

DIRECTIONS FOR THE SUMMER ASSIGNMENT FOR ALL 2023-2024 SENIORS

Section I. Close Reading Directions: Read the steps carefully. Complete all three steps before moving to “Section III. Writing”

Choose two of the following Common Application prompts.

Print the 2 articles associated with each of the prompts.

- a. Page numbers refer to the summer packet students received in their email

Annotate all four of the printed essays using the instructions in Section II. You are not required to answer associated discussion questions, though they are helpful for comprehension work.

2023-2024 Common Application Essay Prompts

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

- Professional Essay - Pages -1-6: “How to Tame a Wild Tongue” - Anzaldúa
- Student Essay - Pages 7-8: Christiane Zhang

2. The lessons we take from obstacles we encounter can be fundamental to later success. Recount a time when you faced a challenge, setback, or failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?

- Professional Essay -Pages 9-16: “I was the Worst High School Quarterback Ever” - Keefe
- Student Essay - Pages 17-18: Lazarus D.

3. Reflect on a time when you questioned or challenged a belief or idea. What prompted your thinking? What was the outcome?

- Professional Essay - Pages 19-22: “The Back of the Bus” - Mebane
- Student Essay - Pages 23-25: David Roberts

4. Reflect on something that someone has done for you that has made you happy or thankful in a surprising way. How has this gratitude affected or motivated you?

- Professional Essay - Pages 26-28: “Unforgettable Miss Bessie” - Rowan
- Student Essay - Pages 29-31: Yueming C.

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

- Professional Essay - Pages 32-33: “No Rainbows, No Roses” - Dipo
- Student Essay - Pages 34-35: Leslie Ojeaburu

6. Describe a topic, idea, or concept you find so engaging that it makes you lose track of time. Why does it captivate you? What or who do you turn to when you want to learn more?

- Professional Essay - Pages 36-40: “How to Give Orders Like a Man” - Tannen
- Student Essay - Pages 41-44-: Mariam Nassiri

Section II. Annotation Directions

ANNOTATING A TEXT

When you annotate a text, you generate a record of response to your reading. Such a record can prove valuable to you later when you proceed to analysis.

Annotating a text is not the same thing as underlining a few words or highlighting several lines. Annotating a text involves an interactive approach with a text's language and images. This approach should help you discover what you find important, what you want to explore, and/or what you find puzzling about a text.

Approach a text as if you were entering a discussion with it, for its words, phrases, and images do indeed communicate. At times a particular text's meaning is clear; at other times it isn't. Either way, you can note such encounters and offer comments. Your discussion with a text occurs as you engage with its words, phrases, and images—its embodied ideas. You are thinking as you read; indeed, reading itself is thinking. In annotating a text you establish a written record of your interactive discussion. You discern meaning, purpose, and effect.

If you fail to note what you find remarkable, the initial ideas and important questions you have while reading may be lost to you. In annotating a text, you make it possible to return to it later to rethink what you considered important.

Techniques for annotating a text will vary, since each reader generates his or her own reading, which means each reader will identify with different portions of a text as worthwhile, interesting, and/or remarkable.

Annotation Directions: Note places in the text that are worthy of remark (hence, remarkable) and explain.

A List of Guiding Questions:

1. Where do particular ideas or claims pull you in or capture your attention?
2. Label ideas that emerge from the text.
3. Label features, figures of speech, that are at work.
4. Describe patterns emerge from your markings?
5. How do particular portions of this text link or connect with each other?
6. What key words, phrases, and ideas emerge in several places?
7. Have you asked questions? How have you answered them?
 - a. Given a second reading, how have your annotations changed?
 - b. Have any questions been answered? What new questions have emerged?
8. How do your annotations add up and categorize?
9. Note specific places where you clearly experience the rhetor's intentions and state what you think those intentions are.
10. Note places where you think the rhetor's intentions are unclear, and explain why.
11. Note other texts in your reading experience that link to this text link and explain the link.

Section III. Writing Directions (Complete all three of the following steps before the first day of classes in August)

1. Assume the role of a college entrance admissions counselor (meaning a person who has never met the student-author and who is evaluating their “fit” for the school with minimal time for consideration). For each of the annotated essays, identify and comment on the essential qualities and character strengths of the speaker. One paragraph per essay, minimum. **Due on the first day of class.**

2. Before writing your own essay, create a bulleted list of your key academic courses, extracurricular experiences, honors and awards, volunteer experience, travel, interests, hobbies, personal background, and any other categories that identify central aspects of your life. **Due on the first day of class.**

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

tongue, train it to be quiet, how do you bridle and saddle it? How do you make it lie down?

"Who is to say that robbing a people of its language is less violent than war?"

—RAY GWYN SMITH¹

GLORIA ANZALDÚA

How to Tame a Wild Tongue

Gloria Anzaldúa was born in 1942 in the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas. At age eleven she began working in the fields as a migrant worker and later worked on her family's land after the death of her father. Working her way through school, she eventually became a school teacher and then an academic, speaking and writing about feminist, lesbian, and Chicana issues and about autobiography. She is best known for *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1981), which she edited with Cherríe Moraga, and *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987).

"How to Tame a Wild Tongue" is from *Borderlands/La Frontera*. In it, Anzaldúa is concerned with many kinds of borders—between nations, cultures, classes, genders, languages. When she writes, "So, if you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language" (par. 27), Anzaldúa is arguing for the ways in which identity is intertwined with the way we speak and for the ways in which people can be made to feel ashamed of their own tongues. Keeping hers wild—ignoring the closing of linguistic borders—is Anzaldúa's way of asserting her identity.

"We're going to have to control your tongue," the dentist says, pulling out all the metal from my mouth. Silver bits plop and tinkle into the basin. My mouth is a motherlode.

The dentist is cleaning out my roots. I get a whiff of the stench when I gasp. "I can't cap that tooth yet, you're still draining," he says.

"We're going to have to do something about your tongue," I hear the anger rising in his voice. My tongue keeps pushing out the wads of cotton, pushing back the drills, the long thin needles. "I've never seen anything as strong or as stubborn," he says. And I think, how do you tame a wild

I remember being caught speaking Spanish at recess—that was good for three licks on the knuckles with a sharp ruler. I remember being sent to the corner of the classroom for "talking back" to the Anglo teacher when all I was trying to do was tell her how to pronounce my name. "If you want to be American, speak 'American.' If you don't like it, go back to Mexico where you belong."

"I want you to speak English. *Pa' hallar buen trabajo tienes que saber hablar el inglés bien. Qué vale toda tu educación si todavía hablas inglés con un 'accent,'*" my mother would say, mortified that I spoke English like a Mexican. At Pan American University, I and all Chicano students were required to take two speech classes. Their purpose: to get rid of our accents.

Attacks on one's form of expression with the intent to censor are a violation of the First Amendment. *El Anglo con cara de inocente nos arrancó la lengua.* Wild tongues can't be tamed, they can only be cut out.

OVERCOMING THE TRADITION OF SILENCE

Ahogadas, escupimos el oscuro.

Peleando con nuestra propia sombra

el silencio nos sepulta.

En boca cerrada no entran moscas. "Flies don't enter a closed mouth" is a saying I kept hearing when I was a child. *Ser habladora* was to be a gossip and a liar, to talk too much. *Muchachitas bien criadas*, well-bred girls don't answer back. *Es una falta de respeto* to talk back to one's mother or father. I remember one of the sins I'd recite to the priest in the confession box the few times I went to confession: talking back to my mother, *hablar pa' tras, repelar. Hocicona, repelona, chismosa*, having a big mouth,

questioning, carrying tales are all signs of being *mal criada*. In my culture they are all words that are derogatory if applied to women — I've never heard them applied to men.

The first time I heard two women, a Puerto Rican and a Cuban, say the word "*nosotras*," I was shocked. I had not known the word existed. Chicanas use *nosotros* whether we're male or female. We are robbed of our female being by the masculine plural. Language is a male discourse.

And our tongues have become
dry the wilderness has
dried out our tongues and
we have forgotten speech.
— IRENA KLEFFISZ²

Even our own people, other Spanish speakers *nos quieren poner candados en la boca*. They would hold us back with their bag of *reglas de academia*.

Oyé como ladra: el lenguaje de la frontera

Quien tiene boca se equivoca.
— MEXICAN SAYING

"*Pocho*, cultural traitor, you're speaking the oppressor's language by speaking English, you're ruining the Spanish language," I have been accused by various Latinos and Latinas. Chicano Spanish is considered by the purist and by most Latinos deficient, a mutilation of Spanish.

But Chicano Spanish is a border tongue which developed naturally. Change, *evolución*, *enriquecimiento de palabras nuevas por invención o adopción* have created variants of Chicano Spanish, *un nuevo lenguaje*. *Un lenguaje que corresponde a un modo de vivir*. Chicano Spanish is not incorrect, it is a living language.

For a people who are neither Spanish nor live in a country in which Spanish is the first language; for a people who live in a country in which English is the reigning tongue but who are not Anglo; for a people who cannot entirely identify with either standard (formal, Castilian) Spanish nor standard English, what recourse is left to them but to create their own language? A lan-



guage which they can connect their identity to, one capable of communicating the realities and values true to themselves—a language with terms that are neither *español ni inglés*, but both. We speak a patois, a forked tongue, a variation of two languages.

Chicano Spanish sprang out of the Chicanos' need to identify ourselves as a distinct people. We needed a language with which we could communicate with ourselves, a secret language. For some of us, language is a homeland closer than the Southwest—for many Chicanos today live in the Midwest and the East. And because we are a complex, heterogeneous people, we speak many languages. Some of the languages we speak are:

1. Standard English
2. Working class and slang English
3. Standard Spanish
4. Standard Mexican Spanish
5. North Mexican Spanish dialect
6. Chicano Spanish (Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California have regional variations)
7. Tex-Mex
8. *Pachuco* (called *caló*)

My "home" tongues are the languages I speak with my sister and brothers, with my friends. They are the last five listed, with 6 and 7 being closest to my heart. From school, the media, and job situations, I've picked up standard and working class English. From Mamagrande Locha and from reading Spanish and Mexican literature, I've picked up Standard Spanish and Standard Mexican Spanish. From *los recién llegados*, Mexican immigrants, and *braveros*, I learned the North Mexican dialect. With Mexicans I'll try to speak either Standard Mexican Spanish or the North Mexican dialect. From my parents and Chicanos living in the Valley, I picked up Chicano Texas Spanish, and I speak it with my mom, younger brother (who married a Mexican and who rarely mixes Spanish with English), aunts, and older relatives.

With Chicanas from *Nuevo México* or *Arizona* I will speak Chicano Spanish a little, but often they don't understand what I'm saying. With most California Chicanas I speak entirely in English (unless I forget). When I first moved to San Francisco, I'd rattle off something in Spanish, unintentionally embarrassing them. Often it is only with another Chicana *tejana* that I can talk freely.

Words distorted by English are known as anglicisms or *pochismos*. The *pochito* is an anglicized Mexican or American of Mexican origin who speaks Spanish with an accent characteristic of North Americans and who distorts and reconstructs the language according to the influence of English.³ Tex-Mex, or Spanglish, comes most naturally to me. I may switch back and forth from English to Spanish in the same sentence or in the same word. With my sister and my brother Nune and with Chicano *tejanos* contemporaries I speak in Tex-Mex.

From kids and people my own age I picked up *Pachuco*. *Pachuco* (the language of the zoot suiters) is a language of rebellion, both against Standard Spanish and Standard English. It is a secret language. Adults of the culture and outsiders cannot understand it. It is made up of slang words from both English and Spanish. *Ruca* means girl or woman, *vato* means guy or dude, *chale* means no, *simón* means yes, *churro* is sure, talk is *periquiar*, *pigionear* means petting, *que gacho* means how nerdy, *ponte águtila* means watch out, death is called *la petona*. Through lack of practice and not having others who can speak it, I've lost most of the *Pachuco* tongue.

CHICANO SPANISH

Chicanos, after 250 years of Spanish/Anglo colonization, have developed significant differences in the Spanish we speak. We collapse two adjacent vowels into a single syllable and sometimes shift the stress in certain words such as *matz/maiz*, *cohete/ciete*. We leave out certain consonants when they appear between vowels: *lado/lao*, *mojado/mojao*. Chicanos from South Texas pronounce *f* as *j* as in *jue (fue)*. Chicanos use "archaisms," words that are no longer in the Spanish language, words that have been evolved out. We say *semos*, *truje*, *haiga*, *ansina*, and *naiden*. We retain the "archaic" *j*, as in *jalar*, that derives from an earlier *h*, (the French *halar* or the Germanic *halon* which was lost to standard Spanish in the 16th century), but which is still found in several regional dialects such as the one spoken in South Texas. (Due to geography, Chicanos from the Valley of South Texas were cut off linguistically from other Spanish speakers. We tend to use

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words that the Spaniards brought over from Medieval Spain. The majority of the Spanish colonizers in Mexico and the Southwest came from Extremadura — Hernán Cortés was one of them — and Andalucía. Andalusians pronounce *ll* like a *y*, and their *d*'s tend to be absorbed by adjacent vowels: *tirado* becomes *tirao*. They brought *el lenguaje popular*, *dialectos y regionalismos*.⁴

Chicanos and other Spanish speakers also shift *ll* to *y* and *z* to *s*.⁵ We leave out initial syllables, saying *tar* for *estar*, *toy* for *estoy*, *hora* for *ahora* (*cubanos* and *puertorriqueños* also leave out initial letters of some words). We also leave out the final syllable such as *pa* for *para*. The intervocalic *y*, the *ll* as in *tortilla*, *ella*, *botella*, gets replaced by *tortia* or *tortiya*, *ea*, *botea*. We add an additional syllable at the beginning of certain words: *atocar* for *tocar*, *agastar* for *gastar*. Sometimes we'll say *lavaste las vacijas*, other times *lavates* (substituting the *ates* verb endings for the *aste*).

We use anglicisms, words borrowed from English: *bola* from 20 ball, *carpeta* from carpet, *máquina de lavar* (instead of *lavadora*) from washing machine. Tex-Mex argot, created by adding a Spanish sound at the beginning or end of an English word such as *cookiár* for cook, *watchár* for watch, *parkiár* for park, and *rapiár* for rape, is the result of the pressures on Spanish speakers to adapt to English.

We don't use the word *vosotros/as* or its accompanying verb form. We don't say *claro* (to mean yes), *imagínate*, or *me emocioné*, unless we picked up Spanish from Latinas, out of a book, or in a classroom. Other Spanish-speaking groups are going through the same, or similar, development in their Spanish.

LINGUISTIC TERRORISM

Deslenguadas. *Somos los del español deficiente*. We are your linguistic nightmare, your linguistic aberration, your linguistic *mestisaje*, the subject of your *burla*. Because we speak with tongues of fire we are culturally crucified. Racially, culturally, and linguistically *somos huérfanos* — we speak an orphan tongue.

Chicanas who grew up speaking Chicano Spanish have internalized the belief that we speak poor Spanish. It is illegitimate, a bastard language. And because we internalize how our language

has been used against us by the dominant culture, we use our language differences against each other.

Chicana feminists often skirt around each other with suspicion and hesitation. For the longest time I couldn't figure it out. Then it dawned on me. To be close to another Chicana is like looking into the mirror. We are afraid of what we'll see there. *Pena*. Shame. Low estimation of self. In childhood we are told that our language is wrong. Repeated attacks on our native tongue diminish our sense of self. The attacks continue throughout our lives.

Chicanas feel uncomfortable talking in Spanish to Latinas, afraid of their censure. Their language was not outlawed in their countries. They had a whole lifetime of being immersed in their native tongue; generations of being immersed in their language, taught in school, heard on radio and TV, and read in the newspaper.

If a person, Chicana or Latina, has a low estimation of my native tongue, she also has a low estimation of me. Often with *mexicanas y latinas* we'll speak English as a neutral language. Even among Chicanas we tend to speak English at parties or conferences. Yet, at the same time, we're afraid the other will think we're *agringadas* because we don't speak Chicano Spanish. We oppress each other trying to out-Chicano each other, vying to be the "real" Chicanas, to speak like Chicanos. There is no one Chicano language just as there is no one Chicano experience. A monolingual Chicana whose first language is English or Spanish is just as much a Chicana as one who speaks several variants of Spanish. A Chicana from Michigan or Chicago or Detroit is just as much a Chicana as one from the Southwest. Chicano Spanish is as diverse linguistically as it is regionally.

By the end of this century, Spanish speakers will comprise the biggest minority group in the U.S., a country where students in high schools and colleges are encouraged to take French classes because French is considered more "cultured." But for a language to remain alive it must be used.⁶ By the end of this century English, and not Spanish, will be the mother tongue of most Chicanos and Latinos.

So, if you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take

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pride in myself. Until I can accept as legitimate Chicano Texas Spanish, Tex-Mex, and all the other languages I speak, I cannot accept the legitimacy of myself. Until I am free to write bilingually and to switch codes without having always to translate, while I still have to speak English or Spanish when I would rather speak Spanglish, and as long as I have to accommodate the English speakers rather than having them accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate.

I will no longer be made to feel ashamed of existing. I will have my voice: Indian, Spanish, white. I will have my serpent's tongue—my woman's voice, my sexual voice, my poet's voice. I will overcome the tradition of silence.

My fingers

move sly against your palm

Like women everywhere, we speak in code. . . .

— MELANIE KAYE/KANTROWITZ

"*Vistas,*" *corridos*, y *comida*: My Native Tongue

In the 1960s, I read my first Chicano novel. It was *City of Night* by John Rechy, a gay Texan, son of a Scottish father and a Mexican mother. For days I walked around in stunned amazement that a Chicano could write and could get published. When I read *I Am Joaquín*⁸ I was surprised to see a bilingual book by a Chicano in print. When I saw poetry written in Tex-Mex for the first time, a feeling of pure joy flashed through me. I felt like we really existed as a people. In 1971, when I started teaching High School English to Chicano students, I tried to supplement the required texts with works by Chicanos, only to be reprimanded and forbidden to do so by the principal. He claimed that I was supposed to teach "American" and English literature. At the risk of being fired, I swore my students to secrecy and slipped in Chicano short stories, poems, a play. In graduate school, while working toward a Ph.D., I had to "argue" with one advisor after the other, semester after semester, before I was allowed to make Chicano literature an area of focus.

Even before I read books by Chicanos or Mexicans, it was the Mexican movies I saw at the drive-in—the Thursday night special of \$1.00 a carload—that gave me a sense of belonging.

"*Vámonos a las vistas*," my mother would call out and we'd all—grandmother, brothers, sister, and cousins—squeeze into the car. We'd wolf down cheese and bologna white bread sandwiches while watching Pedro Infante in melodramatic tearjerkers like *Nosotros los pobres*, the first "real" Mexican movie (that was not an imitation of European movies). I remember seeing *Cuando los hijos se van* and surmising that all Mexican movies played up the love a mother has for her children and what ungrateful sons and daughters suffer when they are not devoted to their mothers. I remember the singing-type "westerns" of Jorge Negrete and Miguel Aceves Mejía. When watching Mexican movies, I felt a sense of homecoming as well as alienation. People who were to amount to something didn't go to Mexican movies, or *bailes*, or tune their radios to *bolero*, *rancherita*, and *corrido* music.

The whole time I was growing up, there was *nocturno* music sometimes called North Mexican border music, or Tex-Mex music, or Chicano music, or *cantina* (bar) music. I grew up listening to *conjuntos*, three- or four-piece bands made up of folk musicians playing guitar, *bajo sexto*, drums, and button accordion, which Chicanos had borrowed from the German immigrants who had come to Central Texas and Mexico to farm and build breweries. In the Rio Grande Valley, Steve Jordan and Little Joe Hernández were popular, and Flaco Jiménez was the accordion king. The rhythms of Tex-Mex music are those of the polka, also adapted from the Germans, who in turn had borrowed the polka from the Czechs and Bohemians.

I remember the hot, sultry evenings when *corridos*—songs of love and death on the Texas-Mexican borderlands—reverberated out of cheap amplifiers from the local *cantinas* and wafted in through my bedroom window.

Corridos first became widely used along the South Texas/Mexican border during the early conflict between Chicanos and Anglos. The *corridos* are usually about Mexican heroes who do valiant deeds against the Anglo oppressors. Pancho Villa's song, "*La cucaracha*," is the most famous one. *Corridos* of John F. Kennedy and his death are still very popular in the Valley. Older Chicanos remember Lydia Mendoza, one of the great border *corrido* singers who was called *la Gloria de Tejas*. Her "*El tango negro*," sung during the Great Depression, made her a singer of

the people. The everpresent *corridos* narrated one hundred years of border history, bringing news of events as well as entertaining. These folk musicians and folk songs are our chief cultural myth-makers, and they made our hard lives seem bearable.

I grew up feeling ambivalent about our music. Country-western and rock-and-roll had more status. In the 50s and 60s, for the slightly educated and *agringado* Chicanos, there existed a sense of shame at being caught listening to our music. Yet I couldn't stop my feet from thumping to the music, could not stop humming the words, nor hide from myself the exhilaration I felt when I heard it.

There are more subtle ways that we internalize identification, especially in the forms of images and emotions. For me food and certain smells are tied to my identity, to my homeland. Wood-smoke curling up to an immense blue sky; woodsmoke perfuming my grandmother's clothes, her skin. The stench of cow manure and the yellow patches on the ground; the crack of a .22 rifle and the reek of cordite. Homemade white cheese sizzling in a pan, melting inside a folded *tortilla*. My sister Hilda's hot, spicy *menudo*, *chile colorado* making it deep red, pieces of *panza* and hominy floating on top. My brother Carito barbequing *fejitas* in the backyard. Even now and 3,000 miles away, I can see my mother spicing the ground beef, pork, and venison with *chile*. My mouth salivates at the thought of the hot steaming *tamales* I would be eating if I were home.

Si le preguntas a mi mamá, "¿Qué eres?"

"Identity is the essential core of who we are as individuals, the conscious experience of the self inside."

— GERSHEN KAUFMAN⁹

Nosotros los Chicanos straddle the borderlands. On one side of us, we are constantly exposed to the Spanish of the Mexicans, on the other side we hear the Anglos' incessant clamoring so that we forget our language. Among ourselves we don't say *nosotros los americanos*, o *nosotros los españoles*, o *nosotros los hispanos*. We say *nosotros los mexicanos* (by *mexicanos*, we do not mean

citizens of Mexico; we do not mean a national identity, but a racial one). We distinguish between *mexicanos del otro lado* and *mexicanos de este lado*. Deep in our hearts we believe that being Mexican has nothing to do with which country one lives in. Being Mexican is a state of soul—not one of mind, not one of citizenship. Neither eagle nor serpent, but both. And like the ocean, neither animal respects borders.

Dime con quien andas y te diré quien eres.

(Tell me who your friends are and I'll tell you who you are.)

— MEXICAN SAYING

Si le preguntas a mi mamá, ¿Qué eres? te dirá, "Soy mexicana." My brothers and sister say the same. I sometimes will answer "soy mexicana" and at others will say "soy Chicana" o "soy tejana." But I identified as "Raza" before I ever identified as "mexicana" or "Chicana."

As a culture, we call ourselves Spanish when referring to ourselves as a linguistic group and when copping out. It is then that we forget our predominant Indian genes. We are 70–80 percent Indian.¹⁰ We call ourselves Hispanic¹¹ or Spanish-American or Latin American or Latin when linking ourselves to other Spanish-speaking peoples of the Western hemisphere and when copping out. We call ourselves Mexican-American¹² to signify we are neither Mexican nor American, but more the noun "American" than the adjective "Mexican" (and when copping out).

Chicanos and other people of color suffer economically for not acculturating. This voluntary (yet forced) alienation makes for psychological conflict, a kind of dual identity—we don't identify with the Anglo-American cultural values and we don't totally identify with the Mexican cultural values. We are a synergy of two cultures with various degrees of Mexicanness or Angloness. I have so internalized the borderland conflict that sometimes I feel like one cancels out the other and we are zero, nothing, no one. *A veces no soy nada ni nadie. Pero hasta cuando no lo soy, lo soy.*

When not copping out, when we know we are more than nothing, we call ourselves Mexican, referring to race and ancestry, *mestizo* when affirming both our Indian and Spanish (but we hardly ever own our Black ancestry); Chicano when referring to a politically aware people born and/or raised in the U.S.; *Raza* when referring to Chicanos; *tejanos* when we are Chicanos from Texas.

Chicanos did not know we were a people until 1965 when Ceasar Chavez and the farmworkers united and *I Am Joaquín* was published and *la Raza Unida* party was formed in Texas. With that recognition, we became a distinct people. Something momentous happened to the Chicano soul—we became aware of our reality and acquired a name and a language (Chicano Spanish) that reflected that reality. Now that we had a name, some of the fragmented pieces began to fall together—who we were, what we were, how we had evolved. We began to get glimpses of what we might eventually become.

Yet the struggle of identities continues, the struggle of borders is our reality still. One day the inner struggle will cease and a true integration take place. In the meantime, *tenémos que hacer la lucha. ¿Quién está protegiendo los ranchos de mi gente? ¿Quién está tratando de cerrar la fisura entre la india y el blanco en nuestra sangre? El Chicano, si, el Chicano que anda como un ladrón en su propia casa.*

*Los Chicanos, how patient we seem, how very patient. There is the quiet of the Indian about us.¹³ We know how to survive. When other races have given up their tongue, we've kept ours. We know what it is to live under the hammer blow of the dominant *norteamericano* culture. But more than we count the blows, we count the days the weeks the years the centuries the eons until the white laws and commerce and customs will rot in the deserts they've created, lie bleached. *Humildes* yet proud, *quietos* yet wild, *nosotros los mexicanos-Chicanos* will walk by the crumbling ashes as we go about our business. Stubborn, persevering, impenetrable as stone, yet possessing a malleability that renders us unbreakable, we, the *mestizas* and *mestizos*, will remain.*

Notes

1. Roy W. Smith, *Moortland I. Cal. County, unpublished book.*
2. La Ophelia "Di roses, here on the Carny slope in The Place of the Roses, Monterey, Alameda, Melvin K. Yerokarovitz and Irena Klevens (eds.) (Montpeler, Vermont: Wisdom Books, 1986), 49.
3. Y. Ortega, *Dialectología del español trans. Homenajes a Juan José del Valle*, CA, R. P. Ortega Publishers & Bookseller (1977), 137.
4. Gladys de Herrán, *Chicana: A New Cohort and Anthony F. Delamo, El Lengaje de los Chicanos: Regional and Social Characteristics of*

CHRISTIANE ZHANG

American food is the pot on the backburner that I check only occasionally. Eleven years of living in the United States have attuned my taste buds to the marbled texture of ground beef alongside melted American cheese, topped off with a refreshing, crunchy layer of lettuce, complemented by the sweet contrast of ketchup, all sandwiched within an unremarkable bun. Somehow I find myself enjoying this greasy, messy, yet satisfying meal; the chance (fatty) bacon strips only increase the appeal of my burger. Indeed, in my family, I am the only one who appreciates its savor and simplicity. But I know I could not survive on a diet of burgers, fries, hot dogs, chocolate chip cookies, or any food that I brand as “American,” as enticing as they sometimes are. Instead, the two thousand (or more likely four thousand) calories that I take in every day originate eight thousand miles away.

At home, Mom is the chef, and in my fair and equitable opinion, no one rivals her in traditional Chinese food. Her signature dish is *qiongrenmian*, literally “poor man’s pasta,” which I would voluntarily eat every day, unlike its American counterparts. More of a stew, *qiongrenmian* comprises of clumps of flour and water, boiled into small, soft bites floating along with tender pieces of pork, splashes of tomatoes, and dispersed clouds of eggs. The flavors meld together, and so I add some sweet chili garlic sauce, the playfully piquant surprise offsetting the cozy, home sensation. My taste buds are so responsive that I wonder if I am not perhaps a poor Chinese man, as the dish’s name suggests. Thankfully, I have yet to see a poor man in China enjoy something

this luxuriously poor, this deliciously simple, so I’m reasonably certain that I am not a Chinese beggar.

As much as I love simplicity in cooking, I cannot resist the more complex wonders of *la cuisine française*, and I will frequently indulge in my love of French baking. Perhaps I romanticize my French birth a little. Regardless, I feel decidedly French as I watch my raspberry *soufflés* rise or my *biscuit aux pommes* turn golden. My most recent escapade involved five hours of preparation to produce fragile, miniature white *macarons* filled with smooth chocolate *ganache*. Despite the tedious work, French desserts seem incapable of disappointing, whether after an elegant meal of savory *steak tartare* and *andouille* sausage, or simply a burger or *qiongrenmian*.

My next project? I think I’ll catch a Canadian goose and make some *foie gras*.

REVIEW

The writer’s essay describes herself in terms of cooking—she is one of many identities with the drive to discover new ones. By introducing herself not directly as a multicultural person, she piques our interest in her varied heritage. Additionally, by mentioning her “next project,” whether in jest or seriousness, the writer hints at her willingness to go ahead and try new things, to take on new goals. The essay is a display of subtle hints at a person through the revelations of food.

However, the immediacy with which she dives into food and the total separation of her nonfoodie self leaves a very focused view of who she is. Though the overall effect of an essay that sounds like it could appear in *Bon Appétit* is tempered by a personal writing style,



dotted with parentheticals and soft humor, the overall feel of large portions of the essay is decidedly not personal nor revealing. With a little less detail, particularly in the next-to-last, French-laden paragraph, the writer could have preserved the intimacy of revealing her tastes and culture in a subtle way.

But overall, the essay presents a likable, thoughtful person with a strong sense of who she is. Christiane succeeds at expressing herself as a bicultural individual with a taste for good cooking.

—Sara Kantor

WHITNEY GAO

It is October 9, and a multitude of high school students have gathered at the test center for a morning of standardized testing. This morning, we are all faceless little numbers. This morning, I am registration number *****7. It is very nice to meet you.

Three hours later, it is time to commence a mass exodus. A sea of bodies floods the halls before bursting through the floodgates, eventually separating and becoming individual trickles. As we all return to our various corners of Little Rock, we finally lose the anonymous masks and become individuals. I am no longer just a number; I am now me.

I am a sister. I am a daughter.

I am an under-the-covers reader of fashion magazines. I am absolutely obsessed with math and science. I am the girl whose laugh you hear all the way down the hallway.

I am a figure skater whose favorite spin is a layback. The ice rink is my escape, and the Diamond Edge Figure Skating Club is a second family. I am a pianist whose favorite piece is Edvard Grieg's Piano Concerto in A Minor, Op. 16. My thirteen-year-long love affair with music has led me to much happiness and accomplishment, and I hope it continues for all of my life. Endless hours devoted to these activities have taught me skills necessary for the future, including self-discipline and perseverance.

I am an ardent volunteer in my community, and I have the privilege of serving as the president of the largest Junior Civitan club in the world. The people I have met and the experiences I have had have left lasting impacts on me and given me memories and lessons



Josh Keefe, "I was the Worst High School Quarterback Ever: Lessons from a Winless Career"

Slate 8/26/14

I've spent more than a decade stewing over it, rolling the memories around in my head, wondering if it could've really been that bad. Now, I'm ready to accept my place in history. Of the thousands of American boys who have played quarterback for their high school football teams, I was the worst.

I went 0–23 as the starting quarterback for John Bapst Memorial High School in Bangor, Maine, a perfectly imperfect record that came during a longer schoolwide run of 41 consecutive losses. The Bapst losing streak began in 1998, when I was an eighth-grader playing quarterback for a middle school team that won one game. It ended in 2003, in the second game of the first season after I graduated. As the guy under center for nearly three full seasons, that streak feels like mine more than anyone else's.

That's not to say it was all my fault. Losing was a total team effort. We were the John Bapst Crusaders, and we never came close to the Holy Land. During my three years of varsity football, we did not once have a lead. Our closest defeat was a 6–0 shutout. My sophomore season, the year I arrived at John Bapst and took over at quarterback, we scored 20 points *total*. During my junior year, we had something of an offensive explosion, averaging more than 9 points a game. We followed that up by scoring 21 points my whole senior year. This was against teams from the smallest schools in eastern Maine, which is about as far you can get, both geographically and athletically, from the high school football hotbeds of California, Texas, and Florida. I did not, to my knowledge, ever play against anyone who was all that good at football. And yet we lost, again and again, almost always by more than 30 points.

I won the starting quarterback job my sophomore year, despite the fact that I weighed about 150 pounds and the balls I threw looked like wounded birds fighting a stiff breeze. And yet, I replaced a bigger, stronger junior mostly thanks to two lucky—really, miraculous—plays that I pulled off while still the backup. The first was a 43-yard touchdown scramble in garbage time of a 52–6 loss. I broke a few tackles, reversed field, found a crease, and dived for the pylon to get the score. It looked great, but in reality the only reason I scored was that the other team thought I was down and had given up on the play. Two games later, I came in just a couple of minutes before halftime. We were losing of course and had the ball in our own territory. A few plays in, I threw an 8-yard out well over the intended receiver's head. Somehow, another of my teammates caught the overthrow and scampered 70 yards for a touchdown. In just a few minutes of playing time at quarterback, I had accounted for all of our team's scoring up to that point in the season. Nobody seemed to know or care that both plays were complete flukes. I started the next week, and we scored just one touchdown in the remaining five games.

"We thought that you were naturally more creative," Bruce Pratt, the head coach my freshman year and an assistant my sophomore season, told me recently when I asked why the coaches had made me the starter. "The quarterback was going to be running for his life."

That was true, at least the running-for-my-life part. I would scramble as soon as the ball was hiked, reversing field three or four times in a single play. I wouldn't make particularly good passes on the run, nor did I rush for many yards. But I did make the plays last longer. I avoided hulking lineman, pump-faking every other step and spinning away from would-be tacklers. I played, essentially, like somebody avoiding the bulls in Pamplona. And more often than not, the bulls ran me down.

I can still feel those failures—and the feeling that I, personally, was a failure.

No one ever really taught me how to read a defense, and I couldn't tell you if our opponents were playing man or zone. We ran a pro-style offense my sophomore year and found more success my junior season by running an old-style T formation, which relied on fakes and trickery to mitigate the fact that we couldn't block anyone. Every year we had a different head coach. Every year we thought that would mean a fresh start. Every year we were quickly disappointed. In spite of all this, I worked hard. I lifted in the offseason. I practiced throwing on my own time. I wanted to be good. And yet, I was honestly, genuinely, mortifyingly bad.

“You were the perfect quarterback for an awful team,” is how my friend and former teammate Alex Rand explains it. You can't be as bad at something as I was at football without seeing the humor in it. I created ironic distance between myself and my failure, as all of us Crusaders did. On the bus ride to our practice field (which was on the campus of a mental hospital) we cheered wildly at every red light and stop sign because each second we were delayed meant one fewer spent at practice. The bus driver eventually started rolling through stop signs just to mess with us and disrupt the timing of our applause.

Despite all the comedy, both intentional and unintentional, I still feel a kind of low-grade, stomach-knotting despair when I think back on my high school football career. Those losses don't sting as much as they once did, but I can still feel those failures—and the feeling that I, personally, was a failure.

I've never known how to process my high school football experience. We all lost, but as the supposed leader on the field I always felt like the avatar of our ineptitude. Only recently have I realized that there must be others out there like me, schoolboy quarterbacks who couldn't tell you what it feels like to score more points than the other team. And so I tracked down some other winless high school quarterbacks to see if they felt how I felt, and if they could help me understand the point of all that losing. If nothing else, they helped me understand just how bad I really was. It turns out, yeah, I'm the worst.

* * *

The quarterback position was invented in 1880 when Walter Camp put forward a rule change at the fourth intercollegiate football convention. Camp's proposal allowed a player on the line of scrimmage to kick the ball backward to initiate the offensive action, creating the possibility of set plays and strategy in a game that had previously been a rugby-style free-for-all. The player that received the ball, the one responsible for making order out of chaos, was called the “quarterback.”

With the later advent of the forward pass, and the innovations and complexities that came along with it, the quarterback became the play caller and unquestioned leader on the gridiron. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, by the early 1930s the term "quarterback" was being used figuratively to describe a person in a leadership position. With the explosion of the passing game and the increasing cultural valorization of scholastic sports in the post-war era, the quarterback became more important than ever, both as an athletic hero and a sort of apex predator of the high school ecosystem. You don't have to know a thing about football to understand that the high school quarterback is an enduring American archetype. He leads his team, the school, and the community. He is strong, graceful, and charismatic. He dates the prettiest girl.

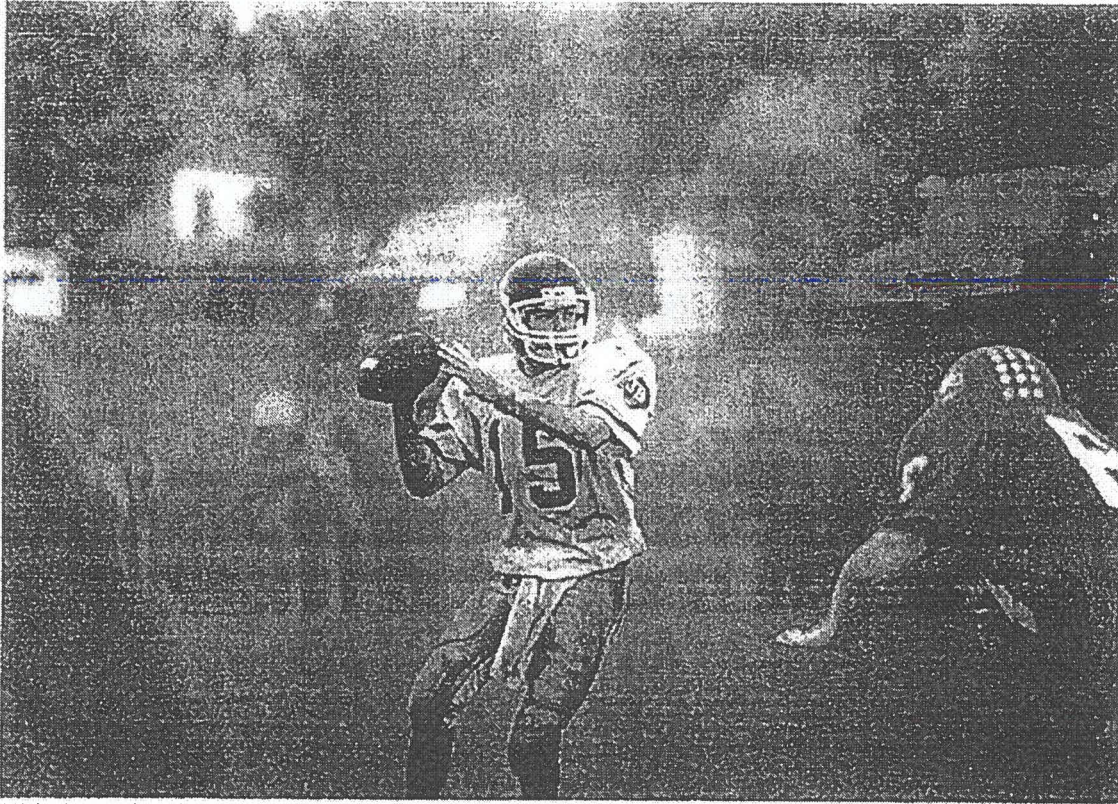
A quarterback who never wins a game is an inversion of everything the position represents. He is an illiterate valedictorian, a superhero who lets the bad guys destroy the universe. I was never cool, and I never dated the beautiful girls. Putting on my helmet every day was excruciating on account of the acne minefield dotting my forehead. I was much more likely to get sent to detention for my untucked shirt (a dress code violation) than to win any kind of acclaim from my classmates.

In addition to my role on the football field, I also rode the bench for the varsity basketball team. After practice one day my sophomore year, the upperclassmen were discussing how good the football team would be if they all went out for the squad. "I don't even know who plays quarterback," one of them said, before asserting that any of them could probably play the position better than whoever it was who did. Then they all started to wonder: Just who was the quarterback of the football team? I finally offered that it was me, and they politely changed the subject. Our team was so pathetic that even a bunch of high school jocks could see that it was cruel to mock us.

The quarterback is both an athletic hero and an apex predator of the high school ecosystem.

"People do kind of look down at the quarterback and think, *You're the leader and you're not winning games*," Al Gunderson told me. Gunderson became the starting quarterback for Sturgis Brown High School in Sturgis, South Dakota, toward the end of the 1997 season, his sophomore year. His first start at quarterback was the first of 79 consecutive losses for the Sturgis Scoopers. "I'm sure you felt the same way," he told me, commiserating. "You kinda felt this pressure on your shoulders and you're thinking, *Man, what am I doing wrong here?*"

I was doing a lot wrong. In my 2½ years at the helm, I believe that I passed for four touchdowns and ran for another while throwing a few dozen interceptions. In a season preview published before my senior year, the *Bangor Daily News* claimed that I completed 34 of 88 pass attempts my junior season. I'd like to confirm those numbers, but my former coaches don't have statistics or film from those seasons. This, it seems, is pretty common.



This is probably not a photo of a touchdown pass.

Photo illustration by *Slate*. Photo courtesy of Josh Keefe.

Nobody keeps track of statistics for terrible high school teams. The history of scholastic sports is written not by but for the winners. No one wants to make a high school kid feel bad about losing. One post-game newspaper write-up I unearthed praised a defense for picking off three passes but was careful not to mention the quarterback who threw them: me. (The box score of that game indicated that I completed four passes to go along with my three picks.) The National Federation of State High School Associations, the website MaxPreps, and the Maine Principals' Association (the governing body of Maine high school athletics) couldn't provide me any information about long losing streaks and the quarterbacks who were a part of them. I was told they didn't track "negative" statistics. Our streak, like many high school football losing streaks that didn't approach a national or state record, was only quantified and discussed in print when it ended, when it could be celebrated as an accomplishment by a tough group of kids who refused to give up.

The players and coaches who never got that win, however, don't get that acclaim. And some of them don't want to rehash all those bad memories. "Who'd want to talk about that?" Cleveland Dansby, the former head coach at Phoenix's Carl Hayden Community High School asked me when I sought his help in finding quarterbacks to interview. Dansby took over the team in 2005 when it was 24 games into what would eventually become a 66-game losing streak. "That's embarrassing," he said.

“You want to give a kid the experience of success, that’s what keeps them going,” Dansby explained. He knew what success felt like: Dansby led South Mountain High School to the 1993 5A state championship game (and coached future NFL defensive backs Terry Fair and Rashad Bauman) before moving on to rebuild Carl Hayden’s program in the 2000s. “Put a kid in a position to be successful and that kid will flourish. But if you keep him around negative stuff, where he doesn’t have a chance to win, what are you doing to that kid?”

I wondered that myself. The sad thing was, so did our opponents.

We would often get beaten so badly in the first half that the clock would run continuously after halftime as a form of mercy. In addition to fielding their JV teams in the second half (and sometimes their freshman by the fourth quarter), our adversaries would sometimes stop returning punts and let us kick the ball into an empty defensive backfield, where it would roll around and run a bit more time off the clock.

I assumed that this kind of humiliating compassion was a common experience for losing teams. “No, we never got any of that,” Gunderson, the former Sturgis quarterback, told me. It turns out that the John Bapst Crusaders weren’t just bad. We were bad relative to teams that accumulated losses with historic consistency.

“That is classic,” Gary Marx told me when I explained the running-clock scenario. Marx, who’s now a reporter for the *Chicago Tribune*, was the starting quarterback for the winless 1973 Harvard School (now Harvard-Westlake) team in Los Angeles. “I don’t remember anybody taking mercy on us,” Marx continued. “They just pounded on us and laughed at us, I think. It was take no prisoners. We were the sacrificial lambs.”

We felt like sacrificial lambs too, in part because every away game seemed to be our opponent’s homecoming. Teams planned celebrations of school and community pride around the nights we came to town.

Still, at least we had a roster that allowed for substitutions.

“My senior year we played [eventual 1993 Georgia Class A state champion] Lincoln County, and we went there with maybe 12 people,” Chris Kelley told me. Kelley’s Glascock County High School lost that day by the score of 72–0. But that was just one game. Kelley was a three-year starter for Glascock County in Gibson, Georgia, which lost 82 straight contests from 1990 to 1999.

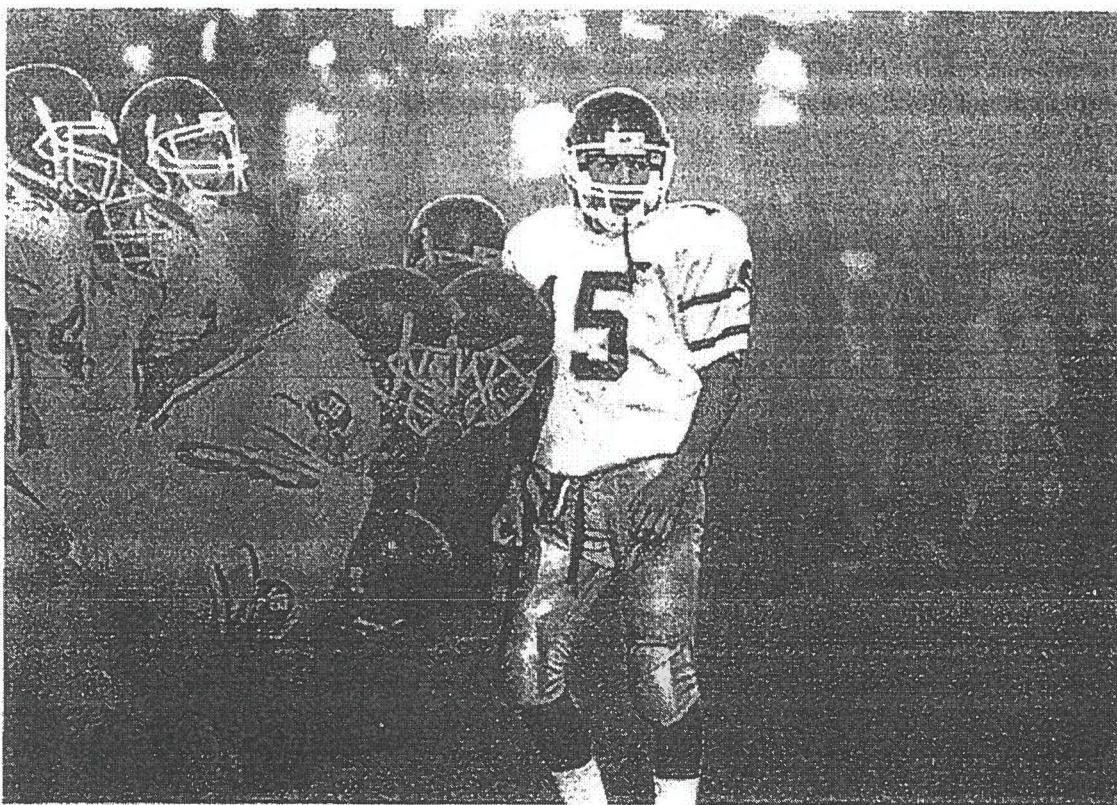
“I got rid of it quick,” Kelley told me when I asked about his quarterbacking philosophy. Now he is the head coach at his alma mater, the smallest public school in the state to field a high school football team. He’s entering his 13th year as the team’s head coach, which included an 8–2 season in 2008. “We’re underdogs,” he told me. “Always have been.”

What made our losing so frustrating was that—unlike Chris Kelley and Glascock County High—we had no institutional disadvantages. Sure, we had a different coach every year, and yes, a lot of the kids had never played football before coming to John Bapst. But very little changed between when I graduated in 2003 and when Bapst won a state championship in 2008. The biggest

differences: a coach who stuck around, a star running back, and a quarterback who won conference player of the year.

My brother Dan, who's now 23, was a junior receiver and defensive back on that title-winning team. As a 10- and 11-year-old he went to my games with our parents and watched me lose. "I remember the other kids who went to Bapst and played other sports were always in the stands and always making smartass comments," my brother recently told me. "I remember always being so mad and yelling at them, 'Why aren't you playing?'"

By the time Dan was on the team, Bapst had some serious athletes. Reporters came to their practices. John Bapst football became something of a local sensation. "It was just because you guys were so bad and we had won a state championship," Dan told me. "[The losing streak] made it 1,000 percent more miraculous." You're welcome, brother.



Looking to the sidelines for help.

Photo illustration by *State*. Photo courtesy of Josh Keefe.

Given my 0-23 record, my lack of even mediocre statistics in defeat, and our team's complete ineptitude in spite of relative parity with our opponents, I am confident in saying I was the worst high school quarterback of all time. Sure, there was probably a kid here or there who had to fill in for an injured starter and had even less of an idea of how to run an offense than I did, but he wouldn't have lasted long. Longevity counts for something in this sort of sports debate, and I never missed a start. I am the Cal Ripken Jr. of losing quarterbacks. Chris Kelley had more losses than I did, but it's fair to say that Kelley, who played in football-mad Georgia, would've

won some games playing in eastern Maine, where making it to Division III college football was a big deal and the tackles were more like aggressive hugs than real hits.

And so, wearing the crown, I wonder what the point was. I worked really hard for three years to win a game. There was nothing in this world I wanted more. I prayed for wins after I stopped praying for anything else.

After our last game, a relatively close 21–6 loss to our rivals Orono High School, I was overwhelmed by emotions I didn't understand and couldn't express. I was sad, disheartened, and demoralized, but since I had felt that way for most of three years, I was also relieved that it was finally over—that it was now someone else's responsibility to lead the John Bapst football team against mill town teams that called us "purple faggots." I didn't cry that day. I sat on the dark bus home in stunned silence, that strange mixture of sadness and relief leaving me unable to articulate anything meaningful when I high-fived and hugged my fellow seniors as we left the locker room for the final time. It was hard to see any purpose in what we had gone through. We had humiliated ourselves publicly while getting physically beaten in the process. And there was no payoff at the end.

How does losing every game teach you anything that going 2–7 doesn't?

But now, years later, I wonder if maybe there was something to be gained from never winning. My fellow losing quarterbacks certainly think so. "I learned so much from it," Gunderson, who is now a chiropractor back in Sturgis, South Dakota, told me. "You get your butt kicked and yet kids show up every single day, and fight every day, and want to work hard every day. That's the real world. I feel I'm a better person for it."

"We had a few kids that quit about halfway through the season, they just didn't want to do it," Gunderson added. "And I felt bad for them because if they quit during something like that, you know they are going to quit later in life, too."

"In football, I don't care if you're on a state championship team, you're going to get knocked down from time to time," Kelley said. "You're going to get knocked down from time to time in life, too, but do you get back up enough? That's the question. ... You either get up or you don't."

It's true but banal to say that losing teaches you important lessons—nobody disputes that. But every team faces adversity. Here's what I've never understood: How does losing every game teach you anything that going 2–7 doesn't?

I think I finally have the answer to that question. It didn't come easily—I struggled for years to see just what the "life lesson" was that parents and coaches insisted I had learned. I had to enter the real world before I could grasp it, knowing what it was like to be penniless (more than once), working terrible jobs, sleeping on couches for months at a time, and getting a seemingly endless trail of rejection letters in response to my writing. I had to get dumped. I had to lose some hair. Now, as an adult, I get it.

Life is a hopeless fight against loss and failure. We are all going to die, as will all of our loved ones. Getting beaten continuously on the football field, sometimes brutally so, illuminates this

existential struggle. It teaches you to find joy in what you're doing, and the people you are doing it with, in spite of the inevitable outcome.

As a culture, we try to make every kid feel like a winner. Maybe we should also give every child a task that he will fail at again and again, along with teammates to fail with. He might learn to detach himself from winning and losing and learn the value of putting up a good fight. He might learn that trying and failing to achieve a long-shot dream is better than settling for a passionless life. He might learn how to lose, which is a valuable skill that this life provides no shortage of opportunities to put into practice, and yet shockingly few people know how to do well.

I know there are quarterbacks out there who won every game, who got the girl, who made it on TV and got their names on statues. It must have been great, conquering a fantasy world. But I learned something about living in ours.

I'm proud of all the losing I did. Not everybody keeps at it until they're the worst to ever play the game.

LAZARUS D.

I used to have a commemorative coin set for 1994, the year I was born. Silver dollar and half dollar, quarter, dime, nickel, and penny, all sparkled inside the protection of a clear Lucite case. It must have been given to me when I was very young because I cannot recollect any of the details of receiving the gift. What I can remember is how shiny those coins were in 2001, when we cracked the case open so that we would have food to eat over a long weekend. I will never forget the tears my mother shed as she cried, "Sorry. I am so sorry," over and over again. The \$1.91 in change bought ten packs of Top Ramen and a box of frozen vegetables—food I was grateful for.

My mother should have been a doctor. But, right out of high school, she married my father, a man significantly older than her, believing he would provide her with freedom and the financial support so she could pursue medical school. In reality, she had married a man with no job and no ambition, who was a drug addict and alcoholic with a violent temper. As a little boy, I would watch him go into rages and break everything he could get his hands on. His diet consisted of Jack Daniel's, cigarettes, M&M'S, and any pill he managed to get a hold of. My mother left him when I was five and my sister was two. I have rarely seen him since.

To say that life has been a struggle would be an understatement. My mother, sister, and I have been homeless on several occasions. With all of our belongings packed in the back of the car, we have bounced from house to house with friends and friends-of-friends, sleeping on the living room floor, in a spare bedroom, or a tent in the backyard. We have also had periods of more prosperous times where my

mother could afford an apartment and gas service, but not power. A few years ago, we spent six months using battery-operated lanterns, rarely staying up after the sun went down. This left me little free time, and it made completing my homework an immediate priority.

In all of this, I have held close the mantra that my mother has repeated to me throughout my life, "The two most important things in life are your education and integrity. Once they are yours, they can never be taken away." My sister and I have always been told that school is the top priority in our lives. Even with family and household upheaval, we have stayed in our neighborhood schools. My mother has made countless sacrifices to keep that portion of our lives steady. I realize the struggles she has faced on our behalf and in return, have strived to take full advantage of the free education provided to me.

It's not always easy finding the time to study. My mother often works three to five jobs at a time, so I am responsible for taking care of my sister, who has a heart condition. I have to help her maintain her diet, exercise routine, and medications, or else she is at high risk for having heart attacks.

My major educational goal has been to attend a top university as a math and physics double major. My area of interest is specifically in laser technology and how improvements can be made to help with major surgeries, such as cardiac and neurosurgeries. I want to create advances in lasers that will not only save lives, but also improve the quality of life for millions. I want to be able to study the most cutting-edge science with the brightest minds in the world. And ultimately, when I reach my goals and create new laser technology, it will save my sister's life.

18

REVIEW

In choosing to write a highly personal essay, Lazarus ensured that his statement would not mimic any other personal statement submitted to Harvard. His life struggles relate extremely important things about who he is as a person and student. The opening description of the Lucite case of coins readies the reader for a story about a hobby or a childhood toy. The story then makes a surprising shift in tone and focuses on extreme hardship as the coins become symbols of Lazarus's loss of innocence. He quickly becomes an adult and saves childish things for his father—the man who only eats M&M'S.

Lazarus's willingness to open up about such a difficult time in his life is admirable and certainly creates a personal narrative that holds up the essay and informs the reader. The first two paragraphs paint a dark picture of a life and what is surely an important aspect of who Lazarus is as a person—which is, of course, the key element of a personal statement. The final paragraphs of the essay turn into a description of his sister's illness and his desire to help surgeons. Important things to be sure but perhaps too much to tag onto the end of an essay that already carries so much.

Conversely, his quick mention of academics works extremely well. For many Harvard essays, any time spent defending the importance of academics would seem out of place or redundant. Lazarus's quick mention of such a thing, however, could be vital. Hardships overcome do not appear on an academic transcript—this essay not only informs who Lazarus is as a person but also allows the admissions officers to see his entire application with a new understanding.

—Amy Friedman

MARY MEBANE

THE BACK OF THE BUS

Mary Mebane (1933-1992) was a member of the last generation of African Americans to endure legal segregation in the South. The daughter of a dirt farmer who sold junk to raise cash, she earned a Ph.D. from the University of North Carolina and became a professor of English. In 1971 on the *Op-Ed* page of the *New York Times*, Mebane told the story of a bus ride from Durham to Orangeburg, South Carolina, during the 1940s that "realized for me the enormity of the change" since the Civil Rights Act of 1964. That bus ride was the germ of two autobiographical volumes, *Mary* (1981) and *Mary Wayfarer* (1983). The essay printed here is a complete chapter from the first book. It is a personal narrative of another, earlier bus ride that Mebane took when the segregation laws were still in place. Mebane said she wrote this piece because she "wanted to show what it was like to live under legal segregation before the Civil Rights Act of 1964."

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Historically, my lifetime is important because I was part of the last generation born into a world of total legal segregation in the Southern United States. When the Supreme Court outlawed segregation in the public schools in 1954, I was twenty-one. When Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, permitting blacks free access to public places, I was thirty-one. The world I was born into had been segregated for a long time—so long, in fact, that I never met anyone who had lived during the time when restrictive laws were not in existence, although some people spoke of parents and others who had lived during the "free" time. As far as anyone knew, the laws as they then existed would stand forever. They were meant to—and did—create a world that fixed black people at the bottom of society in all aspects of human life. It was a world without options.

Most Americans have never had to live with terror. I had had to live with it all my life—the psychological terror of segregation, in which

there was a special set of laws governing your movements. You violated them at your peril, for you knew that if you broke one of them, knowingly or not, physical terror was just around the corner, in the form of policemen and jails, and in some cases and places white vigilante mobs formed for the exclusive purpose of keeping blacks in line.

It was Saturday morning, like any Saturday morning in dozens of Southern towns.

The town had a washed look. The street sweepers had been busy since six o'clock. Now, at eight, they were still slowly moving down the streets, white trucks with clouds of water coming from underneath the swelled tubular sides. Unwary motorists sometimes got a windowful of water as a truck passed by. As it moved on, it left in its wake a clear stream running in the gutters or splashed on the wheels of parked cars.

Homeowners, bent over industriously in the morning sun, were out pushing lawn mowers. The sun was bright, but it wasn't too hot. It was morning and it was May. Most of the mowers were glad that it was finally getting warm enough to go outside.

Traffic was brisk. Country people were coming into town early with their produce; clerks and service workers were getting to the job before the stores opened at ten o'clock. Though the big stores would not be open for another hour or so, the grocery stores, banks, open-air markets, dinettes, were already open and filling with staff and customers.

Everybody was moving toward the heart of Durham's downtown, which waited to receive them rather complacently, little knowing that in a decade the shopping centers far from the center of downtown Durham would create a ghost town in the midst of the busiest blocks on Main Street.

Some moved by car, and some moved by bus. The more affluent used cars, leaving the buses mainly to the poor, black and white, though there were some businesspeople who avoided the trouble of trying to find a parking place downtown by riding the bus.

I didn't mind taking the bus on Saturday. It wasn't so crowded. At night or on Saturday or Sunday was the best time. If there were plenty of seats, the blacks didn't have to worry about being asked to move so that a white person could sit down. And the knot of hatred and fear didn't come into my stomach.



I knew the stop that was the safety point, both going and coming. Leaving town, it was the Little Five Points, about five or six blocks north of the main downtown section. That was the last stop at which four or five people might get on. After the stop, the driver could sometimes pass two or three stops without taking on or letting off a passenger. So the number of seats on the bus usually remained constant on the trip from town to Braggtown. The nearer the bus got to the end of the line, the more I relaxed. For if a white passenger got on near the end of the line, often to catch the return trip back and avoid having to stand in the sun at the bus stop until the bus turned around, he or she would usually stand if there were not seats in the white section, and the driver would say nothing, knowing that the end of the line was near and that the standee would get a seat in a few minutes.

On the trip to town, the Mangum Street A&P was the last point at which the driver picked up more passengers than he let off. These people, though they were just a few blocks from the downtown section, preferred to ride the bus downtown. Those getting on at the A&P were usually on their way to work at the Duke University Hospital—past the downtown section, through a residential neighborhood, and then past the university, before they got to Duke Hospital.

So whether the driver discharged more passengers than he took on near the A&P or Mangum was of great importance. For if he took on more passengers than got off, it meant that some of the newcomers would have to stand. And if they were white, the driver was going to have to ask a black passenger to move so that a white passenger could sit down. Most of the drivers had a rule of thumb, though. By custom the seats behind the exit door had become "colored" seats, and no matter how many whites stood up, anyone sitting behind the exit door knew that he or she wouldn't have to move.

The disputed seat, though, was the one directly opposite the exit door. It was "no-man's-land." White people sat there, and black people sat there. It all depended on whose section was fuller. If the back section was full, the next black passenger who got on sat in the no-man's-land seat; but if the white section filled up, a white person would take the seat. Another thing about the white people: they could sit anywhere they chose, even in the "colored" section. Only the black passengers had to obey segregation laws.

On this Saturday morning Esther¹ and I set out for town for our music lesson. We were going on our weekly big adventure, all the way across town, through the white downtown, then across the railroad tracks, then through the "colored" downtown, a section of run-down dingy shops, through some fading high-class black neighborhoods, past North Carolina College, to Mrs. Shearin's house.

We walked the two miles from Wildwood to the bus line. Though it was a warm day, in the early morning there was dew on the grass and the air still had the night's softness. So we walked along and talked and looked back constantly, hoping someone we knew would stop and pick us up.

I looked back furtively, for in one of the few instances that I remembered my father criticizing me severely, it was for looking back. One day when I was walking from town he had passed in his old truck. I had been looking back and had seen him. "Don't look back," he had said. "People will think that you want them to pick you up." Though he said "people," I knew he meant men—not the men he knew, who lived in the black community, but the black men who were not part of the community, and all of the white men. To be picked up meant that something bad would happen to me. Still, two miles is a long walk and I occasionally joined Esther in looking back to see if anyone we knew was coming.

Esther and I got to the bus and sat on one of the long seats at the back that faced each other. There were three such long seats—one on each side of the bus and a third long seat at the very back that faced the front. I liked to sit on a long seat facing the side because then I didn't have to look at the expressions on the faces of the whites when they put their tokens in and looked at the blacks sitting in the back of the bus. Often I studied my music, looking down and practicing the fingering. I looked up at each stop to see who was getting on and to check on the seating pattern. The seating pattern didn't really bother me that day until the bus started to get unusually full for a Saturday morning. I wondered what was happening, where all these people were coming from. They got on and got on until the white section was almost full and the black section was full.

¹Mebane's sister.

There was a black man in a blue windbreaker and a gray porkpie hat sitting in no-man's-land, and my stomach tightened. I wondered what would happen. I had never been on a bus on which a black person was asked to give a seat to a white person when there was no other seat empty. Usually, though, I had seen a black person automatically get up and move to an empty seat farther back. But this morning the only empty seat was beside a black person sitting in no-man's-land.

The bus stopped at Little Five Points and one black got off. A young white man was getting on. I tensed. What would happen now? Would the driver ask the black man to get up and move to the empty seat farther back? The white man had a businessman's air about him: suit, shirt, tie, polished brown shoes. He saw the empty seat in the "colored" section and after just a little hesitation went to it, put his briefcase down, and sat with his feet crossed. I relaxed a little when the bus pulled off without the driver saying anything. Evidently he hadn't seen what had happened, or since he was just a few stops from Main Street, he figured the mass exodus there would solve all the problems. Still, I was afraid of a scene.

The next stop was an open-air fruit stand just after Little Five Points, and here another white man got on. Where would he sit? The only available seat was beside the black man. Would he stand the few stops to Main Street or would the driver make the black man move? The whole colored section tensed, but nobody said anything. I looked at Esther, who looked apprehensive. I looked at the other men and women, who studiously avoided my eyes and everybody else's as well, as they maintained a steady gaze at a far-distant land.

Just one woman caught my eye; I had noticed her before, and I had been ashamed of her. She was a stringy little black woman. She could have been forty; she could have been fifty. She looked as if she were a hard drinker. Flat black face with tight features. She was dressed with great insouciance in a tight boy's sweater with horizontal lines running across her flat chest. It pulled down over a nondescript skirt. Laced-up shoes, socks, and a head rag completed her outfit. She looked tense.

The white man who had just gotten on the bus walked to the seat in no-man's-land and stood there. He wouldn't sit down, just stood there.

Two adult males, living in the most highly industrialized, most technologically advanced nation in the world, a nation that had devastated two other industrial giants in World War II and had flirted with taking on China in Korea. Both these men, either of whom could have fought for the United States in Germany or Korea, faced each other in mutual rage and hostility. The white one wanted to sit down, but he was going to exert his authority and force the black one to get up first. I watched the driver in the rearview mirror. He was about the same age as the antagonists. The driver wasn't looking for trouble, either.

"Say there, buddy, how about moving back," the driver said, meanwhile driving his bus just as fast as he could. The whole bus froze—whites at the front, blacks at the rear. They didn't want to believe what was happening was really happening.

The seated black man said nothing. The standing white man said nothing.

"Say, buddy, did you hear me? What about moving on back." The driver was scared to death. I could tell that.

"These is the niggers' seats!" the little lady in the strange outfit started screaming. I jumped. I had to shift my attention from the driver to the frieze of the black man seated and white man standing to the articulate little woman who had joined in the fray.

"The government gave us these seats! These is the niggers' seats." I was startled at her statement and her tone. "The president said that these are the niggers' seats!" I expected her to start fighting at any moment.

Evidently the bus driver did, too, because he was driving faster and faster. I believe that he forgot he was driving a bus and wanted desperately to pull to the side of the street and get out and run.

"I'm going to take you down to the station, buddy," the driver said.

The white man with the briefcase and the polished brown shoes who had taken a seat in the "colored" section looked as though he might die of embarrassment at any moment.

As scared and upset as I was, I didn't miss a thing.

By that time we had come to the stop before Main Street, and the black passenger rose to get off.

"You're not getting off, buddy. I'm going to take you downtown." The driver kept driving as he talked and seemed to be trying to get downtown as fast as he could.

"These are the niggers' seats! The government plainly said these are the niggers' seats!" screamed the little woman in rage.

I was embarrassed at the use of the word "nigger" but I was proud of the lady. I was also proud of the man who wouldn't get up.

The bus driver was afraid, trying to hold on to his job but plainly not willing to get into a row with the blacks.

The bus seemed to be going a hundred miles an hour and everybody was anxious to get off, though only the lady and the driver were saying anything.

The black man stood at the exit door; the driver drove right past the A&P stop. I was terrified. I was sure that the bus was going to the police station to put the black man in jail. The little woman had her hands on her hips and she never stopped yelling. The bus driver kept driving as fast as he could.

Then, somewhere in the back of his mind, he decided to forget the whole thing. The next stop was Main Street, and when he got there, in what seemed to be a flash of lightning, he flung both doors open wide. He and his black antagonist looked at each other in the rearview mirror; in a second the windbreaker and porkpie hat were gone. The little woman was standing, preaching to the whole bus about the government's gift of these seats to the blacks; the man with the brown shoes practically fell out of the door in his hurry; and Esther and I followed the hurrying footsteps.

We walked about three doors down the block, then caught a bus to the black neighborhood. Here we sat on one of the two long seats facing each other, directly behind the driver. It was the custom. Since this bus had a route from a black neighborhood to the downtown section and back, passing through no white residential areas, blacks could sit where they chose. One minute we had been on a bus in which violence was threatened over a seat near the exit door; the next minute we were sitting in the very front behind the driver.

The people who devised this system thought that it was going to last forever.

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XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX FOR DISCUSSION XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

1. Why does the bus driver threaten to drive to the police station? What was his official duty under segregation?
2. Why does the businessman with the briefcase and brown shoes take the separate seat in the back of the bus instead of the place on the bench across from the exit? Was he upholding or violating segregation customs by doing so?
3. What is the main confrontation of the NARRATIVE? What emotion(s) does it arouse in young Mary Mebane and her sister as witnesses?
4. Who are the "people" to whom Mebane refers in paragraph 41?
5. Why does Mebane claim a national significance for the events of her private life as narrated here? Is her claim justified?

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX STRATEGIES AND STRUCTURES XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

1. In which paragraph does Mebane begin telling the story of the bus ride? Why do you think she starts with the routine of the street sweepers and the homeowners doing yard work?
2. What is young Mary's role throughout the story of her wild bus ride? In which paragraph does she DEFINE that role most clearly?
3. List several passages in Mebane's text that seem to be told from young Mary's POINT OF VIEW. Then list others that are told from the point of view of the adult author looking back at an event in her youth. Besides time, what is the main difference in their perspectives?
4. Why does Mebane refer to the black passenger who confronts the bus driver as "the windbreaker and porkpie hat" (39)? Whose point of view is she capturing? Is she showing or telling here—and what difference does it make in her essay?
5. How does Mebane use the increasing speed of the bus to show rather than tell about the precariousness of the segregation system?
6. Mebane interrupts her NARRATIVE of the events of that Saturday morning in paragraphs 10 through 13. What is she explaining to the reader, and why is this information necessary? Where else does she interrupt her NARRATIVE with EXPOSITION?

academic passions, and also discreetly includes résumé-worthy accomplishments, such as her own mathematical research project on baseball statistics and summer research at local universities. What is important about her personal statement is that she goes beyond the résumé and gives the admissions officers a look at her character and personal struggle.

Even though her essay is a bit long, Sarah does not waste a word and ensures that every detail she includes contributes in some way to the overall message she is trying to convey about herself.

Rather than simply evoking sympathy for her situation, Sarah weaves humor and a cheeky attitude throughout her narrative. She introduces her love of mathematics with a creative twist on the common saying, "strength in numbers," and affectionately alludes to her father's depiction of fibromyalgia as "your body's way of giving you the finger."

Her vivacious and tenacious personality shines through in her colorful and descriptive language, painting a clear picture of Sarah as a determined person who doesn't let a chronic illness defeat her and instead finds another passion.

—C. C. Gong

DAVID ROBERTS

"Let's face it, you're slow," my violin teacher said.

He was, as always, complaining that running was detracting from my practice time.

That summed up what running had always meant to me, ever since I was a seventh grader, choosing his sport for the first time. I was fine and content, however. I always had Jeffrey and Archie, classmates like me who ran slowly. We were good friends. We laughed together; we raced together; we pushed each other, and endured tough workouts together. But after middle school the people I trained with went on to do things they were better at. I remained, even though I was not good enough to be considered for varsity.

High school running was hell. I struggled with workouts, most of which I had to run alone. In the hot, dry days of autumn, I often coughed on the dust trails left by my teammates as they vanished into the distance. During the workouts, I got passed incessantly, almost getting run over on occasion. It hurt not to be important; to be dead weight for the team. I looked forward to the next year, when I could hopefully run with the incoming freshmen.

It didn't happen that way. Even a year later, I was still the slowest on the team. How could the freshmen who had snored off the whole summer beat me, a veteran from middle school and high school with decent summer training? I nevertheless reconsidered the effectiveness of my training, and looked forward to getting "back in shape." It was only after my condition had been deteriorating steadily for a few weeks that I began to feel a new level of humiliation. I started to have trouble keeping up with old ladies in the park, and each day I worked



frantically to prevent the discovery of that fact by my teammates, running toward the sketchy areas of the ramble, in the south, where there's barely anybody. My mother, worried about the steady deterioration of my condition, contacted a doctor.

I was anemic.

The doctor prescribed a daily iron pill, and the results were exhilarating. I joked that I was taking steroids. I sunk into endless oxygen. I got tired less. During the workouts, I felt more machine than man. Iron therapy taught me something fundamental. It reminded me why I was running; why I had stuck to this damn sport for four straight years. When I was anemic, I struggled to gather what little motivation I had for those painfully slow jogs in those parks. Putting the effort in, and seeing the dramatic results fooled my mind like a well-administered placebo. Iron therapy was the training wheels that would jump-start my dramatic improvement.

It took four months—four months of iron pills, blood tests, and training—to get back to my personal best: the 5:46 mile that I had run the year before.

Early February that year, the training wheels came off. I was running close to seven miles a day on my own. But I wasn't counting. I could catch a light. I could walk as many stairs as I wanted without getting tired. I was even far ahead of where I was the year before. After two and a half years as a 5:50 miler, I finally had a breakthrough race. I ran a 5:30. I asked coach if I could eventually break 5 minutes. He told me to focus more on maintaining my fitness through spring break.

I ran the mile again, this time outdoors. Coach had me seeded at a 5:30. I ran the first lap, holding back. I didn't want to overextend myself. I hoped to squeeze by with a 5:35. The euphoria was unprecedented as I realized by the second lap that I was a dozen seconds ahead and still holding back. I finished with a 5:14.

On the bus ride back from the meet, one of my long-standing dreams came true. I pretended to ignore Coach sitting next to me, but he kept on giving me glances. He was excited about my time. We talked a lot about the race. We talked about my continuous and dramatic improvement. He said it was early in the season and that I would break 5 minutes after only a few weeks of training.

Six weeks later, Mr. Song, my chemistry teacher, asked me if I had broken 5 minutes for the mile yet. I told him all about how I had run in three meets over the past month and had failed to break 5:15 on every one of them. I told him that 5 minutes was now for me a mirage in the distance. Mr. Song, however, did not show much concern: "You're just overtrained. Once you ease up before the big meet, you'll drop in time once more."

Even though these consoling words were from the man who had baffled my nutritionist when he had guessed that I was anemic, I still doubted his wisdom. On Sunday, I would run the mile once. My last mile of the year. This was it. Using my tried-and-true racing strategy, I finished with a 5:02, a 12-second drop in time. Mr. Song's predictions had again turned out to be correct.

Before I was anemic, the correlation between hard work and success was something that only appeared in the cliché success stories of the talented few. Now, I am running more mileage than I ever have before. And my violin teacher still complains.

But I smile. I know it's going somewhere.

REVIEW

David's opening sentence of "Let's face it, you're slow," blends welcome humility with an assumed question. This mystery propels the first half of the essay: namely, "Why is David slow?" It's an admirable

50 Successful Harvard Application Essays

strategy from the start, as college admissions essays usually approximate a brazen “Hardship X and/or Triumph Y Made Me an Übermensch.” Yes, this essay is of those stripes as well, yet it tempers what could be an egotistical display with an attractive dose of self-deprecation. For example, in the first sentence, the assumption is not that slowness is the hardship; rather, it is that he has to face the fact that he is trying too hard and should probably stop doing as such. But we all like someone who has so much earnestness, they must be told to quit.

The first half of the essay exhibits mastery over creating reader interest and flows from thought to thought with ease. We have a mystery, a struggle, and a familiar tone that does not smack of presumption. David’s climactic reveal of the cause of his slow-running speed is a surprise—handled with mature self-awareness that an iron deficiency isn’t the same as cancer or loss of limb.

Ironically, once David’s physical capacity is restored in the essay, the essay becomes anemic itself. Who is Mr. Song? If Coach’s approval was so important, why was he not mentioned pre-diagnosis? Too many elements are thrown in as auxiliary support to David’s victory lap. This leads to an odd contrast to his plain message of hard work equaling success. For where were all of these people when he was working hard but *not* succeeding? Before the diagnosis, it was his friends and his mother; why are these other authority figures coming out of the woodwork in the eleventh hour? Moreover, the quantification of success—only obsessed with numbers and times—takes the heart and soul out of his prose.

Though David starts off strong, his final lap leaves a reader wishing he had stopped halfway through, and is a fair warning to applicants to make sure to stop when they are ahead.

—Christine A. Hurd

EDA KACELI

Homeless for Thirteen Years

I sat on my parents’ bed weeping with my head resting on my knees. “Why did you have to do that to me? Why did you have to show me the house and then take it away from me?” Hopelessly, I found myself praying to God realizing it was my last resort.

For years, my family and I found ourselves moving from country to country in hopes of a better future. Factors, such as war and lack of academic opportunities, led my parents to pack their bags and embark on a new journey for our family around the world. Our arduous journey first began in Kuçovë, Albania, then Athens, Greece, and then eventually, Boston, Massachusetts. Throughout those years, although my family always had a roof over our heads, I never had a place I could call “home.”

That night that I prayed to God, my mind raced back to the night I was clicking the delete button on my e-mails, but suddenly stopped when I came upon a listing of the house. It was September 22, 2007—eight years exactly to the day that my family and I had moved to the United States. Instantly, I knew that it was fate that was bringing this house to me. I remembered visiting that yellow house the next day with my parents and falling in love with it. However, I also remembered the heartbreaking phone call I received later on that week saying that the owners had chosen another family’s offer.

A week after I had prayed to God, I had given up any hopes of my family buying the house. One day after school, I unlocked the door to our one-bedroom apartment and walked over to the telephone only to see it flashing a red light. I clicked **PLAY** and unexpectedly heard the voice of our real estate agent. “Eda!” she said joyfully. “The deal fell

Unforgettable Miss Bessie

■ Carl T. Rowan

In addition to being a popular syndicated newspaper columnist, Carl T. Rowan is a former ambassador to Finland and director of the U.S. Information Agency. Born in 1925 in Ravenscroft, Tennessee, he received degrees from Oberlin College and the University of Minnesota. He worked as a columnist for the Minneapolis Tribune and the Chicago Sun-Times before moving to Washington, D.C., where he lives today. In 1991, Rowan published Breaking Barriers: A Memoir. His most recent book, The Coming Race War in America, appeared in 1996. In the following essay, he describes a high school teacher whose lessons went far beyond the subjects she taught. After reading the details Rowan presents about Miss Bessie's background, behavior, and appearance, determine what kind of dominant impression of Miss Bessie he leaves you with.

FOR YOUR JOURNAL

Perhaps you have at some time taught a friend or younger brother or sister how to do something—tie a shoe, hit a ball, read, solve a puzzle, drive a car—but you never thought of yourself as a teacher. Did you enjoy the experience of sharing what you know with someone else? Would you consider becoming a teacher someday?

She was only about five feet tall and probably never weighed more than 110 pounds, but Miss Bessie was a towering presence in the classroom. She was the only woman tough enough to make me read *Beowulf* and think for a few foolish days that I liked it. From 1938 to 1942, when I attended Bernard High School in McMinnville, Tenn., she taught me English, history, civics—and a lot more than I realized.

I shall never forget the day she scolded me into reading *Beowulf*.

"But Miss Bessie," I complained, "I ain't much interested in it."

Her large brown eyes became daggerish slits. "Boy," she said, "how dare you say 'ain't' to me! I've taught you better than that."

"Miss Bessie," I pleaded, "I'm trying to make first-string end on the football team, and if I go around saying 'it isn't' and 'they aren't,' the guys are gonna laugh me off the squad."

"Boy," she responded, "you'll play football because you have guts. But do you know what *really* takes guts? Refusing to lower your standards to those of the crowd. It takes guts to say you've got to live and be somebody fifty years after all the football games are over."

I started saying "it isn't" and "they aren't," and I still made first-string end—and class valedictorian—without losing my buddies' respect.

During her remarkable 44-year career, Mrs. Bessie Taylor Gwynn taught hundreds of economically deprived black youngsters—including my mother, my brother, my sisters and me. I remember her now with gratitude and affection—especially in this era when Americans are so wrought-up about a "rising tide of mediocrity" in public education and the problems of finding competent, caring teachers. Miss Bessie was an example of an informed, dedicated teacher, a blessing to children and an asset to the nation.

Born in 1895, in poverty, she grew up in Athens, Ala., where there was no public school for blacks. She attended Trinity School, a private institution for blacks run by the American Missionary Association, and in 1911 graduated from the Normal School (a "super" high school) at Fisk University in Nashville. Mrs. Gwynn, the essence of pride and privacy, never talked about her years in Athens, only in the months before her death did she reveal that she had never attended Fisk University itself because she could not afford the four-year course.

At Normal School she learned a lot about Shakespeare, but most of all about the profound importance of education—especially, for a people trying to move up from slavery. "What you put in your head, boy," she once said, "can never be pulled out by the Ku Klux Klan, the Congress or anybody."

Miss Bessie's bearing of dignity told anyone who met her that she was "educated" in the best sense of the word. There was never a discipline problem in her classes. We didn't dare mess with a woman who knew about the Battle of Hastings, the Magna Carta and the Bill of Rights—and who could also play the piano.

This frail-looking woman could make sense of Shakespeare, Milton, Voltaire, and bring to life Booker T. Washington and

W. E. B. Du Bois. Believing that it was important to know who the officials were that spent taxpayers' money and made public policy, she made us memorize the names of everyone on the Supreme Court and in the President's Cabinet. It could be embarrassing to be unprepared when Miss Bessie said, "Get up and tell the class who Frances Perkins is and what you think about her."

Miss Bessie knew that my family, like so many others during the Depression, couldn't afford to subscribe to a newspaper. She knew we didn't even own a radio. Still, she prodded me to "look out for your future and find some way to keep up with what's going on in the world." So I became a delivery boy for the *Chattanooga Times*. I rarely made a dollar a week, but I got to read a newspaper every day.

Miss Bessie noticed things that had nothing to do with schoolwork, but were vital to a youngster's development. Once a few classmates made fun of my frayed, hand-me-down overcoat, calling me "Strings." As I was leaving school, Miss Bessie patted me on the back of that old overcoat and said, "Carl, never fret about what you *don't* have. Just make the most of what you *do* have—a brain."

Among the things that I did not have was electricity in the little frame house that my father had built for \$400 with his World War I bonus. But because of her inspiration, I spent many hours squinting beside a kerosene lamp reading Shakespeare and Thoreau, Samuel Pepys and William Cullen Bryant.

No one in my family had ever graduated from high school, so there was no tradition of commitment to learning for me to lean on. Like millions of youngsters in today's ghettos and barrios, I needed the push and stimulation of a teacher who truly cared. Miss Bessie gave plenty of both, as she immersed me in a wonderful world of similes, metaphors and even onomatopoeia. She led me to believe that I could write sonnets as well as Shakespeare, or iambic-pentameter verse to put Alexander Pope to shame.

In those days the McMinnville school system was rigidly "Jim Crow," and poor black children had to struggle to put anything in their heads. Our high school was only slightly larger than the oncer-typical little red schoolhouse, and its library was outrageously inadequate—so small, I like to say, that if two students were in it and one wanted to turn a page, the other one had to step outside.

Negroes, as we were called then, were not allowed in the town library, except to mop floors or dust tables. But through one of those secret Old South arrangements between whites of conscience and blacks of stature, Miss Bessie kept getting books smuggled out of the

white library. That is how she introduced me to the Brontës, Byron, Coleridge, Keats and Tennyson. "If you don't read, you can't write, and if you can't write, you might as well stop dreaming," Miss Bessie once told me.

So I read whatever Miss Bessie told me to, and tried to remember the things she insisted that I store away. Forty-five years later, I can still recite her "truths to live by," such as Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's lines from "The Ladder of St. Augustine":

The heights by great men reached and kept
Were not attained by sudden flight.
But they, while their companions slept,
Were toiling upward in the night.

Years later, her inspiration, prodding, anger, cajoling and almost osmotic infusion of learning finally led to that lovely day when Miss Bessie dropped me a note saying, "I'm so proud to read your column in the *Nashville Tennessean*."

Miss Bessie was a spry 80 when I went back to McMinnville and visited her in a senior citizens' apartment building. Pointing out proudly that her building was racially integrated, she reached for two glasses and a pint of bourbon. I was momentarily shocked, because it would have been scandalous in the 1930s and '40s for word to get out that a teacher drank, and nobody had ever raised a rumor that Miss Bessie did.

I felt a new sense of equality as she lifted her glass to mine. Then she revealed a softness and compassion that I had never known as a student.

"I've never forgotten that examination day," she said, "when Buster Martin held up seven fingers, obviously asking you for help with question number seven, 'Name a common carrier.' I can still picture you looking at your exam paper and humming a few bars of 'Chattanooga Choo Choo.' I was so tickled, I couldn't punish either of you."

Miss Bessie was telling me, with bourbon-laced grace, that I never fooled her for a moment.

When Miss Bessie died in 1980, at age 85, hundreds of her former students mourned. They knew the measure of a great teacher: love and motivation. Her wisdom and influence had rippled out across generations.

Some of her students who might normally have been doomed to poverty went on to become doctors, dentists and college professors.

Many, guided by Miss Bessie's example, became public-school teachers.

"The memory of Miss Bessie and how she conducted her classroom did more for me than anything I learned in college," recalls Gladys Wood of Knoxville, Tenn., a highly respected English teacher who spent 43 years in the state's school system. "So many times, when I faced a difficult classroom problem, I asked myself, *How would Miss Bessie deal with this?* And I'd remember that she would handle it with laughter and love."

No child can get all the necessary support at home, and millions of poor children get no support at all. This is what makes a wise, educated, warm-hearted teacher like Miss Bessie so vital to the minds, hearts and souls of this country's children.

QUESTIONS FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. Throughout the essay Rowan offers details of Miss Bessie's physical appearance. (Glossary: *Details*) What specific details does he give, and in what context does he give them? Did Miss Bessie's physical characteristics match the quality of her character? Explain.
2. How would you sum up the character of Miss Bessie? Make a list of the key words that Rowan uses that you feel best describe her.
3. At what point in the essay does Rowan give us the details of Miss Bessie's background? Why do you suppose he delays giving us this important information? (Glossary: *Beginnings and Endings*)
4. How does dialogue serve Rowan's purpose? (Glossary: *Dialogue*)
5. Does Miss Bessie's drinking influence your opinion of her? Explain. Why do you think Rowan included this part of her behavior in his essay?
6. In his opening paragraph Rowan states that Miss Bessie "taught me English, history, civics—and a lot more than I realized." What did she teach her students beyond the traditional public school curriculum?

VOCABULARY

Refer to your dictionary to define the following words as they are used in this selection. Then use each word in a sentence of your own.

civics (1) cajoling (20)
barrios (16) osmotic (20)
conscience (18) measure (25)

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY USING DESCRIPTION

The verbs you use in writing a description can themselves convey much descriptive information. Take, for example, the verb *think*. This word actually tells us little more than the general sense of "mental activity." Using more precise and descriptive alternatives—*ponder, conceive, imagine, picture, muse, consider, contemplate, cogitate, ruminate, meditate*—could easily enhance your descriptive powers and enliven your writing. For each of the following verbs, make a list of at least six descriptive alternatives:

go	throw	exercise
see	take	study
say	drink	

SUGGESTED WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

1. In paragraph 18, Rowan writes the following: "If you don't read, you can't write, and if you can't write, you might as well stop dreaming," Miss Bessie once told me." Write an essay in which you explore this theme (which, in essence, is also the theme of *Models for Writers*).
2. Think of all the teachers you have had, and write a description of the one who has had the greatest influence on you. Remember to give some consideration to the balance you want to achieve between physical attributes and personality traits.

both optimistic and engaging. Her tone is refreshing in its simplicity and the essay reads almost like a conversational monologue, adding vitality to what could easily have been a five-hundred-word cliché.

The strengths of this essay lie in its skillful combination of powerful content and frank expression. Its weighty subject matter is balanced nicely by its casual style. Maliza brings her readers into her story from the very beginning, addressing them directly and encouraging them to challenge their preconceived notions of rheumatoid arthritis, as she had to do when confronted with the disease as a child. Her brief but vivid description of “the day things changed” introduces a surprisingly relatable narrative that successfully maintains the interest of the reader as it follows Maliza’s journey toward research. The image of a third grader using Google to find information about her illness is an honest and endearing one that effectively bridges the gap between Maliza’s childhood obstacles and her ultimate interest in research.

Maliza’s essay is effective in providing insight into not only the obstacles she has faced but also the ways in which those obstacles have shaped her passions and worldview.

—Christina M. Teodorescu

YUEMING C.

My Ye-Ye always wears a red baseball cap. I think he likes the vivid color—bright and sanguine, like himself. When Ye-Ye came from China to visit us seven years ago, he brought his red cap with him and every night for six months, it sat on the stairway railing post of my house, waiting to be loyally placed back on Ye-Ye’s head the next morning. He wore the cap everywhere: around the house, where he performed magic tricks with it to make my little brother laugh; to the corner store, where he bought me popsicles before using his hat to wipe the beads of summer sweat off my neck. Today whenever I see a red hat, I think of my Ye-Ye and his baseball cap, and I smile.

Ye-Ye is the Mandarin word for “grandfather.” My Ye-Ye is a simple, ordinary person—not rich, not “successful”—but he is my greatest source of inspiration and I idolize him. Of all the people I know, Ye-Ye has encountered the most hardship and of all the people I know, Ye-Ye is the most joyful. That these two aspects can coexist in one individual is, in my mind, truly remarkable.

Ye-Ye was an orphan. Both his parents died before he was six years old, leaving him and his older brother with no home and no family. When other children gathered to read around stoves at school, Ye-Ye and his brother walked in the bitter cold along railroad tracks, looking for used coal to sell. When other children ran home to loving parents, Ye-Ye and his brother walked along the streets looking for somewhere to sleep. Eight years later, Ye-Ye walked alone—his brother was dead.

Ye-Ye managed to survive, and in the meanwhile taught himself to

read, write, and do arithmetic. Life was a blessing, he told those around him with a smile.

Years later, Ye-Ye's job sent him to the Gobi Desert, where he and his fellow workers labored for twelve hours a day. The desert wind was merciless; it would snatch their tent in the middle of the night and leave them without supply the next morning. Every year, harsh weather took the lives of some fellow workers.

After eight years, Ye-Ye was transferred back to the city where his wife lay sick in bed. At the end of a twelve-hour workday, Ye-Ye took care of his sick wife and three young children. He sat with the children and told them about the wide, starry desert sky and mysterious desert lives. Life was a blessing, he told them with a smile.

But life was not easy; there was barely enough money to keep the family from starving. Yet, my dad and his sisters loved going with Ye-Ye to the market. He would buy them little luxuries that their mother would never indulge them in: a small bag of sunflower seeds for two cents, a candy each for three cents. Luxuries as they were, Ye-Ye bought them without hesitation. Anything that could put a smile on the children's faces and a skip in their steps was priceless.

Ye-Ye still goes to the market today. At the age of seventy-eight, he bikes several kilometers each week to buy bags of fresh fruits and vegetables, and then bikes home to share them with his neighbors. He keeps a small patch of strawberries and an apricot tree. When the fruit is ripe, he opens his gate and invites all the children in to pick and eat. He is Ye-Ye to every child in the neighborhood.

I had always thought that I was sensible and self-aware. But nothing has made me stare as hard in the mirror as I did after learning about the cruel past that Ye-Ye had suffered and the cheerful attitude he had kept throughout those years. I thought back to all the times when I had gotten upset. My mom forgot to pick me up from the bus station. My computer crashed the day before an assignment was due.

They seemed so trivial and childish, and I felt deeply ashamed of myself.

Now, whenever I encounter an obstacle that seems overwhelming, I think of Ye-Ye; I see him in his red baseball cap, smiling at me. Like a splash of cool water, his smile rouses me from grief, and reminds me how trivial my worries are and how generous life has been. Today I keep a red baseball cap at the railing post at home where Ye-Ye used to put his every night. Whenever I see the cap, I think of my Ye-Ye, smiling in his red baseball cap, and I smile. Yes, Ye-Ye. Life is a blessing.

REVIEW

Yueming quickly distinguishes herself with her refreshingly crisp writing. Avoiding a common pitfall in college application essays, Yueming uses the appropriate amount of descriptive language needed to illustrate her thoughts while keeping her prose clean and readable. She doesn't just use big words for the sake of using big words—a pitfall that many are aware of yet many still succumb.

In fact, her succinctness helps her essay shine. For example, the stark simplicity of the line "Eight years later, Ye-Ye walked alone—his brother was dead" makes it especially powerful. The sentence's abruptness hits the reader with the full force of the situation, unmitigated by secondary details. The terse, in-passing reference to Ye-Ye's brother's death in itself is haunting, conveying a sense of coldness in the world that suits Yueming's intent perfectly.

Fundamentally, this reflects the underlying strength of this essay: Yueming's remarkable ability to tell a story. Her concise writing style lends itself well to this art, crafting a narrative that is evocative but easy to follow. Like many good storytellers, Yueming weaves recurring themes into her work, giving it a sense of unity. In particular, there is

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a persistent spark of optimism that her grandfather retains in the face of tremendous hardship, captured in the refrain, "Life was a blessing." It echoes throughout the piece, embodying the larger perspective of gratitude that Yueming credits to her grandfather. Inevitably, though, the heavy focus on her grandfather does come at the expense of her own story, as her role as an individual in the essay feels rather minor. As such, the reader doesn't learn enough about Yueming herself. Though she tells a compelling story, the reader comes away with a better understanding of Ye-Ye as a person than of Yueming.

But in spite of this flaw, the essay works. Yueming comes across as a compassionate individual with a talent for storytelling.

—Victor C. Wu

TONY CHEANG

Describe the world you come from—for example, your family, community or school—and tell us how your world has shaped your dreams and aspirations.

—Beauty in Complexity

Gazing up at the starry sky, I see Cygnus, Hercules, and Pisces, remnants of past cultures. I listen to waves crash on the beach, the forces of nature at work. Isn't it odd how stars are flaming spheres and electrical impulses make beings sentient? The very existence of our world is a wonder; what are the odds that this particular planet developed all the necessary components, parts that all work in unison, to support life? How do they interact? How did they come to be? I thought back to how my previously simplistic mind-set evolved this past year.

At Balboa, juniors and seniors join one of five small learning communities, which are integrated into the curriculum. Near the end of sophomore year, I ranked my choices: Law Academy first—it seemed the most prestigious—and WALC, the Wilderness Arts and Literacy Collaborative, fourth. So when I was sorted into WALC, I felt disappointed at the inflexibility of my schedule and bitter toward my classes. However, since students are required to wait at least a semester before switching pathways, I stayed in WALC. My experiences that semester began shifting my ambition-oriented paradigm to an interest-oriented one. I didn't switch out.

Beyond its integrated classes, WALC takes its students on trips to natural areas not only to build community among its students, but also to explore complex natural processes and humanity's role in them.

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Mrs. Trane lies motionless: the head seems unusually large on a skeleton frame, and except for a few fine wisps of gray hair around the ears, is bald from the chemotherapy that had offered brief hope; the skin is dark yellow and sags loosely around exaggerated long bones that not even a gown and bedding can disguise; the right arm lies straight out at the side, taped cruelly to a board to secure the IV fluid its access; the left arm is across the sunken chest, which rises and falls in the uneven waves of Cheyne-Stokes respirations; a catheter hanging on the side of the bed is draining thick brown urine from the bladder, the source of the deathly smell.

4

I reach for the long, thin fingers that are lying on the chest. They are ice cold, and I quickly move to the wrist and feel for the weak, thready pulse. Mrs. Trane's eyes flutter open as her head turns toward me slightly. As she tries to form a word on her dry, parched lips, I bend close to her and scarcely hear as she whispers, "Water." Taking a glass of water from the bedside table, I put my finger over the end of the straw and allow a few droplets of the cool moisture to slide into her mouth. She makes no attempt to swallow; there is just not enough strength. "More," the raspy voice says, and we repeat the procedure. This time she does manage to swallow and weakly says, "Thank you." I touch her gently in response. She is too weak for conversation, so without asking, I go about providing for her needs, explaining to her in hushed tones each move I make. Picking her up in my arms like a child, I turn her on her side. She is so very small and light. Carefully, I rub lotion into the yellow skin, which rolls freely over the bones, feeling perfectly the outline of each vertebrae in the back and the round smoothness of the iliac crest. Placing a pillow between her legs, I notice that these too are ice cold, and not until I run my hand up over her knees do I feel any of the life-giving warmth of blood coursing through fragile veins. I find myself in awe of the life force which continues despite such a state of decomposition.

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When I am finished, I pull a chair up beside the bed to face her and, taking her free hand between mine, again notice the long, thin fingers. Graceful. There is no jewelry; it would have fallen off long ago. I wonder briefly if she has any family, and then I see that there are neither bouquets of flowers, nor pretty plants on the shelves, no brightly crayon-colored posters of rainbows, nor boastful self-portraits from grand-

BEVERLY DIPO

NO RAINBOWS, NO ROSES

Beverly Dipo is a nurse by profession. "No Rainbows, No Roses," which won a Bedford Prize, was written as an assignment for a college writing class. Using the observational method of her profession, Dipo describes a dying woman with clinical detachment—at first. "Right or wrong, it's the way we're trained," she told a fellow writing student. "I frequently observe things before I ever speak to a patient or get to know them as human beings." In addition to observing her patient as an object among the other objects in room 309, Dipo goes on to look at the whole person beneath the physical ruin. So sharp and clear are the visual and auditory details of Nurse Dipo's clinical observations, we can picture the woman, too.

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I have never seen Mrs. Trane before, but I know by the report I received from the previous shift that tonight she will die. Making my rounds, I go from room to room, checking other patients first and saving Mrs. Trane for last, not to avoid her, but because she will require the most time to care for. Everyone else seems to be all right for the time being; they have had their medications, backrubs and are easily settled for the night.

At the door to 309, I pause, adjusting my eyes to the darkness. The only light in the room is coming from an infusion pump, which is flashing its red beacon as if in warning, and the dim hall light that barely confirms the room's furnishings and the shapeless form on the bed. As I stand there, the smell hits my nostrils, and I close my eyes as I remember the stench of rot and decay from past experience. In my mouth I taste the bitter bile churning in the pit of my stomach. I swallow uneasily and cross the room in the dark, reaching for the light switch above the sink, and as it silently illuminates the scene, I return to the bed to observe the patient with a detached, medical routine.

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children on the walls. There is no hint in the room anywhere that this is a person who is loved. As though she has been reading my mind, Mrs. Trane answers my thoughts and quietly tells me, "I sent . . . my family . . . home . . . tonight . . . didn't want . . . them . . . to see. . . ." She cannot go on, but knowingly, I have understood what it is she has done. I lower my eyes, not knowing what to say, so I say nothing. Again she seems to sense my unease, "You . . . stay. . . ." Time seems to have come to a standstill. In the total silence, I noticeably feel my own heartbeat quicken and hear my breathing as it begins to match hers, stride for uneven stride. Our eyes meet and somehow, together, we become aware that this is a special moment between us, a moment when two human beings are so close we feel as if our souls touch. Her long fingers curl easily around my hand and I nod my head slowly, smiling. Wordlessly, through yellowed eyes, I receive my thank you and her eyes slowly close.

Some unknown amount of time passes before her eyes open again, only this time there is no response in them, just a blank stare. Without warning, her breathing stops, and within a few moments, the faint pulse is also gone. One single tear flows from her left eye, across the cheekbone and down onto the pillow. I begin to cry quietly. There is a tug of emotion within me for this stranger who so quickly came into and went from my life. Her suffering is done, yet so is the life. Slowly, still holding her hand, I become aware that I do not mind this emotional tug of war, that in fact, it was a privilege she has allowed me, and I would do it again, gladly. Mrs. Trane spared her family an episode that perhaps they were not equipped to handle and instead shared it with me, knowing somehow that I would handle it and, indeed, needed it to grow, both privately and professionally. She had not wanted to have her family see her die, yet she did not want to die alone. No one should die alone, and I am glad I was there for her.

Two days later, I read Mrs. Trane's obituary in the paper. She had been a widow for five years, was the mother of seven, grandmother of eighteen, an active member of her church, a leader of volunteer organizations in her community, college-educated in music, a concert pianist, and a piano teacher for over thirty years.

Yes, they were long and graceful fingers.

XX

1. How long have the patient and the nurse in Beverly Dipo's DESCRIPTION known each other?
2. Why are there no rainbows or roses in Mrs. Trane's hospital room on her last night?
3. At first Nurse Dipo observes her patient "with a detached, medical routine-ness" (2). What details does she report? When and where does emotion take over in her description of Mrs. Trane's room and her death? How do her descriptive details change?
4. Does Dipo's expression of emotion make her a better nurse, in your opinion, or is she being unprofessional? Please explain your answer.

XX

1. Dipo uses all five senses in her depiction of room 309, leading us to see, hear, smell, feel, and even taste. Point out EXAMPLES of each one at work.
2. Which sense (or senses) dominate(s) in Dipo's DESCRIPTION?
3. Since this is a hospital at night, it is quiet. For what main purpose, then, does the observant nurse in this scene use her sense of hearing?
4. The DOMINANT IMPRESSION in paragraph 5 is of a growing intimacy between the two women. How does the silence contribute to this impression?
5. Why does Dipo prolong her description beyond the night of her patient's death? What important new information (and perspective) does the obituary add to her eyewitness account?
6. An obituary is a NARRATIVE of a person's life, written upon the occasion of his or her death. Dipo's description focuses only upon Mrs. Trane's final hours, but it also has many elements of a narrative, including a narrator. What does this narrator do besides merely observe the scene?

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1. What do the rainbows and roses signify in Dipo's DESCRIPTION of room 309?
2. In a phrase like "brief hope," Dipo indicates her true feelings about Mrs. Trane (3). Please give several other examples.

with melted hands as a detail of the aftermath of the fire but is then used to draw greater meaning when the author notes that time is continuing on despite the clock's stillness.

But even tragic events can be overdone, and Rory should have looked out for that. References to "the untamed fire in my heart" are too strong, and through hyperbole diminish the power of the story.

Overall, the essay is strong and clearly communicates the author's new intensity for life after the fire. The closing of the essay is particularly strong with its use of repetition. The author's juxtaposition of the items lost in the fire with the sense of purpose he now feels in the last lines of the essay emphasizes to readers what "things" he thinks are truly important.

—Juliet Nelson

LESLIE OJEABURU

Nerves of Steel

My bladder felt as though it would burst right out of my body and yet my mouth burned with an unquenchable thirst. I knew there could be only one grim and damp solution, but I could do nothing about it. I was stuck in a chair, awaiting my turn on the stage and my mind, body, and sanity were being held captive by my nerves. My legs were shaking as though I were in the snow with only my boxers on. My belly was in a Gordian knot and I could feel the telltale wetness that tends to form under my armpits in times like these. I was in no shape to give a speech to a room full of parents but there I was, violently clutching my papers at the side of the auditorium, awaiting my name to be called in a few seconds.

I took a deep breath. It wasn't as if this was my first time in front of a crowd. In fact, as student body president, I had gotten quite used to standing in front of hundreds of teens my age, giving announcements, transforming into Kanye West and President Obama in skits, and watching waves of laughter sweep through the entire room. Yet I knew this time it was very different. My audience was not filled with the young and often quick to laugh faces of teenagers but rather the hardened, mustached, and powdered ones of adults.

"Please welcome our student speaker . . . Leslie Ojeaburu . . . to the stage!" The voice jolted me from my thoughts and almost mechanically I rose from my chair. A huge awkward grin spread across my face as the sounds of Chopin's Funeral March echoed through my mind, but somehow I realized that I had to do what any good president would. I had to speak confidently and pray that no one notices the quaking of my hands.

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Speaking has always been one of my favorite pastimes and each new speech I give . . . one of my greatest victories. You see my nerves, like that of many before me, are not made of steel. They buckle and scream under the assault of any strange, uncomfortable, or challenging moment in my life. Yet it was these very imperfections that forced me to work on public speaking, drove me to run for ASB offices, and taught me to throw myself headfirst into any situation that life may deal.

Indeed we all experience fears and anxieties in similar ways. We all have the same cold sweats, overactive bladders, and feelings of impending doom. Still, what truly distinguishes one from another is how fervently we embrace these fears as catalysts and not roadblocks to our goals.

I may not know where my public speaking will take me in life, but I do know that wherever I go my nerves will surely follow. Acting as constant reminders that there is always more I can improve on and always a new challenge waiting to be conquered.

REVIEW

It definitely takes guts to start a college essay by talking about your bladder. In the case of Leslie's essay, this risky move paid off: Personal statements without any foibles or humility read as unrealistic, unappealing ego boosts. Leslie's essay, on the other hand, most certainly does not portray its author as perfect, and by reveling in his own flaws instead of refusing to acknowledge them, the author evinces a charmingly self-effacing sense of humor, as well as a willingness to tackle challenges. Anyone who has ever delivered a speech with a quavering voice and a cold sweat running down their brow can easily relate to his detailed descriptions of his nervousness. Leslie does not try to cast

himself as fearless, but rather as able to go on despite his fear—as a result, his essay has a sense of humor and believability.

But though he tells an interesting story, it leaves some questions unanswered. What is Leslie speaking about? Is the topic itself important, or is the experience his focus? Though he closes by explaining that overcoming this fear is his goal, the essay begs for answers to these questions and would be improved if he were able to deliver them.

Despite this blip, Leslie succeeds in crafting a winning personal statement that projects likability, determination, and ambition to overcome challenges to succeed, all without making Leslie come off as egotistical or cocky. His humorous and engaging essay serves its purpose well.

—Erica X. Eisen

impact of public opinion polls on a recent election, court decision, business plan, or community issue.

- **PollingReport.com**

<<http://www.pollingreport.com>>

This “independent, nonpartisan” guide to public opinion in America covers topics from mad cow disease to President George W. Bush’s most recent approval ratings.

- **The Gallup Association**

<<http://www.gallup.com>>

This is the home of the Gallup poll, one of the world’s best-known public opinion guides. It lists polls in the categories of Business and the Economy, Politics and Elections, Social Issues and Policy, and Lifestyle.

- **Public Agenda Online**

<<http://www.publicagenda.org>>

This site lists public opinion polls by issue, along with an overview of the issue, articles, facts and statistics, perspectives on the debate, resources, and cautionary advice about how to read the poll’s information.

How to Give Orders Like a Man

Deborah Tannen

Deborah Tannen, professor of linguistics at Georgetown University, was born in 1945 in Brooklyn, New York. Tannen received her B.A. in English from the State University of New York at Binghamton in 1966 and taught English in Greece until 1968. She then earned an M.A. in English literature from Wayne State University in 1970. While pursuing her Ph.D. in linguistics at the University of California, Berkeley, she received several prizes for her poetry and short fiction. Her work has appeared in New York, Vogue, and the New York Times Magazine. In addition, she has authored three best-selling books on how people communicate: *You Just Don’t Understand* (1990), *That’s Not What I Meant* (1991), and *Talking from Nine to Five* (1994). The success of these books attests to the public’s interest in language, especially when it pertains to gender differences. Tannen’s most recent book is entitled *The Argument Culture: Stopping America’s War of Words* (1998).

In this essay, first published in the New York Times Magazine in August 1994, Tannen looks at the variety of ways in which orders are given and received. Interestingly, she concludes that contrary to popular belief, directness is not necessarily logical or effective, and indirectness is not necessarily manipulative or insecure.

BEFORE YOU READ

Write about a time in your life when you were ordered to do something. Who gave you the order—a friend, a parent, maybe a teacher? Did the person’s relationship to you affect how you carried out the order? Did it make a difference to you whether the order giver was male or female? Why?

A university president was expecting a visit from a member of the board of trustees. When her secretary buzzed to tell her that the board member had arrived, she left her office and entered the reception area to greet him. Before ushering him into her office, she handed her secretary a sheet of paper and said: “I’ve just finished drafting this letter. Do you think you could type it right away? I’d like to get it out before lunch. And would you please do me a favor and hold all calls while I’m meeting with Mr. Smith?”

When they sat down behind the closed door of her office, Mr. Smith began by telling her that he thought she had spoken inappropriately to her secretary. “Don’t forget,” he said. “You’re the president!”

Putting aside the question of the appropriateness of his admonishing the president on her way of speaking, it is revealing — and representative of many Americans' assumptions — that the indirect way in which the university president told her secretary what to do struck him as self-deprecating. He took it as evidence that she didn't think she had the right to make demands of her secretary. He probably thought he was giving her a needed pep talk, bolstering her self-confidence.

I challenge the assumption that talking in an indirect way necessarily reveals powerlessness, lack of self-confidence or anything else about the character of the speaker. Indirectness is a fundamental element in human communication. It is also one of the elements that varies most from one culture to another, and one that can cause confusion and misunderstanding when speakers have different habits with regard to using it. I also want to dispel the assumption that American women tend to be more indirect than American men. Women and men are both indirect, but in addition to differences associated with their backgrounds — regional, ethnic and class — they tend to be indirect in different situations and in different ways.

At work, we need to get others to do things, and we all have different ways of accomplishing this. Any individual's ways will vary depending on who is being addressed — a boss, a peer or a subordinate. At one extreme are bald commands. At the other are requests so indirect that they don't sound like requests at all, but are just a statement of need or a description of a situation. People with direct styles of asking others to do things perceive indirect requests — if they perceive them as requests at all — as manipulative. But this is often just a way of blaming others for our discomfort with their styles.

The indirect style is no more manipulative than making a telephone call, asking "Is Rachel there?" and expecting whoever answers the phone to put Rachel on. Only a child is likely to answer "Yes" and continue holding the phone — not out of omeriness but because of inexperience with the conventional meaning of the question. (A mischievous adult might do it to tease.) Those who feel that indirect orders are illogical or manipulative do not recognize the conventional nature of indirect requests.

Issuing orders indirectly can be the prerogative of those in power. Imagine, for example, a master who says "It's cold in here" and expects a servant to make a move to close a window, while a servant who says the same thing is not likely to see his employer rise to correct the situation and make him more comfortable. Indeed, a Frenchman raised in Brittany tells me that his family never gave bald commands to their servants but always communicated orders in indirect and highly polite ways. This pattern renders less surprising the finding of David Bellinger and Jean Berko Gleason that fathers' speech to their

young children had a higher incidence than mothers' of both direct imperatives like "Turn the bolt with the wrench" and indirect orders like "The wheel is going to fall off."

The use of indirectness can hardly be understood without the cross-cultural perspective. Many Americans find it self-evident that directness is logical and aligned with power while indirectness is akin to dishonesty and reflects subservience. But for speakers raised in most of the world's cultures, varieties of indirectness are the norm in communication. This is the pattern found by a Japanese sociolinguist, Kunihiko Harada, in his analysis of a conversation he recorded between a Japanese boss and a subordinate.

The markers of superior status were clear. One speaker was a Japanese man in his late 40's who managed the local branch of a Japanese private school in the United States. His conversational partner was a Japanese-American woman in her early 20's who worked at the school. By virtue of his job, his age and his native fluency in the language being taught, the man was in the superior position. Yet when he addressed the woman, he frequently used polite language and almost always used indirectness. For example, he had tried and failed to find a photography store that would make a black-and-white print from a color negative for a brochure they were producing. He let her know that he wanted her to take over the task by stating the situation and allowed her to volunteer to do it: (This is a translation of the Japanese conversation.)

On this matter, that, that, on the leaflet? This photo, I'm thinking of changing it to black-and-white and making it clearer. . . . I went to a photo shop and asked them. They said they didn't do black-and-white. I asked if they knew any place that did. They said they didn't know. They weren't very helpful, but anyway, a place must be found, the negative brought to it, the picture developed.

Harada observes, "Given the fact that there are some duties to be performed and that there are two parties present, the subordinate is supposed to assume that those are his or her obligation." It was precisely because of his higher status that the boss was free to choose whether to speak formally or informally, to assert his power or to play it down and build rapport — an option not available to the subordinate, who would have seemed cheeky if she had chosen a style that enhanced friendliness and closeness.

The same pattern was found by a Chinese sociolinguist, Yuling Pan, in a meeting of officials involved in a neighborhood youth program. All spoke in ways that reflected their place in the hierarchy. A subordinate addressing a superior always spoke in a deferential way, but a superior addressing a subordinate could either be authoritarian,

demonstrating his power, or friendly, establishing rapport. The ones in power had the option of choosing which style to use. In this spirit, I have been told by people who prefer their bosses to give orders indirectly that those who issue bald commands must be pretty insecure; otherwise why would they have to bolster their egos by throwing their weight around?

I am not inclined to accept that those who give orders directly are really insecure and powerless, any more than I want to accept that judgment of those who give indirect orders. The conclusion to be drawn is that ways of talking should not be taken as obvious evidence of inner psychological states like insecurity or lack of confidence. Considering the many influences on conversational style, individuals have a wide range of ways of getting things done and expressing their emotional states. Personality characteristics like insecurity cannot be linked to ways of speaking in an automatic, self-evident way.

Those who expect orders to be given indirectly are offended when they come unadorned. One woman said that when her boss gives her instructions, she feels she should click her heels, salute, and say "Yes, boss!" His directions strike her as so imperious as to border on the militaristic. Yet I received a letter from a man telling me that indirect orders were a fundamental part of his military training. He wrote:

Many years ago, when I was in the Navy, I was training to be a radio technician. One class I was in was taught by a chief radioman, a regular Navy man who had been to sea, and who was then in his third hitch. The students, about 20 of us, were fresh out of boot camp, with no sea duty and little knowledge of real Navy life. One day in class the chief said it was hot in the room. The students didn't react, except perhaps to nod in agreement. The chief repeated himself: "It's hot in this room." Again there was no reaction from the students.

Then the chief explained. He wasn't looking for agreement or discussion from us. When he said that the room was hot, he expected us to do something about it — like opening the window. He tried it one more time, and this time all of us left our workbenches and headed for the windows. We had learned. And we had many opportunities to apply what we had learned.

This letter especially intrigued me because "It's cold in here" is the standard sentence used by linguists to illustrate an indirect way of getting someone to do something — as I used it earlier. In this example, it is the very obviousness and rigidity of the military hierarchy that makes the statement of a problem sufficient to trigger corrective action on the part of subordinates.

A man who had worked at the Pentagon reinforced the view that the burden of interpretation is on subordinates in the military — and

he noticed the difference when he moved to a position in the private sector. He was frustrated when he'd say to his new secretary, for example, "Do we have a list of invitees?" and be told, "I don't know; we probably do" rather than "I'll get it for you." Indeed, he explained, at the Pentagon, such a question would likely be heard as a reproach that the list was not already on his desk.

The suggestion that indirectness is associated with the military must come as a surprise to many. But everyone is indirect, meaning more than is put into words and deriving meaning from words that are never actually said. It's a matter of where, when and how we each tend to be indirect and look for hidden meanings. But indirectness has a built-in liability. There is a risk that the other will either miss or choose to ignore your meaning.

On January 13, 1982, a freezing cold, snowy day in Washington, Air Florida Flight 90 took off from National Airport, but could not get the lift it needed to keep climbing. It crashed into a bridge linking Washington to the state of Virginia and plunged into the Potomac. Of the 79 people on board, all but 5 perished, many floundering and drowning in the icy water while horror-stricken bystanders watched helplessly from the river's edge and millions more watched, aghast, on their television screens. Experts later concluded that the plane had waited too long after deicing to take off. Fresh buildup of ice on the wings and engine brought the plane down. How could the pilot and co-pilot have made such a blunder? Didn't at least one of them realize it was dangerous to take off under these conditions?

Charlotte Linde, a linguist at the Institute for Research on Learning in Palo Alto, Calif., has studied the "black box" recordings of cockpit conversations that preceded crashes as well as tape recordings of conversations that took place among crews during flight simulations in which problems were presented. Among the black box conversations she studied was the one between the pilot and co-pilot just before the Air Florida crash. The pilot, it turned out, had little experience flying in icy weather. The co-pilot had a bit more, and it became heartbreakingly clear on analysis that he had tried to warn the pilot, but he did so indirectly.

The co-pilot repeatedly called attention to the bad weather and to ice building up on other planes:

Co-pilot: Look how the ice is just hanging on his, ah, back, back there, see that?

Co-pilot: See all those icicles on the back there and everything?
Captain: Yeah.

He expressed concern early on about the long waiting time between deicing: 20

Co-pilot: Boy, this is a, this is a losing battle here on trying to de-ice those things, it [gives] you a false feeling of security, that's all that does.

Shortly after they were given clearance to take off, he again expressed concern: 21

Co-pilot: Let's check these tops again since we been setting here awhile.

Captain: I think we get to go here in a minute.

When they were about to take off, the co-pilot called attention to the engine instrument readings, which were not normal: 22

Co-pilot: That don't seem right, does it? [three-second pause] Ah, that's not right. . . .

Captain: Yes, it is, there's 80.

Co-pilot: Naw, I don't think that's right. [seven-second pause] Ah, maybe it is.

Captain: Hundred and twenty.

Co-pilot: I don't know.

The takeoff proceeded, and 37 seconds later the pilot and co-pilot exchanged their last words: 23

The co-pilot had repeatedly called the pilot's attention to dangerous conditions but did not directly suggest they abort the takeoff. In Linde's judgment, he was expressing his concern indirectly, and the captain didn't pick up on it — with tragic results. 24

That the co-pilot was trying to warn the captain indirectly is supported by evidence from another airline accident — a relatively minor one — investigated by Linde that also involved the unsuccessful use of indirectness. 25

On July 9, 1978, Allegheny Airlines Flight 453 was landing at Monroe County Airport in Rochester, when it overran the runway by 728 feet. Everyone survived. This meant that the captain and co-pilot could be interviewed. It turned out that the plane had been flying too fast for a safe landing. The captain should have realized this and flown around a second time, decreasing his speed before trying to land. The captain said he simply had not been aware that he was going too fast. But the co-pilot told interviewers that he "tried to warn the captain in subtle ways, like mentioning the possibility of a tail wind and the slowness of flap extension." His exact words were recorded in the 26

black box. The crosshatches indicate words deleted by the National Transportation Safety Board and were probably expletives:

Co-pilot: Yeah, it looks like you got a tail wind here.
Captain: Yeah.

[?]: Yeah [it] moves awfully # slow.

Co-pilot: Yeah the # flaps are slower than a #.

Captain: We'll make it, gonna have to add power.

Co-pilot: I know.

The co-pilot thought the captain would understand that if there was a tail wind, it would result in the plane going too fast, and if the flaps were slow, they would be inadequate to break the speed sufficiently for a safe landing. He thought the captain would then correct for the error by not trying to land. But the captain said he didn't interpret the co-pilot's remarks to mean they were going too fast. 27

Linde believes it is not a coincidence that the people being indirect in these conversations were the co-pilots. In her analyses of flightcrew conversations she found it was typical for the speech of subordinates to be more mitigated — polite, tentative or indirect. She also found that topics broached in a mitigated way were more likely to fail, and that captains were more likely to ignore hints from their crew members than the other way around. These findings are evidence that not only can indirectness and other forms of mitigation be misunderstood, but they are also easier to ignore. 28

In the Air Florida case, it is doubtful that the captain did not realize what the co-pilot was suggesting when he said, "Let's check these tops again since we been setting here awhile" (though it seems safe to assume he did not realize the gravity of the co-pilot's concern). But the indirectness of the co-pilot's phrasing certainly made it easier for the pilot to ignore it. In this sense, the captain's response, "I think we get to go here in a minute," was an indirect way of saying, "I'd rather not." In view of these patterns, the flight crews of some airlines are now given training to express their concerns, even to superiors, in more direct ways. 29

The conclusion that people should learn to express themselves more directly has a ring of truth to it — especially for Americans. But direct communication is not necessarily always preferable. If more direct expression is better communication, then the most direct-speaking crews should be the best ones. Linde was surprised to find in her research that crews that used the most mitigated speech were often judged the best crews. As part of the study of talk among cockpit crews in flight simulations, the trainers observed and rated the performances of the simulation crews. The crews they rated top in performance had a higher rate of mitigation than crews they judged to be poor. 30

This finding seems at odds with the role played by indirectness in the examples of crashes that we just saw. Linde concluded that since every utterance functions on two levels — the referential (what it says) and the relational (what it implies about the speaker's relationships), crews that attend to the relational level will be better crews. A similar explanation was suggested by Kunihiro Harada. He believes that the secret of successful communication lies not in teaching subordinates to be more direct, but in teaching higher-ups to be more sensitive to indirect meaning. In other words, the crashes resulted not only because the co-pilots tried to alert the captains to danger indirectly but also because the captains were not attuned to the co-pilots' hints. What made for successful performance among the best crews might have been the ability — or willingness — of listeners to pick up on hints, just as members of families or longstanding couples come to understand each other's meaning without anyone being particularly explicit.

It is not surprising that a Japanese sociolinguist came up with this explanation; what he described is the Japanese system, by which good communication is believed to take place when meaning is gleaned without being stated directly — or at all.

While Americans believe that “the squeaky wheel gets the grease” (so it's best to speak up), the Japanese say, “The nail that sticks out gets hammered back in” (so it's best to remain silent if you don't want to be hit on the head). Many Japanese scholars writing in English have tried to explain to bewildered Americans the ethics of a culture in which silence is often given greater value than speech, and ideas are believed to be best communicated without being explicitly stated. Key concepts in Japanese give a flavor of the attitudes toward language that they reveal — and set in relief the strategies that Americans encounter at work when talking to other Americans.

Take Sugiyama Lebra, a Japanese-born anthropologist, explains that one of the most basic values in Japanese culture is *omiyari*, which she translates as “empathy.” Because of *omiyari*, it should not be necessary to state one's meaning explicitly; people should be able to sense each other's meaning intuitively. Lebra explains that it is typical for a Japanese speaker to let sentences trail off rather than complete them because expressing ideas before knowing how they will be received seems intrusive. “Only an insensitive, uncouth person needs a direct, verbal, complete message,” Lebra says.

Sashi, the anticipation of another's message through insightful guesswork, is considered an indication of maturity.

Considering the value placed on direct communication by Americans in general, and especially by American business people, it is easy to imagine that many American readers may scoff at such conversa-

tional habits. But the success of Japanese businesses makes it impossible to continue to maintain that there is anything inherently inefficient about such conversational conventions. With indirectness, as with all aspects of conversational style, our own habitual style seems to make sense — seems polite, right and good. The light cast by the habits and assumptions of another culture can help us see our way to the flexibility and respect for other styles that is the only best way of speaking.

READING TO READING

In her essay, Tannen states that “indirectness is a fundamental element in an act of communication.” Paraphrase it: Do you agree with Tannen on this point? What does she mean when she says that indirectness is important to note? What do you think she means when she says that indirectness is important to note? What do you think she means when she says that indirectness is important to note?

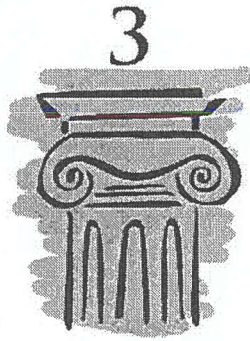
QUESTIONING THE TEXT

1. How does Tannen define indirect speech? What does she see as the benefits of indirect speech? Do you see comparable ability in heretofore direct speech?
2. Tannen does not contest a finding that fathers had a higher incidence of fully direct speech and mothers orders than mothers. How does she interpret the meaning of these results?
3. Why does Tannen tell her audience how to deal with an “insecure boss”?
4. What is typical for Japanese speakers to let their sentences trail off?

UNPLUGGING THE WRITER'S CRAFT

1. Which examples of ethos and where does she present it? (Glossary: The speaker's credibility.)
2. Tannen uses examples in which negative direct orders. In what ways do these examples support her thesis?
3. How does Tannen use an anecdote in her essay? Does this help you understand why she is not so friendly on indirect communication? (Glossary: Anecdote? (Glossary: Audience))
4. Tannen uses examples of flight attendants that resulted from indirect speech. How does she then explain that top-performing flight attendants had a higher incidence of indirect communication than poorly performing attendants? How do you think Tannen's anecdotal examples support the author's argument? (Glossary: Anecdote? (Glossary: Audience))

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ACAD EMIC PASSION

"Bacon"

Mariam Nassiri
Duke University

THE ALARM CLOCK IS, TO MANY high school students, a wailing monstrosity whose purpose is to torture all who are sleep-deprived. Those who believe this are misguided, and are simply viewing the situation from a twisted perspective. For when these imprudent early-risers blearily rub their eyes each morning, and search in vain for whatever is making that earsplitting noise, they are, without a doubt, annoyed. Why?

It isn't because the only thing they desire is to sleep a few extra hours, as many would presume. No, these kids are groggy and irritable because they are waking up to what they think will be another horribly boring day of school. If one of these foolish Sallys or Joes were, say, sleeping comfortably on a *Saturday* morning, I could certainly see something different happening. A beautiful breakfast of tantalizing vittles—eggs, hash browns, and the like—would be ready and waiting for them on their kitchen tables. But the scrumptious delight to outshine them all would be a slab of bacon, piled proudly for the taking. It



would be that wafting, wondrous bacon smell that would draw dear, sweet Sally abruptly from her slumber—long before an alarm clock has the chance to pierce the air.

Oh, bacon: what a marvelous, glorious thing! I live for those heart-stoppingly good strips of succulence, so crispy and crunchy, so packed with perfection. The thought of having a plate of bacon every day, perhaps every school day, sends me into sheer waves of ecstasy!

To be sure, many others would also wax poetic about this lovely breakfast food. But precious few would share this same zeal for learning. I, however, can smugly decree that I do regard both very highly. I brightly waken every morning to the mellifluous joy that sounds from my alarm clock, a huge smile plastered on my face, and the yearning to learn in my heart.

When I board my school bus Monday through Friday, it is still pitch black outside. Busmates will groan about how even the day has not yet dragged itself out of bed; I only chuckle through their thirty-minute rant fest as we chug down the freeway. Opting to be part of a far-away Magnet school, after all, has its benefits. My peers may still not look forward to waking up earlier, but when we are all together in a classroom, we take on the “bacon mentality.” I have the opportunity to choose from a wealth of diverse classes, and love arriving to school each day with the prospect of having a new Spanish History lesson—taught to me in Spanish, for a change. Teachers, driven by the enthusiasm of their Magnet students, are inspired to create new classes for advanced students, including those who have completed AP Spanish Literature and are still eager to learn more, or those who want to learn about a specific aspect of a subject—we now have a Middle Eastern History class. Not to be outdone, the post-AP exam period of my English Language class included an intensive literature study, where we laughed at good ol’ Yossarian in *Catch-22*, and developed a strong attachment to Jay Gatsby. I’d like to think that *The Great Gatsby*’s pursuit of Daisy is not unlike my own pursuit of bacon. I’ve gobbled up new knowledge rapidly, hankering after it like any elusive bacon strip, and happily digesting any new bits of information.

But six classes a year are simply not enough to satisfy my hunger for knowledge. Just as I eat bacon all three meals of the day (when possible), I attempt to learn all days of the week. Rather than make another trip to some lackluster movie theatre on the weekend, I dedicate my

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time to reading another good book, or reviewing Economics with my friends. But high school is starting to smell like leftovers to me now; I want fresh, new, crisp learning. I want not to read a textbook written by a renowned professor: I want to hear him speak directly. I'm ready for the university, and hunger for all the new opportunities waiting for me! I've finished my breakfast, and now it's time to get going to school.

ANALYSIS

Mariam's essay "Bacon" uses lively language and plenty of humor to tell a story that highlights her eagerness to go to school. Her writing is casual and funny, and it conveys in a personal and genuine way her enthusiastic attitude. "Bacon" reminds us that topics do not have to be serious to be sincere.

The metaphor of bacon is a very memorable one in image, smell, texture, and taste. Mariam capitalizes on these features in her beautiful—and mouthwatering!—descriptors of a Saturday morning breakfast of eggs. With a touch of humor and a hint of parody, she writes, "Oh, bacon: what a marvelous, glorious thing! I live for those heartstoppingly good strips of succulence, so crispy and crunchy, so packed with perfection. The thought of having a plate of bacon every day, perhaps every school day, sends me into sheer waves of ecstasy!"

Just when this celebration of bacon begins to appear over-the-top, and readers are beginning to worry that Mariam swapped a food magazine piece with her college admissions essay, she links the succulent bacon metaphor with school: "To be sure, many others would also wax poetic about this lovely breakfast food. But precious few would share this same zeal for learning." Though Mariam takes a risk in waxing poetic over bacon, she does so with carefully calculated dramatic effect that ultimately pays off. We are convinced that the "yearning to learn" is deeply engrained in our bacon-lover and early-riser author.

Mariam's narrative also shows us the sacrifices she makes for attending a Magnet school far from home. Her use of the phrase "bacon mentality" is original and creative. Mariam's descriptions of her classes are specific enough to prevent them from reading like a list. Rather, she demonstrates the depth of her commitment in her classes by citing specific details like Yossarian in *Catch-22*. Mariam's essay demonstrates how she is able to fit impressive details of her life into a narrative framework, a strategy that can avoid the pitfall of sounding like bragging. Mariam follows the "show, don't tell" mantra when she mentions the Magnet school in the context of her long early-morning bus ride, and in celebrating her Spanish history class, which is impressively taught in Spanish.

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At the end of the essay, the bacon metaphor may seem overdone to some readers, as Mariam has “gobbled up new knowledge rapidly, hankering after it like any elusive bacon strip” and has expressed a desire for “fresh, new crisp” learning to satisfy her “hunger for knowledge.” She might have reduced the number of mentions of bacon and hunger. However, Mariam’s essay ultimately stands out for its originality and unpredictable connections, like linking *The Great Gatsby* to—what else?—bacon.

“Beyond Plug-and-Chug Math”

Anonymous
MIT

I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN A MATH-SCIENCE girl. I sighed and sulked through classes on US History and French in eager anticipation of the formulas and applications I would be learning later in the day. I believe there are many factors which attribute to my success, two being my fascination and persistence.

When I was seven I once asked what math was good for and why I should learn it. The answer I received simply does not do math justice, “One day when you’re in line at the grocery store the cashier will give you too little change and you’ll be glad you learned this.” Now in calculus I see the application of all these once foreign symbols, formulas, and letters. I am often amazed by the calculations I am able to do using the cumulative information acquired from nearly 12 years of education, such as how to maximize the volume of a box given a certain surface area. Math is not just plug and chug as many view it but it requires creativity and thinking out of the box to solve the problems encountered in the real world. Beauty lies in its simplicity and in the fact that proofs and observations are what brought the golden rectangle from ancient Greece, Pascal’s triangle, and the Pythagorean Theorem as well as a host of other theorems, equations, and postulates. Math has made the impossible possible and the once long and tedious, simple and quick. The genius of it is amazing as well as the fact that any person is capable of applying and discovering it. I draw graphs and try to make shapes from functions for fun, count to 10 to calm down, and save money at the store, too. For all of these reasons and many more, I am fascinated by math.

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