning game with my best friends!” Almost without thinking, I murmured, “Now the heart is so full that a drop overfills it,” a line from James Lowell’s poem, “And what is so rare as a day in June?” Lowell’s words described my mood perfectly, even better than I could have done. This scholar-poet of the nineteenth century felt exactly about a day in June as I did about a Sox game.

That’s what I’ve always loved about literature: realizing that other men and women, living in radically different times and circumstances than my own, have felt as I do. I was six years old when I slowly plowed through my first “real” book, Laura Ingalls Wilder’s Little House in the Big Woods. I read about Laura’s games and fights with her sister, her chores, and her occasional confusion with the world of adults. I saw myself in Laura, who lived more than a century ago. I fell in love with books then and there, and my passion has never cooled. Whether I’m reading historical nonfiction or romance novels set in fantasy worlds, I find characters, situations, and simply quotes which I can never forget. My love for all things literary has even spilled over onto literature’s poor step-children, grammar and spelling: my friends ask me to proof-read their essays and laughingly call me a “walking dictionary”. I can never contain my excitement when I visit a library or bookstore. I saunter slowly through the aisles, reverently running my hand along the rows of books until a title catches my eye. Then, I pounce. I’ll sit down in the middle of the aisle, oblivious to the stares of passersby, and begin reading. If the book speaks to my heart, I inevitably bring it home.

Why am I so passionate about literature? It is simply because I am passionate about other people. Literature allows me to feel emotions I have yet to experience, to connect with men and women from all times and places. My interest in others guides my life in countless ways, whether I’m working as a camp counselor or costumed museum tour guide, or just enthusiastically befriending strangers I meet along the way. It guides me to apply to the University of Notre Dame, where passionate thinkers like myself, who care deeply about the world around them, belong.

# A Man of Convictions Eric Tracz

## Try to fit who you are in 500 words. Anything allowed!

I am well known for having many strongly held personal convictions. Whether people look fondly on my convictions or harness utter disdain for them is a completely different story. Some are seen to be outrageous, such as believing that dipping Wendy’s fries in Frosties is the greatest food marriage ever. Some are seen to be, at least to a limited extent, intelligent, including my belief that the loose criminal justice code used exclusively in professional sports can be largely attributed to its strong lobbying ties with the government. I have compiled three of my most popular and passionate convictions, which should be embraced or at the very least challenged by all.

My most controversial belief is my pro-conservative view of politics. Brian, my brother and a philosophy major at Boston College, claims to have “liberal tendencies.” As such, I can say that my “conservative tendencies” have been adequately challenged and forever will be. Let me begin my political rant by stating that liberals do not have anyone as attractive and captivating as Sarah Palin. Even my mom unintentionally bought a pair of glasses making her look almost identical to Palin. Who cannot help but go rogue? In an appeal to more intelligent audiences, I explain that conservatism offers better economic and social frameworks. Being Catholic, I believe that conservatism best represents the Catholic view of issues such as abortion and the legitimacy of traditional family values. Fr. Ober, my truly legendary AP Modern European teacher, enlightened us to the great economists of Ricardo and Adam Smith, who essentially paved the way to our free market system. Thus, I have come to the conclusion that conservatism is superior because it supports retaining and perfecting the free market system of America, which has shown to be durable and reliable throughout American history. In addition, I am a regular reader of BusinessWeek magazine and have started to delve into economic works, so I am somewhat well-read in the field of business and have a limited basis by which to make economic conclusions. My rant is done.

Speaking of convictions, I am sure that OJ is guilty. Sorry. I promise that my political rant and any mention of politics is over.

Coke is unequivocally superior to Pepsi. I have a valid and prized view of this issue because I have lived in Atlanta, the headquarters of Coke, and Cleveland, a hotbed for Pepsi distribution and consumption. Also, there are no drinks that I refuse to drink and only three foods I refuse to consume: Brussels sprouts, corned beef, and escarole. As such, I am not susceptible to strange cravings for one food and inexplicable disdain for another. After many years of analysis, I have concluded that Pepsi has the same properties as carbonized sugar water with a negligible hint of citric and phosphoric acid. Coke has a sweet taste, yet it also has a slight spice taste, which is simply undeniable. My verdict is that every savory sip of Coke is an experience. Pepsi is simply the drink for the unrefined and sweet-toothed. No wonder the majority of the schools I am applying to are located in Coke territory, also referred to as the South.

Lady GaGa is the best musician to ever exist. To begin, I believe that Lady GaGa is one of the most attractive women of the decade, a belief not so well received by my girlfriend. To put into terms even Descartes would understand—premise: Lady GaGa is the greatest artist of dance-pop—premise: and because dance-pop is the greatest genre ever—conclusion: therefore Lady GaGa is the greatest artist in all of music. Also, the mere fact that I am a male who even recognizes the name, Lady GaGa, further substantiates my conclusion. Lady GaGa’s presence is also felt in the dance world with her revolutionary dance moves, which I largely attribute to my world-famous dancing skills. Ultimately, the uniqueness and addicting nature of her beats and lyrics makes her tunes timeless.

Even though I have explained three of my most prominent convictions, I have many others that I feel passionately about. Should I go to the College of William and Mary, I will enlighten its community with my sometimes intelligent and largely humorous beliefs.

PS: I am convinced that Virginia is the best state in the Union.

# Unique Eyes Grace Sheridan

## Beyond your impressive academic credentials and extracurricular accomplishments, what else makes you unique and colorful?

Eye color was evenly divided in my family before I was born: two sets of blue eyes and two sets of green eyes. My birth would have traditionally tipped the scales, but I was born with one blue eye and one green. This anomaly was originally considered simply to be a fun fact or a strange tidbit, but, upon reflecting, I realize that my eye color signifies much more. Maybe the duplicity of the score foreshadowed that I would become a compromiser, that I would not see the world in black and white, or that I would not be restrained by typical limitations.

Another unexpected interpretation of my eye color stems from the different points in relationships at which any given person notices my uneven appearance. Some realize the moment they meet me, others realize years later, and perhaps some never notice. I like to think that my eyes are somewhat of a scale as to the type of person I am talking to. When someone notices your eyes, it shows they are perceptive and genuine in their interest. When you have unique eyes, you will undoubtedly receive a comment whenever they are noticed. This occurrence has caused me to strive to notice others. It inspires me to demonstrate that each person I am talking to has captivated my attention, to notice eye color, however congruent it may be.

My different eye colors are also more noticeable depending on my surrounding colors and lights, similar to how each person’s individual strengths and unique traits are more noticeable depending on his or her environment. Just as my eyes are physically unique, I believe my unique talents and desire for academic challenge would shine in a passionate and engaging community. Considering this, I believe that the place where my gifts would be most noticeable and useful is at this college.

# Artist Megan Zhu

## Please briefly elaborate on one of your extracurricular activities or work experiences in the space below (1000 character maximum).

The fan is chugging away overhead, desperately fighting off the heat that Jinhua’s summers are infamous for.

But I am oblivious: I’m finishing my drawing of Mickey Mouse. With pencil in hand, markers sprawled about, and a new book of cartoon pictures, the last thing on my mind is the weather. Nothing can stir me—I am in my element.

Over the past twelve years, I’ve learned to command my tools. As the artist, I am powerful: I act as both a creator and a mediator, imbuing each painting with a distinct impression. The variation, uniqueness, and uncertainty underlying each step of the process—these make up the essence of art which I strive for.

But I have discovered that true passion doesn’t reserve itself. From using my talent in student government to applying that same creativity in my patents, I’ve happily seen art penetrate all other areas of my life. Genuine passion brings joy to everyone—not just the pursuer.

# My Grandmother's Influence Megan Zhu

## Indicate a person who has had a significant influence on you, and describe that influence. (500 Words Maximum)

Zhu Qin, a peasant girl who had been isolated from civilization her entire life, knew nothing of the world that existed beyond the mountains. Not a single person in her family had had any prior education whatsoever; nobody was able to even write his or her own name. The youngest of nine children, Zhu Qin was determined to alter this. She started her formal education at age ten, and, with the odds very much against her, worked through high school and college, eventually becoming a reputable doctor.

I’ve heard my grandmother’s story once a year, every year since I immigrated to the States at age four. But I never get tired of it—her determination, hard work, and astounding accomplishments leave me in awe each time. Her daughter, my mother, became extraordinary as well: she attended Stanford on a full scholarship and succeeded in her subsequent entrepreneurial pursuits.

My grandmother’s whole-hearted persistence, ambition, patience, and, most of all, grace, are traits that I intend to mimic in my own life. She had only a slim chance of succeeding in her endeavors—but was never discouraged. Instead, she pushed herself even harder, focused on disproving the odds.

This brief yet meaningful family history has humbled me, making me realize that I am only where I am today because of the efforts invested by those before me. My grandmother’s determination, sacrifice, and unrelenting drive to achieve her goals regardless of all obstacles are traits I have come to hold in highest regard. She’s taught me a lesson that will be crucial to my future: if I yearn for success, I must work for it.

Over the past thirteen years, I’ve increasingly familiarized myself with this concept. From my cartoon drawings to my paintings hung in city hall, from my first debate tournament to my 2nd-place finish at the state championship, I’ve tested this truth for myself.

My grandmother has demonstrated that with effort and dedication, I can accomplish anything and everything I set my mind to. With my life just starting and so much ahead of me, there are guaranteed to be sleepless nights, stressful days, and moments when I’m ready to quit. But seeing how my grandmother ignored all hurdles and continued, I, too, will press forward. The family history I’ve heard many times has done well for me: it has inspired me, driven me, and most of all, made me eager to take on the challenges of leading an exceptional life.

Not too long ago, I was told by a distant relative that the women in our family tend to run strong.

I smiled.

Why?

I’m about to be living proof.

# Entering Musicianship Anonymous

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

When asked how to get to Carnegie Hall, a wise musician replied simply, “Practice.” Although I did plenty of practicing leading up to playing at Carnegie Hall, it was performing in New York that launched me towards true musicianship. The first time I really saw beauty in music was on that stage, getting to share my work of the past year with an audience. The sheer size and organic atmosphere of music in the Hall changed my approach to music from just going through the motions into a thinker, an analyzer, and a musician.

I can clearly remember a time when music was not a part of my life. I can remember sitting in the back seat of my parents’ car and asking about good music, cool music, and what they used to listen to. Music was a body of information I knew nothing about, almost as foreign as a new language to me. I can remember sifting through old records in my basement, from Led Zeppelin to Simon and Garfunkel. This was my first exposure to the world of music. I was hearing songs without really listening and grasping at their roots.

Along with nearly all my friends, I was thrown into band class in the sixth grade. I stuck with music all through middle school, on trombone, baritone, and tuba, but never really considered myself a “musician,” just a player of music, along for the ride. Out on stage, I was a scared little kid. I was stuck inside the boundaries of my knowledge, and knew nothing about being on stage.

Coming into high school, I began playing the bass, but was still just going through the musical motions. This new instrument presented a new challenge and renewed my interest, but even still, I was all too often lost among the jumbled lines on my sheets and rarely looked at the conductor for guidance while playing. My uncertainty and clumsiness on the bass only heightened my nervous tendencies leading up to our school concerts. To say the least, as the last chair of many basses I never even dreamed of playing outside of the high school, much less a world-renowned hall.

The first I heard of the Carnegie Hall performance was in the beginning of the next year, tenth grade. This year was soon packed with after school sectionals, Saturday practices, and playing tests. I grew more in musicianship through this constant exposure than almost any other time, I can still recall the melodies from Dvorak’s Serenade for Strings after playing them so many times. While I became a better player through this endless practice, the greatest shift into musicianship came from the Carnegie performance itself. Sitting on stage in New York was the first time I listened to music, rather than just hearing its notes. The sights and sounds of the hall shifted my frame of reference, practice turned from a chore to a daily opportunity for self-betterment and performing from a fear to a thrill.

Today, I look for every opportunity to play. I am part of what my parents say is too many performance groups and what I say is too few. Everything deserves to be recreated, from Mozart in Youth Symphony to James Brown in my funk band, and their notes are worth learning. I am no longer confined by the boundaries of my knowledge, but inspired by the unknown. Every new piece and phrase is an opportunity rather than a limit. The challenge and opportunity that Carnegie Hall put in my head gave me the desire to move from childhood as a player of music to adulthood as a musician.

# My Life as a Third Culture Kid Grace Kim

## The essay demonstrates your ability to write clearly and concisely on a selected topic and helps you distinguish yourself in your own voice. What do you want the readers of your application to know about you apart from courses, grades, and test scores? Choose the option that best helps you answer that question and write an essay of no more than 650 words, using the prompt to inspire and structure your response. Remember: 650 words is your limit, not your goal. Use the full range if you need it, but don't feel obligated to do so. (The application won't accept a response shorter than 250 words.) 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.

My family faced tragedy shortly after we arrived in Afghanistan. We struggled through our first six months, but my parents were new missionaries filled with excitement for God's work. Even when we timidly bought food from strangers who spoke Dari and ran around naked in the house because of the heat, we plowed through. One terrible night, I woke up in shock as I saw six masked robbers point guns and knives at my parents. I stared at the sharp glints of the knives so dangerously close to my parents' necks. These six raggedy, armed men looked so out of place in my pink room that I did not believe they were there until my baby sisters started crying at the sight of them.

When my sisters continued to wail to high heaven, the men pointed their guns at my sisters and told my mother in Dari to shut them up. My mother bravely tried to soothe my sisters, but they took my mother and father so that they could guide them to our money. I, as a seven-year-old, was left with my sisters, but I watched everything in a dream-like state. The robbers literally carried out everything, including electronics, closets, and even our mini gas stove. Finally, they rounded up our family and locked us up in the basement. My head was in a whirl, so confused, and so afraid. We stayed all night in the basement, waiting to see if the robbers would come back and shoot us. Thankfully, we found out they left, and in the morning, we packed up what few belongings we had left and crossed the border to Uzbekistan.

I left Afghanistan with a lot of bitterness. Even as a seven-year-old, I felt an emptiness knowing that this place was now a place of could-have-beens. Not only that, but the good memories of Afghanistan were forever marred by images of robbers hurting my parents. My parents were the two people who had always been constant in my life no matter where we moved, and seeing them so vulnerable created a fear in me I had never experienced before. I did not know the meaning of “safe” anymore. I wanted justice against these six men who came in, took our possessions, stole our futures, and traumatized our whole family. The Middle East had changed into a land of painful memories.

Despite this pain I often associate with Afghanistan, as I lived in Uzbekistan, and now Turkey, the Middle East as a whole has become my home. Much of my cultural experiences in Uzbekistan and Turkey have been similar to Afghanistan, and living in these different Middle Eastern countries have allowed me to re-develop an appreciation for this culture despite my past hurt. As time passed, I could associate the familiar arid air that slaps my cheeks and the booming sounds of the call to prayer as elements of “home”. In a mass of olive-skinned men and women, I always stand unique with my shiny Asian hair, but these differences are a part of who I am now. Sometimes it is still hard to forget the past, especially when sights, smells, or people remind me of my last day in Afghanistan. However, I have learned to reconcile the bitterness of my past and cultivate a new heart of compassion for this land and for these people, acknowledging the unmistakable print the Middle East has left on my heart.

# A Transformative Experience Anonymous

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

As the sunlight began to dim, my panic rose. The street signs were incomprehensible, and any request for assistance only resulted in a barrage of unfamiliar German. I found myself hoping for a rapid rescue, yet I knew that I needed to find my own way out of the urban confusion of downtown Stuttgart. I was terrified. I found myself racing around a train station, frantically asking all the cab drivers in broken German if they knew where my temporary residence was; finally, I was directed to a bus stop. Unfortunately, I would have to wait quite some time before the next bus arrived. As I sat on the cold stone bench, dejected, I began to notice what was around me. The city was filled with images that were so incongruous with the strict mold of my past experiences that I was stunned.

Born in India and raised in the most traditional manner possible, I had lived a very sheltered life. It was drilled into me that "your success depends on your dedication to your grades," which left little time for "superfluous" activities. I became a diligent worker, yet I lacked the conviction to pursue more than just my education. The structure of my life led me to believe in the universality of my work-driven code, yet this belief was now being shaken.

On every corner of the city was new evidence that my principles were not shared. Teenagers with beers were strolling through the streets, leaving me dumbfounded, only able to wonder: "What would their parents say?" It surprised me further to know that their parents followed close behind, beers in hand. In other areas, I saw other children walking through the city late in the evening, even though school would begin early the next morning. The entire metropolis was full of individuals my age, not just having fun, but developing -- working, volunteering, training, networking, and engaging. The freedom and relationships astounded me and opened my eyes to new possibilities.

Upon leaving the train station, I begin to recognize the imperfections in my perspective. If individuals across the world had found such apparent comfort, confidence, and success by following different beliefs, then maybe my beliefs were not as universal as I had thought. Over time, I departed from my single-minded focus on academics, and began to take a greater role in the activities which had once seemed "frivolous" or "secondary." I discovered ways to reach well beyond textbook education: computer technology, music, and tennis became paramount. Every day, I learned and practiced, developing my skills in Python or HTML, refining my tone and expanding my range, or honing my stamina and shot selection through rigorous practice sessions. Though I only gradually arrived at my future course of study, I envisioned the possibilities for the first time: developing software to propel the next generation of spacecraft, researching neural pathways that influence physical capabilities, or even performing music professionally.

The experience at that German Bus Station, Schloßplatz, remains one of the greatest influences on my life. Its destabilizing nature gave me the opportunity to observe the world unbiased, and to derive a perspective more global in nature. Such a drastic variation has taught me that education is far more than a textbook: it is a method to expand on your passions and strive towards something greater, the essence of the fulfilling yet unexpected lifestyles that I observed, from a bus stop bench, that day in Germany.

# First Love Affair Carlos Holden-Villars

## What work of art, music, science, mathematics, or literature has surprised, unsettled, or challenged you, and in what way

My first love affair was longer than thirty pages; it had no thirty-point font; it did not include any colorful illustrations. In the summer of third grade I read Matilda, by Roald Dahl. I was awed at the size of the thing; I mean, I could barely hold it with two hands. I felt like such an adult when I flipped through all 232 pages and saw nothing but normal text and a few black and white illustrations. Soon enough I was begging for the Trunchbull to have mercy on Matilda, and I remember how badly I felt that Ms. Honey had to eat margarine instead of butter. Recalling the hilarious image of Amanda being catapulted through the air by her pigtails always puts a grin on my face.

I paused every few paragraphs to whoop into my pillow, punching the bed with gusto. I would become irritated at the slightest interruption. Reading an actual book better be enough to finally make me smarter than my sister, I thought. I can still remember the sense of accomplishment at finishing Chapter 1. Chapter 1! I was finally able to experience reading a book, after years of scribbling on paper with colored pencils and stapling the sheets together just to imagine what it was like.

The monotony of third grade was broken when I entered the world of a precocious girl with telekinetic powers who lived happily ever after. Many others worlds followed, from those of Dostoevsky to Hemingway to Orwell, but Dahl’s remains the one that ignited my passion for literature.

# A Fairy Tale Anonymous

## Recount an incident or time when you experienced failure. How did it affect you, and what lessons did you learn?

It was 2 AM. As my fingers moved across the keyboard, words sprang onto the surface of my laptop screen like drops of tar. Word count revealed that I had only written 500 words today. Unacceptable. Stephen King averaged 2000 words a day. I had to keep up. Disregarding how the stream of words popping up on the screen contradicted the story line, I continued to write.

My desire to write a novel had been born out of envy. I felt painfully ordinary in comparison to my classmates who each seemed to possess a ream of talents that outshone my own. I craved a success, and I thought writing a novel would be a suitable solution.

I began the endeavor with enthusiasm, titling my work-in-progress The White-Haired Princess. Even though the characters I came up with were beings of another world, by fleshing out their physical features, fears, and histories in my mind, they became satisfyingly human: Aia, the brazen queen, Sarah, the eerie princess, and Geoff, the cruel prince. I wondered what sort of childhood could have made Geoff calloused enough to kill forest animals in front of fragile Sarah, and how much of Aia's harsh treatment of her daughter contributed to her meek disposition. Late at night and early in the morning, I would huddle over my keyboard pondering these questions. The world was submerged in sleep, but I led myself to a realm teeming with animation. I was enthralled by my daily discoveries.

However, it was not long before the novel-writing sessions became less than romantic. My impatience for success soured my ventures into the fairytale world: why was I trying to figure out what Aia liked eating for breakfast when there was a plot that needed furthering before I could reach the ending that would catapult me towards success? The writing sessions mutated into long periods of frustration: I typed and typed and typed without interludes of contemplation. I was no longer bringing my story to life but merely churning out senseless words.

There was a painful contrast between the miserable final days of forcing myself to type the would-be novel and the jubilant sprees of flying fingers that I had experienced at the beginning of the project. It served as evidence that the desire for the end result can be the very force that prevents the achievement. A genuine heart that enjoys every step of the process is just as valuable as success, for how can authors be lauded as masters of writing when they feel no attachment to their own stories? Ultimately, both the process towards success and success itself merge into a means for me to understand myself. If I had continued to plow through writing sessions, the sad heap of pages that would have resulted would be meaningless. What gave the stories meaning was that my mind had danced with various story lines, throwing some of them away but learning lessons from all of them. Their waltzes brought forward ideas that resonated within me until my imagination became clearer than it ever was before.

The end of my experience with The White-Haired Princess was not the triumph I had imagined, but it was an experience that satisfied its conception: I no longer felt anxious comparing myself to my classmates. An achievement is not valuable because it is a giant trophy, but valuable because it symbolizes dedication to the project that brought it into being. I had not gotten my hands on the trophy, but I had discovered the key to what makes a trophy so coveted. It is, at its best, a symbol of who you are and where (imaginatively, in my case) you've been.

# Resilience Jacob Isler

## 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. What is the one thing that you think sets you apart from other candidates applying to the University of California? What perspective do you feel that you will contribute to life here?

If I had to describe the culture of my family in one word, it would be "resilient." Every year, my father gets a new assignment... fight in the skies above Iraq, train future pilots in Mississippi, advise a four star general in Hawaii, and now, command an entire base in Texas. There is a motto in our branch of the military: "Home is where the Air Force sends us." True to this sentiment, regardless of the disposition of my father's new assignment, my family fights to remain strong. When orders come, we move, leaving behind our friendships and worldly attachments, but always taking a little bit of that place's culture with us.

This transient lifestyle is not new to my parents. My mother is a product of the Vietnam war, born in Da Nang to a native mother and a U.S. Army officer before they immigrated to America and raised her, like me, as a military brat. My own father had a similar upbringing, living with his Army chaplain dad even during extended deployments in Panama before joining the force himself. Being raised in military households taught my parents to embrace the lifestyle they now choose to have. When given orders, one must accept them and make do with what one is given. Growing up in a household that upholds this philosophy -- to make the most out of situations -- has shaped me as a person. Because I often change schools every year, I cannot always devote myself to the same sports or extracurricular activities. For example, when my family moved to Hawaii, my new high school did not offer the robotics program in which I had excelled through my previous school in Mississippi. So I joined the debate team, and have managed to break into the state finals every year since.

In the same manner, living in 13 different places over the first 17 years of my life has impacted my view of the world and of what makes me feel at home. With every move, we add something to our family's traditions. When my family moved from Hawaii to Texas, I brought with me a newfound passion for boxing (a required skill for youth growing up in the Pacific) and started a self-defense club at my current school. It is now impossible for my mom to cook fried rice without adding Spam. My baby brother still talks about paddle boarding in Hickam Harbor with the sea turtles. And sometimes, I think about the friends I used to have a move or two ago... I don't wonder if they miss me, just if they remember me, whether I had any impact on their life, or if they would even recognize me today. Not whether I look the same, but how my behavior has changed... if I've really matured like I think I have, or if I've fundamentally changed as a person.

I was raised in a house characterized by resilience, a trait needed for the military lifestyle. I was also brought up in a dozen different societies, each showing me a different perspective on things and changing me in some way. At Boy's State, I had the chance to interact with students from every corner of life in Texas. As I talked to them and befriended them, I realized something... no matter how different from me that person may seem to be, we could relate to each other. Regardless of whether we were strangers minutes before, we could become comfortable and share some of the things we experienced in our lives, because chances were that at some point, I had gone through something similar to them. My past has taught me many lessons. I hope for the chance to share them with my university.

# Modeling Maude Evelyn Marie Torsher

## Common app - What is a movie that impacted your life?

As a child, I worried about everything. Things that most kids enjoyed like school, roller coasters and junk food made me nervous and uncomfortable. I became used to having a persistent stomach ache; I was always anxious and reluctant to try anything. Consequently, I felt perpetually sure that whatever was around the next corner would be tragic and scary.

My parents, known for their readiness and optimism, refused to let my hesitations hold me back. They pushed me to try new things while supporting me despite my tearful objections. Though few things could comfort me in my loneliness and apprehension, most nights I would be found safety curled up with them, watching a movie. We watched everything from documentaries to cartoons, The Godfather to Airplane!. I normally viewed these gatherings as an escape, but one film truly touched me: Harold and Maude.

While I sought to survive in a family where living life to the fullest was the cardinal rule, I watched Harold struggle to fit in with a family of wealthy socialites. I empathized with his somber acts of rebellion in response to his mother’s insistence that he conform. Harold was a loner, and I could identify with him.

Soon, Harold and I met Maude. Maude’s outlook, that every day is a gift, could not have been more contrary to Harold’s and mine. “A lot of people enjoy being dead,” she tells us, “they’re not dead, really. They’re just backing away from life.” She loves to do and feel new things and introduces us to a fresh way of life by showing Harold how she lives: abandoning cowardice and making the most of each day.

Approaching middle school armed with Maude’s confident words, “I’m always looking for a new experience!”, I began to realize that opportunities had to be seized or they would be missed. Maude did not drag me along in unique machinations as she did Harold, but I kept her philosophy in mind as I pushed myself to try things I would have been anxious about in the past: I joined the city swim team, and went to sleep-away summer camp for two weeks. Though twinges of nervousness still surrounded much of what I did, I knew that Maude would be proud to see me saying “yes” more often.

With time, maintaining an open mind has become easier. I entered high school with few worries and my mindset has provided me with an array of invaluable experiences. I have touched a stingray, been to a rap concert, and eaten raw oysters: things that would have made second-grade Evelyn cringe.

Now that I am approaching college, open-mindedness will continue to be important. I have learned to embrace each experience rather than to count the moments until it’s over; I have become always prepared to greet new people and ideas with readiness and optimism. With that attitude, I strive to gain wisdom from any experience, every experience. I have come so far from my anxious childhood, and am grateful for those movie nights, and for Maude.

# The Tap Shoes 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.

On my first day of third grade, I wore tap shoes to school. The majority of my elementary school years was a blur, but I vividly remember this occurrence as it is the earliest memory I have of going decisively against the crowd. They were a creamy beige color with a dainty ribbon tied into a tiny bow, and aluminum taps that were so reflective if you turned them towards the light in a certain way, they’d blind you. Although my interest in dance was short-lived, those shoes made me feel like an icon, a Fred Astaire of some sort. My eight-year-old self made the executive decision to wear them to school.

So when the day came, I, with the utmost defiance, slipped on the tap shoes, ran onto the bus, and made my way to school. As I strode into the building, nearly all the students turned their heads in response to the rhythmic clacking that echoed from the aluminum taps hitting the shiny, epoxy floors. Only a few hours into the school day, my English teacher pulled me aside and curtly explained that the noise from my shoes was distracting, then proceeded to walk me down to the nurse’s office. The nurse was lighthearted about the situation, mentioning how my footwear dilemma was the first one she had encountered in her career. After a brief discussion with the teacher, the nurse pulled out a roll of masking tape and began taping the bottom of the shoes in order to dull out their sound. Considering that I chose to wear them solely for their unique silver taps, I was thoroughly disappointed. My special shoes were now like every other pair I owned, with no sign of the individuality I possessed at such a young age.

My footwear of choice that day was not to purposely garner attention, but instead represented the non-conformist attitudes I continued to stand by throughout my life. To my fifth-grade school pictures, I wore a ridiculous pink dress because it was my desire to do so, and even then, I was comfortable with being different from the majority. Fitting in with my peers was a secondary concern when compared to my need for self-expression. As my academic career progressed and my interests grew, I learned to embrace what was unique to me - even if it was challenging, even if it was outlandish. I didn’t dress, act, or even draw a certain way in order to seek approval from my peers, but because my nonconformist qualities were what shaped my identity - mostly, after a time, my psychology.

Is the power of non-conformity only displayed through outward appearances? Of course not. Even when faced with hardships or opportunities, I approach them differently than someone else standing in my shoes might. And in doing so, I make the problems I encounter my own, and often, come up with a solution that no one would have expected.

Those old tap shoes and frilly dresses are most likely stuffed into a closet collecting dust, yet they are still a reminder of my non-conformist choices that I am proud of - the very first symbols of individuality that eventually shaped my life and my future.