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### Education Essay Draft

As of right now, Taylor Swift's latest album, *1989 (Taylor's Version)* is set to release in just twenty minutes. I feel an anticipation that is reminiscent of last year, when Swift was about to release her album *Midnights*, as well as mirroring every other time she has released another work of art. I found that as every new song or collection came out, I repeatedly turned to her music in search of something *different* from the standards of education spoon-fed to me.

Growing up in an immigrant household, the emphasis on excelling in math has been instilled as the sole determinant of a successful education. I relied on Swift's work as my own outlet for the arts because of my lack of exposure to the arts from the beginnings of my educational journey. Now, as I and many others watch the album release countdown in painstaking anticipation, I ask myself why one woman's music has had such a transformative power in how I saw the importance of artistic expression in education. When considering why I hold Swift's music so dear to my heart, I realize it is because she has been a defining factor of my experience in the world of art, so far away from the definition of educational "success" I had been taught to follow.

"Our coming-of-age has come and gone / Suddenly the summer, it's clear / I never had the courage of my convictions / As long as danger is near" (Swift). Growing up as a first generation American, what actually counted as "education" was preordained for me. As a child I had fostered a love for literature and painting—but these interests were quickly stifled. From my first years in school, an extensive education in math became an obligatory path with no

alternative. My passions in artistic pursuits grew, but the traditional immigrant parent “mindset” ended these just as quickly. Though immigrant parents have often been labeled with this stereotype, I find that it especially holds true with my own parents. Having faced the harsh realities of immigration to the United States, they were no stranger to the fact that having a STEM-based career generally equated to higher income and better quality of life. Their knowledge mathematics being one of the main reasons for their success, their educational standards for math was based on a conception that my own success would be defined by my education mathematics. Thus, the question “Why are you always reading?” has been asked of me more times than I can count. Literature was the first outlet I found for my thirst for artistic expression. Specifically, exploring the art of storytelling seemed considerably more enticing than returning to the unending math practice I had been subject to solve. Growing up, the amount of math practice and math competitions I had entered was innumerable. Attempting to live up to my parents’ expectations (one of the many things many first generation children will never achieve) consumed all of my time and energy. While I toiled and cried over math problems in many late-night study sessions, I sought solace in my books. However, as I advanced in age and in school, I found that my exposure to and love for literature slowly slipped away. Lacking encouragement or support of exploring books and other forms of art at home, I instead redirected my efforts to what was expected of me—math. My need for validation from my parents drove my quest for excellence in this field. And as I consistently won awards and earned higher scores for my efforts, I eventually understood that it was the result of my neglect towards my own love for art. I could not help but take pride in all these achievements, yet I was not fulfilled. I was successful in mathematics, yet it did not define me, nor was it the only place where I ‘belonged.’ And thus, I sought refuge in the forms of art that were not the ‘useless books’ I had been restricted from.

"No one wanted to play with me as a little kid / So I've been scheming like a criminal ever since" (Swift). My passion for art began with literature, but by now it had transformed into something that I resonated with more—music and dance. Although my parents had instilled a heavy emphasis on the importance of math, they still put me in classical Indian dance—something that they had intended would serve as a connection to my Indian heritage. Instead, my dance journey not only became a cultural connection, but a method through which my artistic expression was released. Similarly, Taylor Swift's music has been a played a pivotal role in my pursuit of expressing my passion for the arts. As the pressure of mathematical education was stacked atop me, my creativity had to be released somehow; the means being classical dance and Swift's work. When seeking solace in these, I found pieces of my identity that math did not define—the obvious being a love for artistic expression, but also the value of artistic exposure. While I and many others face the similar teaching from traditional parents that people in STEM fields are generally more successful, we often overlook the fact that art is a critical part of education as well. My experience in dance has taught me how the acting or “becoming” aspect of the art form teaches its students the value of emotional understanding. The empathetic nature of this style of dance was valuable because it is something math never could have taught me—empathetic connections and awareness of others in social situations. On the other hand, Swift's work is famous for her poetic songwriting skills. The underlying meanings of obscure lyrics in many of her songs teach the art of masterful storytelling through symbolism. (will flesh out with more examples, not finished yet)

These two vents for my interests in art led me to the discovery that art is not something to be excluded from education. Math was not the sole form of learning that mattered, and my success in that field did not fully represent how I felt about my education. Art was a critical part

of my identity, and therefore significant to my educational journey. It did not fit the standards of education that had been defined for me. Now, *1989 (Taylor's Version)* has just been released, and I again seek solace in Swift's gifted talent in storytelling through music. The suspense of the album releasing having been sated; I realize now that her music has been a constant thread throughout my path to realizing why artistic exposure has been crucial to my educational journey.

#### Works Cited

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