NEW VOICES

A COLLECTION OF STUDENT ESSAYS

23rd Edition

STRETCH COMPOSITION PROGRAM
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTH RIDGE

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Many thanks to our families for their patience, especially Ces and Moss.

Most of all, thanks to the many students, published and unpublished, who share their *New Voices* with us each year.

---

**Tomas Medina, 2012 Recipient**

Pamela Bourgeois Prize for Writing Excellence in the First Year

With Dr. Pamela Bourgeois, founder and long-time managing editor of *New Voices*.

The prize is awarded to the best essay written by a Stretch Composition student, published in either *New Voices* or *Wings*.

New Voices Writing Awards

The following students will receive prizes from the Matador Bookstore at the Publication Ceremony in Fall 2013:

Section 1: Writing about Writing
Honorable Mention: Karla Montenegro, “Real Reading and Right Writing”

Section 2: Exploring Literacy
First Place: Joyce Vondee Amankwah, “Mama Sweet”
Honorable Mention: Natalie Santoyo, “The Runaway Bunny”

Section 3: Examining Education
First Place: Michelle Lay, “Listening to Student Voices”
Honorable Mention: Muath Mana Aljohani, “Heart of the Family”

Section 4: Developing Identity
First Place: Jacquelyn Rabe, “Toys Are Not Us”
Honorable Mention: Jessie M. Lara, “Mirror, Mirror”

Section 5: Spotlight on Sports
First Place: Leslie Martinez, “Out of the Comfort Zone”
Honorable Mention: Christopher Hernandez, “Progression II: Three Exercises and an Essay: Confetti Is Everywhere”

Section 6: New Voices Online
Honorable Mention: Jessica Contreras, “The Sacrifice of Becoming a Teen Model”
Honorable Mention: Jasmine Estrada, “We Are All the Same.”
Honorable Mention: Mark Santiago, “Observing the Bus”

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Lisa Riccomini, Instructor, English, Academic First Year Experiences, and Liberal Studies
Mary Riggs, Instructor, Chicana/o Studies, and Academic First Year Experiences
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“Books are the quietest and most constant of friends; they are the most accessible and wisest of counselors, and the most patient of teachers.”

Charles William Eliot
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- Some sections may overlap in content.
- Formatting may vary across different sections.
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How Do Faculty Use New Voices?

I use New Voices at the beginning of the semester to show students that they can use it as a reference for how to write a works cited, how to incorporate a quote, and other technical matters. I point out the strengths of each writer, and what I think is weak about even a good essay. We practice analyzing how the thesis guides the paper. We look at New Voices again before we start work on our portfolios and review the same things, looking at different essays. New Voices works to show structure, paragraphing, and other essay elements.

—Beverly Rousseau, Lecturer in English, CSUN

I use New Voices in a variety of ways. For instance, students read an essay at home, write comments, and then we practice peer reviewing the same essay all together in class; I use the Literacy Narratives as an option for students to use for their Letter to the Author Exercise if they feel more comfortable writing to a fellow student. The research essays are examples of how to incorporate research, so I’ll have the students read one, then do an online Moodle post where the students reflect on the effectiveness of the use of sources.

—Rachel Jordan, Lecturer in English and Academic First Year Experiences, CSUN

I use New Voices to demonstrate paragraph development and methods of support. As in a “scavenger hunt,” students search one of the persuasive/research essays for various support methods: a statistic, an expert opinion, a personal anecdote, an example, varied quote styles, a research study, or analysis. If the essay did not include one of these techniques, students are tasked to “create” one and place it appropriately into the essay. It’s a competitive and fun way of looking closely at a New Voices essay.

—Mahta Rosenfeld, Lecturer in English, CSUN and Moorpark College

I use the portfolio prefaces to expose my students to the broad range of their options for their own cover letters, from the very direct to the very creative.

—Amber Norwood, Lecturer in English, CSUN and New Voices Associate Editor
How Do Faculty Use New Voices?

We examine the “moves” of a successful academic essay. We study how the writer transitions from one topic/paragraph to another, and exactly why the paragraphs are separated as such. We also do a small group activity where I give a one-line “purpose” or “function” for each paragraph of the essay, so paragraph #1 might be “to acknowledge the complexity of an issue and state a position with an argumentative thesis.” Paragraph #2 might be “to state why this issue is relevant and why we should care, as readers.” One function may even be “to show the writer’s closeness with this issue or ‘community’ through his/her clever use of slang, or other specifics.” Then each small group of students matches an assigned paragraph to the “purpose” statement provided on the board. I may also assign a *New Voices* reading alongside a more established author writing on a similar topic, reinforcing the idea that we are all authors and potential contributors to ongoing academic conversations about what matters to ALL of us as citizens of the planet.

—Robert Speiser, Graduate Teaching Associate in English, CSUN

I use the essays in *New Voices* as models to show how other students responded to assignments. Since the published essays take various approaches, students become aware of the possibilities for creativity.

—Terri Silverberg, Lecturer in English, CSUN
Section 1: Writing about Writing

Quick Write:
What are your strengths and weaknesses as a writer?
Notes, Responses, & Ideas
Would I be willing to exchange my life with the life of a character from one of my stories?

Alejandra Mendoza Diaz
Instructor: Stephan Topf

The Prize

Dear Reader,

During the last few days, I have been revising works that I wrote during the course of the semester. I must say that after receiving a grade on a paper, I usually set the assignment aside and forget it exists. I have to confess that I do not keep most of my projects. Having to revise past essays for my English Composition course, however, has made me search the dusty drawers of what was once a perfectly well-constructed, sophisticated desk. It is in truth depressing that I have found yellowish-brown papers, which were once pale white and unwrinkled, hiding underneath my more recent work. When I gaze down at the sheets and see their sides folded and the ink somewhat faded, I realize that the appearance of my old writing divulges the length of time that I have been exposed to the art of words.

While searching for my essays, I recovered several poems and stories from my childhood. These are pieces of what I call “my tangible thoughts” that I evidently believed were worth saving. As a matter of fact, the other day I found myself sitting on the floor of my room, reading several of these pieces until the last light from outside slowly was replaced by absolute obscurity. I was delighted to know that several of my favorite poems and stories have survived. I became conscious that I take pleasure in bending letters. I like being the only person who is able to understand my personal writing, and this probably makes me a terrible writer when it comes to my private work; but, after all, these words are not intended to be read by anyone else. Most of all, I am thrilled to state that after comparing an old poem to a more recent one, I see that I have truly advanced as a writer.

Reading the essays entitled “Into the Spider Web” and “Where Soul Meets Body,” which I have attached to my portfolio, has made me acknowledge that I have grown as a writer during this course. Throughout this course, I have managed to stretch my imagination as if it were rubber, and by gaining new strange techniques, I have investigated a new territory. It would be an
The Prize

exaggeration to say a person can greatly progress at anything in the course of a semester, but I believe we can have a time in our lives when there is a great improvement in our ability to put words down on paper. My particular time was during my first semester of college. I was exposed to many different types and styles of writing that I had never experienced before. I found myself writing things such as, “When I joined this particular group of people, I felt like I had stepped into a world immensely different from my own jungle,” and then wondering from which dim corner of my imagination the jungle had come. In “Where Soul Meets Body,” I wrote, “The boy that left the reservation uncovered numerous things about the world when he reached the top of the mountain, and by making it to the peak, he managed to finally catch a glimpse of the sunset that had been hiding behind the mist of the reservation’s armor.” I explored different levels of a new technique that elevated my voice and made me thrive in expressing my opinions.

While it would be satisfying to continue analyzing positive aspects of my writing, I have to address the negative ones as well, in order to maintain a state of balance. People say, “There must be a pro and con side to have an argument,” or, “Both a predator and a prey should exist for the ecosystem to continue functioning.” I believe it is the same when it comes to writing. You have to have weaknesses in order to have strengths; you need equilibrium in order to stop yourself from falling in one direction or the other. My most visible weakness in writing lies at the beginning of each essay: the thesis. For the essay, “Where Soul Meets Body,” I wrote three different theses and both the first and the second could have easily evolved from the fungus that grows inside a rancid mango. The third one, however, did not seem to come from a rotten fruit; in fact, the thesis was more argument based and connected smoothly with the rest of the essay.

Ultimately, finding these pieces of my work has pleased me in a way that words cannot precisely express. I try to prepare myself mentally and I have noted that it is not until I look back in the mirror of my past that I understand what has shaped my work. I have also come to realize that we all want what we don’t possess; wanting to be a better writer or artist is not easy to ignore. Would I be willing to exchange my life with the life of a character from one of my stories? Yes, probably. Nevertheless, I am certain that I would eventually crave my own life. Development depends upon experiences. Experiences depend upon you and whether or not you are willing to take risks to grasp the prize.

Sincerely,
Alejandra Mendoza Diaz
Revision is a Writing Process
On Learning How to Revise
By: Deisy Arevalo

For me, the most difficult part about writing a paper was actually writing without interruption. In high school, I took AP English and journalism for two years. I excelled at writing when I had enough time to revise, though I always struggled to get my ideas to flow during timed tests. I did not feel that I could revise a paper within an hour. However, in Freshman English, I discovered a trick to being creative and organized through a better revision technique.

In my writing process, I always had a hard time deciding what came first, and as a result, I spent a lot of time trying to put down a single sentence. I was not confident of my sentences, and I was ashamed about letting a grammar mistake slip out in my writing. Growing up, I got into the habit of erasing the words right after I wrote them if I did not like them. I became aware that the reason I never had time to revise was because of this annoying habit.

I started out strong in the class but I still had trouble with developing my papers and identifying audience. My paper analyzing the article “Smartphones, Dumb Drivers” was not the worst paper I had written but I did not have time to revise the tone or lengthen my paragraphs because I focused too much on each sentence.

Continued on page 2

Traversable Wormhole
By: Deisy Arevalo

To the left and to the right, I pedaled down between a two-way road Just one mile down Mount Writer’s Block. Oh, the heavy load piled on my shoulders from the tick-tock of the dreadful clock.

It’s near dead-end, I must make a bend only five minutes till the end.

The introduction is perfect, and no longer does structure delay, to infect and shrivel my missed comma to cause my paper’s coma.

Nothing seems right, the only thing left to do is write. I scribble down my thoughts as my pen takes flight, just as “RING!” my paper’s out of sight.

Structure triumphed, or should I say, trumped creativity. Too OCD about the intro’s aim, I worried about the most trivial activity, until Freshman 114A showed me the real game.

’Tis not to say that my first test in freshman year did not bring me again near dead-end, as the dreadful tick-tock got near again.

Only this time it was my traversable wormhole that like Alice in Wonderland, showed me a different world, where creativity and structure could coexist.
it was difficult for me to adapt to an informal tone.

In the course of the semester, after reading stories such as Sherman Alexie’s *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, I developed a new way of thinking. I learned that not all good writing is formal. It has been a great feat for me to finally adjust tone when addressing my audience, whether children, teenagers, or professors. Whenever I revise, I now look for areas where my tone is off.

For my second essay, “Ads Against the Wealthy Taking over,” I had to analyze visual rhetoric in an advertisement. With the 2012 elections going on, it was an ideal time to write about how ads persuade people to vote either “yes” or “no” on propositions. I never expected my professor to try something creative in teaching the class about rhetoric. First, he explained to us what the terms *pathos*, *logos*, and *ethos* meant and then showed us articles and YouTube videos on how rhetoric is effectively used in and out of class settings. He applied rhetoric to different scenarios and went so far as to apply it to romantic relationships on the verge of a break-up. So how was this done?

In the “Exercise on How to Use Rhetoric,” the professor prompted us to write a letter to a significant other who is considering ending the relationship because he/she is mad at the fact that the partner failed to come quickly when his/her car broke down. So my task was to use rhetorical devices—*pathos*, *logos*, *ethos*—to persuade my partner to not end the relationship. I chose *ethos* and *pathos*, and I was able to see the difference between both letters as the letters were discussed in a Socratic circle.

After the exercises with rhetoric, I was able to gain a better understanding of my audience, and that facilitated the revision process. I was able to see how every paper is intended to persuade. Learning that most papers are intended to persuade someone of something helped me write a stronger analysis of visual rhetoric for my second essay.

Freshman English taught me a great deal over the course of the semester. It assures me that there are always new concepts and techniques to learn in order to become a better writer. Revising is a big part of it. Now, I anticipate more development in the next semester of Freshman English.
Guadalupe Castro
Instructor: Nicole Warwick

Preface

Writing isn’t something that you can develop fully; there are always areas for improvement, details to be included, and more knowledge to be gained. My portfolio serves as proof that generating a generous amount of material has given me the opportunity to transform this preface, my traditional paper (“Spark Notes”), and my non-traditional paper (ethnography). Devoting my time to these papers has allowed me to see that the development of my writing depends on my contributions and efforts. Freshman Composition has allowed me to see that I do have strengths as a writer, but I wasn’t aware of these and I let my weaknesses as a writer overwhelm me. I am not stuck in a web of conformity anymore; I am able to break out and cease to underestimate my writing skills.

The focus at the beginning of the semester was education. Through the activities that we did in class, such as the education collage, I was able to come up with a topic proposal for my traditional paper: “Spark Notes.” The Spark Notes website has become problematic due to the resources being used incorrectly. I was able to come up with a solution to this problem with the help of the material that I generated on this topic. The proposal helped me with the development of my paper because it included questions that, when answered, helped me come up with a solution to the controversial usage of Spark Notes. I needed to figure out how Spark Notes affects students, why students use Spark Notes, how students are impacted, and lastly, what can be done about it. Through intertwining my experiences, I came to the conclusion that Spark Notes should be utilized as a guide rather than a resource that students depend on due to lack of motivation. Students should be taught how to utilize Spark Notes as one viable reading strategy.

Mike Bunn, the author of “How to Read Like a Writer,” was a helpful source, and through his experience as a writer, I was able to find an important connection between reading and writing. Bunn came to realize that “the way I was reading—one word at a time—was exactly the same way that the author had written the text. I realized writing is a word-by-word, sentence-by-sentence process.” This is when I finally realized that neither reading nor writing is intimidating: it is a step-by-step process, which led me to conclude that Spark Notes can be implemented as a reading strategy to supplement the main text.
While I was headed to the bus stop with a friend, she told me about her experiences in her classes at the university. When she shared her experience of her Music/Film class, I became fascinated with what she was doing. She was analyzing films through writing, just as I was analyzing written works through writing. I asked her if she had written a Music/Film analysis because I was really interested to see if it was different from the analytical essays that I had written in my previous English classes. To my surprise, her Music/Film analysis was very distinct from an ordinary textual analysis. To start off, the format was different and she had written 6–7 pages full of descriptions having to do with the music of the film and how it related to the film itself. She had to note every time music played and describe exactly what was occurring when the music was playing. It was very intimidating to see how much time and effort she had devoted to developing this analysis.

When the ethnography was assigned in my English Composition class, I knew instantly what I wanted my research to focus on. I interviewed my friend because this allowed me to investigate how she was able to write distinctly different writing assignments, such as a traditional English analysis and her Music/Film analysis. Through the interview, I became informed about how much time she gives herself to write and how she is able to begin the process of writing these papers, whether it is by brainstorming or peer discussion. I decided to transfer all the information that I had gathered for my ethnography on to PowerPoint, as it was a great way to organize all of my research; this is how my ethnography became a non-traditional paper.

In this class, Mahara became a vital tool that allowed me to visually see all the material that I was generating in and out of the classroom. Mahara is an electronic portfolio that allows one to visually organize writing, images, videos, and other media. Using Mahara for the first time was intimidating, but it became easier to use throughout the semester. It was a great way to keep me organized, so I decided to take advantage of this tool as it allowed me to include in my portfolio my preface, traditional paper, and non-traditional paper. I also decided to include most of my in-class activities and the progression exercises that helped me develop the papers included in my portfolio.

My experience in this class was distinct from my English classes in high school. In this class, technology became a prominent and positive component that allowed me to see my progress as a writer. The class wasn’t what I expected it to be, as I thought that we would be perpetually writing essays. My professor mentioned that, instead of writing many essays, our primary focus would be on developing our traditional paper. Surprisingly, this was much
Section 1: Writing about Writing

harder than I expected. Instead of depending on our professor to make the changes necessary for me to produce a well-written traditional paper, for the first time writing depended on me, my effort, and the effort of my classmates, with the guidance of my professor and SI instructor.

Work Cited
Real Reading and Right Writing

Karla Montenegro
Instructor: Sandra Jackson

One Step at a Time

Learning how to annotate while reading was quite confusing at the beginning. I didn’t even know what “annotate” meant. First of all, to annotate means to take side notes as you read. As my professor said once: “Annotating is a way of talking back to the writer.” Even though learning how to annotate was difficult, I practiced and became better at it. I’ve noticed that I’ve become stronger in analyzing essays. I’ve paid close attention to the structure, vocabulary, content, emotion, credibility, purpose, and argument of an essay and to the intended audience. These reading skills have guided me to write stronger essays myself.

My first essay for this class, “Unravel: My Choice, My Future” is where I talk about the obstacles I faced when I came to this country. When I started writing this essay, I knew exactly what to say, but I didn’t know how to begin writing. I had to use details, examples, and citations, make sure I had good grammar and punctuation, and the most difficult of all: have great sentence structure and essay organization. Therefore, this was the most difficult essay for me. Things couldn’t get any more difficult at that point. I heard my professor say, “Please, make sure you use MLA format in your essay,” and my mind went completely out of this world. What the heck is MLA format? I kept asking myself. Then I looked through the pages of our handbook and I noticed that this was the proper way of writing a college essay. I didn’t know there were these rules you had to follow when writing an essay. However, I’ve learned how to properly use MLA format now.

I wrote my last essay, “New Advertising Strategies, Same Bad News,” on the negative aspects of fast-food advertisements. I put a lot of time and effort into this essay; I did research, which I am really good at, made sure my argument was strong enough to have the audience on my side, and most important, gave my essay a lively voice. Even though I enjoyed writing this essay, the

I didn’t know there were these rules you had to follow when writing an essay.
struggle I faced again was with sentence structure and vocabulary. My essay organization improved when I revised my papers carefully. To use quotes, the professor introduced us to what she called the “Quote Sandwich.” First, you introduce the quote, which would be the top slice of bread. Second, you insert the quote, which would be the sandwich’s ingredients. Lastly, you discuss the quote, which would be the bottom slice of bread. She taught us that quotes are supposed to support our points in the essay.

One of the New Voices essays that I enjoyed reading was Ying Lin’s, “Language and Me.” I felt that I could relate to her because she also had a hard time learning a new language. On the other hand, the essay that I disagreed with was “Creative Writing” by Lillian Tran. In her essay, she says adults would have a better imagination in writing if they thought as if they were kids again. Realistically speaking, at some point we all have to grow up and make tough decisions in life. We can’t be stuck as kids forever.

Long Way to Go

English is one of the most difficult subjects for me. I know that I still have time to improve my sentence structure and vocabulary. I have to learn how to properly explain what I want to say, so that the audience understands, and this is something I need to work on. To improve my sentence structure, I ask my siblings to read my essays to see if they understand what I am trying to say, and I seek for ways to make the sentences better. When it comes to vocabulary, I try not to use those fancy, confusing words. When it comes to reading, one of the things I have to improve on is how to make an outline of the reading. It’s been difficult for me to grasp the main idea of the text and examine the supporting details. I need to look carefully at the text and make sure I understand it.

To improve my reading and writing skills, I have to put in more time and effort. For me, learning is not only a matter of understanding and getting better, but it’s also a matter of growing as an individual. That’s why learning will never stop.
Reflecting on the Semester

Leslie Martinez
Instructor: Nina Ahn

Creating the Enemy
-
What are the assorted (literal and implied) images? How are bodies manipulated on this image and what is the effect of this manipulation?

First day of school: somewhere along the road...

I was so excited!

The professor would use powerpoints to present her ideas, because it made the class easier to understand. Out of this proposition, we were supposed to write an essay about visual rhetoric and find three sources online. So I headed to the Oxnard Library.

The library's floor is discourage...

Why do I wait until the last minute to do things?

This will be done, just don't do this.

Sometimes, you get assigned a project that you don't know how to complete...

I feel so strong. It's very powerful after seeing others' work. I was impressed that all of our ideas and their power.

REFLECTING ON THE SEMESTER
Section 1: Writing about Writing

- Okay, this time no more procrastination. I won't leave this assignment until last minute and actually get my eyes rest.

- Hmm... how can I apply everything I learned and all the feedback to create a better essay...
  *thinks, thinks...

- A few hours later...
  - YESSSS!!! I'm finally done :D

*Seconds later...

- Didn't even make it to the bed.

*Wakes up scared

- Did I actually finish my essay on time???
  - Feels like I haven't but I know I did... DID

- Off to school to print because I get 20 sheets of fine paper per day at the LRC. Lucky me!

- Turtle noise.

Boo! I hate waiting in line for printing especially since I only have fifteen minutes to get to class...

- So do I.

- Max, waiting in line too!

- Finally made it to class on time!

- Results are here!!!
  - was impressed by the confidence and passion which you presented this argument your thesis was

clear and your paragraphs were engaging. At times your essay failed to engage deeply enough with your evidence therefore your analysis was sometimes less strong than it could have been, but overall it was a strong essay.

YAY! Now I can sleep.
Assignments

What Does the Writer Say?
1. Look back at Deisy Arevalo’s “Freshman Quarterly” and Karla Montenegro’s “Real Reading and Right Writing.” Respond to the following:
   a. Analyze Arevalo’s poem “Traversable Wormhole,” found in “Freshman Quarterly.” What connections does she make about creativity and structure?
   b. What did Montenegro learn about reading and writing?
2. In “The Prize,” Alejandra Mendoza Diaz writes about “bending letters.” What does she mean, in relation to her “private” versus “public” writing?

What Do You Say?
3. In Leslie Martinez’s comic “Reflecting on the Semester,” did you relate to the author’s procrastination struggle? Describe any similar experiences you or someone you know may have had with procrastination.
4. In “Preface,” Guadalupe Castro states that she let her “weaknesses as a writer” overwhelm her and hinder her writing process, causing her to ignore her strengths. As a writer, why do you think it is important to acknowledge your strengths and weaknesses?

Writing Exercises
5. For this exercise, write a 1–2 page letter to a classmate discussing your strengths and weaknesses as a reader and writer.
   What are the main obstacles you face when you sit down to read or write? Despite your weaknesses, what would you like to achieve in your reading and/or writing? Declare a goal for your reading and writing that you’d like to reach by the end of the semester.

6. Work with a classmate to develop a timeline with strategic steps that will help you achieve your reading and writing goals for the semester.

7. For this exercise, write a 2–3 page creative piece that uses texts and images to illustrate your experiences with writing.
   Create a poem, comic, story, or mixed media project about your writing process that employs visual rhetoric. Think about how your choice of genre will impact your writing style.

8. At the end of the semester, re-visit your creative text and reflect on how your writing process has changed.
Section 2: Exploring Literacy

Quick Write:
What does it mean to be literate? What factors have helped or hindered you on your path toward literacy?
Notes, Responses, & Ideas
Joyce Vondee Amankwah
Instructor: Janet Cross

Mama Sweet

Discrimination against the girl child: the kitchen is where she belongs. She must learn to become a kitchen literate in order to have a good husband. Women are taught to treasure the kitchen and all activities thereof. In Akosombo, where I come from in Africa, the “white-man’s literacy” was only for the boys, and with the conviction that men are bread-winners and women are homemakers, no poor or middle-class family bothered to educate their girl-children. The people of Akosombo viewed female literacy as a calamity. Women who became literates, according to my people, turned out to be arrogant and very ill mannered. Educating a girl was taboo and the rich who educated their daughters were always ridiculed and seen as social misfits.

However, Ama Ansah, a poor, single parent who lived as a humble member of this ignorant Akosombo community, realized there was a big difference between the rich and the brain-washed poor and middle classes in society. She saw how the rich became richer and the poor became poorer. After a thorough search for answers, her curiosity showed her how illiteracy curtailed all chances of the poor to enjoy success and prosperity. She knew there was a deeper reason why the rich educated their daughters. She decided to experiment and find the reason, using me as her specimen.

For a living, my poor Mama babysat two kids of the richest man in my neighborhood. Mama spoke a typical English vernacular and was proud she could at least write an application letter for a job. Her ability to write a little was actually what got her the babysitting job in the rich community in Akosombo. She saw the beauty of literacy when she started working as a nanny to the kids of Mr. Sammy, the richest man in Akosombo. She admired the potency and confidence the kids exhibited. Mama saw how belittled I felt whenever I followed her to her babysitting job because I could not speak English with Tina and Kevin. She could see the gap between literacy and illiteracy and yearned to make the future of her Princess better. After comparing those rich kids to me, she knew I was ignorant, lost, and needed help. Fear canopied her thoughts as she envisioned me turning out like her, a semi-illiterate babysitter. The insecurity of my future aroused her desire and triggered her need to have me, her only daughter, become literate.
Mama Sweet

Although she had the drive to educate me, there was no way she could afford the 500,000 cedis in fees demanded by the schools. She did not have money to fix our leaking straw roof, never mind to pay for my tuition. We spent each night saying a prayer to keep the rain away. Anytime it rained, we left our house for the nearest bus station to spend the night because the room flooded as a result of the damaged old roofing. Should she have any money, the best expenditure would be to buy a new roof for our little mud house.

Nevertheless, Mama developed an idea to school me in the confines of our humble abode, where we laid our heads to slumber after the ups and downs of the day. To start, she wrote down the alphabet and led me to pronounce English words like “go, come, sit, stand,” and many others. I memorized the words and the alphabet until they became part of my being. I studied new words each day and most of them had a rhythm that made me ride along with my Mama as a good student. She taught me songs related to the parts of the human body so that I could memorize them easily. We moved on to my surroundings. I was taught the names of everything I could lay my eyes on. I spent each day studying and writing new words.

Weeks followed days, and the months fled so fast, leaving me with words I never knew before. I could read sentences with the sound of nervousness tickling my voice. I could also write and describe myself in English, my “official” language. The studies were getting interesting, and I wanted more and more of the spring of literacy to flow through me. I could not wait to speak this official language of my country with Tina and Kevin. They were the rulers my Mama and I used to measure my literacy height. I could write and read a few paragraphs now, with my accent making every word sound like tongues, the spiritual language.

I became extra motivated to study more as I got better each passing day. Mama spent every little coin she earned to buy me story books. I read and wrote down summaries of every book in a journal she got me. Even though her job did not pay much, she enjoyed the fact that she could get access to the kids’ homework and copy it in her haphazard handwriting for me to study when she got home. I also read many of Tina and Kevin’s text books and discussed the content with them whenever I had the opportunity to follow my Mama to work.

My strength and confidence grew as I began rubbing shoulders with the rich kids. I was actually on the same page with them, or even better. They had huge TVs in their bedrooms which they watched while going to sleep. In my case, we had no TV, so my Mama made me read until sleep carried me away to my dream land, where I saw myself reading and writing about everything I read.
I became a secretary who kept notes of our daily activities and read the notes to Mama at the end of each day. At the end of every month, I wrote a summary of how the month had been spent, based on my daily notes. In order to enrich my vocabulary, I read an old King James Bible, passed on to my Mama by my grandpa. Most of the chapters were allegorical and difficult to understand. However, I was just glad I could pronounce each word confidently, without blabbing.

I spoke English with my Mama and people who heard us ridiculed her for her insanity in copying the rich. They whispered to each other: “Look at how this poor woman is wasting her precious meager income to enroll that little girl in school.” They had no idea I had never stepped foot into a classroom. Anytime they ridiculed her, she became more empowered and I grew stronger and stronger in literacy. Campaigns about how unfruitful the girl child becomes with literacy knocked on her door daily. She refuted them tirelessly, turning deaf ears to them.

Anytime I did very well in narrating a story I had read, she took me along with her to work (babysitting), where I had the opportunity to watch movies with the kids. I always wrote summaries of every single movie I watched with Tina and Kevin. I found writing summaries of movies very interesting, and before I knew it, I could write short stories of my own. Mama bought me a big notebook and asked me to write everything I thought about life in the notebook. At the stroke of my pen, I was inspired to write about how I became literate. I wrote down everything my Mama had gone through to educate me. I read the story to her and she listened with rapt attention, uncontrollable tears flowing through her tired eyes. I knew those tears were tears of joy so I gave her a warm hug and celebrated tearfully with her. She later advised me to read the story to Tina, the older of the two rich kids she babysat. Tina also had tears in her eyes while I read my literacy narrative to her.

Tina liked my story very much and arranged for me to read the story in her eleventh-grade class. Miss Medusa, her American teacher, was amazed at the fact that my Mama, a virtual illiterate, could turn me into a literate. She invited my Mama over to the school, and introduced her to an NGO named Save Our Children, which could help me go to school without paying a dime. It sounded quite impossible to Mama, but she said, “There is no harm in trying,” in her broken English.
We woke up early the following Monday and set out to Kumasi for the head office of Save Our Children. After a series of interviews and filing several documents, Mama was handed a letter declaring my approval to go to school for free. The letter stated, “The above named recipient of this scholarship is eligible to go to school without paying fees from elementary to the college level in any part of the world.” The joy brought to us by the content of the letter left my Mama and me in tears on our journey back from Kumasi to Akosombo. Oh, what a wonder, that the daughter of a tattered penury could go to school with free tuition and free books.

I passed my entrance exams after taking my scholarship letter to Providence International School. I was enrolled in eleventh grade and Miss Medusa was my first teacher. She became my mentor and gave me all the support I needed to graduate as the best student in the school. I worked very hard, leaving no stone unturned. I made very good use of the school’s library and joined the Writers’ and Debaters’ Clubs on campus to enrich my writing and debating skills. Sooner than I realized, I finished writing my last paper in high school and graduation arrived.

On the day of my graduation, Miss Medusa introduced me to Mr. Gerald Anderson, an American script writer, who was interested in my story and was willing to buy the story for a movie. This was the greatest gift I could receive on my graduation day. A passport to riches!

My Mama and I made millions of cedis from selling our little story to Mr. Anderson. We moved from grass to grace and the first thing we did after receiving the check was to buy a two-bedroom house and let go of our precious little leaking mud house.

My 4.0 GPA after high school earned me another scholarship from Providence International School to study abroad. Given five schools to choose from, I settled for California State University, Northridge, Miss Medusa’s alma mater. I am currently a freshman here at CSUN, majoring in accounting. I basically get paid for going to school; I am on two scholarships, one for the pocket and the other for school. I walk on the CSUN campus each day, carrying the warm spirit of my poor Mama in my heart in everything I do. I know one day, I will graduate with honors to fulfill the dream she had for me many years ago.

The people of Akosombo have had a change of mind concerning girl-child education, due to my story. The Save Our Children NGO, in collaboration with the chief of Akosombo, has built schools in my community just to educate girl children, all because of what a woman named Ama Ansah did for her only daughter.
Mama made it all possible. Today, I am like a celebrity in Africa; everyone who has heard my story asks for my autograph when they see me. I stand with shoulders high and head lifted up and say I am literate. However, literacy is a lifelong activity and I know I have many potholes that I need to work on here at CSUN.

Oh, Mama Sweet. She took me along the way of literacy and she still teaches me how to read and write in the confines of our luxurious home in Africa. Never underestimate what literacy can do. I heard it, I saw it, and I felt it. Literacy breaks boundaries. Thank you, Mama Sweet.
In my earlier years, I always felt embarrassed about my culture...

RITA SAADE
Instructor: Nina Ahn

HABIBI

There was a day in my fourth-grade year that my mother came to school with lunch for me. I was so excited until I saw that she had brought me Lebanese food. “Hi, habibi,” she said. “I brought you a labne sandwich.” Habibi in Arabic means “my love” and labne is a type of Middle-Eastern cheese. It was a typical Lebanese sandwich. I felt so embarrassed. I wished she had brought me a turkey sandwich just like all my other friends had. Her English, spoken with an accent, also made me upset because I wished she could speak like my friends’ parents did. I felt like the writer Amy Tan when she said that “when I was growing up, my mother’s ‘limited’ English limited my perception of her. I was ashamed of her English. I believed that her English reflected the quality of what she had to say” (564). I felt the same. I thought because my mother spoke this way, it meant we were below others. Going through my earlier years in school, I never felt the need to try hard and my lowest grades happened to be in reading and comprehension.

I did not have confidence in myself because, seeing my family and how their English was not perfect, I felt I could not do well. In middle school, I went downhill and did not bother trying at all. I remember my mother telling me: “Do not do anything without putting your all into it.” That always stuck with me, but at that age I never paid much attention to it. I continued struggling in school, but never felt I could do better. During my early teenage years, as a fourteen-year-old with a mind of her own, I used to bicker with my mother. We argued when she could not understand me because I used more complex words, or when she asked about something that seemed so simple to me and I would get mad. I used to think, “Why can she not understand this? It is so simple. Everyone gets it.” It seemed so strange to me that I could understand things differently than her, but it did not mean she was wrong or illiterate. Little did I know that, in just a couple of years, I would be asking her to read my essays and help me with homework that I did not understand.

One night, during my eighth-grade year, my family was sitting in our living room, telling stories about how hard it had been for them when they first came to the U.S. My mom said, “I used to go to my English class and I tried so
hard that eventually I would find mistakes the teacher made and correct her.”
Once I heard that, my way of thinking completely changed. I had never known
the history behind my family and the struggle they had been through to learn
English. Hearing her tell that story, I felt as if I was not trying hard enough in
school and I was using my family as an excuse. I began to think to myself that
if my family, who had come to the U.S. knowing no English, was able to do
well, then why couldn’t I?

That sparked a drive in me to succeed. Seeing my grades plummet,
and knowing I was capable of much more, made me get my head together.
I started to try harder and looked to my mom as my inspiration. This was a
major turning point in my literacy journey. In my earlier years, I had always
felt embarrassed about my culture, but now it was motivating me to do better.
Speaking to my mother in Arabic or English and her answering me in her ac-
cent has become normal and I no longer feel that the way she speaks is wrong.
Amy Tan talked about how she felt her mother’s English shaped her. She ex-
plained, “But to me, my mother’s English is perfectly clear, perfectly natural.
It’s my mother tongue. Her language, as I hear it, is vivid, direct, full of ob-
servation and imagery. That was the language that helped me shape the way
I saw things, expressed things, made sense of the world” (566). At this point
in my life I felt the same as Tan about how the way my mother spoke shaped
me; it was my mother tongue as well. The way I looked at others and the way I
looked at myself and my culture changed. People with accents made me more
interested in them and how unique they were. I was no longer ashamed of my
culture and proudly told others that I was Lebanese and I spoke Arabic to my
family around my friends.

In the middle of my junior year, I had to write and present a speech
on Shakespeare and the Shakespearian era for English class. It was in proper
English and I had my mom read it over. She said it was good but it was hard for
her to understand all the words. Regardless, she understood the point. It was
then that I realized the different ways I communicate with people. The way I
talk to my family is different from the way I talk with my friends or at school.
At home, I incorporate Arabic with English, use easier words, and sometimes
speak only Arabic. Also, I recognize that even though my mother cannot un-
derstand every word I say, the words are still able to reach her. She is able to
understand the gist. That made me fascinated by the ways people comprehend
each other, as well as more open minded about how others may speak differ-
ently but are still much like everyone else. My idea of literacy has changed
over the years. I used to think if someone did not speak perfect English, it was
a problem.
In high school, my grades went up drastically, and for once, I enjoyed reading and did well in my English classes. I would usually get Bs on my essays and really strived to get an A. My mother told me to keep trying. One day during my senior year, for an in-class essay, I finally earned my A. I felt a sense of accomplishment that I could produce an A paper in forty-five minutes. That same year I went on a four-day retreat, called Kairos, with my classmates. On the second night, the leaders surprised us, saying that our parents had written us letters and my principal was going to read them out to everyone. As my principal was reading the letters, I could tell some parents had written letters very formally, using perfect English, and others had not. This did not make the letters any less meaningful to their children or the audience listening. When my letter came up and was read out loud, I felt as if my mother was there reciting it. The English was not as perfect as others but seeing that she had taken the time to write a letter for me about the way she felt, made me feel so at ease. She told me that she would always support me in everything I do. Also, that she was proud of my success and the person I am. That letter deeply touched me and gave me confidence in myself.

Standing up at my graduation, looking down to see my parents with big smiles on their faces, I felt accomplished. I knew that despite the resentment I had towards my culture and language in my past, I could now say I was proud to be me. I was proud to come from my culture. Because of my family, I received my high-school diploma and was ready for the road ahead. The struggle they had to face coming to the U.S. as foreigners inspired me to do well, just as they had done. Once the ceremony was over, I went to find my family. My parents came up to me, gave me big hugs and kisses, and said, “We are so proud of you, habibi.” That meant everything in the world.

Work Cited
Arabic began to feel like a “private language”
that I could use only at home...

Mashalle Jasem
Instructor: Sandra Jackson

WE’RE NOT IN ARABIA ANYMORE

I’ve always been the kind of person who has had her whole life put together. I had my own schedule, my own friends, and I knew every part of the city I lived in. I left my comfort zone the second that I graduated from high school. I grew up in the Middle East—Saudi Arabia, to be more specific. When I graduated, I knew I wanted to follow both my parents’ footsteps and study in the United States. I didn’t want to stay back home. However, living in the United States, surrounded by Americans, and adjusting to a whole new culture was hard.

It was very hard for me to adjust to speaking only in English, the “public” language and the language everyone around me understood. I grew up in the Middle East where everyone speaks Arabic. At first, in the United States, it was hard for me not to speak the Arabic words that I was used to saying all the time, such as yallah for “let’s go,” or bas for “but.” I used to throw these words in a lot and no one would understand. Arabic began to feel like a “private language” that I could use only at home or with my family and not in America.

When we were assigned to read the essay, “Public and Private Language,” by Richard Rodriguez, I felt as if I was the author myself because I could completely relate to everything he wrote. Unlike Rodriguez, I knew how to speak English because I had studied in an American school in Saudi my whole life. However, it was hard adjusting to a new environment and being with people with different cultural backgrounds and ideas. When Rodriguez was forced to speak English, he was out of his comfort zone and very uncomfortable, which was exactly how I felt when I first moved to America.

Rodriguez and I both have the same qualities. We both beat the odds and worked hard to fit in and learn the English language and culture like native-born Americans. It was very hard, but it was well worth it. However, I lost the sense of my family’s closeness, like Rodriguez did. He lost that feeling of union and closeness because his whole family would speak Spanish.

In New Voices, I read an interesting essay by Ying Lin titled, “Language and Me.” Lin describes how many people would make fun of her name because it was a Chinese name and not a neutral name like “Mark Watson,” for
We’re Not in Arabia Anymore

example. Lin explains how your name can be significant and impact your future; your name is a representation of who you are. Lin explains how a person should embrace his or her culture and that it is much better to stand out than be part of the crowd. Like Lin, I have a very foreign name that is completely different from other names in the United States and I have also encountered discrimination for that.

When I was young, I was more upfront and direct about how I felt. Sadly, I am not that person anymore. The essay “Creative Writing,” by Lilian Tran, made me realize that. As we all progress from young infants to children to teenagers, we are being taught to grow up and be more mature. What is the meaning of maturity? It is an image you have in your head of what society thinks you should be. As young children, we are our true selves. Our imaginations and our young bodies are full of energy and we constantly ask questions and learn about everything around us. What makes us so brilliant as children is the fact that we honestly don’t care about anyone else’s opinions and just live our lives. Kids celebrate who they are and embrace it. Adults should learn from kids.

Coming to America is one of the best decisions I have ever made because I am learning so much about my surroundings and the people who live in the huge city of Los Angeles. I have learned how to embrace my individuality and my culture even more than I would have if I were still in Saudi Arabia. Being foreign and young has allowed me to learn about all these differences that I am not accustomed to.

Works Cited


I have always been a little ashamed that I am not fluent in Spanish like my parents and the rest of my family.

**Corazon Montanio**
Instructor: Mandy Macklin

**Mexicali**

Every year my high school, Village Christian, takes a trip down to Mexicali during Easter Break to help out churches and to teach children about the word of God. I am Mexican American and can speak a little Spanish but not enough to carry on a conversation. This was a problem for me because everyone who came back from Mexicali in previous years would brag about how they had connected with the children there. Year after year, I would hear testimonies from my classmates on how their lives had been changed because of the kids. I wanted to experience these life-changing relationships.

While in Mexicali, I helped out at Agua Viva Church. I was on the music team, which meant that three other people and I would lead the kids in Spanish worship songs. After our performance, the kids would be dismissed and go over to the arts-and-crafts team. During that time, the music team would hang out in the church on the pews. One afternoon, after worship was over, all the kids ran over to arts and crafts except for one boy. I walked over to him and asked him what his name was. “Me llamo Manuel,” he said. “My name is Manuel.” I shook his hand, smiled, and introduced myself.

“Me puedes cantar una cancion?” he asked. “Can you sing me a song?”

I hate being put on the spot to sing so I politely declined.

“Adele? Tu saves la cantante Adele? Adele?”

I had no clue what he was saying to me. I panicked and called over a translator. But before the translator could reach me, Manuel began to sing Adele’s “Rolling in the Deep.” He was singing in English! I sat there mesmerized at how well he was singing in English. I joined in and we began to have a little jam session. We ended up singing four Adele songs together, all in English. He also taught me the chorus to one of his favorite Spanish songs.

Singing with Manuel was incredible; with just one song we instantly made a connection. In that moment of singing with him, it did not matter that I did not know how to talk to him in Spanish, or that he could not ask me a question in English. What mattered was how quick and easy it was to relate to
Mexicali

him over something as simple as music and lyrics. We came from two completely different worlds but were able to share the same common interest, and that was mind blowing to me. Even though Adele’s song was about a bad break up and Manuel and I had never gone through one, it did not matter because we shared a bond over Adele’s hit song and nothing in the world could replace that moment. In the essay “Language and Me,” by Ling Yin, she starts off by writing, “In the world of language, everyone is different but equal.” I now realize just how true that statement is.

During my last few days in Mexicali, I was introduced to a young man named Eduardo; he was thirteen years old and could speak very little English. I explained to him that I was not very good at speaking Spanish. He then said to me, “You teach English, I teach Spanish.” He started pointing at different things and saying what they were in Spanish: “Iglesia, columpio, bola…” (“Church, swing set, ball”). Touched by his sweet gesture, I went along with his Spanish lesson. I returned the favor by teaching him a few conversational phrases and we ended up learning a lot from each other. Eduardo and I would teach each other every day for ten to fifteen minutes, and by the end of the week, we had improved our skills in English and in Spanish. I have always been a little ashamed that I am not fluent in Spanish like my parents and the rest of my family. Sometimes they teased me about not knowing Spanish and jokingly called me “gringa,” which basically means “white girl.” My family also got mad at me for not being motivated to learn how to speak Spanish. I did not really care until going down to Mexicali and meeting Eduardo.

Through broken English and Spanish, Eduardo and I were able to learn from each other. Even though we were limited by what we could say, we could still communicate and help each other out. We were both eager to teach one another, which made learning the language more interesting and fun. It was very rewarding to know that I could help someone who was so enthusiastic to learn. Not only did Eduardo teach me Spanish, he also reminded me of how proud I am to be a Latina. I know that I am very Americanized but that does in no way mean that I do not acknowledge my Mexican roots. In the essay, “Dona Aída, With Your Permission,” Julia Alvarez talks about how she is Dominican-American and she does not favor one side over the other. She writes that even though she does not speak her native language, it does not make her less of a Dominican. This is exactly what I felt when I read her essay. I do not want to be called an American or a Mexican, because I am both. Just like Julia, I am a mixed-breed and proud of it. She even goes on to write how being a part of two different cultures makes her a better writer. Being a Mexican-American can give me new ways of reading, writing, and analyzing essays. I know now that I can read or write from not one, but two different perspectives, which can be very beneficial.
My week in Mexicali was a life-changing experience. I embraced my Mexican heritage, but most importantly, I learned how powerful and impactful language can be. Often, there are language barriers that stand in the way of building relationships. Fortunately, using simple words in different languages can beat down those barriers and can start something amazing. In Mexicali, I built two wonderful relationships with two very special boys with a little Spanish and English and a few song lyrics. When I said good-bye to Eduardo, he gave me a big hug and a hand-made bracelet. He looked up at me with his big brown eyes and said, “Rí eres mi hermana en Cristo,” which means, “You are my sister in Christ.” Those words will be in my heart for the rest of my life and I hope to one day go back to Mexicali and find those two boys again. I have so much more to learn from them.

Works Cited
Tell Me a Story

Andrew Creme
Instructor: Melissa Filbeck

Tell Me a Story

How many people have had their parents, grandparents, or older siblings read them bedtime stories like The Little Engine That Could, and Pinocchio? Most people probably have, but not me. When I was younger, I never saw my grandfather that much, but I called him once a week to talk and tell him how my week went. At the end of the conversation, he would always say, “Tell me a story.” My first response was always, “I don’t have a story to tell. Nothing happened today.” He replied, “Make one up; just tell me a story.” So I did. I remember my first few stories were short, with very little plot. But week after week, he would add to that one simple and basic sentence; he would tell me to add more characters and try to create a plot. For a five-year-old it was hard enough understanding the language, and yet my grandfather wanted me to create a whole story and explain each character. We kept this up all the way until I was thirteen, when he passed away. I remember at his funeral I did not speak, but as we were burying him, I silently told him one more “story” that I created on the spot. I learned a lot of my creativity from talking with my grandfather and I learned the basic structure of a story from him.

I remember when my grandfather was still alive and I was in seventh grade and had a writing assignment, which was a narrative. We had to tell a story about a time when we felt accomplished or had succeeded in something. I sat at my computer, blank, not understanding how to start this paper, when I decided to call my grandfather for advice. He just laughed a little and said, “Why don’t you just tell me a story?” So I did, but this time I wrote down everything I told him, and when I was done, I had written a page and a half of the paper, which for me at the time was a huge accomplishment. I ended up getting a passing grade on the assignment.

After my grandfather passed away, my mom told me he actually had known eight different languages: German, English, Romanian, Italian, Yiddish, Hebrew, Spanish, and French. It astonished me when I found out that English had not been his first language. His first language was actually German, and
he had learned English by watching movies and television, mainly cowboy shows. My mom told me that for the first couple of years he spoke like a cowboy and it wasn’t until he met his wife that he realized he was talking strangely. I was amazed that he had been able to help me out so much in English, since English wasn’t even his first language.

I am extremely fortunate to have been able to learn just a little of what my grandfather knew. I still sometimes pretend to talk to him when I am feeling writer’s block and I sit there and just “tell him a story” and it always helps me out. Even while writing this essay, when I felt my mind going blank, I would pause and “tell him a story” and it always helped. Towards the end of his life, I don’t think he knew what he was doing when he asked me to tell him a story. I think it was just a way to continue the conversation so it wouldn’t end. I would love to use this technique of reverse story telling on my kids or grandkids because I know how much it helped me with English, and I would love to help my kids the way he helped me.
The Runaway Bunny

Now the reading world felt the same as reality; nowhere seemed safe or perfect.

Natalie Santoyo
Instructor: Nina Ahn

The Runaway Bunny

It is raining outside. Class starts at seven in the morning so I am sitting in class a little early, watching the rain rhythmically hit the window. For some reason, “story time” is written on today’s agenda. I roll my eyes. My high-school English teacher is crazy, so who knows what the next hour will bring. The bell rings and cold, damp students walk in, shaking off their umbrellas. Girls make faces as they discover the papers in their binders are wet and guys shake out their hair. It is time for class to start. We all curiously turn our attention to the teacher. She’s a cute little old lady in her late fifties, about as tall as me and skinny as a twig. Her silver eye liner complements the shine of her short black hair underneath the florescent ceiling lights. She walks over to her shelf and picks up a small rectangular book. I smile because I recognize the cover from when I was a child. It is light blue; there is a picture of long, slanting stems of grass being blown to the right by an imaginary wind. In the left corner, there are two little white bunnies. She begins to read us a children’s story. Her voice begins to change pitch, slowing down then speeding up. Her narration of the book is impeccable—so sweet and serene. I love the pictures; the class giggles when the bunny turns into a bird and when it suddenly becomes a funny looking sail boat on the ocean. I haven’t picked up this book since I was a little girl.

One of the earliest memories I have of books is picking up Harry Potter. There is an image in my head that has stayed with me throughout the years. The book was brand new, with a price tag on it and everything. The paper cover felt like a crisp, new dollar bill. I also remember it smelling nice. (I remember sticking my nose up at old books because, being eight, I thought they smelled like paper farts.) My small hands looked even smaller holding the book as it sat in my lap and my hands gripped the edges. Curiosity got the best of me and I finished that book in five days.
For some odd reason, I picked books by the way they felt; neither the picture nor the content made an impact. My imagination began to grow as I began to quickly absorb different stories. Reading allowed me to expand my horizons throughout my childhood. I began to form my own ideas and think differently at a very young age. Reading books allowed me to tune out the physical world, as I listened to the words that created delicate, captivating stories in my head.

I remember walking down the street and sitting on a curb a few feet from an old sickly-yellow fire hydrant whenever I heard my parents start to fight. I would read for hours; some days I was out there till sunset, unaware that I had sat for hours, completely ignoring those pesky pin-head sized bugs that annoyingly flew for my ears and nose. I would lose myself in these stories because they were better than reality. Reading taught me to take a step back and think. I began to form my own ideas because of reading. I formed my own morals and values. I loved searching for the secret message behind everything an author poured onto the page; it was like looking for treasure or finding a message in a bottle. I enjoyed reading, then sitting in silence, thinking about the words and the context. As I got older, the stories got more complex and began to have more meaning. *Lord of the Flies* was a book I read over and over.

The last book I read in my free time was *My Sister’s Keeper*. I remember crying. My hands were shaking as my tears fell onto the page. Who knew that books could break you? After that, I didn’t pick up a book willingly for years. Reading had immersed me in a fictional world. All those years it had been my escape from a broken, imperfect world. Now the reading world felt the same as reality; nowhere seemed safe or perfect. I lost my way. Stuck in a cold, numbing fog, I hid from reality and everyone or anything that tried to bring it back to me. I got involved with the wrong crowd and did the opposite of what my parents told me. The fighting at home got worse. I had pretty much shut out my family because they had done the same to me. I rarely ever read. The only time I did was when I was forced to read something for school. I missed reading but for some reason couldn’t find the courage to get back into it. I felt ashamed that I had left something I loved too suddenly, but I was too tired emotionally and mentally to put any effort into reading. When I stopped reading, what I found important in life seemed to perch on the highest mountains. And then I heard a voice in my head, telling a story about a little bunny that ran away.

It is now raining harder. The drops hit the window in an almost mad hum of tribal drumming, beating faster and faster. My classmates have long, pleasant grins on their faces because the bunny has stopped trying to run
The Runaway Bunny

away. He returns to his mother, a little bunny leaping into mother’s warm, open arms. The embrace makes the class say “aww.” That is when I realize that I had followed the little bunny and I too had run away. A children’s book has brought me back to reality.

The message of the book couldn’t have been more relevant to my problems. I had lost hope, faith, and myself. This children’s book helped me understand an important message in life. No matter where you are, where you go, or where you hide, hope will always find you, and faith will always seek your heart. When times get tough, I close my eyes and let my mind escape. I reread the book in my head, imagining the vivid pictures of a tiny courageous bunny.
Who knew that words on a piece of paper could make your heart beat so fast and make your palms sweat?

Christina Marie Zikry
Instructor: Nina Ahn

**Lost in the Words**

Literature, reading, writing. It has been a love/hate relationship, a rollercoaster with ups and downs. Sitting on the couch as a young child with my mother and a book used to be the best part of my day. Looking at the pictures and listening to the voices and stories were great, until I had to start reading them for myself. I no longer looked forward to sitting on that couch with my mother every night. Something that was once a pleasure turned into a fear.

Throughout my literacy journey, I was faced with challenges. As I started to struggle, my mother put me on “Hooked on Phonics.” Feeling that I was inferior to everyone else, I resisted the help of a program. I wanted to learn easily, like everyone else. I told myself I didn’t need the help of a program to read. As time went on, the program proved me wrong and my reading articulation and speed improved greatly. My mother was so proud of her decision to put me on the program and couldn’t stop bragging about it to others. I was so embarrassed; none of the other kids seemed to need any help. I didn’t want to be a special case.

I started improving and becoming a faster reader, but I still wasn’t confident. It came time for our class to read chapter books. We anxiously walked into the school library to pick our first book from a list given to us by our teacher. I looked down the list for the most interesting titles. I found a book with a cartoonish girl and her friends on the cover. I tried to figure out what this story could be about from the picture on the front cover. I looked inside the book and found the table of contents. My eyes widened as I discovered that there were ten chapters. How could I possibly read ten chapters? I told myself, “This will take forever to finish.” I got home and began reading anxiously. Soon, I found myself on the page titled “Chapter Two.” I had done it! I had finished one whole chapter of the book and discovered that it wasn’t so hard after all. When I finally finished the book, I had the biggest feeling of accomplishment in my life so far. I was a big girl who could read a whole book with chapters. I was proud and surprised.
Lost in the Words

The books we were assigned in school didn’t interest me that much. Reading became a chore that I had to do, until I found a book about a dog called *Shiloh*, by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor. It was the first book I lost myself in, the first book that I couldn’t stop reading, and that left me wondering what would happen in the next chapter. I had always wanted a dog and this was my escape. I had discovered the magic of reading. I could lose myself in a different world and forget that I was sitting on a couch in my living room, reading a book. After this discovery, I started buying books that actually interested me rather than the ones I was assigned to read in school.

At age ten, I bought a book called *Soul Surfer* by Bethany Hamilton. The cover featured a girl with one arm and a surfboard with a shark bite. Surfing had always been a dream of mine and as I started reading, I fell more and more in love with Bethany and her story. I found that we had so many common interests, including sharing the same faith. After school, I couldn’t wait to get home to start reading the book. Who knew that words on a piece of paper could make your heart beat so fast and make your palms sweat? It wasn’t long before I found myself at the end of the book, shocked. I couldn’t believe it. Had I really read this fifteen-chapter, 211-page book in just one day? It was then I realized that I had been underestimating my reading abilities.

In high school, we learned about different genres and types of writing. We learned about poetry and I instantly became hooked. Poetry was a way of writing all the things my mouth couldn’t speak. I found myself lying in bed, not being able to sleep, pulling out my notebook and writing poems. I could stay up for hours writing. Once I started, all the thoughts would come to me and I had to write them all down. I would look back to see how I could improve a line. It was like a game. One line would play off another line and it would keep going. I even wrote poems on my computer with the help of synonyms and antonyms. The computer made it easier to find words that rhymed and meshed well together. It was almost like writing a song without the music.

Literacy and literature have always had their ups and downs for me, from reading struggles to writing blocks, from non-stop reading to passionate rambling. It has been quite the journey. There were long nights when I couldn’t understand and there were also long nights when I couldn’t stop understanding. At first I was lost in the words I couldn’t understand, and then I lost myself in the words, absorbed in the story.
What Does the Writer Say?
1. In “Mama Sweet,” what does Joyce Vondee Amankwah mean when she says “kitchen literacy” and “female literacy”? Furthermore, in what sense does she mean the word “literacy”?

2. How do Joyce Vondee Amankwah and Rita Saade, the writers of “Mama Sweet” and “Habibi” describe their mothers? In what ways are they portrayed similarly? In what ways are they portrayed differently?

What Do You Say?
3. In both Christina Marie Zikry’s “Lost in the Words” and Natalie Santoyo’s “The Runaway Bunny,” the act of reading becomes for them a form of escape. Do you agree that reading is an effective means of escaping? Why or why not? What other ways do you use to escape? How do they compare to the act of reading?

4. In “Mexicali,” Corazon Montanio discusses how she bonded with two children despite the language barrier that divided them. How important do you think verbal communication is in forming connections? Can you think of any connections you have made that did not rely on words?

Writing Exercises
5. For this exercise, write a 1–2 page dialogue between Mashalle Jasem, author of “We’re Not in Arabia Anymore,” and Rita Saade, author of “Habibi.”

The purpose of this dialogue is to elaborate on the connections that you see between these two essays. Consider the shared theme of language in the essays and how language functions in both public and private spaces. Also consider how the writers’ experiences with language affect their identities.

6. For this exercise, write a 1–2 page letter to a close friend or family member in which you discuss Andrew Creme’s “Tell Me a Story.”

Creme explains that when he experiences writer’s block, he imagines he is writing to his grandfather and this helps him to release his ideas. Picturing your audience is an excellent writing strategy. Imagine someone to whom you would feel comfortable writing a letter. Explain Creme’s essay to him or her and discuss your reaction to the essay. Also, in your letter explain why you have chosen this particular friend or family member as your own captive audience.
Notes, Responses, & Ideas
The Journey
I stuttered my introduction to the class
And in seconds my literacy was haunting my past.
I looked at the syllabus and let out a sigh
So much work, in what seemed so little time—
Narratives, comparisons, and even an argument
To help me grow, to help me be, was part of this parliament.

My writing was a bit “too pretty,” a bit “too scrambled,”
My use of words a high-risk gamble.
The story of writers, the pictures that told tales
Inspired me to achieve and not to fail.

Whether it was a sun-glassed bear that did the trick,
Or the view of an outsider whose world I decided to pick,
Learning is a process that takes different roads along the way
The journey may head to a busy city or an ocean in the bay.
But whatever path you may choose,
It’s filled with knowledge and nothing to lose.

By Evelyn Flores
Instructor: Robert Speiser

Section 3:
Examining Education

Quick Write:
How do you learn best? By reading? Through experiences? How have your teachers and schools fostered your learning? How could it have been better?
Student Writers
...through Tumblr, I am able to meet people from all around the world whose lives are far different from my own.

Nicholas Hillery
Instructor: Robert Speiser

The World at Our Fingertips

According to a survey by the Kaiser Family Foundation, almost three-fourths of 7th to 11th graders have, at minimum, one social networking account. Spiderman’s Uncle Ben once said, “With great power comes great responsibility.” The Internet really is what we make of it. It is up to us to use this tool in a way that will benefit us and the relationships that we share. The whole world is, literally, at our fingertips. Social media is not just beneficial but is also a necessity in today’s society.

Social media has many useful applications. It isn’t just about connecting with friends; it is also helpful in the classroom. Many studies have shown that when children learn in a way that is more engaging and fits their interests, they learn at a much faster and more efficient rate. Elizabeth Delmatoff, a 7th grade teacher, developed a pilot social-media program and her class benefited greatly from it. In the article, “The Case For Social Media in Schools,” Sarah Kessler states that after Delmatoff’s online program, “20% of students school-wide were completing extra assignments for no credit, grades had gone up 50%, and chronic absenteeism was reduced by more than a third” (par. 1). Numbers don’t lie. From this we can see that when kids are learning in a way that interests them, they learn more and actually want to learn. From my personal observations, students do not usually do extra assignments if there is no credit involved, so that says a lot about Delmatoff’s system and how well she connects with her students.

Contrary to popular belief, social media can be a vast source of information and education. According to Mizuko Ito, “…youth are picking up basic social and technological skills they need to fully participate in contemporary society” (par. 8). According to the results of Ito’s study, “youth use online networks to extend the friendships that they navigate in the familiar contexts of school, religious organizations, sports and local activities” (par. 3). However, just because most teens use social media as a means to contact friends doesn’t change the fact that they need to be informed on what is out there and how to stay safe. In a way, using social media is like having a second life. Parents teach their kids how to stay safe in the outside world, and the Internet should not be any different.
The World at Our Fingertips

I believe social media has helped me and others to develop and become well-rounded individuals. Not everyone on the Internet types like dis. I have a Tumblr account, and through Tumblr, I am able to meet people from all around the world whose lives are far different from my own. I also follow a lot of news blogs and through these, I become aware of the world around me. I even go on news sources and intellectual sites, such as The Huffington Post and Los Angeles Times online, so I can say that not all my time on the Internet is spent on useless things.

Social media can also benefit and help promote businesses and talents. I have a friend named Nicole who became really famous through Tumblr and now she gets paid to model for clothing lines. NastyGal.com, a really popular clothing site for women, did a whole collection based on her look. Through her own unique style, she has developed relationships with celebrities and people in the fashion and entertainment industry. So Nicole is living proof that social media can be beneficial and help you develop your career.

Nicole has a friend named Brianna, and because she also became famous on the Internet, Brianna is now getting paid to DJ and perform at various nightclubs. I just saw her on i-D Magazine, a prestigious high-fashion magazine based in London. So anyone who says that social media sites like Facebook and Tumblr are not good, obviously do not use them and do not know what actually happens on those sites. My generation communicates and operates a lot differently from previous generations. We live in a digital age where we communicate and interact through technology, and through technology, we are able to meet new people and start connections.

Many, like David DiSalvo, believe that social media isolates people from the outside world. In his article, “Are Social Networks Messing with Your Head?” DiSalvo claims, “Research suggests that those who turn to social networking sites out of loneliness will remain lonely.” The Internet actually does quite the opposite. I go on social media sites when I feel bored and lonely and I have made friends on those sites. For example, I have a friend named Sam, who I have known for five years now. We spent time together and I introduced her to my friends and now she is just as relevant as all the friends I met offline. However, Sarah Greenfield, a professor of pharmacology at Oxford University and the director of the Royal Institution of Great Britain, argues against social media. She states, “My fear is that these technologies are infantilizing the brain into the state of small children who are attracted by buzzing noises and bright lights, who have a small attention span and who live for the moment” (qtd. in Mackey). If this is the case, then shouldn’t we also take away televisions as well? TVs have buzzing noises and bright lights, yet children have been watching TV for decades and are just fine.
Section 3: Examining Education

Social media has somewhat of a bad reputation. I don’t understand why. The Internet brings us the world in a computer. The conveniences that the Internet and social media have ushered into our lives are parallel to the dramatic shift brought by the Industrial Revolution. Tumblr, Facebook, and other social media sites are not used just to waste time and talk to friends. They build relationships, careers, and opportunities for success.

Works Cited


Listening to Student Voices

The best teachers learn from their students...

Michelle Lay
Instructor: Nicole Warwick

Listening to Student Voices

Every teacher wants his or her students to do well in class, whether it is English, history, math, or science. Often, reality will interfere and a teacher will recognize that not every student will succeed. However, one can’t always blame the students for failing a course. A mutual respect between teachers and students is needed in order for students to fully comprehend and learn the lessons at hand. In order for this mutual respect, teachers must keep their minds open to students’ ideas. Paulo Freire’s book, Teachers as Cultural Workers, suggests that teachers should talk with their students rather than talk to them. For example, students’ essays would be better written if they had more of their own voices in their writing. The same concept applies to all other subjects. A few students will discover an alternate way to solve a math problem or answer a question, but some instructors will accept only their own methods. Teachers need to have open minds towards students’ views.

From middle school to college, I have struggled with having a voice in the majority of my classes. There was one project I remember doing in the sixth grade where I was allowed to use my opinions and do my own research without objections from my teacher. The project was to give a presentation about a country of our choice. I chose to do my research on Cambodia, since it’s well-known to me and my family, but not to others. My teacher, Ms. A, gave us a very broad outline on how to do our presentation. Since this was a topic of my choice, I had so much interest in finding out more about Cambodia. During the few weeks I had to complete this assignment, I grew passionate about the research. Finishing the project turned into a secondary goal and expanding my knowledge became my primary goal. Because I grew so zealous about the assignment, the finished product contained abundant information that was well formatted into a four minute and thirty-five second presentation. When Ms. A was done grading everyone’s project, I received ninety-five percent. I was marked off only because I had used notecards during my presentation. Other than my lack of memorization, my final result was very satisfactory. Having passion for this project created more effort on my part and produced an amazing piece of work that earned me a successful grade. Doing this myself meant that I was one step closer to being independent and ready for
the next step in my academics. I wanted to have that same passion for all my other projects so they wouldn’t feel like chores.

In my high school, teachers became more and more reluctant to listen to me and my classmates. I can’t remember an assignment that allowed me to include my thoughts. In my junior year, I decided to take Honors Human Anatomy with Mr. B. However, the entire year my grade suffered severely due to his lack of understanding his students. In all of his homework and test questions, the only answers he accepted were the answers he thought of. A majority of my tests in his class consisted of essay questions from the chapters we had studied. The answers I had were correct; they were mainly summaries of the book. However, I was missing the “key words” Mr. B wanted. All Mr. B did was talk down to the students the whole year and he never accepted a variation to an answer. As a result, there were low test grades from me and my classmates.

I’ve witnessed other students struggle to have a voice as well. During my senior year in high school, I was a peer tutor, which is similar to a teacher’s assistant. I assisted students in Honors Algebra 2/Trigonometry. Helping each student, I realized that they all had a different way of grasping the concept of the lesson. One student, Billy, had his own method of solving each equation. It was shorter and completely different from the way the teacher taught. His answers were correct as I graded his homework. But when it came time for the test, the teacher, Ms. C, marked him wrong because his method didn’t show a sufficient amount of his work. Benny believed that math came easily to him, so he added his own voice to his work to save time. However, Ms. C didn’t accept his way of solving the problem. On one of his tests that I entered in the grade book, he received a seventy-two percent even though all his answers were correct.

An anonymous professor, Professor X, demonstrates he thinks very lowly of his students in his article “From the Basement of the Ivory Tower.” He believes “few of [his] students can do well in [English 101 and 102]. Students routinely fail; some fail multiple times, and some will never pass, because they cannot write a coherent sentence” (1). His students did not fail because they lacked the ability to write. He refused to listen to his students and talk with his students, so there is no surprise that most of his students did not pass his class. He sat with one of his students and “worked on some of the basics. It didn’t go well. She wasn’t absorbing anything. The wall had gone up, the wall known to every teacher at every level: the wall of defeat and hopelessness and humiliation, the wall that is an impenetrable barrier to learning. She wasn’t hearing a word I said” (2). In this case, it was not the student’s fault for not understanding the concept or the assignment. Instead of talking with his student, he constantly tried to tell her his way of doing the paper. With no connection or passion for an assignment, there’s a greater chance of a student not doing well
Author Paulo Freire discusses the importance of listening and talking with learners. He believes, “If, however, educators choose to be democratic and if the distance between their discourse and their practice becomes ever smaller, then in their scholarly daily lives...they live the difficult but possible and pleasurable experience of speaking to and with learners” (114). I notice how he uses the word “learners,” instead of students, and “educators” instead of teachers. Using those words as an alternative strips the roles of authority and minority. My Cambodia research project was challenging and uncomfortable for me because the instructions were purposely vague. But I worked past my comfort zone and developed an enjoyment for the project. Everything became more interesting. I realized that my entire project was so much stronger without a rigid outline to follow given by the teacher.

As a result of Ms. A allowing me to write freely on a country of my choice, it diminished the student–teacher barrier between us. She didn’t look down upon me or show that she was superior to me. She hardly interfered with my research; she checked up on me and my classmates only to see if we were doing our work. Everything was extremely liberal and it made all the difference. Because of the freedom I had with my project, I felt there was a better connection between Ms. A and me. With a strong bond between learners and educators, the outcome will benefit both greatly.

Sadly, a majority of teachers are “consistently authoritarian, then they are always the initiators of talk, while the students are continually subjected to their discourse. They speak to, for, and about the learners” (Freire 114). Through my experience, the grades of students suffer because they are prevented from using their voices. If teachers want their students to succeed in their classes, they need to give their students a chance to express their methods and ideas in their work.

Teaching isn’t black and white. Giving students a voice in their work will allow students to see concepts in their own way, thus improving their academics. The best teachers learn from their students as well as the students learning from them. Students need to have drive other than simply getting a good grade. Grades should be more of a secondary concern, while passion towards their assignments should be the primary. Practice doesn’t make perfect; passion does.

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Music has always been part of my life. It started with my cousins. I remember when they started playing instruments in middle school and how I was captivated the moment they pulled out one of their instruments to practice. One of my cousins played the flute, and the first time I listened to her play, the beautiful sound that flowed out ignited my desire to learn how to read and play music. After listening to my cousin play the flute, I was inspired to play it as well. I played the flute throughout my early years, but in high school I decided to try the French horn.

One day during junior year at the end of band class, my music teacher, Mr. Sakow, had just finished explaining the upcoming auditions for those who wanted to move up to the next band. I had been waiting the whole week to talk to him about switching from the French horn back to playing the flute, but every time I tried, he was busy and I was running late to get to third period. Maybe I had been avoiding the conversation because I was unsure of how he would react to my request, but this time, I wasn’t backing down.

When he finally dismissed class, I went up to him and asked, “Hi, Sakow. I was wondering if I could audition and switch back to flute? When can I audition?”

“You want to switch back to flute? What about the French horn?”

“Yeah, I want to switch back; I’m more comfortable playing flute.”

“Switching back now is hard. You know, playing an instrument in this band isn’t a joke,” he said.

I thought, I know this is not a joke, that’s why I want to switch back. He continued, “You see other kids here, they take band seriously. You don’t see serious band kids switching instruments all the time.”

I am serious about band, and I’m not trying to play around switching instruments. I’ve only switched once anyway, I thought to myself.

The only reason I was playing horn in the first place was because I wanted to be in a higher band. I thought that by playing the horn there would be less competition for me and it would be easier to succeed because there were hardly any horn players in each band. However, I realized that playing the horn well was harder than I had first assumed.
Mr. Sakow knew I wasn’t the best in the horn section; if anything, the band would be better off without me as a horn player. I don’t know why he thought I wasn’t serious. The way I saw it, switching back would benefit us both; the band would have one less horrible horn player and I’d go back to flute and know I was playing the right scale in the right key. I think Mr. Sakow thought I had the potential to become better at playing a brass instrument, so he pushed me to stay with the French horn and improve my skills. I wished I still played the flute, as memories of my first encounter playing the French horn flooded my mind.

It was the first time I tried out a brass instrument. “Just pick one and take it to the guard room,” said Mr. Sakow. So I picked a case. It was an old black case, with the number ‘7’ written in white on one side, and it was heavier than I expected. As I carried the horn in its case from the locker room to the guard room as fast as I could, I realized I had no upper-body strength whatsoever. In fact, I felt like my arm was about to fall off. I should have realized then that the French horn was wrong for me, but curiosity overtook me. I finally arrived at the guard room and rested the case on the floor. I undid the latches on the case and opened it to find a golden French horn. The bell was undented but with a few scratches, and the keys had a faded gold tinge from the constant striking of the previous owner to create a melodious brass tone. I held the horn in my hands and felt the smooth, cold brass. After exploring the figure of the horn, I and six other former flute players finally got to insert the mouthpiece and blow into the brass instrument. To make a sound, I had to put my lips together and make a tight smile with a small opening in the center and buzz, not blow. I buzzed into the horn, expecting to make a dazzling sound, but I failed. This was harder than I thought. I tried a few more times but I couldn’t get the right sound. It was like the flute in the sense that it required a lot of what we musicians call “embouchure work,” also known as “lip posture.” It took me two weeks to finally get my embouchure right and to get a decent beginner’s sound. It took me maybe four months to get the tone right, and it took me even longer to get used to transposing notes and keys.

I was a decent flute player. I had some trouble reaching the A and B-flat notes in the third octave because of their high range and the amount of air I had to blow to get the sound, but overall, I felt I was pretty good. The flute was the easiest of instruments to play, since its key was in C major and I never needed to transpose (translate) the notes to another key, unlike other instruments that needed to transpose to C major. The key of C major meant that the
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band was speaking (or playing) in that dialect; it is like the official language of music, just as English might be considered the official language of the United States. The French horn’s dialect is F major, not C major. So when I was given the French horn, I had to occasionally transpose from the key of F major to the key of C major. I’d have to mentally count up each note, from F major to C major, and I’d still get confused along the way and play the wrong note. Luckily, I had a chart that showed all the note fingerings (or hand positions) for the horn in F major, which I later used to transpose each note’s equivalence to C major, the main dialect. I kept my fingering chart on my stand at all times; I held on to it like a security blanket, always insecure of what note I needed to play next.

I was scared and intimidated to play a note loudly because I was afraid it was wrong. Even though Mr. Sakow reassured us that it was alright to play the wrong note as long as we played with a strong tone, I was still terrified about possibly being singled out in front of the entire class. I tried to overcome this fear by studying the notes and memorizing the fingering for the notes we played most often. I improved a little, until I hardly needed my fingering chart anymore, but I kept it on my stand behind my music sheets, in case I forgot how to finger a certain note. There was also some new vocabulary to learn in order to play the French horn. For example, in a piece of music, sometimes a plus sign like this (+) appears, and the horn players have to mute the sound of the horn, which basically muffles the sound a little and changes the pitch to a more nasal sound. Muting the horn also involves shifting the note to a major third, which sometimes I forgot to do.

I also had difficulty learning how to play and strike the valves with only my left hand, which was too small to hold the whole horn. Mr. Sakow stuck a dime on each key pedal, which allowed me to reach the keys better and have a more comfortable hold on the instrument. I learned how to transpose and strike the valves of the horn faster in sectionals, i.e., when different sections of the band rehearse with only their section to focus on their own part before all sections performed as a band. Often, Mr. Sakow would take the horn section out of the band rehearsal and lead a sectional in order to go over the difficult parts of a music piece. He helped us reach high notes and practice alternative fingerings for the notes that were hard to quickly switch to.

When senior year came, I was still playing the French horn. Sadly, I hadn’t switched back to flute but I still played the flute in Marching Band. I was now in Symphonic Winds, the second highest band in my school and I was proud of my success. I had worked hard improving on my scales, tone, and sight reading for my audition in French Horn for Symphonic Winds. To prepare for that audition, I committed myself to practice more than twice a
Smooth Brass

week at home, and I occasionally met with one of the music assistants to help me improve. Now, in Symphonic Winds, I would arrive to band practice as early as I could and set up my chair and music stand. I’d practice before class started, playing with emotion, practicing the crescendo from piano to forte, and the decrescendo from fortissimo to mezzo piano, until my mouth grew tired. Luckily, I became faster at transposing notes too.

Learning how to read and play music was so much fun as well as a privilege because some schools didn’t even offer a music program. Looking back, learning how to play the French horn was definitely a challenge because I had to learn a different dialect of music, but once I was able to create a beautiful tone, I smiled and pushed for better. Committing to play an instrument really shaped my experience in learning a whole new language and understanding how to read music. In fact, I still remember the notes and fingerings for both the flute and French horn. Since my first encounter with music, I haven’t been able to leave it behind.
I was starting to think about dropping my classes and going to a community college instead.

JENNIFER BRAN
Instructor: Sandra Jackson

ROAD TO CSUN

“You are worthless! Why do you go to school if you don’t get anything good out of it? You can’t even do anything good in the house. I’d rather have you not go to school anymore and just start looking for a job!” These were hurtful words that kept coming at me every day from a father who didn’t understand or see his daughter’s hard work to get into college.

In “Understanding Rhetoric,” Stephanie Lazaro’s step-father said she would become a high-school dropout by the tenth grade and become a man’s “baby maker” for the rest of her life. These were very hurtful words but she took every negative comment as an encouragement to do better. The day she walked down the aisle and received her diploma, she proved him wrong. Even with all the negativity towards her, she was still able to move forward with her education. I could relate to Stephanie, because I had to deal with my father’s negativity as well.

I was the daughter of that father who didn’t understand the hard work I was doing to get into college. Every day, I would be busy doing school work and making sure everything that had to be done in order for me to go to college was completed. I had to deal with filling out forms, registering for tests, and making calls to CSUN to make sure I wasn’t missing any documents. It was stressful because I dealt with it all by myself and I was tired by the end of the day. My father never saw the positive in what I was doing, he just saw the negative.

There was a time I took a class after school to fix a grade in order to improve my transcripts. When I arrived home at 6 p.m., I felt extremely tired. As soon as I arrived home, I helped my mom, started on my homework, and then fell asleep. By the time my father came home from work, he would only see me sleeping. Then came his negative comments. It bothered me that he thought I never helped out at home when in reality I did; he was just never there to see it.
I kept working hard to complete everything that needed to be done in order for me to go to college and everything went well. I found out that three of the four colleges I had applied to had accepted me. However, I didn’t feel that much excitement because my parents didn’t show any enthusiasm. Nevertheless, I continued to do well in my classes in order to graduate and attend college in the fall.

Graduation was three days away when something unexpected happened. I was half asleep when I heard my dad complaining in the kitchen, then he barged in my room and started screaming at me. I didn’t know what was going on. I just heard him talking about me, saying negative stuff as he always did. I was so furious that I raised my voice at him. And then he smacked me on the face. I couldn’t believe it. It went through my mind that I did not want to see him at my graduation. He had never shown support, so why have him there to see me cross the stage? When the day came, he didn’t show up and I didn’t bother to care.

During my summer break, his negativity started to get to me even more. When he started talking to me about school and what I was going to study, I told him I was planning to major in apparel merchandising. When I explained to him what the major was, he said my career choice wasn’t good enough. He told me it would be a waste of money and that I should study to become a doctor or a lawyer. When I told him that none of those careers were of interest to me, he got mad. I told him it was my decision; he was not paying for it, so he shouldn’t complain about the money. He then found something else to complain about: my choice to attend CSUN.

This made me lose hope and I started to think about dropping my classes and going to a community college instead. My big brother told me that his company was going to start hiring, so I was thinking about going there. Before I did all this, I mentioned this to my best friend and she told me I was committing a mistake. She made me realize I had worked too hard to let my father interfere with my plans to attend college. She was right; I didn’t want my father to be the one controlling my future.

My father’s behavior didn’t change. When he picked me up after orientation, he immediately started complaining as always. Instead of asking me how things went, he began complaining about how far the school was, how much traffic there was, and all the gas he was wasting just to pick me up. His negativity was never going to stop. In spite of knowing I was doing something good in my life, he didn’t seem to care.
Many students have stories of a difficult situation faced during their time at school. Richard Rodriguez and his family went through a few struggles themselves. In “Public and Private Language,” Rodriguez discusses the hard time he had learning the English language. He wasn’t the only one who had to get accustomed to speak English, so did his parents. The family’s relationships started to change as they spoke English more. Rodriguez felt as if his only intimate place was taken over by something new in his life. After accepting the new language, his mother and siblings socialized more with the neighborhood and didn’t spend that much time with each other. His family’s closeness at home was lessened and they no longer bonded as much as before. They remained a loving family, but became more public.

In Ying Lin’s essay “Language and Me,” she speaks of how she was treated as a foreign student. She describes the rude and unfair ways she was treated and how she was being classified by her ethnicity, name, and appearance everywhere she went. She had to deal with classmates making jokes about her name and her English skills. Lin was facing a very unfair moment in life that made her depressed. One day, she read a Chinese article that said language is the most important tool humans need because it can shake the whole world. Lin used that as encouragement to do better in her life and to prove she was able to become successful. She used all the teasing as an encouragement to overthrow all the difficulties. It gave her strength to achieve her goals.

To this day, my father still finds any little thing to complain about, but I don’t let that interfere with my future. I chose to move in with my aunt in order to attend CSUN. Everything has been going great so far, but I just sometimes wish my father would stop complaining and see where I am now in life.

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My dad still did not agree with me, but this time I did not let my dad decide what was right for me.

Inderpreet Kaur
Instructor: Mary Marca

**Fire-Eater**

It was a hot summer’s day in August. I was talking to a friend on the phone, telling her how excited I was for junior year in high school. I finally felt like an adult. After I ended my conversation, my dad walked into my room and asked me what all the excitement was about. I told him, “Being a junior and finally feeling like an adult.”

As I spoke about being a junior, my dad started a conversation about my future. He asked what my plans were and what career I was going to choose. After I told my dad that I wanted a career in computer technology or engineering, he gave me a look of disdain and asked, “Career in technology or engineering?” Not quite sure what his look meant or what he was trying to imply with his question, I asked why he had given me that look. He laughed and replied, “You know that it is going to be really hard and competitive for you to handle such a career. Careers in such fields are for men. You would not be able to handle it. How about nursing? It is a really good career and way better for you.” It shocked me that my dad treated me as a joke and told me how I was not competent as a woman to become an engineer or have a career in the technology field.

My dad’s words kept haunting me and I ended up with no confidence in what I wanted to become, so I just chose nursing as my career. I had been determined to get good grades in 11th grade and do my best, since this was the most important year of high school and colleges look at this year, but after that conversation, I lost all my determination. Since I decided I was going to private nursing school, I stopped caring about my grades and earned a bad GPA.

The next summer, I had the same conversation, but this time with my mom. She asked me about my plans for the future and what career I was going to choose. In a low, sad voice I replied, “Nursing.” She saw my sad face and knew right away that I was not very happy about this. She told me that it was a really good career and then asked why I had chosen this career. I could not reply. Looking at my face she said, “Think about why you are choosing nursing. What do you like about it? Think! And if you do not have an answer to my question then you should not choose this career.”
That night, I did lot of thinking, and I could not come up with any reasons to like nursing, other than my dad’s words. Then I started thinking about the careers I had wanted from the beginning and many reasons came to mind. I was happy to realize that I would still love to become an engineer or work in the technology field.

The next day, I woke up early and was excited. I went to my mom and told her that I was not able to find any reason to choose nursing but had many reasons to choose engineering or technology. She was glad to hear my reasons and told me to believe in myself and go after my dream. My dad still did not agree with me, but this time I did not let my dad decide what was right for me. I listened to my mom’s words and believed in myself.

Today, I have proudly chosen a career in Computer IT and I am confident I will prove my dad wrong. I know there are people who believe that I am not capable of this career, but this does not stop me from believing in myself. I know it will be difficult and very competitive along the way, due to men outnumbering women in this career, but I am ready for everything that is in my way.

Eavan Boland’s poem “It’s a Woman’s World,” depicts the world women have been living in and how it has not changed much throughout time. Women throughout history have been fighting for their rights and equality. Women might have their freedom today, but they are still often looked down upon by men. Women can be easily mocked by men, which can lower their self-esteem. In the poem, Boland describes the women who stood up for their rights and went after their dreams as “fire-eaters.” I see myself as a fire-eater because I am standing up for myself and going after my dream career despite being told I am not capable of it.

Work Cited
Heart of the Family

Flavio became the change he wanted for his family.

Muath Mana Aljohani
Instructor: Terri Silverberg

Heart of the Family

Gordon Parks wrote “Flavio’s Home” after his journey to Rio de Janeiro to photograph poverty for Life magazine. In the essay, he writes about the unfortunate child, Flavio Da Silva, who lived in poverty in a favela called Catacumb. He wrote about Flavio’s home, which was a shack without any of life’s necessities. Flavio’s whole family lived in that shack: his seven siblings, his pregnant mother, and his father. He took on the role of the provider for the whole family; he was the engine of the family. Flavio lived a hard life and taking responsibility for the family made his life harder. Flavio reminds me of my father because they have many similarities; they both took care of their families, and shared similar living conditions as well as many day-to-day struggles. Many of us have a Flavio in our lives. My Flavio is my father.

My father’s name was “Mana” which in Arabic means “obstacle.” His life’s motto was “I am an obstacle for obstacles.” I was fortunate enough to live an affluent life. Most of us do, in comparison to Flavio. My father was not that fortunate and I have experienced the feeling of living a poor life through my father’s words. My father was born into a life filled with misery; his mother died while giving birth to him, but his father re-married and his stepmother raised him as her own. He did not have any brothers from his mother’s side, but he had eleven younger siblings from his stepmother, or his “second mother,” as he liked to call her. His father was an ill man, so when my father was twelve years old, he took on the responsibility of providing for the family. Like Flavio, my father was the heart of the family. As a child, that was a lot to take in, but my father managed to take care of his family of thirteen people until he died.

Flavio and my father were the providers and the keepers of their families. Flavio’s family would not have survived without their little hero; he brought wood and water so he could cook for his family, and he raised his siblings. Back in Saudi Arabia, my father practically raised his siblings as well. He also took special care of his father as his father’s health grew worse and his vision got weaker and weaker until he became blind. My father decided to take
his father to Jordan to find a cure. Since they had the money to buy only one camel, my father had to walk all 908 kilometers to Jordan. It was 1957 and my father was only fifteen and had just graduated from middle school. My grandfather and my father went from Aleaiss (an area near holy Medina), to Jordan and stayed there for three years. My father kept sending his family money from his work as a shepherd. After three years, my father graduated from high school with honors. He knew all along that his only chance of making something out of himself was through education.

Flavio and my father shared similar housing arrangements. My father and his family lived in the desert because of their life as Bedouins. As Bedouins, they needed to move from time to time, looking for water and for grazing land for their animals. They lived in a tent that did not protect them from anything except the eyes of the people. It did not protect them from wind, rain, sandstorms, cold, or heat. They did not have any utilities such as water or electricity, so getting water was not simple. My father had to walk for two hours and then wait in line for hours so he could get water. Flavio had to “[go] down the mountain for more water” (256). Civilized people take water for granted and a bathroom is one of the basics of life. Neither my father nor Flavio had that privilege.

Mahatma Gandhi said, “Be the change you want to see in the world.” Flavio became the change he wanted for his family. Flavio reformed himself to be the heart of “Flavio’s Home.” My father was also the heart of his family. Mana and Flavio lived on different continents, but they both shared poverty and they helped their families through it. On his journey to Jordan, my father realized the change he wanted to be and he realized that, if he wanted to make something out of himself, he needed to get a good education. So he did not stop studying until he got his Ph.D. from Indiana University. He became the Secretary-General for the World Assembly of Muslim Youth; one of its biggest concerns is to fight poverty around the world. My father also fought poverty as a minister in the Consultative Assembly of Saudi Arabia. Most people wait for something to change so they can change. Others change when horrible things happen to them, or their roles change, but the greatest change is the one that happens from a sense of responsibility.

Work Cited
The Food’s on You

Chris Lagunas
Instructor: Mona Houghton

The Food’s on You

Take a minute and think: how does that meat in the supermarket get there? As essayist Makenna Goodman writes in her piece, “Ever Wonder If You Could Kill What You Eat? We Did the Other Night,” the meat we buy “does not simply fall from the sky, packaged on a shelf in a supermarket; it comes from a living, breathing being” (1). This means our food gets there thanks to the person who dealt with the process of killing an animal for consumption. Without this person doing the dirty work, would the average American be able to kill what he or she eats?

When I was six, my family decided on a two-year trip to Mexico to visit my grandparents’ farm. Every day, life on that farm was something else; something I was not used to. A day came when my grandfather came up to me with a chicken and a big smile. At first I thought, “Oh, it’s gonna be my first pet!” but I was terribly wrong. He said (in Spanish), “Son, I want you to kill this animal and not shed a tear; food’s on you tonight!” At first, I didn’t have the courage to do it. I sat there looking at the knife, not wanting to do it. Finally, I broke the chicken’s neck as fast as I could and then started chopping it into edible pieces, showered in my own tears. After a few weeks went by, I would kill little chickens without even thinking about it. It’s a hard process but it’s something you get accustomed to and eventually learn to do for a living.

Then came another day I won’t soon forget. My grandfather brought me up to the slaughter room one early morning and said, “Son, I’m very proud of what you have done. I think you’re brave enough to handle something even larger now.” I thought that it must just be a larger chicken or something of that nature; once again, I was wrong. I heard a few snorts, as if someone was snoring. Then it hit me—the animal that was about to meet its fate was a pig. Because the pig was almost the same size as me, I had the impression that I was killing more than an animal, something almost human. So many thoughts started racing through my head, but in the end I had to do what was necessary for the family. I killed the pig. It wasn’t an easy task. By then, killing chickens was fairly simple for me because I didn’t have to hear their moans of death;
with a simple, quick twist of the neck, the chicken was out of its misery. With the pig it was much harder. I had to strike the pig down with a large sledgehammer-like object, which not only made the pig suffer great pain, but made me suffer as well.

Being accustomed to American life, most of the stuff I saw in Mexico looked really disturbing and abnormal to me. What I know now is that it’s all part of life; farmers like my grandparents don’t do this for fun. They are doing it to provide decent meals for the family and to make a decent living.

Of course, most Americans know where the food comes from, but most don’t really know about the process of killing an animal. It’s something most consumers don’t think about. Most Americans go through an entire lifetime without having to kill an animal to eat. Many may think it’s an easy process, when it’s really not. Having the courage to strike down an animal is one thing, but having to deal with the guilt that follows is another.

Later, in high school, I was involved with my school’s urban-farming program. The class was fairly simple. We planted flowers and vegetables, watched a couple of farming movies, and at the end of every other month, we would harvest what we grew and make a meal. Although we didn’t actually kill an animal, I felt that if we were given the chance to, any one of the students in that class would have been able to do it without hesitation. What I took from that class was that I can rely on myself for food. Children should learn exactly where their foods are coming from and exactly how they got there. In the end, it’s an experience that only benefits us.

Work Cited
Assignments

What Does the Writer Say?
1. What are some of Nicholas Hillery’s supporting reasons in “The World at Your Fingertips” for his argument that social media can help students excel in an educational context?

2. Jennifer Bran, author of “Road to CSUN,” discusses how her father was not supportive of her education. What are some of her father’s justifications for not supporting Bran in her educational path? What other options are open to her?

What Do You Say?
3. Lizeth Antonio, in her essay “Smooth Brass,” discusses how her teacher influenced her musical education. How do you think her experience would have been different without the pressure of her teacher? Has anyone in your life tried to influence your education, either positively or negatively? Explain.

4. Chris Lagunas, in his essay “The Food’s on You,” discusses an educational experience he had with his grandfather, who expected Lagunas to kill animals for consumption. Do you agree with his argument that we need to understand where all our food comes from? What are some advantages and disadvantages to having this kind of education?

Writing Exercises
5. For this exercise, write a 1–2 page analysis of “Student Voices,” by Michelle Lay, in which you respond to the following:

   Turn a curious yet skeptical gaze onto the essay “Student Voices.” What is the writer’s position? What are her essential claims? What evidence does Lay offer for these claims? Does the evidence persuade you? Next, play the devil’s advocate: can you offer a reasonable counterargument? Which assumptions or conclusions strike you as problematic or unreasonable?

6. For this exercise, write a 1–2 page narrative in which you respond to the following:

   Lizeth Antonio, in the essay “Smooth Brass,” refers to music as a “language” or a “dialect.” First, consider how Antonio would define these words. Next, describe a situation in which you needed to learn a new “language.” This can be for any activity, such as playing a sport or using social media.
Section 3: Examining Education

7. For this exercise, write a 1–2 page letter to Inderpreet Kaur, author of “Fire-Eater,” in which you respond to the following:

Kaur discusses the conflicting advice that her mother and father gave her. Focus your discussion on your own experiences with receiving conflicting advice from your parents, teachers, or anyone else. Think about the features of Kaur’s text that still puzzle you. Discuss your comments and concerns in the letter, seeking to earn the writer’s praise through thoughtful analysis of the text.
Notes, Responses, & Ideas
Hi... my name is Jessica Whang. Before college, I had a lot of hate and rage inside of me. I felt like everyone was unimportant in my world, and I could do things on my own... I am the type of person who hates doing all stereotypical things, which is ironic because here, I am an Asian, drawing a book as my preface...

From "Preface" by Jessica Whang

Section 4: Developing Identity

Quick Write:
When someone asks you to describe yourself, what do you say? How much of your identity is determined by what others see when they look at you? How much is determined by what you know about your history?
Notes, Responses, & Ideas
Mirror, Mirror

How many times have you watched a movie and noticed that all the women are thin or are showing a lot of skin? These women are seen as “beautiful” in our eyes, thanks to our media-driven society. Women grow up seeing this constant ideal, and as a result, become pressured to look a certain way in order to be considered beautiful. We are influenced to fit into this mold of “flawless” so that not only our looks have to change, but our behavior as well. Women have been influenced to emulate this idea of beauty with plastic surgery, airbrushing, or even simply makeup; women are no longer accepted in their natural state of beauty.

Like most young girls, I grew up watching Disney Princesses and it definitely shaped my view of beauty. There are about nine Disney Princesses, including Cinderella, Snow White, Belle, Aurora, Ariel, Jasmine, Pocahontas, Mulan, and Tiana, who was added in 2009. There are only three princesses of color: Jasmine, Pocahontas, and Tiana, who aren’t among the most well-known or popular princesses. If you see advertisements for Disney Princess items, they are normally for Cinderella, Snow White, Belle, or Aurora. Each of these princesses has the same characteristics: thin, light skin, and light-colored eyes. Aside from Snow White, they have medium to long hair as well. What do you think a child learns from such images? The book Our Bodies, Ourselves, A New Edition for a New Era, by the Boston Women’s Health Book Collective states, “Researchers have found that ongoing exposure to certain ideas can shape and distort our images of reality” (10). That’s exactly what happens to everyone, including children; with something as simple and harmless as Disney Princesses, our image of reality becomes distorted and our vision of beauty is redefined.

Realistically, women cannot be as thin as a Disney Princess or other women shown in the media. The women in films, music videos, and advertisements are all altered to appear a certain way: “It’s not surprising that in our media-driven culture, our views of what women should look like are warped. Real women with pubic hair and breasts that aren’t perfect round orbs begin to
Mirror, Mirror

seem unnatural compared to the altered images we see in the media” (Boston Women’s 10). Every imperfection is hidden and true beauty is covered or even replaced. It is amazing to see the lengths actresses and models will go through just to be seen as perfect. In Our Bodies Ourselves, Eugenia Suhee Kim, an average woman, tells a brief story about her sister, a Korean woman who had her eyelids “done” just because everybody was doing it for the exaggerated crease, to make eyes look bigger. Kim believes her sister sold out for the “Western notion of beauty.” Later on, Kim had to have her eyes done to correct a droopy eyelid; however, after her surgery she didn’t recognize herself when she looked in the mirror and found herself trying to cover the crease that had formed (Boston Women’s 9).

Many film producers have made it a point to have the women in their films appear flawless, giving society a perception of how women should look as well as act. In films, women are often submissive and unintelligent and their sex appeal is exaggerated. Films like The House Bunny and Legally Blonde are good examples of this. In The House Bunny, the main character, Shelly, played by Anna Farris, is a Playboy bunny who is kicked out of the Playboy mansion and forced to live on her own for the very first time. Shelly finds herself at the front steps of a sorority, Zeta Alpha Zeta, that is about to lose their house because the girls are socially clueless. Shelly, a “dumb blonde” who wears outfits that show her legs, midriff, and cleavage and is covered in pink sparkles or glitter, decides to give the sorority girls a makeover. Shelley is the definition of the “dumb blonde” stereotype. According to Aaron Devor, Dean of Social Sciences at the University of Victoria and author of “Gender Role Behaviors and Attitudes,” our society believes each gender has these roles to maintain. A female should be feminine, meaning she should be passive and submissive (Devor 672).

In Legally Blonde, Elle Woods, played by Reese Witherspoon, is a sorority girl who is dumped by her boyfriend, so she tries to get into Harvard Law School to get him back. Elle Woods is the “dumb blonde” who wears similar outfits to Shelly in House Bunny. For her application to Harvard, she makes a video that involves her in a swimming pool wearing a sparkly bikini. Woods gets into Harvard Law, surprising many of its students. She fights to prove people wrong throughout the film because people assume she is unintelligent for the simple fact that she is blonde. Both films have the typical stereotype of the “dumb blonde,” which sends the wrong message to young girls, that as long as you’re attractive, it doesn’t matter how dumb you are and this message can influence their actions as well as their appearance. These films support the dependent and submissive woman as a “natural role” (Devor 673). At least Elle stands up for herself and attempts to break the “dumb blonde” image.
When films attempt to give women a more masculine role, like the fairly new Disney/Pixar film *Brave*, controversy occurs. The main character, Princess Merida, has some masculine behavior and characteristics: she has wild, untamed red curls, hates girly outfits, and enjoys archery. Her voice is slightly deep and she does not walk or eat like the typical Disney Princess. In addition, Princess Merida is independent and is a better archer than all the males in the film. A critic from *Entertainment Weekly*, Adam Markovitz, states, “Her love of unprincess-like hobbies, including archery and rock-climbing, is sure to strike a chord with gay viewers who felt similarly ‘not like the other kids’ growing up” (1). So, because this character prefers archery, fights like the boys, and is not the usual submissive princess, she may be a lesbian? According to Devor, “Persons who perform the activities considered appropriate for another gender will be expected to perform them more poorly; if they succeed adequately, or even well, at their endeavors, they may be rewarded with ridicule or scorn for blurring the gender dividing line” (673). Certainly, Princess Merida challenged these “gender roles” that other films have developed and continue to preserve in our society.

Linguist Deborah Tannen, a UCLA professor who studies gender differences, is the author of “Marked Women, Unmarked Men.” She explains that there are many details in the appearance of females that draw more attention and makes them “marked” (Tannen 392). Famous pop star, Pink, was interviewed by *Cosmopolitan* magazine and said, “Magazines have told me in the past, ‘We don’t want you on the cover. You’re not pretty enough’” (Prato 49). Pink herself is “marked.” She has over twenty tattoos, various piercings, bold, shaved bleached-blonde hair, and is very athletic. This doesn’t make her any less beautiful; in fact, it makes her unique and even more beautiful. These gender markers are also seen in films. Female characters are put into skimpy outfits to show off their bodies, yet they are always well put together. Apparently, we’re supposed to care about how we look every second of every day. “A woman whose hair has no particular style is perceived as not caring about how she looks” (Tannen 393). When Shelly, in *The House Bunny*, gives the sorority girls make-overs, she focuses on one girl in particular, Natalie, played by Emma Stone. Natalie, an intelligent red-head with shoulder-length straight hair, is a social outcast and can be described as a “Plain Jane.” Shelley quickly changes that. She gives Natalie hair volume, makeup, and outfits to show off her body. Natalie then receives attention from everyone. She even begins to act dumb so the males will like her. This shows how films tell women that they have to choose between being pretty or intelligent and that they should probably pick looks because that’s obviously more important.
Mirror, Mirror

Gender markers tell us we are supposed to look a certain way all the time and gender roles tell us to act a certain way, so our image of beauty has become altered and distorted. Natural beauty is true beauty: women with little-to-no makeup, no plastic surgery, a few blemishes, and different body types. The film industry has put this pressure on women to make them fit an ideal that is unrealistic without the hazards of plastic surgery or pounds of make-up. More real women should be shown on television and in films so that young girls can develop the confidence to embrace their natural beauty.

Works Cited


I realize I have forgotten how a scrumptious chocolate-chip cookie melts in my mouth.

**Kaeblie Yang**
Instructor: John Gides

**Skinny**

Just like any other day, in the fall of 2007, I stood in the school cafeteria trying to decide what to eat for lunch. Should I get the usual hamburgers and fries, make-your-own-sandwich, salad bar, or one of the new meal ideas the lunch ladies had come up with? At a distance, my friends waved me over to the usual, but that did not intrigue me at all. Instead, I walked over to the salad bar; if I ate a salad, then maybe I’d become skinnier, like the models on the cover of a magazine. I walked away from the chatter in the cafeteria, and I strolled into the library, alone. I set my plate down on a table, and for five minutes, I just stared at my food. As I picked each little green piece into my mouth, I tasted the bitter crunchy leaves slugging down my throat. That was the moment I realized I needed to change, to reconstruct myself into a whole new body.

The thought of losing weight was on my mind as I grabbed the rolls of my stomach, felt it jiggle as I walked, and felt the heaviness of it when I sat. When I looked in the mirror, all I saw were my imperfections; the thickness of my chin and the roundness of each thigh rubbing against one another. My face crumbled in pain at the sight of my own image. I snatched the mirror and threw it at the wall, smashing it into tiny pieces. I didn’t ever want to see myself again. Suddenly, an idea shot through my head like a simple math equation: eating less equals less fat.

**Day one:** School, classes, lunch. My friends came up to me and asked me what to eat. I kept my plan from them because this was my thing; no way was I going to tell them that I wanted to lose weight. It was too embarrassing. So I grabbed my food, munched two bites of cucumber, then threw away the rest even though my stomach growled. Later, sitting in class, I noticed a girl beside me, Brittany. She was the image of my goal: she looked incredibly thin and wore the cutest jean skirts and coiffed hairstyles every day. I kept staring at her, wondering how she maintained this perfection. Was she born that way? Did she have to work hard to look like that? Did she eat anything at all? Of
Skinny

course, it got awkward because she knew that I was staring at her, so I looked the other way and pretended to write something vigorously in my notebook. My head was in the clouds all day, thinking to myself that I could do it. Going on a diet wasn’t so bad, right?

Dinner came around and normally my whole family ate together in the dining room, but this time I sauntered upstairs to dine in isolation in my room. No one could see me, no one could hear me. Two bites, I reminded myself. Later on, I joined in with my sisters watching the hit TV show on Disney Channel, Hannah Montana. I watched in awe as Miley Cyrus strutted across the screen; we shared only one thing—we were the same age, fourteen. She was very petite, while I was the complete opposite. Flipping through the TV channels, it seemed as though everyone flaunted what I had always desired: the perfect body. That night, I tried to sleep and it was one of the worst nights of my life. My consumption of food had been small, consisting of only a few bites, and my body felt drained. As I lay in bed, I felt so lifeless.

Over the next few days, I would go through the same process—grab lunch and eat little. I was angry with myself because I wasn’t seeing any results. So I came up with a new theory: I would work out until I trimmed off the extra belly fat. That didn’t seem too hard to do—strenuous workouts as well as cutting proportions. I saw it on television all the time; these amazing stories about how someone dramatically dropped 50 pounds. If they could do it, I could too. It was as simple as that.

Week one. I was really excited when my parents signed up for a local gym. Luckily, they offered me a membership as well. Not being able to drive yet, I had to work out whenever they decided to go. When that happened, I usually ran on the treadmill until I was drenched in sweat or did as many “ab” crunches as possible. I didn’t ever want to stop. In the television show, The Biggest Loser, the renowned fitness trainer Jillian Michaels says, “Unless you puke, faint, or die, keep going!” Her words of motivation gave me a reason to work out as much as possible, even though at times I felt light headed. Before I exited, I always weighed myself, comparing any differences and hoping to lose more pounds.

Month one. I don’t know what to feel anymore. I’m so used to eating almost nothing that sometimes I skip meals. My friends and my parents are worried, questioning my eating habits and asking me why I wear such baggy clothes. I answer them, “It’s okay, I already ate,” or the occasional, “I’m not hungry today.” They just don’t understand what I’m going through. Sometimes when I am extremely hungry, I take a nap. That’s it; that’s the cure, sleep. When
I close my eyes, it takes me to a whole new world where I imagine myself thin and beautiful with everyone gazing in my direction. In those spare moments, I am comfortable with myself. The instant that I wake up, it all disappears and reality hits me. I’m still a fat girl. 

Month two. It’s cold, always cold. While everyone is sporting the latest trend of capris, I hide myself in hoodies and sweatpants. My friends barely talk to me anymore because I don’t sit with them at lunch, and my parents are suspicious as to how thin I’ve become and why I am so pale. For a while, I haven’t looked at myself in the mirror, so for the first time in a few months, I really observe myself in the reflection. I grab my face; nothing. The double chin that was once there has vanished, replaced by sharp cheek bones, my tanned skin has turned to white, rolls on my stomach have changed into a rib cage, and thunder thighs have transformed into chicken legs. I am terrified. Who is this girl looking back at me? This isn’t who I am and want to be; I can’t believe what I have done to myself. It is disgusting. Unexpectedly, I feel the urge to hit myself for my stupidity, brainwashed by people and the media. That night, endless tears stream from my face. For the first time in my life, I pray for myself—to have happiness, joy, and hope. 

The next morning, I wear my favorite blue shirt with a pair of dark wash jeans to school and I have never been happier to see my buddies. I eat as much as I can possibly fit in my mouth. My taste buds explode with the flavors. I realize I have forgotten how a scrumptious chocolate-chip cookie melts in my mouth.

Work Cited
Toys Are Not Us

I think this toy segregation in many toy stores is causing little kids to feel forced to play with gender-assigned toys in order to be considered normal.

Jacquelyn Rabe
Instructor: Nina Ahn

Toys Are Not Us

Years ago, I remember seeing a little boy waiting in line at the Burbank Airport, holding a baby doll. I also remember thinking to myself how strange that looked. I immediately hated that these stereotypical thoughts crossed my mind, but I just couldn't help it. A boy holding a “girl toy” was definitely something I did not see every day. Normally, I saw boys holding trucks or action figures, like Spiderman. In my head I knew that there was absolutely nothing wrong with this little boy, but by the way people looked at him, you would have thought he had grown two heads. Whether we choose to believe it or not, stereotypes are everywhere and they start at a young age: there are “boy toys” and then there are “girl toys.” Unfortunately, kids who are not following the correct toy rules are considered weird. All people should be both independent and sensitive. It is important for males and females to be able to work, cook, and clean. I think little boys and girls should be able to play with whatever toys interest them, no matter what gender the toys are intended for.

I think toy stores do a horrible job of making it easy to play with the opposite sex’s toys. All the girl toys, like Barbie dolls and dress-up clothes, are located in one section. The same goes for boy toys: all Hot Wheels and Nerf guns are located in their own section which is separate from the girl-toy aisles. I think this toy segregation in many toy stores is causing little kids to feel forced to play with gender-assigned toys in order to be considered normal. This issue is one of the reasons children today are afraid to be original. In the article, “Toys Start the Equality Rift,” Katrin Bennhold explains that toys are characterized by the colors pink (for girls) and blue (for boys). She points out that children’s toys are also heavily determined by gender roles. For example, girls are supposed to be more nurturing, so people think they need to play with dolls and kitchen sets. Likewise, boys tend to be more adventurous and rough, so they are expected to play with tools and monster trucks (Bennhold). If children do not solidly fit into the correct gender mold, people view them as weird or unnatural. Bennhold explains that many girls today enjoy building things out of LEGOos and some boys like to play with stove sets. Bennhold suggests that parents should introduce gender-neutral toys to their children and allow them to choose which toys they want to play with and how to play with them.
Bennhold states that stereotyping is also very prevalent in the adult world. She points out that the more nurturing jobs, such as teaching and nursing, are considered female jobs, so they pay less. I had never really thought about this issue, but it could not be truer. Males earn more money because society thinks that the man should be the main supporter of his household. In reality, women are just as capable of supporting the family. All one really needs to be successful is the proper skill to perform the task. Oftentimes, gender stereotypes make people feel uncomfortable if they do not fit properly into the mold. These so-called “misfits” become the minority and are often looked down upon because they are different. I think that people should put all judgments aside and just be themselves, even if that means you’re a man who likes to cook and clean, or a woman who wants to build things and put out fires.

I strongly believe that children should play with whichever toys they want. If the children are happy, then nothing else should matter. They are just toys, and it is not the end of the world if your son plays with a doll or your daughter plays with tools. There are bigger problems in the world. Holly Wall writes about how gender stereotypes affect both sexes. LEGOs for girls, called “LEGO Friends,” were created so girls could play with these plastic blocks too. However, this actually made many mothers very upset. The mothers argued that their daughters could play with the original LEGOs just as much as with the purple and pink ones. I agree with Wall when she states that stereotyping girls also affects how boys view females and their roles in society. The truth is that children look up to their parents and want to be just like them. I have talked to many children and they have told me that they want to be able to cook and fix cars. I feel it is very important to teach children that they can do anything they want to. Wall’s article is also very helpful for parents because it gives a list of ways in which they can start to decrease gender stereotypes. I think that if the child is happy, then the parents should be happy too.

Gender stereotyping has become a habit in our society today. When we go shopping to buy a present for a little girl, we head straight towards the girl section to pick out the newest Barbie doll. It does not even cross our minds to see what the latest boy toy is. In the article, “Guys and Dolls: Reducing Stereotypes in Your Home,” Jae Curtis discusses how toy companies have decided what is “normal” for each gender. Curtis points out that many girl toys are based on appearance, like plastic make-up and princess dresses. Similarly, boy toys are more focused on male’s traits and actions, like playing sports or performing science experiments (Curtis). Unfortunately, these gender stereotypes encouraged by toy manufacturers make girls and boys wonder if they are feminine or masculine enough. Curtis points out that by the time toddlers are thirty months old, they already realize what is appropriate for their specific
Toys Are Not Us

gender, and as a result, start to reject certain toys. This is one of the main reasons children fear being different and unique. Both Curtis and I strongly believe that people should let their children be who they want to be.

The entertainment industry also plays a big role in keeping the gender stereotypes alive and flourishing. Often, kids who watch cartoons or movies learn that certain things are acceptable, while others are firmly looked down upon. I think that if movies were more accepting of different gender roles, then there would be less stereotyping amongst the sexes. In the article “Toy Story,” Kelli Bender talks about how the movie Toy Story 3 uses toys to stereotype the genders. She explains that in the movie Ken is negatively stereotyped as a weak, emotional man who cares too much about his looks (Bender). The other characters frequently make fun of him because he is different. Little kids are going to view these types of men that same way the characters do. Similarly, the movie portrays Barbie as a melodramatic, hyper-emotional girl (Bender). These negative stereotypes belittle women and degrade people who are different. Little kids are like sponges and absorb everything they see. I used to think the original Toy Story movie was a great movie because it taught children that boys and girls could play with the same toys because Andy played with Little Bo Peep and Buzz Lightyear. Now, however, my view of this popular Disney movie has changed because of how the characters are negatively portrayed.

I believe that girls are self-conscious and boys are not as open about showing their emotions because of these expectations to be a certain way. There are many things that both girls and boys can do. It is not the end of the world if your son wants to play dress-up, or if your daughter wants to play with Hot Wheels. Each child is going to like different things, so should not be limited in his or her desire to play with a toy that is not quite girlie or boyish enough. Parents could buy gender-neutral toys like brain stimulating games, educational toys, puzzles, and books. Parents could invite children of both genders over for play dates so they get used to playing together. When it comes to the child’s toys, the child should be the one leading the parent.

Works Cited


I find that sometimes people from your race are the ones that put you down because you’re a little different from them.

William T. Monroe, Jr.
Instructor: Nina Ahn

Social Labeling

“Boy, you should put that body to use and play some sports.” Throughout high school, people have told me I should play sports. While riding public transportation, I was often asked, “Do you play basketball?” I’d tell them that I did not play any sports and their expressions would change, as if they had a suspicion that I was not telling the truth. I used to wonder, why basketball? Then I realized I was being racially profiled. Society has a way of creating different stereotypes and racial profiles. This is not to say that people with misperceptions of an ethnic group are bad, but to comment on the ridiculousness of racial stereotypes. These ideas shape our world and cause people to develop misperceptions regarding someone they may have only known for a few seconds. People miss out on opportunities, get into sketchy situations, and are frowned upon because of these misperceptions. This is shown in Nella Larsen’s short novel, Passing, and Brent Staples’ essay, “Black Men and Public Space.”

In Passing, Irene and Clare are treated as respectable women because people believe that they are Caucasian. Clare and Irene do not correct these people because if people knew their racial background, they would be treated like dirt. During her first meeting with Clare’s husband, Jack Bellow, Irene sees the dark and evil perception that he has of African Americans. Although Mr. Bellow has never met any African Americans on a personal level (to his knowledge), he rants with hatred for them, stating things like, “I read about them in the papers. Always robbing and killing. And...worse” (Larsen 30). How can someone with so little knowledge of African Americans say such evil and hateful things? On the one hand, Mr. Bellow claims he is proud to never have known any African Americans and wants nothing to do with them. On the other hand, Mr. Bellow’s wife, Clare, is African American and he regards her as the perfect wife. This shows that Mr. Bellow’s opinion of African Americans is solely based on what he reads in the newspaper and what people tell him. Basically, his opinion is shaped by the way society portrays African Americans.
In “Black Men and Public Space,” Staples is seen as a criminal and a potential threat because of his skin color, facial features, and clothing. In the beginning of Staples’ essay, he chooses to use the phrase, “My first victim” (314). I believe that Staples uses this phrase to show sarcasm—to give an outsider’s perception of his character. While Staples is out for a walk in Hyde Park, he notices a woman ahead of him walking quickly with her head down. As Staples continues to walk, he notices the woman moving more and more quickly. Finally, she starts running. This shows that her fear is a result of racial profiling. Many Americans assume that a black man walking behind them at a late hour is a sign of danger. This is because society portrays African American men—and men from some other ethnic groups—as violent, dangerous, and angry. Society uses that fear to brainwash people into believing that we should fear, avoid, or ignore certain ethnic groups.

I happen to sympathize with Staples, perhaps because I have been in his situation before. I have noticed that a lot of people avoid walking next to me in small areas at late hours and sometimes take a different route or cross the street when they see me. I have also noticed that, while walking, most people avoid making eye contact with me. Although this may seem insignificant to some people, I find this very troubling. What is it that people see in me that makes them so afraid?

In “Black Men and Public Space,” Staples goes into a jewelry store to kill time before one of his interviews. As he looks around, the proprietor excuses herself and she shortly returns with an enormous red Doberman pinscher. She stands silently, as if she has become mute, her eyes protruding in Staples’ direction. Staples, wanting to avoid trouble, leaves, bidding the proprietor farewell. I’m of two minds about the proprietor’s actions. On the one hand, I agree that safety and precaution are both important. On the other hand, I’m not sure if her actions are acceptable. It is highly annoying when people imply, through their actions, that you are a thief. During my ninth-grade year, I was suspected of stealing and was followed through a store. I was at 7-Eleven, looking for something to buy for lunch. I noticed the manager talking to the store clerk, and shortly after, I noticed the clerk following me, at a distance, of course. After a few minutes, I put back whatever I was going to buy. I decided that if they did not value my business enough to not suspect me of thievery, I would not do business with them.

In “Should I Act More Black?” Ashley Benn comments on her experiences with misperceptions and racial profiling in high school and in college. During high school, Benn was labeled as “Oreo,” “bougie,” or “whitey” because
she was not loud or obnoxious, and wanted to pursue a higher education. Since Benn was friendly with a white crowd, most of the African Americans that went to her school verbally disowned her by telling her she was not black, but white-washed. They also believed that Benn thought she was too good to hang out with other African Americans. You would think that it is common for races to stick together but I find that sometimes people from your race are the ones that put you down because you’re a little different from them. Is it not black to speak properly, to want a better life for yourself, or to want to wait before having children?

Society has created an image that portrays African Americans as lazy, mischievous, loud, and uneducated. So when an African American steps out of this image, some people say negative side comments to tell them that they do not belong. Benn feels insecure because her boyfriend and her family make fun of the way she talks, calling her “Almond Joy” or their “white cousin.” Although they are joking and do not mean what they say, Benn still feels hurt and insulted. It has become common today to dismiss a person’s individuality and label them as bizarre because we find them to be too different from ourselves. When people have a negative perception of someone, they tend to show it through their actions and body language. Benn recalls an incident when she was younger. She was walking with her dad in a 7-Eleven and the store worker followed them throughout the store. Through his actions, the store worker told them, “I think you are going to steal.” Another incident that Benn recalls in her essay was when her brother was driving their mom’s Chrysler 300 and two white cops followed them home. Many people assume that if a person looks underprivileged and he/she has something that is rather expensive, he/she must have stolen it. Even the people who have sworn to protect and uphold the law are influenced by society’s labels.

I feel that one of the main causes of racial profiling and misperceptions is the social labeling that goes on in grade schools. Within these schools, students constantly label each other. Whether it is a positive or negative label is not the issue I’m addressing, it’s the act of labeling. Students pick up the habit of labeling and then carry it throughout their lives. In “Se Habla Español,” Tanya Barrientos talks about her experiences being a Hispanic who is bilingual but more fluent in English. She recalls an incident when she was checking into grade school. Tanya and her mother were running somewhat late to registration, and when they got there, the registrar frowned and said, “You people. Your children are always behind, and you have the nerve to bring them late?” This shows that the registrar thinks Hispanics are slow and do not
Social Labeling

have academic proficiency. Although statistics may show that in some states, like California, Hispanics have lower grade point averages than other ethnic groups, what gives her the right to make such a prejudiced statement?

People cast judgments on others because of stereotypes and misperceptions. These misleading perceptions cause innocent people to be frowned upon as if they are criminals or something is wrong with them. People believe these perceptions because it is easier. Rather than getting to know people on a personal level before judging them, we subconsciously outfit people with ideas of what they might be like. This is wrong, and we are all guilty.

Works Cited


My uncle was insisting that I stay home from school that day.

Saif Ali  
Instructor: John Gides

An American Child

It was early morning. The sun peeked in through my half-opened blinds, the calm fall breeze seeped in through my window, and the birds chirped, reminding the world to wake up. I had just woken up, minutes before my annoying alarm went off, and I was glad to hit the off button as I rolled off my bed and began to prepare for another day of school. I was in the second grade and life could not have been treating me better. In just a few minutes or so, I would be playing with my friends on the blacktop, running amuck.

I remember going on with my morning as usual: scrubbing my hands down with soap, making sure to get in between my fingers and nails; brushing my teeth, rigorously stroking the brush up, down, left, right, and gargling out the astonishing amount of candy and gunk from the previous night; washing my face. Breakfast was always prepared before I even got to the table. My mom made me the usual peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwich, without the crust, and a full glass of milk with strawberry Nesquik, mixed in my favorite glass with the straw swirling around and around—my favorite! I turned on the television, getting ready to watch Power Rangers, but instead I clearly remember seeing in bold black and red letters: “BREAKING NEWS.” Terrorists had hijacked and crashed commercial planes, American Airlines Flight 11 and United Airlines Flight 175, into both towers of the World Trade Center. American Flight 77 had crashed into the Pentagon and United Airlines Flight 93 had crashed somewhere in a field.

I vividly remember videos of the planes crashing into the Twin Towers, the buildings incinerating with the jet fuel and collapsing within minutes. I remember individuals jumping off from nearly the top of the towers, their bodies unrecognizable as they hit the ground. I also remember camera men rushing behind the courageous firefighters into the smoke-filled towers, knowing that they would collapse any second. The whole world stood still in awe and disbelief at what had just occurred. As I watched, I was unaware that I would be directly affected by this event. It would alter the rest of my life.
I remember my Uncle Zahid calling my mom from work, describing the catastrophe that had just unfolded. I was wondering why my mom was on the phone at this hour, especially knowing that we would be running late for school if she continued socializing, but it wasn’t socializing. My uncle was insisting that I stay home from school that day. My mom broke the news that I wasn’t going to school. In a way, I was ecstatic because I wouldn’t have to deal with my grumpy old ogre of a teacher, but I was somewhat saddened by the idea of not seeing my friends and not being able to play basketball. I was infatuated with basketball, with running around, dribbling, and scoring. Instead, I spent the entire day in pajamas watching *Power Rangers* and *Yu-Gi-Oh!* I re-enacted the combat sequences and scenes from *Power Rangers*, and I spent hours watching the new episodes of *Yu-Gi-Oh!* as I anticipated which trading cards to get next, in order to defeat my opponents.

The next day, I went through the same routine of getting up before the annoying alarm, rushing to the bathroom, washing my hands, brushing my teeth, washing my face, and then on to eating breakfast. When I turned on the television again, the same news channel was covering what had occurred the day before. I flipped through every single channel and almost all consisted of the same exact news feed. Now I was worried. I remember seeing that 7-Elevens, Sikh temples, mosques, and other establishments associated with Muslims or Middle Easterners were being vandalized, and any individual who fit the image of the terrorists was being discriminated against, verbally abused, and even physically assaulted.

I fit every physical description of the terrorists presented on TV. I was filled with remorse, grief, anger, and other mixed emotions, because I knew that I wasn’t in any way like the barbaric and inhumane individuals who had done such horrific acts. However, I would be discriminated against. I would be judged. Because I was born into a particular religion, because I practiced that religion, because I belonged to a specific ethnicity and culture, did not mean I was associated with those individuals. I remember I was angered by the fact that I had been born into this culture. I began hating myself. I was accused and set aside. I remember being called *sand nigger*, *towel head*, *traitor*, *back stabber*, and other words that I cannot even express. I was broken; I was hurt. What had the world come to?

With time, I moved on. Those hurtful words did not describe who I was as a person. Those barbaric and inhumane people were not me. I’m equally an American and a Muslim, not one above the other. “I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.” God Bless America!
Tomer Zilbershtein
Instructor: Andrea Hernandez

An Israeli Soldier

The author of The Alchemist, Paulo Coelho, starts his book by telling us about his personal quest in life and his road to success as a novelist. He then tells us what four obstacles he believes prevent most people from living their dreams. The obstacles he describes are discouragement from our environment, fear of abandoning loved ones, fear of defeat, and the fear of realizing our own dreams. The first part of Coelho’s book tells the story of a very intelligent, philosophical shepherd boy named Santiago. His parents wanted him to be a priest but all Santiago ever wanted was to travel. He made his dream come true by becoming a shepherd boy.

On one of his travels with his flock, he meets a merchant’s daughter and falls in love with her. He decides that the next time he visits her village he will ask for her hand. On his journey to the village, Santiago stops at a city to rest. He decides to visit a fortune teller who might help him understand a strange dream that he has been having about a treasure in the Egyptian pyramids. The fortune teller is not too helpful but later on he meets a mysterious, intelligent old man who claims he can help Santiago understand his dream. Santiago is curious to know more but is highly suspicious of the old man, thinking he might be a Gypsy trying to trick him. Through his book, the author shows us that there are different obstacles we must face in life in order to achieve our personal dreams. By telling us his story and Santiago’s, Coelho delivers the message that nothing is easy in life and that we have to work hard and keep on going, even when it seems all hope is lost.

I can relate to Coelho’s introduction and the concept of his book because I too went through certain hardships in life before becoming a student here in the United States. Growing up, I traveled the world with my parents. We lived in different countries and experienced amazing cultures. I went to private schools and was exposed to opportunities one can only dream of. Those experiences made me confident of the opportunities which were in my grasp and put me in a state of illusion, making me believe that I had a secure future among my foreign friends and that I was similar to them.
An Israeli Soldier

The reality was that I was not like the rest of my classmates. I was Israeli. I was born in Israel and with that came heavy responsibility. When Israelis turn eighteen, they must put their lives on hold for three years and serve in the military in order to be counted as respectable citizens in Israeli society. It is mandatory in Israel and everybody serves, but I felt it was not my calling.

When I turned eighteen, I returned to Israel and within three weeks of my arrival, I found myself with head shaved, wearing the olive uniform, ready to join the rest of my Israeli brothers in service. I spent two months in boot camp and about four more months in specialized training before I was ready to be called a soldier. From the jungles and skyscrapers of Singapore and the magical islands of Thailand, I found myself in the olive tree covered, rocky hills of the West Bank, surrounded by Arab villages and the chanting of afternoon prayers bursting from mosque minarets. It was mesmerizing, Biblical scenery. A beautiful land, but deadly too. All I ever wanted was to go to college, meet new friends, and start a career. Instead, I found myself climbing on watchtowers, experiencing sleepless nights sweeping through narrow village alleys, searching for terrorists, constantly on alert with my weapon ready to shoot, and wearing a bulletproof vest in case there were snipers on the village mosque’s minaret.

I had deserted everything that was familiar to me—my friends, my family, and the great opportunities waiting for me overseas. I felt as if I was on a different planet, having to learn everything all over again and adjust to a culture that had become foreign to me so long ago. Putting my life on hold made me feel as if I was losing my momentum. I was sitting in my RPG-protected watchtower, watching my foreign friends going to college. I felt as if I was being held back. I felt as if my dreams were slipping away from me. Being an Israeli soldier in such a difficult and hostile place made me wonder if I would ever survive this experience. I occasionally heard about an unfortunate soldier who fell in battle, got hit by a sniper, or had a patrol car blown up by roadside bombs left by terrorists. I knew that it was mostly a matter of luck and all I could do was think of my parents and hope I would not be the one who made it onto the six o’clock news tonight.

Even when I felt all hope was lost and that my dreams were getting farther and farther from my grasp, I always tried to be optimistic. As a soldier, one learns how to be patient and wait for things, and so did I. I knew that even though I was going through my own personal hell, one day it would all be over and I would be free to continue my life and pursue my dreams.
Section 4: Developing Identity

During my time in the army I began to look at things differently. I developed a different perspective on life, a perspective I never would have adopted if I had not served. I do believe that surviving this obstacle helped me to understand what I want in life. I decided that my calling in life is to help people to adjust to changes and help them to overcome difficulties. My goal is to become a psychologist. Just like Coelho and his character Santiago, I too went through a journey.

Work Cited
The Separation

After that day, my mom never returned to that house.

Guadalupe Miranda
Instructor: Mary Marca

The Separation

It was a usual weekday night. I was home with my mom and my three older brothers. My dad worked the night shift and was hardly ever around. But this night was different. As I sat in the living room watching television with one of my brothers, my dad walked in the front door with the usual blank look on his face. We were surprised to see him home so early. I ran up to him to give him a hug. He hugged me briefly and then softly pushed me away. By this time, I was used to his absences and separation. I wasn’t close to him; none of us were, not even my mom. He was very distant from us. The only times I remember seeing him was on weekends, in the morning. I always craved his attention but I didn’t get much of it. My parents’ relationship consisted of little communication and constant arguing. I was too young to understand what they argued about. They rarely showed any affection and even slept in different rooms sometimes. I wondered if they had always been this way.

My mom walked into the living room soon after she heard my dad arrive. She asked him what he was doing home so early. They both walked into the kitchen and began having a conversation. Everything seemed normal. I continued watching television and a few minutes later, I began to hear my parents argue again. I couldn’t take my mind off the yells coming from the kitchen. They were louder and angrier than ever. It was like no other argument of theirs I had ever heard.

I remember standing behind a chair, watching them say mean things to each other. I wanted to help my mom so badly because I hated seeing her upset. As I saw tears running down her face, I ran in between my parents and begged my dad to leave my mom alone. He looked down at me and didn’t say a word. He simply walked away. I asked my mom if she was okay and she looked at me and said, “We’re spending the night at your aunt’s house.” I didn’t question her. I followed her to our room and I sat on the bed as I watched her pack our clothes. I soon realized we weren’t spending just the night; it was going to be longer than that. All our clothes and belongings were soon in the back of our car with nothing left behind. “Go say good night to your dad,” my mom said. I walked into the room where my dad was sitting, still with that blank look on his face. Yet I could tell he was upset. “Good night, Daddy. I love you.”
Section 4: Developing Identity

“I love you too,” he said. It was the first time I remember hearing those words come out of his mouth. After that day, my mom never returned to that house.

I was only four years old when my parents separated. Soon after they separated, I started school. The first few years were the hardest. I was ashamed to let my friends know that I didn't live with my dad because I thought they would see me differently. But as I grew up, I became proud to say I lived with my mom, just my mom. I was proud of both her and myself. I was always provided with everything I needed and wanted. I was happy because even though I didn't live with my dad, I was able to form a bond with him after he and my mom separated.

Many people think that children who are raised by a single mother have less of a chance to be happy or successful. But I believe that I was better off that way. Many also believe that mothers take away the opportunity for children to have relationships with their fathers once they separate or divorce. But in my case, not once did I go a week without spending time with my dad. Even though I had just one parent at home, and even though I didn't grow up with a traditional father–daughter relationship, I still grew up as a happy child.

In her poem, “It’s a Woman’s World,” Eavan Boland says, “We are defined/by what we forget/by what we will never be:/star-gazers, fire-eaters” (19–23). Many times, we let people’s expectations get the better of us. We believe that because of who we are, where we come from, or how we were raised, we fall into a certain category. We reach only for what is expected of us and not what we expect from ourselves. In my eyes, there is no such thing as a category. I believe we are all equal, have the same rights, and are capable of the same things.

Having been raised by a single woman, I understand the struggles women face every day. The separation of my parents will not define the person I am and want to become. I will be a star-gazer because I am going to reach for my goals, and become not what people expect me to become, but what I want myself to become. I will be a fire-eater because I will take all the risks necessary in order to become the person I want to be.

Work Cited
Assignments

What Does the Writer Say?
1. Explain what Jessie M. Lara means in her essay “Mirror, Mirror,” when she says that a body can be “marked” with a gender.

2. Tomer Zilbershtein describes, in his essay “An Israeli Soldier,” how he experienced a change in plans when he was required to join the Israeli army. How did this experience alter his identity?

What Do You Say?
3. William T. Monroe, Jr., in his essay “Social Labeling,” says in his conclusion that “we are all guilty” of racial stereotyping. Consider the evidence that Monroe gives in the context of your own experience. Do you agree with his claim? Explain your response.

4. Kaeblie Yang in her essay “Skinny,” Jessie M. Lara in “Mirror, Mirror,” and Jacquelyn Rabe in “Toys Are Not Us,” discuss different ways that the media can influence one’s gender identity. In what ways do you agree with their claims? What counterarguments might you propose to refute their claims?

5. In “The Separation,” Guadalupe Miranda reveals her positive attitude towards divorce, especially her own parents’ divorce. What reasons does Miranda give for this position? To what extent do you agree or disagree with her argument. Support your answer.

Writing Exercises
6. For this exercise, write a 1–2 page narrative in which you respond to the following:

Tomer Zilbershtein describes a significant life experience that altered his identity and his destined path. Describe a situation that helped shape your identity, your way of viewing the world, or your future. Explain why it had such an impact on you.

7. For this exercise, write a 1–2 page dialogue in which you respond to the following:

Saif Ali in his essay “The American Child,” and William Monroe in his essay “Social Labeling,” discuss their racial identities. Create a dialogue between these two authors. The purpose of the dialogue is to highlight similarities and differences in their experiences.
Section 5: Spotlight on Sports

Quick Write:
Is there a sport or a team that you feel passionate about or especially connected to? Why do you feel that way? What is it about sports that awaken such strong emotions in so many people?
Notes, Responses, & Ideas
Christopher Hernandez
Instructor: Amy Reynolds

**Progression II—**

**Three Exercises and an Essay:**

**Confetti Is Everywhere**

**Exercise 1—Word Picture**

My object is purple and gold. It is used to hold one’s keys. You often see people wear these around their necks, or nowadays, hanging down from their pants or shorts. It represents the biggest sports team here in Los Angeles. It is one of the memorabilia of this team. You can find this item in a sports store and I have even seen them in auto-parts stores. The price varies from $6 to anywhere around $15. This item comes in either primarily gold or primarily purple, with the team’s logo all over it. The team’s logo is plastered on it about 25 times (that’s a guess).

I chose this object because it reminds me of when I was younger and I would watch all the games. I would sit there with my dad, godfather, and my cousin. We would have parties where we would watch the playoff games. My schedule was, and still is, centered around Laker games. I remember rushing home from school when I was about 8 or 9, because I didn’t want to miss the game. (I got out at 3 and the game started at 7:30, but I thought that I was going to somehow miss something.) I knew every player and everything about the team. When I went to Chicago, I felt out of place because everything was so different, but no matter where we went, I saw someone in a Laker jersey.

**Exercise 2—Scene**

Brian and I are sitting on the couch, awaiting the seventh and final game of the series. Both teams have three wins apiece. My purple-and-gold key chain is in the same spot it has been for the entire playoffs: back left pocket. This is the same green team that beat us two years ago, in embarrassing fashion. Brian and I reminisce on how it was to go to school the next day and get ridiculed.

“I remember having to go to school and having to hear all my hater friends ask ‘What happened to your team?’” he says.

“Yeah, me too. The moment I walked into class, my friend David was there with a grin on his face. He made fun of my pain,” I reply, laughing.
The clock strikes five and the game begins. There are butterflies in my stomach, and probably in his too. Both teams come out cold. The arena is so loud we can hardly hear the announcers. Halftime rolls around and they are up 40–34. In the third quarter, their lead plateaus and drops and we are now down 13. Brian gets up, donned in his purple jersey, and begins cursing at the TV as I sit there in disbelief. Slowly, we begin to chip away, and before you know it, we are only down by 1. The buzzer sounds and the quarter is over; three down, one to go. Fast forward about 20 minutes, 5:21 left; the best player on the team, probably in the world, hits a jump shot after struggling all game. “Hell, yeah!” Brian yells as we high five each other. We are up four. It feels like the trophy is ours but we do not want to celebrate early. Time keeps ticking and the game is back and forth. We make a shot and they answer with one of their own. The butterflies have turned into elephants. There are now seven seconds left; we are up four, but they have the ball. They inbound and take a tough three pointer—\textit{clank}. We rebound the miss and throw it down court. The clock hits zero and the buzzer goes off. Final score: 83–79.

Confetti begins to rain down from the rafters of the Staples Center, with Randy Newman’s “I Love L.A.” blaring through the speakers. The players in gold uniforms are celebrating. Brian’s frown is now a big smile that matches mine. We celebrate as if we are also getting rings. We have just beaten our biggest rival, the same team that embarrassed us two years earlier by 39 points in the final game. The same team that poured Gatorade on their coach as if they were playing on gridiron and not hardwood. This is the fifth championship we have witnessed, and undoubtedly, this is the best.

“Oh my God, what a game!” I remember saying.

My dad gets home from work and gives us a big hug. Brian gets on the computer and finds Queen’s “We Are the Champions” on YouTube. We shout the lyrics with joy, with pride. We watch the trophy ceremony; our smiles are now touching our ears. We won number 16. We have our revenge, and boy is it sweet. Just as sweet as it will be to rub it in David’s face the next day.

\textbf{Exercise 3—Observation}

With the acquisition of superstars Steve Nash and Dwight Howard, the Lakers had a busy off-season. That is the way they operate. They want championships. Anything short of that is a failed season. However, in all my years of being a fan, never has there been a time when Kobe Bryant was not the main subject dressed in purple and gold.

On Saturday, October 13, I went to John’s Incredible Pizza Company, a pizza buffet in Montclair. This restaurant has different rooms in which to eat, such as a kid’s room where they play cartoons, and the cabin lounge which gives the effect that you are camping. I was not expecting to do this
ethnography exercise there, but something stood out to me. There was a Lakers pre-season game being shown in the sports room. The Lakers were playing the Utah Jazz at Staples Center, their first game played at the arena this year. The sports room was full, which surprised me since it was pre-season. I figured most were there because their cable provider did not carry Time Warner Cable Sports Net, the new channel that broadcasts the Laker games. There were three men and two children wearing their Laker gear. Three of them had jerseys, one of them had a cap, and the other had a key chain similar to mine. There were also other obvious fans, who celebrated when the Lakers scored.

What really stood out to me were the eyes of the fans when Steve Nash touched the ball. They were locked on the screen. It was as if they were anticipating an amazing pass, one they would see on the highlight reel. When the Lakers were on defense, they continued to eat their pizza or converse with their dinner guests. When the other team would score, they didn't seem angry, but rather excited because Nash would get the ball and run the offense again. They resettled themselves in their seats.

At the 3:43 mark in the first quarter, Nash was subbed out. He was replaced by second-year guard Darius Morris. This was when the viewers all went to get more pizza or to the restroom. Bench players remained in the game for the rest of the quarter. The fans returned to their tables around the start of the second quarter. Nash and Kobe were still out, so their attention was not on the game. I spoke with a fan seated at the table next to us. His name was Jerry. He looked about 40 years old. He told me he was there for his daughter's birthday. He was at the table while his wife and kids were at the arcade and he was going to meet them at halftime. I recorded him with my sister's phone.

“Who is your favorite Laker right now?”

“Steve Nash, because it’s been a while since we had a good point guard. Plus, he can create easy shots for everyone. I mean, I still got love for Kobe, but I’ve been watching him play since he was drafted. The only time I got to see Nash was when L.A. played Phoenix. That was what, like five times a year?”

Nash subbed back in at around the five minute mark. A couple of minutes later, he made a no-look pass to Kobe that sent “oohs” and “ahhs” around the restaurant. It was a very simple pass, but it was pretty nice. For the remainder of the quarter, Nash had their complete attention although he was not even as involved as he had been in the first two pre-season games. At one point, I looked over to my right and saw what appeared to be a father and son. The boy was talking to his dad about something. His dad was nodding his head saying, “Uh huh, uh huh.” I looked at the screen and saw Nash bringing the ball up court and calling a play. It reminded me of when my dad and I are watching TV and my little brother keeps talking about something that happened at school. When he leaves, we look at each other and say, “What did he just say?”
Kobe Bryant was having himself a good first half. He had made a between-the-legs pass for a slam dunk back in the first quarter. However, at one point he was over-dribbling and he was double-teamed. I saw a guy mouthing the words, “Give it to Steve.” When Kobe did, I saw the guy look over to his guest and say, “Finally!” It was as if he was relieved that Nash had the ball in his hands again. This completely shocked my cousin and me because we had never seen people so excited when someone other than Kobe Bryant had the ball. Kobe Bryant! The same Kobe Bryant that brought this city five NBA championships.

The half ended and the Lakers were up by 11. Everyone, including myself, made our way into the arcade. They did not return to their seats; instead, I saw them playing games with the people who had been at their table. I could not help but think that if it had been a regular season game, they would be back at their tables rooting for Nash and the Lakers.

**Essay: Confetti Is Everywhere**

I consider Jack Nicholson to be a brother of mine. Ice Cube, George Lopez, and David Beckham are also on the family tree. We are all related by blood, the purple and gold blood that runs through our veins. Unlike them, I do not sit courtside, nor have I even been to a game. However, you can bet that come game time, our television is locked on the Lakers, just as it has been for years. My family knows that if they want me to do anything, they have to wait for commercials or halftime. Not only are the Lakers my team, they are my Los Angeles.

I remember becoming a fan when I was six. The Lakers had just won the NBA championship. I jumped on the bandwagon because I wanted to celebrate with my father, so I became a fan. The next year, we won another championship. Again we celebrated. The year after that, another celebration. Three years in a row! By this time, I was interested in not only the team, but the sport. I played basketball with my older cousin every day. We would take turns to be Shaq and to be Kobe. I imitated all of Shaq’s post moves. I studied the moves he used to score on his defender and I utilized them when I played at recess with my friends. The Lakers were on my mind 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

After they won the trophy for three consecutive years, I was sure that a fourth would be coming. Unfortunately it did not. I remember the camera panning to the players on the bench, and seeing them cry. I started to cry with them and so did my cousin. Then I remember my dad, who was sitting on the other couch with a glum face, reminding us that the Lakers could not win...
every year. It was hard to accept this. However, I noticed that everywhere I went for the next couple of months, people still wore their Laker jerseys. This was weird to me because I thought fans should be embarrassed, like I was, to show others that they supported a losing team.

The 2005 and 2006 seasons were the worst. In 2005, I had no reason to watch the playoffs because I could not stomach watching other teams play. In 2006 I did watch, but stopped after the five-game elimination. That offseason, my cousin won a Laker jersey after he beat a coach—who supervised the summer school basketball program—in a game of one-on-one. I was shocked that the coach had given up his expensive jersey so easily. I knew the price of those jerseys because I had bought a cheap one from downtown. I was the coolest of all my friends, though, and they all eventually went to get one.

Later, when I asked the coach how he could give up such an expensive jersey so easily, he said, “It’s alright. I got like, ten.”

“Ten?” I said, “But they’ve been playing horrible for … like the last three years.”

“For better or worse,” he responded.

This stuck with me all these years. It reminded me of something my dad would say, and it made me realize why I kept seeing everyone wear their Laker jerseys despite the fact that they had not had a parade for almost four years.

First-round playoff exits were a pattern until 2008, when the Lakers reached the Finals. It was against the Celtics. I was young, only in the eighth grade, but I knew the history of this match-up. I knew of all the great players who had put on the green and gold uniforms. It was not the first time I had seen footage of Magic Johnson and Larry Bird in the Finals. It definitely was not my dad’s first time. He remembered where he had been and what he had been doing when these two greats played more than 20 years ago. I had heard all of my friends’ trash-talk. They told me that the Lakers had no chance, but I did not listen; I had faith. Unfortunately, my friends were right. The Lakers lost in six games. The fourth and title-clinching win for the Celtics was by a margin of 39 points.

I was embarrassed to go to school the next day. The moment I walked into class, my friend David was there with a big grin on his face, because he hated the Lakers. That whole day was horrible for me. Everywhere I walked, I heard others talking about how badly the Lakers had played. My embarrassment turned into anger. At one point, I turned the corner to go into P.E. and saw a guy in a Laker jersey. He was sitting with a group of about five others.
Progression II—Three Exercises and an Essay: Confetti Is Everywhere

I remember their conversation: they were making fun of him for wearing his jersey, but he did not care. I overheard him say how proud he was that they at least had made the Finals. This reminded me of the coach from elementary school, but it also made me angry. For me, it was win a championship, or the season was a failure.

Over that next summer, I kept hearing from NBA insiders that the Lakers’ main focus in training camp was to win a trophy. This was apparent when they opened the season strong. I was still reluctant to crown them so early in the season, but the Lakers kept coming out on the winning side of games.

They went into the playoffs as the top seed in the Western Conference. They took down the Oklahoma City Thunder, Houston Rockets, and Denver Nuggets. For the second year in a row, they were in the Finals. This time, they played the Orlando Magic, and this time they won. I remember what I did when the final buzzer went off. I jumped out of my seat and hugged my dad. I then called my cousin who was yelling on the phone. But the next day, all the water-cooler talk was about the riots at LA Live. I kept thinking, “Who cares about those idiots? Did you guys see how great the Lakers played?”

It was a great summer. I loved the fact that ESPN kept talking about the Lakers and how they could see them repeat as champions. And that is exactly what they did. It took seven games, but the Lakers won another title. This one was sweeter, however, because it was against those Celtics. My cousin and I watched the game together. We were both nervous, especially when the Lakers trailed by 13 points. My cousin was wearing his Lakers jersey and I had my keychain, but we both wanted to take them off at this point. It was not long before the Lakers were back in the game and eventually led. That fourth quarter was the most nerve-racking time in my life, but when the clock hit zero, it was undoubtedly the happiest.

After riding the emotional high of winning back-to-back championships, I then had to ride the emotional low of back-to-back second-round exits. While the rest of the country was having barbeques and watching fireworks explode in the sky during the Fourth of July, my dad, cousin, and I were inside watching ESPN. The Lakers had just traded for Steve Nash, one of the best floor generals in basketball, despite being 38 years old. The former two-time MVP had averaged 10.7 assists the previous year for the Phoenix Suns while Kobe had led the Lakers that year with only 4.3 assists (NBA.com/stats). For us, the fireworks were celebrating the acquisition of the point guard.

To put the cherry on the sundae, a month later the Lakers traded for Dwight Howard, perhaps the best center in the NBA, according to many experts such as Charles Barkley, who said, “This just makes the Lakers the team...
ESPN’s coverage of the Lakers’ huge offseason went on all weekend. I imagined the instructions at the morning staff meetings at ESPN headquarters: “Just talk about what the Lakers have done over the past month.” It was good to be a Laker fan again. All the jokes about them being has-beens had become irritating. I was also starting to get angry again at the losses. After the trades occurred, all my fellow Laker “family members” were extremely excited, more so for Steve Nash because of his skill. Jerry, a fellow fan I spoke to at John’s Incredible Pizza Company in Montclair, said that Nash was his favorite Laker and that Nash could “create easy shots for everyone.” At this restaurant, I also noticed that Kobe Bryant appeared to be old news because there was no excitement when he made a basket. Jerry mentioned, “I’ve been watching him [Kobe] play since he was drafted in 1996.” It came as a shock, because if there was no Kobe, there would be no championships.

Laker fans are different. A successful season is one that ends with a championship, and we do not accept anything less. We are not like Detroit Lions fans, who hope to just make the playoffs. We do not get excited over a blowout win over the New Orleans Hornets. As a matter of fact, we leave early, because let’s not forget how congested the 110 freeway is, especially after a basketball game. We might not even watch the game if we expect a “W” in the win column. Los Angeles is a Laker town, because they give us the best chance of a parade. The Clippers are turning the corner and could snag a championship, but that would be only one to our sixteen. The Dodgers have not won the World Series since the 1980’s and no one even knew that Los Angeles had a hockey team until the Kings won in 2012. As for the Galaxy, no one watches soccer in America.

I am a realist. I know that the Lakers are not going to win the trophy every year. I know that when the Lakers get eliminated, I am not going to be a happy camper. But what speeds up the healing process is the fact that, in a couple of months, a new journey begins. The same goes for all sports fans; every year you think your team can go all the way. However, what separates the Lakers’ fan base from the Bobcats’ fan base is the fact that we demand a good product on the court. Ownership knows we do not want scrubs out there getting us to only the second round, which is why they went out and got Howard and Nash. Sadly, it did not pan out.

To others, Los Angeles is about the beaches, palm trees, and Hollywood. To me, it is about the team playing in Staples Center, wearing the gold jerseys. It is about the memories I have with my father and cousin surrounding this team. It is about me rushing home to finish my homework when I was
Progression II—Three Exercises and an Essay: Confetti Is Everywhere

younger, so that I could watch the game in peace and not have to hear my mom lingering over me, asking, “Is your homework done?” If you were to ask me what I wore last week, I would really have to think about it. But ask me what I wore to the parades, there will be no hesitation. The Lakers have always, and will always, be my number one team. Everything else in life—besides family—takes a back seat from the beginning of the season in November, to June, when, hopefully, I will be partying on Figueroa Boulevard.

Works Cited


I guess my ego got in the way as I envisioned myself “pulling a Lebron”...

Femi Ige
Instructor: Melissa Filbeck

Impact of a Dunk

At first, the doctors thought my wrist was broken, then strained, or maybe sprained, so I was in and out of casts for two months, with no progress. I questioned their intelligence as, day after day, I left the hospital with no results to show from it. In the meantime, I found myself replaced and forgotten as the team traveled to San Diego for tournaments without me. I had lost my spot and my future as a basketball player looked bleak. Eventually, the doctors finally diagnosed my injury as a dislocation and I was put in a cast for eight weeks.

Growing up, I have always had a love for basketball. I looked up to the greats like Kobe Bryant, Tracy McGrady, and Allen Iverson, to name a few. They inspired me to pursue basketball at a young age and I found myself playing any chance I had. I would always study old tapes of Michael Jordan and Magic Johnson to gain a few techniques to use when I played. I loved how Michael Jordan always did a type of fade-away that seemed to me like the hardest shot, but he made it look effortless. Sometimes, I would switch it up and watch Magic Johnson cross over defenders and do no-look passes as if he was Michael Jackson displaying his moonwalk. Jordan and Johnson made it look like a work of art when they played, and I was determined to be just like them. I practiced all day and all night to improve my skills. I learned how to do a fade-away by the age of 11, and by the age of 13, I was on several basketball teams. I used to play center for a lot of my teams because I was the tallest, but that didn’t deter me from patenting my game after Michael Jordan and Kobe Bryant. My favorite team was the Lakers and I used to love going to Staples Center to see my favorite players play under the bright lights. I used to tell myself, “One day that will be me playing under those bright lights, getting cheered on by thousands of fans.” I was a child at the time; I still had a dream and I was pursuing it against all odds. Basketball was more than a hobby; it was life.

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1 A fade-away or fall-away in basketball is a jump shot taken while jumping backwards, away from the basket. The goal is to create space between the shooter and the defender, making the shot much harder to block.

2 Basketball slang for “imitating.”
Impact of a Dunk

As my game continued to progress, I found myself playing harder competitions, with added intensity. I started playing for my high school, averaging about fifteen points and eight rebounds a game: solid numbers. Yet I wasn’t satisfied. I began intensifying my workouts and playing more than ever to increase my productivity on the court. Although it was mandatory for all basketball players to follow the rules, especially, “Don’t play pickup games,” I found myself engaged in games at parks near my house. My reason was to get better through the added time spent away from mandatory practices and games and to find out what kind of player I was. That seemed like a smart idea at the time, but later I would realize that perhaps the rules were created to protect players like me.

One day, I was playing at the park and I found myself on a fast break with no one near me and only one player in front of me. I guess my ego got in the way as I envisioned myself “pulling a Lebron” and dunking over my friend, Garren, who was all set up for me. I increased my speed and took off in sight of the ten-foot rim that stood between me and two points. While in the air, I felt someone swipe at the ball and all I could see was the ground as my body lost balance mid-air. I put my arm out to try to absorb some of the impact of the fall, but all I heard was a crackle and I was out. I opened my eyes and felt a sharp pain. I looked down and saw the downward shift of my hand and felt excruciating pain. I was carried off the court and rushed to the hospital.

During my long recovery, I often found myself in the hospital waiting room, where I tried to occupy the free time I had by reading magazines. One day, I came across an ESPN magazine article about a famous basketball player, Shaun Livingston, who had suffered a horrific injury on the basketball court. I continued to read the article and found out that his leg had literally turned sideways and he had to be carried off the court. He had to quit basketball indefinitely. I picked up another magazine describing another basketball player, Brandon Roy, who had suffered multiple injuries to his knee but continued to play through. I discovered that Roy later suffered a massive injury and had to retire from the NBA at the age of 27. Although these stories were sad, I couldn’t help but love the players for their passion. I felt a connection with these athletes because they too had to give up what they loved because of injuries. I could envision the disappointment in their eyes and their heavy hearts as they sat in the doctor’s office, waiting for the bad news. I reached to grab for more magazines but then heard a dim voice calling my name, “Femi Ige, the doctor is ready to see you now.”

Pulling a Lebron: To dunk over someone with extreme power.
When I arrived home, I looked up the latest books and magazines specializing in sports. I began researching my own injury and even diagnosed myself a month before the doctors did. I had a real connection with the texts and felt as if I was still a part of the game, even though I wasn’t playing. These books made me realize that playing basketball wasn’t everything and reading opened up a world of infinite opportunities. I stopped feeling sorry for myself and started pursuing other books that weren’t just about sports. Although it may seem hard to let go of something you love, pursuing something different may be beneficial as well. Reading helped me when I was struggling with what life was dishing out to me. I realized that I wasn’t the only one who had to give up something he loved because of an injury. Sometimes you have to accept what you are given and try to make the most of it.
One Team

The title of this picture sums up the neglect that women’s sports face.

Kourtney Kutscher
Instructor: Rachel Jordan

One Team

A visual text allows for a story to be told even though no words may be present. The photograph of the USA women’s soccer team, “The Greatest Team You’ve Never Heard Of,” is a perfect example of how visual texts can recreate an identity through a photograph (Nike). The photograph is of seven women soccer players, on the USA National Team, standing or kneeling on a soccer field. Although this description may seem basic and unsophisticated, the message of the photograph is powerful and complex. The photograph of “The Greatest Team You’ve Never Heard Of,” allows the viewer to identify with the women athletes and gives girl athletes role models to look up to. In addition, the visual shows how much dedication it takes to be a professional athlete. The photograph constructs the identity of the women and gives them a new image, as well as the recognition they deserve.

The title of this picture sums up the neglect that women’s sports face. “The Greatest Team You’ve Never Heard Of” is the best description of the photograph. This team has acquired countless wins in major events, such as the Olympics and the World Cup, yet they are rarely mentioned. Because they are women, the accomplishments that the USA women’s soccer team has achieved have been barely recognized or even ignored. The serious and determined looks on each of the players’ faces demonstrate their dedication and show that a woman’s sport is no less important than a man’s sport. It also attempts to crack the stereotype that women’s sports are a joke and that anyone can do them. The serious tone of this picture puts these thoughts to rest. Whether you are a professional male or female athlete, your position is earned through hard work and dedication. Nothing is handed to these athletes who have talent and heart. This picture is trying to break the general stereotype that men are superior to women and women can’t do things such as physical sports. Instead, this picture creates a powerful identity for women by showing their passion for soccer, and demonstrating the sacrifices women athletes make for their sport and their teammates.

By glancing at the photograph, a person sees the basics: seven professional women soccer players next to each other on a field. By taking a deeper

\[Note: \text{Google the keywords: “The Greatest Team You’ve Never Heard Of” to access the advertisement.}\]
look, one can see that there is more to learn and understand about this team. Not every woman in the picture is of the same race. They have different ethnic backgrounds, but they have all come together to form one team. This demonstrates that women’s athletics is a culture that requires tolerance in order for them to form a bond and play together. They come together to form a second family that supports one another. The visual text illustrates this second family by placing the team members close together, with one player having her arm on the other player’s shoulder. Even though the game is serious and they constantly battle against each other for a starting position, the picture shows how much the teammates truly mean to each other.

Despite negative comments towards these professional athletes, they set a high standard and give countless younger soccer players such positive figures to look up to. The tone of the image is motivational to amateur female soccer players who wish to reach the professional level some day. The photograph gives us examples of dedicated women who spend all their time together and make sacrifices because of their love for the game. They spend numerous hours on the field daily to earn respect from their fans and to get the win on game day. For example, the text above the picture states that these women “have together missed out on 13 proms, 74 birthdays, 21 Thanksgivings, and 989 boyfriends” (Nike). The difference between someone who has never played professionally and these women is that “they know why they miss these things. They know that the game-changing slide tackles and goals” are worth missing a friend’s birthday or a holiday (Nike). The love they have from their second family and the feelings of accomplishment are their rewards. These female athletes know they are the greatest team you’ve never heard of.

All in all, soccer inspires passion and it tends to shape and sway culture. I believe that athletes have to work together and put all negatives or cultural differences aside to become a team. Whether they are best friends off the field or not, they come together to achieve one goal: to win. National teams have become symbols of our nation and teams doing as well as our women’s national team will help promote and encourage more people to become bigger supporters of women’s sports. The visual text shows people what it is like to be a top-notch athlete. Whether they have fewer fans at their games than the men’s team or not, they are dedicated to representing our country and sacrificing anything for the love of the game. These women are inspirational to younger athletes.

Work Cited
Out of the Comfort Zone

When women had the opportunity to prove themselves, they made themselves shine...

Leslie Martinez
Instructor: Nina Ahn

Out of the Comfort Zone

Title IX, of the Education Amendments of 1972, states, “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.” Before this law was passed over forty years ago, females could not participate in many of the sports activities provided for males. Males were given all the opportunities and all the funds. Many people do not realize that, through Title IX, many doors opened for women and gave them the chance to succeed and achieve better lives. Women have taken advantage of this opportunity and even surpassed expectations by becoming gold medalists at the Olympics, experiencing a decrease in health problems, and even becoming medical doctors. Although this is very beneficial for women, men see it as a disadvantage because they now have to share fifty-percent of the federal funds with female athletes, as well as share the facilities, equipment, coaching, and scholarships. Many people argue that Title IX’s time has passed and should be abolished, but I believe that Title IX has placed males and females on the same level and given women the same opportunities to compete, live healthy lifestyles, and have successful careers.

When the modern Olympics started in 1896, Baron Pierre de Coubertin, founder of these Olympics, forbade women from competing because he thought it would be “impractical, industrial, unaesthetic, and incorrect” (qtd. in Brennan). As the years passed, women athletes were given the opportunity to compete but were entitled to participate in less than half of the events that males competed in. When they were given more opportunities, they took that fighting chance to show that they too could win medals in as many events as males. In the 2012 Olympics, for the first time, women exceeded men. The U.S.A. sent 268 women but only 261 men. When they returned, the women brought back not only the most medals but also the most gold medals in several different events. When women had the occasion to prove themselves, they made themselves shine and even set new world records.
Before women could go to the Olympics, they had to start somewhere. That’s why Title IX is still so important in high schools and colleges. It teaches girls and young women that they too can excel in life. Some girls first realize this in high school and make themselves distinguishable from the crowd. Joe Drape, from the New York Times, states that previously, “1 in 27 girls played a sport in high school.” By the year 2000, “1 in 3 girls played a sport in high school” (Drape). According to Peg Pennepacker of the National Federation of State High School Associations, being part of a sport provides females with the “benefits of physical fitness and overall health.” Title IX is much more than just a sports law. It has encouraged females to have better lifestyles, keep fit, boost their immune systems, and feel energetic and vibrant. This also helps reduce the chances of women suffering illnesses like diabetes, hepatic steatosis, or some heart diseases (“Effects”). Exercising decreases the chance of cancer, heart attack, stroke, or blood clots because it lowers blood pressure. Also, it decreases the chance of having a bone breakage or other injury. Many people who don’t exercise or strive to have healthy lifestyles suffer from depression because they don’t like how they look in front of others (“Effects”). Pennepacker also states that numerous studies have shown that participation in sports leads to a decrease in obesity, which leads to higher self-esteem.

Title IX has also aided women in their careers. Researchers show that women who’ve participated in sports, “have a greater chance of employment later in life and receive salaries 14–19% high than those who did not participate in sports” (Pennepacker). Before Title IX, “Women earned less than ten percent of law and medical degrees and just thirteen percent of doctoral degrees. Today, women nearly earn half of all law and medical degrees and more than fifty percent of all doctoral degrees” (Pennepacker). Susan Morse writes, “When you remove sports from the training of women, you make them less competitive in other activities including the work world.” This makes sense, because the skills you develop while you’re involved in sport can help you to attain qualities such as leadership, teamwork, cooperation, discipline, communication, commitment, friendship, compassion toward others, and determination. These are usually the type of qualities bosses look for in their employees. People with these attributes not only present themselves as good workers but also as good role models for others. On the other hand, since more females now participate in sports, this means that fewer men have the opportunity to participate. That leads to the cutting of some men’s sports teams. Joe Drape argues that although Title IX was a good law at first, it is now time to abolish it because it’s not fair to the men. Drape states that “more than 170 wrestling programs, 80 men’s tennis teams, 70 men’s gymnastics teams, and 45 men’s track teams have been eliminated, according to the General Accounting Office.”
Out of the Comfort Zone

However, some men don’t realize how beneficial Title IX has been for women. The law has helped girls and women in school step out of their comfort zones and experience something that will make a difference to their future. Without this law, I would not have been able to participate in volleyball, track and field, or cross country. I’ve learned so much through sports and I’m continuing to develop this learning in college. Right now, I am studying to get my degree in kinesiology. Title IX is one of the best laws ever passed and I hope it stays that way for the rest of the women to come.

Works Cited


ASSIGNMENTS

What Does the Writer Say?
1. Summarize the three writing exercises written by Christopher Hernandez. Trace the way the specific observations in the exercises are developed in his final essay, “Confetti Is Everywhere.”

2. Consider Femi Ige’s “Impact of a Dunk” and Hernandez’s “Confetti is Everywhere.” Respond to the following:
   a. Why does Ige use footnotes?
   b. How do Ige and Hernandez use language to describe pivotal scenes?
   c. Ige states that he connected to the texts he was reading because “they too had to give up what they loved.” How do these two writers demonstrate their connection with the athletes they admire?

What Do You Say?
3. In “Out of the Comfort Zone,” Leslie Martinez claims that Title IX is beneficial for women for several reasons. What are her claims and do you agree with them? Why or why not?

4. In “One Team,” Kourtney Kutscher argues that the photograph of the USA women’s soccer team provides female athletes with role models while showcasing the lack of recognition female athletes receive. Why does the author claim these are two important issues in the sports arena? Within that context, do you agree that the photograph redefines what it means to be a female athlete? (To view the photograph online, Google the keywords: “The Greatest Team You’ve Never Heard Of.”)

Writing Exercises
5. For this exercise, write a 1–2 page discussion of what sports mean to Hernandez, Ige, and to you.

   Describe the emotions sports and sportsmanship can create. How do these emotions connect fans as a “family” and build bonds with their professional idols on and off the court? Aside from the positive nature of sports fandom and sportsmanship, what are the hardships or drawbacks? What is your own attitude towards sports?

6. For this exercise, write 1–2 pages in which you compare and contrast “One Team” and “Out of the Comfort Zone.” To prepare for this exercise, revisit both essays. Which essay is more persuasive and why?
Notes, Responses, & Ideas
New Voices Publication Celebration
Introducing Our New Voices

Saif Ali: I’m 19 years old and my birthday is on April 11, which makes me an Aries. I’m predominately Middle Eastern, with a hint of Russian, Arab, and Caucasian. I was born and raised in sunny Northridge, California. I previously attended Northridge Academy High School, and I currently attend CSUN. I’m studying Public Health Promotion/Pre-Dentistry, and plan to work in the dental field as a hygienist with a specialization in orthodontics. My goal in life is to provide every individual with a bright, healthy smile that leaves an everlasting impression. As people say, the eyes are the window to your soul, and your smile is the window to your stomach. A healthy mouth is a happy mouth.

Muath Mana Aljohani: I am a 19-year-old freshman, and I am majoring in insurance. I have dreams, and I shared my dreams for the first time in my life through writing. Writing gave me a refuge where I could write about anything without worrying about what others thought, because I would not be there when they read it. The thing about writing is, even if your writing is bad, you will always be happy when you finish your paper. Only a few can achieve writing as an art, but until I give it to someone to read, I believe my writing is art. Write with passion and you will love writing.

Joyce Vondee Amankwah: I am a native from Ghana in West Africa. I am married with two children, Matthew and Jadon, whom I love to the max. I am here at CSUN, majoring in accounting. I spend each day on campus striving to be the best in all my classes. Although it is cumbersome putting education and family together, I am blessed to have a lovely husband, Moses, who inspires me daily to keep marching on. His encouragement gives me the zeal to unroll every scroll, to achieve higher heights in everything I do, both academically and in life. I will forever live to love Moses, our two sons, and our children yet to be born, so help me God.

Lizeth Antonio: I am Mexican American and the first generation in my family to attend college. I grew up in Santa Monica but moved to Northridge this year for school. I started learning music in third grade, playing the recorder, and then the next year, I started to play the flute and continued through high school marching band. In high school, I learned to play the French horn as well, which was a challenging switch for me. I am not in music anymore, but I will be taking a piano course in the spring semester, because music is important to me and I have missed it.
Introducing Our New Voices

Deisy Arevalo: I am currently majoring in screenwriting at CSUN. I like to do anything that involves the arts, whether it is music, art, or film. I never thought I’d be serious about cinematic arts until I took a video-production course and joined a film club at my high school. From then on, I was set on this dream which I am now attempting to fulfill. I wish to further develop my writing skills so that I can contribute to the world of media, most probably in the sci-fi or fantasy genres.

Jennifer Bran: I was born and raised in Los Angeles and I am the first in my family to attend a four-year college. Being the first to attend college, before my two brothers, has been hard for me. I went through the process of applying to college without help and appreciation from my dad. All I want is for my father to realize my accomplishments to be where I am today. For now, I’ll make sure to keep on working hard in school, so I can have a better future for myself.

Guadalupe Castro: I am an 18-year-old freshman at CSUN, planning to major in broadcast journalism and minor in political science. I have traveled to Germany, Italy, Switzerland, and Austria, as well as Mexico and Guatemala. This career would allow me to travel to many more places. I aspire to learn more about the politics and government of the United States and other countries and to be a television news broadcaster in Spanish or English. I am also interested in writing. I know that through my effort and commitment, my writing will keep developing. I am excited about my journey here at CSUN, as this is only my beginning!

Andrew Creme: I never enjoyed English or writing essays and I never believed I was any good at them either. I submitted an essay to New Voices because I wanted to see for myself that I could work hard and tell a story that would be good enough to be published. The essay I chose to submit was a literacy narrative. It’s a story about my relationship with my grandfather and how he helped me learn the English language and become a better writer.

Alejandra Mendoza Diaz: In my letter titled “The Prize,” I explain my development as a writer. Throughout this long procedure, I explored different levels of writing (some beyond peculiar) until I found the perfect one that enabled me to get my points across clearly. Growth in any area takes time, and although I do consider myself more capable in writing than before, there is still a long path ahead to grow as a writer. In “The Prize,” I found myself typing out words that came naturally to me, which is not the process I usually follow. This piece allowed me to express what was truly in my mind, and “The Prize” is a piece of my mind set on the page.
**Evelyn Flores:** I am an English major, in the English Subject Matter Option. My inspiration to help others is one of the reasons I want to become a teacher. As discussed in my Literacy Narrative, I’ve had struggles that needed guidance and mentoring to help me achieve my goals. Most people in this country have had the opportunity to get an education, and have grown up going to school, doing homework, getting good grades. I believe that we have become the people we are today because of the education system. What better way to show appreciation than to become another stepping stone for the generations to come. I am a CSUN student dedicated not only to my future but to the future of others.

**Christopher Hernandez:** I am a freshman from Sylmar, majoring in journalism (which I chose just so I could watch sports all day). Honestly, I don’t really like school, but if it wasn’t for school, I’d probably have an even more boring life. I live with my little brother and sister and my mom and dad. And let’s not forget about my two dogs. I also have many cousins that I consider siblings. I am just a normal, boring person—going to school and going home. I never played sports in high school, but I am a big sports fan. I love to play, but mostly, I love to watch them. I am a big fan of the Los Angeles Lakers and the Oakland Raiders. You can always find me on the couch on game day. During the offseason is the best time to reach me, but then again, there are still Dodger games.

**Adefemi Ige:** Everyone calls me Femi. I am one of the most outgoing and chill people you will ever meet. Born and raised in California, I am currently a freshman at CSUN. Growing up, I enjoyed playing sports, but I had a passion for basketball. I played basketball on multiple teams for 12 years. Basketball is my passion and I still play every chance I get. I enjoy writing essays that have a connection to my personal experiences and triumphs. I am always looking for inspiration everywhere and I love being able to express my thoughts on paper.

**Mashalle Jasem:** I am an international student here at CSUN. I have spent my whole life in Saudi Arabia and I came to the United States to follow my dream to become a writer. Living in Saudi Arabia is much different than living in Los Angeles, and it was very hard to adjust to this new environment. Although it was difficult, it taught me to mature and to become more independent. I am a broadcast-journalism major and I hope that one day I will become a successful anchor for a big network on television. I learned how to be very independent and take care of myself without my parents. I can speak three languages fluently: English, Arabic, and French. I am in the process of learning Spanish.
Introducing Our New Voices

Inderpreet Kaur: I was born and raised in the state of Punjab in India. At age 11, I moved to the United States with my family. I am a freshman, majoring in Computer Information Technology. When I was young, computers were always a mystery to me. I was always curious about how they work and how they were built. My curiosity about computers led me to learn more about computers and now my goal is to get my bachelor’s degree in Computer IT and then transfer to an Ivy League school for my masters.

Jessie M. Lara: I am a freshman at CSUN with the intention of becoming a kinesiology major. I love sports, so I would like to become a physical therapist to help prevent and mend any athletic injuries. Since taking courses at CSUN, I feel my writing skills have improved and will only continue to improve. My essay, “Mirror, Mirror,” was inspired by the effects the media has on our view of beauty. I hope I raise awareness of the consequences of conformity and that there is not one definition of beauty. My goal is to encourage women to embrace their natural beauty; everyone’s beautiful in their own way! This has been such a great opportunity; I hope all of you enjoy my writing.

Michelle Lay: I am a Chinese American, first-year freshman, and biology major, here at CSUN. I was born in Chinatown, Los Angeles, but most of my time growing up was spent in Castaic. I moved to Castaic coming into second grade because my parents wanted a better education for me. As I progressed in each grade level, science always fascinated me. I also excelled in my math classes. My weakness in school was probably English. My writing hasn’t always been perfect, but I strive to do the best I can in every assignment.

Leslie Martinez: I am the first in my family to have the privilege of attending a university. At first I didn’t think going to school was for me, since none of my siblings ever came through when they went to college. I thought I was going to end up like them and become a disappointment to my parents. They always had high expectations for me and I didn’t want to let them down. Now, I’m seeking my B.S. in kinesiology. I want to become a physical therapist and this school has one of the best programs for that in the whole nation. It’s going to be very competitive, but I know I’m capable of following through because I have all the support I need from my family and friends. They always encourage me to try my best and to never give up because they know going to school is a great opportunity. CSUN may seem like a big school but it’s actually just the right size. What really is big is the peoples’ hearts you meet along the way. I didn’t think CSUN was going to be so heart-welcoming and homey. I’m grateful for being accepted to such a great school and hope those who come to this school feel that warmth as well.
Guadalupe Miranda: I grew up in Sylmar, in the San Fernando Valley. I am the youngest of four children and I am the only female. School and education are very important to me. This is my first semester of college and I am really beginning to enjoy it. Writing is something that I became interested in as I grew older. When I was in my first years of high school, I had trouble structuring paragraphs and writing essays. I had a hard time finding things to write about and making connections to other people’s writing. Now I like to express myself through writing because I feel it is easier to let feelings out that way. I wish to become a very well-rounded writer and maybe write my own book one day.

Karla Montenegro: I am a 20-year-old sophomore here at CSUN and live in the San Fernando Valley. I was born in El Salvador, but I came to this country when I was 13 years old. I struggled learning English and adapting to a new environment. However, I managed to leave my fears behind and became more sociable and interested in school. My favorite subject has always been math and the one I have always struggled with the most is English, but this doesn’t stop me from trying my best to become proficient at it. I am the first from my family to graduate with high honors from high school and attend college. Thanks to the support of my idol, my favorite person in the world, the one who is always there for me, supporting my decisions and picking me up every time I fall—my mother—I made the choice of coming to college and achieving my goals. She is the reason I wake up every morning and go on with my life. I want to make her proud of how far I’ve come and that all her sacrifices have paid off. I am currently a business management major, peer mentor, and high-school Outreach Ambassador working at CSUN.

Ani Muradyan (Cover Artist): My first name is Ani, given by my dad, and my last name is Muradyan which came from my great-grandpa. I was born on July 7th 1993, in Yerevan, Armenia, and although I’m not sure it was a sweet and sunny day, I definitely try to let the sun shine through my life. I grew up in a family where, at night, my dad played the accordion, while my mom smiled as I danced; my brother, who is three years older than me, never learned the moves I taught him. I grew up in a loving, caring, and vibrant family. At the age of eleven I moved to Los Angeles to gain a better education. I’m excited to continue my journey at CSUN, and I plan to put my heart and soul into everything I do in order to expand my knowledge. My major is sociology and I plan to become a college counselor, Latin-ballroom dancer, and a photographer; but hey, got to take things step-by-step right? My passion is to help others in need, whether it is through education, dance, art, or photography. I want to teach others how to be chronic optimists and capture reality from a different angle, because everything has its own beauty, but not everyone sees it.
Introducing Our New Voices

**Rita Saade:** I am 19 years old, and going to be a sophomore at CSUN in the fall. My major is psychology. I am Lebanese, and I speak both English and Arabic. I was born and raised here in Northridge, California. I come from a very loving family. I am an only child, so my relationship with both my parents is very strong. I am very much in touch with my culture and it has made me who I am today. English was never my strong point, and I was very hesitant about taking English in college. Once I took English 114, that all changed. I definitely grew as a writer and I never thought I would. I encourage everyone to try, no matter what, because something good can come out of it and you can realize a lot about yourself.

**Natalie Santoyo:** I am eighteen years old and live in Santa Clarita. I am currently undecided regarding my major. I grew up loving reading and the richness it brought to my imagination. Recently, I have found a new passion for writing and its relation to themes, concepts, and our lives today. This essay is my first experiment and I write about what literature has done and changed in my life.

**Tomer Zilbershtein:** I am a 25-year-old international student from Israel. I grew up in Israel, Singapore, and the U.S., and when I turned 17 I returned to Israel, finished my senior year of high school there, and was drafted into the Israeli Army. After I finished a full three-year service as a staff sergeant, I decided to study in the United States. I am currently a sophomore at CSUN, studying for my Bachelor’s degree in Psychology.