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**Sample essays 2017**

**Amherst College**

**It Doesn't Matter If You're Black Or White, Allison Toth**

**Describe a situation in your life that you considered to have been a life-changing experience. Include any negative or positive variables that were associated with this event. Essay must not exceed two pages in length.**

"Wow," I whispered to myself as I walked into the main doorway of my new high school. I walked through the endless hallways and questioned myself as to why my parents decided to move here, Wuerzburg, Germany, one of the alleged bad schools in the area. Why did they force me to leave my friends, home, and some of my best experiences? I had never before in my life seen as many different ethnic faces as I now would every day for the next four years. I acted very apprehensively that first week of school; I mean it's not every day that you meet someone whose father is the principal. What would people think of me? Before in my old school the ethnic majority was white and now, in a matter of one day I had become the minority. I had heard rumors and tales of alleged gangs in my new school. I believed what others had told me and prepared myself for the worst. First looks can be very deceiving. I found this out the hard way. This move was by far one of the best events that had ever taken place in my life. It taught me about ethnic diversity and allowed me to enrich my life with the friendships of different people around me.

I entered high school, to put it blatantly, scared. I didn't know what to expect. Would people see me only as the principal's daughter? At first I was labeled as a teacher's pet and a goody two shoes. Of course, I was upset about accusation but I failed to realize that I too stereotyped the faces I saw everyday. I kept a small profile to avoid any confrontation. This was my avoidance tactic. Where I came from before people congregated together as one. Color was not an issue. But here it was the opposite. These oppositions made me not want to do anything that I thought would put me in a position where I would have to defend myself.

Slowly I began to realize that moving here to Wuerzburg was actually something that was good. My original view of people and the world was confining. Now, as I walk down the halls I greet everybody with a friendly face. No matter who they are, how they look, or their reputation I befriend them. Playing sports such as volleyball and soccer allowed me to learn new attitudes and ideas from all sorts of people. Currently on my basketball team I am able to experience a whole new world of traditions with a group consisting mostly of African Americans.

Being in a school with over 600 students, 50% of them African American and 30% white allows me to communicate with people different than me. The experience has been an enriching one. Who would have ever thought that the once shy freshman was now a person encountering people and attitudes from every part of the globe? In these four years my personality has adjusted and changed into something that allows me to feel comfortable around any person and allows any person to feel comfortable around me. I feel that my personality not only has helped me to broaden my views about people but also has helped others that are still too scared to approach people other than their own race.

So far, I know that I am off to a great start. My education and attitude can only get better.

**From Negative to Positive (Or Positive to Negative?) The Lurid Confessions of a Member of Teeny Bopper Anonymous Janet Rosenbaum**

**Write on a topic of your choice.**

From Negative to Positive (Or Positive to Negative?) The lurid confessions of a member of Teeny-Bopper Anonymous

Wow. Wasn't I cool? Since this picture was taken, everything outside of myself - my appearance, my surroundings, even my superficial attitudes about life - has undergone a complete revolution. Contrasting me with that girl in the picture would be like comparing this picture with its negative; everything in this picture is now reversed, inside out.

Life started out fairly easy. Before middle school, I did what I wanted to do without regrets. If my friends wanted to do the same, company would be nice; if not, I would have just as much fun alone. Middle school changed things. Suddenly group dynamics became almost political, and social esteem, not self-esteem, became the key to happiness. Seventh grade, the time when this picture was taken, was the peak of social pressure in my life.

This picture epitomizes all of the elements that society had labelled as "important" for my peers and me, yet it also belies them through subtle clues.

For example, while I exude quite smugly what I think is maturity, the menagerie of stuffed animals and the "cutesy" picture of kittens are reminders of my immaturity.

The picture also reveals the things about myself that I'd thought were hidden away; my veneer of anti-intellectualism is belied by the often-used bookshelf and world map behind me. If I truly believed what I preached, my bookshelf would be tidy from disuse and pictures of some cretin teeny-bopper would adorn my wall.

Why do social pressures transform otherwise intelligent, creative children into lemmings? These influences to conform transcend the mere pressure of peers; they come from society as a whole. The media portray "teens" with a uniform image that tells them the way they "should" be.

A young consumer of modern entertainment (TV, movies, recent books) comes to think of the most prevalent image of "teens" as the norm.

The roles of young women in American culture are even narrower, as delineated by the following three tenets:

1. You must be trendy. Following current styles and fads is mandatory.

Additionally, the timeless rules still apply: make-up must be worn and legs must be shaven. (A careful observer might note that I am wearing blue (!) eye-shadow and blush and sport a few trendy styles: a hat, curled hair, and a T-shirt replete with pithy sayings.)

2. You must keep abreast of current events, not in the world abroad, but in your own parochial world. If you do not know in advance what everyone is wearing on Friday night or who is talking with whom, you are doomed to live alone eternally with only 13 cats for companionship.

3. Adults aren't cool. Always scowl in their presence. I was so convinced that I was living the ideal "teen" life that I had no time to think about things of true importance. Although I did homework, and did it well, I looked at school assignments as another chore to be done; I may as well tell them what they want to hear and get it over with, instead of actually thinking.

Thus, any intellectual activity that I engaged in did not permeate my consciousness. My journal from seventh grade is a continuous recitation of rumors, speculation, and other excerpts from the rather dull soap opera of seventh grade social life: proof that nothing besides this rather large mass of intellectual Spam squooshed around in my trendy blonde head for very long.

But then things changed: the advent of New Kids on the Block in eighth grade cleared this banality from my life. New Kids on the Block was an untalented group of kids assembled by a music producer for the express purpose of making money. Not only did I dare to be the only girl in my grade who didn't like them, I dared to despise them. I listened to my music and figured that matters of taste really shouldn't matter to my friends.

Wrong! Not only was I isolated from the stimulating debates about which one was cutest, but the giggles I unsuccessfully attempted to stifle certainly didn't add to my popularity. At the time, this isolation upset me greatly, but not enough to make me conform. The social vacuum in my life was replaced by ideas: books, newspapers, schoolwork, and in-class debates on subjects ranging from legalizing drugs to literature.

I summarized my feelings in my journal on November 29, 1989 when I wrote, "Let them laugh! I'd rather be an original nerd than a conformist follower."

So it was that a little less than a year after this picture was taken, its negative became closer to the truth; prominent lemming-like qualities faded into the shadows while hints of originality and intellect, previously buried in darkness, became illuminated.

**Most Influential Teacher Anonymous**

**Topic: Indicate a person who has had a significant influence on you, and describe that influence.**

She was the toughest; she was the best. She was also the most influential teacher I have ever had. Ms. William, my sixth grade teacher, was never one to settle for second-best. As a demanding teacher, she hadn’t always been popular. In fact, my classmates and I used to grumble frequently about her stringent standards. However, by continually challenging us, Ms. William instilled in us an enduring passion for learning.

I remember my first day in her class. While most teachers started the year with fun activities, Ms. William jumped straight into academics. After taking the attendance, she promptly started our first unit: Forces.

She narrated to us the story of Newton and the apple tree, and asked us why things always fell toward the Earth. She asked us many other questions – questions about natural phenomena that I had never thought about before. “Why do we see lightning before we hear thunder? How can we measure the speed of a falling object?” We learnt never to take things for granted. “Always, always, always question what you see. Do you understand why it happens?”

At first, I had a hard time understanding many of the concepts, and often stayed after class to learn more. Once, when I doubted that objects of different mass fell with the same acceleration, Ms. William and I conducted our own experiment with a pendulum to prove the theory. Throughout the year, whenever there was a concept or theory I did not understand, Ms. William would encourage me to research or carry out an experiment by myself. Under her guidance, I entered In doing so, she not only taught me to become inquisitive about the world, and also gave me the tools to explore it.

Another gift that Ms. William gave me was an appreciation of literature. Before I met her, I had always stubbornly rejected as true literature any book that was not written by Enid Blyton. To me, there was nothing that could be better than the adventures of the Famous Five. But as the list of Enid Blyton “To Read” books grew shorter, I started hunting around for other novels to entertain me. I decided to take a look at the Reading List Ms. William had compiled. I still remember picking up Oliver Twist from the library shelf and looking at it skeptically. Today, I’m glad I had listened to Ms. William, for she not only introduced me to the world of Oliver and Fagin, but also that of Huckleberry Finn, Uncle Tom, the BFG, Lucy, Edmund, Susan and Peter. I remember coming to school early one morning, hardly able to contain my excitement, to tell Ms. William that I had finally finished all the books on her Reading List. She smiled in her usual way, and promptly gave me a second List.

Although it’s been six years since I last saw Ms. William, her legacy lives on even today. Every time I read a particularly interesting book, I’d record it in my Reading List. My hope is to one day visit her, and to show her my new Reading Lists. I want her to know how much she has helped me to grow, and how much she has inspired me.

Canadian poet and essayist Irving Layton wrote in his essay The Role of the Teacher that “It is usually from a gifted teacher that a child catches his first glimpse of harmony or wisdom and gets his first hint of the intellectual adventure which may engage him for the rest of his life.”

Ms. William was that teacher for me.

**Understanding Myself, Just a Little Better Ipsita Basu**

**''Stereotyped beliefs have the power to become self-fulfilling prophesies for behavior.''Elizabeth Aries, Professor of Psychology, Amherst CollegeFrom her book Men and Women in Interaction, Reconsidering the Differences**

Shouting, tantrums, chiding, infuriation; I scuttled back into my room and slammed the door to defy my parents exhortations and advice. What followed was the sulking and tears, complete with the customary introspection. I fashioned the introspection to my own convenience with the use of platitudinal notions; I was a teenager whom they did not understand because of the generation gap. After wallowing in some more self pity and tears, the big bag of chips and songs hosting themes of ‘isolation’, ‘angst’ and ‘ignorance’ seemed necessary. In attempt to stop the self-generated profuse tears, I tried some motivational talk which ended in consolation that it was okay to cry since I was a girl.

It had been a while since I had faced this situation.

Or rather, created it. Not that the short-lived introspection had helped sufficiently, it was more the effect of long drawn rumination. This was such a generic scenario. Emotions were supposed to be so individual, so personal yet this may as well have been the story of every teenager. Why were we all so similar?

No we weren’t; We were impelled to act similarly, to direct our thoughts in a certain way. It is actually expected that we didn’t understand our parents and choose to seek distance from them. Our parents had never chosen to question our retaliation. The talk about generation gap, teenage angst and empathetic music had buzzed so prevalently in our heads that it had become a part of us.

Then what about the 17 year old farmer’s daughter in Vietnam whose mother discussed her innermost sentiments while tying her hair into braids every evening? The gap in generation exists over there as well but where are the displays of defiance and being ‘emo’ which has conventionally become accepted in liberal societies? They are non-existent because we have aggravated these behavior patterns. I wondered whether man had steeped so deeply in stereotypes that it eclipsed his own personality or independence in behavior.

After all, every one of my actions on that day seemed ascribable to a stereotype. My recourse to junk food - the notion of comfort food. The music and self-pity was a ramification of the thought that my parents always insisted on overlooking my wishes. And finally, being a girl who is often looked upon as emotional and docile somehow legitimized more tears.

So does that mean psychological studies should not be exposed neither should characteristics be discussed because the very study will transcend into a belief and make it true? No it should, because understanding the very cause of our behavior helps to eradicate undesirable characteristics that our extrinsic to our own personality. I know because now that I understand this, I am able to look at stereotypes more objectively and act in a way that isolates their effect from my behavior. After imbibing that thought process, I have become more rational, disciplined, individualistic and possess more control over my emotions.

On the flipside, some stereotypes actually benefit us, like the stereotype that one’s race is good at sports. In that case, by treating the stereotype objectively, one can ensure that there is a self-enforcing benefit. Essentially, understanding the causes of our behavior enables more control over our thoughts and actions.

**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.

**Having a Ball in Europe Dan Venning**

**Write about an event or experience that has deeply affected your development as a person.**

On a summer vacation with my family last year, my first experience of independence in Italy was of almost being arrested. My parents had decided that they wanted to go to Europe for our annual summer trip. Since I had studied Latin for three years, I told them that I wanted to go to Rome. They agreed, and we packed our bags for a trip to Italy. The only problem was that once we got to Rome, two of those bags were missing. We found one, but the other was nowhere to be seen. While my parents were talking to an official at the desk, who happened to know English, I was sent off into the separate baggage claim room to see if our missing bag had arrived yet. On the way back to meet my parents, I was stopped by a policeman who had a very large dog and a gun. He asked to see my passport, which my parents were carrying. I tried to explain this fact, but he didn't seem to understand. He then asked, in English, "Are you a hash dealer?" It was a surprising question, but I calmly responded, "No." "So you just smoke hash sometimes," was his response. Beginning to get disturbed, I responded again, "No." His third question was more of a statement, "So you just smoke cigarettes." Not being a smoker, I again responded, "No." He went back to the first question. He tried to get me to go into the room that I'm guessing was some sort of interrogation room, but I managed to get him to come over to my parents. He asked, "Is this your baby," seeming unaware of the fact that I was sixteen and had just managed to keep cool in front of a man carrying a large gun and whose dog's size implied that it was part German shepherd and part horse. Thankfully, my parents responded, "Yes," and showed the guard our passports. Seeming not the least bit apologetic and perhaps a bit disappointed at not arresting a new felon, the officer said, "Bene," and walked away. So began my trip to the cradle of civilization.

So much of that trip passed in a hurry. The Coliseum, the Roman Forum, and the great fortress of the Vatican all passed by in such a short time. I had really wanted to see the ruins of the civilization that I have learned about in my Latin class, and this trip gave me the chance. Only about fifteen miles from Rome sits Ostia Antica, an ancient city that is much like the Roman Forum except about a hundred times larger and devoid of people. I saw Pompeii, a city I had studied for a full year in a textbook filled with cartoons. Mt. Vesuvius on the horizon behind the city looked just like the pictures in my book. I recognized the things I had studied, and had a chance to see firsthand what had largely been in my imagination.

It was the freedom I had that set this trip apart. I have been on many trips outside of the United States with my parents and three to Europe before this one. They had never let me wander off in foreign cities before. I found it exhilarating to roam through the streets of Rome near our apartment at night, and to explore the foreign villages we stayed at in the countryside. In some of the places we visited, my parents gave me the camera and let me stray off for a while, taking pictures they wouldn't have, such as one of an ancient Roman mosaic in Pompeii of the birth of Venus, or a panorama of Rome. I did spend most of my time with my parents, but the freedom was something new.

Our last four days were spent in Paris. The last night was July thirteenth, the night before Bastille Day, and the night when the entire city of Paris turns into one large party, called the Bal. While my parents slept in our hotel on the Ile St. Louis, near the center of the city, I walked a few kilometers to the Tullieries gardens and around the winding streets of the city. I went to the banks of the Seine, where masses of people were dancing and listening to music played over huge speakers. On the way I watched dancers and drummers on a bridge and visited another bridge that had been converted into a food court and a stage for live music. I spent my last hours in Paris among people whose language I didn't know, awed by the revelry that lasted deep into the night.

The next day we left for home. I had loved our trip instead of counting the days until it ended, as I had when I was younger. That was due to my visiting places I had dreamed of seeing, and my newfound freedom. Next year chances are I will live in a city far from my home in Oakland, California, and my family. I know now that I'll be ready to learn from that place and my new situation, and to have fun on my own. All of these events, from the accusing guard at the Rome airport to my walk through Paris at night, have shown me that I can adapt to new situations on my own, and appreciate them for myself.

**Challenges of the New Millennium Anonymous**

**What are some of the challenges facing the world at the dawn of the new millennium?**

The advent of the year 2000 signifies a new world of hope and challenges for our country and the planet. With developments in technology such as the Internet, the world is coming closer together than ever. It is vital for the survival of our planet that we become more tolerant and understanding of other cultures so that we can work together for the benefit of future generations. During the past century, two World Wars and countless smaller struggles have decimated nearly every part of the planet. Today, too many countries and specific ethnic groups are involved in conflicts across the globe which are causing incredible violence and death. This makes it imperative that we teach the values of tolerance, diversity, and cooperation to our children.

Unfortunately, many people (especially teenagers) are very apathetic when it comes to global issues. When most people my age watch the evening news, they often feel very removed from the international situations and issues that are presented. The drug war in Colombia, Indonesian political crisis and solar eclipse in Rumania hold no personal significance or even interest for most teenagers. For me, however, these events are more than just images on a television screen. Through an organization called Children's International Summer Villages (CISV), I have developed close friendships with people from all of these countries and many more. CISV is a non-profit, international, educational organization that operates in over eighty nations. Its purpose is to foster cross-cultural friendship and understanding for people of all ages.

When I was eleven years old, I traveled with a delegation of three other children and an adult leader to Munich, Germany, to participate in what is known as a Village. Living with other children from twelve different countries for a month was an experience that completely changed my view of life. I gained a different perspective on what it means to be a member of a world community and formed extremely close friendships with many people who did not speak English.

I continued participating in local CISV activities and have attended three National Board Meetings for the organization in Cincinnati. When I was thirteen I traveled to a camp in Washington, D.C. I went to Detroit as a counselor for eleven-year-olds when I was sixteen, and this past summer I flew to Finland for three weeks to be part of a Seminar Camp. Created for seventeen- to nineteen-year-olds from twenty different nations, this event was the best experience I've had. At the beginning of the Seminar Camp, the participants had to decide as a group what we wanted to get out of our time together and what sort of focus the camp should have. As a participant, I was involved in planning each day's activities, which ranged from serious discussions of current events to intricate role-playing games and trips around Helsinki. Problems were discussed and solved in 'open meetings', which were similar to the Quaker Meetings for Business at my school. The skills of compromise, creative problem-solving and respect I have learned throughout my years at a Quaker institution were very useful to me.

Despite the different cultures and perspectives each person brought to the group, what we discovered as a result of our time together was that we were all fundamentally very similar. If these skills and experiences could be passed on to the global leaders of tomorrow, I believe that we would have more peaceful and successful resolutions to world conflicts.

One simulation we created had the delegates pretending to be refugees waiting to pass through immigration. As with every activity at our Seminar Camp, this simulation was followed by an in-depth discussion during which we each shared our individual experiences and perspectives on the subject. I was amazed to learn just how powerful my United States passport really was. Several people had experienced discrimination and mistreatment while trying to obtain visas or participate in CISV camps. One friend from Brazil had been held in a foreign airport for two days solely because of his nationality, and another had been detained because of his 'suspicious' appearance. One delegate from Lebanon told of being kidnapped during that country's civil war. The realization of how much easier my life is because I was lucky enough to be born in America really hit me. I believe that the democratic values and human rights we enjoy in this country should be fundamental to every nation.

At the end of July, I returned home with more than just photographs and Finnish souvenirs. In a remarkably short amount of time, I had become more independent, self-sufficient, and knowledgeable about the world and its inhabitants. My international experiences with CISV, through which I have learned skills of cooperation, trust, and tolerance, have truly given me global perspective. Hopefully, I will be able to further these talents at college and use them in the future to enable others to achieve the sense of world community that I have found. I am committed to making the CISV experience available to as many people as possible in every country. Because of CISV, I was inspired to take a strong interest in foreign languages, so that I would be better able to communicate with my international friends. Currently, I am learning French, Spanish and Welsh, and hope to branch out further in college. This is very important to me, because I believe that understanding our similarities and differences is the only way in which the human race will survive and prosper in the coming millennium.

**The Power of Diversity Anonymous**

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

The doorbell rang incessantly. The rest of the NASA Sharpies (as we like to call ourselves) and I in the room looked at each other in confusion - the door was already wide open. Glancing over, we saw Kennedy walk in with a curious look on his face. "Why does it make that sound when I press that?" he asked us. We all responded by letting out a heartfelt chuckle. I explained to him that pressing that little button is usually used to signal to the residents living inside that there is a visitor waiting to be greeted. "Ah, that's tight!" he replied while smiling. He had never seen such a device in his hometown of Tafuna, American Samoa. Although it may have seemed to be just a trivial difference in the two cultures, it was one of many moments at NASA SHARP that allowed me to experience firsthand the richness of diversity.

Twenty of us flew into LAX, everyone from a different part of the United States or one of its outlying territories. The first night, we played a game where each of us was asked questions ranging from favorite sports teams to professional goals. I participated intently in the game, asking as many questions as I could to learn more about everyone. It became quite clear that although there were differences in our backgrounds and ethnicities, we had many interests in common. I began to realize that the disparities between us were not barriers but catalysts for meaningful interaction.

I learned something different from each sharpie. Fozoh taught me how to solve a Rubik's cube. Tiffany lent me some CDs that they listened to down in Mobile (properly pronounced "Mobeeeele"), Alabama. Andrea described life on a Navajo reservation and debunked many myths that I had. Kennedy told stories of how he could string thirty coconuts together back in Samoa. Jasmine even allowed me to try one of her special Puerto Rican fruits. I, personally, cooked authentic Chinese fried rice for the others and explained many times that we say "pop" instead of "soda" in the Midwest.

Together, we would often stay up at late at night. Over chips and salsa, we discussed issues that we felt were pertinent. My views often clashed with others' as we debated topics ranging from politics to movies. It was lighthearted and fun at the time, but now I look back with a sense of nostalgia. The environment that existed at NASA SHARP broadened my point of view and made me reevaluate my stance on certain issues. The beauty of our differences is that it allows us to have such different perspectives and intellectually stimulate others.

Over the eight weeks, I developed a deep respect for the eclectic community that surrounded me. Coming from a homogenous suburb in the Midwest, I was in awe as we bonded. It is this desire to connect that I hope to bring to Yale - perhaps not by cooking fried rice for everyone, but by having an open mind and an avid determination to embrace the power of diversity.

**A Night at the Fifth Avenue Brian D. Earp**

**Pick a topic of your own choosing that will give you the opportunity to express to us a sense of how you think, what issues and ideas are most important to you, and a sense of your personal philosophy, traits, goals, etc.**

Midnight was two hours old before I could finally peel out of my costume. The prosthetic nose and glue-on beard tore at my skin as I tugged them off, and they quickly joined the clutter on the bathroom floor: a tired pile of mismatched robes, rags, and a decrepit old wig. I stood in my boxers and scrubbed at the layers of pasty make-up until forty years were washed down the sink, until finally a look in the mirror revealed my own face, clean and raw. It was the first time in the last six hours that I had confronted a reflection that told the truth. My own face.

The disjointed memory of a vibrant evening began to tickle my mind, whizzing around my brain like an insect trapped in a jar. Everything that evening had felt somehow monumental. A sea of people, and a white blaze that consumed my vision as I stood on that enormous stage. There was the elaborate music cue; the song performed in the violent shine of a spotlight; the applause that seemed almost too thick; and finally the award, handed to me by that black-bedecked woman. I remembered the podium and the clutter of notes that the announcer had left there. I remembered saying "thank you" into the microphone, and wishing I could think of something else to say. Seattle's premier professional theater, The Fifth Avenue, and I was performing on its stage. I had never experienced a night that felt so much like it was going to burst. So full of *something*. Yet even as the evening's events recycled through my mind, I felt something prick at my consciousness. I had to know, what did it all mean?

There is something warm about applause. About an award. It says that you're appreciated, that you did your job. It is the naked patter of rain or the damp roar of a waterfall, and it sneaks up your spine and tickles the back of your neck. Yet as the evening moved on, each hour felt saturated with it. Brian the Actor. Brian the Actor. Brian the Actor. A strange contradiction began to swim in my stomach. On the one hand, the smiles and cheers. On the other, something deeper. Something inescapable. Beyond the lights and laud, there is a satisfaction in theater that resonates with my core. Something intense.

Theater is fundamentally human, and sublimely ancient. It is the seed of religion itself; it is deeply spiritual. A heightened state of mind. You are at once yourself, and someone entirely unlike yourself. You forge a vibrant connection with the audience in a tacit and beautiful chemistry that cannot be grasped, but is always felt.

Theater is a process, not an event. For the actor as an individual, it's an internal struggle: finding the meaning as it exists between the character and yourself. Then, as it exists between your performance and those who are watching you perform. It's entering into a focus and dimension that is like space or infinity-that ineffable high that has a meaning of its own. It's sucking the marrow out of each word so that it becomes your own, imbued with life and meaning. It's the research, the internalization, and the assumption of another being. It's finding authenticity in a reality that's made up.

A performance lasts a night, and lingers only in mind and memory, but the achievement of theater is permanent. Transformative. It's searching a new depth with every role in order to attain a greater height. It's finding something in yourself that can only be discovered by being someone else.

This is theater. And the byproduct of this personal achievement is extraordinary: to be on a stage, and to captivate. To go deep, and perplex reality with what is unfolding under the stage lights. To eradicate the world as it exists outside the four walls of a darkened room.

Then there's the byproduct of applause. Brian the Actor. Brian the sixty-year-old pickpocket. And now, standing amidst the molted remains of that knavish old man, Brian the seventeen-year-old high school kid. Brian, standing in his boxers in front of his bathroom mirror after a very long night, with school in the morning.

**The Listening Party Brian D. Earp**

**Personal essay that will help us to know you better. Families, intellectual and extracurricular interests, school and community events, people who have influenced, significant experiences, personal aspirations, or anything that pops into your head.**

My brother lives in a "gated community," one of those manufactured neighborhoods. It was like we were driving through the streets of a toy city, a miniature suburb built for the amusement of a god-sized obsessive compulsive. I myself was steering the matchbox car, a massive and ancient gray truck I borrowed from my dad, and my girlfriend Alexis occupied the passenger's seat. Clone after architectural clone, we watched the houses float by the truck's windows. We were headed to our very first Listening Party.

I really didn't know what to expect. My "brother" Keith is actually my half-brother--Dad's first marriage--and quite a bit older than I. He's very intelligent and congenial, albeit occasionally unpredictable, and good looking for someone in his late thirties. He's just the sort of older sibling to suggest a vague "listening party" in the middle of the school week and actually inspire me to come. Plus, his friend Astrid was going to be there. She's "hip." I'm not certain what that means, but if someone were "hip," it would be Astrid. (She and Keith met in a health food store-he sells aged garlic extract and she's going to be a naturopathic doctor-and they've been good friends ever since.) Tall and unconventionally beautiful, she made a vivid impression on Alexis and me the first time we all met. We both looked forward to a rendezvous with her and Keith again.

We're an unlikely group of friends, I'll admit. Alexis, a freshman at the University of Washington, is...well, how does one describe Alexis? Long, reddish brown hair and a clever smile. Musical prodigy and a black belt in Tae Kwon Do. A girl of her own style. As for me, I'm an academic type still in his senior year of high school who has a knack for theater but hates being labeled an actor. I can balance a picnic table bench on my chin. I'm composedly quirky.

You've met Keith and Astrid.

As a group, we span twenty years from oldest to youngest and yet we connect on a level of common understanding. We click.

So that brings us back to the listening party. Let me set the stage:

His living room is clean, comfortable, and open, with windows on two sides overlooking the neighborhood. There's a gas fireplace and an elegant coffee table. Not opulent, but nice. After we had all taken up a station on the couch or one of the armchairs, Keith dimmed the lights. The mood was set with the mysterious glow of a few candles; the atmosphere was decidedly rich. The final step was adding the music.

Turn by turn, we filled the evening with melody, with rhythm. With chords and memories. Now and then, one of us would dispatch a story: "the first time I heard this song..." Or we'd talk about the way the music made us feel, why it was effective. The mood in the air became warm, reminiscent, thick, electric, inspired, deep, deeper, and intricate. We shared ourselves through our appreciation of good music. Time flew.

And as the evening finally drew to a close, ("We have to get going-school tomorrow") I knew it had been time well spent. Time away from work and obligations. Time with good friends, good music, good conversation, and a feeling like something glowing in the atmosphere. We drove back down the street, now befallen with night, and headed home.

**Safeguarding Memories Rachael Ji Yoon Kim**

**Common Application: Topic of Your Choice**

Leaping over crooked crevices in the sidewalk, my childhood self hopped a few yards ahead of my grandfather. As I paused to scrutinize a colorful candy wrapper, the smell of melting sugar drifted from a small blue cart where an old woman flipped flat buns on a pan. Grandpa always bought two buns: one for him and one for me.

Not long before my fourteenth birthday, my grandfather was diagnosed with a severe case of Alzheimer’s, and shortly afterwards, he moved into a nursing home. Upon entering his room, I shouted “Hi Grandpa!”

Grandpa murmured, “Who are you?”

The next day, I bought two of the sweet buns Grandpa and I had enjoyed.

“Grandpa, do you want one of these?”

He paused, then said, “No. Who are you?”

Leaving the buns in the paper bag, I replied, “I’m Rachael, your granddaughter.”

Eyes widening, he gasped, “You have to get out of here; the communists are guarding this place!”

I explained, “No, the Korean War is over! You’re safe in America.” With a small sigh, I returned home for the day.

Now, after more than three years, Grandpa recognizes me when I step into his room. However, he cannot connect the round-faced child beside the bun cart to the person I am today. Once a memory slides past the grip of his mind, it can never return.

This troubling truth has motivated me to preserve the memories of others in my grandfather’s generation through the War Stories Project. A year after joining the volunteer effort, I have become the coordinator of the project. Fellow volunteers and I collect the experiences of World War II witnesses and collaborate with local colleges to produce a documentary and companion anthology for high school students.

While managing the project, I interviewed Holocaust survivor Bruno Bienenfeld, who unraveled the touching story of his childhood. In 1943, his family was taken to the Jasenovic concentration camp, where they were only given one piece of bread a day. But one day, he reached under his threadbare pillow and found another piece of bread. His mother said that it was an answer to his prayers. The young Bruno asked, “Are there Jewish angels?” His mother smiled and said, “There are angels for all people on earth.” Every day, Bruno found an extra bit of bread under his pillow, but after three hard months, his mother died, and the deliveries ceased. He told his father “The angel didn’t put the bread under the pillow tonight.” His father replied, “He was too busy taking Mom to heaven.”

Working with primary sources like Mr. Bienenfeld, I learn about World War II from the people who lived it. I also delegate tasks and teach volunteers how to search for and sort images to be used in the documentary. In addition to the responsibilities of coordinator, I have taken on the position of Fundraising Head for the project. Besides speaking publicly on behalf of the War Stories Project in fundraising efforts, I also burn the midnight oil writing letters to more than 200 corporations and local businesses, looking up addresses, and licking envelopes until my mouth goes dry.

Each year, more and more World War II veterans and Holocaust survivors pass away, and the loss of these valuable witnesses reminds me of the urgency to preserve their life stories. Just as Grandpa forgot eating sugar-filled buns with me, we can fail to remember what our world has endured. Whether the record of our past must serve as a lesson or reminiscence, we must look back at the path of our history before laying the cobblestones of the future.

**Color Guard Rachael Ji Yoon Kim**

**Common Application: Please elaborate on one of your activities (extracurricular, personal activities, or work experience)(150 words or fewer).**

I like to play with guns and knives.

It’s not what you think: I’m in color guard. Although events like the Virginia Tech incident have worsened the reputation of weaponry, color guard attempts to transform the traditional connotations of potentially harmful objects into an art form.

I’ve participated in this artistic and athletic manner of multi-tasking for three years, starting with flag and advancing to the weapon lines by mastering both rifle and saber. In the familiar settings of home and school, I’m your typical teenager. But at a guard show, I become a dazzling entertainer, a fluid dancer, a dexterous performer.

Crimson eye-shadow fans out over my lids, and a crown of twisting locks sits proudly on my head. Brilliant lights gush over the football field, our stage. Maneuvering through lines of gleaming instruments, I roll to the ground, quickly pick up a billowing flag, and spread its silk before me over the night sky.

**Poetry Rachael Ji Yoon Kim**

**Please elaborate on one of your activities (extracurricular, personal activities, or work experience)**

“Poetry is a packsack of invisible keepsakes.”

~ Carl Sandburg

It is impossible to convey the art of words with more words. Case in point: try to find another word for “salty.” It isn’t bitter; it isn’t sour; it’s salty. Likewise, the terms “diction” and “tone” do not even come close to expressing the actual feel of a poem. It is the inspiration behind the poem, and that only, which drives the very essence of verse.

Just as inspiration can produce poetry, poetry can produce inspiration. Each unforgettable experience during my high school years was made manifest in a poem, and like a little packsack, my poetry harbored my memories. My poetry class trained me to reflect on our world, humankind, and myself. In my backyard, I would often sit cross-legged for hours, absorbing passing autumn breezes and hearing the twitter of sparrows in the sycamores. Homework had never been so enjoyable.

During my junior year, I led the annual winter and Valentine’s poetry seminars. As a veteran of the poetry class, I mentored many of the Poetry I students, urging my “mentees” to maintain open minds. At the end of the year, my fellow students and I held a “Readings and the Redwoods” event, except now we were not only the performers, but also the coordinators. At the start of my senior year, the Poetry Club I had founded became an official school club, which gave me the opportunity to invite several prominent contemporary poets, such as Poet Laureate Robert Hass, to our school. In addition, our club brought what we’d learned to the rest of the community, teaching our area youth about poetry.

Through every success and every disappointment, poetry has recorded my thoughts onto paper. A composer arranging each individual note, poetry has orchestrated my high school experiences into one resonating composition, bringing all of my memories together. When I want to look back at those memories, all I have to do is open my packsack of poetry, and listen.

**Colors of Life Anonymous**

**Topic of Choice on the Common App.**

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

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

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

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

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

**Unfinished Symphony Hang Xu**

**You have already told us about yourself in the Common Application, with its list of activities, the Short Answer, and the Personal Statement. While we leave the topic of your second essay entirely up to you, we encourage you to use this opportunity to tell us something that we could not learn from the rest of your application. Try to pick a topic that will convey some aspect of your experience or outlook that you would like us to understand better.**

I play the B.

A small square office, no more than ten feet wide, holds two upright mahogany pianos sitting back-to-back. The metronome marks the beat, ta-ta-ta-ta, first 100 beats per minute, then 105, 110, working toward 120. The door is closed, the hall empty. It is a sunny Saturday afternoon; some Governor’s Honors Program (GHP) participants are playing ultimate Frisbee on West lawn, others are attending the square dancing seminar, but four pianists are practicing the opening chord of Schubert’s "Unfinished Symphony" for the first time on two Yamahas.

It is not just any "Unfinished Symphony"; it is *my* "Unfinished Symphony".

Or so I thought.

Jessica joins in with the F.

Two days before Dr. Indergaard had announced to us, “We will be holding a concert at the end of six weeks. I need you to submit the ensemble pieces you will be performing.” I thought back to my solo debuts, to bowing to a sea of thunderous applause, to striding toward the stage to receive my trophy, to forgetting the entire development section due to uncontrollable anxiety. I had become accustomed to playing alone, earning distinctions alone, accepting failures alone. The only time I had performed in an ensemble was with my teacher, and all I had to do was learn my part. She would accompany me. Besides, I had a program ready - Chopin’s "Fantaisie-Impromptu", Brahm’s "G Minor Rhapsody", Bach’s "Prelude" and "Fugue in C Minor" - it was my choice. So what would I do with three other pianists, taking my time and disregarding my interpretations of the piece? I could no longer work for myself, but I made up my mind to dominate, to play the first piano part, to make the piece mine.

It is now the third week, and our progress has slowed. I am frustrated with the tempo, the dynamics, and the style. Jay plays the beginning with too ominous a tone, J.D. is too loud, Jessica’s legato is more accurately a staccato, and the rhythm for my opening part is not in sync with the metronome. Making this piece sound decent is going to be harder than I thought.

Jay plays the C.

Six weeks of practice - of missing the '70s dance, of opting out of the 5K race, of running back to the dorms from Whitehead Auditorium in the rain before lights-out - amount to this. The lights dim, the spotlight finds its target: we are on stage, the four of us, eight hands, performing Schubert’s "Unfinished Symphony" in front of six hundred and seventy-five Governor’s Honors finalists and instructors. But this time, I am not alone. I look up from the keys, meeting Jessica’s glance as she waits for the next cue. I nod to her and smile.

It is not any "Unfinished Symphony"; it is *our* "Unfinished Symphony".

J.D. plays the G.

GHP is over. The school year has begun, and I find myself once again teaching music at a local elementary school. I look down at my students, who are sitting around the piano in the classroom listening to me play Beethoven’s "Sonate Number Twelve". They too must learn that, though the beauty of music arises from the notes, sharing it with others is the joy.

We play the F sharp.

**The Ride Hang Xu**

**Please complete a one-page personal statement and submit it with your application.**

September 15, 2002

4:35 P.M.

“Star 94 FM Real-time Traffic…those heading northwest on Peachtree Industrial should expect major delays due to a gas leak….”

I abruptly change the radio station. What luck! I have moved exactly one mile in ten minutes. My first car, the epitome of self-liberation, has confined me in a ten-by-five-foot box. The heat is unbearable; the air outside is stagnant; the air conditioning offers little relief. I roll up my pant legs, take off my socks, secure my hair in a ponytail, and sink into my sweat-drenched seat.

Today’s ordeal is pure frustration. My obligations begin to float and jumble in my mind: trigonometric problems, an English paper on *The Crucible*, an outline about China’s WTO accession. I have to get home. If I do not complete these assignments I will face dire consequences…zeros, failing classes, expulsion from school, rejection from colleges…

The clock reads 5:16. Any other mode of transportation would have gotten me home by now. My thoughts begin to wander, and I recall the vehicles that carried me here from my hometown, Yuci, years ago: a bus to Taiyuan, a train to Beijing, an airplane to Memphis, a family sedan to Atlanta. Sitting miserably in my car, awash in these memories, I realize I never enjoyed any of these journeys.

March 4, 1993

1:30 P.M.

The blue paint of the metal skeleton had begun to peel off. The seat was not cushioned. The handlebars did not even have a bell that, with a flick of the finger, would ring out with a clean and crisp tone. But it was a bicycle, and it was *mine*. Not being able to afford a new one, my grandfather had purchased it from a friend. Though it was dirty and old, I could not wait for my first ride.

I climbed on, pulled my feet off the ground, and pedaled to nowhere, without a thought on my mind. I turned round and round in the tiny courtyard, a brick wall blockading the dirt road on one side and towering apartment buildings enclosing another. The courtyard was an apartment in itself: a group of elementary school kids engaged in a game of “rubber band jumping,” two old ladies sitting on stools eating noodles with the aged vinegar aroma engulfing them, aproned figures hanging up lines of fresh wash in the sun, a mother from the second floor calling for her child to return for lunch. From the outlook of the concrete porch of our first-story apartment, my grandparents and great-grandmother watched me maneuver around this Chinese tableau.

September 15, 2002

5:31 P.M.

A honk from behind jolts me back, and the sound of a little girl’s laughter during that bicycle ride fades away in my mind. I look at the car two inches in front of me, the one two inches behind me. Why am I in such a hurry to go home? Must I keep dreading the ride simply because it is a means to another destination, another goal? I suddenly realize that my anxiousness and preoccupation with completing a task do not help me get anywhere any faster. I let down my hair, turn up the music, wave to my neighbor, and enjoy the day for what it is.

**Most Influential Teacher Anonymous**

**Topic: Indicate a person who has had a significant influence on you, and describe that influence.**

She was the toughest; she was the best. She was also the most influential teacher I have ever had. Ms. William, my sixth grade teacher, was never one to settle for second-best. As a demanding teacher, she hadn’t always been popular. In fact, my classmates and I used to grumble frequently about her stringent standards. However, by continually challenging us, Ms. William instilled in us an enduring passion for learning.

I remember my first day in her class. While most teachers started the year with fun activities, Ms. William jumped straight into academics. After taking the attendance, she promptly started our first unit: Forces.

She narrated to us the story of Newton and the apple tree, and asked us why things always fell toward the Earth. She asked us many other questions – questions about natural phenomena that I had never thought about before. “Why do we see lightning before we hear thunder? How can we measure the speed of a falling object?” We learnt never to take things for granted. “Always, always, always question what you see. Do you understand why it happens?”

At first, I had a hard time understanding many of the concepts, and often stayed after class to learn more. Once, when I doubted that objects of different mass fell with the same acceleration, Ms. William and I conducted our own experiment with a pendulum to prove the theory. Throughout the year, whenever there was a concept or theory I did not understand, Ms. William would encourage me to research or carry out an experiment by myself. Under her guidance, I entered In doing so, she not only taught me to become inquisitive about the world, and also gave me the tools to explore it.

Another gift that Ms. William gave me was an appreciation of literature. Before I met her, I had always stubbornly rejected as true literature any book that was not written by Enid Blyton. To me, there was nothing that could be better than the adventures of the Famous Five. But as the list of Enid Blyton “To Read” books grew shorter, I started hunting around for other novels to entertain me. I decided to take a look at the Reading List Ms. William had compiled. I still remember picking up Oliver Twist from the library shelf and looking at it skeptically. Today, I’m glad I had listened to Ms. William, for she not only introduced me to the world of Oliver and Fagin, but also that of Huckleberry Finn, Uncle Tom, the BFG, Lucy, Edmund, Susan and Peter. I remember coming to school early one morning, hardly able to contain my excitement, to tell Ms. William that I had finally finished all the books on her Reading List. She smiled in her usual way, and promptly gave me a second List.

Although it’s been six years since I last saw Ms. William, her legacy lives on even today. Every time I read a particularly interesting book, I’d record it in my Reading List. My hope is to one day visit her, and to show her my new Reading Lists. I want her to know how much she has helped me to grow, and how much she has inspired me.

Canadian poet and essayist Irving Layton wrote in his essay The Role of the Teacher that “It is usually from a gifted teacher that a child catches his first glimpse of harmony or wisdom and gets his first hint of the intellectual adventure which may engage him for the rest of his life.”

Ms. William was that teacher for me.

**Writing With Emily Emily Zhao**

**Write about a piece of literature that changed your life./Topic of your choice**

In my naïve middle schools days, I did not think highly of English class. My love was math, with its logical equations, universal numbers, and challenging problems. English was my second language, something that surrounded and engulfed me the second I left the sanctuary of my Chinese-speaking home. English terrified me. I didn’t understand the phrases that my friends used; my essays always seemed childish and simple; and spelling was a constant enigma with its irregular rules. So instead, I hid behind a façade and pretended that English was not important. I tried to convince myself that math awards were the only academic achievements that I needed.

My false fabrications crumbled as soon as I read the first ten pages of Emily of New Moon by L. M. Montgomery. All of sudden, I was mesmerized by the power of words. Montgomery’s vivid descriptions, rich images, and personal style made me feel like I had made a new friend. Soon, I was laughing with the protagonist, Emily Starr, as she made a lopsided pudding cake and crying with her when she was betrayed by a phony friend. Above all, as I read through the trilogy, I felt myself growing with Emily.

With my analytical side, I was, at first, surprised at my book choice. While Emily Starr and I did share the same passionate and determined personality, Emily’s dream was to become a writer. I, on the other hand, was so disheartened by my lack of abilities in English that I was terrified of writing. However, Montgomery had such a way with her diction that she was able to convey her own love of writing through her characters. As a result, her characters were also able to convey that love to the readers. While reading through Emily’s innumerate attempts at finding the perfect lines for her poems and the most articulate ways to write her stories, I found myself looking for those elusive words with her. For the first time in my life, I realized what a series of well-chosen words could accomplish. Words allowed Montgomery’s ideas to travel across the decades; words allowed such lively and realistic people like Emily Starr to be created.

Suddenly, I loved English, and L. M. Montgomery via Emily Starr became my role-model. The trilogy also taught me a lesson: the power of perseverance. I realized that I was not alone in my struggle to write better essays, and my failures did not reflect my intelligence but, instead, my lack of experience and practice. Even though Emily loved words and grew up writing, she still faced years of hard work, constant revisions, and uncountable rejections before she finally tasted the fruit of success. Who was I to expect instant success when I had only been speaking English for a few years at school?

I began to emulate Emily’s determination. I worked my way through thousand-paged English workbooks; I channeled my over-imaginative ideas into stories; I even read under the bed-covers with a flashlight when my grandparents enforced a bedtime. I still received B’s on some of my essays, and my grammar tests still took a dip once in awhile. However, I did not let the disappointments deter me from my goal. Just like Emily, I simply stored away the bad news and worked harder.

Then one day, my perseverance paid off. I could not believe it at first, but there it was, my little fictional piece, proudly claiming a whole page spread in our school’s literary journal. After I jumped onto my bed with joy, I reached into my bedside drawer to pull out my faithful yet worn copy of Emily of New Moon. I reread the part where Emily had her first poem published. I wanted to celebrate my first success with Emily.

**Beyond What I Knew Kevin Lin**

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

Imagine this: you are working on a complex jigsaw puzzle, placing piece after piece at ease, when you suddenly realize you have absolutely no idea what goes where next. I felt this initial shock when I first reached the third paragraph of a Judith Butler article I was reading for the Telluride Association Summer Program. What on earth is the language of discursive construction? I thought. What does Butler mean by creating a body “ex nihilo from the resources of discourse”?

But as much as I analyzed and diagrammed, there was still some gaping hole in the puzzle that prevented me from seeing the larger picture of Butler’s argument. I could go no further alone. Pulling myself out of my seat, I began wandering the halls of the Telluride House for inspiration, when I ran into fellow TASPer Yichao Hao and asked him, “Did you understand this reading?” We sat down, and I handed him my marked-up book.

His eyes swiftly roamed over the pages and his lips parted to say, “Yes… she’s describing how language actually acts on a body.”

“But what does that actually mean?” I pursued, stuck in my preconceptions. “Is she referring to a physical transformation?”

“Sometimes. See, you’re assuming that all actions have to be physical. But really, one way a body can take form is if we address it using language…”

As he spoke, I could feel the missing piece sliding into place. It dawned on me that I had been blind all along, blinded by a worldview that was still too narrow. That was why I had such difficulty with the reading – I couldn’t imagine things existing beyond what I already knew. So I dug deeper and deeper with our conversation – past Judith Butler, past cultural norms, and past the status of chastity in Western history. By the time Yichao left my room, the nightstand was blinking 1:00 A.M.

I was a sponge in the coming weeks, filling my brain and my notebook quickly with discourse, lessons and thought. As I became more and more of a post-structuralist and as universal truths I once held to be inherent were unmasked to be social constructs, I came to question everything. Suddenly, nothing could be taken for granted – and my world was redefined.

I began to use Michel Foucault and Mary Douglas in those precious and endless streams of conversation outside the classroom. Every night, we would wait for one another in a group on the House balcony. And every night, when enough people had congregated, we would launch into anthropology and the possibility of ethnicist undertones in the international development industry; romantic relationships; censorship, specifically China’s technological panopticon in particular; evolutionary reasons for social phenomena; the meaning of life – anything under the sun. No matter how much homework we had, these talks nourished us and I would come back again and again, one day to tell people the merits of social enterprise, another to learn more about anarcho-capitalism than I could swallow in a night.

And the learning never stops. Although the program itself has ended, the lessons survive forever. TASP taught me to be skeptical of everything, even something as ubiquitous or “inherent” as gender. By creating such a binary, we leave room to discriminate those who happen to fall through the cracks of intelligibility. The prejudice directed toward transgender people is an example. Only by scrubbing away these binaries can we take a step toward viewing the world in shades of gray – not as black and white, homosexual and heterosexual, male and female, or rich and poor; not as young and old, native and foreign, or convict and innocent, but as people, forever heterogeneous pieces in the jigsaw puzzle that represents our whole world, in harmony.

**Finding My Faith Anonymous**

**Personal statement for the common application.**

A year and a day’s journey lay ahead of every fabled knight in search of the ever elusive Holy Grail, and if said knight was deemed worthy to find it, exhaustion would cause him to sleep at the feet of the Grail without ever truly seeing it. And while medieval grail legends are fiction, to this day people argue about the grail’s true nature. Most recently, Dan Brown’s novel The Da Vinci Code put the limelight back on the ‘alternative’ history as portrayed by Gnostic Gospels and guess work. In retaliation, the orthodoxy condemned the book, and sparked an interest in the matter that consumed an entire summer of private research. From my late nights of reading, I just became entirely lost in what was fiction and what wasn’t; but I did tend to side with the less spoken for side of the story.

Part of the reason why I like the controversy of alternative history is that I don’t approve of the organized manifestation of religion, churches. It is clear to me that the root of the problem is that in order to keep multitudes of people believing the same thing, the powers that be have to be strict about conformity to the message. But something gets in the way of that, it’s commonly called personal faith. When enough people’s personals faiths are very similar they like to start their own churches, and if it happens a lot, it gets coined a Reformation. But it is here faith can get lost. A wise friend once told me, “no two people can really worship exactly the same God” Likewise, two people cannot see Jesus in exactly the same way. That is why monotheistic religions took longer to develop than polytheistic religions did. In the ancient civilizations, there were gods and goddesses for almost everything. People prayed to what was important to them. With the rise of the one true God, problems arose. First, if both sides of a conflict believe in the one true God, how can either side be the worthy cause? Also, if something in one’s personal life has gone awry, how will the one God have time for small issues? This is why there are patron saints for just about everything now. Still, churches eliminate the need for any kind of substantial personal faith. If you need a group of people or a book to tell you how to feel, or what to believe than you lack faith.

My faith is basic. I believe that things happen for a reason, and if I do something wrong I will get punished for it, and if I do something right I’ll get rewarded for it. I believe that I am not in control of everything and must to my best to respect those things that I cannot control that are greater than me, Nature, or whatever else that power may be. Because I have trust in what I believe, alternative histories don’t shake the religious ground on which I walk.

**More on Rowing Anonymous**

**Please continue your common app short answer.**

The first rower I ever met was my proctor in my dorm. At the end of her senior year, her first year on varsity, I asked her how she felt about closing her career with a championship. “I would have rather been on third boat,” she said, “Less stress.”

Though this and all other signs indicated that high-level rowing would lead to hypertension late in life. I wanted a varsity letter more than most anything. When my second season rolled around, I was given a chance to get the letter, but at first, varsity was living up to all I had heard it would be. Day after day I would diagram seat line ups, seat races, nagging my brain trying to anticipate the next day’s practice instead of doing homework. Before our first race, what was then second boat, with me at two seat, met to discuss our race plan. We divided our race into three 500-meter sections. The first was the dubbed the ‘attack’ 500, where we were supposed to get out in front as early in the race as possible; the second was dubbed the ‘mack truck’ 500, for its true test of ability to barrel through the hardest part of the race; the last was the ‘blast off’ 500 for the all out, no-guts-no-glory sprint, ideally to victory. From that race, our boat became known as the Mack Truck, for our post race cheer.

The Mack Truck was more the spirit of our boat than the people, though we were rather attached to each other. My pair once confided in me if she was seat raced into first boat, she would throw it to stay with the Mack Truck. No one could guess that we were a varsity boat, we didn’t live up to the varsity equals extra stress standard. Only on the Mack Truck would someone shout ‘Look its foxes!’ and then pause in the middle of a piece, or the bow four learn new uses for the reeds that float in our river. Our coaches used us as a model for other boats with the theory that we row better if happier. And next year, when all the boat lineups change, I hope the Truck will live again, only in the team as a whole. Surely the attitude we cultivated in our boat will ward off the hypertension that I once assumed was an inevitable component of the rowing life!

**The Duty of a Journalist Anonymous**

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

“You have a choice to make. If you choose to publish that article, you will be responsible for ruining the reputation of the school. Do you want to have that on your shoulders?” Assistant Principal Jeff Dingo asked me sternly. The following day, Principal Joe Schwartz summoned me to his office and warned that although he had never censored the school newspaper, Tandro, he had the right to do so. Several faculty members advised me to think carefully about publishing the article. Seven months earlier at the Iowa Forensics Institute, I researched and debated whether journalists have an ethical obligation to withhold information from the public. Now, as co-editor-in-chief of Tandro, I needed to answer that question in the “real world.”

Less than a week earlier, we had learned of a drinking incident on a school-sponsored trip to France and decided to investigate. Gradually, we discovered the administration’s motive for seeking to suppress the story. Despite adopting a zero-tolerance policy following the widely publicized 2003 Homecoming drinking debacle, the administration rescinded the punishments it had meted out because students had apparently been told by a faculty chaperone they could drink in moderation to fully experience the culture.

The story had merit, but I was deeply troubled by the potential repercussions of publication, including sullying the reputations of participating students, faculty chaperones and the school, jeopardizing future field trips and precipitating a backlash against Tandro and its staff. I also considered the feasibility of preserving the Tandro experience in light of Principal Schwartz’s threat. After much study, consultation and reflection, I determined that suppressing the article would be a dereliction of journalistic duty and the practical equivalent of submitting to censorship.

In view of the political pressures, it was agreed, contrary to customary Tandro practice, that I should co-author the article and personally verify its accuracy and fairness. I interviewed several key students and sought confirmation from teachers and administrators, most of whom refused to cooperate. I decided we should focus on the school’s zero-tolerance policy and the strengths and weaknesses of the travel abroad program and eschew the sensationalism of disclosing names and discussing details of drunken behavior.

We published the article without prior review by the administration. Unlike the 2003 Homecoming, other media did not cover the incident, and there was no backlash. Indeed, numerous faculty members, including some who had advised against publication, complimented the article and the manner in which we conducted ourselves. Additionally, The Journal News ranked the article first in the News category of its High School Journalism Awards.

I am confident that our decisions were correct as a matter of principle. Our actions also had the added benefit of re-establishing the proper relationship between Tandro and the administration, as demonstrated by the administration’s recent refusal to quash a potentially controversial article about a local clergyman despite pressure from several parents. However, writing the article sensitized me to the administration’s concerns about negative publicity and sharpened my awareness of the responsibilities and burdens of a reporter, especially in connection with the reputations of affected people.

**A Tradition of Service Anonymous**

**How do you use your talents to help others?**

Each weekend before Christmas the tempting aromas of ginger, cloves and cinnamon permeate our kitchen as jovial friends and family gather. Freshly baked gingerbread for miniature houses are laid out on the table, and bowls of candy and homemade icing cover the countertops. We eagerly coat the gingerbread shapes with icing and adorn them with colorful candy patterns. Once the walls and roofs are covered with sweets, each house is assembled on a tinfoil-covered cardboard platform coated with snow-like white icing and coconut “snowflakes,” licorice paths, and the like.

My family strongly believes that the true Christmas spirit includes sharing with others, so one house remains with us and the others are wrapped in brightly colored cellophane, tied with festive ribbons, and given away. Each child takes a small gingerbread house to school to share with classmates and gives cookies to teachers and staff. The largest house and other treats are brought to our church to be taken to a homeless shelter

This spirit, however, does not surface at Christmas time only, but rather illustrates a spirit manifest in our house throughout the year. My mother has always tried to make community service an exciting and fun-filled family project, and throughout the year as a child I would help my mother cook meals, bake deserts, and purchase necessities for a senior citizens’ center in connection with our church’s community service program.

The example my mother set by giving her time to help those less fortunate has inspired me to use my own talents to help others and give back to the community. Tutoring at the Coachman Family Center has been a wonderful experience because I have been able to interact with children with a completely different set of life experiences. I derive internal satisfaction from these visits by helping children, and I realized the extent to which I can positively affect the lives of others when one child informed me that my tutoring was integral to his passing his final math exam.

My experience tutoring, as well as my love for debate, inspired me to look for a way to use my debate talent to help others. I have volunteered to teach members of the Scarsdale Middle School speech and debate club and have worked to promote the VOICES Foundation, an organization that raises money for the purpose of allowing underprivileged children to participate in debate. These experiences have inspired me to consider other ways that I can use my talents to help others, such as by founding and coaching a debate program in an inner city school. Debate has proven to be both an enjoyable and intellectually enriching activity for me and I would like others to have the opportunity to have the same experience.

I know my family's Christmas tradition gave me the inspiration to serve others, and I am eager to continue helping others in meaningful ways in the future.

**Jerk Chicken Anonymous**

**Using the quotation below as a jumping off point, tell us about an event or experience that helped you define one of your values or changed how you approach the world:''Some questions cannot be answered./ They become familiar weights in the hand,/ Round stones pulled from the pocket, unyielding and cool.''1- Jane Hirshfield, poet, Princeton Class of 1973**

I prodded the chicken with my fork. The rest of the table was heatedly arguing about health care while I wondered how much longer the school fundraiser dinner would last. Then, an idle comment uttered by a boy I didn’t know made my head jerk up.

“…It’s all because of those Jewish bastards in Congress,” he finished.

Silence dropped like a hammer on a nail. I stared.

A friend glanced at me and said, “She’s Jewish, you know.”

I was paralyzed. Questions flickered through my mind. Chief among them was simply: “Why?”

Why intolerance? Why again?

My mouth moved. “You're the bastard, if you think that saying that is okay,” I said. My calm, forceful words surprised me. I felt like a marionette, lips and limbs moving at the whim of an outside force.

He flushed. “I wasn't insulting you.”

I went on a brief, terse rant, wondering all the while whose tongue was uttering my words. The boy stared at me, but wouldn’t apologize, and I stood and left the table. The hollow disdain in his eyes haunted me. Later that night, I reflected on his words.

I’ve always known that Jews are rare on the Eastern Shore. In elementary school, someone once asked me what a Jew was. The questions have evolved since then: What’s the story behind Passover? What makes Jews different from Christians? I love such questions. Thanks to my friends’ curiosity, I’ve learned more about Judaism myself than I might have otherwise; it’s the rarity of my religion that has helped make it precious to me. Being Jewish has become a core part of my persona, and I wouldn't trade that for all the simplicity in the world.

Over the years, I’ve seen prejudice in action and heard occasional insults. But when faced with such instances, my parents carried themselves with pride and self-assurance, and I took my cues from them. I learned how to deal with prejudice and moved on. Sometimes it hurt, especially when I discovered unsavory elements in people I liked. But I learned patience, tolerance, and empathy, and those lessons are easily worth a few bruises.

At the fundraiser dinner, it had been a while since I’d heard such blatant anti-Semitism. I was initially furious. But afterwards, my anger dimmed, to be joined by a sense of pride and gratitude. Yes, the boy was ignorant and spiteful, but he’d revealed some important things. I was proud of my quick response—though perhaps I hadn’t been civil, remaining silent would have been traitorous to myself and my faith. More importantly, I was proud of my companions. The next day, I learned that they’d had words with him, too, and that he’d stalked away after finding no sympathy.

Instances like the one at the school fundraiser dinner are consequences of living in the larger world; fully escaping prejudice is impossible. But more important is the way in which we approach such cases. I chose to focus on the support of my friends, the acceptance I witness every day, and the enrichment that comes from mingling cultures instead of on momentary glimpses of intolerance. My experiences as a minority on the Eastern Shore have taught me that the world is fundamentally a good place, and that it is my duty to continue to make it so. As a proud Jew, I will always promote understanding and denounce ignorance. And most importantly of all, I’ll do it alongside my many friends—Jew and gentile alike.

**Uköhsutha’ Anonymous**

**Indicate a person who has had a significant influence on you and describe that influence.**

“Go fish.” The vibrant smell of freshly crushed Roma tomatoes and oregano splashes across the dusty kitchen, letting me know that it’s time to stir the red sauce for tonight’s lasagna.

Silence. My opponent stares defiantly. How dare I insult her with such a base command? She knows what she’s supposed to do.

“Go ahead and draw,” I clarify. “I’m just getting up to stir the sauce.”

“Are we going to have spaghetti?”

“We’re going to eat lasagna in a couple hours.” I draw the wooden spoon through the sauce several times and return to the table. She hasn’t drawn a card. I give up. “Do you have a queen?” We used to play rummy and poker, but as my grandmother’s Alzheimer’s disease has entered its advanced stages, those games have become hopelessly complex. At any rate, it’s easier to throw occasional games of Go Fish in her favor.

When Nana was first diagnosed, I decided that I would become a medical researcher and cure Alzheimer’s, that I would save her personally. I quickly discovered, however, that (a) the ten years I would need to finish med school meant that I would be too late to help her, and (b) I had little genuine interest in neuroscience. If I couldn’t help her keep her memories, though, I could at least keep them elsewhere. I took to asking questions voraciously about her life and writing down everything I learned. To me, the most striking part of her story was her relationship with the Seneca language. I only found out a few years ago that she was a fluent speaker, and she couldn’t understand my excitement; as she put it: “There’s nobody to talk it with. Why learn a language you can’t use?” Still, I managed to extract the word for “thank you” (“niawë’”) and a promise for her to teach it to me someday. Unfortunately, as her Alzheimer’s progressed, she lost her ability to speak the language.

Subsequent attempts to find another way to learn Seneca brought my attention to the waning of tongues that aren’t part of the “big ten” languages spoken by almost 40% of the world’s population. Society’s increasing economic globalization has been accompanied by growing cultural homogeneity. However, minority languages and the cultures they describe offer unique perspectives on the world and lend valuable insights to the fields of anthropology, sociology, and cognitive science. After researching the issue, I concluded that we urgently need to create a definitive catalog of the world’s languages, recording and archiving those facing imminent extinction. Languages endangered right now can still be saved if we focus on encouraging bilingual education, pro-diversity public policy, and language revivals.

Studying at Harvard will provide me with the tools I need to help implement these measures and contribute to the preservation of endangered languages. Like our elders, we have relegated the world’s cultural diversity to the pages of history. Just as I don’t expect to cure Alzheimer’s, I know that I cannot singlehandedly reverse the decline in linguistic diversity. However, there is little awareness of this problem, and few measures are being taken to solve it. If the wholehearted efforts of an individual can prevent just one culture and its language from being uköhsutha’ -- “left behind” -- then I believe it’s worth a try.

**Finding an Allegiance Anonymous**

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

After the September 11, 2001 attacks, the United States ceased to be the backdrop to my life and instead became an ideal, a cause, a veritable force. The autumn parade in my town, which had previously been a ragtag band of candy-throwing Girl Scouts and antique car collectors, suddenly became the American Pride Parade, now featuring Uncle Sam on stilts and flag-bearing Knights of Columbus. People wore their political views on their sleeves -- or, more accurately, their bumpers. The 2004 presidential elections only heightened the atmosphere of nationalism and strong political passions.

It was in this environment that I attended my sophomore year of high school, equally absorbed by the political and social changes my country was experiencing and by the literature of my seminar-style English class. Daily we discussed the ideas behind such works as <i>Heart of Darkness</i> and <i>Les Misérables</i> and experienced those sparkling moments of intellectual unity when their relevance to our lives and to society suddenly became clear. My enthusiasm for society’s great books led me to Henry David Thoreau’s “Civil Disobedience,” and I was affected deeply by his notion that citizens are obliged to abstain from participating in institutions they view as corrupt.

For some time, I had viewed the Pledge of Allegiance as a questionable daily ritual, but I had felt powerless to do anything about it. However, “Civil Disobedience” is a call to action as well as a critical inquiry, and after deciding to act on any conclusions I developed, I pondered the issue and decided that encouraging students to salute a flag and take an oath of allegiance is unacceptable in an academic setting, which should be kept as ideologically neutral as possible. Furthermore, it runs contrary to the idea in education that students should think critically and develop their own opinions on issues, essential to the functioning of democracy. Although (or perhaps because) I have a healthy respect for the First Amendment rights that come with being an American, I felt that I could no longer in good conscience participate in the Pledge of Allegiance, whether by reciting or by standing up. Participation would not only be hypocritical, but insulting to my classmates who did so out of genuine sentiment.

The first time I stayed seated during the Pledge, I was prepared for the worst, and had even gone so far as to program the ACLU legal hotline into my cell phone. As I stared at my folded hands and tried to assume the facial expression of a noble dissenter rather than a traitor, I began to wonder if nonparticipation could change anything, whether it would be worth the social cost. However, the Pledge ended and my day proceeded as usual. No CIA agents detained me on my way out of class. No divine bolt split the heavens to smite me. No burning crosses appeared on my lawn. In fact, very few students noticed, and the ones who did showed no reaction beyond indifferent glances and friendly questions. Perhaps I had jumped to conclusions about my peers.

About a month after I had stopped participating, however, a substitute teacher came to my chemistry class; he was a military veteran who expressed his patriotism in a more traditional way than I. The class knew he was serious when he urged everyone to “get up, stand up,” and they recited the Pledge with a resounding, crushing unity. The substitute noticed my nonparticipation immediately. Despite my attempts to explain that I meant no disrespect, and that my actions were legal under the 1943 Supreme Court case <i>West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette</i>, he yelled that I was ungrateful, disloyal, and should “get the hell out of [his] classroom.” Although I was terrified, I refused to move. He called the office and was informed that he had to let me stay.

The next day, the substitute was gone, but my problems were not. Overnight, many of my peers had heard about the incident and developed opinions, and they couldn’t wait to inform me. Initially, the reaction was hostile; some students followed the substitute’s cue, and I became the object of shoves and pinches in the halls as well as admonitions to move to France. However, as students continued to confront me and I was given opportunities to explain my position, a startling thing happened: people started to discuss the Pledge of Allegiance among themselves, and they came to many different opinions on the issue. Extracurricular philosophical discussions are always exciting, and I found that voicing a dissenting opinion and standing up for it stimulated debate and a deeper exploration of the issue than many had ventured before.

I now know that simply by maintaining one’s personal integrity, an individual can make a difference, even if only by inspiring debate and inquiry into an issue. This experience instilled in me the confidence I need to maintain my integrity and independence -- to be that individual -- in the future.

**A Fire to be Kindled Anonymous**

**Topic of choice**

<BLOCKQUOTE>“The mind is not a vessel to be filled, but a fire to be kindled.” --Plutarch</BLOCKQUOTE>

I asked everyone how to write a perfect college essay. “Show your passion,” they said. “Proofread” was another common admonition. The most (and least) useful advice came from my film teacher and mentor, who urged me to “just relax and it’ll come.”

I was putting the finishing touches on my piece at the end of October when four National Guardsmen showed up at my front door and told my family that we needed to evacuate our home immediately, that our house was threatened by the wildfire raging a few miles away, one of fourteen that had engulfed San Diego County in the last 24 hours.

In the subsequent week, my family was shunted from a Denny’s parking lot to my uncle’s house to my grandparents’ house. The experience ranged from long, tedious hours of scouring grocery stores for bottled water to the bizarre experience of strolling down the Pacific shoreline with my best friend, singing “I Am the Walrus” and observing how the smoke in the sky had scorched the crisp autumn morning into twilight.

Yes, I had felt sorry for the victims of the Indonesian tsunamis and Hurricane Katrina and donated to the Red Cross in the aftermath of those disasters. I spent three years volunteering at my local hospital. I thought I was passionate about helping people, but like some Gilded Age philanthropist, I had managed to help without having any idea of the refugee experience. Although I felt very strongly about my civic duty to help others at those times, living as an evacuee for a week alongside everyone else I knew instilled in me a redoubled passion to help society’s less fortunate.

The reason I struggled for weeks trying to convey my desire to improve society was that although intellectually I wanted to help the marginalized peoples of the world, the idea of what it was to be in need was something I could only imagine. I no longer have to imagine it, though. I’ve lived it, if only for a week and with no long-term damage to health or property.

That epiphany left me reexamining my passions and purpose in many aspects of my life, all while I’m attempting to chart its course. If my desire to help those in need was only galvanized by experiencing need, then how can I know that my other passions -- such as my love of learning, which I’ve had since childhood and have nurtured protectively over the years -- are genuine? There was no single experience that made me want to devour books and newspapers, to spend hours browsing the library of San Diego State University purely for pleasure. These things are in my nature, and I’ve always done them reflexively. But can I be truly passionate about learning if, like eating or sleeping, it’s something I’ve always done intuitively?

I believe that I can. Passions formed in a crucible may determine what we do, but it is our long-term interests and beliefs that determine how we fare in difficult situations; this combination of past experience and reaction to our surroundings allows us to grow.

My past will decide where I begin at university. I have my life experience thus far, an allegiance to integrity rather than tradition, a love of diversity and a willingness to do what it takes to preserve it, an insatiable hunger for knowledge, and a clear understanding of the benefits of helping those in need. More importantly, though, I understand that personal growth is about not only where you’ve come from, but also your reaction to the present. I know that attending university will enrich and change my perceptions of myself, my beliefs, and my world. I know that despite my convictions and goals, I may not follow the course I’ve charted in this application. I know that everything I have just written may be proven wrong.

I can’t wait.

**Remix Anonymous**

**Topic of your choice.**

I sat down on the bench, apprehensive. I hadn’t touched the ivory keys in almost eight years. Instead, I had actively avoided them, treasuring instead the strings of my violin. In debates I claimed that it was harder to play my instrument, belittling the plunking keys. Yet now I found myself seeking the power of the piano again, wanting music that was its own partner.

I began by sounding out the melody with my right hand. As the silky notes glided through the silence, I was reminded of my violin.

This is where I belong. I am a violinist, a purveyor of sweet melodies. This was where I took tentative steps away from the strict notes and rhythms I had adhered to as a young pianist, as I discovered that music comes from the emotions spiraling from the thin black lines. On the violin, I can close my eyes, enthralled by the music, exploring to match the compositions racing through my head. I have spent Friday nights improvising with pianists, cellists, guitarists -- whomever I can find. I have been a street musician, spreading the joy that I already give myself. The first time I wandered downtown, I gathered a motley group of an accordionist and a cellist. We unpacked in an alley between two quaint cafes, away from questioning eyes, amidst the pink daisies of early spring. As we emerged onto the sidewalk, a chilling wind raced against our dancing fingers, countering the warmth of the afternoon sun settling on our skin. And we played. Passersby -- a wrinkled man, a dancing little girl, a gangly preteen -- stopped and stared, occasionally leaving spare change in exchange for the smiles that sprouted on their faces. As our improvisations managed to cut into their everyday lives -- lives that had been absorbed in their separate paths -- I found a pastime in the streets. The purity of a melody slicing through the air simply cannot be underestimated.

Yet as the notes swelled throughout the room, I heard the force of the piano. There was no violin. Instead, I switched to the lower line of the music. The notes of the left hand outlined a beat that matched the sound of the drums.

A year ago, a friend gave me his old drumsticks. I immediately raced to the old drum set in the student center to start banging away. Fortunately, no one was around to hear me miss beats and drop my sticks. I was playing as a violinist, not a drummer, without resolving the two instruments. My initial attempts occurred at 6:00 AM to hide behind the solitude of the sleeping campus. Eventually, my confidence, if not my skill, progressed to allow early arrivals to hear my offbeat screeches.

Yet I heard the smoothness between the piano’s consistent beat. There were no drums. Together, my two hands created the perfect harmonies of the barbershop quartet I had started a year ago, born from a friendship formed in a theory class. We began by wandering around the school at lunchtime, singing our separate ways, until the next bell rang to shoo us off to class.

But here the music will not end. As I began to deviate from the sheet music in front of me, I knew that I could delight in my right hand as long as my left hand stayed steady. The piano was only a remix, a compilation, of what I had done before. In time, my playing of the piano came into its own, becoming a springboard in itself to bigger and better things.

**Soccer Anonymous**

**Tell us something that you would like us to know about you that we might not get from the rest of your application – or something thatyou would like a chance to say more about.**

I was a master of my hometown, of its shortcuts, playgrounds, and potholes. I knew all of the secrets of Cary, North Carolina -- admittedly not difficult in our traditional, white, conservative community. The houses were, by law, as beige as their inhabitants.

One early morning, I arrived at the park for a skateboarding tryst, expecting solitude on a Sunday. Yet as the sun began to rise, cars started pulling into the parking lot, filling the air with their clunks and door slams. What could possibly be going on at 7:00 on a church morning? I left the pavement to investigate.

As I neared the soccer field, the composition of the noise began to change to the rolled “r”s and fluid syllables of the Spanish language. Suddenly, black and white whirled by my feet, and I raced to kick it back to the field. As I pivoted to send the ball flying back, I looked up to meet open-mouthed gapes. For a moment, we watched each other.

Finally, a young man motioned for me to join them. I considered the offer. Something about foot-eye coordination simply evades me, and the players here could move. I knew I would embarrass myself, but I was going to try.

“You play with us,” the man told me in a thick accent. A motion towards the chest indicated the shirts versus skins division of teams. Evidently I was the only female as well as the only non-Hispanic.

I was even worse than I anticipated. I could run fast, but I simply could not keep the ball from getting stolen. Despite taking Spanish for two years, I could not comprehend the good-natured advice thrown at me from all sides. Yet I was thrilled to be accepted by these strangers, whose feet sliced the air around my own clumsiness. I smiled unabashedly at my teammates, trying to convey all of my excitement, gratitude, and apology at the same time. I think they understood.

As the sun began to loom high overhead, men trickled away. The young man called out, “Next Sunday, 6:30.” I waved and stumbled away on my bike, nursing bruised knees and sore legs.

Over the ensuing mornings of Sunday soccer, I was always the last to be chosen for teams. Nevertheless, the others soon learned that I was eager to talk if they spoke as if to a toddler. I never learned most of their names; I never knew where they were from or who their wives were. But it didn’t matter -- this was a community, and it was one of Cary’s true secrets. I may have found its roads, but I didn’t know its people. The real treasures, the surprises, lay in the scrawny 10-year-old boy and the heavyset 50-year-old man, out of breath yet still blending into the amalgamation of Hispanic males gathered to share their love of soccer. This is a group hidden in the shadows of time and place, emerging only through chance encounters of shared passions.

**Leadership Anonymous**

**Using one of the leadership roles or extracurricular activities you prioritized as being important to you,describe what impact the experience had on you, what you contributed, what you learned about yourself,and how it has influenced your plans for the future.**

Society must work together. People must endeavor to do everything they can so as to ensure that humanity upholds valuable ethics and a strong sense of goodwill. The I Club, sponsored by Rotary International, seeks to accomplish these goals on a worldwide scale. As the Treasurer of the I Club for the past three years, I have not only learned the importance of global service and international benevolence, but also the indispensable skills that have taught me to be a more effective leader and a more motivated individual.

I was born in war-torn former Yugoslavia and relocated to the United States as a refugee of a war of genocide. I have always felt an obligation to my country to advocate global awareness and peace on an international scale. Accordingly, during my sophomore year of high school, I discovered I Club. I is an international organization of students aged twelve to eighteen with more than 250,000 participants in over 120 countries. As part of its undertaking, it ventures to promote service and global awareness among the youth.

As an officer for my high school’s chapter of the I Club, I am accountable for the organization of a multitude of charitable events that benefit others on either a local or an international scale. In terms of local contributions, I have worked with my colleagues to organize a number of school enhancement and library beautification projects. Our chapter of the I Club has cultivated strong affiliations with local elementary schools and worked hard to make sure that I Club members are always available to offer our services at the schools. Moreover, as a leader of the club, I helped to regulate a number of service projects that contributed to international causes. During the aftermath of the devastating Japanese Tsunami in early 2011, our I Club worked to initiate a charity drive in which we sent boxes of food and supplies to victims of the natural disaster. Our chapter of the I Club also prides itself in having maintained a commitment to providing support for the eradication of the Polio disease worldwide. Today, Polio is impairing the lives of children in four countries – Pakistan, Afghanistan, India, and Nigeria. Although entirely avoidable with the administration of a simple vaccine, families in these countries live in such impoverishment that such a vaccine is exorbitant to them. Consequently, our club has worked to raise funds so as to help us join in the fight against this preventable disease. With enough persistence and tenacity, my fellow I Club members and I are more than convinced that our work will help to make a positive effect on the lives of hundreds of impoverished children in these developing countries.

I Club has allowed me to raise awareness for those who are being born into the same impoverished and destitute conditions that I was born into, and I feel so fortunate to have escaped. Today, I fight to ensure that all people can have the opportunity that I was given to achieve something and to become successful.

**An Intellectually Stimulating experience Anonymous**

**Describe an experience that you have had or a concept you have learned about that intellectually excites you. When answering this question, you may want to consider some of the following questions: Why does this topic excite you? How does it impact the way you or others experience the world? What questions do you continue to ponder about it? (750 word limit).**

I woke up that morning with a feeling of dread. As I raced down to the bus stop through the twilight of the early morning, I felt my heart palpitating with anticipation and worry. Every second that the bus brought me closer to New Haven, my fear grew more intense. Even as I swiped my keycard at the gates of Yale University’s Osborn Memorial Laboratory, apprehension of what I might find out in the minutes ahead overcame me. Eventually, after mustering my courage, I stepped into the cool air of the staging area; first donning my lab coat, then the gloves, then the goggles. Each move felt mechanical and automatic, like the motions of any other day. Yet today was different: today I would discover if my toil and trouble that I had poured into this experiment was truly worth it. My hands, ever steady through countless trials, now shook from simultaneous fear and excitement.

My heart plummeted as I opened the incubator. It appeared that my experiment had been a complete failure. I dreaded having to report my failure to my mentor; to my surprise, Dr. Davis was not in the least bit disappointed. He told me that often times, experiments may appear to be disasters, but that they still give us insights into the world around us. His goal, he said, was not to be always right; rather, he endeavoured to gain an understanding of the fundamental topics of science. My internship in Dr. Davis' lab gave me a greater understanding of “success,” not only in scientific research, but in life itself.

Science is a passion which is often frustrating before becoming rewarding. I had always wondered how viruses infect cells and survive the hostile conditions of the human body; though invisible to our eyes, viruses and humans interact in so many different ways. Though my laboratory work tested my patience and seemed useless at that time, it helped me answer those questions that I had pondered since my childhood, while granting some small insight into the workings of the world we inhabit. As my summer internship progressed, I conducted innumerable trials and poured countless hours of effort into my work in the attempt to discover something concrete. Two weeks after my first, less-than-successful experiment, I was able to determine how certain strains of viruses are able to evolve at the molecular level to attain higher survival rates.

My early experiments reminded me that I am not perfect. I can’t promise to cure cancer, fix the economy, or anything like that. What I can promise is that I will do my utmost to utilize whatever skills I have and have acquired, to the fullest of my ability. I want to engage in scientific research that expands the gamut of human knowledge, even if it is only a small contribution in the form of fundamental research. I revel in the true reward that comes from the thrill of discovery after the possible disappointment of failure. Results apart, scientists get involved in research for the pursuit of knowledge as an end in itself.

I still wonder why my viruses could not survive under certain other conditions, but I learnt that innovation and discovery do not come from shirking away from the unknown, but rather from being a beacon of light in the darkness of ignorance. Like ancient explorers who charted the dark unknown for others to follow, I know that someday, some eager researchers will ask similar questions and utilize my work as the basis for their studies. I only hope that my contributions will help others as I continue upon my quest to help solve pressing medical problems that pervade the world around us.

**My Cultural Identity Anonymous**

**Using the quotation below as a starting point, reflect on the role that culture plays in your life. “Culture is what presents us with the kinds of valuable things that can fill a life. And insofar as we can recognize the value in those things and make them part of our lives, our lives are meaningful.” Gideon Rosen, Stuart Professor of Philosophy, chair of the Council of the Humanities and director of the Program in Humanistic Studies, Princeton University.**

At a strange intersection of customs exists my cultural essence; I am the product of an infinitely improbable arrangement of DNA. Seemingly, Fate threw darts at a board to select my parents from the world’s population, and just this once they landed on a Nicaraguan war refugee that I affectionately refer to as “mom” and an nth generation Irish naval corpsman from the suburbs known to me as “dad.” Such is life, and Austin came to be a child of divided culture: a child of two languages, two families, two coexisting and yet so vastly different identities.

Mom’s dancing in the living room to her favorite Zumba workout tape, and Dad’s sitting in the kitchen, screening some Discovery special as he diligently finishes his paperwork; I exist as the fusion thereof.

My Nicaraguan heritage is a subtle presence in the otherwise culturally homogenous sphere of vanilla blandness that is Fairview, Pennsylvania. However, upon visiting my family in Miami, I’m treated to the cultural variety that is the essence of what it means to be Hispanic. Two springs ago, my family and I found ourselves at the Calle Ocho festival, in the heart of Miami’s Little Havana. It was an awakening to the heritage I had yet to fully acknowledge; my integration into the Hispanic community transcends nationality and embraces the commonality of its members. The Cuban espresso shots I enjoyed served as my impromptu induction into my mother’s cultural community. It’s fitting I would rediscover myself in city my mother spent her teenage years; I found my heritage hiding in the festival’s rhythmic bongo beats.

The Hispanic community is warmly welcoming, passionate and energetic, and I am proud to be a part of it. To be Hispanic in the United States is to denounce divisive nationalities and embrace newfound ethnic commonality. My mother has given me more than just a heritage language, she’s served as my liaison to a vibrant community full of el duende, a passionate energy whose variable and untranslatable meaning is yet another demonstration of the bonding nature of being Hispanic. When I speak to my Dominican friend, our connection extends beyond the superficial fact that we’re usually speaking Spanish. Our upbringings in a predominately Caucasian environment have been subtly interwoven with our mothers’ past heritage. There’s nothing better than having a dancing mother who chastises me in Spanglish to make my bed.

I am an Irish-Nicaraguan who wishes to make the best of what his mother has given him. She’s connected me to a vibrant, welcoming community, and her dedication has allowed me to live without the poverty and disadvantage she had to withstand as an unfortunate byproduct of her community. I’m advantaged with a mother who has overcome obstacles far greater than those that I must face. My cultural experience has driven me to achieve through my duality: to succeed not just as Austin, but to succeed for the sake of validating my mother’s continuing efforts and for the diverse, energetic Hispanic connection she’s given me.

**An International Affair Anonymous**

**5a.) In this essay, please reflect on something you would like us to know about you that we might not learn from the rest of your application, or on something about which you would like to say more. You may write about anything—from personal experiences or interests to intellectual pursuits. (Please answer in 500 words or less). Before you begin, we encourage you to go to http://admissions.yale.edu/essay, where you will find helpful advice.**

I have always envied those amongst my peers who have figured out what they want to do with their lives, down to the exact job description. That highly pinpointed sense of direction and purposefulness in regards to my future is what I have always lacked, and consequently, always craved. Not until recently did the scattered pieces of my mental landscape begin forming themselves into a more cohesive map, with an "X" marking the spot of a career involving foreign affairs.

In the jumble of classes at school, no subject has ever quite piqued my interest like Spanish has. One of my earliest childhood memories is of my kindergarten self, perched on a stool in a corner of my elementary school library, learning the letters of the Spanish alphabet. Whether it was because of my early introduction to foreign languages or not, my love for languages continues to be one of my greatest passions. Nevertheless, as I looked towards the future, I was faced with the troubling and also incorrect notion that a career involving foreign languages would have to be something along the narrow lines of linguist or translator, neither of which particularly interested me. With mounting pressure from my peers and society to decide on a life path, I was once again at a loss.

However, during my second college visit to Yale, I met Caroline, a girl with similar passions to me whose major sounded too good to be true. She explained how she was majoring in Global Affairs, with a focus on international security. The little girl in me remembered watching in awe as Kim Possible the teenage spy upheld justice and defeated the baddies on TV, and it excited me that this was something I could perhaps even slightly emulate in my future career.

This revelation coincided with the beginning of International Affairs, a class that I enrolled in because I thought it might come in handy one day. Little did I know that this simple choice would help me tremendously in orienting my life. Like many of my peers, my previous limited knowledge of global issues made me a casual bystander in my society rather than an active participant. However, after participating in simulations on, for example, the necessity of the United Nations or the United States' role in a changing world, I realized that the act of formulating and defending my opinions on these international issues, something that I had rarely done in the past, was something I greatly enjoyed. The class was the final push that I needed to continue the path that Caroline had inadvertently directed me towards. This new sense of direction, although by no means perfect, will at the least guide me in the coming years as I approach my life-changing college experience. Although I know that my chances of becoming an international CIA superspy are rather unlikely, the simple pleasure of having a general idea of what I want to pursue is enough for me.

**My Favorite Room Jared Andrew Michaud**

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

During my junior year of high school, I moved homes and got my own bathroom. For a sixteen-year-old, this is second best to getting your own car. I was elated. I would no longer have to worry about my brothers taking candid photos of me on the toilet and sending them to family and friends. Those days were gone. I soon discovered, though, that the bathroom was a special place for me.

No, I didn’t turn my bathroom into a bachelor pad or a man cave. I instead developed a liking for my bathroom because of its ulterior meaning to me. The bathroom became a place for me to unwind, to have Jared time. It’s where I can process my day, Skype a long-distance friend, or just clear my mind. With my far from enjoyable digestive issues, my fondness of the bathroom is certainly questionable. Nevertheless, the bathroom provides me with time to myself. After a busy day of school, meetings, sports, play rehearsal, voice lessons, and homework, I go to the bathroom and I take some time to just slow down.

My bathroom does not have any windows. While some may view this as a ventilation concern, it actually makes my escape much more vivid. I live in a small rural community where a boy becomes a man when he buys a snowmobile; where hunting, fishing, and mudding are practically the high school sports; and where school closes for two weeks for potato harvest. And though I am not a vice-presidential candidate, it’s also vital to mention that I can see Canada from my house. This town’s rich French culture and close-knit community has truly benefited my upbringing and impacted my character. Though I’m grateful to have grown up here, the community has limited me in many ways. With passions such as the arts, education, and volunteerism, I tend to stick out like a sore thumb. Going to the bathroom and not having windows to see where I really am helps me imagine where and what I could be. With so many of my peers not planning on going to college, not leaving this area, and not pursuing their true passions, I occasionally fear that my dreams will become only a fantasy instead of an attainable objective. But with a map of our world hanging proudly on the wall, my windowless bathroom stimulates my inner dreamer. Though at times I may feel trapped, small, or limited, my bathroom supports me and all that I can become.

I play a lot of music in the bathroom. From classical to Indie rock, you’re bound to find me singing something. Furthermore, while brushing my teeth I’ll do a plie and practice my ballet positions. Yes, I like to dance. In fact, I’ve been dancing for years even though being the only boy in dance class in this small town has been quite difficult. I was constantly teased and tormented. My bathroom is like my safehaven. I can sing and dance and no one will laugh. It’s true: my bathroom allows me to freely express myself.

Some of my best work hails from my bathroom. I’ve watched TED talks and have felt inspired to make change. I’ve sent emails and organized service projects. I’ve practiced a French speech in front of my mirror and I’ve rehearsed audition songs as if I’m in a recording studio. The person I am today and my list of accomplishments would be very different if it were not for my discovery of the bathroom. Though I’ve been using one for nearly my whole life, I never realized the importance of my time spent there. Without time to unwind, to think, and to discover myself, I wouldn’t have the confidence to be the person I know I am. I am Jared Michaud and I respectfully submit this essay from my bathroom.

**The "Unsolvable" Cube Brandon Joshua Dixon**

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

Wedding bells were ringing in the background, and my fingers were deftly picking their way through the Rubik's Cube concealed under my blazer. The last wedding I had attended was in fourth grade -- a bubble boy in a lavender suit**.**Today, my only role was to behold my two favorite teachers as they got married.

Except, I couldn't quite focus on their wedding. *Clack Clack Clack*went the cube as I spun through an algorithm that my Algebra teacher (the bride) had taught me. My mother bristled beside me, but I cared not for her disapproval. My Algebra teacher and her fiancé, my Physics teacher, had given me my first Rubik's Cube, and I was hell-bent on solving it.

They would often be the sponsors of my obsessions throughout my high school career. Before the Rubik's Cube, I had taken up YuGiOh cards. After school I would hike to their classrooms and play against upperclassmen duelists. At first I couldn't beat any of them, and my Physics teacher (whose seemingly vitriolic banter was aimed at trying to encourage my growth) reminded me of those defeats daily**.**It wasn't long before I was good enough with YuGiOh cards that I could defeat almost every other duelist in the school, except for one senior who brutally eviscerated me with her skills. Till this day I have never managed to beat her.

Eventually, my Physics teacher suggested that I try my hand at something else**.** He ducked into the storage room adjacent to his classroom and returned with a box full of dusty Rubik's cubes. He looked straight into my eyes and said "I bet you won't be able finish one of these," before thrusting the box into my hands. He knew that I relish the idea of a challenge and excel in instances when someone tells me I cannot accomplish a goal. "Bad bet," was my response.

So ensued months of interminable hours spent probing the cube, trying to coerce it into its solved position. I fumbled with it during meals, after studying, and while walking home from school. I surrendered myself to trying to solve the Rubik's Cube, but it seemed like no matter how many times I came close to solving it, I could never get the colors to fall into neat, orderly rows.

The morning of the wedding, I woke up determined to complete the cube before the ceremony ended. I snatched the cube off of my dresser and began to work, but no matter how furiously I tried to cajole the cube into solving itself, it continued to twist into infuriatingly random assortments of colors.

As the ceremony started, my attempts became more frantic. Eventually, I diverted my eyes completely and focused on the cube. I probably would have grappled with it right through the end of the wedding, had it not been for an interruption by my senior rival. She sat down next to me, plucked the cube from my fingers, twisted one row into place and then solved the Cube within 30 seconds of elegant finger work. She gave me an amused smirk and slapped a note into my hand. When I glanced at it, I saw that it was from my Physics teacher, telling me that he had deliberately sabotaged the cubes so that they would be unsolvable, regardless of if I used the correct algorithms. He had purposefully given me an unreachable goal, simply to see if I would give up.

"Sometimes the odds are stacked against you. But with that amount of perseverance you might just find a way to win even when it seems impossible," said my Physics teacher after pulling me aside the next day. Life is full of potentially insurmountable challenges. My experience with the "seemingly unsolvable" Rubik's Cube galvanized my drive to tackle the impossibilities in life and transform them into opportunities, to face the barriers that only hard work can overcome.

**Child of the City Brandon Joshua Dixon**

**In this essay, please reflect on something you would like us to know about you that we might not learn from the rest of your application, or on something about which you would like to say more. You may write about anything—from personal experiences or interests to intellectual pursuits. (Please answer in 500 words or less). Before you begin, we encourage you to go to http://admissions.yale.edu/essay, where you will find helpful advice. AND We’d like to know a little more about you. To that end, please choose one of the following questions and write a short response in the space below. We believe it is critical that your candidacy reflect the interests, experiences and pursuits that are most important to you. To this end, is there anything else you would like us to know?**

I am a child of the city. My summer afternoons were spent baking under the tyranny of the sun, whose heat bounced unforgivingly off of the blacktop streets and the harsh, cement sidewalks. Blaring hip hop mixes and soulful R&B ballads filled my childhood. Block parties and cookouts. Freeze tag and quickly erected pools. I am a child of the city, tempered in the fires of urbanity, but of all of the places on this vast earth, the forest is the place that has my heart.

The first time that I went camping, rain poured on my Boy Scout troop from the time that we entered the campsite until the time that we left. It was a wholly miserable experience, having to prop up tents in the dark of night while rain soaked into every fiber of my being. It seemed as though every attempt to keep the water from creeping into my tent was doomed to fail. But some love affairs only prosper under duress. Even with the less than pleasant weather, that camping trip was one of my best experiences. We hunted for snakes in thigh-high grass, scrambled up an old, twisted tree trunk; went on a night hike on an off-beaten trail; roasted marshmallows inside of a spitting fire and carved staffs out of fallen tree limbs. In the moonlight we chanted old scouting songs and learned more about one another than we ever would have if we were surrounded by concrete. By the time that I returned to the city after my first foray into the forest, I had abandoned the idea of being a child of the city. Why find comfort in the artificiality of a man-made creation, when Mother Nature was so willing to open up her arms to me?

The first trip happened when I was in sixth grade, and now, as a twelfth grader, I value those camping trips more than ever before. When I am in the city I am a captive of the vicissitudes of urban living. There is no peace when you live in a Wi-Fi soup, because your fingers know nothing more than fumbling for the nearest device and trying to insert yourself into the global online community. And now, all of a sudden, you are connected and you cannot take yourself off the map. Every aspect of the human existence, both fortunate and unfortunate, assails you from all sides. Deadlines and nauseating news headlines fill your mind with unnecessary clutter. I am a child of the city, but life in the city is *suffocating*.

So when I slip away on the weekends and find myself ambling through the foliage, I am liberated. And in many ways, these excursions have tempered my personality more than day to day experiences. In the forest I can reflect, and as a result I have become altogether more conscientious. I was born in the city, but ultimately, the forest is what raised me.

**Lessons from the Bench Rebekka Strom**

**Describe how a passion or individual talent has shaped you into the person you are today.**

*The dazzling stage lights blocked out the members of the audience, momentarily blinding me. With sweaty palms, I bowed deeply towards the crowd, symbolically expressing my gratitude. I walked slowly off the wooden stage, my long, white gown swishing delicately behind me. Back in the wings, I took a deep breath and massaged my shoulders, reflecting on the events of the last few moments. I had just played Schubert’s striking “Erlkönig” in my county’s annual scholarship competition. I had devoted the last few months to this very moment, dedicating two to three hours of daily practice. Pausing backstage, I reminisced about the lessons I had learned from the bench over the past twelve years.*

I began taking piano lessons when I was five years old. My parents later told me that the instrument’s ivory keys, which sounded so sweet one moment and so intense the next, mesmerized me. I longed to lovingly stroke those eighty-eight keys and convey my emotions to my audience, expressively connecting with the music on a personal level I could only dream of. What began as an innocent desire to create beautiful music transformed into a profound passion, fueled by sincere focus and dedication.

I feel that playing the piano has developed me as a person, and each time I sit down to play, I learn new lessons from the bench. Music has given me the desire to strive for excellence in anything that I attempt. From enrolling in advanced classes to exerting myself in my daily workouts, my ardent desire for precision encourages me to attempt new tasks with a clear perspective. Yet, music has also taught me patience and acceptance. I avidly continue studying the components of a piece until I find exactitude in my playing. I have also learned not to become worked up when I miss a note or mistakenly interpret the cantible style of a measure. Each time I encounter a challenging rhythmic section or a rapid chordal progression, I allow my mind to search for a fresh viewpoint as I condense my problems into manageable sections. Whenever I become discouraged, I am reminded of my teacher’s straightforward mantra, “Simplify, pre-plan, and see the perspective,” I regroup my thoughts, take a breath, and try the section again. The lessons of dedication and focus learned at the bench have impacted me so strongly that I have transferred these teachings into my personal development. My fierce desire for excellence is also evident in my academic achievements, as I maintained a 4.0 GPA while enrolled in college classes during my senior year. When discouraged over a difficult subject or one of life’s challenges, I stimulate my mind and body for success as I remind myself of the rewards which ensue from hard work, patience, and dedicated focus. Simplification is perhaps one the greatest lessons I have mastered. When demanding circumstances arise, I challenge myself to attack the difficulty one step at a time, just like I tackled “Erlkönig” one measure at a time. Simplification provides me with the clarity to solve complicated problems.

*The baritone voice of the emcee rang out throughout the concert hall, inviting the evening’s participants to take the stage for the awards ceremony. As the names were called, I stood quietly, overwhelmed in my private thoughts. Suddenly, my name was announced, and a giant sparkling trophy was placed in my arms. I had won the first prize scholarship, and I was elated! Amid the flash of the photographers, I turned to glance at the black Steinway grand piano. Wheeled to the back of the stage, it rested there majestically, the glare of the stage lights dancing on its gleaming ebony body. I gazed fondly at the instrument’s ivory keys, longing to touch them once more, and slowly smiled, vowing to remember this moment forever.*

After years of practicing music, I have developed an intense bond with my instrument, a bond that has led me to strive fervently for improvements in my personal growth. Playing the piano is not merely a vocation, but a passion. Every evening, I yearn to pour my heart and soul into those eighty-eight keys. From its tiny hammers to its brass pedals, the piano has become my love, my teacher, and my greatest joy. Whatever obstacles may hinder my path, I am confident in my ability to overcome them, using all that I learned in all those lessons from the bench.

**Hip Hop Anonymous**

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

“Understand the meaning of MC. The power to Move the Crowd like Moses splits the seas.” Remembering the lyrics of Talib Kweli, my favorite rapper, I rapped, surrounded by a small crowd on the streets. As I stole glimpses of teens in their oversized sweaters and baggy jeans throwing their hands in the air and swaying them left and right, I felt as if I were a talented rapper – a real MC.

“Hip hop is for African Americans,” retorted my English literature teacher after overhearing my views on rhymes in rap music. He argued that a middle class Asian girl’s mimicking an African American rapper’s style and lyrics wouldn’t make her an authentic artist. Though I wanted to fight back, I found myself unable to offer a counter argument.

That night, I sent an e-mail to Vanessa Diaz, the director of the Cuban hip hop documentary, *Desde el Principio*, which had mesmerized me only a few nights ago, explaining what had happened during that class – and the problems of expressing myself through hip hop. Through her lengthy reply that arrived after many days, I learned that the Cubans and African Americans had gone through similar predicaments – poverty and oppression – and thus adopted similar music as a means of expressing their sufferings. Toward the end, she added, “What kind of strife are you going through?”

To that question, I was dumbfounded. Perhaps, it was because I was too immature, inexperienced, or maybe because I was born to middle class comfort. Though my heart throbbed with the pulsating beats, my body swung to the smooth melody, and my eyes were enthralled with the flamboyancy, I then realized that I knew not the pains of oppression and deprivation the musicians rapped about. I knew I wasn’t faking it, but I wasn’t identifying with it either.

So I stopped rapping. Rapping without consciousness, I thought, was like trying to pass for something that I was not. Days had passed when Jin, a member of the school rap group, called and asked, “Come and show how to freestyle.” “No,” my mind resisted, but before I knew it, the rhythm of the body had already swept through my small frame. “Give her the beat!”

Riding the Talib Kweli quadruple beats, I rapped Korean rhymes mixed with my hometown dialect – about suffocating competition at school, about the estrangement I felt living alone to continue my studies, about a friend who refused to talk to me for days, about the xenophobic tendency of certain Koreans, and about a few populist politicians’ branding us, foreign language school students, “elitists.” None of my stories actually coincided with those of African American or Cuban rappers, but the lyrics this time were fully mine.

Hip hop is a vessel through which one molds and refines one’s identity. I was initially attracted to certain beats, particular rhymes, and the unrefined swagger the musicians embodied. But now I know, whether I am African American, Cuban or Korean, that this music is a way of figuring out who I am.

**The Balcony 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?**

This is the balcony that extends into infinite dimensions. Inside: paintings and the smell of dusk. Lined against the tiled walls are canvases both void and filled. A soft light overhead. There is something extremely calming about occupying this platform, transforming it into surreal dimensions. In the studio I am expanding both into my mind space and the concrete space of my artwork.

Very often, a friend would read my poetry, view my paintings, and ask:*what was your inspiration? What draws it all together?*

I am never really sure how to answer. To be honest, I have never found any conceptual disparity between visual art and the written form. My urge to create, or express, is like letting out a breath of air. And by creating art, I am able to crystallize that exhalation and preserve it forever. When I paint, language and brushstrokes coalesce into the same motive: to translate my cognitive abstractions into concrete expressions. To tentatively let you into my mind space, this is the trance-like state I fall into when creating: the sky is a stretch of watercolor spreading into little streams, telegraph poles streamlining my ideas into electric currents, reverberating into houses; electric wires gone loose. And beside the overarching landscape, materializes the side portrait of my mother. The silhouette of a slender arm, then the shoulder's precise curvature.

Some people say that art is cathartic. That statement is only half-true. In the very beginning, creating each artwork is like wrestling forever with an unknown contender who seems to come from the realm of artistic perfection. Even when my artwork is finally polished and displayed under the glowing light of art exhibitions, I am not lost in the applause. Interlaced with each brushstroke and each nuance of color is the memory of a self-limitation I've been able to conquer. Thus, out of all the artworks I've ever made, the ones I value the most are not necessarily the most aesthetically successful, but are the ones in which, like a war hero, I battled through to claim victory. In those rare, precious moments, when transfixed by the wild waltz of my imagination, I would feel as if I've reached the apex of divinity. Existing in between the initial concept and the unclaimed, unchartered space of the blank canvas, I've never stopped believing that a secret awaits--perhaps the truth to the wholeness of life, the interconnected beauty of the entire cosmos.

The balcony door opens: I step away from its light, covered in paint. But I do not hurry to wash the colors off my skin. Instead, I let these chaotic remnants of my arduous creations stay, because after hours upon hours inching towards an artistic ideal, my body becomes at one with these brushstrokes, and I am no longer alone.

**The Child Who Opened My Eyes Alena Rajwani**

**Boston College: What contemporary issue or trend relating to politics, culture, and society, or foreign policy particularly concerns you and why? Yale: Please reflect on something you would like us to know about you that we might not learn from the rest of your application, or on something about which you would like to say more. You may write about anything—from personal experiences or goals to interests or intellectual pursuits.**

Disgusted by the foul urban odors of Pakistan, my younger brother and I became possessed by the utility of our iPhones and remained confined within the walls of our uncle’s apartment. Eventually, my uncle became frustrated with our self-isolation and offered to take us on an “adventure.” In the minds of children, an adventure consists of going to a park or a skating arena. But we were in for a not-so-pleasant surprise.

After a bumpy rickshaw ride through narrow streets and arid fields, we arrived at a plantation. Wandering through the rows of crops, I saw children using sharp tools in the scorching sun. We took a seat on a haystack and were joined by a young boy, whom I had seen working in the fields earlier. He told us about the long hours. He told us about the life-threatening injuries he suffered. He told us about the school he attended and the quality time his family used to spend together before a multinational company built a factory in town. Soon, the azan began to play, signaling the time for prayer. My brother and I headed home, both touched and troubled by the boy’s stories.

The image of the boy stuck with me even after I returned to Dallas. To ease my queasy conscience, I began researching child labor, hoping this abuse was not widespread. To my disappointment, it was. The more I learned about the topic, the more frustrated I became. After surfing through what seemed to be a million links, I finally found one that relieved me. The article explained how region-wide boycotts encourage companies to implement better work environments. In that moment, I realized the power humans possess to encourage changes in longstanding practices.

There are two types of change — positive and negative — and unfortunately, many companies pick the latter. However, as a tutor who makes money by helping students excel, I do not view business as a win-lose situation for myself and my students. Rather, I believe that business should and can be a win-win for both the company and the surrounding societies. Through impact investment, in which companies stimulate societal uplift alongside profits, businesses can help their own communities. By concentrating in business analytics and economics, I will ensure that business models serve disadvantaged rural societies. We must create a world where profit is not the only measure of prosperity.

**Lost Election Adrianne Lynn Owings**

**Please reflect on something you would like us to know about you that we might not learn from the rest of your application, or on something about which you would like to say more. You may write about anything—from personal experiences or goals to interests or intellectual pursuits. (Please answer in 500 words or fewer).**

"So, vote O-*WINGS*, and let's soar!"

A unanimous groan can be heard throughout the class as I flash a quick thumbs, mostly up to try to level out the resentment I just acquired through a tacky pun of a campaign slogan. Nonetheless, I leave the podium with a big, hopeful grin, but the subsequent election reveals that this effort was made in vain. No surprise there. I take my newest defeat with pride and greet our new student leader with a good-natured embrace.

I have had a history of being labeled a "try-hard," a label that no high-schooler really wants. But this never stopped me from doing what mattered most to me, even when my campaigns for leadership in my academic life have been crushed time and time again. Even when I was elected co-President of Mosaic club, which promotes understanding among all races, cultures, and people, I was ridiculed for my stance as a feminist and my status as a well-to-do white girl leading a diversity-centered extracurricular. Nevertheless, I carried on with trademark cheer, organizing events that made a positive change and tenaciously holding fast to an idea best conveyed by Mary Pickford: "This thing we call failure is not the falling down, but the staying down."

Without countless losses, I would've had neither the ability nor the know-how to win. I never would've offered my candidacy for Governor during Arkansas Girls State – I'd already encountered enough failure at that point that the idea of another foiled election had lost its potency. I didn't arrive at the week-long civic education camp with a call to leadership ringing in my ears, but as I gradually gained the trust of over eight hundred girls, I realized that a loss in my race for Governor would still be a job well done. Then, I encountered a concept so foreign in my perception of my chance in political leadership: success. They were shouting my name, raising their hands in the shape of wings, inspired by my now-popular campaign slogan. Fast forward a month later at the Girl Up Leadership Summit in Washington D.C., where I am shaking the hand of First Lady Michelle Obama who told me that, yes, even I, the girl who couldn't be elected to be the hall monitor at her high school, much less class president, could be the President of the United States one day.

After a whirlwind of an empowering summer, I returned to school in the fall with high hopes, which would never be dampened by another lost election.

**Who Am I? Anonymous**

**Please reflect on something you would like us to know about you that we might not learn from the rest of your application, or on something about which you would like to say more. You may write about anything—from personal experiences or goals to interests or intellectual pursuits. (Please answer in 500 words or fewer).**

“So, you’re like a plant, right?”

Yep, exactly. My name is Katia, my favorite color is aubergine, and I’m secretly a plant because I don’t experience sexual attraction. How did you know?

I found out I was asexual the summer after sophomore year. For years, I had defined myself largely by compulsory heterosexuality. I had rather forced crushes on boys, and certainly didn’t “look at girls the same way boys looked at girls,” as every lesbian YA novel phrases it. As I’d gone to Catholic school for the past ten years, there was no sex ed, and my best friend realized I should know the basics. My friend was a witty, fierce girl who I’d met on our school’s tennis team, who’d grown up self-confident in an artistic mecca that was a local Waldorf school, empowered in ways of sexuality where I was not. She told me what sexual attraction felt like, and slowly it all made sense. I’d never checked anyone out; I hadn’t had romantic dreams about anyone in middle school; I’d gone along with saving myself for marriage. Maybe I wasn’t as straight as I thought I was, and I was strangely okay with that. It felt realer to me than the black-and-white of sexual orientation I’d been introduced to before, the gay or straight dichotomy.

I embraced my new identity, although adults around me replied with some variant of, “are you sure? Well, your orientation can change, you know.” Despite coming out publicly as asexual multiple times, most people older than me assumed I was gay or, most likely, straight. This invalidation of a central part of myself left me confused. To me, it seemed like an easy thing to accept. However, explaining it was surprisingly difficult; most people haven’t heard of anything like the Kinsey scale, and so eventually I learned to keep that information quiet. It became a “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy of my own making.

As I became more comfortable with my sexual orientation -- or, perhaps more aptly, lack thereof -- I didn’t intentionally hide it anymore. I don’t mention it often, because when your sexuality is nonexistent, things like sexual attraction don’t come up in most conversations you have. That being said, I don’t feel ashamed of the person I am, unlike times in the past when I’d wished I could just be like everyone else. The people around me might not fully understand, and that’s fine. I don’t need to fit neatly into boxes. Last winter, I performed a slam poem about being asexual in front of more than a hundred people, and my performance ended in resounding applause. My identity is not for anyone else’s comfort or consumption; finally, I’m becoming proud of who I am.

**History in the Eyes of the Beholder Anonymous**

**Reflect on a time in the last few years when you felt genuine excitement learning about something.**

I stood in the Sainte-Chapelle, listening to the echoes of angelic choir voices, while a soft pink glow set over the whole room, filtering through the stained glass windows that cover the walls. Every crevice, every little detail can be seen while walking through; every relic that adorns the walls has a story to tell and offers onlookers a glimpse into the past. The light illuminates the detail on the altar’s metalworking and creates an aura that neither pictures nor an art history textbook can describe accurately.

Studying the history of the Sainte-Chapelle while being there makes the learning three dimensional; the experience essentially provides a backdrop for the history itself. A significant intersection of textbook knowledge and first-hand experience occurs, heightening the learning process. The history of Sainte-Chapelle can be better understood when one views the magnificent display of both wealth and artistry, offering an explanation for the historical events that have occurred there.

**Good Game, Frank Christopher Walleck**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**The Third Shot Steven Michael Wang**

**Some students have a background or story that is so central to their identity that they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.**

On any given dusky afternoon, I find myself asking the pressing question: Will I make it a third time in a row? I raise my arms, examine a dulled orange orb clinging to my aching, sweaty palms, and squint at the near-invisible net. Far from aspiring to become an NBA player, I use my recreational basketball skills as a daily relaxing ritual. I fall into a rhythm, a fluctuating combination of layups, free throws, and outbursts: "3...2...1!" I imagine shooting the game-winning basket in the last seconds of my coliseum game. But, no matter how tired I am, my workouts always end the same: three baskets in a row. Of course nobody is there to enforce this law, but it feels wrong to leave without accomplishing this arguably foolish task.

My tendency to set arbitrary goals serves as a sort of closure for me. Seeing the third basketball swish through the net evokes such a euphoric feeling; it represents a consistent end. I admit it - I need closure. I enjoy stories with a beginning and ending; I furiously research movies that end with cliffhangers after watching them; I demand answers to unsolved problems: Is there a universal cure for cancer? How can we stop aging? Where do we come from? It thrills and perplexes me that explanations currently unperceivable to the human mind will someday answer such questions. Therefore, I approach each pursuit as a basketball challenge I have to complete: knowing I will miss many shots along the way, I will persist until I make my magical three and reach a conclusion that satisfies.

While the third swish of the net is always an enjoyable sound, my true satisfaction from this self-imposed three-shot test stems from the journey the basketball takes: the perfect backspin, the initial angling of the shot, and the beautiful arc of the ball's trajectory. Likewise, the most meaningful aspect of my search for closure lies not in the actual discovery of the truth, but in the arduous journey of reaching such a conclusion. It's within these journeys that I expand my perspectives and understand new viewpoints through interactions with other individuals. In my search for technological ways to alleviate human suffering, for example, I've started to question the meaning of "impossible" after interacting with Mick Ebeling, an inventor who 3D prints prosthetic limbs. Like every three-shot challenge, no pursuit I undertake is ever the same. I have the opportunity to stretch my perspectives to great lengths in any direction I choose, to learn from the untapped memories and experiences of unique individuals. It all exists within the journey.

So will I make three-in-a-row tonight? I raise the basketball up in the air and fling it with calculated force. As I watch the illuminating orange sphere twirl in the air, I remember that my need for closure transcends the final conclusions I reach. Each question I seek to answer holds a journey, an arduous mid-region to traverse, that will inevitably expand my viewpoints, values, and beliefs. The ball swivels on the rim before finally dropping into the white mesh. A day's journey has ended; a new one has just begun.

**Why Yale Engineering? Anonymous**

**Why Yale Engineering?**

When my mother caught the flu last winter, I researched the developmental process of Tamiflu, the medicine she was prescribed, and how it operated to prevent the disease from progressing. I learned how researchers identified a specific protein used for viral transmission, utilized computational tools to identify a potent inhibitor, and brought their findings into clinical use through laboratory experiments. It fascinated me how a simple discovery of a viral protein could lead to something much greater, improving the health of millions. Engineering defines this same innovative process that I love: the application of scientific discoveries to the real world. It is the giver of life to pure research, building up simple concepts like proteins into groundbreaking inventions like anti-flu drugs. I want to be on the forefront of this revolution. I want to become a biomedical engineer.

However, I face a dilemma: I have only experienced the initial phase of this process. Having the opportunity to design cancer vaccines, develop new chemotherapy treatments, and even grow miniature organs in a cell culture dish has exposed me to the discovery side of engineering, the initial spark that starts it all. Yet, to aid patients in the future through these findings, I need to understand how these discoveries are translated into tangible practicality. So, my love for pure research clashes with my fascination with real-world environments. Through extemporaneous speaking, I have studied topics ranging from the ramifications of US containment policies of malaria to the economic effects of the pharmaceutical industry in domestic markets. How can engineering reconcile laboratory experiments with financial needs, humanitarian efforts, or political events? I recognize that engineering can act as an omnipotent force that encompasses pure science with societal circumstances to advance the human condition. Now I seek to control and understand that power.

Yale Engineering harmonizes these two concepts and provides the perfect environment to fuse the most helpful disciplines of study into one super-solution. In state-of-the-art laboratories, my "discovery" side would be thrilled to continue my scientific pursuits. I would like to explore the application of cutting-edge innovations to medical issues, such as how magnetic nanotubes act hand-in-hand with the biological immune system to treat tumors in the Fahmy lab. Through Yale Engineering, I can then place my scientific pursuits into context by researching the worldly challenges that my innovations can meet. In particular, I am looking forward to taking "Biotechnology and the Developing World" to better understand how innovations are implemented to address needs in developing countries. Additionally, I plan to engage with the Center for Biomedical and Interventional Technology (CBIT) to understand the economic and business aspects of translating an idea into a novel medical technology.

I stand between two giants: pure science research and real-world circumstances. I seek to integrate these traditionally partitioned fields by applying my research to unmet societal contexts. As a solver of problems, I see no other way to do this than to take the form of Yale's Y-shaped engineer.

**Plastic Surgeon Stephanie Marie Blas-Lizarazo**

**If you selected one of the computer science or engineering majors, please tell us more about what has led you to an interest in this field of study, what experiences (if any) you have had in computer science or engineering, and what it is about Yale’s program in this area that appeals to you. (Please answer in 500 words or fewer).**

Eight years ago, I was a plastic surgeon – then again, anyone could say that after watching an entire season of Dr. 90210.

My mother was my main patient, with the tummy tuck being her favorite procedure. Instead of a scalpel, my most faithful tool was a purple Crayola marker. The process of performing a tummy tuck is an exact science: you must remove the exact amount of excess skin, tighten the abdominal muscles to the exact degree, and suture the incision with exact tightness. The precision and tedium required of a surgeon only satisfied me, feeding my perfectionist tendencies. Just as I thought that I was going to be the next Dr. Robert Rey, everything changed.

The summer prior to sixth grade, I had the privilege of attending the Miami PREP Summer Program at Florida International University (FIU), which is a STEM-focused program for students in elementary and middle school. My favorite course was Introduction to Engineering (IE). In IE, the teacher, Ms. Sara Zapata, hosted a plethora of guest speakers – all engineers. My favorite speaker was Ms. Ranu Jung, Ph.D.: the chair of FIU’s Department of Biomedical Engineering. She defined biomedical engineering as “the marriage of mathematics and medicine,” even showing the IE class research projects that the Department of Biomedical Engineering was working on.

It was in that moment that I made a life-changing connection: Dr. Ranu Jung’s words and my older brother’s cardiac arrest the previous year. Biomedical engineers played a crucial role in his survival. Hence, I realized that biomedical engineering was much more than “the marriage of mathematics and medicine.” It is having the power to save lives through the medical knowledge required of doctors and the problem-solving skills required of engineers.

Nonetheless, there was one crucial aspect of biomedical engineering that I had not been exposed to: design. However, last summer, I occasionally went with my older brother to his job as a project engineer at HEICO Aerospace (also known as Jet Avion) – a company based in Hollywood, FL that “designs, manufactures, and sells aerospace-related products and services throughout the world.” In my excursions to Jet Avion, Carlos showed me how he works with Autodesk Inventor (an industry-standard Computer Aided Design program) in designing a plethora of aircraft engine and non-engine mechanical devices, like diaphragms and piston rings.

Yale’s Department of Biomedical Engineering offers me the opportunity to better understand the human body from the perspective of an engineer. In particular, I am eager to take advantage of the cutting-edge research opportunities offered in Tissue Engineering – my area of interest. For instance, instead of merely learning about coronary bypasses in a textbook, I could work with Dr. Laura Niklason in “developing engineered arteries for coronary bypass procedures.” Essentially, Yale’s School of Engineering and Applied Science will provide me an education that will simultaneously give me the mind of a doctor and an engineer, leading me to success in clinical and industrial environments.