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**Sample essays 2023**

**CMC**

**A night of freedom, pride, hot dogs....**

**David McDevitt**

**B. Although it may appear to the contrary, we do know that people have a life beyond what they do to get into college. Tell us about a fun experience you've had outside of your formal classroom and extracurricular activities. You might choose to write about time spent with friends, family, or even by yourself.**

Last fall, my mother was able to snag four tickets to Game 7 of the 2001 World Series. The Arizona Diamondbacks, my home team, were taking on the New York Yankees. We had an extra ticket, and since my brother was studying in Europe, I invited my friend, Justin. As we stepped into section 318, I could smell beer on the breath of an already drunken fan. We climbed up what seemed like thousands of stairs, crushing peanut shells and popcorn under our feet and stepping into puddles of unknown sticky liquids. Beads of sweat began to run down my forehead as I got whacked in the face by random posters and banners. One rowdy fellow was even kind enough to share some of his Miller Lite with my favorite shorts. It was one of the best days of my life.

When we got to our seats and looked out into the stadium, we saw the most incredible sight. Every spectator had been given a white pom-pom upon entering the stadium, and nearly all of the 50,000 fans were cheering for the Diamondbacks. The crowd looked like a sea of white tentacles, rhythmically pulsating as if the stadium had its own heartbeat. The intensity in the stadium was a blend of excitement, anxiety and tension. When the national anthem began, a wave of pride began to swell up in my chest. As blazing red fireworks shot over the field, a stealth bomber flew over the ballpark like an eagle protecting its nest. An emotion ran through my body like an electric shock. As I turned to my friend, I realized he too had tears in his eyes. Less than two months after September 11th, our nation was enjoying its favorite pastime, and no terrorist organization could stop that.

After five scoreless innings, the Diamondbacks took a one run lead in the bottom of the sixth. Derek Jeter quickly answered by scoring in the seventh for the Yankees to tie it up. When Alfonso Soriano stepped up to the plate in the top of the eighth, my heart sank. A feeling of dread came over my body. I knew this would be Curt Schilling's final batter. At that instant, Soriano smacked a monster homerun into left center field, giving the Yankees a 2-1 lead. Over the next inning, I felt like I was watching an hourglass pour the last of its sand into the bottom. Time was running out and it seemed that the invincible Yankees were about to win another World Series2E With Mariano Rivera on the mound, the man who hadn't given up a World Series game since 1997, it was almost certain the Diamondbacks would become another fallen challenger. But in the bottom of the ninth, Luis Gonzalez proved the world wrong by hitting the game-winning single to win the 2001 World Series.

Hysteria filled the stadium as the Diamondback dugout emptied and formed a mob in the middle of the field. After two hours of hugging random people and 'high fiving' everyone in sight, we drove all the way home with the windows rolled down, honking the horn and celebrating. That was one of the best memories of my life. It reminds me the emotion I felt for my country that night. It reminds me of how many opportunities my parents have given me in my childhood. I got to see my favorite baseball team win the World Series with my best friend sitting next to me. Sixty years from now, when I'm old and gray, I'll still be telling this story.

**Ferris Bueller.....You're My Hero.**

**David McDevitt**

**Pick a person, real or fictional, from art, literature, history etc., and discuss how she/he has shaped culture and thought.**

Ask any high school student about the John Hughes film Ferris Bueller's Day Off, and you'll find that this mid-eighties teeny bopper flick still has kids hooked. Matthew Broderick stars as Ferris, the rebellious teenager from a wealthy suburb of Chicago, who is sick and tired of the monotonous life of public education. Being a charming and handsome young man, Ferris is able to have his way with the ladies, but more instrumental to his revelry is his ability to orchestrate plans for the benefit of all. Whether it be helping a freshman out of summer school, doctoring his attendance record, or faking the identity of Abe Froman (the sausage king of Chicago), Ferris shows the initiative of a true leader.

While Ferris Bueller's first agenda may be to get out of school, he's not your average high school lowlife. One of the most impressive parts of Matthew Broderick's character is that while he is rebellious, he is quite cultured, intelligent, and has a good time. Ferris and his friends visit the Sear's Tower and the Chicago Museum of Art, catch a game at Wrigley Field and then nosh on pancreas at Chez Luis for lunch. This accentuates the film's message: life is pointless when it is shackled by a mundane system of routine. Ferris doesn't skip school to use drugs or party, but rather to have an exciting afternoon in which he would experience events more meaningful than listening to Ben Stein's character ramble on about 'voodoo economics.'

The role of Ferris Bueller has been influential in the teenage culture. There's even a popular ska band named "Save Ferris," a catch phrase formulated to raise money for Ferris' mythical kidney transplant. One reason I enjoy the movie so much is because I identify with Ferris, not only because of his personality, but because of the way he tries to make his friends have fun during their stressful adolescence. My peer group is mainly comprised of the fifty seniors who are in the International Baccalaureate program. Because we take six advanced classes and participate in many extracurricular activities, we often find ourselves burnt out from work. In the way Ferris gets his best friend out of bed and his girlfriend out of class, I do my best to organize study groups at the local Starbuck's or IB gatherings at the AMC movie theatre nearby in an attempt to keep our heads above water and avoid getting 'senioritis.' Ferris' fun loving tactics, while taken to fewer extremes, have still been mimicked years after he left the screen.

On the surface, Ferris Bueller's Day Off is little more than a flick for high school teens who watch Matthew Broderick in admiration of his rebellious behavior. Underneath, it is a film about a complex character who understands that the meaning of life isn't found while inside the walls of a classroom. Ferris shows to the younger generation that life has value beyond the routine nine-to-five schedule. In the words of an unorthodox leader, "Life moves pretty fast. If you don't to stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it."

**General Washington - A True Leader**

**Blake Masters**

**Please compose an analytical essay on the topic of 'leadership.'**

Throughout the American Revolution, John Adams often humbly remarked, "We are ordinary men living in extraordinary times." Due to his modest nature, Mr. Adams most likely believed his statement to be true. However, I must disagree with Mr. Adams. The Founding Fathers were not ordinary men, but extraordinary men. Furthermore, a convincing case can be made that General George Washington was the most extraordinary of them all.

If one were to look up the definition of leadership in a dictionary and then meticulously compare it to the character of George Washington, I am confident that not a single legitimate contrast could be made. Being a leader, however, means much more than ostensibly conforming to some lexicon's definition. One cannot be a leader because he fits a certain stereotype; true leadership is defined only in the hearts and minds of followers. Using this criterion to evaluate leadership, one would be hard-pressed to cite a better or more effective leader than George Washington.

George Washington's role as a leader was established long before the Revolutionary War. As a Major in the Virginia Militia, Washington fought valiantly and bravely in the French and Indian War. He was by no means perfect or untouchable, as he suffered near-death episodes of dysentery and numerous military defeats in his early career. Instead of quitting, however, he exhibited an unparalleled sense of determination and relentlessness, earning the respect and admiration of the men under his command. A fundamental characteristic of a true leader is fearlessness in the face of hardship and danger. Throughout his life, Washington would prove over and over again that this was a characteristic that he possessed in seemingly infinite supply. During one military campaign, his unit came under attack from a confused and disoriented friendly unit. Seeing that friendly fire was killing American men on both sides, Washington rode his horse into the no-man's land between the two sides, exposing himself to musket fire from both groups! He was unharmed (though his clothes were shot-up) and within moments, the fighting ceased as both groups recognized their leader in his dangerous effort to placate the situation.

Countless stories like the aforementioned one lend further proof to the battlefield bravery and leadership of George Washington. His leadership, however, was not limited to military matters. Due to his unparalleled honesty and integrity, Washington was unanimously chosen as the Commander of the Continental Army and later as the first President of The United States under the present government. In office, Washington continued to always act responsibly and honestly, setting precedent after precedent as to the manner in which the Presidency should be conducted. Of all the men who are known today as the "Founding Fathers," Washington was and still remains the most predominate. He was the first true "father" of the United States; Washington oversaw its birth, protected it to the best of his ability during its infant years, and used his superior leadership skills to guide the nation in the right direction.

Virtually no man was ever respected in the history of this nation as was General Washington. While this country has seen many exquisite and courageous leaders over the years, Washington remains one of, if not the most, outstanding. Through his remarkable leadership, Washington fought for and secured freedom for his compatriots and all future generations of Americans. Amending John Adam's quotation, General George Washington was truly an extraordinary man living in extraordinary times.

**The Fall of Icarus and the Rise of Spirit**

**Silvia Lu**

**Describe a book, play, composition, poem, scientific discovery, technical achievement, myth, historic event or work of art that has inspired and intrigued you. You can assume we are familiar with the plot and details; instead, tell us what it means for you personally.**

A single pair of legs, kicking up from the ocean. Kicking up from the far right corner of a pleasant landscape depicting what may be the most tranquil morning in the history of pleasant landscapes. And there, the legs - added as almost an afterthought to the scheme of things - a splash unnoticed by the shepherd and his roly poly sheep or the farmer making even rows in the field.

In Pieter Bruegel's "Landscape with the Fall of Icarus" I find a strange sort of inspiration and motivation; a call to action and compassion - ironically from a painting that could stand as the greatest conception of indifference in the history of art. I remember the first viewing; a sweeping glance that yielded only a mild reaction towards yet another typical renaissance painting. Then, a halfhearted examination of the title. Searching, searching for Icarus - and then finding him. Once mirth at the clever placement passed, I was filled with an unsettling feeling. Something, something about the painting was bothersome and continued to be so long after the slides had been put away.

Then, it hit me. A young boy, a boy who had flown with the birds and nearly touched Apollo's chariot, had fallen. A young boy had just plummeted to his death. He must have cried out before slicing into the dark waters and that splash must have been audible to every figure in the painting - and yet how everything turns away.

An accurate judgment on the nature of society centuries ago, the message is still applicable yet. The tragedies of others are nothing more than background noise for our daily lives - and we have willed it so. We advert our gaze from the ringing bells of the Salvation Army outside the store we enter for the purpose of buying goods that cater to more a want than a need. We change the channel on World Vision and Feed the Children programs, choosing glamorized sitcoms over the imploring eyes of a starving child. We avoid the evening news because "it's just too depressing," or worse yet, because we just don't care. We have taken to putting on an armor of apathy everyday to shield us from anything that might deter from our paths of self interest.

This is the reality.

This, I reject.

I refuse to accept apathy as protection from emotional disturbance. To me, the painting suggested the demon I have sought to banish with everything that I do. I teach to see my students excited to be playing Scrabble - not even realizing they are learning. The Junior State of America is founded on the assumption that there are adolescents who question the established and who seek to voice their opinion. Theater is all tears and screams and laughing and everything to every extreme. Yearbook documents a year with the mindset that the memories created do matter. Because everything does. I seek not to carry the weight of the world on my shoulders - one would collapse. But, I do seek to understand and to inspire. I have found my purpose in caring, in wanting to care. For so long my greatest fear was simply that nobody else would. That one day, I would awaken to find that like the painting, everyone had turned away.

After all, worse than hate or disdain is indifference. Our ability to feel is what makes us human. We are weak, we are vulnerable. We are supposed to be affected by pain - that is how we are made. So often now we allow machines and technology to dictate our schedules and thoughts, lending a sterile efficiency that has turned us into productive automatons. By allowing our minds to deny what our hearts recognize as truth is the mark not of progression, but regression. We are only able to maintain that facade of indifference so people look. My art, my voice, my words can tell the world, it is about one person. It is about every person. I can make them care.

**Analysis of Thomas Paine's Common Sense**

**Lindsey Brooke Anderson**

**This question, specifically requested by Claremont McKenna College, explores the impact Thomas Paine, as a revolutionary and a great leader, had on American history with his essay "Common Sense".**

Of all the founding fathers in America's history, few have played a role equaling the paramount importance of Thomas Paine, and few have been so repeatedly overlooked. At a time when even the most devout patriot stood uncertainly in the shadow of British tyranny, Thomas Paine wrote with power and charisma enough to fortify the resolve of young America; single handedly rousing thousands to join the Revolutionary cause. Rising from a modest upbringing in England to become America's most outspoken patriot, Paine was indisputably responsible, at least in part, for stirring up the seeds of war that would eventually lead to the birth of a new nation.

Born in the country town of Thetford in 1737, Thomas Paine was not always a master of rhetoric and rebellions. For the first thirty years of his life Paine, like his father, worked as a staymaker in England. However, Paine was far from happy with the monotonous banality of his career, so he began to study politics. He wrote furiously for several years, occasionally drafting pamphlets, but ultimately remaining penniless. Then, in 1774, Paine was approached by Benjamin Franklin, who persuaded the struggling writer to seek work in America. Upon arrival, Paine worked a short stint as a school teacher before becoming a successful contributor to the Pennsylvania Magazine. Quickly, he became involved in America's heated political conflict, which prompted Paine to pen the opening pages of Common Sense.

Unlike other political essayists of the 1700s, Thomas Paine wrote in the clear, direct voice of a common person. He realized that war against the world's most powerful country could not be won or loss with the support of a few rich men, so Paine appealed to the masses of potential Revolutionists. His use of language was not pretentious or diluted with flowery descriptions, and because of that, Paine swayed thousands to rebel against England. As one patriot noted, "It would be difficult to name any human composition which has had an effect at once so instant, so extended, and so lasting... It worked nothing short of miracles and turned Tories into Whigs." Men, women, and children tore through the pages of Common Sense, which had become an overnight success.

Coupled with his straightforward style, Thomas Paine also used various literary techniques to persuade his readers. Predominant in Common Sense is Paine's infallible reasoning, which expounds his message point by point, driving the author's logic through his reader's head like a sledgehammer through cardboard. However, Paine also relies on religious allusions, figurative language, and statistics in hopes influencing a more varied crowd. Additionally, Paine possessed great skill in twisting words and penning inspirational mottos, as shown in his writing: "In America the law is king. For as in absolute governments the king is law, so in free governments the law ought to be King; and there ought to be no other... Let the crown at the conclusion of the ceremony be demolished and scattered among the people whose right it is." Such words, infectious in their simplicity, spread through the colonies like wildfire, igniting passion in the hearts of rebels everywhere.

Although Paine spent months writing over fifty pages of rhetoric, the entirety of his work can be boiled down into one concise thesis statement: All citizens have a natural right and duty to free themselves from oppressive governments, no matter the cost. This concept is explained, analyzed, and reiterated consistently throughout Paine's writing. Even when fleshing out complex philosophical principles Paine never strays far from his thesis, giving the statement more effectiveness.

200 years after writing Common Sense, the ramifications of Thomas Paine's significance can still be felt. Without Paine, rebel colonists never would have gathered the support needed to instigate revolution. As a result, America would have remained a possession of England, strengthening the British Empire and weakening the rest of the world. So much so, in fact, that there would be nearly no chance of another super power emerging to counter England's force. And with such incontestable dominance, England would be able to exert its will on people everywhere, good or bad. Considering that, Thomas Paine is almost single handedly responsible for instilling a lasting balance of power and curbing the influence of England.

Paine's powerful, emotionally charged essay stirred up sentiments strong enough to unify a nation and overthrow an empire. After ending his life as a staymaker, Paine rose up to draft the most monumental American essay of all time. His simplistic style and use of persuasion appealed to a wide range of people, and his achievements have spanned the centuries to remain an integral part of today's culture.

**Cassius Clay**

**Antonio J Hernandez**

**Common App Question 1- Evaluate a signigicant experience, achievement, risk you have taken, or ethical delemma you have faced and its impact upon you.**

"Cassius Clay," my father declared, "KO'ed Moore in four. I was there. Ringside." Annoyed at hearing the thousandth incarnation of this story, I rolled my eyes. My father loved telling stories. If you let him, he would talk you up all night. "Muhammad," he would say "really was the greatest. Woulda beat Smokin' Joe too, if Frazier hadn't knocked him down in the 15th." Friends, family, my teachers, the librarian, the mail carrier-anyone within earshot suffered the fate of listening to my father's elaborate stories. At best, I found these stories sufferable; at worst, simply unbearable. I came to understand later that my father's stories were a small fraction of his larger than life personality. No one could mistake his six-foot frame, his slicked pepper gray hair or his tortoise-shell Ray-Bans complete with Croakies. With pockets ever-full of Lifesaver mints, my father was a real character-which made it that much harder to do him justice when I spoke at his funeral.

I am no stranger to public speaking. As Debate President and Student Council President, I regularly address large audiences. However, the speech I most wanted to be remembered by did not involve approving a new draft constitution or rallying underclassmen in to serving their community; it was about the man who gave me life. The speech's difficulty did not arise from lack of context: a year spent eating dinners under the florescent glow of hospital cafeteria lights had acclimated me to the idea that my father's passing was coming. Rather, its difficulty grew because it required me to synthesize a vastly complex man into a ten-minute eulogy. I knew in giving the speech, I was towing a line-I needed to express emotion without letting it overcome me. In the week leading up to the ceremony, I hashed out draft after draft of my speech, becoming increasingly frustrated with the futility of my efforts to represent my father. The day before the funeral, it finally hit me: maybe making a speech about my father was impossible. Perhaps, my best strategy would be to make a speech that conveyed part of the whole, that certain spark which made my father so unique.

I arrived at Unity Temple and greeted well-wishers without showing any of the anxiety that plagued me. When all was quiet, I ascended the steps to the podium at the head of the chapel. I collected myself, removed the notes from my right lapel and took a deep breath. Then I dove headfirst into the speech that would define me. "I am Antonio Jubencio HernÃ¡ndez," my voice trembled as I began, "son of Eugenio HernÃ¡ndez, and I'd like to tell you some stories my father told me." For the next ten minutes, pausing only to ensure my composure, I delivered some of my father's favorite anecdotes in the same didactic tone I had heard my father use all his life. As I told them, I believe I gained some redemption from all those times I had rolled my eyes at my father's convoluted recitals. Although the stories that I told at Unity Temple lacked the physical presence of the Ray-Bans, they were part of my father. By delivering my speech in the way I did, I was acknowledging the fact that these stories were also part of me. As I look back upon it now, I believe that it was not I who delivered the speech. The words belonged to my father and I was simply Plato transcribing Aristotle, Jefferson citing Locke, or Muhammad playing the poet.

I plan to embarrass my kids with stories of boxing matches and World Series past. When they inevitably roll their eyes, I will know exactly what my father knew: a good story lasts lifetimes.

**The Conquest of Gaul**

**Antonio J Hernandez**

**"Leadership is a constant theme and emphasis at CMC. In fact, one of the ways we describe CMC students is "Leaders in the Making." Identify and discuss a person, fictional or nonfictional, who has helped shape culture and thought. You may select someone from any field: literature, the arts, science, politics. history, ahtletics, business, education, ect.**

It was early morning in Alesia. Gleaming rays of red-orange light danced on the wheat fields of southeastern France. Suddenly, three hundred thousand Gallic soldiers blotted out the horizon. Vercingeterix's reinforcements had arrived to fight against Caesar's paltry forty thousand men. The days following the enemy's arrival saw one of the greatest battles in European history-a battle that defined the fate of Western Europe. Caesar reacted gracefully when faced with the determined Gallic opposition, and fought bravely to defend against advances on two fronts. His performance displayed marked qualities of leadership, most notably those of reliance and battle strategy.

To understand Caesar's plan is to understand Alesia, the heavily fortified Gallic stronghold perched atop a French hilltop. Caesar had never intended to attack this zenith directly-doing so would lead only to defeat and the loss of Caesar's entire Gallic campaign. Rather, Caesar dug his-and his troops'-heels into the brittle French soil surrounding Vercingeterix, severing Vercingeterix supply lines and effectively forcing him into open battle. Vercingeterix, himself a man of great cunning, knew to resist initial temptation of glory and await solid reinforcements first. On one early March morning, reinforcements finally arrived and outnumbered Caesar's men nearly ten to one.

Caesar knew he could not hold the lines alone. In order to secure a twenty-five miles stretch of land, he had to rely on his staff. Marc Anthony and Junius Brutus provided the necessary support for the early part of the battle. Caesar's leadership touched other areas as well. His ability to delegate jobs and rely on others for solutions was essential to running an effective campaign, whether on the battlefield or in Rome. However, these were not the sole factors leading to Caesar's success: his keen battle strategy and personal leadership skill also contributed to his eventual victory.

The Gallic opposition Caesar faced was comprised largely of untrained peasant farmers. Although they greatly outnumbered the Romans, the Gallic soldiers' lack of skill in the end presented little challenge for the Roman blades. That morning, the first onslaughts of Gallic forces proved detrimental to Roman foot soldiers, debasing morale. Eventually, even the most hardened Romans grew wary after hours of battle-despite their military prowess. Brutus reported to Caesar that his legions were facing heavy losses. The seemingly impossible looked to prove true-Caesar might lose the battle and, as a result, his entire Gallic campaign. Under pressure, Caesar responded resourcefully. He quickly donned his crimson battle robes and mounted his noble white horse. Caesar knew what all great leaders of history have known: although great strategy and a reliable staff help, they do not ensure success. No strategy compares to personal intervention in a time of crisis. By leading a cavalry charge at the height of the Gallic battle, Caesar simultaneously raised the morale of his men and struck fear into the hearts of his enemies. His charge proved decisive in the battle for Alesia, and cemented Caesar's success for the remainder of the Gallic campaign. Caesar secured Gaul thanks to his marked skills as a leader. These same skills would prove ever valuable to the leaders that would come after Caesar, two millennia later.

**Passion**

**Anonymous**

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

I would have never expected my life to change dramatically after a trip to the men’s room. However, on June 20, 2007, one did. I overheard a conversation that changed my point of view on nearly everything. “He didn’t even make it to Extemp Semifinals. Frankly I knew he wasn’t really that great of a speaker,” said the first young competitor. “Well, he may do okay in Impromptu,” replied the second one. “Only if the competition is mediocre,” said the first speaker as he was washing his hands. Then they both belted out a haughty laugh sending chills deep into my spine. I, Andrew Hosea, was eliminated from Extemp at Octafinals and would soon compete in another category, Impromptu. Feeling demoralized and downtrodden, I wondered how I would regroup for my upcoming Impromptu rounds at the national convention the following week.

Often, people change when they least expect it. Here I was a two-time national qualifier, the top speaker at my school, arguably one of the top speakers in town and I had been feeling like I was on top of the world. Initially, I felt much pride for my accomplishments. However, upon leaving that somewhat moldy and musty high school bathroom, I saw my self-esteem and confidence evaporate before my eyes quicker than water in the Mojave Desert. Following that experience, existential thoughts began to cloud my mind. Was I really good enough? How could two people talk so callously about achievements that I strived for and often dreamed of obtaining? My confidence was on a roller coaster, and I began to doubt myself in other endeavors as well. I wondered how I could be successful, which led me to the even deeper question of what being successful really meant.

Oddly enough, on another trip to the bathroom (this time on my own turf) which lately had seemed to become an unusual place of reflection and understanding, I reached a climax in this life changing event. I realized that success and accomplishment are ambiguous. As the old cliché goes, beauty is in the eye of the beholder. After reading countless success stories of people that achieved momentous triumphs in many unique and individual ways, I realized there is no standard definition of success. Lately it had been a monstrous creation contrived in my mind. Each and every person has his or her own love and passion, meaning that each person has his or her own distinct way and opportunity to be successful. I realized that I am what I love. I am my passions. As Benjamin Disraeli eloquently said, “Man is only truly great when he acts from the passions.” With this insight and newfound confidence, I walked with my head held higher than ever before.

I am civic minded; I love my involvement in speech, debate, politics, history, scouting and anything else that relates to public policy and social issues. I now know that as long as I am adamant in my pursuits, I will succeed. Only when I let myself become free the from the competitive winner-take-all societal attitude could I realize my full potential and allocate my energy where it really belonged. It takes such knowledge to stand firm in the face of doubt and uncertainty. It takes this wisdom and commitment to stand back up, give it my all, and take eighth at a national championship tournament. But nonetheless, I learned it is not what rank I hold, what title is mine, or any other attempt to quantify human accomplishment; it is what I love that truly matters. I love the social sciences and I know one day I will use this passion to make a positive impact on society long after my days participating in national high school competitions.

**The Impact of The West Wing On Me**

**Anonymous**

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

During a trip to the US, my father brought back a boxed set of *The West Wing* DVDs. While I planned to watch them during my school holiday as amusement, the show instead became an obsession and an education in itself.

My greatest passion has always been politics and global issues. I have a keen interest in joining the political process in my own country, India, and I see myself as a person concerned about the issues of the world at large as well. This zeal has existed in me for a long time, but it was in 2006 that I began to truly understand my passion. I attribute this to many things: reading books, newspapers, and magazines and talking to people who feel similarly (or radically differently!). But nothing has given me a better understanding of the deeper issues and the effects of politics than, strangely, *The West Wing* and its core characters.

The series deals with a Democratic administration led by an economist-President, and offers a glimpse into the workings of the White House. Delving into the relationships between the President, various senior staff members of the West Wing, Senators, lobbyists, foreign leaders and journalists, it is a political junkie’s delight. However, it offers me something more. It reflects my image of an ideal government. The show portrays committed individuals, idealistic and yet practical, who always have their country’s best interests in mind. Though this can be mocked at as a utopian dream, it realistically blends this fantasy with a very realistic world of discord and compromise. It embodies the notion that politicians can be intelligent, honest and honorable while at the same time remaining flawed human beings.

Another feature of *The West Wing* that appeals to me is the exploration of complex domestic and international issues from a liberal viewpoint very similar to mine. The show’s thorough dissection of global problems such as terrorism, nuclear proliferation and foreign policy has peaked my interest to the extent that I have carried on to learn more about these issues through other sources. I attach great importance to the sustainability of the environment, and the fictional administration’s ardor toward this issue indicates a welcome alternative, albeit fictional, to the environmental policies of modern governments. *The West Wing* engages me far more than the average television drama by actually involving debate about our pressing problems and positing pragmatic ways in which these problems might be tackled.

In the recent past, I have engaged myself in various tasks connected to politics. There is a terrible lack of accountability among politicians in my country, caused in large part by the paucity of accurate data pertaining to elected representatives. I work extensively with a non-governmental organization in my city, Bangalore, to find and make available accurate and verified data regarding the constituencies represented, the margins of victory and the assets of elected representatives in my state. Publishing the assets of a politician is especially satisfying, since the public in a country so riddled with political corruption like India ought to know the sources of their leaders’ wealth.

*The West Wing* itself inspired me to get actively involved with an election campaign. For two weeks in mid-2006, I volunteered to join the campaign of a maverick politician running for a seat in the legislative council of my state. Highly educated and possessing great integrity, he seemed to me a one-of-a-kind statesman, removed from the appalling political climate of my state. My task was to campaign over the telephone to numerous constituents. Despite the fact that the politician ultimately lost, the conversations I shared with these constituents truly inspired and encouraged me.

Though *The West Wing* is set in the United States (a developed country whose problems are fundamentally different from the problems of a developing country like my own), it still offers great lessons applicable to issues in India as well as the rest of the world. This American television series has not only bolstered my passion to join politics but also taught me an important life lesson. I have realized that while the world order necessitates pragmatism, idealism and vision must also be present. As *The West Wing*’s President says to one of his advisors, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful and committed citizens can change the world.” To which the advisor replies, “It’s the only thing that ever has.”

**Vijay Mallya: A Maverick**

**Vishnu Narasimhan**

**Leadership is a constant theme and emphasis at CMC. In fact, one of the ways we describe CMC students is “Leaders in the Making.” Identify and discuss a person, fictional or nonfictional, who has helped shape culture and thought. You may select someone from any field: literature, the arts, science, politics, history, athletics, business, education, etc.**

Vijay Mallya, an Indian airline and brewing tycoon, is an unconventional businessman. He is the owner of the world’s second largest spirits company and also of one of India’s largest airlines, and his business success is one of many examples of the economic rise of India. However, even in a country where millionaires are springing up by the hundreds, this liquor baron is in a class of his own. A self-styled “King of Good Times”, he lives his life to the fullest and unrepentantly displays his wealth, having no qualms about living the way he does. To the rapidly expanding Indian upper middle-class he is an inspiration, a person who challenges the deep-rooted Indian ethos of saving and sacrifice.

Mallya’s father, Vittal Mallya, was a rich industrialist who deftly bought the shares of a brewing company, United Breweries, during a time when the Indian government was proposing prohibition. Vittal’s intuition told him that the government would find prohibition to be impractical, and when the idea was shelved a few years later, he found himself at the helm of United Breweries. When he suddenly died of a heart attack in 1983 at the age of 59, his frivolous 27-year-old son Vijay was suddenly thrust into the chairmanship of a $100 million corporation. For a person braded as a playboy and more into fast cars, planes and women, this change was dramatic. Vijay handled it smoothly, growing his United Breweries Group into a multi-billion dollar conglomerate, with interests in Brewing, Airlines, Formula 1, Real Estate, Information Technology and Television. His airline, Kingfisher Airlines, is said to be the world’s fastest growing. It offers a premium service at an unapologetically premium price, while still remaining profitable in a low income country like India.

However, Mallya’s business success is not the reason for his deep influence on the culture of India’s upper middle class; rather, it is his choice of lifestyle. Unlike the other billionaires of India, Mallya is very visible in the Indian media, hosting and attending numerous parties, buying the latest jet or showcasing one of his 250 odd vintage racing cars. With four private luxury jets, 26 mansions around the world, the world’s most expensive yacht, 200 odd racehorses, and a Formula 1 team, he is looked up to by millions of Indians as their role model. He is regarded as the ultimate lifestyle icon, inspiring the young, burgeoning middle class to live their lives in a very different manner than that of their parents. He has come to represent the success of risk taking and free enterprise, challenging the notion of the previous generation that a fixed salary in a government owned firm was the way to subsist. For a country so marked in the contrasts between the haves and the have-nots, Vijay Mallya immediately strikes a chord with people dreaming about a better life.

In the days of socialism in India, between 1947 and the early 1990s, the country was economically stagnant, with the government having almost no success in bringing the country out of the extreme poverty that it was facing. People saved up almost all of the little money that they earned and for the average Indian, dreams always remained dreams. Then, after a financial crisis in 1990, the government has had no choice but to break its shackles on the economy and quite inadvertently, it has unleashed an economic boom of unprecedented scale. With a massive number of people joining the middle class, the way of life that had been practiced for the past couple of generations is being fundamentally confronted. Thus, in this modern, increasingly prosperous India, Mallya’s way of life challenges the mindset of saving that is so entrenched in Indian culture.

Mallya probably is more of an icon to the upper middle class than to the lower sections of society, but he certainly gives out a radically new message to Indians declaring that “Greed is good.” Of course, on one hand it can be argued that his lifestyle promotes unabashed consumption and shows no respect for the natural environment, but for the average middle-class Indian, he represents their dreams and ambitions. At the same time, it is true that for the 600 million Indians surviving on less than 2 dollars a day, Vijay Mallya’s life means absolutely nothing. Yet, for the middle class that he has influenced, he has shaped a booming economy made up of hungry consumers with growing disposable incomes. Personally, I respect him not because his lifestyle is one that I seek, but because he is someone who has radically defied existing notions. He is a maverick, and I believe that any far-reaching change in India is going to have to come from people like him who have the courage to challenge the status quo.

**Disparity Through My Windows**

**Ipsita Basu**

**2. Discuss some issue of personal, local, national, or international concern and its importance to you.**

The colors through the window become inconsequential, only the forms and their faces significant. Through the window of my hometown Kolkata, India I see a half naked child running around on the street. His face depicts childish levity and frolic but the swell of his belly betrays the daily struggle facing him. It speaks of abject poverty, of a hand to mouth existence where life constitutes begging or odd jobs to satisfy one’s basic physiological necessities. In contrariety, when I observe children of the same age in Singapore, the city where I have lived for the past 15 years, I see the same naïve smile, cherishing moments spent on one of his three pairs of roller blades.

For me, this is one of the world’s biggest tragedies: unbearable starvation leads to death in one place and affluence necessitates the limitless squandering of money in another. In simple terms this is inequality, in economic terms, inequality of wealth and income distribution. The power of this term is in the fact that it highlights a multitude of underlying causes leading to this gap and the beauty of its solution is that it can be addressed at any level by absolutely anyone.

Inequality in income distribution is taking place due to a number of reasons. On a global scale, it is taking place because of preferential terms of trade and multi-national companies exploiting wage differentials due to which developing countries are not paid what the good or labour would be worth in a developed country. Within a country, the capital is in the hands of the rich and when they utilize it, the profits benefit only the rich, thus, never alleviating the poor from there deplorable condition. Illiteracy is one of the major causes of inequal income distribution because without education it is very difficult for people working in the primary sector or performing blue collar labour to improve their standard of living.

Inevitably, its solution would entail large scale governmental policies like progressive taxation and social benefits in addition to intervention by the WTO or IMF but every individual can play a part by simply donating small sums of money or uneaten food in their household to the soup kitchen. This situation manifests how every movement towards change starts from the grassroots level. Indeed, it is imperative that people understand this crisis and influence some redress because if an economic policies to encourage the same are implemented, they need to possess the support of the middle and affluent class.

When recently elected U.S. president Barack Obama spoke about wealth distribution in his presidential campaign, I stood up from my couch and applauded this sentiment. In fact, if the divide lessens, a lot of related factors will change. Crime rate and poverty levels will reduce, and health care for the lower class will improve.

Human rights have been integrated into the ideology of most countries as this is a basic pre-requisite for the development and advancement of the country. Using the same line of argument, do human rights not encompass the ‘right to life’ and ‘right to food’? The amalgamation between my cultural background and country of residence impels me to dwell on this problem and provide my contribution. When I volunteer at the Missionary of Charity Kolkata founded by Mother Teresa for a month every year, serving food and distributing clothes to the underprivileged gives me immense satisfaction.

I do not deny that there are a number of causes for unequal income distribution but they have to be eradicated, one at a time. One day, when I go back to my hometown or to any other neighborhood where there had been relative or absolute poverty, I do not want to see the ache in the eyes of the poor that I see now; I wish to see satisfaction, well-sustained satisfaction.

**The Man Behind the Curtain**

**Jonathan Lee Hopkins**

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Whether or not one supported Barack Obama’s election to the White House, one must concede that the President’s campaign speeches brilliantly portrayed a new vision for a tired country. Yet Obama did not write them. The man behind the curtain was 28-year-old Jon Favreau. Though not yet a household name, Favreau was the wordsmith behind the 2008 Obama campaign that changed the face of the American political landscape. Favreau’s words presented a simple message -- “Yes, we can” -- and that message carried Obama to victory. Through his writing, Favreau helped to shape the country’s thoughts and culture. He not only influenced the election, but also inspired people to have hope for a better future.

The man with the mighty pen had humble beginnings. Born in Massachusetts, Favreau began to excel during college, graduating as valedictorian from the College of the Holy Cross. His valedictory address mixed humor and poignancy. Though his tone was lighthearted, Favreau still left his audience with a serious message, writing that, “The employers are our communities, and while each position is already being filled by millions all over the world, there is a desperate need for more help. And here’s some of what we need: soccer coaches…, signature collectors, boo-boo fixers, grocers to the hungry, roofers to the homeless, and believers -- especially believers. Will not these tasks constitute bold undertakings? Indeed, I’m sure they will. But I have faith that we will try them, and, God willing, we shall succeed.” Favreau called the students, teachers, and family members at Holy Cross to believe and get involved, even if it was through something as simple as coaching a Pee Wee soccer team. His words, though delivered on a much smaller stage, were reminiscent of the great orator John F. Kennedy’s call to “ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country.”

While in office, President Kennedy used author Ted Sorensen as his “intellectual blood bank” and main speechwriter. Similarly, Obama found someone who could “read his mind” in Favreau, who was then just a few years out of college and working for John Kerry. While on the campaign trail, Obama realized that there were simply not enough hours in the day to both campaign and write. Though Obama, like Kennedy, was a best-selling author, Obama, like Kennedy, still needed help from a speechwriter. Obama and Favreau immediately clicked, forming a friendship around baseball and politics. But it was Favreau’s ability to channel Obama’s already pristine language into something sublime that made the difference in Obama’s campaign.

The finest example of Favreau’s work was heard not along the campaign trail, but rather at its end: Obama’s victory speech in Chicago was breathtaking. When Obama won the election, much of the country was in a state of euphoria, and Favreau’s task -- crafting an oration for both the crowd at Grant Park and the millions of viewers across the world -- was daunting. Obama’s victory speech, however, was not the first piece Favreau had ever written with such a celebratory tone: though the two speeches were written at different times for radically different purposes, the thoughts presented in Obama’s speech were largely reminiscent of those contained in Favreau’s own valedictory address. For Obama, Favreau wrote that America should “summon a new spirit of patriotism, of service and responsibility where each of us resolves to pitch in and work harder and look after not only ourselves, but each other.” These ideas of working together as a community and looking after each other echo his May 2003 address. His words about believing, helping, and hoping are essentially the same whether spoken to a few people at the College of the Holy Cross or to the nation at large. Jon Favreau knows how to lead with the power of his pen. Though he was the man behind the curtain for much of the presidential campaign, he helped to change our country’s thinking and shape our culture by giving us what we needed most in a time of great change: hope.

**For the Love of the Script**

**Jonathan Lee Hopkins**

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

Three A.M. I still smell like the chicken-soaked grease of a shift spent working at Chick-Fil-A, but I’ve hit a plot snag. My character’s stuck in Boston, I’m stuck on page 78, and I need to figure out how to get us both out before I’ll let myself shower and go to bed. If I had been thinking rationally, I might have wondered what I was doing. All I knew at that moment, however, was that I was consumed with a then-70-something-page screenplay that had stretched my imagination and creative ingenuity to the limits for the past few weeks.

Over the past several years, I had often casually mentioned to my family and friends that I might want to write movies someday. Their responses were similar and disempowering: I should spend my summers working at a “real” job and focus my spare time on something more ordinary. I probably wouldn’t be able to get past page five anyway, they said.

Yet plots kept creeping up on me. Ideas, characters, and images consumed my dormant mind, teasing my imagination as I bagged drive-thru orders of breaded chicken. As these ideas slowly evolved into stories, I realized that I didn’t just want to write -- I had to. Thus, a few days into the summer, I began writing. From the time my evening shift ended into the early hours of the next morning, I wrote in secret, pensively at first but always passionately. I lived to find intricacies in relationships that didn’t yet exist, to wrap my mind around a new character and find the soul in a scene. My imaginary settings existed independently and unknown to the rest of the world, but they were still vibrant, active, real. Late in July, as I began to wrap up my script’s loose ends with only one scene to go, I realized a fantastic truth: I had not only written a movie, but I had also discovered a passion.

The surprise on the faces of my friends and family when the freshly printed and bound script hit the table in front of them brought a smile to mine. The fact that I had written a script -- that I had actually completed a feat that most merely aspire to -- changed their attitudes toward my passion for writing. Immediately, their doubt shifted into support, and the next few weeks were a tizzy of queries, rejections, and editing suggestions: a harsh baptism into the world of cinema. I’m still searching for that first lucky break; my script may never find a home, or it may hit screens sooner than anyone would have ever guessed. To me, however, it doesn’t matter. I didn’t write a movie to prove anything, to get rich, or to satisfy my friends and family. I wrote it for the plot and for the characters. I wrote it for the joy I felt in each crafted scene. I wrote, and will continue to write, for the love of the script.

**Funny Girl**

**Caitlin Tran**

**Leadership is a constant theme and emphasis at CMC. One way CMC emphasizes leadership is through the Athenaeum Speaker Series ( www.cmc.edu/mmca), which enables CMC students to dine with leaders from a wide range of fields every weeknight during the academic year. Recent speakers have included authors, activists, entrepreneurs, scientists, professors, politicians, and more. If you could invite anyone to speak at the Athenaeum, who would you choose and why? Please limit your response to no more than 300 words.**

The Parks and Recreation star’s blonde locks and petite stature may be that of the quintessential Hollywood darling, but Amy Poehler is anything but. After becoming the first woman to ever become a full cast member of Saturday Night Live in her first season, she quickly became a fan favorite due to her quick wit and impeccable impersonations. It is undeniable—Poehler is hilarious and would keep the Athenaeum laughing all night long.

Most importantly to me, however, is the fact that Poehler hasn’t put her career on hold since her marriage or the birth of her children. Instead, as a working woman, she serves as an inspiration for countless young women hoping to join the male-dominated comedy industry. Additionally, Poehler recently has begun producing Smart Girls at the Party, a web series aimed at girls that encourages them to follow their own unique paths and “change the world by being yourself.” This message may sound cliché and trite, but the videos Poehler stars in really hit home when she interviews young girls on their passions, ranging from robotics to yoga, without a hint of condescension. Poehler recognizes the value in encouraging girls and making sure they know that their passions are valuable. This focus and celebration of their achievements is a refreshing breath of fresh air in our culture that is saturated with gender roles and pretenses.

Amy Poehler is a trailblazer for women, a leader in her industry who is unconcerned with traditional hierarchies and more concerned with lifting up others, and whom I would love to hear speak at the Athenaeum.

**My Own Teacher**

**Anonymous**

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

According to tradition, every Chinese New Year children receive lucky money in red envelopes from older relatives and friends. In my toddler years, finding the crisp, red envelopes embossed with gold characters to be aesthetically superior to and more valuable than the worn and wrinkled bills they held, I habitually kept the envelopes and returned the money. Yet as I learned the function of money in society, it still seemed magical that we handed pieces of old paper to a department store clerk, a street-side food vendor, or a toyshop owner in exchange for winter coats, roasted yams, or a plush tiger twice my size. My parents explained that money could be used in exchange for a seemingly limitless variety of goods because everyone simply agreed on its value. This only resulted in more questions, to which they could only say that they worked in film, not finance, for a reason.

School was no better at providing answers. Economics is not a core subject. My lack of exposure and access to the field of economics made it an enigma to my mind. Completely shrouded in mystery, it beckoned me, enticingly, to explore it. My curiosity in the subject soon reached a level I had never before experienced, having previously had access to all the information I needed. I began to unconsciously tune-in to the news at any mention of the economy, and found myself drawn to Internet articles that focused on commerce and finance. I did not understand most of what I heard or read, and online explanations only introduced entirely new sets of alien terms. Yet the less I understood about this puzzling concept of "economy", the greater my desire became to learn everything about it.

Eventually, fragments of information, of which I understood little, had become insufficient. Though I had no one to teach economics to me, there was nothing stopping me from teaching it to myself. And so, one spring afternoon in the eighth grade, I marched, authoritative and determined, into a used textbook store and demanded to see "an economics textbook please." I was subsequently shown the five vast, ceiling-high shelves, packed with textbooks, in the economics and finance section. In my excitement and haste to miraculously fill my brain with economic knowledge, it never occurred to me that I would have to choose a textbook from an endless array of options. Overwhelmed, I spent the afternoon browsing the shelves, leafing through books of all shapes, formats, and sizes, pretending to know exactly what I was looking for. Eventually, I settled on*Economics: Principles and Policy* by Alan Blinder. That summer, I embarked on my quest to learn its contents. Nearly every page introduced foreign words, concepts, and notation I had never seen at school, requiring me to re-read many passages several times to understand them.

The experience of learning on my own was even stranger. I did not have a teacher to clarify confusing sections of the textbook; my teacher *was* the textbook. I missed the nine different perspectives I could glean from my classmates during discussions; the textbook's opinion was the *only* opinion. Yet, I also found this new approach to learning liberating. No longer feeling obliged to focus my time and energy exclusively on information relevant to "the test," I was able to further research or gloss over topics depending solely upon my preferences. It is quite ironic that I then chose to take a test, standardized, no less, on macroeconomics. This test was a milestone for me, a way to track my progress and understanding after nearly one year of weekend and vacation studying, and certainly was not the final stop. Instead, I hope that it will serve to remind me of my original, zealous curiosity in economics, which still propels me, even today, through the challenges, to delve deeper into the broad scope of the discipline. I cannot imagine stopping.

**Wandering Feet**

**Anonymous**

**Discuss an accomplishment or event, formal or informal, that helped to shape your indentity or understanding of the world.**

It’s been three years. The edges of the photo are soft now, and the colors have dimmed. It has been worn thin and fragile, and there is a deepening crease down its center from the years it spent folded between my fingers. I don't usually keep photos. But there’s something which lies beneath the scratches of this one that has settled into a spot in my soul. There’s something about the fading horizon that reminds me of what was ignited in me the day I stood with my face against the wind, hand in hand with a person who would come to reveal my own horizon.

The two of us stood tall, leaning heavily into the shoulders of each other as we combated exhaustion. She was blind. I was slowly emerging from my own darkness after eleven months of concussive recovery. And there we stood, on the summit of Mount Katahdin, having completed the most infamously grueling hike of the Appalachian Trail. Alongside us lay a red-tipped cane, and some Advil. But below us lay all of Maine, from the rivers which soared with an echoing vitality to the valleys which tumbled into spacious green expanses. The fall colors created a mosaic of orange, yellow, and red: a fire on the hills which leaked into our souls. We were a couple of deficient madmen with a passion for adventure. And we’d made our way to the top of the world.

“What’s it like,” I remember Charlotte asking. Tears ran along the wrinkles on her face, weathered by fifty summers that she had never seen. I wondered if beauty meant anything to her at all. I wondered how that fire could have reached her soul without her there to witness it. But there was a certain radiance in her eyes, one that left me wonderstruck. Then I understood.

Charlotte, in her dark abode, had learned to capture that beauty within herself. She found it not in the summit, but in the journey to the top. She found it in each of the pebbles that tripped her aging bones, and in the unforgiving wind which whipped through the creases of her skin. Most importantly, Charlotte found that beauty in her passions and the opportunities she created for herself in a world that told her she could not. With it, she accomplished feats which many of us never will.

Charlotte passed away two months ago, having lived a life of numerous colorful summits. In the short time that I knew her, Charlotte guided my wandering feet, both on the trail behind me, and on the trail before me. I understand the role of my own deficiencies not as impeding my journey, but as creating new journeys. I suppose that this is why I hold that photograph so dear. For me, it marks the beginning of a journey that I have just begun to undertake. It marks the base of a mountain of endless opportunities. And I’m glad I have a lot of time left, because I definitely have a lot of summits left to reach, a lot of beauty left to find.

**Shadows Beneath the Sun**

**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.**

If at any given moment there is not at least one child screaming, one dog barking, any variation of an alarm sounding and/or someone "practicing" an instrument they don't actually know how to play, something is awry in my house. Generally, any kind of silence indicates either that irreparable destruction is in the process of being concealed, or that something is being plotted between recently forged alliances of siblings. On a consistent basis, my house can be accurately characterized as both a war zone and an insane asylum. Growing up alongside four younger siblings, a few animals, and the occasional unlucky wanderer who ended up the midst of our free-for-all, I have grown accustomed to a consistent state of unpredictability and chaos. I am a Slowe.

Over the years, my last name has adopted a certain infamy in our small town. Attendance on the first day of school is characterized by the calling of my name (an incorrect pronunciation of Elsie as Elise), and then "Oh! A Slowe!" My response to this has varied over the years, but I can clearly remember one in particular, sixth grade, when I think I tried to deny that relation. That morning, my two youngest siblings, twins and three-years-old at the time, had taken it upon themselves to leave the house at 5AM for a "stroll," as they would later identify it. Among a frantic search by the entire town police station, they were found at a local park, playing on the swings. Completely naked. But hey, it was hot outside. Who could be bothered with clothing? Certainly not them. My teacher, through tears of laughter, was careful to convey this in detail to my class. It was my first year of middle school, where my primary priority was to be "cool." I found myself less than thrilled to be a Slowe that morning. I blamed them, in a fit of rage, for destroying my reputation. It was tough being a sixth grader.

I now recognize that memory with a smile as one that will follow me well into adulthood. Many days in our house come with memories like that, and with the passing years, each one has enhanced the love and pride I hold for my little band of misfits. Even if we're not particularly "cool" all the time. Evidently, each summer has given way to a new story about my family on the first day of school, even as we moved through three different towns. I'm realizing now that this was my last year of that, and what a bittersweet realization that is. It's the end of an era.

Growing up as a Slowe, a fact beyond my choosing, has left a permanent legacy on my heart and a spot in my soul. As the oldest sibling, the idol, the protector, and the sometimes unfortunate leader of chaos, I will trace my own legacy in the stories that are yet to come, especially in those that will be told to my brother and sister's classes when they enter middle school themselves next year, and I am gone.

Despite the number of times that I swore to have disowned my family, I would trade nothing for each of the memories, ludicrous as they are. This is who I am. It's who I'll always be, and I am thrilled to carry into the world the same thirst for adventure, the same love of the absurdities that shape us, and the same excitement in finding myself a few steps off of the beaten path. My family has left me with a special way of embracing the world around me, despite its imperfections. Although I will at times feel lost without them next year, I will find my way after navigating eighteen years, and many to come, as a Slowe.

# My Realization Anonymous

## Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.

The American Ballet Theater (ABT) Gillespie School parent/student meeting back in March started off with nothing exciting, nothing new. New drop off and pickup procedures. The June showcase. Spring evaluations. Yawn. But then the school’s artistic director announced, out of the blue, that she was restructuring the entire program!

I bolted upright, suddenly very wide awake. Going forward, the program would no longer support students wanting to dance in college. Instead, becoming a professional dancer immediately upon high school graduation had to be every ABT dance student’s goal. It was all in or entirely out. Class times for the upcoming fall were moved from after school to 1 pm, an impossible time for me to make if I wanted to continue with my rigorous AP/honors course load and school activities. My world felt like it was crashing down. I was faced with a stark choice: professional dancer or college? Until this point, I always thought I could do both. Now, at age 17, I was forced to make a decision that would affect the rest of my life.

No one was more committed to dance than I was. I spent the last 15 years training up to 30 hours each week. I danced for several years at ABT, one of the nation’s premiere programs, where I blossomed into a highly accomplished ballerina. The only time I ever missed a class was the day our beloved Goldendoodle unexpectedly died. I spent two summers at the prestigious Central Pennsylvania Youth Ballet training with some of the best instructors in the world. But I was equally committed to school and my rigorous curriculum. Would I be a quitter if I gave up dance after spending all of those years perfecting my craft? Then again, would I regret not having a traditional college experience and developing my other interests? Would my parents, who had sacrificed so much for me to dance, be disappointed? The decision was consuming my every thought. Now I couldn’t concentrate on ballet or school. I paced incessantly. My heart felt like it was going to burst. My mother reminded me to breathe.

In late spring, I made a decision to focus on my academics and my high school experience. While dance had always been my driving force, when faced with the choice, I realized that I had other passions as well. One of them is politics. I am one of thousands of young women who were energized by the last presidential election. First, by the exciting possibility of a female president and second, by the desire to make a difference given the current political climate. I realized that dance has actually made me into this person who understands politics. When I started dancing, I was shy, introverted and lacked confidence. But over many years of training, I gained discipline, preparedness, resiliency, charisma, and, most importantly, inner strength. I worked through the physical pain of ripped toenails and blisters bleeding through my pointe shoes and the emotional pain of constantly being corrected by teachers, which I then equated with failure. I learned to go beyond just nailing choreography but to embracing the collaboration with fellow dancers and expressing my artistry and passion to move and inspire viewers. These are the same skills I will use as a future politician or lawyer. Thanks to dance, I know how to connect with people and get things done. Criticism will never tear me or my message down. I am poised under pressure.

Ballet will always remain a part of my life. I still take open classes and plan to dance in some capacity in college and beyond. I see now that dance and academia are not mutually exclusive. I am who I am because of ballet. But now I am ready to star in next big production of my life, An American in College, and eventually impact audiences in the political theater.

**Snowbell, Dreaming Anonymous**

**Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others.**

As January snow fluttered outside the window of the hospital where I was born, my mom carefully chose a Chinese name to give me. While I go by Carolyn in America, I am Xuě Líng in China. Years later, my mom told me that my second name translates to Snow Bell—a sound as delicate as the flower.

China and the stories my mom told me about it seemed like magical realms that carried the irresistible promise of belonging. I craved to be a part of them, especially in the years when I didn’t fit in my small, homogeneous middle school. Along with myths about dragons and foxes, my mom told me stories about her youth—of the love letters she received; the karaoke bars she frequented with her friends; the lush green of Nanjing; the relatives back in China with hearts as big as our family tree.

This summer, I transported inside those storybook retellings.

Despite my initial excitement for a trip to China, I feared, despite the wonderful stories my mom told me, that I wouldn’t belong. I hold my chopsticks like a pencil. I have an awkward American accent. I’m also vegetarian, so dishes like fish ball soup or salted duck, staples of the Nanjing diet, are off-limits. Most of all, I was terrified that my family would brand me as “just another American-Born Chinese,” someone so entrenched in Western culture that she forsakes her own heritage.

When my mom’s godmother visited four years ago, I barely said a word to her, fearing that I’d make a fool of myself due to my elementary-level Mandarin. But my family spoke slowly and hung on to my every word so we could communicate, making me realize that it didn’t matter if I stumbled over sentences or couldn’t understand complex conversations. We spoke through home-cooked meals, yi po’s herbal soup for my cold, and the insistence that my aunts blow-dry my hair when they discovered that I went to bed with it still damp. When I opened up about my worries and hopes for the future, my uncles gave me advice and had faith that I could succeed in non-STEM fields. For the first time, I confronted my fear of speaking Mandarin to natives and chatted with my uncles for hours over tea. After one of them refilled my cup, he taught me that family doesn’t say “thank you,” but instead that giving to each other simply comes naturally. By the end of my trip, I learned that strong family bonds can form regardless of distance or linguistic barriers.

Despite the blistering sun and merciless mosquitoes, China was just like the paradise of my childhood self’s dreams. No river dragons blessed my future, nor did any nine-tailed foxes play pranks on me, but the loneliness of my Midwestern youth melted away after meeting my family in China.

Eventually, I began to truly feel like a Chinese girl. After being immersed in Mandarin, I could laugh at the punchlines of my popo’s jokes and tell tales about my siblings that made my relatives travel back in time. No longer was I the Carolyn who had to prove constantly the authenticity of her heritage, but Xuě Líng, the girl who confidently spoke Mandarin regardless of her American accent. In a room full of aunts, uncles, and cousins, I cheered to the first reunion dinner of the Yan family since my mom immigrated to America.

This summer taught me that the warmth of receiving familial love is incomparable to any other. Now, when I think of China, instead of fearing the unknown, I reminisce over memories of uncontrollable laughter and tender love. I learned that as long as I’m with my family, I belong. Just like I have two names, I now have two homes as well.