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**Sample essays 2023**

**Brandeis University**

**Yeye Anonymous**

**Who has influenced you the most?**

Waking from calm dreamless sleep, I find intricately patterned welts on my skin, embedded by the woven bamboo mattress, the only reminders of the night. I descend from the bed and frown as my feet reach the cold and damp dirt floor. It rained early in the morning, silent, without warning, a commonly decided upon secret among the capricious gods. Curling up my toes, I toddle across the room to a wooden dresser, its top reaching slightly above my head. He stands there, immersed in brushing his teeth, as I watch, silently and barely noticed from below. He glances down quickly, without moving his head, makes his decision, and spits into the porcelain washing-bowl.

I would go to school with him today. I bite on my lower lip to hide a smile. Dressing quickly, I run outside and leap over a group of scattered brown and white chickens in the yard. I pick a small, immature tomato from the garden and begin to eat it as I wait by his bicycle. We journey down the only paved road of Majia Village. Unfastened on the back of his bicycle, I cling to his shirt and hold my legs out so that they stay free of the spokes. We turn into the school courtyard and he places the bicycle against a wall. Upon entering his classroom, rows and rows of students stand from their seats, turn toward the door and, in unison, salute their teacher, my grandfather.

When the Communists emerged in China, they failed to completely destroy the old order. My grandfather remained the domineering patriarch, unquestioned and proud. A cursing, self-righteous, incessant drinker, his family relations were shaky at best. I was born a girl in a new one-child society where, despite all talk of progress, boys were preferred. My grandfather demanded I be sent to the countryside where I would not have to officially exist. My mother refused and alone named me and registered me in my birth town of Shuangyashan by Siberian Russia. In 1988, my parents immigrated to America and I was to follow. The year before I left, I stayed with my grandfather, yeye, and my grandmother, nainai, in the little farming village that bears my name.

"Sit there," he points to a chair in the corner.

I walk proudly and slowly across the room and alight upon my appointed throne. I am after all the daughter of college-educated parents living in the mysterious and magnificent land of America, for which I will soon depart. I tell this self-servingly to a girl in the class, adding, "They have yellow hair in America. My hair, too, will become yellow." My intention was to invoke jealousy, which I assume identical to exaltation.

Yeye looks up from his desk and hears my grandiose speech, pulls me out of the room and slaps me on the cheek. "You are nothing," his harsh voice reverberates off the walls, "until you make yourself something." I am bewildered and angry and stare back fiercely, as he continues: "The moment you think yourself superior, they have already become one thousand times better." I look down at the ground. His features soften, his voice, subdued: "I am a poor farmer, and perhaps will never be greater. You can have everything. If the whole world disappears, that will be the only thing that matters to me."

At that moment, my grandfather, Ma Zhijiang, unyielding sovereign of the family, imperial descendant, survivor of the Japanese invasion of Manchuria, dignified village elder, forsook all his pride and admitted to a four year old that he was less than what he'd hoped for. And all of this to tell her that his sole wish was for her to live well and humbly. In spite of yeye's temper, his preference for boys, the unchangeable things rooted in his nature and customs, I forgive him for what he told me that day.

# Brandeis: The Pinnacle of my Collegiate Desires Daniel Dolgicer

## Why Do you Think Brandeis University Would be a Good Place for you to Receive a College Education?

Brandeis University's international prestige, reputation for academic excellence, appealing location, and familial social environment compel me to seek acceptance to the university.

Offering a wide range of courses, Brandeis University is an institution where I can pursue all of my diverse interests in satisfying detail. As someone with a vested interest in Middle Eastern affairs, I am most fascinated by the Crown Center for Middle East Studies. The esteemed professors, exemplary facilities, and noble mission of the Crown Center create an environment in which I can immerse myself in my chosen field of study. It is a collegiate habitat that can facilitate my passions for Israel, the Middle East, and the issues facing the region. Brandeis University is the premier school in the United States for the study of the Middle East - an asset which in itself makes the university unique and attractive for students like myself.

Brandeis's formidable linguistic programs are yet another appealing feature of its academic repertoire. My interest in global studies naturally breeds a potent desire to learn languages. Furthermore, as an American-Israeli, I maintain an equally strong desire to master Hebrew; Brandeis's lauded Hebrew program is a rare commodity among elite American universities. Brandeis's emphasis on foreign languages matches seamlessly with my academic goals.

The quality of life Brandeis offers is also appealing to me. I imagine myself studying the finer points of Zoroastrianism for three hours and then dancing to international music at Pachanga. Brandeis strikes the consummate balance between learning and leisure; it appears to be a place where students are truly happy.

Finally, in stark contrast to gargantuan universities - overrun by teaching assistants and characterized by enormous lecture halls - Brandeis offers an atmosphere of familiarity in which professors and students interact on a more personal level. This creates a more engaging classroom environment, characterized by class discussions and one-on-one consultations. It is in this exceptional educational framework that I truly feel that I can blossom.

# Nuts Drive Me Nuts Emily Ricklin

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

At a Bat Mitzvah I attended in eighth grade, an encounter with seemingly innocent Japanese cabbage-which I did not know was marinated in peanut oil-produced an unparalleled wrath. Upon putting a mere spoonful into my mouth, I went into anaphylactic shock. This taste of hell enveloped my entire body in quarter-sized welts, sent excruciating pains darting up and down my spine, inflated my eyelids and lips so that I resembled a grotesque blowfish, and virtually disabled me from breathing. Calling this treacherous event a near-death experience is not a hyperbole by any means. The maximum safe dosage of Benadryl was a life-saving intervention, pacifying the reaction rapidly enough to prevent the need for an Epi-Pen injection and a visit to the emergency room. If I had not taken any measures, that morsel of lethal cabbage could have taken my life.

A trait that has distanced me from most of my peers is my severe allergy to nuts. Nothing else could garner the bewildered gaze at my Medic-Alert bracelet as people guess the identity and magnitude of the medical anomaly engraved on the reverse side, or the sophomoric chuckles when they hear "nuts." I take the jokes in stride, but few comprehend the burden of living with such a dietary restriction. Scrutinizing ingredient labels is irksome, yet the punishment for slacking off can be fatal. I learned the hard way how imperative it is to investigate the contents of food that is not pre-packaged, since numerous cuisines contain nuts or nut products.

Living with a severe food allergy has caused me to mature more quickly than most my contemporaries. Growing up, I have faced an arguably daunting task-finding the words to politely decline certain foods without insulting one's cooking or housewarming abilities. My limitations have undoubtedly sharpened my awareness and increased my tolerance of others' food sensitivities, since I completely understand what they go through. Moreover, whether someone is lactose intolerant, of another race, or from a different religion, I empathize with their feeling "different."

No matter how careful I am in monitoring my actions, there is an inevitable margin of error that can only be avoided by literally sealing oneself within a protective barrier, making oneself a "Bubble Boy" (or girl), which I clearly refuse to do. In that way, my allergy is a direct metaphor for going off to college: I will be leaving my comfort zone to enter a much bigger-and potentially threatening-new environment. Since the cafeteria is laden with potentially hazardous foods, I can only rely on myself for protection. Depending on my parents' vigilance when I have a lapse in judgment, food-related or otherwise, is no longer an option. More importantly, the people I will encounter may not be as sensitive to those who are distinctly different, as I am. I may have always been deprived of peanut butter and jelly, but I possess an allergy that-despite its negative aspects-has constantly reminded me to be open-minded and respectful of others.

# A New Life Konstantin Drabkin

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

I still remember it like it was yesterday. After seven days of grueling labor pushing my body to its limits, I was proudly walking - no, strutting. As my clean and pressed uniform held my new ribbons for the world to see, I looked up to the stands to find the people I cared noticed, and there they were, proudly snapping away with their cameras as Captain McClelland announced my name. Earning a spot in Leadership Academy, an NJROTC boot camp, is a privilege; graduating is a life-altering circumstance.

In the first day, the drill instructors broke us down, removing the protective bubble wrap of the individual, leaving behind raw, primal beings. We were then left on our own to fix ourselves. For the next seven days, we would be nothing more than mosquito bait in the blistering sun. Many tacitly accepted the situation, concerned with simply surviving the week; I chose to rise up and use this chance to improve myself. All of life's tedious little lessons I thought I knew began to truly make sense. Suddenly I could not picture myself as anything other than a perfect gentleman, complete with self-discipline and a well-developed code of honor. That was my rebirth.

As I left the stadium following the graduation ceremony, I sped by my new friends, quickly exchanging goodbye's and congratulations. I was a man on a mission. I had to take my family to the restaurant; I owed them a proper meal. As I would do for my guests so many times later, I held the door for my family, waited patiently for them to begin eating prior to enjoying my first real meal of the week. The pangs of hunger gave me strength. It felt great to behave like a gentleman. As I go about my every day life, I take every chance to help someone else. My motivation comes from knowing what is right.

"Act like there is a camera fixed on your face, with your family watching 24/7," my Drill Sergeant, Chief Petty Officer Morales, told me. During Leadership Academy, personal honor was an object that was graded on a daily basis. Thievery, disrespect, and dishonesty were not tolerated, and troublemakers were immediately sent home without the coveted completer's cord. I take personal pride in upholding the highest standards of morality. Though my ideals often face ridicule in the world that widely accepts complete lack of effort and motivation, I stand by my beliefs. The only gratification I need is knowing that I am representing my family, my school, and my country to the best of my ability. This is not to say that such behavior always comes naturally, but I have learned that self-discipline almost always pays off in the end.

According to the United States Army, "Pain is weakness leaving the body." Rigorous discipline is a key factor in nearly everything I accomplish, from fitness to academics. Following my graduation from Leadership Academy, I knew that I was capable of doing anything I set my mind to, and with only four months of training I won my age division in the Paul Bunyan marathon. Upon my return to school I was disappointed to find out I had already completed all of the advanced placement courses I was pre-qualified to take. Rather than face a lack-luster year, I decided to take on an array of new A.P. Courses. Without ever taking a computer class or Spanish III, my A.P. Computer Science and A.P. Spanish courses are an uphill battle, but one I am winning. Though the week I spent at Leadership Academy had a very powerful effect on me, its permanent change comes from the choice I make every day by defining myself as a disciplined, honorable gentleman.

# Crap Anonymous

## Tell us something about yourself.

I love crap. I love bad novels and cheap clothes. I love dirty shoelaces and melted candles, junk earrings and instant coffee. It's about finding the beauty in everything. I find it in palms and tea leaves. I sense Pablo Neruda's sonnets in my coffee dregs, the sublime in street signs, the art in skillfully spilt milk. Every morning, in red beret and blue jeans, I sniff out the bizarre, the grotesque, the beautifully grotesque – a spiraling stack of Post-It notes, photos of transvestites, the horned slug on my lawn in November - life.

The beauty that I even exist is a fleeting grin of luck. In post-Mao China's universities, where my parents met, it was rare for anyone to go to college. They wax nostalgic about their Cultural Revolution, now working keyboards instead of farms. My parents embody human accomplishment and flaw: my dad can whistle; my mother makes great spareribs; neither enjoys cheese. Loving cheese is the hidden East-West divide, a fragile fence of cheddar marking the difference between two worlds. From my mother, I inherited my creativity, first manifested in sewing my own dolls since we could ill afford any. No regrets: I've been told Barbie is an oppressor of women.

At arm's length, my parents humor my love for writing and design, thinking it impractical. They try not to think of my gay rights work at all. My creativity is my liability, although I try not to forget as my mother has forgotten hers; it would mean a tragedy of unlearning how I love the way words taste. French is a heady swirl of tongue pronouncing aubergine and pamplemousse. I love writing words, lining them up in haphazard rows, turning a phrase, luxuriating in how they ring in my mouth as salty, sweet, umami. Words help me find the oblique connection, the absurd switchboard of the universe, how we are connected: me, you, six degrees. I am a mere two degrees from James Rosenquist, pop artist. I trawl thrift shop racks for the thrill of wearing clothes with someone else's name Sharpied on the tag.

This summer, I wondered how I would calculate the speed of the 8:45 Metro North train to Grand Central from the angle of the raindrops. I traced their path, noting how I held a map of Beirut in my wrinkled palms and another of the London Underground in my knuckle creases. I am a zygote, a fetus, a child overcome with wanderlust. The train halts. The doors open. I need to interview all these people, pry their secrets from their jealous fists. I need less cynicism, more vulnerability. Instead of streaking, I smile at strangers. Both make you naked.

# Imported Culture Michelle Salman

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

“Lower your lids!”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

After all, acting is culture.

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

“Dear Michal,

“Congratulations —-

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

# My Passion for Writing Anonymous

## The 18th century French philosopher Denis Diderot said, "Only passions, great passions can elevate the soul to great things." Describe one of your passions and reflect on how it has contributed to your personal growth.

I don't remember how I stumbled upon it, but after I did, I became inspired and motivated. It was too surreal that a thirteen-year-old girl could have written and published a book at such a young age. The book was called In the Forests of the Night and it was written by Amelia Atwater-Rhodes.

As a writer myself, I began to have hope that I would be able to publish a book. I was in sixth grade and I had found comfort in writing fiction, but this was also a naive time for me. Ever since I can recall, I have always liked to secretly compete with others. I wanted to be the youngest writer to have successfully published a book, but reality didn't work that way.

I was convinced that I would be able to finish my novel before my thirteenth birthday. I researched animals and drew sketches of my fantasy world. I printed out baby names and meanings to choose my character names wisely. I was so into creating my own story, so accustomed to this hobby that as high school started to pull me back into reality I began to lose grasp of my fantasy world.

Now every time I write I get pulled back into my fantasy world. That world where I can reconstruct what I imagine and let my creativity flow to its max. This yearning to break free has allowed me to thrive out of my boundaries and think outside of the box. There are plenty of times where I’m not fully sucked back into my fantasy world because of daily distractions, but I do appreciate every moment I spend in there.

The summer before senior year I remembered my past writing ambitions and decided to continue them but using a different story idea. I hoped to write a play manuscript about vampires so that it might be used in the spring play at my high school. I have this general layout in my head, inscribed in my fantasy world, waiting for me to take it up again. These ideas keep on floating around, expecting me to grab and make use of them.

With my fantasy world, every time I experience anything I take in the outcomes with an open mind. I have some leeway to help shape my own character by learning through my past experiences. I am aided by my world to allow constructive criticism and different ideals of morals and beliefs to consider for my own character.

Whether or not I decide to go into my fantasy world is my choice. With the good and the bad experiences, my fantasy world has always been so patient and lenient, just sitting there until I go back into it. Different interruptions throughout life have always caught my attention and distracted me from my fantasy world, but I can never deny that it’s always there for me no matter what. It is my foundation of living, my peace of mind, my everything.

**Crack & Grow Up Grace Anzalone**

**Evaluate a significant experience and the effect it had on you.(Common Application, Prompt 1)**

I firmly believe that antidrug campaigns whose values instill the “just say no” attitude in elementary school children should be extended to encompass the wretched habit of knuckle cracking. I have done it since I was a young tot, I am told, which seems to make sense since I could rattle off about fifteen variations of the harrowing warnings that my peers and superiors are inclined to give when they hear my signature bone crunching. For instance, “You’re going to get arthritis, you know. My great uncle cracked his knuckles, Grace, and now he has to hire a scribe to put his mental pen to paper.” But I was a brave little thing, or else just hard headed, and would respond with a flippant retort regarding the godly strength of my family’s bones, but thank you for the concern. And so it looked as if I was destined for a life of displaced synovial fluid and gradual knuckle swelling which could very well ruin a far off proposal that some brave man would make.

But, even after years of practiced cracking, came a new manipulation of my fingers which proved to produce the same symptoms in a week as would several decades of relentless cracking. I would grasp the top joint, between my first and second knuckle, and twist, until a faint yet supremely satisfying pop could be heard. It was less disruptive and not unpleasantly masculine, and, before the symptoms hit, I imagined it to be less harmful, due its pleasant pop that exemplified the new, ladylike, twenty first century knuckle pop. And I stuck with the method until that fateful day when, in twelve hours time, both of my fifteen year old hands went from dexterous and flexible, to two swollen lumps of flesh incapable of writing, eating, or moving with any precision at all. For all intents and purposes, I was powerless and, consequently, miserable; the helplessness which characterized my condition did not suit me in the least.

And so I sat that day, coincidentally on the day I turned sixteen, my hands elevated and sausage-like, sitting in my room as I watched the minutes tick by. Undoubtedly, it was my most depressing birthday to date, as it signaled the end of any notion of invincibility which I had clung to for so long in my childhood. Though my fingers gradually returned to a normal size and I cannot claim that the eye opening experience has rid me of the habit completely, the time when I truly believed nothing could harm me had come to a close. I was no longer the fifteen year old who had never seen a lasting consequence of her actions but now a sixteen year old who could wrap her mind around aging, consequence, and the values of foresight.

# Statement of Purpose Ashish Dharmadhikari

## "Your artist’s statement should discuss your goals and their relationship to your past experience, as well as evidence of your interest in performance based design whether in theater, film, installation, writing or other related forms."

Last summer, while aurally interpreting the script of Lorca’s ‘Yerma’, my biggest challenge was bringing to life the ‘shepherd’s horn in the distance’. My initial choice, the authentic sound of a conch-shell horn actually used by Andalusian shepherds, was rejected by the director as not sounding ‘musical’ enough – ironic, considering a conch shell can’t produce polyphonic melodies, as I know from personal experience, and in this script, Lorca is fairly specific about the horn being a conch-shell one. After many iterations, I finally used a fragment from a melody played on the lur, a wooden tube played in Nordic countries. While its inauthenticity offended my sensibilities as a student of history, this gave me a valuable lesson on one of the key principles of all audio design disciplines. Namely, the anticipated perception of a sound effect is more important for its selection than its source, or its ‘genuineness’ for that matter.

Interpreting scripts for the theatre is something I grew up doing, initially as an actor. Acting in musicals through my school years was followed by straight plays in college. After graduating from one of India's best known liberal arts colleges with a degree in History, I started looking for work instead of a Masters degree or professional course. I didn’t want to spend time studying something that had little to do with what I was going to actually do in life. And appropriately enough, my first professional engagement was in theatre, as an actor in The Legend of Ram. Not only were the audio/visual special effects and soundtrack edifying; doing continuous runs of 15 to 20 physically demanding shows without losing any of the emotive qualities of my performance was invigorating training in theatre discipline.

Since then, I’ve held four formal positions, and executed any number of professional assignments. My professions, in series or parallel, have ranged from actor to television producer to copyeditor to voice artiste to musician to sound engineer to composer to sound designer. But despite jobs and financial pressures, I’ve managed to stay within shouting distance of theatre. And over the last three years, I’ve segued from primarily actor to primarily sound designer.

Sound design, as a discipline, is situated in the interstices of my two greatest loves, theatre and music. It is also a field that combines technological creativity with creative technology in a way that few others do. I know that my strong background in theatre, albeit as an actor longer than as a sound designer, will be an asset in my study of sound design. After all, one is designing sound to help the actors make a script come alive for the audience. And having extensive qualifications in learning, creating, producing and recording music is a considerable advantage, in sync with the demands of most sound designing jobs. Aside from being able to compose requisite music scores for a theatrical production myself, my familiarity with a substantial range of instruments, genres and ethnic musical traditions enhances my rendition of cultural and geographical specificities while interpreting a script for sound design.

Through all my professional endeavors, I see a common thread — creation of quality content in a creatively satisfying yet perfectionist manner. I like working towards quality. While some may have seen me as a ‘jack of all trades’, I knew that in these places I was learning more than just television production or video editing or how to QC a music CD or how to write line-notes or how to use Pro Tools or Reason. I was trained in and can do all those things too. But what attracted me to these jobs were the originality of work, and the excellence of the finished product I created. Whether it was 27 minutes of TV programming that made classical music come alive, a best-selling music album series with well-researched sleeve-notes, an exceptional soundtrack for a children’s animation spot, or inventive music pieces for a multimedia theatre installation. It is this obsession with quality that now leads me to desire further education at Brandeis University.

I’ve picked up the requisite real-life people skills. For example, I know that just sometimes, your job as a sound designer is to simply allow the director to dictate exactly what sounds he wants — after all, you’re implementing his vision, not yours. I also have many ideas in terms of sound and music. What I now need is to build a larger vocabulary and develop a wider skill-set, in order to be able to express and concretize the ideas that I may not be able to adequately articulate as of now. I want to consolidate the knowledge I’ve picked up over the years, by studying things more systematically. Hence graduate school: I am looking for a disciplined, academic environment, where asking for the theory behind a certain theatre practice or culture is not considered irritating ‘idle curiosity’, responded to with a “Just do it, don’t ask questions!” I would like to work with professors and colleagues who get as excited as I do about sound, design and theatre; about the little things, or things that we all know, but are still marvels of nature. Like phase cancellation in live sound. Like music’s dependence on physics — note X being note Y's nth octave because the ratio of the two frequencies is the nth power of 2. Like the algorithms governing Pro Tools 7.4’s new ‘elastic time’. Like the world-wide ubiquity of ‘modal’ music, in forms ranging from the Greek echos to the West Asian maqam to my beloved South Asian raags.

As a freelance sound designer in India, one struggles against a general lack of awareness about our discipline, as well as a lack of adequate funds. And finding one’s creativity and vision continually cramped is a little frustrating. A very basic attraction of American colleges, and concomitantly of moving temporarily or permanently back to the United States, is that there, sound craft is recognized as a valid profession and art, and there are resources that can be spent on going the extra inch to create an exceptional soundtrack for a play, film or installation. Furthermore, I know that I like learning better in an academic atmosphere. And I know what a luxury higher education is, something most fresh college graduates don’t often realize in their hurry to join the working world. Professionally, I know that I have a lot to learn before I am ready to take on my dream projects, such as being creative sound designer for my beloved Disney animation movies, or technical sound designer for my favorite rock opera Jesus Christ Superstar.

There is no program that is equivalent, or even comparable in terms of rigor and academic-creative challenge, to the American university system BFA, at least in my discipline of Sound Design, in my corner of the world, India. Having spent my first six years in USA, and subsequently having experienced India’s rich cultural and historical heritage to the utmost, I feel that this is the perfect time and opportunity to re-explore my American roots; particularly among the diverse and vibrant campus population of St. Louis, bringing to it a wealth of learning gained in so vastly different a society. And the distinctive blend of courses in the sound design curriculum here are ideally suited to my diverse range of interests and experiences.

To create quality work-product, you need a well-trained imagination, powerful interpretive techniques and rigorous technical skills. These can be developed the slow and diffused way in the ‘school of life’, as I’ve done so far, or they can be studied and imbibed, methodically, at college. I feel that the latter better harmonizes with my current learning aptitude. I believe that the sound design program at the Brandeis Theatre department will not only help me focus my energies, but will utilize and blend the diverse elements of my professional, cultural and educational background, giving me something whole and powerful: an intellectual tool, with practical training in using it.

# David Wolkoff's eBay Store David Wolkoff

## Common Application. Topic of your choice.

When I was fifteen I borrowed $200 from my father, bought a broken Sidekick phone on eBay, watched YouTube videos to learn how to repair it, and re-sold it for an $80 profit. That was the start of David Wolkoff’s Store, an eBay business, which has Gold Powerseller status and over 700 unique positive feedbacks. I had never used eBay before buying and selling the Sidekick. I became interested overhearing a friend tell how he sold a phone, and found after some research that he had undervalued his. I decided to try to do better.

At first, I bought individual phones, repaired them, and sold them as “refurbished.” Soon, however, I discovered that I could make a larger profit in less time if I bought phones with common defects in bulk and outsourced the repairs. As I began to feel a mastery over my business and expanded into different types of electronics, eBay changed its policies, undermining its individual merchants. A number of small businesses left eBay. I decided, however, to take my name to heart and fight Goliath.

I took two weeks off from conducting business to study the new rules, and strategize how to stay in business; I was not going to let policy changes discourage me from pursuing my hobby, my job and my passion. Therefore, I decided I needed to sell internationally where the large corporations that eBay was now favoring did not or could not do business. The customs regulations seemed daunting at first, because of the precise details necessary and to complicate matters, eBay’s rule changes in this period were frequent, and I needed to adjust plans two or three times to accommodate them.

I soon realized I could sell products unavailable, or more expensive locally because of currency rates, in Europe, Asia and Australia for a premium price, which increased my income and saved my business. Also, I implemented the use of drop shipping, where I have items sent directly from manufacturers to the customer so I took no inventory risks and saved on shipping.

I serve individuals where Amazon and Best Buy don’t compete. In the past three weeks I have shipped a Nokia N900 Smartphone to seventeen countries and two states, including Israel, Australia, Ireland, U.K., France, Mexico, Cyprus, and Malta. Electronics leave my house in the suburbs and a few days later end up with someone in London, Seoul or Sydney; I find this fascinating.

Dealing with people internationally has given me the confidence to hire a software developer in Pakistan to help create an iPhone application. The developer and I spoke over Skype and exchanged comments as if we were neighbors. The application, which is called iSiren, has been accepted by Apple Inc. and is now available for sale in the iTunes store. It has been downloaded over 10,000 times in just over two weeks of being ‘live’.

Running David Wolkoff’s Store for the last few years from the headquarters of my bedroom has been a true ‘hands-on’ learning experience. The global economy has made my business possible; however, I still focus on satisfying each customer as an individual. This is my hobby, but I love excelling at it, and having my customers believe they are dealing with a store, not a teenager.

# Travels Anonymous

## Tell us about yourself.

I ask a man for directions, only to be rewarded with awkward silence and a mildly bemused, uncomprehending stare. I try other passersby and get the same discomforting stare, sometimes coupled with an apologetic, “Sorry, no English”. The one woman who does seem to understand me offers a dazzling smile and replies, “Stew to rum migi ni mawatte, zutto stun kono flailing chicken. (Stew and rum turn right, and ever stun this flailing chicken),” then turns and briskly walks away. Each conversation leaves me more confused, but the harder I try, the more frustrated I get. I walk through crowds with a sinking stomach, fists balled by my sides, thinking, “This wasn’t the way it was supposed to be.”

When my mother offered me a solo trip to Harajuku, Japan, I was thrilled. I researched tourist attractions deep into the night, amassed huge piles of maps and brochures, created the perfect packing plan, and scheduled everything down to the last minute. I was going to traipse boldly through new territories, easily navigate streets and read maps and signs with translations underneath, and confidently order meals from servers who spoke coherent English. The trip was going to be a fun, doable challenge.

My naivety astounds me.

Everything has me bewildered – there is a man flaunting zebra prints layered with tiger stripes under faux fur; a loli-goth girl in a lacy Victorian dress stands next to a man wearing nothing but a loincloth and socks; the city is a labyrinth; conversation leaves me tangled in an incomprehensible, rapid-fire blur of Japanese and English; and even the toilets stupefy me with their twenty-something buttons.

As I am forced to accept how truly lost I am, I surprise myself and smile. The mounting panic steadily subsides, and I am left with a strange mixture of mild dismay and exhilaration. I am lost, yes. But I am also in the middle of Harajuku, the fashion center of Japan – a cultural center of the world. Looking up, I see that what I had moments before perceived simply as an unknown area is now a whirlpool of diversity, pulsing with an excited, high-tension atmosphere. The clothing and styles are unfamiliar, the signs around me flash neon symbols I cannot decipher, and the garbled speech of passerby sounds like life played at two-times speed.

I spend the rest of the evening wandering through storefronts, watching blurs of sailor uniforms mix with business suits and yukatas, exploring streets filled with takoyaki vendors and rotating sushi bars and maid cafes, understanding absolutely nothing, having nothing understood, and loving every second of it.

Three summers later, I hold a map somewhere in the streets of Bangkok, Thailand. I can’t speak; I can’t understand; I can’t read. I have no plan, I am alone and lost in a distant, unfamiliar country, and I am entirely enjoying myself.

# The Shadow Anonymous

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

Everyone thinks me strange because I love it all as though it were a person.

I love the quiet road named after my great-uncle Pintor Ruano as though it were my great-uncle himself; I love the old church like an old friend; I love the sound of its bells like a familiar song—not a current favorite, but an old melody with notes carved into the crevices of my early childhood memories. The pristine anthem of my baptism, or the soundtrack of my morning walks to the bakery. I have kissed the countless cans of lemon-flavored soda and been embraced by the cold waters of the public pool. I have spent more time staring into the intricate shells of the snails on my great-grandmother’s almond trees than I have ever stared into the eyes of another. I love the shadow, and the whole town it touches, as though it were someone whom I have loved since I was very young.

The shadow was cast over a thousand years ago: first by one settler, then by his followers, then by the towers of a medieval castle following the Moors’ conquest of Iberia. They did not know that their castle would stand over the town of Orba and be spoken of by locals as El Castallet, as I am spoken of as La Americana. They built El Castallet to watch for invaders and outsiders, and had they been alive today, I would have never been let so close as to fall in love with its shadow.

There are other outsiders now, ones whose origins are not even half-Spanish, as mine are. Once I befriended one—an English boy of seven, who taught me backstroke. We played billiards as our parents chatted at the bar, their eyes warmed with alcohol and summer hours past. But the shadow does not freeze time for others as it does for me, and in a few years, the boy made his name in television. The bar was sold. Yet the shadow still touched our old stomping ground and I still loved the shadow as a person, so I returned to the bar’s back patio. That afternoon, I was extra-careful with my glass bottle of soda.

Forgive me if I speak as though the shadow is permanent, for it changes by the year. Two of the four towers have fallen since my birth; a third fell years before. The castle lives on in a single tower. It has seen the birth and death and rebirth of people, of kingdoms, of empires, even of the ideology of the Europeans. It has seen myriad styles of art: that of my great-uncle and of the 20th century surrealists and of myself, struggling to capture the face of the morning in a weathered notepad. It saw my great-grandmother embroider elegant tapestries and saw the clothing she washed in the ravine across the road, and it covered her home and the ravine with morning glories in her honor. Every day it looks upon the pesetas in my grandmother’s bottom drawer, sitting like scars of Francisco Franco’s revolution.

Yet the tower still stands to cast a shadow in which I am content to be. It watches me with the same eyes—me, singing to the breeze, gazing out at the skyline over the top of a book, sitting in a silent lemon grove—that may have watched wonders more worthy. So I love the shadow like a person, because the shadow loves me back.

# Chocolate Chip Cookies Alicia Ireland

## 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.

There are few places in this world as diverse as my high school cafeteria on a food sale day. A tell-tale spicy aroma draws students with jingling pockets to the back table where they are greeted by an array of cultural foods. They fight over the last empanada, compare the prices of jollof and pork lo mein, and choose between the Spanish and Chinese fried rice sitting side by side. Most of the food is gone within minutes, but, clutching precariously to the far edge of the table, a plastic package remains unopened. Inside are store-bought chocolate-chip cookies, priced at twenty-five cents apiece - my contribution.

I am lucky to go to a school with a largely immigrant student body that hails from eighty countries and speaks seventy languages, but sometimes I cannot help but feel inferior to my classmates. They possess something I do not, something incredibly valuable, something imperative to life in our community - a culture of their own. Each has a one-of-a-kind background; they all bring new stories, traditions, and perspectives to the table. Me? I bring the chocolate-chip cookies.

I am utterly American. I’ve never left U.S. borders; I was born and raised in one house, in one city - the city my parents grew up in, and their parents before them. My ancestry in this country traces back to the Civil War, perhaps even farther; my genetic makeup is Polish, British, Irish, German, and Scandinavian - so convoluted I hardly have an identity.

I wish I could be more like my classmates, and not be like anyone at all. I crave a unique heritage that would influence my behavior and beliefs. I want to fill the morning bus on food sale days with penetrating tendrils of flavor that I alone recognize as my cultural dish. I wish I was a bit more exciting than a chocolate-chip cookie.

And yet, there is a comfort in a cookie. It’s an everyman’s food; I’ve never met a soul who didn’t enjoy cookies and milk. And every bake sale, the cookies do sell out, if not at first. Even better, they never sell to one group of people, to one nationality or culture . Everyone buys them. Everyone, regardless of age, race, or culture, can get together over a package of Chips Ahoy. This baked confection has the ability to bring people together across borders, cultures, and backstories. America, with its melting pot of people so evident in my high school cafeteria, demonstrates the same quality. I like to think I do as well.

Sometimes in my school, people are identified by the country from which they came. Cultures have such heavy influence on our lives that we come to embody them. But while I might recognize my classmates as Vietnamese and Cambodian, Dominican and Puerto Rican, Ghanaian and Nigerian, I never began to think of myself as an American until very recently. I always felt I was a fish swimming without a tail fin, a shadow making my way through life without forming an identity, without truly living. But now, I have realized the full potential of the chocolate-chip cookie. I do have a culture, a culture so embedded in my very existence that I hardly knew it was there. It’s in the Fourth of July parties, in my catchphrase - “Jeez-Louise” and my taste for Jell-O. My culture is in the glue that holds my community together, in my smiling, approachable demeanor, in the place that people of all cultures can call home. My culture is mixed - it borrows traditions from far-off places and people and makes them it’s own, and it’s still expanding. My culture travels to the far corners of the world without moving an inch.

In the cafeteria, the place where tastes and cultures converge, where individual histories and traditions are discussed over steaming plates, I am more than a chocolate-chip cookie. I am part of our diverse America.

# Equality and Community Anonymous

## Why Brandeis?

Since my childhood, I have been disturbed by inequality and injustice in the world. I felt like a solitary beacon of humanitarianism upon a coast of apathy and egoism. The idea of college life, then, was unnerving to me; I imagined attending a school full of ruthlessly competitive students of my own ability or higher, indifferent to the plights of others.

Finding Brandeis was a profound relief for me. The prospect of attending a school founded on a desire for equality, where students interact amiably and noncompetitively, seemed a dream come true. Even after my first visit to Brandeis in July, though, I was skeptical- could a school really be so rigorous and yet so accommodating, so prestigious and yet so friendly, equally dedicated to liberal arts and to research? However, after talking to current students and attending the Fall for Brandeis open house, I have found that Brandeis truly does possess this unique balance of characteristics. I am now certain that this combination of rigorous academics, a friendly atmosphere, and a dedication to social justice makes Brandeis perfect for me.

# A Meaningful Place Sophie Lis

## Common App (Describe a place or environment where you are perfectly content. What do you do or experience there, and why is it meaningful to you?)

The soft reminder of warm light, the neat rows of novels and biographies and volumes of poetry against mahogany shelves back to back in a literary continuum… I walk further into Barnes and Noble. Swim in circles around the small brown tables in the center, feel the raised letters of the titles wedged under ‘Books That Make You Think’. I’ve been here a thousand times before and yet still feel the exhilarating serenity of the quiet hum of people, the stacks of unread books, the particular excitement of the aroma of anticipated coffee, each trip a unique euphoria and different exhilaration. I have been here since I was five years old, since my mom let me loose in the children’s section, still jumping and peering and feeling the hard indention of the unbent spines stacked definitely on same, if not higher, wooden shelves.

I walk diagonally and make zigzags, crane my neck, peering curiously at the fresh copy of Harry Potter; experience the illumination of the Great Hall, the swish and flick of wands, the heavy familiarity of the white waiting pages. Jump to get at Sylvia Plath’s evasive Ariel, perched high on the top shelf where only the tips of my fingers graze. Ariel is especially important to me. When I first came pushing home with it, red-cheeked and adolescent-awkward, I was fourteen. Feeling my way, blindly, through the frightening reality of high school and coming of age, I leafed through it at night, my small lamp perched precariously in the dark. I discovered very new, and very different ideas. The idea of the radical housewife, inherent feminist, I saved dog-eared and bookmarked, the poem Lesbos a new and interesting perspective. I didn’t understand what feminism was and was shocked and stimulated to see it so bluntly manifested in the poem.

Only later, after the catalyst of Ariel did I render its full significance, unaware of the importance activism and equality would have for me later on. This kind of literature ushered me past the quiet, safe teenage fiction I had been engrossed in, leading dangerously and provocatively into new territory. For me, books like Ariel are important not only as a result of their convincing stories but also because they shaped me in all my totality and complexity as a human being. It is important to be able to understand others, a skill that is typed and sealed in the form of a novel. Since then, when I discovered history, literature, and poetry, and then history and literature and poetry in the same book, I have not left. Literature, engrained in my life as enduringly as the lines on the back of my hands, has changed and bettered me, causing me to be not only more aware, but significantly better-rounded. It has introduced me to history, philosophy, bettered my vocabulary, made me a more adept writer, and become my most luxurious pastime. What’s more, I found my safe haven, away from the loud and running world in my two hundred pages of print, bound, typed, and delivered in the form of an escape and a passion that has wholly transformed my interests and personality.

I feel that books are a universal medium of understanding, connecting people of all denominations, creeds, and ideas. They incite the excitement and security not exclusive only to myself but those in all history of readers who have enjoyed and reveled in the same literary comforts as I, and experienced the very similar ache and desire for understanding and learning.

# My Dream Anonymous

## What is your dream?

When I was 12, I found a book on global poverty at the local bookstore. For weeks my grandpa and I sat at a coffee table and read the analysis of foreign aid. I stayed up past bedtime, hiding under the covers, leafing through the debate about economic assistance to nations. My parents always instilled the idea that the only way to live your life is to help others, and this book kept me thinking about the lack of substantial help to those in poverty. The book explains failure is probable for nations in poverty because society expects them to fail. How could I make sure we expect people to succeed instead?

I came back to this idea while I was creating budget proposals for Youth and Government’s Department of Finance. I had been tasked to reform K-12 education, and I saw I could create significant social change by using economic policy. It was such a powerful notion that I could use money, which is sometimes considered greedy and evil, and turn it into a driving force for good.

A few months later, in AP World History, I discovered the International Monetary Fund, and they became my dream. I want to work at the IMF to provide support and guidance around the world. I am ecstatic to set countries on a path to create a sustainable economy. There, I could make the wide reaching impact I desire and help people expect to succeed instead of fail.

# The passionate flame Anonymous

## Wislawa Szymborska said, “You can find the entire cosmos lurking in its least remarkable objects.” Help us see something ordinary in an extraordinary light.

I blow out the candles on my seventeenth birthday cake. Another year has passed. The flames slowly flicker, burn out, and die.To me, a candle is merely a wax stick that steadily holds the flames. It’s only regularly used for birthdays and as a last resort for light.

Seven thousand miles away, my cousins and grandparents, along with hundreds of thousands of other Koreans, hold similar candles in protest against a corrupt president. They chant for President Park Geun-Hye’s resignation as their country has repeatedly been let down by her abuse of power. “A puppet controlled by a puppet-master,” they say; this president is too dangerous and irresponsible to rule a country. The protesters peacefully and proudly hold the candles as they demonstrate, hoping that they can succeed through strength in numbers. A sea of light moves like one body, flooding the streets with hope.

Rather than using them trivially, such as birthday celebrations, these simple objects hold the liberty of an entire nation. Candles control the dangerous weapon of fire, but with the flame too big, it can cause destruction. The Koreans contain their fiery passion through solemn protest rather than riot as the graceful nature of the flames continues to dance along the tip of the wick.

They blow out their candles, exemplifying the darkness Ms. Park has led their country into. Another day has passed... Now the flames slowly flicker and burn out—but what will happen if the hundred thousand candles die?

# Speaking through a Deck of Cards Hyun tea Kim

## Wislawa Szymborska said, “You can find the entire cosmos lurking in its least remarkable objects.” Help us see something ordinary in an extraordinary light.

‘And voilá my amigos! All four beautiful queens.’ I reveal the top four cards of the deck with a thin smirk. The kids simultaneously call out ‘Show us more! Show us more please.’ Regardless of age or gender or culture, everyone loves a well-executed card trick.

Ever since childhood, I was always interested in cards, whether they featured Pokémon or the familiar suits of a Bicycle deck. Technology has introduced humanity to a world where our imagination is our limitation, but it’s amusing to notice how quickly people become indulged into a plain pack of playing cards.

Paradoxically, a single flick of the wrist can dazzle and impress more than computer graphics. I devote many hours to master reflexes which last only one-tenth of a second perfectly. Not only the tricks themselves, but a successful magician must also be an entertainer. I make a great effort to implant stories and naturally blend in card flourishes between tricks. This way I can effectively catch the attention of the audience and put on a show. When everything goes right, I sit back, smile, and fully appreciate the looks of amazement and bewilderment as I show people something ordinary in an extraordinary light.

# Violence Against Women Ela Piskiner

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

“At 6.00 in the morning she begins her morning cleaning. After preparing breakfast and clearing the table, she cleans up all the rooms.” This is a brief translation of a short passage secondary school students are given in Turkey. The passage supposedly depicts the role of a married Turkish woman in a household. Nowhere in the passage is a man mentioned doing any housework. The passage is completely based on the fact that women are the one’s who should clean, cook and nurture the children.

I remember the first time I read it. I didn’t even question what I had learned that day in school. It was just another mundane school day. Little did I know by not speaking up that day in class, by not questioning the passage and by not asking whether being a woman was more than just cooking and cleaning, I was contributing to a problem that was much bigger than I ever realized.

I was brought up in a culture where once a girl gets married the family “gives” her away, as if girls are a prized possession, where it is completely normal to see more than 5 reports a day in the newspapers about girls who were raped, murdered or beaten, and where in some places it is completely normal to get married at ages as young as 13. How can one accept us to stand up for ourselves when we are taught only in secondary school that our only role is to serve men?

One day I came home to meet my mother talking on the phone with tears running down her face. I later on found out that my mother’s friend’s cleaning lady, had been beaten to death by her husband. I didn’t shed a tear. Not because I have no emotions, or not because I am a cruel person, but because it was not the first I had heard this story. I had been growing up constantly listening to similar versions of this tale. Strangely enough, my emotionless reaction to this event had greater effect on me, than any other event that I had bowled my eyes out for. I realized it was not natural for me to view these situations as “ordinary” events. The main problem wasn’t the uneducated men who didn’t know any better, the problem was the educated and strong girls like me who weren’t using their voices to stand up.

In school, I heard about a project the previous year’s seniors had left incomplete. A teacher was looking for students to complete the project. As soon as I heard the name of the project I jumped at the opportunity; the project was called ‘Violence Against Women’ (VAW).

The project began with only three students and a two hundred slides of PowerPoint. We started by only translating the English slide show into Turkish, while editing and deleting additional information. A basic PowerPoint slowly started converting into a successful presentation packed with interviews, reel stories, effective content and videos. We practiced for months until we decided we were ready to take the stage.

A problem that once seemed so far away was now right in front of me, and I had the power to tell everyone what I had learned, to create awareness and make everyone understand that violence is never “normal”. We began as a small group, but in one short year we managed to turn our small project into an official school club. We went to over twenty schools in one year, ranging from public schools to private. We managed to get our project verified by the government, which gives us permission to go to schools all over Turkey.

Even though it is solely a few words on a presentation, I can feel the effect we create in each classroom that we enter. When we tell the stories of the victims suddenly all heads turn to us. All the quiet whispers amongst the students suddenly stop and everyone listens in silence. At the end of our show, we ask the audience if they would like to contribute to our project. We give the school a CD of our presentation and ask them to create a group in their own school. We ask this group to continue our presentation in other schools. Are goal is to spread our project across the country and create as much awareness as possible.

Still each time I take the stage to tell the stories of the victims of abuse I begin to shake. No matter how many times I state the same story, it still hurts when I talk about the victims. Violence or the undermining of women is not “normal” and it will never feel “normal” to me again. Creating and leading this project has affected me in many ways. Not only has it taught me discipline and work ethics, but has also taught me should never stop. When we first started the project our goal was only to turn the project into an official school club. After we achieved that goal we started struggling for government verification. We also achieved that goal. We never stop creating more targets for ourselves.

This project has become a part of me. I don’t want to stop giving it my all, until I actually feel that I am making a difference in my country.

**Source:** ‘’Sabah saat 06.00’da sabah temizliği ile başlıyor. Kahvaltının hazırlanması ve sofranın toplanmasından sonra oda temizleniyor. İşe giden kadın, akşam yine sofra hazırlıyor, bulaşıkları yıkıyor, ertesi günün akşam yemeğini yapıyor, odaları topluyor ve 21.30’da dinlenme saati başlıyor.’’ (Fatma Çiçekçi, ilköğretim 6, 7 ve 8. sınıflar için)

# Lean on Me Rachel Lynch

## Common App choose your own prompt/submit an essay on any topic

Summer begins with skin made of ants. The months between school years were designed for sitting on the border of the sandpit at the Jewish Community Center with ants crawling over my hands.

“Sugar ants don’t bite people,” my friend assures me every June. And, in the years I have let my body be overrun, I have never been bitten. I’ve spent every summer in camp at the JCC, braving triple digit temperatures and the bee-swarmed pool. Nowhere feels more familiar. Consumption by ants started as a thrill, a five-year-old’s novelty trick. Every year, the ant trick became less wondrous and more comforting, a sign that summer had begun and I had arrived at the JCC. The JCC grew with me, but I never realized how deeply it had changed me until I became a camp counselor.

Summer 2017, I held the most coveted position of all: camp counselor. I was assigned to Chaverim, given a single co-counselor and responsibility of twenty five year olds for eight weeks. Chaverim could have been a nightmare; the amount of energy contained in the body of a five-year-old is slightly nuclear. Instead, the summer was one of the greatest experiences in my life. I returned summer 2018 and received the same position. What made working with Chaverim so wonderful was the way they were constantly learning to exist as humans. As a counselor, I stepped into a leadership role and found that I could make a difference in my campers lives just as my counselors had made a difference in mine.

As a child, I was jaw-wired-shut shy. I worried about making new friends or speak in front of a group. I cried during drop off. Counselors were always willing to take a moment with me in the hallway, to talk as though I wasn’t just some kid, to help me calm down and join the group. My counselors made a difference in my life. Instead of leaving me hysterical, the JCC gave me five extra minutes a day to breathe and grow into my own skin. By making small adjustments, like ensuring I had my best friend nearby during activities, my counselors helped me feel secure and enjoy camp. Eventually, I stepped into a new comfort zone and made friends, participated in games requiring communication.

In 2018, I sat in the hallway with a crying five-year-old.

“Are you excited for your trip this weekend?” He nodded, sniffled. “What are you going to do on your trip?” He took a deep breath and started talking. After around five minutes, he confided that he was nervous about swim. We made a compromise: he would sit on the edge of the pool, but he didn’t have to get in further.

At camp, Friday ends with an all-camp Shabbat service featuring Bill Withers’ “Lean On Me.” Shabbat is the pinnacle of the feel-good summer bonding experience; it is unapologetically, wonderfully campy. Around four hundred kids gather in the auditorium. The lights dim. The first chords filter through the room. We circle within our groups, arms around each other, and sing. “Lean On Me” embodies the spirit of the JCC: coming together with a community to become the best version of yourself.

On the last Friday, I was prepared for nostalgia, but not to see how miraculously each camper had changed. As I leaned into the song, my campers’ differences from their week one selves became joyfully obvious. I considered the boy who had feared swimming showing off his freestyle earlier in the week, how the girl who had no friends wrapped her arms easily around the kids on either side of her. Seeing how I had helped my campers learn and develop allowed me to view myself in a new light, both as a leader and as someone who has been profoundly impacted by her community.