

MARRIAGE 101  
and  
Other  
Student  
Essays

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# *To the Student* 1

*Marriage 101* would not exist without the creativity of real students—real writers—like you. Put yourself in it! To submit your writing to us for publication consideration in the next edition of this collection, go to [bedfordstmartins.com/theguide](http://bedfordstmartins.com/theguide) and click on “Submit an Essay.”

# Remembering Events 2

The essays in this chapter were written in response to the following assignment: *Write an essay about an event in your life that will engage readers and that will, at the same time, help them understand the significance of the event. Tell your story dramatically and vividly.*

# *Marriage 101 (Draft)*

Mai Vue Moua

Marriage. That is a pretty big, serious, life-changing event. I have always thought, at the back of my head, that I would get married at the age of sixteen, finish high school, pop out some kids for the hubby, go to a two-year college, get a job, and live happily ever after. In my culture, this is not all that strange or unheard of. Before my cousin Mai Yang got married at the ripe old age of sixteen, this is what I had in mind. Thank God I changed my view before it was too late for me.

This story took place about probably three to four years ago. I had come home one night to the news that my oldest cousin Mai Yang had ran off and gotten herself hitched to a guy who she barely knew, her family had never met, and a guy that I was determined to dislike. I couldn't believe it! My cousin, a girl almost a woman, my best friend, someone who I looked up to, someone that I loved like a sister, had left me! I threw myself on to my bed and dropped like may be four or five tears and then decided why should I cry? It was her stupid decision for doing the unthinkable. I could not and would not be consoled by anyone. I didn't for one minute stop to think about the fact that this was what I also had in mind for me.

In my culture, the “wedding” is an unusual ceremony. The groom's family and the bride's family celebrate this union of love separately. Don't ask me why, but that is how it has been and probably will always be. The day of Mai Yang's wedding started at six in the morning for me. I myself was like a nervous and jittery bride because I couldn't wait to see Mai Yang and the guy that I was determined to dislike. Thinking back I guess I was having an empty-nest syndrome like most parents do when their “offspring” leave the nest. In this case, my cousin had left the “nest” that included my sister, Mai Lia, Mai Yang, her sister, Mee Mee, and me. I was fretting if she



was okay, was she happy, do her parents-in-law and new family treat her well? All these thoughts were racing around in my head.

Everyone who was invited helped out with the cooking, butchering of a pig, washing and wiping a million dishes, and cleaning the house. The older generation was just sitting around gossiping about their wedding a long time ago or ordering the younger generation. Do this! Do that! No, that's not how it is done! Come wash these dirty dishes in the sink! Sweep up the floor; it's dirty! The morning of Mai Yang's wedding was exhausting. I felt like I was doing anything right, and people just kept on handing more and more tasks to do. What do they want from me? Blood? My feet was hurting so bad, and I just wanted to sit down for one minute and rest, but in a traditional wedding there is no such thing as "sitting down and resting for one minute." I was about to cry!

Finally, I hear someone say, "Mai Yang and the groom are here. They are here. Everyone come and meet them!" Everyone rushes to the door, and the groom and his best man got down on their knees and bows down before the Mai Yang's parents. My aunt and uncle say that they should get up and that there is no need for bowing. I finally get to see Mai Yang, and here she was all dressed up in the traditional Hmong gear, and she had tears running down her face. She was getting hugged and lectured by her older siblings, and probably the young ones, too, aunts and uncles, and friends. Finally, I got to her and I hugged her. I look straight into her eyes and said, "I've missed you." Mai Yang and I didn't have a private time where we could just talk and see how both of us were doing. Even now, I feel like if she hadn't gotten married we would have experienced a lot of stuff together, but since she got married the time that was designated for teenage girls to gossip and giggle about never happened.

I am one of those people who like to sit back and observe what is going on around me. Mai Yang's wedding was a rude-awakening for me. Again, a Hmong's traditional celebration of a wedding is not all that fun and memorable. Now, I know that I probably couldn't have handled what Mai Yang had to handle that day. Throughout the whole day, I am sure that family, friends, and relatives pulled her aside and lectured her on the right and polite ways of treating her new "family." I watched people hurrying back and forth to get things done. Whatever those things were. People were always on the move, never sitting down to "celebrate" the wedding. In the beginning, I thought that my wedding at the age of sixteen would be fun and memorable. I now know that if I was to have a traditional Hmong

wedding, it is never going to happen. I am so happy for Mai Yang because she got married at sixteen, finished high school, popped out a beautiful baby girl for her hubby, is going to a 4-year college, and living happily ever after. But I am also so glad that I changed my mind about getting married so young. I think back and I weep because I didn't make that irrevocable mistake. I don't know where I would be if I was married at the age of sixteen. I know that if I did get married young, I would have never had the chance to go to Spain as I do now, I would never get to see my true family on a regular basis as I do now, I would never get the chance of succeeding in school and taking part in school activities as I do now. Watching Mai Yang on that fateful day getting lectured by her family, friends, and relatives made me realize that I was not ready for that. I was not ready to let my family go, and miss out on so many opportunities that would have come knocking on my door. I am happy with the choice that I made, and for that I will always forgive Mai Yang for running off and getting herself to a guy who I'm gradually accepting as her husband.

# *Marriage 101 (Revision)*

Mai Vue Moua

At the back of my head, I have always thought I would get married at sixteen, pop out some kids for the hubby, attend a two-year college, get a job, and live happily ever after. In my culture, this scenario is neither unheard of nor strange. In fact, before my cousin Mai Yang got married at the ripe old age of sixteen, this was the future I had in mind. Thank God I changed my view before it was too late.

Three to four years ago, when I was about thirteen, I came home one night to the news that my oldest cousin, Mai Yang, had run off and gotten hitched to a guy whom she barely knew, her family had never met, and I was determined to dislike. I couldn't believe it. My sixteen-year-old cousin, a girl almost a woman, my best friend, someone I looked up to, someone I loved like a sister, had left me. I threw myself onto my bed and dropped maybe four or five tears. Then I asked myself, "Why should I cry? It was her stupid decision to do the unthinkable."

I reflected. We had been neighbors since I was six; her mother and mine were sisters. Mai Yang, her younger sister Mee Mee, my younger sister Lia, and I had been inseparable. The four of us had done everything together: sleepovers, summer picnics, Hmong New Year's Festivities, and regular girl stuff like painting our nails and watching TLC channel movies on TV. I didn't even know she had

a. Moua makes clearer her relationship with her cousin and her reasons for being unhappy over her cousin's marriage.

an interest in this guy. It seemed to me as if she had made an instant decision. I could not and would not be consoled by anyone. I didn't stop for one minute to think about the fact that her choice was what I also had in mind for myself.

In the Hmong culture, the *rooj thsoob*, or wedding, is an unusual ceremony. The groom's family and the bride's family celebrate this union of love separately. Don't ask me why, but that is how it has been and probably will always be. The day of Mai Yang's wedding started at six in the morning for me. I was like a nervous and jittery bride myself, because I couldn't wait to see Mai Yang and the guy I was determined to dislike. Thinking back, I guess I was feeling empty-nest syndrome like most parents do when their offspring leave home. In this case, my cousin had left the home where she, her sister MeeMee, my sister Lia, and I had created a special bond. I fretted about whether or not she was okay. Was she happy? Did her parents-in-law and new family treat her well?

The relatives and friends from the Hmong community who are invited to the *rooj thsoob* help with cooking, butchering a pig, washing and wiping a million dishes, and cleaning out the house. On Mai Yang's wedding day, the men and boys prepared the pig they had bought live from a local farmer. They shot the animal and then either boiled it in a huge vat of water or fired it with a propane torch in order to remove the hair and clean the meat. I tried to stay away from the butchering because it was the guys' business. After it was cooked, eight or ten of my male relatives put sections of the pig on a huge butcher block in the middle of the garage floor, chopped it apart, and then sliced or cubed it. At a wedding or big Hmong ceremony, every bit of the pig is eaten; nothing is wasted. The men and boys also made *laj*, a type of ground pork boiled and mixed with dry rice that has been browned in a skillet. They put the rice into a grinder until it's a fine powder,

b. With her readers in mind, Moua clarifies the specifics of her culture.

c. Moua explores preparations for the Hmong wedding ceremony more fully, using naming ("vat," "propane torch," "butcher block," "grinder," "green onions") and detailing ("huge," "middle of the garage floor," "browned," "fine").

then add it to the boiled meat with cilantro, green onions, hot red peppers, salt, and MSG to bring out the flavors.

Despite the confusion, talking, and commotion in the house and garage, my mom and other female relatives kept a watchful eye on me. “Stop playing with your younger cousins and go help out in the kitchen,” my mom scolded. “Watch the rice! No, that’s not how you wrap an egg roll.” My aunt summoned me to the sink, holding a dirty plate. “You missed a spot on the dishes,” she said. “Come sweep up this dirty floor,” commanded an elderly woman from my aunt’s side of the family. Who did they think they were? It didn’t occur to me at the time, but maybe this expectation of obedience for girls in the Hmong culture helped to explain why Mai Yang was so eager to leave home and establish her own authority. At that moment, however, I could only think about my own sorrow and fatigue. The entire morning of Mai Yang’s wedding day was exhausting. I felt as if I weren’t doing anything right, and people kept on handing me more and more tasks to do. What did they want from me? Blood? My feet felt sore, and I just wanted to sit down for one minute and rest. But in a traditional wedding, there is no such thing as sitting down and resting for a minute.

We had to cook enough rice for sixty people, and it had to be done perfectly, in the Hmong way: not too soft so that it’s mushy, but not too hard so that it hurts the teeth. First we soak it in water overnight, and then we put it in a steamer. When the rice is puffy, we take it out of the steamer, put it in a huge bowl, pour water over it, and stir. When the water evaporates, we put it back into the steamer. For a big crowd, the process takes an hour or two for the rice alone. We also had to chop and slice green onions, cilantro, ginger root, baby corn, water chestnuts, potatoes, and a green and white eggplant-like vegetable called *lws* that you can’t pronounce in English—

d. Moua includes specific narrative action (“My aunt summoned me to the sink, holding a dirty plate”) and enlivens dialog by identifying specific speakers (“my mom,” “an elderly woman from my aunt’s side of the family”). She also connects the demands placed on her before the wedding to those that may have driven her cousin to leave home at an early age.

e. Moua gives readers a clearer sense of the preparations for the wedding, using specific narrative action (“take it out...put it in a huge bowl, pour water over it, and stir”; “chop and slice”) and detailing (“not too soft...mushy...not too hard...hurts the teeth”).

maybe it would be “lauh” or “luh.” We had to soak cellophane noodles in hot water, grate carrots, shred cabbage, and dice the pig meat that the men and boys had butchered. I was about to cry.

Out of nowhere, I heard someone say, “Mai Yang and the groom are here. They are here. Everyone come and meet them.” The guests rushed toward the door, where the groom and his best man entered. The young men got on their knees and bowed down before Mai Yang’s parents, hands on the floor and heads lowered in a show of respect. I have never seen this side of the ceremony from the groom’s perspective, but for me, the groom’s bowing gesture has always meant goodwill toward his new family and indicated that he is thankful they have accepted him and allowed the wedding to go forth, even though he is taking their daughter to a new home. As I watched this ritual unfold, I examined Mai Yang’s husband-to-be. He didn’t impress me. He wasn’t tall or good-looking; in fact he seemed to me like a bit of a mama’s boy. He was the oldest son in his family, so he and Mai Yang would be expected to live with his parents and take care of them when they grew older. His mother seemed controlling and his father very quiet. I wouldn’t have traded places with Mai Yang for anything. “I would rather chop green onions and listen to my mother scold,” I thought, “at least for now.”

My aunt and uncle said “*Sawv. Sawv. Txhob pe me vaav,*” indicating that the young men should get up; there was no need to bow down. But we all knew that this statement was part of the ritual. The bride’s parents protest but still expect the young men to show respect by getting on their knees and dipping their foreheads toward the floor. When this was finished, I finally got to see Mai Yang, all dressed up in traditional Hmong attire. She wore a loose pair of trousers made of black velvet. The fabric was covered with flowery designs and tied around her waist with a cord. She

f. Moua adds details about the ceremony and the groom-to-be and concludes this new section with a comment that suggests the ultimate significance of the remembered event.

g. Moua elaborates on the bowing ritual and adds specific dialog.

h. Moua details the specifics of her cousin’s wedding attire.

wore a fitted jacket of the same fabric with a white blouse underneath, the collar folded neatly over the jacket. A silver necklace, a decorative cloth turban, and comfortable shoes completed Mai Yang's wedding outfit. The groom wore regular American black trousers and a blue dress shirt. Hmong men don't dress in traditional garb for weddings in America; I don't know why. Aunts, uncles, and friends surrounded Mai Yang to hug and lecture her. Finally, I got to her and held her. I looked straight into her eyes and said, "I've missed you." She was crying. I wanted to speak with her, but the next eager guest pulled her away. Mai Yang and I didn't have a private time to talk before she was lost to me in a new married life. Even now, I feel as if her marriage prevented us from experiencing many events and emotions together. Because she got married so young, the time that was meant for teenage girls to gossip and giggle has never occurred.

I watched people hurrying back and forth to get things done. Relatives and other guests were always on the move, never sitting down to celebrate the marriage. Mai Yang's wedding day was a rude awakening for me. I didn't find her traditional Hmong ceremony particularly fun or memorable. There was no such thing as a reception, a bouquet of flowers, a ring bearer, or a flower girl. Her father didn't walk her down the aisle, the groom didn't throw Mai Yang's garter, and she didn't wear a white dress or have an elegant cake with a bride and groom on top. I was born and raised in America, and before this day I thought my wedding at age sixteen would be a magical event like I saw on television. Mai Yang's *rooj thsoob* made me realize that if I were to marry young and have a traditional Hmong wedding, it would never be the wedding that I want, with the white dress, the tiered cake decorated with fancy icing, the something old, something new, something borrowed and something blue. Among

i. Moua condenses to avoid repetition.

j. Again, Moua more explicitly establishes the significance of the remembered event by making clear how the wedding triggered her realization that she didn't wish to follow in her cousin's footsteps.

American girls in the small town where I grew up, that ideal of a traditional wedding is understood, and it had become my ideal, too.

I am happy for Mai Yang because she got what she wanted and expected out of life. She married at sixteen, finished high school, delivered a beautiful baby girl for her husband, attends a four-year college, and seems to be living happily ever after. But I am also glad I changed my mind about getting married so young. I think back and I smile because I didn't make that irrevocable mistake. I don't know where I would be now if I had married at age sixteen, but I do know that it would be someplace other than here, in a college English composition classroom, working toward my bachelor's degree. I know that if I had married at sixteen, I would never have had the chance to see Spain as I do now on an upcoming trip with the Spanish club. I would not get to see my immediate family every day as I do now. I would never get the chance to explore all the options college has to offer and take part in school activities as I do now. Mai Yang may be a college student, but she has all the responsibilities of a wife and mother on top of her studies, and she already knows the goals that she is working toward: a part-time job to help the family once the babies are old enough.

k. Moua clarifies ambiguities about her upcoming trip to Spain and how her college experience differs from her cousin's.

Watching Mai Yang receive lectures and advice from her family, friends, and relatives on that fateful day made me realize that I was not ready for marriage. I was not ready to let my family go and to miss out on opportunities that have since come knocking at my door. I am happy with my choice, and because her wedding helped me to clarify what I truly desire, I will always forgive Mai Yang for eloping with a man I am gradually accepting as her husband.



# *The Weight of Words*

Jackie Kraatz

I remember Mom yelling up the stairs, “Let’s go, kids, you’re going to be late for school.” Normally I liked to lie in bed until the last minute. That day was different. The butterflies that normally flew around in my tummy had fallen asleep. I couldn’t wait to go to school. I remember how I jumped out of bed, ran down the stairs, gulped down my breakfast, put on my new shoes, and was the first of the seven Napoleone kids to be off.

I recall being very excited to show off the new saddlebacks that Mom had bought me. I thought my shoes were the neatest. They weren’t the plain old black and white saddlebacks. Nope, they were as blue as the ocean and the brightest red you have ever seen.

I think back about how carefully I walked between the newly paved road and the dew on the grass. Right shoe, left shoe, blue, red, right shoe, left shoe. I would have died if any of that goopy blacktop gunk dirtied my shoes before my friends, especially Marta, could envy them. Marta got everything new. I usually got my sister Karen’s hand-me-downs.

Each step I took made me feel taller and taller. Finally, I met up with my green-eyed companion Marta.

“Wow, are those *new* shoes? They’re really neat. Where did you get them?” asked Marta. I lied. The little red man with horns and a pitchfork on my right shoulder guided me in my response.

“I don’t remember the name of the store. I think it started with a *p*, no maybe a *d*.”

After what seemed like the longest walk to school of my life, I arrived. I recall the school looking different that day. For some reason it didn’t look dark and dingy. The walls shone and reminded me of a melting vanilla ice cream cone. The old gray tile floor glistened like new-fallen snow, and the wood paneling that surrounded the hallways

looked like it had been polished. Mrs. Lanchert wasn't there yet, but I remember how enthusiastically I waited outside the classroom door.

I recall my classmate Sue and I kicking off the ritual chant, which we allowed to be spoken only by the best first graders: "Mrs. Lanchert 305, Mrs. Lanchert 305." We giggled at the sounds of each other's voices. After what seemed like an eternity, Sue's eyes dropped to the red and blue pedestals that raised me from the floor. "Are those new?" she asked. I couldn't speak. So I just stood there with every tooth showing, nodding my head like one of my brothers' bobble-head dolls.

I can still see Mrs. Lanchert as she approached room 305. I remember catching sight of the upward curve of her painted red lips. She reminded me of the feather duster my mom used: she was tall with brown puffy hair, and she smelled like lemon furniture polish. I wondered what Mrs. Lanchert would say if she saw my new shoes and rehearsed what I would say back to her. It didn't matter; Mrs. Lanchert unlocked the door and said only, "Good morning."

My desk was in the front row, right next to the door. The top of it looked like a pencil that had been chewed on by some nervous student. I remember lifting the old wooden top to pull out my reading workbook and to hide my lunch money. My classmates finally entered the room. I recall purposely dropping my lunch money near my feet. No one saw my new treasures or me. It was too late; the reading lesson interrupted my moment.

Reading was my favorite time of the day, next to lunch. The memory of Mrs. Lanchert calling up the "top" reading group to read aloud from the textbook is etched in my mind. I remember how I inched out of my chair, little by little. I knew that being the last one up to Mrs. Lanchert's desk allowed me to take center stage. My new shoes slowly and proudly carried me to the front of the class. Neither the teacher's desk nor the other students hid my feet. Normally I don't like to be stared at, but that day was different. All fifteen pairs of eyes were watching me.

Dan got to read first. I thought he looked cute with his new brush cut. Dan started reading aloud, but he suddenly paused and lost his voice.

"Try to pronounce the word slowly," said Mrs. Lanchert. Dan couldn't speak. His voice wouldn't work. I can still envision how Mrs. Lanchert's face quickly changed shape from a grape to a raisin, and how she instructed Dan to sit down. Then Sue read until she lost her voice, just like Dan. I remember how Mrs. Lanchert used her

teeth to make the left side of her lower lip disappear. I wondered if she had a toothache. Sue was also instructed to leave.

Etched in my memory like an old movie, I remember how I moved slowly into the spotlight. I couldn't believe I was finally getting the chance to show off my new shoes. Everyone was watching. I began reading. I stopped. Mrs. Lanchert didn't say a word. The smell of her lemon perfume didn't help. I recall not being able to breathe and feeling like I was going to gag. She was just staring. My lips tried to say the word, but my mouth wouldn't let any sounds past my tongue.

"Jackie, say the word. Sound it out," she said. My stomach hurt. I couldn't. I didn't know the word.

Her voice grew stronger. "Jackie, try to say the word. Don't just stand there. Say something!"

After what felt like forever, my tongue, lips, and larynx decided to work together. "I don't know it," I whispered.

The feather duster rose up from behind her desk and wrote *T-H-E-I-R* on the blackboard. I can still hear the whack the long pointer stick made as it smacked the *T-H*. She ordered me to speak. "Thuh," I murmured. The *E-I* was smacked even harder. I knew I couldn't do this. I didn't know what sound to make. The *E-I* was punished once again for my lack of response.

"Say the sound *E-I* makes! Jackie, did you hear me?" My eyes conveyed what my paralyzed mouth couldn't.

Mrs. Lanchert had no problem with her vocal cords. "You aren't even trying. You're *lazy!* And *dumb!*" I think I am dumb.

I remember that suddenly, my head fell forward and downward. Quickly and harshly it was jerked back up. The back of my head felt like it had lost the ponytail Mom had placed in it that morning. I don't think I'll ever forget that day. I stood staring, face to face with the monster. She was enormous and much scarier than the monsters in any nightmare I had ever experienced. I remember thinking that there was nowhere for me to run.

The ogre's insensitive words maimed me.

"Since you won't even try, you are out of the highest reading group! Go sit down."

My wounded head fell listlessly toward the floor and remained there. My eyes focused on my shoes. At that moment, my shoes didn't seem to be as special as I thought they were. To this day, I wonder if my classmates noticed the red on my shoes or the red on my face.

If I learned anything that year from my first grade teacher, it was fear. Fear that on rare occasions overtakes me, so that to this day I

sometimes have to calculate and recalculate my answers before responding. I never know what mask the monster could be wearing, and I do not want to relive the humiliation and embarrassment from long ago.

It took the seven-year-old a long time not to fear teachers' raised voices. It has taken even longer for her to believe in herself, to trust her abilities, a lesson she continues to discover every day.

# *When All Else Fails*

Charles Goodwin

I remember the day clearly. The temperature was in the low to mid-eighties. The sun came out every now and then. It was not what you would call a beautiful day, but it was comfortable nonetheless. The park was actually pretty crowded. It being Sunday and all, a couple of church groups were in the park having social gatherings, and there were eight to fifteen kids in the water at any given time.

I was sitting in the shack on my hour down playing cards with a couple of the other guys. Two women were on duty. It was standard procedure to have at least two lifeguards on duty, even if there was only one swimmer. We had walkie-talkies so that the guards on duty could communicate with those in the shack if they should need assistance or want a jacket or something when the weather was sketchy. I was in the middle of my game with an ear out for the walkie-talkie. I always had an ear poised to hear the radio chatter or the gut-wrenching shrill of an emergency whistle.

“JENNIFER’S GOING IN!” suddenly screeched across the walkie-talkie. It took me a moment to register the call for help. It was not the first rescue made at our beach. Far from it. I was leading the county in rescues this summer, not a fact I was proud of, just a circumstance of the job. I assumed this was going to be another one of those frantic sprints down to the beach to see a fellow guard coming out of the water returning a child to a parent who was, as usual, oblivious of what had just been avoided.

I sprinted into the lead and passed the other guards on my way down to the water. Jennifer was just diving in as I reached the dock. I had stripped down to my shorts on the way down. It was a habit, a way of saving time should I have to go in. I stood on the dock taking in the situation. I could not see a swimmer in distress, but that did not surprise me; sometimes the people we rescued were questionable

swimmers and did not appear to need assistance. Teliah was clearing the water, which meant there weren't multiple victims. If there had been more than one person in trouble, she would have entered the water as soon as the rest of us reached the beach. I waited for Jennifer to come up, and I prepared to dive in and assist her once I saw where she was headed. Instead I saw Jennifer surface right below me in front of the dock.

"What is going on?" I asked calmly. I drilled my crew daily and hard. I expected a lot out of them and rarely was I disappointed.

"I don't know," she replied. I could see the panic creeping in to her face. "She jumped in right here and never surfaced."

I thought to myself, "Oh shit." The beach I worked at is one of the most hazardous I have ever seen. It is thirty feet deep in the deep area, the water is pitch black from three feet down due to a high iron content, and below seven feet the lake temperature starts to drop drastically, so that by the time you reach fifteen feet in depth the water temperature is only 45 degrees. We did not have much time.

My actions were automatic. I had the weakest guard go call 911 for a dive team and my supervisor. I also told him to grab my wet-suit; if I wanted to stay down long enough to do any good I needed to stay as warm as possible. I had another guard clear the water and keep people away. The rest of the guards began a search for the missing girl in the area where she had jumped in.

Four of us were in the water doing shallow dives in a textbook search pattern. The water was so dark that we could see nothing, and we relied on touch more than sight. We did one, two, three, four, five dives and found nothing. I could feel myself starting to think about all the possibilities. Maybe she swam the length of the dock and came out and Jennifer missed her. Maybe she did not jump in here. Maybe she's not in the water but is scared to say anything because she knows we are looking for her. It had happened before. Maybe, maybe, maybe... Suddenly it hit me. Out of nowhere came the truth. As the thought crossed my mind I was surfacing, and my eyes met the other manager's. Nathan was a good friend of mine. He had been at the beach for the previous two years, so we had learned a lot from each other. There was an understanding between us: I was the veteran of the staff, having guarded at oceans across the world, but Nathan was the veteran of this lake. We complemented each other well, and we often thought alike. His eyes grew big, and I imagined mine did, too. We both knew we were not going to find her.

A renewed determination came over me. I swam as I had never swum before. We started searching under the dock, which we were not supposed to do. It was dark and cold and extremely easy to get lost underneath it. I had gotten lost under there about two weeks before and almost drowned. I was swimming along the bottom of the lake and got turned around, and I surfaced right under it. It was an enormous U-shaped dock, thirty feet wide by forty-five feet long. It was made of cement and sat flush with the water so there were no air pockets underneath. I had come up in the middle of it and been unsure which way to go. Only a cool head had gotten me out of that one. I thought the same might have happened to the little girl, so, heedless of our own safety, we began to search underneath it for her. I surfaced-dived down to about twenty feet. I was freezing, my body shivering in spite of the sweat that had formed during the constant search. I had expelled the last of my breath, and I knew if I did not start toward the surface I was going to come up choking, so I angled my body and started my ascent. Just then, I felt something brush my leg. I spun around as quickly as I could and saw some brightly colored cloth just out of reach. I struggled to get to it, but my oxygen was all gone and there was no way I could stay down there. As I broke the surface, I immediately began to swim back hoping to find the same spot, but I had no such luck. I had come as close as we ever did to finding her.

The next forty-five minutes went on like this until the dive team arrived. We searched all over the swim area and even outside it in hopes of finding the little girl. When the dive team came, we were ordered out of the water. I was exhausted and had to be helped out. Out of all of the guards, only I had stayed in the entire time, determined that I was going to make a difference. I was so weak I could not stand. I looked around.

About five hundred people were standing behind the police line. The dock was full of EMS workers and the fire department. I saw one woman in the corner crying. I guessed she was related to the missing girl. I walked over and talked to her, trying to reassure her that the coldness of the water would actually benefit the little girl and that there was still hope. The words sounded hollow as they escaped from my lips, but they seemed to comfort her. I found out that she was the girl's grandmother and that they were in the park with their church. They had been getting ready to head home, and the little girl had jumped in one last time. She hugged me and thanked me profusely. She said she had seen the other guards and me risk our own lives to try to save her granddaughter's. I wanted to crawl under a

rock. My job was to protect lives, not lose them, and I had failed. The thought that I was responsible for this little girl's death weighed heavily upon me. I knew I had not forced her into the lake, but I had not found her either and that was my job. I thought back to the brightly colored cloth that had brushed against my leg under the dock. I wanted to ask what color the girl's suit was, but I already knew. Eventually her parents came to the lake. I had changed into dry clothes and asked to be on and help in any way I could. I did not want to leave. Reporters had arrived and were calling to us. They knew we were lifeguards—some of us wore the county's jackets, and the regular beachgoers had eagerly pointed us out. The grandmother had pointed me out to her daughter and son-in-law. They walked over to me. I just stood there with my head hung low. When I noticed their feet in front of me, I looked up reluctantly. The looks on their faces killed me; tears started coursing down my face. I knew I was partly responsible for their losing their daughter. The one thing my job was supposed to prevent had happened. Part of their life was gone, and it was my fault. The mother hugged me. The father looked as if he wanted to hit me but did not have the strength. I knew how he felt. Part of me wanted him to hit me; anything would have been better than the man breaking down in front of me. I knew they knew how terribly sorry I was for letting them down, but it was not enough to be sorry. Sorry would not bring their daughter back. Sorry would not comfort me when the memories resurfaced and haunted the few moments my insomnia allowed me to sleep. Sorry was a lonely walk down a deserted and forbidding road.

I mumbled some excuse for leaving them and made my way towards the shack. As I was walking up, someone emerged from the crowd and grabbed my arm. I looked up expecting to see a reporter who had been hounding us for statements; instead it was an elderly gentleman.

“Come here, son,” he said to me. He led me over to a circle of about fifty people. “This is the group from our church; we want to pray with you.” I was overwhelmed. I had let everyone down, yet here were people from this little girl's church praying for us both. We linked hands and prayed. Tears streamed silently down my face. After the pastor had finished the prayer, everyone came up and shook my hand or hugged me and said that what I and the other guards had done was extraordinary and that we did everything we could. The words had little comfort, and I still felt responsible, but it was nice to know the other people felt that we had tried.



The next three days passed slowly. The beach was shut down, but the other guards and I were allowed to help in whatever way we could. We did a lot of shallow-water searches and checked the water outside the swim area in case her body had moved with the spring currents. On the third day her body was found under the dock in a spot that had been searched many times. It was a testament to the darkness of the water. I remember that the day she was found I had sent one of the guards to the store to purchase some flowers for the family. The news cameras had been on us as we presented them. It was all over the news, and it angered me. I thought it was an invasion of privacy in an intimate moment. We had given the flowers as a token of sorrow and regret that we had not saved their daughter's life. The news turned the moment into a sound bite that seemed to cheapen our regret.

The days passed and the park was shut down for a couple of days. I spent the days in the park ensuring no one came in. One night as I was getting ready to leave, the family showed up and asked for a few moments down at the water to say good-bye one last time. I stood on the beach watching them, playing the day over and over in my mind. As they were leaving they spoke to me about the day and how they felt. They thanked me repeatedly for my part in trying to save the girl. I told them how I had thought for a moment I had found her but had been unable to bring her up. They didn't seem to be mad at me. In fact, they seemed relieved that we had almost had her. I expected anger, but instead I received sympathy.

A few days later was the funeral. All of the guards who had been on duty went. It was somber and spoke of an eight-year-old who loved gospel music and school. Her name was Tammy. The church thanked us, the family thanked us, we wept, we smiled, and we even managed a couple of somber laughs.

It has been almost two years and I still wake up with the occasional nightmare. I can feel the chill of the water. My heart races and I exert my body beyond its limits. Once more I have no control over what is happening. The water envelops me in its cool embrace and I join Tammy in rest, where no pain can reach us.

# *Journey from Home*

Linda Taylor

During the summer of 1957 I was a seven-year-old child enjoying the green Kentucky bluegrass on the bottoms of my bare feet and basking in the love of two adoring grandparents, my Ma and Pa. My days were spent following Ma around from early morning milking to Bible reading by the light of hurricane lamps at the end of the day.

Our farm was about three hundred acres of mostly dense woods that were magical to me. It was not at all unusual for me to play in those woods for hours on end. They were dark and old but not threatening. They were home. There was a large stable, a chicken coop, a smokehouse, an outhouse, a tobacco barn, open fields for the livestock to graze in, and a four-room house that my grandparents built the first year they were married. They were married on Christmas Day, 1904, when Ma was only fourteen years old. She was the baby of her family, with five older brothers.

I can still see my grandfather walking between the rows of tobacco plants, his back stooped as he babied those green, gummy leaves to maturity. Then the leaves had to be cut and hung in the barn, and fires built on the dirt floor to smoke the tobacco. Late in the fall, after the weather had turned, we would sit out in the barn, stripping the leaves from the stalks they were hung by, and sorting and tying them into bundles to be taken to town and sold. Tobacco was our source of income, and there were special tasks almost every season of the year related to growing the crop. My grandparents and their grandparents, and on back to shortly after the American Revolution, had lived on this land in much the same manner that we did. We had no electricity—it was not available in the area yet; no running water—we drew water from a well outside the kitchen door with a bucket; and no close neighbors. Life was a great deal of hard work. We did have a lot of love, laughter, and wonderful food that

we grew ourselves, as well as a sense of belonging to the land and being exactly where we were supposed to be.

Ma was a soft, overweight woman with a comfortable lap I had been rocked in for many hours. She smelled like the soap she made, corn bread baking, fried chicken, and starch. Her fingers were already gnarled with arthritis, but that did not stop her from quilting, making our clothes with fabric that she ordered from the Sears catalogue, painting the house, or milking the cows. She had very pale blue eyes that I had seen laugh, squint at the sun in the fields, and cry when her mother, Granny West, died. But mostly what I saw in those eyes was love. Yes, you can see love in a person's eyes.

My mother was a woman living in a faraway place called Chicago. Ma and Pa could not tell me much about it because they had never been there. They had never been out of the county that we lived in. My mother came to see us once a year—usually in the summer—and stayed a few days. She had left me with her parents shortly after my father's death when I was two, and I had no memory of ever having lived with her. On those short visits I remember being in awe of her. She did not look like us or even talk like us. Her clothes were bought in a store, her lips were red, and she smelled like flowers, and even for the short time she was with us she stayed out late at night. Long after Ma, Pa, and I had gone to bed, the dogs would start barking and I would wake up to headlights shining in my window and know that my mother was home. Other than to walk to church, or to Great-Granddad West's farm about two miles away, Ma and Pa and I never really went anywhere, especially not at night.

The day my mother showed up with her new husband to reclaim me and take me back with her to Chicago descended on us unexpectedly, like a sudden storm. She was there one afternoon and we were gone the next morning before breakfast. A few of my things were packed in the shiny new Pontiac, but most of them were left behind. I was to have new things. These country things would not do.

That morning it was barely light out. There was dew on the grass and I remember my feet being wet from walking to the car. I was confused and frightened, but I did not want to cry in front of these strangers. I did not understand why Ma and Pa were letting them take me away, but I did see the pain and fear mirrored in my grandmother's face. She hugged me to her and said, "Now, you be a good girl. You show them what a big girl you are. Your mother loves you very much and you must always listen to her."

Pa said nothing. There were tears running down his face and he looked very old and tired.

There was no conversation between my mother and grandmother that morning. We drove away quickly and I experienced for the first time a feeling that would become familiar to me. My throat was frozen from holding back my tears and sobs. I lay on the floor in the back seat and tried to be very, very quiet. I closed my eyes and held my breath and tried to fight the pain and fear. I swallowed it down in big gulps. I was alone for the first time in my life. I felt paralyzed. It would be many years until I learned to move through pain, and not brace against it, deny it, swallow it.

It was not until many years later that I was able to grieve the loss of the deep, dark woods of Kentucky, my dog Ringo, the barn cats, or the chickens that were all named as they hatched. It was many years until I could think of walking to church on Sunday mornings, sitting on the front porch shelling peas, listening to the owls hooting at night, picking blackberries, or sitting in the garden dirt with a salt shaker eating tomatoes from the vine without that lump in my throat.

As soon as we drove out of Muhlenberg County, where alcohol could not be sold, the first thing we did was to stop for a drink. It was the first of many. When I realized that I was not getting out of the car, I began crying. I was told to “cut it out or I would get something to cry about.” And so my journey from home began.

# *Books and Their Covers*

Mark Leslie

It was 7:45 in the morning and there I sat, in a bright lobby at the end of a row of fixed chairs. In my mind, I kept running over the many things I could have been doing if I hadn't had to chauffeur my mother-in-law to her medical appointment. My thoughts were interrupted as she called out to my five-year-old stepdaughter, who had made herself quite at home in the play area.

"Noelle? Noelle!" she called. "Stop playing for a minute, honey, and come and let me fix the back of your hair."

Noelle crawled up into my lap and leaned back so quickly that the back of her head banged into my chubby chin. The pain was so sharp that a lonely tear formed in my left eye. I hope that this is no indication of the remainder of my day, I thought.

I watched her Grandma Dorothy run her small, pale, bony fingers through my daughter's thick, silky hair and noticed how her hands would disappear at times. "Biracial hair is so pretty, but sometimes hard to manage," she murmured as she fashioned the locks into a thick ponytail. "We have to stop at Sally's and pick up some new products that your mommy wants to try on your beautiful hair," she softly whispered into her granddaughter's ear.

"Okay, Nanny," said Noelle as she slid off my lap. It's chilly in here, I thought. I really hadn't noticed the cold until she had left my arms to go play. I watched her as she picked up a yellow plastic hammer and pounded on the toy stove that stood in front of her.

"How would you like a piece of peanut brittle?" Dorothy asked, and handed me the largest of the shards from her crinkled plastic bag. After I crunched for some time on the noisy candy, I noticed that the room had grown unusually quiet. As I looked in my daughter's direction, I noticed that she was standing completely still and was extremely quiet. The expression on her face made me think

that she had just seen an apparition. I looked to find the cause of her alarm.

An elderly woman and a man whom I presume was her husband were sitting in the same row of chairs at the other end of the room. I couldn't help noticing the well-dressed woman's dark, cold eyes as she seemed to stare furiously back at my daughter. Hmmm, the old-school mentality still exists today, I thought. The woman had affixed her hateful eye on Noelle as though my little girl had suddenly offended her in some manner. As Noelle resumed her play, I sat and watched the stuffy old woman stare at my daughter with cat-like fixation. She just couldn't seem to help herself.

How outwardly rude can one person be? I thought to myself, as I searched through my trouser pockets for nothing at all. I quickly peeked at my mother-in-law, who was oblivious to everything except the peanut brittle she was still eating. I'll just ignore the bigot's behavior, I thought, and try to save the rest of my day. I just won't look anymore at that woman.

Staring at the clown painting on the wall across from me was no longer interesting, and I was growing angry and impatient. Out of the corner of my eye, I caught a quick glimpse of the enemy's round head peering in my daughter's direction, her olive-colored skin glowing against the dark blue wall behind her. What are you looking at, I wondered. If you're a bigot at least try to hide it. At that point my blood began to boil and my legs began to shake, just a little.

I began to study the man who sat next to her. He had been preoccupied with a newspaper the whole time and hardly ever looked up. Just then, his ignorant companion had the audacity to tap him on the wrist and brazenly point at my daughter. The man then lifted one of his bushy white eyebrows and looked sheepishly at her and then at me. Afterwards, he did his best to pacify the woman without being noticed. At that moment, the thuds from my heartbeats drowned out my daughter's incessant hammering.

I've about had it with this garbage, I thought. I told myself again to not let this rude, insensitive, bigot old biddy make me lose my temper, but it seemed inevitable. In addition to the other anger symptoms that had plagued me, a new one had now developed. My throat began to throb and ache, which usually is a forecast for unwanted tears. Something had to give.

*Fsssssst.* The sound of the sliding window distracted my thoughts for an easing instant. "Dorothy Cook? Dorothy?" called the bubbly nurse. "We're ready for you now," she said as she slid the glass partially

shut. Oh wonderful, I thought. There goes the one person that might keep me from blowing my top. I would have loved to trade places with her at that very moment.

Dorothy and I slowly stood up and moved toward the play area.

“I’ll be back soon enough,” she murmured, and softly kissed the back of her granddaughter’s wrist. At that moment, the bigot arose from her throne and started to approach us slowly.

You have got to be kidding me! I thought. The nosy old woman, who smelled like stale perfume, was now standing in front of me with folded hands, as if she was about to pray. “Excuse me?” she said. Here we go, I thought. “Um, I couldn’t help but notice this little girl,” she muttered, then half reached out to touch her.

“May I ask you folks a personal question?” she inquired. I said to myself, this couldn’t possibly be happening to my family and me. Noelle’s grandma looked as though she was waiting for the punch line of a sour joke. She then said gently to the woman, “What can I help you with, ma’am?” My eyes were now fixed on the woman’s lips, and her next sentence seemed to leave them in slow motion.

“Our granddaughter is biracial too and I just wanted to know what you use in her hair to make it so silky looking.”

Dorothy smiled widely and joined arms with the visitor. “You see dear, it’s a matter of touch,” Dorothy told her, as she patted the woman’s hand. Their voices grew dim as the pair slowly walked toward the waiting nurse.

Noelle continued to hammer, and the man turned to the next page of his newspaper. I was left alone to face the real monsters of the room—the guilt and presumptions that had clouded my nature. *Never judge a book by its cover* is the catchy cliché I vowed that day never to forget.

# Writing Profiles 3

The essays in this chapter were written in response to the following assignment: *Write an essay about an intriguing person, place, or activity in your community. Observe your subject closely, and then present what you have learned in a way that both informs and engages readers.*



# *Making the Anacostia Beautiful*

Mary Fischer

We are flying through the water. Mist is beginning to rise off of the Anacostia River and it feels as though the shell is flying. On the side of the boat, water skims by, splashing dangerously high every time the oars stroke together. I hear a voice all around me shouting,

“And row... and row... and row... and wane off... and row... and row...”

In response to these commands, every woman in the boat pulls through the water in complete unison. Every muscle in our bodies is tense and our faces are tight in a mixture of agitation and complete concentration.

Rowing crew is just one of the many ways to experience the Anacostia River at 5:15 a.m. in the pitch dark of the pre-morning sky. A few stars have managed to push their way through the thick cloud cover, but not many. The sun has not risen and won't for quite some time, so I sit in the boat and take a good long look at the river. The first thing I see is a gigantic, grease-covered barge that rests in the middle of the Anacostia, dredging the muck below. The stern-looking steel ship emits a loud roar and a foul smell as the dredger shifts the river base. A train rattles by, parallel to the bank, and lets off huge amounts of black smoke as it blows its defining horn into the otherwise dead-silent morning air. The water itself seems completely lifeless and dull; there is no current. At first sight, there is nothing even remotely appealing about the Anacostia River.

You experience the Anacostia before you see it. From about a half-mile up the road, you know you are close to the river by the putrid stench that hits your nostrils. The smell of rotting fish mixed with car exhaust, trash heaps, feces, and general decay smacks you sharply in the face. It is so intense that your eyes water and it's hard not to gag. If you weren't awake at 5:00 a.m. before, you are now. You might

attempt to breathe through your mouth, but that only results in almost tasting what you smelled before. If you can muster up the courage to stick around the bank of the Anacostia for a good five minutes, the smell eventually starts to dissipate from acclimation. If the stench isn't enough of a deterrent, the sight of the Anacostia is enough to make most stay away from its banks.

The sun doesn't rise as early as the crew team, but when it finally joins us, the view of the Anacostia is not much better than the smell. The water itself is a murky brown color that has the consistency of churning mud pie. It is so dark that things lurking only one inch below the surface are completely hidden from view. Bits and pieces of hidden objects float by, and I have no idea how deep they go or what they might be. As I sit in the middle of the river, I begin to notice the heaps of trash that float by as we row. Every third stroke or so, my oar will dip in and meet a pop can or a bottle that is bobbing merrily by. On the banks of the river, most of the trash has accumulated into large heaps. These tend to form close to the overpass bridges where thoughtful motorists decided that the Anacostia was just the place for their waste. Along with fast-food trash, occasionally we will find a bicycle, a trash bin, or sometimes even a car embedded into the banks of the Anacostia. All of this refuse makes me curious as to how the river got in this shape.

A woman in a brown hat is methodically bending down and scooping water into vials. She has been working like this all morning. I apprehensively decide to approach this stern-looking, middle-aged woman, who takes water samples for the District of Columbia. When I ask her about the pollution she looks at me accusatorily and says, "Chemicals have been dumped in here by businesses for at least the last hundred years or so. Also, the sewage systems in this area are so antiquated that whenever it rains, the sewage just dumps straight into the 'Costia.'" She sighs and continues to bend down and fill the vials as she carefully avoids touching the water. "The only thing that could save her would be money, which we *don't* have." When I ask her about the businesses, she tells me that seventy percent of the Anacostia River's bank is commercial. Because of this, the natural cleaning system for the river has been completely wiped out after years of abuse.

After this encounter, I get a second perspective on the Anacostia from an overwhelmingly chipper member of the crew team. She tells me, "The Anacostia's fine as long as you steer clear of the jagged trash and don't swallow the water. I've fallen out of this boat too

many times to count, and I'm still alive." If this speech was meant to allay my fears, it failed; I continue to eye the water with distaste. While touching the water won't hurt you, it is true that the fish in the Anacostia have a higher rate of cancerous tumors than those in any other river. It is also true that its neighboring river, the Potomac, has been heavily cleaned and purified in the last few years, while the Anacostia has been ignored. Many speculate that this is directly related to the fact that the Potomac runs through a wealthy part of Washington, DC, while the Anacostia runs through the poor neighborhoods of town. There seems to be no real push from the government or the citizens to clean up this river because it is easier to simply look the other way.

The more time I spend on the Anacostia, the more I see that as hard as humans try to destroy this waterway, nature continues to thrive. It is only when you sit very still that the Anacostia begins to really show herself to you. It starts with a low humming that can easily be missed if you don't pay attention, but all around are the sounds of crickets filling the early morning air. Flocks of birds fly overhead, and suddenly a fish jumps far off, and then another and another into the morning air. The sky gradually begins to lighten as the sun rises and a pelican lands majestically on the bank. It begins to hunt for breakfast, continuously bobbing its head in and out of the water. A beaver frantically swims around the Anacostia's waters, searching for wood and trash to fortify his home. Suddenly, the pelican reaches down and grabs a cancerous fish. It flies off victoriously with its meal. The sun finally rises, and it begins to dance off the top of the brown muck, as if bringing the water itself to life. These small instances are all the Anacostia River has left legitimizing her as a true river of nature and not merely a landfill.

Suddenly and with no warning, the boat begins to pick up more speed with every stroke on the Anacostia. I feel myself start connecting with the boat, my body sliding back and forth completely even with the strokes of the oars. The women's faces light up, and their looks of agitation become looks of joy. The bank starts to rush by, and we leave the beavers, birds, and fish in our wake. Suddenly I realize that this is how we make the Anacostia beautiful every morning. We become an intertwined part of her, instead of simply throwing our trash into her and looking the other way.

# *The Plaza*

Luz Aguado

“El panadero con el pan,” shouts a man, glancing over his left shoulder and turning toward a crowd of people. Despite the fact that he bears a crammed basket of bread on his head and rides an old-fashioned bicycle, the middle-aged man goes by unhurriedly. With him comes the smell of Mexican bread—conchas, cuernos, orejas, and empanadas. Although his hands are not on the basket, it does not seem to shift; it is almost as if the basket is superglued to his head. From where I sit, the enthralling façade of the neogothic cathedral is still visible; the spires of the cathedral’s two bell towers appear to pierce the heavens. The colossal church bells fill the plaza with their dominant yet pleasing resonance. The sound moves up and down the scale progressively and endlessly. As the echo of one bell fades away, another bell sounds its melodious note. The bells signal the day’s last *Angelus Domini*, the prayer that is recited three times a day in the Catholic tradition.

Although I have been here before, in this small plaza of Silao, Guanajuato, nothing is quite the way I remembered it. The walls look older, and the crevices on the floor appear to have grown. I have come here today to relax from the long trip up to Cristo Rey, or el Cristo de la Montaña, as most people here refer to it. While the soft beams of the setting sun slowly descend from the towers and make their way toward the pointed arches of the stained glass windows, pigeons flutter diagonally across the sapphire sky. They soar in synchronized movements and look as if they are dancing to the harmony of the bells. It is not long before the façade of the cathedral becomes a flaming orange. And for a second, the greatness of the heavens transforms the plaza into one of the Louvre’s romanticized paintings.

This is the place to be on a Saturday night. There is no special carnival here, but a foreigner would not know the difference. Dressed

in the traditional flamboyant garments of tight black pants and a short matching jacket with a sequence of imprinted gold buttons on the outside seams, a white blouse with a windswept scarlet tie, glossy short boots, and the famous broad sombrero, the mariachis become the spirit of the night.

“Eh, eh, eh, eh, ja, ja, ja, ja, ja, ja, ja, el mariachi loco quiere bailar, el mariachi loco quiere cantar!” While beating their right feet on the floor at the pace of the music, they play the renowned *El Mariachi Loco*. The most important mariachi grips an elegant guitarrón to his chest, and a pair of shorter mariachis play medium-sized brass trumpets behind him. A trio of violinists stands in a straight line alongside two mariachis playing the guitar and the vihuela. With enthusiasm, they continue to perform “A la bio, a la bao, a la sim bom ba, México, México ra ra rá!” One can never predict how long a zealous mariachi group like this will play. They leave with the people and come with the people—time is no object. The sky is now black: the sun has set on Silao, Guanajuato.

As time goes by the plaza gets busier. Ambulant vendors emerge from every corner, and slowly but surely they spread like a plague over the plaza. The best vendors station themselves at the center of the plaza. From the distance a chrome taco stand draws nearer until it stops next to a lamppost. “Tacos Garibaldi,” it says in royal blue neon lettering. The man attending the stand wears a snowy-white blouse, coffee-colored pants, a long plaid apron, and a hair net. “Ya llegaron Los Taquitos Garibaldi!” he screams out. As the man sets up his taco stand, his assistants bring out the daily menu. It reads, “3 Tacos al pastor—55 pesos, 3 Tacos de chorizo—45 pesos, 3 Tacos de pollo—45 pesos, 3 Tacos de carnitas—55 pesos, 3 Tacos de carne asada—55 pesos.”

It is six o’clock in the evening but the day is just beginning. The wind blows the sunburned leaves and multicolored confetti from one side of the plaza to the other. Antique emerald green lampposts encircle the heart of the court, giving it a supple golden glow. Desperately dragging their parents by the hands, young children sprint about in all directions to the nearest ice cream or churro stand. With impatient expressions on their faces, their parents are compelled to stand in line. In the background the resounding music of the mariachis continues to echo.

Thousands of vibrant banners sway serenely with the summer breeze. On plastic strings they dangle across the plaza from the brick terraces of shops. Near the rustic fountain men cluster around the

iron benches at the heart of the court. Several of the men sit on the bottle-green benches with their legs crossed ankle to thigh, and others lie back on the trunks of the black walnut trees. They converse in the typical Castilian language but with an apparent Silao dialect. "Pasame el tequila, compadre," says an aged man in cowboy boots, patting one of his comrades on the back. All night, the bottle of tequila moves from one hand to the next. "Oiga, compadre, are you sure you are not a genie?" asks one of the men. "No, why?" the elderly man answers. "Because every time I stroke the top of a tequila bottle you appear," responds the man. The men begin to chuckle at full volume, and their laughter resonates in the plaza.

Back at the ice cream stands, children and their parents take minuscule steps toward the front. "Yo quiero la de chocolate, mama" says one of the children while skipping on the tiles on the ground. While some of the children raise their heads to the dark sky in disapproval, the cathedral priests embrace the night. They no longer wear their long, elaborate vestments; instead they have on black knit shirts with white cotton collars and black pants. On their way to the Tacos Garibaldi stand, they are stopped many times by the inhabitants of Silao. "Buenas noches, padrecitos," people say respectfully. After making their way through the crowd of pious families, the two priests order three tacos al pastor, three tacos de pollo, and two aguas de horchatas. The vendor hands them their tacos, which they squirt with lemon and sprinkle with diced onion and cilantro. Then they make their way through the crowd again, heading for the stone tables where they will eat their dinner.

No one stays put in the plaza; everyone is moving. Young people walk around looking for members of the opposite sex. Vendors of all ages walk around selling their goods. A magician stands near the neoclassical kiosk waving his magic wand over a black hat, while children sit on the brown tile floor clapping their hands over their mouths in astonishment. The magician pulls a dove from the tall black hat and lets it fly away. Then he pulls out a long ribbon that changes colors as it gets longer; the children open their mouths in awe at the never-ending ribbon. The whole plaza resembles a medieval carnival.

On the other side of the kiosk, people dance to the beat of the mariachis. Passersby pause to watch the dancers. Dresses swing in all directions, and women take off their high heels and set them near the kiosk stairs. Men and women move their hips and pound their feet on the floor. While some take breaks to get something to drink, the

others continue to dance to the catchy songs of the mariachis. Thus the night goes on, uninterrupted by the ordered rules of civilization. This is a place where most things are forgotten, including the coming day. This is a place where time becomes the summer breeze that moves the branches of the trees left and right: like the wind, time passes unnoticed here. The plaza's only reminder of time is the limestone monument at its center, inscribed "Founded 1537." This is a place where the present is not just a second that just passed—it is a moment that keeps on existing.

# *The Fillin' Station*

Kylie Jansen

The hot sun beat upon my skin as I jumped into my Grand Am. The inside of my car felt like an oven, but I was on a butter run for my mom and decided I'd be better off dealing with the heat than with her. With one turn of my hand, the car began to tremble and the music from my stereo consumed me. I bobbed my head to the tunes and headed across town to the Fillin' Station.

A minute later, I found myself parked in front of a gray-and-purple-trimmed building. Signs along its walls advertised brands of oils and tires. Through the window an orange Bud Light sign blinked. I walked into the station and saw Sara Davis, the owner's daughter, working as usual. I said hi to her and made my way to the dairy cooler. The place had just been remodeled, and yet it was still rather small. Chips, candy, and coffee were in the front half of the store, while the back held coolers full of frozen foods, dairy items, and pop. I walked to the back and grabbed a small dish of butter out of the dairy cooler. Then I went to pay for it only to discover that the front counter had been abandoned. A big-bellied farmer leaned against the counter next to me. He sipped his coffee and stared off into the distance. *He must have missed out on coffee hour*, I thought.

Every morning at around six, a group of area farmers gathers at the Fillin' Station. The smell of coffee pervades the place as they talk about the weather, problems with their crops, and local news. The group can often be heard filling the room with laughter; however, heated arguments over proper farming techniques are also commonly heard. Occasionally, things get out of hand, causing the owner of the station to come in from the shop. He'll throw a sarcastic comment at them, catching them off guard and subtly ending the great debate.

The robustness of the owner, Jerry Davis, has become a legendary part of the Fillin' Station. In winter he wears shorts and a



parka till mid December, and then he grudgingly replaces the shorts with pants until late March; in a sense he has become the town's own groundhog. He has always had a cynical personality. The biting remarks he throws at his customers always seem to bring a slight smile to their faces. His customers have respect for him because they know when they end up with car trouble they can rely on Jerry to help them. The place is not only the local gas station and grocery store for the small town of Hudson, it's also the local mechanic's shop. Jerry's workers fix tires, change oil and batteries, fix lawn mowers, and so on, and try to do so as quickly as they can. "I like to get every car and tractor back on the road again as soon as possible, because I know how important they are in our everyday lives," Jerry says.

Getting cars out of the shop isn't the only thing he likes to do quickly. Getting people's gas pumped is another priority. As soon as a car pulls up to the pump a chime sounds inside the station, causing Sara to drop what she's doing. She rushes outside, asks how much the customer wants, puts the nozzle in the tank, and starts pumping. A blue "full-service" sign hangs below the gas prices, which means Sara will pump your gas and wash your windows for free. "It's rare to find full-service gas stations anywhere nowadays, so when they came out and started pumping my gas I was shocked, but it sure is nice," said an out-of-town patron. Rushing out to cars when the bell chimes seems to be a game to Sara. She tries to get back into the station as fast as she can to minimize conflict between the indoor and outdoor customers. Occasionally, however, she will have to serve Tom Hansen, a rather hostile old man from the community. He will slowly get out of his small car and glare at her for a moment, then order her to put ten dollars in. While the ten dollars' worth is being pumped, she will go to the front of his tan car and wash his windows. The skinny, gray-haired old man will then point out all the spots she missed and yank the squeegee from her hands. She then will finish up with the gas and ask him for the ten dollars. "What do you mean ten dollars? I only asked for eight!" he'll holler back. Eventually he forks over the money while muttering that he'll never come back again. "Usually he shows up the next day and bugs me about something else," Sara laughs. "I don't take anything he says personally."

Many elderly people reside in the town of Hudson and have lived their entire lives there. The town has a grand total of four hundred and two residents. It is located in the southeastern portion of South Dakota, along the Iowa border. Most people in town know each other and probably know more than they'd like to about one

another. They would probably describe Hudson as a typical small town: few businesses, lots of gossipers, and no law enforcement, yet always a friendly smile or a helping hand to be found within its limits.

“That will be ninety-seven cents,” Sara said to me with a smile. I must have been daydreaming because I saw her standing before me with the butter already rung up on the cash register. I handed her the money with a “thank you” and left the station. The rumble of the fans from the grain elevator caught my attention as I walked back into the sunny day and dust from the grain fell upon me like snow as I made my way to my car.

When I arrived home I handed the butter to my mom.

“Thank you,” she said. “What took you so long?”

# *A Step Back in Time*

Pam Clericus

From the grass parking lot, the first sounds you hear are raucous laughter and upbeat music wafting over the walls, inviting visitors to quicken their pace to the gate. Once there, you are greeted by a member of the Queen's Guard with a merry "Good day to you, kind stranger," and you step into an interactive experience known as the Ohio Renaissance Festival.

The thirty-acre Renaissance Park is built to resemble a sixteenth-century English village, like those to which royalty once escaped in late summer when their "towne" homes would have been oppressively hot. Gravelly dirt paths guide you around in a meandering oval, past single-story shops and characters in medieval clothing. Most of the participants are employees, but many are simply spectators outfitted like peasants, nobility, or anything in between. The costumes are colorful and often noisy, from the soft tinkling of the gypsy-coin jewelry to the jangling armor and chain mail of the knights. The noise of the costumes adds to the cacophony of the street peddlers hawking their wares, from "troll house" cookies to long-stemmed flowers. Add to the mix the Minstrels of Mayhem, a strolling troupe of musicians strumming lutes and singing sometimes bawdy ditties, and your ears are nearly overwhelmed.

Between boutiques selling whimsical "olde English" clothing and handmade medieval crafts is a performance stage for the Swordsmen, two "bold and stupid men" who call themselves Masters of the Manly Arts. During breaks in their simulated, silly swordplay, they jokingly tutor you in wooing and poetry, posturing and hand-kissing. The Swordsmen are one of the many scheduled attractions scattered throughout the day.

While waiting for the shows you can browse for souvenirs and enjoy the savory food. It is hard to ignore Squire Tom's turkey legs;

they are dangled from the roof of the restaurant by heckling vendors. The smell of the one-pound roasted hunks of poultry is mouth-wateringly enticing. A turkey leg capped off with a frothy mug of ale is a meal fit for a king (or a commoner equipped with enough cash). Although you are pleasantly full, can you resist Eve's apple dumplings, plump apples baked in flaky pastry and served with cinnamon ice cream?

Now that you are uncomfortably stuffed it is probably not the time to attempt Jacob's Ladder, a game of agility that requires you to climb on a rope-and-board contraption to ring the bell at the top. Maybe it would be better to try the Vegetable Vengeance game, where you can hurl overripe tomatoes at a decidedly rude and obnoxious moving human target—at least in this game *you* don't have to move much.

Drawn by the roar of a large crowd, you find yourself in the center of the park, jockeying for a spot to watch the joust. Attended by her court, Queen Elizabeth I greatly enjoys the spectacle, instructing her loyal subjects to cheer on their favorites with an enthusiastic "Huzzah!" The trumpets that herald the entrance of the combatants are followed by the cracking of the knights' lances slamming into their opponents' shields. It is a dazzling sight as the gallant knights in armor on handsome steeds contend for prizes and Her Majesty's attention.

But no visit to the Renaissance Festival is complete without a stop at the Muditorium, comically known as the "Theatre in the Ground." Plank benches, suspiciously dirty even though they are far from the mud itself, surround the pit. The "Mudde Show" consists of three actors making a literal mess of the classics *Beowulf* and Dante's *Inferno*. Unsuspecting first-timers are forewarned as the narrator on the stage flings a handful of mud into the pit, surveys the damage, and proclaims this a "twelve-row show!" Cleanliness and decorum are cast aside as the actors romp through the loosely adapted story while managing to frolic in the muck as much as possible, to the delight of the rowdy crowd. The spectators are often divided into groups and goaded into competing to make the most racket. Audience participation is crucial, as the show ends with the villain (by then covered head to toe in mud) being chased into and on top of the less-favored section by the hero (similarly covered in mud but also in possession of two gloppy handfuls), causing mass scrambling and shrieking and general chaos.

After the show you file past the actors to offer a smile of thanks and possibly place a tip into one of their long-handled baskets. You head for the parking lot exhausted from laughing and cheering and overloaded with mementos and food you could not resist.

# *Fatty's Custom Tattooz and Body Piercing*

Brianne O'Leary

Dupont Circle is an impressive area in Washington, DC. The streets are full of classy shops and quaint restaurants and cafes. Men and women walk through Dupont with plenty of money to spend. The neighborhood is chic, to say the least. That Fatty's Custom Tattooz and Body Piercing is located in the middle of this high-end district is interesting; here a tattoo parlor is unique.

When I told my friend Emma that I was looking around for a place to get a tattoo, she recommended Fatty's Custom Tattooz, saying, "It's sooo good!" When I went to check the place out, I expected a big flashy sign and a huge, modern studio. I found only a small sandwich board on the sidewalk with an arrow pointing toward a barely larger building. The building itself looked run-down, deserted; there were no rooms on the first floor. Against my better judgment I walked up some stained, carpeted stairs, a little frightened of what I would find at the top. Was this really the place that was "sooo good"? I was a little annoyed that Emma hadn't mentioned the atmosphere of this joint. With each step the pungent smell of rubbing alcohol hit my nose harder. When I finally reached the top of the stairs, I saw that the studio's door was shut. I wasn't sure whether to knock or walk right in. I felt a bit queasy imagining what might lie inside. It took all my strength to pull the heavy red-and-black metal door open, but as soon as I did I was greeted by a friendly face. John, the shop's body piercer, showed me inside, and to my surprise, he was not covered in metal and skull tattoos.

I immediately noticed the heavy metal playing in the background. While at first the sound of fast-paced drumming and hard-core male roaring caused my heart to race, the comforting sound of pleasant conversation and laughter that could be heard from the tattooing room eased my nerves. If I was nervous just observing the place, I couldn't imagine what it would be like when I actually went

to get a tattoo. Although I couldn't make out the words coming from the tattoo room, an airy giggle and a deep chuckle offered a bit of solace: maybe getting a tattoo can be *fun*?

The first customer to walk in was a teenage girl who wanted a butterfly tattoo on her ankle. She was exactly the type of person I would expect to see in a tattoo parlor: a young person, a teen, a member of my generation. She pulled out *O, The Oprah Magazine*, to read during her wait. It wasn't long before another customer entered, this time a middle-aged man wearing all leather and covered from head to toe in tattoos. He, too, was exactly the type of person that I would expect to see in a tattoo parlor: the standard biker. No one would be surprised to see either a teenage girl or a hard-core biker at a tattoo parlor, but the two made an interesting picture together: the girl wearing Abercrombie and Fitch sitting next to a man who looked like a member of a motorcycle gang. Watching them made me wonder, *Are tattoos only representative of my generation, or are they more universal?*

I put my thoughts aside in order to meet with the studio's owner, Fatty himself. Fatty invited me in to speak to him as he tattooed a dragon on the back of forty-eight-year-old Rose. In my quest to find the perfect place to get my tattoo, I had visited five or six tattoo parlors, and Fatty looked no different from any tattoo artist I had seen before. He was about forty, with shoulder-length, thinning gray hair thrown back in a ratty bandana.

While at first glance Fatty seemed like an average tattoo artist, from talking to him I noticed a spark, a creative drive that I have never seen in any other tattoo artist. He was so focused, so driven, that sweat beaded on his forehead as he concentrated on filling in a brilliant blue on Rose's back. Rose offered me her personal insight on Fatty: "I see the animation in his work—he makes everything he does come alive. He's so focused it's amazing. I've never trusted anyone with my body like I've trusted him. Trust is so important when getting a tattoo. You're getting something permanently engraved on your body. No matter how much I want my tattoo, I will never get it unless I have complete trust in the artist."

Rose makes getting a tattoo look easy. As the needle drags beneath her skin, blood bubbles up to the surface. Each time I sneak a look at her back I feel vomit rising in my throat. "This one, she's a f-ing rock star. She's doing great," Fatty says, gesturing toward Rose. Something makes me think that I won't be quite the rock star when my turn comes to be in that chair. "I make big boys cry, I make big girls cry too," Fatty says with a grin.

Despite his teasing, it's obvious to me that Fatty is different; he cares about his clients and his work, the art of tattoos. "It's about my passion," Fatty tells me. "Life's too f-ing short to live in a passionless way." When I ask why tattoos are so special, he responds, "They are a part of who you are, an extension of yourself." Fatty's demeanor and passion, as well as the detail of his art, show that he has had a lot of experience with tattooing, so I can't help asking his professional opinion on the question that's been lingering in the back of my mind since I saw those two customers in the waiting room: "Are tattoos simply a trend of my generation?"

Fatty barely bats an eye before responding. While tattoos really came out culturally in the 1990s, he says, they are not just a trend for a single generation. "There is no one type of 'tattoo person,'" he tells me. "I've tattooed liberals, conservatives, males, females, teenagers, middle-aged people, even some old people," he says. "Tattoos themselves really span all generations." He notes that even before the 1990s people were getting tattoos, but the practice wasn't as widespread because tattoos were not very well known or well thought of. "Think sailors, World War II soldiers, and some other badasses after that."

Tattoos are more than a trend—they are a form of art. Rose called Fatty "a true artist. He's like the Picasso of tattoos." When I look at Fatty's work, I think her description isn't far off the mark. The detail and brilliant colors that go into each one of Fatty's designs is truly incredible. Maybe that's why he has won more than ten national and international awards. Rose says that even her law-firm colleagues respect Fatty's work: "They were all really impressed. They even said 'no one could do that but an artist'—and these are rich conservatives who probably own some gorgeous art." Such a beautiful art form cannot be limited to a single generation.

According to Fatty, the current popularity of tattoos is a result of society's evolution: "Our culture is socially progressing, people are open-minded, it's hard to f-ing believe, isn't it?" But maybe it's not so hard to believe—although tattoos are a form of art, they're also fun and very personal. Each tattoo represents something important to the person who is getting it—something important enough to have it inked permanently into his or her skin. Every person has individual interests and passions, and tattoos mark that passion. You don't have to be a rebellious badass to get a tattoo; you just have to care about something enough to know that it is forever. When I get the Red Sox logo tattooed on my back, it is a symbol not only of a sports team, but of my hometown, something I want to keep with me forever.

# *Explaining a Concept* 4

The essays in this chapter were written in response to the following assignment: *Write an essay about a concept that interests you and that you want to study further. When you have a good understanding of the concept, explain it to your readers, considering carefully what they already know about it and how your essay might add to what they know.*



# *India's Dowry System: A Woman Killer!*

Manprit Virk

A twenty-year-old, newly wed bride was burned to death by her in-laws. Why? Because her family was unable to pay the dowry the groom's family demanded. Result? The groom will get married again and with his new bride will come more dowry. Dowry (*daaj*) is a wedding gift given by the parents of a bride to her groom. In India, the dowry tradition is centuries old. It started in the time of kings among the very rich but is now practiced even by relatively poor families. Once a willingly given gift, dowry has become a business of daughters.

Dowry was once a gift that parents gave to their daughter on the occasion of her marriage. Now, however, it is a payment given from the bride's parents to the groom's parents to cover the costs of the groom's education and wedding clothes and the marriage ceremony. The better educated the groom, the larger the dowry. As educator and researcher Anuppa Caleekal states, "Doctors, chartered accountants and engineers even prior to graduation develop the divine right to expect a 'fat' dowry as they become the most sought after cream of the graduating and educated dowry league." Dowry can consist of jewelry, automobiles, furniture, and other expensive household items. The price of dowry "ranges from \$5,000 to \$50,000" (Kulman par. 2A) and is a status symbol—people do business by taking daughters-in-law along with money or expensive gifts. According to Sudheer Birodkar, "Dowry continues to form an essential part of the negotiations that take place in an arranged marriage. During the marriage ceremony, the articles comprising the dowry are proudly displayed in the wedding hall." The dowry given by the bride's parents is shown to the community, and that determines the status of the family. Due to this tradition, rich families marry into rich families, whereas poor families stay within poor families.

In the time of kings, dowry was part of a business alliance. One king would marry his daughter to another king's son and give enough dowry to keep the groom's family loyal to his. This gift was also insurance that the daughter would be well treated. According to Birodkar, dowry was only practiced among Brahmins (priests) and Kashatriyas (warriors), the two richest and highest castes in India. Middle- and lower-class families did not practice dowry not only because these lower-income families were unable to pay the price but because the custom was strictly limited to the upper class. But when the British took over India, dowry became a necessity for every class. In the article "Dowry Murder: The Imperial Origins of a Cultural Crime," Veena Oldenberg points out that the taxes the British government levied on the land were so high that families of all classes turned to dowry for needed revenue. Dowry may have been a necessity under the British, but now it has become a business and a leading cause of death among Indian women.

Today, dowry is a curse for women in India. During the wedding ceremony, the groom's parents demand a certain amount of money; if the bride's parents are unable to pay, the marriage is canceled, and the bride is left standing in the middle of the wedding ceremony, sometimes marked for life because no one wants to marry a girl who has been refused. The *Times of India* reported such a case on July 1, 2005: a man "put forward his demand just before the ceremony was to begin [and] said he would get married only if he got a car." In many of these situations, the bride, to prevent causing more embarrassment to her family, either runs away or commits suicide. Some people marry their sons off and ask for no dowry, but after the marriage, they start demanding money from the bride's parents. If their demands are not met, the bride is either brutally tortured to death or deserted by her husband. One of these cases was reported in the *Ludhiana Tribune* on January 7, 2005:

When her marriage proposal was being discussed, her in-laws had said that they did not want any dowry and that they were crusaders against the evil. Moni Bala (25) and her family had thought that they had found "angels" in the form of humans and decided to go ahead with the marriage. Allegedly harassed at the hands of her "greedy" in-laws living in Naya Gaon [Village] near Chandigarh [City], Moni came to terms with reality just after a month of her marriage and found that she was in the midst of dowry seekers who started berating her and her family that they were incapable of giving her any gifts.

In the Indian culture, women are taught to spend their whole lives with their husbands; if their husbands desert them, wives have no choice but to commit suicide. To prevent these situations, some parents abort female fetuses or kill their daughters at birth. Kulman claims that “many women end up having abortions because they are going to [have] girls [that] the husband does not want. Before birth, a girl in India risks being one of five million girls in India who are aborted by sex-selective abortion.” Furthermore, when a daughter is born into a family, people pity the parents instead of congratulating them because they foresee that the parents will have to pay the dowry price for their daughter’s marriage.

In brief, dowry is supposed to be a gift, but it has turned into a business. It is hard to get daughters married into good families when the price tags on grooms are so high. Dowry, once a custom of the rich, has now become a curse on middle- and lower-class families. Despite having been banned in 1961, the dowry system is still widely practiced, and continues to victimize women in India on a daily basis. According to Caleekal, “Like clockwork every 12 hours a dowry death claimed to have taken the lives of over 20,000 women across India between 1990 and 1993.” The dowry tradition is insupportable, but educated men still say things like, “I got my bachelor’s degree in science, that means nine hundred thousand rupees from the bride’s father!” Because of this mind-set, a twenty-year-old, newly wed bride is murdered every day, and every day a daughter is born who will take her place in twenty years.

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# *Jihad: The Struggle in the Way of God*

Ammar Rana

In Arabic, jihad literally means “struggle.” In Islamic terminology, it means struggling in the way of God. Jihad has long been misunderstood in the non-Muslim world; many people incorrectly assume it is comparable to the Christian idea of Holy War. To truly understand jihad, one must look at the different types of jihad, their conditions, and their significance in Muslim history.

There are two main types of jihad. The first is *jihad-an-nafs*, which is jihad of the inner self. This is the never-ending struggle between the self and the Satan inside the self. It is the struggle of doing good while being tempted to do evil. This type of jihad is the greater jihad. Examples of this type of jihad are numerous; they include struggling to wake up for *fajr* (morning prayer) and struggling to tell the truth in the face of punishment. The second type of jihad is *jihad-as-sayf*, or jihad of the sword. This type of jihad is a call to war triggered by one of several clearly defined situations: when non-Muslims invade a Muslim land, when Muslims are expelled from their land, when there is a threat of war, or when there is injustice such as genocide, tyranny, or oppression in the land. *Jihad-an-nafs* is known as the lesser type of jihad. It should be made clear that *jihad-an-nafs* only calls for defensive war—never offensive war. In addition, both types of jihad have strict rules and guidelines that must be adhered to.

Islam teaches us that the two most important things in life are intention and action. The intention of jihad must be to gain the pleasure of God. The action of jihad must also meet specific conditions set forth by Islamic rule. For example, Islam dictates that in *jihad-as-sayf*, one may not harm any civilians, women, children, elders, animals, or plant life. However, if the enemy uses plant life as a defense, the Muslim army is allowed to burn the plants. The Muslim army

may not destroy homes, hospitals, schools, religious institutions, or anything else vital to society. If the army breaks any of these rules, it is held accountable by the *khalifah* (Muslim government).

Jihad is a fundamental part of the Muslim *ummah* (nation), and it has been very important in Muslim history. The strict guidelines governing jihad have given Islam great fame as a just and noble religion. Throughout eras of intense barbarity, as other nations created bloody histories of oppression and genocide, the Muslim nation established a reputation as a model of morality. Jihad is a code, a set of rules for the two main struggles: the one with Satan in the inner self and the other with the armies of Satan on the battlefield. Jihad has been very important in developing an ethical Muslim society, one that condemns and outlaws anything that leads to sin and destruction.

Jihad is a part of Muslims' daily lives; it is a never-ending struggle that continues until death. Struggling in the path of God is the most important thing a Muslim can do. I believe that if everyone waged jihad against themselves, the world would be a much better place.

# *Flow*

Clayton Stothers

It's Saturday morning. I stumble out of bed and put on the oldest and dirtiest clothes I can find. I walk into the garage, which I affectionately call the "garoffice," and sit in my lawn chair to survey the work ahead of me. I see a cylinder block on the stand, a pair of cylinder heads on the ground, an intake manifold, pistons, pushrods, rockers, a crankshaft, and all the other goodies that go along with a healthy new V8 engine. I begin work by prepping the bearings, checking clearances, and bolting pieces on. I fit the crank in place and begin bolting it in. I begin gapping and fitting the rings on all eight pistons, oiling the bearings as I go. It's a smooth process of picking up the part, checking the manual, bolting it into place, and checking the manual again to make sure it's correct. My fingers scrape against rough places on the block, but I don't notice. I get oil and dirt on my face, but I don't bother wiping it off. Once I'm finished, I take a sip from my soda and step back to look at what I have done. I am surprised at how fast the engine came together. I walk into the house to wash my hands for lunch. Once I step out of the garage and into the house I suddenly become really hungry and have to go to the bathroom really badly. I look at the clock—it's almost 6 pm! Here I was thinking about lunch, and it's practically dinner time. I glance down at my hands and it looks like I just had a fight with a cactus. My face probably looks like I was working in a coal mine all day. This type of thing always happens to me when I'm working on my car or doing anything that I like; time flies and nothing gets in my way. This phenomenon is known as "flow," and it is experienced by everyone at one time or another.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has studied flow and has spent much of his time researching what makes people happiest and how flow affects their lives. Csikszentmihalyi is a professor of psychology at the

University of Chicago and author of the book *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. Flow can best be defined as “the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it” (Csikszentmihalyi 4). When I was assembling my engine it took so much of my concentration and focus that my hunger, the cuts on my hands, and my appearance didn’t matter and time seemed to pass at an incredible rate. Most athletes experience flow when they are performing well; this is often referred to as “being in the zone.” Understanding the concept of flow is very easy; understanding when, where, and how flow happens takes a little more analysis.

Flow can occur during almost any activity and at any time of the day, but some activities are more likely to trigger flow than others. For example, sports are designed to trigger flow: They create challenges that require the competitors to focus completely on the task at hand. A person is most likely to achieve flow when their skill level is equally matched with the level of challenge (Csikszentmihalyi 75). So if we took Wayne Gretzky and matched him up against a ten-year-old, neither Gretzky nor the ten-year-old would achieve flow; Gretzky would probably be bored, and the boy would probably be frustrated. However, if we could put Gordie Howe and Gretzky on the ice together, they might both achieve flow. Just as Gretzky could be in flow during a championship hockey game, a little boy could be in flow at Little League practice or a university student could be in flow while writing an essay. You may not be very skilled at an activity, but as long as your skill level is matched to the level of the challenge, you can achieve flow. But why do so many people strive to be in flow? Why do some people risk their lives to achieve flow, as ice climbers do when they scale sheer cliffs of ice? Can being in flow affect the way your body physically reacts to certain demands or even how your mind deals with problems?

The first chapter in Csikszentmihalyi’s book, “Happiness Revisited,” helps answer the question of why people strive to be in flow. The simple but quite accurate answer is that flow makes people happy: “The best moments usually occur when a person’s body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile” (Csikszentmihalyi 3). Think about the last time you watched TV because you had nothing else to do or when you relaxed from the time you woke up to the time you went to bed—how did you feel? Chances are you felt bored and

tired, and you were thinking of something to do. Now think about the last time you scored a point in your favorite sport, broke a personal record, beat the twentieth level on your video game, or even the last time you spent hours writing an essay and received a good grade. How did you feel? You probably felt accomplished, energized, and happy. Even though at the time some of these experiences were painful, physically or mentally, in the long run it was worth it. Flow helps us achieve these great personal hurdles, and that is why so many people strive to achieve it.

Ever since I first heard of flow I have been interested in how it can affect the way your body and mind perform certain tasks. Does the simple fact of being in flow make you jump higher or run faster? Does being in flow make you smarter?

When I was ten years old my hockey team was looking for a goalie. My coaches suited up all the players and shot the puck at each of them. Apparently I was the best on my team at blocking those shots, so I became the team's goalie. I had no formal training, but I seemed to have a natural ability to stop the puck. Over the years I honed my skills, and soon it became a personal obsession to stop the puck every time. Even though I concentrated while playing goalie, I didn't achieve flow until a few years into my hockey career. The first time I experienced flow wasn't during an important game but during a regular practice. We had been scrimmaging, and for the last play of the game my coach, who was a very skilled hockey player, joined the other team to try to score on me. I knew that my team's defense wasn't going to protect me well, and I needed to stop that puck.

Once the teams were established and the puck was dropped, I became extremely focused, almost as if someone had thrown a switch. I readjusted my armor and made the best blocking stance possible, focusing on where my glove and blocker were and trying to squat as low as I could. I was slightly in front of the goalie box, chewing on my mouth guard in anticipation. Once the coach got ahold of the puck, I knew that was it. He charged down the ice, and sure enough it was a breakaway, one on one. I slowly backed up into my zone as he charged at me. Glaring through my facemask I studied his movements, trying to anticipate how, when, and where he was going to fire the puck. He cranked his stick up and fired. The puck came fast and low, heading between my legs. I slammed my body onto my knees and laid my stick on the ground to block the puck, ricocheting it to the right of me. Before I could get back on my feet he fired it again, and this time I threw myself to the right, where the



puck hit my shoulder pad and bounced off. The coach had the puck again, but now I was laid out on the ground, leaving nearly the whole net open. He swung around in front of the net to shoot it over me, but at the same instant I spun myself around and stretched my glove-arm out to the center of the net. The coach raised his stick and launched the puck right into the safety of my glove. After the save I completely collapsed, letting all of my muscles relax and slumping to the ground, and I started laughing. I had never made a save like that before, and even I was surprised. It felt like I was stronger and faster than ever, being able to throw my whole body from one side to another at any instant.

Did being in flow give me this super strength and speed? The answer is no. It's just that people don't use 100 percent of their physical abilities unless they are in fight-or-flight response or in flow. Flow isn't just an adrenaline rush, but rather a state in which the mind focuses all of its processing power on the challenge and nothing else.

Flow is a very important part of life for many people, whether they know it or not, and can many times be the key to happiness. There are some people who find happiness by visiting museums, reading books, writing, going to parties, or planning their next activities. On the other hand, there are people who find true happiness sitting in their garages working on their favorite hobbies with nobody around. As Csikszentmihalyi said in his book, it doesn't matter *what* you spend your time doing, but *how* you go about doing it.

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# Explaining Opposing Positions 5

The essays in this chapter were written in response to the following assignment: *Write an essay about opposing positions on an issue that interests you and that you want to learn more about. When you have reached a good understanding of the debate on the issue, explain it to your readers. Consider carefully what they already know about the debate and try to interest them in it. Your goal is to explain the debate in an unbiased way—to report on it—while taking care not to express your own position on the issue of the debate, should you have one.*

# *Should Internet File Sharing of Music Be Legalized?*

Kristal Lee

After years of providing free downloading, Napster, an online music service that shared MP3 format song files, was shut down. Recording companies had sued the service for copyright violations. Quickly, new online music companies such as the iTunes Music Store filled the void. Unlike Napster, these services charged users for subscription and downloading, and while they became popular, so did anonymous peer-to-peer (P2P) file sharing of high-quality music and movies facilitated by services like Grokster that followed the discovery of new decentralized file sharing technologies and high speed Internet connections. Finally in June 2005, the Supreme Court ruled that Grokster could be sued by movie studios for allowing copyright infringement; they did not decide, however, whether those who use P2P file sharing are responsible for their own infringing of copyright. Since the ethicality of file sharing remains under dispute, the debate to convince young people hinges, as the two essays discussed below demonstrate, on differing definitions of both music and theft, which are informed by different life experiences and values.

In the essay “In Defense of Music Downloading: Why Internet File-Sharing Is Necessary for the Survival of Music,” Michael Scrivner portrays music as a democratic art that has been accessed by the masses throughout history. In his view, the record industry finds file-sharing frightening because it has shifted too much power and control to music fans and “without control...[the record industry] will be unable to tell you what to listen to, when to listen to it, and how much you should pay for it” (Scrivner). “Thou Shalt Not Pirate Thy Neighbor’s Songs,” by Graham Spanier and Cary H. Sherman, on the other hand, treats music as a collection of individual songs, each of which is someone’s intellectual property. The essay focuses on university students, who it says are mainly responsible for music

file-sharing, and explains why schools bear responsibility for stopping the practice.

The different life experiences of Scrivner, Spanier, and Sherman inform their divergent points of view. Michael Scrivner lives in Tucson, Arizona, supporting himself by doing tech support. He has been a volunteer staff writer for *2 Walls Webzine*, where his essay first appeared on February 15, 2004. In addition, he writes fiction and is the assistant editor of a small literary magazine. His background seems to indicate allegiance to technology and to grassroots movements rather than larger corporate entities. By contrast, Graham Spanier is the president of Pennsylvania State University and “a founding member of the Internet2 board and co-chair of the Committee on Higher Education and the Entertainment Industry” (Spanier and Sherman). In 2002, Spanier testified before Congress about file sharing. His coauthor, Cary H. Sherman, is president of the Recording Industry Association of America. Sherman wrote *Computer Software Protection Law* in 1989 and has been described as “one of the top copyright attorneys in the country” (Spanier and Sherman). Spanier also plays in a jazz band and hosts a radio talk show. Sherman is also a musician and songwriter. Aside from their identification with institutions from colleges to Congress, both men are have active, personal experience in creating music.

Correspondingly, Scrivner and the team of Spanier and Sherman understand music to fulfill different functions. To Scrivner, music is something romantic and ethereal, a form of “information” and “vibrations of air created by instruments and human voice, translated into meaningful patterns of harmony, melody, and rhythm by the human mind” (Scrivner). To Spanier and Sherman, music is a commodity, someone’s “intellectual property” that must be bought to be enjoyed (Spanier and Sherman). Scrivner treats that idea with scorn, claiming that record companies “want you to believe that music is a product, something to be consumed, that the \$18.99 you are spending is the legitimate purchase of the experience of that product” (Scrivner).

The authors’ points of view, more than their allegiances, reveal their values. Scrivner’s argument that Internet file sharing is necessary for the survival of music is a very personal, individualistic one. To Scrivner, the moment the song gets stuck in your head and you start singing or whistling along, it becomes yours: “There is nothing to steal in music except ‘the moment,’ that energy of inspiration, that unnamable force of ‘wow’ that makes good music good” (Scrivner). He contends that musicians intend this experience of music to be

“freely shared between musician and listener” and that, in eliminating the middleman by downloading music, young people are doing the natural and correct thing.

By contrast, Spanier and Sherman’s view on Internet file-sharing is that it is stealing to take something without paying for it. They argue in stark terms that “the promotion of theft, even in the digital age, should not be tolerated” (Spanier and Sherman). To support their point, they compare Internet file-sharing with plagiarism. They believe that “higher-education institutions all across the country view plagiarism as an issue on which they must intercede,” so “copyright infringement should be no different” (Spanier and Sherman). If colleges can make the moral decision to prohibit plagiarism, they should be able to prohibit copyright infringement too. Although Spanier and Sherman state flatly that “stealing intellectual property is wrong,” they also frame the question in terms of safety for the college (Spanier and Sherman). File-sharing threatens “the security and stability of a college or university’s competing infrastructure” because illegal files “bring malicious viruses, worms, and Trojan horses” (Spanier and Sherman). It is thus in the college’s interest to forbid it.

Scrivner argues that even if file-sharing is theft, it’s a benign and ultimately productive kind. It is “theft in the tradition of Robin Hood and the results of it are the natural exchange of ideas between people that make music what it is” (Scrivner).

Scrivner and Spanier and Sherman do all agree that musicians should be paid for their work, although for somewhat different reasons. Scrivner believes that musicians should be paid because “music enriches our lives, and those that produce it should be rewarded” (Scrivner). Spanier and Sherman, on the other hand, believe that artists should be compensated for their products.

Both essays rely strongly on research as well as values, personal beliefs, and the law to support their points. Scrivner alone, however, also discusses historical context, referring to the fact that “before compact discs, before cassettes and eight tracks and vinyl, before radio, hearing music live was the only way it was done” (Scrivner). He makes the analogy that music without “moment” would be empty, like “a scarecrow with no spine” (Scrivner). To this emotional argument, Scrivner also adds facts. He says “there has been no concrete proof offered so far that music downloading has caused financial loss for musicians” (Scrivner). Spanier and Sherman do not specifically use historical context, and they avoid emotional appeals. Instead they offer pragmatic solutions to the problem of Internet

file-sharing, suggesting the implementation of “anti-piracy hardware, software, or other means to prevent piracy” or adoption of “a legitimate service to offer students an alternative to stealing” (Spanier and Sherman). Their essay also provides evidence that these solutions can work: “70 colleges and universities across the country have adopted legitimate online services such as [the new] Napster, Cdigix, Ruckus, Rhapsody, and iTunes, to enable their students to acquire music and movies legally” (Spanier and Sherman).

In Scrivner’s view, record companies feel threatened because consumers have regained the ability to communicate directly with musicians. Scared of becoming obsolete and recognizing that they are losing “ground to technology” despite their “best efforts” and “injunctions and lawsuits,” companies are trying to regain control over the transaction (Scrivner). While Scrivner resents those actions, to Spanier and Sherman they are perfectly appropriate because people who bypass the industry and collect music straight from musicians are stealing. Although it’s easy to sympathize with Scrivner’s romantic view that music is by nature a wild thing, for now at least our society seems to be on Spanier and Sherman’s side—American law does recognize the monetary value of intellectual property. That may, of course, change once the generation that grew up on file-sharing takes over.

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# *Arguing a Position* 6

The essays in this chapter were written in response to the following assignment: *Write an essay on a controversial issue. Present the issue to readers, and develop an argument for the purpose of confirming, challenging, or changing your readers' views on the issue.*

# *Terrorists: The Gray Wolves*

Dustin Berg

In 1995, after many years of debate, fourteen wolves were released into Yellowstone National Park (Yeh). Again in 1996 another twenty-one wolves were released into the Yellowstone area (Peek). This was the start of a new ecology in Yellowstone that would eventually spread into the rest of Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, and even Utah. In 1997 the program was temporarily halted, but it resumed again in 2002 with the introduction of forty-one wolves (Yeh). The arrival of wolves has caused many changes in the ecosystem of Yellowstone, mostly for the worse. Measures should be taken to drastically reduce the number of wolves in Yellowstone and remove them completely from the surrounding areas.

Today there are more wolves than originally predicted. These wolves have killed countless cows and sheep and have caused a major decrease in the big game animal population. This has happened not only in Yellowstone but throughout Wyoming, Idaho, Montana, and now even Utah. When originally introduced, the wolves were expected to reach a population of no more than one hundred animals (Peek). Experts assured ranchers that with a population of less than one hundred, the wolves would have no reason to leave the park area and therefore would not be near cow and sheep herds. People were also assured that the new wolves would not cause any noticeable decline in game animal herds. So far, nothing has been done to sufficiently control the wolves.

The original cutoff of one hundred wolves in Yellowstone has long since been reached and surpassed. Five years ago there were a recorded 118 wolves in Yellowstone alone (Hinrichsen). Today wolves are thriving in the mountain west. Hundreds of these animals roam the mountains as well as the grasslands bordering them, and there has still been nothing done to keep them in check. Wolves started leaving the park



shortly after their release, following their natural tendencies. Wolves are pack animals. When a young male grows big enough to compete with the alpha male, one of two things happens: either one of the males is killed in a fight, or one male, normally the smaller, leaves to start his own pack. Wolves are also very territorial, so the departing wolf has to establish his own territory well away from that of his old pack. It is simple to see that when this happens, the wolves must spread out to new areas. This process happened again and again until Yellowstone was filled, and then the wolves began to migrate into other areas.

Because of their extremely large numbers, the wolves in and around Yellowstone have killed countless animals and scared herds away from prime feeding grounds. In the years before the reintroduction of the wolf, elk and other large grazing animals thrived in the park. Elk alone had an average herd size of 17,500. Since the wolves were released, the average population of an elk herd has dropped to under 8,300 (Peek). Not only do the wolves kill many animals, they also cause the herds to keep to open ground, where they can more easily watch for predators. When herds stay in open areas, feed becomes scarcer and fewer elk can be sustained. In addition, elk are more vulnerable to the elements away from the cover of the forest. Many of their young have a harder time coping with the cold winter wind on open ground, and this decreases the number of calves to replenish the herd in the coming spring.

Many supporters of the wolf reintroduction argue that the wolf should be left to its native habitat for moral reasons. This view is unfounded and does not take into account the true effect of the wolves. In the 1940s wolves had become all but extinct in the western states. This was due to the government's authorization to remove the wolves from the area (Yeh) in response to ranchers' complaints that they were unable to make a living while the wolves feasted on their stock. Nothing has changed: today ranchers still have to deal with the wolf as a major predator of their livestock. What's worse, until the wolf actually attacks, ranchers can do nothing to protect their herds; they often watch wolves walk toward their stock, powerless to intervene.

Wolves do not kill only the sick and the old, and they do not kill only for food. In my experience, the wolf has been given too much credit as a majestic creature. Not only do wolves kill everything they can catch, they seldom eat more than one animal, leaving the remaining carcasses to rot. It is not uncommon for a rancher to lose ten or more animals to one attack and find that only one has been eaten upon. The indiscriminate way that wolves kill livestock is no different

from the way they hunt any other animal on which they prey, be it elk, bison, moose, bighorn sheep, or deer. This fact is shown all too clearly by a case in which a pack of wolves killed seven sheep in the foothills of the Wind River Mountains just north of Farson, Wyoming; the pack returned the next night and killed six more. The owner of the sheep, Jim Magagna, said that “one of the ewes was eaten, and the rest were just ‘ripped up’” (Royster).

Soon after the wolf reintroduction began, it became clear that wolves would not stay within Yellowstone’s borders. As early as 1997 ranchers started to lose cattle to wolf attacks. Because of the ranchers’ concerns, the government started a fund to compensate ranchers for their animals that were lost to wolves (“Case Study”). Unfortunately, the complexity of the proving process made it nearly impossible to be granted compensation for lost animals, and very few wolf kills were compensated (Warchol). The loss of animals is an extreme financial burden for ranchers, and few people know how much the loss of even one or two cows or sheep can affect a rancher (Warchol). Wolves are spreading even farther now; not only have they caused great distress to the ranchers near Yellowstone, they now threaten cattle as far south as northern Utah. In 2001 they had made their way as far south as Pinedale, Wyoming (Warchol). This migration has taken place over the course of only six years, and now the wolves are extremely close to the Utah border, only one hundred and fifty miles away. From their rate of travel from the park in the last six years, they are likely to cover that distance in just a couple of years. The wolves will continue to spread until they reach unfavorable habitats.

The reasons to remove the wolf far outnumber those to allow it to spread. Wolves negatively affect every other animal in the northwestern states, be it wild or tame; they are just too destructive to co-exist with other animals.

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# *Terrorists: The Gray Wolves (Section Draft)*

Dustin Berg

[1]When originally introduced, the wolves were expected to reach a population which numbered no more than one hundred animals. (Peek) [2]On top of the population projections, experts assured ranchers that with a population of no more than one hundred, the wolves would have no reason to leave the park area, and therefore would not be anywhere close to cow and sheep herds. [3]Also, people were assured that the new wolves would not cause any noticeable decline in game animal herds. [4]Thus, the wolves were introduced, and today there are not only more wolves than originally predicted, but they have killed countless cows and sheep and caused a major decrease in the big game animal population. [5]Not only has this happened in Yellowstone but throughout Wyoming, Idaho, Montana, and now even Utah.

[6]Today wolves are thriving in the mountain west. [7]Hundreds of these animals roam the mountains as well as the grasslands bordering them. [8]The original cutoff of one hundred wolves in Yellowstone has long since been reached and surpassed. [9]Five years ago there were a recorded 118 wolves in Yellowstone alone, and there has still been nothing done to keep them in check. . . .

# *Terrorists: The Gray Wolves (Section Revision)*

Dustin Berg

Today there are more wolves than originally predicted. These wolves have killed countless cows and sheep and have caused a major decrease in the big game animal population. This has happened not only in Yellowstone but throughout Wyoming, Idaho, Montana, and now even Utah. When originally introduced, the wolves were expected to reach a population of no more than one hundred animals (Peek). Experts assured ranchers that with a population of less than one hundred, the wolves would have no reason to leave the park area and therefore would not be near cow and sheep herds. People were also assured that the new wolves would not cause any noticeable decline in game animal herds. So far, nothing has been done to sufficiently control the wolves.

The original cutoff of one hundred wolves in Yellowstone has long since been reached and surpassed. Five years ago there were a recorded 118 wolves in Yellowstone alone (Hinrichsen). Today wolves are thriving in the mountain west. Hundreds of these animals roam the mountains as well as the grasslands bordering them, and there has still been nothing done to keep them in check. . .

a. Dustin reorganized this paragraph to lead off with two facts crucial to his argument, which were buried in sentence 4 of the draft paragraph and run together as a single sentence. In the revision these facts are more prominent and immediately receive more attention.

b. Again, Dustin has divided a long, somewhat unwieldy, sentence in the draft (sentence 2) into two sentences that are easier to read.

c. Dustin again reorganizes to lead off this paragraph with two facts crucial to his argument. The final sentence included here combines elements of sentences 2 and 4 in the draft to make a more general point that summarizes Dustin's central case.

# *Sex Education in Schools*

Amber Dahlke

Few issues related to America's public secondary school system arouse more hostility and encompass more conflicting opinions than the topic of sex education. It is strange that in an era when the public and the media speak so openly about sex, we still debate when and how to introduce pre-teens and teenagers to the topic. Children, parents, teachers, principals, religious leaders, and legislators are in a constant battle over what should be taught in schools and how it should be approached. Attempts to find a common solution only reveal how tangled the discussion has become (Coeyman).

On one side of the argument is the "abstinence-only" approach. This curriculum requires teachers to teach that sexual intercourse out of wedlock is wrong, no matter what age the participants are. On the other side of the conflict is the "comprehensive sex education" approach. Teachers using this sex education style teach that abstinence is the best way to avoid sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancy, but also instruct students about safe sex practices (Landry et al.). In particular, they teach about contraceptives, demonstrating how to use them, describing how they prevent sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancy, and telling students where they can be obtained (Coeyman). The debate centers on how public funds should be spent—in trying to convince teens not to engage in sexual activity, or in educating them about the risks of unsafe sex (Landry et al.). Sex education in all junior and senior high schools in the United States should be comprehensive.

Sex education should be taught in a comprehensive style because this approach teaches students that abstinence is the best way to avoid sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies, while also teaching them tactics for reducing risks if they do engage in sexual activity. The American Medical Association, the American Academy of

Pediatrics, and the National Academy of Sciences endorse comprehensive sex education for students because it encourages them to have fewer sexual partners and to use condoms, birth control, and other methods to prevent disease and pregnancy. Students are taught that having sex for the first time is something that they should wait until they are emotionally and physically ready for. According to a study in the journal *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, young people who are taught using comprehensive sex education methods are more likely to use protection when engaging in intercourse later in life (Landry et al.).

Another reason that comprehensive sex education should be taught is the number of unwed pregnant teenagers. The United States has twice the teenage pregnancies of any other Western industrialized country. At least one million American women between the ages of fifteen and nineteen become pregnant each year. Seventy-six percent of these women are unwed. The percentage of American mothers between ages fifteen and seventeen who were unmarried when they gave birth has more than tripled in the past fifty years to eighty-four percent. The average age at which young women go through puberty is twelve, and the average age they marry is twenty-five. This leaves a thirteen-year gap in which a young woman might have sex. Out-of-wedlock births are on the rise because many teenagers are not being taught the importance of contraception and other safe sex tactics (Koch).

A final reason that a comprehensive sex education is important is that teenagers as a class contract sexually transmitted diseases at the second highest rate in the United States; every fourth teenager is infected with a sexually transmitted disease by the age of twenty-one (DeCarlo). Teenagers in the United States are one hundred times more likely to contract a sexually transmitted disease than teenagers in any other industrialized country in the world. The number of HIV/AIDS infections among teenagers is rapidly rising. Studies show that three million new AIDS cases are being treated in thirteen- to twenty-four-year-olds per year. It is estimated that one in every four teenagers will contract the HIV/AIDS virus before reaching age twenty-two (DeCarlo). Teenagers also run the risk of contracting one of more than twenty new sexually transmitted diseases discovered in the last forty years (Koch). These staggering statistics proving that teenagers are having unprotected sex show that a comprehensive sex education style is necessary to disseminate knowledge about sexually transmitted diseases and their prevention.

Currently, conventional political leaders are supporting abstinence-only sex education as the best way to lower teen pregnancy rates and the occurrences of sexually transmitted diseases. President Bill Clinton signed the Welfare Reform Act of 1996, which provided fifty million dollars per year to fund abstinence-only education. The Bush administration increased that amount to \$135 million dollars in 2004. Any state that uses the funds must agree to promote abstinence-only education. With ninety-five percent of schools teaching some sort of sex education, the percentage of abstinence-only education is increasing as the funds for sex education become increasingly earmarked for abstinence-only curricula (Coeyman). Only sixty-five percent of principals report that their schools teach comprehensive sex education, even though eighty-five percent of Americans prefer that teaching style (“Strategic Thinking”). The result of the increase in abstinence-only sex education is that students are being denied valuable health information that could improve or even save their lives (Van Dorn).

Many people believe that comprehensive sex education increases sexual activity among teenagers and that teaching kids about sex suggests that having sex at a young age is okay. Overwhelming numbers of studies confirm that this is a misconception (Koch). Still, out of the ninety-five percent of Americans who believe that some type of sex education should be taught in schools, fifty-five percent believe that providing adolescents and pre-adolescents with information about safe sex will make them curious and more likely to engage in sexual activities earlier than they would have otherwise (“Sex Education in America”). They claim that providing teenagers with information about sex and distributing condoms and information about where to obtain contraception without parental knowledge gives them permission to have sex. On the contrary, studies done six to twelve months after a comprehensive sex education course show that teenagers are postponing sexual activity and reducing their numbers of sexual partners dramatically (Koch). As Douglas Kirby, who leads the Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, puts it, “Sexuality and HIV education curricula do not increase sexual intercourse, either by hastening the onset of intercourse, increasing the frequency of intercourse or increasing the number of sexual partners” (Koch). The research demonstrates that comprehensive sex education aids teenagers in making wise choices regarding sexual intercourse.

It is important to encourage adolescents to choose abstinence but also to provide those who do choose to engage in sexual activity



with the information they need to do so safely. According to Betsy Van Dorn, “A national task force of health, education, and sexuality professionals believes that an issue as multi-faceted as sex requires a multi-targeted approach. Teaching abstinence is a significant piece of the puzzle, but ‘just say no’ may be lost on students who are already sexually active.” In many ways, the abstinence-only curriculum is the opposite of the comprehensive sex education that most people in the United States prefer. Seventy-seven percent of Americans believe that comprehensive sex education will encourage teens to practice safe sex practices now or later in life (Coeyman). Studies prove that teaching kids about sex will help them make better decisions concerning multiple partners, the use of condoms, and other methods for protecting against diseases (Koch).

The parents who prefer comprehensive sex education believe that their children should be taught more than the basic reproductive facts. The millions of teenage pregnancies and cases of sexually transmitted diseases point to the dire need for teenagers to have information about how to resist the pressure to have sex, how to protect themselves from unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, and where to go for counseling and support (Van Dorn). It is time for educators, parents, and policy makers to stop misconstruing ideas about sex education based on the numbers of sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies. We can no longer ignore the need for education both on how to postpone involvement and on how to protect oneself when the time does come to engage in sex (DeCarlo).

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# *What's the Stink All About?*

Carrie Schipper

Have you ever driven down the road and thought, “What’s that smell?” Most likely it was a hog confinement. The number of hog confinements in Iowa and throughout the country has increased dramatically over the past few years. Iowa leads the nation in pork production with around fifteen million hogs. That is about five hogs for every one person in the state. All but seven of Iowa’s ninety-nine counties have more hogs than people (McCormick). Even though a majority of people oppose large hog confinements, they offer many benefits to the farmers and the economy. Hog confinements provide farmers with extra income, lower farm production costs, and boost state economies.

Iowa is the number-one producer of hogs in the nation. Iowa’s farmers raise about twenty-two percent of the country’s hogs. Pork production in Iowa has become more concentrated over the last several decades. The number of farms raising pigs has declined from 90,000 in 1970 to 18,000 in 1996, but the number of hogs per farm has increased from 180 to 778 (Freese). This increase is due in part to the decline of the family farm and the rise of hog confinements. Many farmers decide to run hog confinements because it provides them with extra income. Most confinements are actually owned by larger companies and only managed by the farmer. Usually the company buys the land from the farmer, who is then hired to manage the site. The companies provide the pigs, medication, feed, and technical advice (Barnes). The average site usually consists of two to three buildings, each housing around twelve hundred pigs. Farmers can earn anywhere between \$11,000 and \$18,000 per year, depending on whether or not they load or unload the pigs (Schipper). Two of the main hog companies in Iowa are Iowa Select Farms, located in Iowa Falls, and Heartland Pork Enterprises, Inc., located in Alden. Between 1995 and 1997, Heartland Pork alone built twenty-two

sites in Butler, Bremer, Chickasaw, and Floyd counties (Phelps and Wagner).

Hog confinements offer many benefits to farmers. Even though many people despise the thought of manure, farmers see it as a blessing. Manure contains many nutrients such as nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium, essential elements that replenish the soil for the next year's corn and soybean crops (*Iowa Pork Producers*). By using manure as fertilizer instead of purchasing costly commercial fertilizer preparations from elevators, farmers can save an average of seventy dollars an acre (Schipper).

The pork industry has a huge impact on the Iowa economy. It generates twelve billion dollars a year, five percent of Iowa's total economic impact. It also provides jobs for more than 65,000 Iowans: veterinarians, agronomists, truck drivers, feed suppliers, equipment manufacturers, financial lenders, marketing specialists, and meat managers. The pork industry also helps keep businesses and rural communities flourishing. Pork producers purchase feed, building equipment, machinery, gas, energy, and other essentials from local suppliers. Pork production also provides a market for more than 30 percent of Iowa's corn and soybeans. Swine feed requires both corn and soybeans—corn for energy and soybean meal for protein. The largest market for corn and beans is the hog industry in Iowa (*Iowa Pork Producers*).

Hog confinements also bring in tax dollars. Local, state, and property taxes contribute more than seventy million dollars to the state's rural economy. Every pig in Iowa results in an additional \$2.75 in local tax revenue, which benefits communities and schools. The property, income, and sales taxes from the pork industry fund local schools, neighborhood improvement projects, county road maintenance, and other public service programs (*Iowa Pork Producers*).

Many people oppose hog confinements because they feel that they are built too close to existing structures or water sources. However, state law requires that confinement operations must be built at least five hundred feet away from a water source, one thousand feet away from a major water source, and two thousand feet away from a designated wetland. Opponents feel that manure runoffs contaminate the water. All large confinement owners, however, must submit manure management plans to the county board of supervisors detailing how they will dispose of the manure properly. According to Iowa state law, manure may not be applied on land located within two hundred feet of a known sinkhole, an abandoned well, an unplugged agricultural drainage well, an agricultural drainage well surface inlet, a drinking water well, a

designated wetland, or a water source (*Code of Iowa*). State laws are much more environmentally aware than they used to be. This results in less manure runoff and contamination of drinking water.

Another reason people oppose hog confinements is that they believe it is unsafe and cruel to the animals to keep them penned all the time. Most farrowing facilities keep pregnant sows confined in metal stalls two feet wide by seven feet long. Shortly before the sows give birth, they are moved to slightly larger stalls. Hog farmers believe this is better for the sows; they say isolating sows allows farmers to give them more individual attention and gives farmers better control over the sows' environment. Sows are known to bite each other and fight for feed, and the stalls are a way to ensure that every sow is kept safe and given the proper amount of feed (Perkins).

The main reason people oppose hog confinements is the smell. They believe that the smell and emissions from confinements present health hazards. So far, the research has been inconclusive: there is no direct link between hog confinements and health problems. The main cause of health problems among hog confinement workers seems to be hydrogen sulfide from manure. It has been known to kill hogs and people, but only when ventilation systems have failed or when a farmer went into a pit without an oxygen mask (Perry).

Most people who complain about the number of hog confinements and their smell are those who have moved from the city to the country. The general public has an idyllic image of a farm: a farmer raising a few animals and tending to a few hundred acres. Farmers now have to farm thousands of acres and raise large numbers of livestock to keep out of debt. Without hog confinements, there simply would not be enough farms to raise all the hogs we need. If everyone who lived in the country raised hogs, the demand would be met, but that is just not possible anymore, in part because so many country dwellers are originally from the city and have no idea how to raise hogs (Ragsdale).

Even though odor is a drawback of hog confinements, steps are being taken to lessen it. Much research has been conducted on reducing or eliminating the odor from hog farming. One study led to the discovery of microbials, food additives that can reduce the amounts of odor-causing fatty acids and ammonia in the manure. In addition to reducing odors, microbials also trim down cleanup time and reduce nitrogen loss (Freese). Manure-free hog units are also being planned. These units would remove and treat waste from the facilities daily, doing away with the need for storage lagoons. The system would separate the solids from the liquids in the waste and flush the buildings. The solids would

be used as crop fertilizer, and the water would be atomized and then dispersed. The new facilities would be more environmentally friendly and would also reduce fertilizer application costs (Perkins).

Hog confinements are a benefit to farmers and the economy. They provide farmers with extra money and lower their production costs. Hog confinements also provide Iowans with many jobs as well as taxes that help improve communities and schools, and they boost local economies. Without hog confinements, Iowa would have great financial difficulty. Although many people oppose them for a variety of reasons, their benefits definitely outweigh their costs. Hog confinements are the reason rural communities in Iowa continue to survive.

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# *An Indecent Proposal*

Ashley Mills

Dusk fell some time ago on the 2004 presidential election, when George Bush defeated John Kerry. Two major issues on the presidential platform that year were the legalization of gay marriage and the war in Iraq. Homosexuality, which has existed for the whole of human history, has come a long way in terms of societal awareness and even acceptance. Like adultery and conceiving a child out of wedlock, homosexuality was once something people only whispered about. Even now, although gay citizens have traveled quite a way by standing up for their rights, the path to equality still stretches on into the distance. Homosexual Americans are just like heterosexual Americans and should be treated as such and afforded the same rights. Equality is a principle that every human being deserves, a principle that every group of people (African Americans, women, and now homosexuals) is willing to fight for. Gay marriage should be legalized and I am going to tell you why.

Is homosexuality biological, or is it chosen? A question you should ask yourself when considering this popular debate is, "What does it feel like to be homosexual in a heterosexual culture?" (Myers). One way for heterosexuals to answer this question is to think about how they would feel if they were shunned or discriminated against for acknowledging or showing their feelings toward a member of the opposite sex, or if they overheard people making rough jokes about heterosexuals. How would they feel if most television shows, movies, and advertisements starred homosexuals, or if their family members pressured them to become homosexual? Although some people claim that homosexuality is a chosen lifestyle, to do so they must ignore the fact that homosexuals often try to deny their sexual orientation. They may use psychotherapy, willpower, or prayer, but their feelings stay the same. Just as heterosexuals are incapable of

becoming homosexuals, homosexuals are incapable of becoming heterosexuals (Myers).

While studying sections of the hypothalamus of deceased homosexual and heterosexual people in 1991, scientist Simon LeVay found that sexual orientation is at least partly biological. He discovered a cell cluster that was noticeably larger in heterosexual men than in women and homosexual men. A year later, Laura Allen and Roger Gorski provided more evidence that brain anatomy influences sexual orientation. They discovered that a section of the anterior commissure (fibers that join the right and left hemispheres of the brain) is one-third larger in homosexual men than in heterosexual men. In 1994, Brian Glauze noted that “the emerging neuroanatomical picture is that, in some brain areas, homosexual men are more likely to have female-typical neuroanatomy than are heterosexual men” (Myers).

Another avenue of research used to find out if homosexuality is chosen or biological is the study of prenatal hormones’ possible influence on sexual orientation. A few tests have shown that homosexual men have spatial abilities more like those of heterosexual women than like those of heterosexual men, which supports the hypothesis that homosexuals are exposed to atypical prenatal hormones. In other studies, gay men have been shown to possess fingerprint patterns similar to those of heterosexual women. A majority of people have more fingerprint ridges on their right hands than on their left hands. In 1994, Jeff Hall and Doreen Kimura saw that the difference between the numbers of ridges on right and left hands was greater for heterosexual men than for women and homosexual men. Since fingerprint ridges are normally finished forming by the sixteenth fetal week, researchers think that the difference is caused by prenatal hormones. This theory of prenatal hormones affecting sexual orientation also provides a possible reason why data from twenty studies showed that homosexual participants had 39 percent greater odds of being left-handed. It has also been shown that lesbians have more male-typical anatomy. For example, the cochlea, the auditory branch of the inner ear, in homosexual women has a unique shape, intermediate between that found in heterosexual females and that found in heterosexual males. This, too, gives credence to the idea of prenatal hormones’ influence on sexual orientation. As David Myers concludes, “Regardless of the process, the consistency of the genetic, prenatal, and brain findings has swung the pendulum toward a biological explanation. Nature more than nurture, most psychiatrists now believe, predisposes sexual orientation.”



Opponents of gay marriage offer several reasons for their position. One is that a ban on gay marriage will “protect the institution of marriage.” People who make this argument believe that homosexuals would be more likely to commit adultery or get divorced than their heterosexual counterparts. Has the possibility that a heterosexual couple might cheat or get divorced ever allowed us to take the right to marry away from them? The same principle must apply to homosexual marriages. Greg Marcy and Barak Ben-Gail, taking the position of devil’s advocate in “The Devil’s Advocate Examines Gay Marriage,” articulate another argument of many gay marriage opponents: that homosexuality is an evil on a par with polygamy or incest. They ask, “Why should loving, committed, polygamous groups of communes not be legally married? What is so special about the number ‘two’? Recent studies question the validity of higher rates of disease and birth defects among children of incest. Should we allow marriage among loving, committed relatives?” The logic of this stance is flawed: fundamental differences exist between gay marriage and polygamous or incestuous marriage. Homosexuals are simply fighting for a right given to all heterosexuals, the right for one person to marry the person he or she loves and be legally recognized as married by the government. Max Boot calls the argument expressed by Marcy and Ben-Gail “the slippery slope” and shows how it could be applied to any act: “Traditionalists have tried to put forward various nonmoral arguments against gay marriage, but none is particularly convincing. . . . [One] argument is the slippery slope—first gay marriage gets legalized, then polygamy, pederasty, incest, and who knows what. But this kind of *reductio ad absurdum* can be applied to just about anything. If liquor is legal for adults, why not for children?” (Boot).

Legalizing gay marriage would help reduce hate crimes against homosexuals. Government approval giving homosexual marriage legal equivalence to heterosexual marriage would in time change the general social attitude. An example of how time and the approval of the government can alter the face of society took place in 1957 in Little Rock, Arkansas. Nine African American students became the “first black teenagers to attend the all-white Central High School” (Brunner). Even though segregation had been outlawed in schools as a result of *Brown v. Board of Education*, black students were still intimidated and threatened in desegregated schools. On the first day that the young African Americans were to attend Central High, the Arkansas governor called in the state’s National Guard to block the entrance of the school and prevent the black teenagers from entering. President Eisenhower

dispersed federal troops to protect the students. Although they were allowed into the school, every morning after that they were confronted with insults and death threats on their way there (Brunner). Society has come far since that day in acceptance of African Americans as equals, although we still have more road left to travel on this issue. A similar result would come from the legalization of gay marriage. With time and effort, people and society would come to accept homosexuals as equal to heterosexuals, and hate crimes would decrease, just as they did after African American integration.

Another point to consider is the underlying meaning of *hate crime*. A crime is an injustice done to someone, and the phrase *hate crime* indicates an injustice done to someone because of race, religion, sexual orientation, gender, or ethnicity. Banning gay marriage could be construed as the government committing a hate crime against its own people—not allowing homosexual citizens to marry is an injustice done to them because of their sexual orientation. Our country, which has been so appalled by the crimes of foreign leaders such as Saddam Hussein, should recall that America is known as the land of the free, where citizens are not persecuted for simply being who they are.

*Religion.* That single word holds enormous power in the debate over gay marriage. Opponents of gay marriage say that homosexuality is going against God, and that because of this gay marriage must not be legalized. What about marriage between two heterosexual people who are agnostic or atheist? By the same logic, such unions would be considered “against God,” yet no one is fighting to stop them. Barak Ben-Gail, taking the affirmative position in “The Devil’s Advocate Examines Gay Marriage,” writes that “religious marriage doesn’t hold any weight in the United States when it comes to the nearly 1,200 legal rights that are afforded to heterosexual couples.” Separation of church and state should prevail in marriage as in anything else. On March 14, 2005, Richard Kramer, a San Francisco Superior Court judge, ruled that California’s statutory ban on same-sex marriage was an infringement of the civil rights allotted by its constitution. Judge Kramer’s twenty-seven-page decision angered many people who are against gay marriage. The first step of their counterstrike was to mar the judge’s reputation. However, the judge, a fifty-seven-year-old Roman Catholic and a registered Republican, cannot be easily discredited. “No rational basis,” Kramer says, “exists for limiting marriage in this state to opposite-sex partners” (“Simply Put”).

Family dynamics is another important part of the debate over gay marriage. Many opponents of gay marriage argue that children born

into or adopted into gay households will be the subject of ridicule and teasing in school. There is no available evidence that shows that children are psychologically or physically harmed by having gay parents. However, there is a lot of evidence showing the opposite: that children are not harmed in any way by having gay parents (“Facts and Figures”). Some people say that if children have gay parents they will “become” gay. Research, however, has proven them wrong, showing that people with homosexual parents have the same incidence of homosexuality as the rest of the population. Gay marriage protestors also say that if children have homosexual parents, they will lead unbalanced and maladjusted lives, yet “on measures of psychosocial well-being, school functioning, and romantic relationships and behaviors, teens with same-sex parents are as well-adjusted as their peers with opposite-sex parents. A more important predictor of teens’ psychological and social adjustment is the quality of the relationships they have with their parents” (“Facts and Figures”). When it comes to raising children well, what matters isn’t that they have both a mother and a father. What matters is that they are raised in a household of love.

The legalization of gay marriage is a multifaceted topic that requires much consideration. From family dynamics to the institution of marriage to religion to civil rights to hate crimes, homosexual marriage has proven itself to be one of the major controversies of our time. Not only is banning gay marriage an infringement of homosexuals’ civil rights, it is also an infringement of their rights as human beings. We are here on earth to learn and to love, and banning gay marriage is taking the right to love away from someone. Fight against the injustice.

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# *Proposing a Solution* 7

The essays in this chapter were written in response to the following assignment: *Write an essay proposing a solution to a problem. Choose a problem faced by a community or group to which you belong, and address your proposal to one or more members of the group or to outsiders who might help solve the problem.*

# *Zero Tolerance: Harsh but Worth It*

Chris Horsley

Binge-drinking deaths and other alcohol-related problems, including alcohol-related violence and rape, are becoming more and more common on college campuses. In one sad incident, a University of Virginia senior named Leslie Ann Baltz died after falling down a flight of stairs. Her death is said to have been the result of a college ritual called the “fourth-year fifth,” which involves downing a fifth of liquor before the football team’s last home game. Reports from the hospital showed her blood level was .27—three times the state’s legal limit (Scrivo). Students who commented on Baltz’s death said it did affect their outlook on drinking but that it would not change their drinking habits (Scrivo).

College is an exciting part of many people’s lives. For some people part of that excitement is fraternity life. Many students will do anything to get into a fraternity, and year after year there are reports of students dying while pledging fraternities—many of these incidents involve alcohol. One incident at the Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity at Louisiana State University took the life of Benjamin Wynne. Reports showed his alcohol level was .58, about six times the legal limit (Scrivo).

Deaths are not the only negative outcome of alcohol abuse by college students. The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism has said that in addition to 1,400 deaths, alcohol abuse causes 500,000 injuries, 600,000 assaults, and 70,000 sexual assaults or date rapes every year on college campuses. Alcohol-fueled riots are a common problem at sports events and other social activities (Gruenewald and Saltz). At Washington University, two security guards were injured in a fight on fraternity row (Munz). This incident seems particularly worrisome; if drunken students don’t respect the authority of security guards, there is no telling who can control

them. Just from these few examples and statistics it is clear that alcohol abuse on college campuses is a negative thing and that we need to find a way to stop it. The question is how.

First, let's look at a few proposed solutions. One is lowering the legal drinking age, which would allow many more students to access alcohol. Most college students are eighteen or older, so lowering the age to eighteen would allow most students to legally purchase alcohol. Advocates of this approach argue that it would mean that sneaking alcohol onto campus and hiding it would no longer be an issue. However, if the legal drinking age were lowered, more students would drink on campus, and alcohol-related problems would be likely to increase. We have already seen this trend back in the 1970s, when the legal drinking age was lowered to eighteen; reports showed that alcohol abuse among teenagers began to rise (Scriver). This evidence proves that lowering the drinking age would not be an effective solution to the problem.

Many schools are trying to regulate on-campus drinking. Wesley Perkins, a sociology professor at Hobart and Williams College, said that students "aren't thinking about health if they are 18 to 34 years old. They are thinking about their social life" (Munz). Instituting a bar on campus is one way to teach students responsible social drinking through moderation. Colby College in Maine has already installed a bar off the main dining hall, where legal-aged drinkers can order food and a few drinks. Students must show I.D. and pay for what they order, and each student is limited to two drinks. Student Christian Allen comments, "Drinking alcohol with food definitely teaches you to drink properly in a normal social scene, as opposed to, say, more competitive drinking" (Baron). The director of college studies at Harvard University's Department of Health and Social Behavior disagrees that the distribution of alcohol on campus will reduce alcohol-related problems, saying, "If you let them drink on campus, it doesn't mean they'll only drink on campus" (Scriver). A Rhode Island college has tried the approach of permitting but regulating alcohol use on campus. Legal drinkers are allowed one six-pack in their rooms at a time. The school has reported a decrease in alcohol-related problems (Scriver), but enforcement seems nearly impossible, and this rule still allows alcohol on campus.

One simple, easy-to-follow solution that will prevent alcohol problems is to ban drinking on campus altogether. Colleges should consider implementing such a zero-tolerance policy. Anyone caught in violation of the policy would lose the right to live on campus.

A student who violates it twice would be expelled from school. Though this policy may sound harsh, it is supported by the results of a survey given to a thousand college presidents by *U.S. News & World Report*, which showed that schools that allow drinking on campus were three times more likely to have high percentages of binge drinkers (Scrivo). A zero-tolerance policy would curb binge drinking and lower the number of alcohol-related incidents on campus.

Research done by H. Wesley Perkins on the “social-norm campaign,” a zero-tolerance program many colleges are trying, revealed that it decreased not only alcohol-related deaths but also property damage, missing classes, and unprotected sex by 30 to 40 percent (Munz). From these examples we can see that a policy that bans alcohol will improve the campus environment.

Implementing a zero-tolerance policy is simple. As part of registration, have students sign an agreement to follow the policy. If students are in violation, they are subject to being kicked out of student housing and, for a second offense, expelled. Doing this would make students more aware of their actions and encourage them to be more responsible. It would clean up the campus and the problems would decrease.

In conclusion, zero tolerance is the best solution. The others discussed here are good but not effective enough. Regulating alcohol still allows access to it on campus—putting in school-sponsored bars just promotes drinking, and limiting alcohol possession on campus is impossible to enforce. Banning alcohol entirely will make college environments safer by reducing the number of alcohol-related problems on campus.

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# *The Lifesaver*

Emily Timperman

NASCAR racing is dangerous. Even just *watching* a race can be hazardous to your health. But the thrill gets you every time. In this sport, as in any other, the quest to be the best overcomes all. But with several big-name drivers killed in the past few years, the safety of NASCAR drivers has come under great scrutiny. People often ask if NASCAR officials are doing all they can to prevent deaths and serious injuries. Drivers are currently required or strongly encouraged by NASCAR to wear helmets, five-point safety harnesses, fireproof suits, and fireproof gloves. Since the death of racing legend Dale Earnhardt, much consideration has been given to mandating some sort of head and neck restraint system as well.

The HANS device, short for head and neck support, is that restraining system. In the event of a wreck, the device is “designed to limit the extreme front to back and side-to-side movement of the head and neck during a violent crash” (Ryan, *Should NASCAR*). In its current form, the HANS device works in conjunction with the seat to keep the head from flying forward in the event of a crash. During any automobile crash, the body must come to a stop very abruptly. At 190 miles per hour, there is very little distance or time to stop the body. Currently in race crashes, the safety harness slows the body down quickly, while the head keeps traveling forward, causing the neck to snap violently. More than eighty Gs of force are placed on the body in such a crash, and when the head is unrestrained, the neck must stop the equivalent of 1,200 pounds. The force the neck can withstand without injury is 740 pounds (*HANS Device*). The HANS device works to slow the head and neck at the same rate as the body and can limit the force on the neck to 20 percent of what it would be without head restraint (Ryan, *History*).

Drivers have been fighting the mandatory use of a head and neck restraint for some time. They wonder how NASCAR can mandate a

device that must be tailored to each driver. To me, the answer is clear. NASCAR is trying to keep its drivers as safe as possible. The use of a head and neck restraint system can save lives in the event of a high-speed crash. The HANS device has proved to lessen the force exerted on the head. According to co-creator Bob Hubbard, "Perhaps the most compelling fact about the HANS Device is that not a single driver who has worn one in a crash has suffered a neck or head injury. With more than 250 units currently in use, the HANS Device works every time" (Ryan, *Should NASCAR*). "I won't wear one of those devices for anything," NASCAR driver Mark Martin has said. "I can tell just by looking at it I wouldn't wear it. It's just not for me—I'm not even going to tinker with it" ("*Reluctant Drivers*"). Driver Tony Stewart also commented, "I think a head and neck restraint is a good idea. . . . But I also believe that [it] has to be right for each individual driver. What is right for one person may not be right for another." Tony continued, "I want to wear something, but I haven't found anything yet that I'm comfortable with" (Smith). The current design is in the process of being customized for NASCAR.

The current cost of the HANS device, from twelve hundred to two thousand dollars, seems like a small price to pay for the added protection that the device provides. Crash testing in race settings has provided some startling evidence: "It seems that Mercedes Benz had gotten hold of a broken original HANS. . . . Mercedes Benz had been working on an elaborate air bag system. . . . It was very expensive. When they crash tested the HANS against their own air bag system, the results were amazing. The broken and repaired prototype of the HANS provided as much protection as their elaborate air bag system, and in some areas [it] was better. . . . [It] works impact after impact. . . . [The tests] proved once again the value of the HANS" (Ryan).

Because of these tests and others proving the device's effectiveness, the decision should be clear. This device has more than proven itself as a good thing. The HANS device has never been proven harmful and reduces the force that the head and neck must sustain in the event of a crash. The device is mandatory in the Indy Racing, Formula 1, and Cart Racing leagues. Next season it will also be required by the American Speed Association. Why hasn't NASCAR followed suit? In the rules of NASCAR, many things are left up to the drivers, though they may be strongly recommended by officials. In the 2001 rulebook, even fireproof suits aren't requirements, just strong recommendations. This is one of the reasons NASCAR hasn't

mandated the restraint system yet: the league likes to pride itself on giving drivers a lot of leeway, to race instead of put on a show.

The opposition has some concerns also. Some worry that in the event of a crash, the HANS device may hinder the driver's ability to get out of the car quickly. Addressing this issue, NASCAR officials have allowed the window opening to be enlarged to make it easier for drivers wearing the device to slip out. Another concern is fit. In its original form, the device could be ordered in only three sizes—small, medium, and large. But racers have found that to be worn comfortably over the course of a five-hour race, the device must be customized. Stacy Compton, who is six-foot-two, has said, "When I had [the device] on, I had to lean forward the entire time to fit into it. Over a five-hour race, that's not going to work." Even smaller drivers find that the device chafes. But drivers who are unable to wear the current model shouldn't rule out the possibility of using improved future models.

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# *Keeping Baseball Competitive*

Jaimee Troth

Professional baseball has taken a dive in the last decade. It went from being America's pastime to a game played by greedy athletes controlled by overpowering owners. The strike of 1994, the third baseball strike and arguably the most devastating because it caused the cancellation of that year's World Series, marked the end of baseball as a sport and the beginning of baseball as a business. As Major League Baseball becomes more business oriented, it also becomes competitive between fewer teams. Between 1995 and 2005, only thirteen different teams played in the World Series. To make major league baseball competitive once again, the league needs to develop a better system of revenue sharing.

When most people think of baseball they automatically think of the Yankees, the Red Sox, or some other well-known franchise that is among the league's perennial winners. The problem is that there are increasingly fewer of these winning teams. Here's what happens: A team begins to win, attracting fans, who buy tickets and other merchandise. Ticket and merchandise sales pay for television time, which fuels more revenue, which is spent on talented, high-priced athletes. Talented players drive a team's success, triggering more revenue. Over time, the team accumulates talent. This cycle leaves a drought of talented players for other teams. Think of the Yankees and the Montreal Expos. The Yankees' broadcast and ticket revenues for 1999 were more than \$100 million more than the Expos' (Costas 72). This in the long run makes it impossible for smaller teams such as the Expos to compete with monster teams like the Yankees. Organizations that don't have the money to buy talented players and crafty coaches simply cannot compete with those that do.

This issue was part of both the strike in 1994 and the threat of a strike in 2002. Although there are other issues involved in these

strikes, the revenue gap is one that can be easily fixed. The solution is a plan of revenue sharing, in which teams with large amounts of money such as the Yankees, Red Sox, Mets, and Dodgers give a portion of their earnings to lower-revenue clubs such as the Brewers, Marlins, and Devil Rays. The plan is simple: it is a “Robin Hood scheme that takes from the rich and gives to the poor” (Costas 64). Such a “Robin Hood scheme” would even the playing field by allowing lower-revenue teams to purchase more expensive and more talented players. Now games are frequently between a team with a line-up of all-stars and another with a line-up of wannabes and has-beens. This can cause fans not to watch when they know their team is going to lose. If each team has two or three good players, competition between all teams will be more even, making for better baseball.

A revenue-sharing plan would also help low-market teams retain the talented players that they develop over the years. The Montreal Expos have developed some of the league’s premier players, including Cy Young winners Randy Johnson and Pedro Martinez, but the Expos didn’t have the money to keep them. Mike Piazza, catcher for the San Diego Padres, has said that revenue sharing gives low-revenue teams “the resources to retain some of the players they have developed and maybe add a piece here or there” (Heath A1).

Many people object to the revenue-sharing solution for several reasons. The owners of the high-revenue franchises object to giving away money that their teams have earned. However, if the sport does not stay competitive, fans will no longer want to watch or attend games—even “up-market fans have been deserting, driven away by clapped-out ballparks and lackluster games” (*Economist*). This lack of attendance affects not only the organizations themselves but also the advertisers who support them. Big-market owners must “understand that increasing revenue sharing is as crucial to them in the long run as it is to small-market teams in the short term” (Costas 70). Revenue sharing may hurt big teams at first, but in the end every team will benefit from increased profit due to the revival of competitive games.

Another objection to revenue sharing by high-revenue organizations is that the lower-revenue teams may use the money they receive as they please. With the revenue-sharing that is in effect today, teams are not using the shared money to sign starting players to improve their rosters. Some teams such as the Expos, Reds, and A’s have actually lowered their payrolls by getting rid of their starting players, which causes them to be out of the pennant race by Labor Day (Badenhausen 112). Instead, the teams may use shared revenue on

maintaining and improving ballparks, leaving owners like George Steinbrenner of the New York Yankees to ask, “Why should [I] fork over more Yankee dough to them?” (Badenhausen 112). The solution to this problem would be to create a binding agreement on how the money shared with lower-revenue teams must be used.

An additional issue that can arise from revenue sharing is that it encourages high-revenue teams to try to generate even more money so they can overpower the teams they give their money to. This directly affects the fans: in the 2003 season the Red Sox raised their ticket prices by about seven percent (Hohler E1). The inflation in ticket prices is due to revenue sharing. To stay financially competitive the Red Sox must pass the cost of revenue sharing on to their fans. If the team does not generate even more money to offset the shared revenue, it becomes less competitive on the field and eventually loses money.

Although there are other problems in baseball that are related to its lack of competitiveness, revenue sharing could correct a large part of the current player dissatisfaction that initiates strikes. These changes alone “wouldn’t eliminate the revenue gap, but they’d give the smaller markets a fighting chance” (Costas 72). For this to work, Major League Baseball teams must cooperate with one another. Baltimore Orioles manager Peter Angelos has said that “Baseball is a contest, a game, there has to be competition. If there isn’t [fans] lose interest.” Revenue sharing is a large part of the solution to the unbalanced playing field that baseball has created; it “go[es] a long way toward bringing baseball closer to the true meritocracy that any other sports league should be” (Costas 79). Revenue sharing has worked in professional football. Teams in the National Football League share revenue generated by ticket sales and television broadcasts. Now every new year starts fresh, and any team can be dangerous. The same can happen in professional baseball. It is time for the sport to be reborn into a blood-thirsty battle between new teams and old rivals. If baseball can reignite the drive to win, the sport will be saved.

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# *Missing the Fun*

Molly Coleman

The spectators are on the edges of their seats. The homecoming king and queen are about to be announced. The announcement will be followed by the football game. Everyone in the stands is talking excitedly about who they voted for, what the homecoming court's dresses look like, and where the party is after the game. Everyone, that is, but you. Your Friday night consists of a swim meet. The meet is an hour and a half away, which means that even if it ends early, you won't make it back for the pep rally or the game. Each year, many high school athletes are torn between their social lives and their teams. Many high schools create this strain on their athletes by planning too many events for the same day. If schools submitted a list of blackout dates to the Illinois High School Association (IHSA), schedules could be devised that minimize overlap with other high school events.

Time conflicts between sports and social events are nothing new. Most high school athletes know what it's like to have a meet or a game when all their friends are at another high school event. Coaches know what it's like as well, since ditching practices and even games on the day of a major social event is common among players. If there weren't conflicts in sports schedules, high school athletes would be able to participate in sports without sacrificing other high school events. Students could enjoy the social aspect of high school as well as play sports. Athletes could fully focus on their sports without needing to worry about making an event. More students might even get involved in athletics if they knew there wouldn't be conflicts.

I propose that student associations submit lists of dates when certain social events will be scheduled and that sports teams declare those dates blackout days on which meets should not be scheduled if another option is available. This solution costs nothing and would



take hardly any time to implement. A schedule has to be made at some point, so why not put a little extra consideration into it? If just a few major conflicts could be avoided, many people would benefit. To start, a list of events and dates should be submitted by the student association. The athletic director can then contact the IHSA with the dates, and the IHSA can create a schedule that avoids as many of the blackout dates as possible. This would benefit high school athletes and therefore parents and coaches by allowing student athletes to participate both in sports and in social events. If schools want every sport and club supported to the fullest, they have to give everyone the opportunity to be in attendance.

If a survey were taken, the overwhelming majority of students polled would want the opportunity to be on a sports team as well as attend major high school social events. The superintendent at Riverside/Brookfield High School in Illinois, Dr. Jack Bladermann, is an advocate of supporting all teams and clubs. He thinks that if schedules were more carefully designed, the number of students joining extracurricular activities would go up.

The problem of students quitting teams and clubs midseason has usually been addressed within the sports team or high school rather than at the level of the IHSA—those students' reason for leaving the organization usually is that the time commitment conflicts with their social life. These conflicts in the schedule are avoidable. If events were scheduled on different days, teams and clubs could retain more students.

During my sophomore year in high school, Mollie, a girl from our swim team, almost had to quit the team to accommodate two separate events. That year, a swim meet was scheduled for the same day as the homecoming pep rally. Mollie was a senior and had been chosen for the homecoming court, which was supposed to attend a pep rally leading up to the announcement of homecoming king and queen. My coach thought that the team's performance would suffer if Mollie wasn't at the meet. In the end, Mollie chose to go to the pep rally. We came in second at the meet by only a few points—Mollie's contribution could have given us first place. Had the pep rally and the swim meet been scheduled for different dates, this situation could have been avoided.

Some readers may have objections to my proposal, including students who aren't affected by this particular situation. I would ask them to put themselves in the athletes' position. The four years of high school should be the greatest years of our lives—years filled

with a variety of events, not years in which we have to routinely make stressful decisions in which we sacrifice one event over another, and potentially affect entire teams.

Others may object that this solution makes work for the IHSA. This drawback could be avoided by moving the bulk of the scheduling work to the high school level; high schools could schedule as many events as possible together and then collaborate to create a master list of blackout dates. If, however, it's difficult for more than a few high schools to schedule together, the IHSA could take a different approach, scheduling meets only on certain days of the week. For example, avoiding scheduling meets on Fridays would be helpful because that is when most football teams have games and when most major social events are scheduled. Each high school could also have set make-up days at the end of the season. That way, if an unavoidable conflict does arise, it won't be a struggle to fit the meet in at the end of the season. Most important, though, if a conflict cannot be avoided, teams can alert the players at the beginning of the season before they commit to a team so that students can choose between a social event and team participation before it becomes an issue that affects the rest of the team.

This proposal would be simple to implement. If players, coaches, student associations, athletic directors, and the IHSA all did their part, the benefits of the solution would be numerous. By creating a list of blackout dates, conflicts could be avoided, more high school students could participate in sports without sacrificing social events, and more time for extracurricular activities would be available. Athletes could focus fully at meets, instead of thinking about what they're missing at a social event taking place at the same time. More students would get involved if they knew there wouldn't be conflicting interests. Athletes could enjoy the social aspect of high school as well as participate in team sports. Teams wouldn't have to suffer because of inadequate planning. All players could attend all meets because there would be no—or very few—scheduling conflicts. Make-up days set at the end of the season could be used for unavoidable conflicts. Finally, making the players aware of unavoidable conflicts before the start of the season would prevent last-minute decisions that could hurt the team.

# *Justifying an Evaluation* 8

The essays in this chapter were written in response to the following assignment: *Write an essay evaluating a particular subject. Examine your subject closely, and make a judgment about it. Give reasons for your judgment, reasons based on widely recognized standards for evaluating a subject like yours. Support your reasons with examples and other details from your subject.*

Handheld game systems provide great stories, game play, and easy control to video gamers on the go. Unfortunately, handheld gaming has not fared well in the graphics department. Thankfully, the Nintendo company has devised a way to re-energize the handheld gaming system market, in particular by focusing on graphics. Known throughout the world, Nintendo is responsible for lovable characters such as Marion and Donkey Kong, great games such as the Legend of Zelda series, and the ever-popular Game Boy system. Nintendo's newest product will secure Nintendo's status as the portable gaming king. This product is the Nintendo DS. Released in the United States on November 24, 2004, the Nintendo DS sold about 500,000 units even before being released in Japan, where the company's main headquarters are located (Harris). The Nintendo DS has it all: two liquid crystal display (LCD) screens, a touch screen, wireless network communications, a ten-hour rechargeable lithium battery, two stereo speakers, and microphone voice recognition abilities ("Nintendo DS Technical Specifications").

### **TOUCH THE DUAL SCREEN**

The prime feature of the Nintendo DS is its dual screens, which give the DS its name. The specifications are phenomenal: each screen features a three-inch reflective, TFT color LCD with  $256 \times 192$  pixel resolution; backlighting technology allows gamers to play in the dark. This is a gamer's dream for a portable gaming system ("Overview"). But the most innovative part of the Nintendo DS is the transparent analog touch screen function on the lower screen. Reminiscent of personal digital assistants, the DS' touch screen allows gamers to take

their gaming experience to new levels by controlling characters or accessing special maps by a mere touch of the lower screen. For easy control, the Nintendo DS comes with a stylus pen that easily stores in the back of the system and lets players touch the screen without using their fingers. Also included with the Nintendo DS is a thumb stylus, which latches onto the back of the system. The thumb stylus is sort of like a joystick on home consoles; it lets players move characters by moving their thumbs in a circular motion on the touch screen. Although the stylus pen and the thumb stylus have the right idea, it can be awkward to play using buttons and touching the bottom screen at the same time. Besides that tiny flaw, Nintendo has created a new way of integrating game play into an old-fashioned handheld gaming market. Many games, like *WarioWare Touched* for the Nintendo DS, have players use the stylus instead of the button controls to perform quirky actions such as petting a virtual dog or slicing meat. According to Chris Roper, a staff writer at IGN.com:

Still, for the games and apps that make use of the stylus to write, draw, pick up, or tap things on-screen, it functions very well. As mentioned, it's very responsive and the response resolution of the touch screen seems to be quite fine. The second, touch-sensitive screen is obviously the Nintendo DS' focal point and luckily it functions extremely well.

The DS' dual screens and touch screen feature are a great combination and offer video gamers a new way to play handheld video games.

## CONTROL

Overall, the control scheme of the Nintendo DS is effective and easy to use. The controller is reminiscent of the Super Nintendo controller. The X/A/B/Y face buttons are arranged in a clockwise pattern starting from the X button for easy control. Above the X/A/B/Y buttons are the select and start buttons, and to the left of the touch screen is a regular control pad with the basic functions—up, down, left, and right. These buttons are all easy to access and very sensitive to the touch. Also incorporated into the control design of the system are left and right shoulder trigger buttons. The left and right shoulder triggers have changed from a much larger design in the Game Boy Advance to a thinner design that nevertheless retains the function and responsiveness of the older, larger triggers. According to Chris Roper, however, “It feels quite a bit different though as

the thumb buttons are a fair bit smaller and have a lower profile. They're almost *too* small and close together for my taste, actually." This is one problem that can be overlooked though, since most gamers become accustomed to any game system regardless of the control system.

## GRAPHIC AND GAMING POSSIBILITIES

The Nintendo DS does not discriminate: not only can it play gorgeous 3D games, it also features backward compatibility for old Game Boy games. According to Nintendo, the Nintendo DS can "reproduce a true 3D view, with impressive 3D renderings that can surpass images displayed on the Nintendo 64" ("Overview"). The Nintendo 64 could display 64-bit graphics, and it was a large system, but the Nintendo DS is small enough to fit into a pocket, and yet it achieves higher than 64-bit graphics. The DS is a powerful system, and Nintendo has emphasized this with its launch title, *Super Mario 64 DS*. *Super Mario 64 DS* is an updated version of the Nintendo 64 game. Nintendo increased the game play by adding more than 150 stars to collect to beat the game. This time around Mario is not the only star of the game. Wario, Luigi, and Yoshi, all with special abilities, accompany Mario and lend him their skills so that the evil Bowser can be defeated. Rereleasing a smaller version of a nine-year-old game is not a money-saving ploy by Nintendo—*Super Mario 64 DS* redefines the genre of the platformer and helps show the possibilities that games can have on the Nintendo DS.

## WIRELESS NETWORKING

Another significant aspect of the Nintendo DS is its wireless playing technology. For the first time ever, players can now battle each other without linking up with a cable, and only one game cartridge is required. If one gamer has a cartridge with multiplayer technology, others can join in by downloading the software needed to compete in the multiplayer games. Many games support this feature and the included chat client software Picto-Chat, which is the Nintendo version of a wireless chat room. Nintendo has also integrated a social aspect into the Nintendo DS so that many gamers can use these wireless features. As Roper says, "Your DS will actually wake up from sleep mode if

someone nearby enters a chat room, which is in line with how Nintendo was saying they want to see gamers meet up with others nearby via their networked DSes.” And with Nintendo planning to incorporate Internet play via the computer and creating a larger wireless network range by releasing a satellite, the multiplayer game play could be limitless.

## CONCLUSION

The future of handheld gaming is here, and Nintendo has once again proven itself strong in the handheld gaming market with the release of the Nintendo DS. The Nintendo DS’s strongest features are its dual screens, its touch capability, its control design, its graphics, and its wireless networking. The most innovative features are the dual screens and the touch control, which lets players interact more with the game of their choice. The Nintendo DS is worth every penny of its \$150 price—it provides every Nintendo geek and Nintendo newcomer the gaming features they have always wanted in a portable game system. The Nintendo DS has established itself strongly in the future handheld gaming systems war, and with the upcoming release of the Sony PSP, Sony should be worried.

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# *Twenty Dollars?!*

Micah Yu

After many attempts to perfect an NBA game, Visual Concepts may have finally created an avid basketball fan's fantasy. The ESPN NBA series has been among the best of its kind since it entered the basketball gaming scene in 1999. Now, after battling its rival NBA Live for six consecutive years, ESPN is offering the new 2k5 at a bargain price of twenty dollars. Does this game have the features of a twenty-dollar game, or is it a gem at an amazingly low price?

## **SUPERIOR GRAPHICS**

If NBA 2k5 were judged solely on its graphics, it would receive an extremely high A. The ESPN NBA 2k series has always been known for its lifelike graphics. However, ESPN NBA 2k5 stands above the rest of the pack; sometimes the game cannot be distinguished from an actual basketball game. The players even have facial expressions during the games. When a player misses a shot, he looks angry; when he makes a shot, he looks happy. ESPN NBA 2k5 is the first game of its kind to use such detailed graphics, pioneering a vast new universe of sports games. Despite the remarkable features of the graphics, there are some flaws. First, the crowd looks like a bunch of cloned cartoons. Each and every person looks like John Doe. However, the fact that the crowd is made of 3D people is already a monumental step in creating a lifelike atmosphere in the sports genre. Second, there are some minute glitches in the game that may irritate the player: the basketball may go through the backboard, players may run through each other, and the players may look happy when they are losing. Though these flaws can irritate, they are subtle and should not disrupt enjoyment of the other fascinating parts of the game.



## SOUND IS THE KEY TO LIFE

Ever play a game, become engrossed in the atmosphere, and feel like you actually became the person in the game? Well, that is exactly how ESPN NBA 2k5 will make you feel. The precise sound effects are incredible. If you listen intently, you can actually hear the players communicating with each other. Taking a horrendous shot will cause the coach to fume, “What you doing?” In addition, the crowd will react according to game play. If the home team is winning and has momentum, then the crowd will be excitingly loud. If, however, the home team is losing, then the crowd will be dead silent. You can even hear spectators talking and screaming during the game, giving the game a realistic atmosphere. In addition to the in-game features, the soundtrack also gives the game a boost. Some great tracks are “What Tyme Is It?” by Abstract Rude and “Try Me” by J Hoogy. With a myriad of songs to listen to, the gamer will never tire of listening to the background music.

One of the most essential parts of any sports game is the commentary. Who would want to listen to a dull commentator? With Bill Walton and Bob Fitzgerald commenting on the sidelines, the only thing that is dull is their looks. Their voices are recorded into the game, and their upbeat personalities make ESPN NBA 2k5 even more like experiencing a televised basketball game.

## INNOVATIVE MOVEMENT

Control in this game is superior. The controls are essentially simple, yet the resulting actions are complex. Sega has done an outstanding job in creating different moves using just one joystick. If the joystick is moved in a specific direction, then the player will construct a creative move, such as a crossover or a spin move. While in the post, the gamer can perform hook shots, spin moves, or perform a face away. Never before has a basketball game had such a creative design. The game comes with all the essential moves needed in a basketball game, such as jumping, shooting, and passing. However, a novelty has been added to these basics: the player will throw the basketball according to how hard the controls are pressed. If the controls are pressed hard, the on-screen player will throw the ball quickly. If, however, the game player gently taps the controls, the on-screen player will throw

slowly. As in other basketball games, the player must shoot the ball at the apex of his jump or the shot will bounce off the rim.

## THE FRANCHISE MODE

If there is one weak aspect of the game, it is the franchise mode. The franchise mode is essentially a season mode. The amount of time spent on this mode is obvious from its disorganization: the creators did not pay much attention to this part of the game. Trading players and making contracts is frustrating. For example, at the trading scene, there can be no comparison of statistics, so there is no way of knowing if players of similar value are being traded, and the game player has to constantly go back to a previous menu to see players' salaries. Roster checking, an integral part of any sports game, has been left out of ESPN NBA 2k5. Despite these maddening imperfections, the franchise mode does have some nice additions from previous versions of the game. New coaches can be hired if the team is performing at an unsatisfactory level. If players are consistently injured, a new trainer can be hired. Players can now talk to the team if they have problems, and depending on the gamer's response to a player's demand, the player will respond positively or negatively. If the player responds negatively, then the team's chemistry and the player's confidence will decrease. Despite flaws in the franchise mode, it is still playable for the avid fan of the season mode.

## AI

For many sports gaming fanatics, AI is probably the biggest concern — without a witty AI, a game is a failure. However, ESPN NBA 2k5 has one of the best AIs in gaming. The computer has great defensive and offensive awareness and will know when to shoot the ball and who to guard. If a player is on fire, the computer will double-team that player every time he touches the ball. This is a huge improvement in the sports gaming genre; however, the computer is still not perfect. For example, one of the biggest concerns in the franchise mode is the AI. Playing repetitively will give the ESPN NBA expert an advantage over the subpar AI because the AI cannot improve its game as the player gains more experience. The game will become too easy for the veteran

gamer. Despite these flaws, the ESPN NBA 2k5 AI is vastly improved over its predecessors.

For twenty dollars this game is a bargain. What other great new games can you get for twenty dollars? Buying ESPN NBA 2k5 is like purchasing a two-carat diamond ring for twenty dollars—it is simply too good to be true. Every game has its flaws, but those in ESPN NBA 2k5 are nothing to worry about. The game is an improvement over all its predecessors; it is the closest thing to reality ever made.

# I Am Sam: *An Unforgettable Drama*

Jennifer Brown

It happens all the time: you catch the end of a movie and think, *Well, I've seen the ending so it isn't really worth watching now*. About a year ago, I stumbled upon the end of the film *I Am Sam* while flipping through the cable television channels. This time, however, seeing the ending only made me want to watch the movie that much more. I had to know what happened to the characters to bring about such a heartwarming finale. So the minute I had a couple of hours between my homework and job, I rushed over to the closest video store and rented the movie. Without a doubt, anyone over thirteen who likes dramas should watch this film. *I Am Sam* is an unforgettable combination of complex characters, realistic acting, and a soundtrack that reveals the movie's multiple layers.

The movie is about Sam, a man with the intellectual capacity of a seven-year-old, who is left to raise his newborn daughter, Lucy, after her mother abandons them. As Lucy is about to turn seven, she begins to hold herself back from learning in an effort not to become smarter than her father. Shortly after a social worker becomes aware of their situation, Sam and Lucy are torn apart by the family court. They are allowed only monitored visits twice a week for two hours. Devastated, Sam persistently pursues Rita, a high-powered attorney, for help to get Lucy back. Together they fight the legal system, and in the process Sam shows Rita how to love herself and her son.

The complexity of each character adds depth to the movie. Sam is a man of repetition. He reads the book *Green Eggs and Ham* to Lucy over and over again. He goes out with his friends to do the same things every week: Wednesday is breakfast at the IHOP, Thursday is video night, and Friday is karaoke. One night, however, Lucy asks to go to Big Boy's instead of the IHOP. At first, Sam says no, but being sensitive to Lucy's need to grow, he eventually decides to

step out of his comfort zone to take her there. He, like most fathers, only wants the best for his daughter.

Lucy seems to be like most little girls. She plays on swing sets, gets into pillow fights, and sings funny songs. She likes listening to Sam read *Green Eggs and Ham* over and over. One night, however, Sam tries to read *Stellaluna*, a book Lucy has to read for homework, instead of *Green Eggs and Ham*. Lucy helps her father pronounce words like *silence* and *different*. She is sensitive to her father's feelings of inferiority, and suggests switching back to the easier book. She, like most daughters, would do anything for her father.

As Lucy nears her seventh birthday, the roles of parent and child seem to reverse. When Sam asks if they can read *Green Eggs and Ham* one more time, Lucy politely says that she needs to go to bed; she doesn't want to be too tired for her first day of school. When Sam tells her he is going to buy an answering machine so that she can call him and leave a message, Lucy tells him they can't afford it. She appears to be becoming the more responsible person.

Rita, Sam's attorney, seems to be a woman with a meaningless career and an estranged family. She has insignificant clients. Her husband always says he's working late, but she knows he is having an affair. Her son hates her for never being around and ignores and disobeys her. After spending so much time with Sam working on his case, Rita gradually begins to discover what is important in her life. She starts to ease up on herself, recognizing that she does not have to try so hard to be perfect. Finally, Rita begins to create a bond with her son. She, like most people, would simply like to feel good about her life.

The realistic acting adds empathy to the movie. Sean Penn, who plays Sam, respectfully takes on the role of a man with autistic tendencies and mental retardation. His repetitive speech and hand movements, quick shuffle, blank stare with glassy eyes, and sweet, innocent nature allow the viewer to understand Sam's world.

Dakota Fanning, who plays Lucy, plays a little girl who becomes caught between behaving like a child and an adult. Her constant questions, giggling, and big, blue, wondering eyes allow the viewer to appreciate Lucy's innocence. Her clear, precise speech and calm, mature nature permit the viewer to recognize Lucy's growing awareness.

Michelle Pfeiffer, who plays Rita, takes on the role of a woman who will accept nothing less than perfection from herself. Her quick speech, incessant fidgeting, rapid stride, flickering eyes, and anxious, scatterbrained nature allow the viewer to understand Rita's world.

She is continuously moving in order to resist comprehending just how bad her life has become.

The recurrence of Beatles songs and references adds meaning to the movie. The movie's soundtrack is a compilation of twelve Beatles songs. For monetary purposes, however, each song was interpreted by other performers. Every song adds to the message of the scene in which it plays. After Lucy is born, "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds" begins the movie. After going to Big Boy's and during the Halloween party, "I'm Looking through You" plays, reflecting the embarrassment Lucy has for her father. After Lucy comes home and when she scores a goal in a soccer game, the song "Two of Us" ends the movie. Without these songs, the scenes would not have been as expressive.

Sam's Beatles references also add to the underlying messages of scenes. When Lucy asks if he thinks her mother will ever come back, Sam says that Paul McCartney and John Lennon both lost their mothers when they were little and that God picks just the special people. This shows Lucy that she is not the only person who has ever lost a mother at a young age. When Lucy's principal asks if Sam understands what Lucy's teacher is trying to tell him about his intellectual capacity in comparison with his daughter's, he says that John wanted to try new things and it wasn't Yoko's fault. The principal and teacher don't seem to understand, but what Sam is trying to explain is that he recognizes Lucy's need to grow. When Rita asks Sam why Lucy belongs with him, he tells her that Paul McCartney wrote the first part of the song "Michelle" and then John Lennon wrote the second part that says, "I love you, I love you, I love you." Sam says it wouldn't have been the same song without it, telling the family court that Lucy wouldn't be the same without him. These references contribute to the meaning of the scenes.

*I Am Sam* was nominated for an Academy Award in 2001. With such a memorable mixture of complex characters, realistic acting, and recurring themes, the film should have won the award for best picture that year. Though it lost, this movie is well worth watching from beginning to end.

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*I Am Sam*. Dir. Jessie Nelson. New Line Cinema, 2001.

# *Speculating about Causes* 9

The essays in this chapter were written in response to the following assignment: *Write an essay about an important or intriguing phenomenon or trend, and speculate about why it might have occurred. Describe your subject, demonstrate its existence, if necessary, and propose possible causes for it. Discover a way to sequence the causes logically. Then support or argue for the causes so that your readers will find them plausible.*

# *Not Just for Nerds Anymore*

Joshua Slick

It's Friday night, and instead of going out to a bar to look for Mr. or Ms. Right you are sitting at home in front of your computer, talking in a chat room with a couple dozen other people your age or perusing a list of people in your area. Some would call you lazy or anti-social, but that number is dwindling. Online dating is becoming more mainstream. The increase in the use of the Internet as a dating tool in the last ten years is due to the increase in homes with computers, the increase in Web sites and chat rooms whose purpose it is to bring people together, and the ease with which daters can now research potential mates.

According to a U.S. Census Bureau report from September 2001, the number of homes with computers dramatically increased from 1993 to 2000: "In August 2000, 54 million households, or 51 percent, had one or more computers," up from 22.8 percent in 1993 (U.S. Department of Commerce 1). Internet use has also increased: "In 1997, less than half of households with computers had someone using the Internet. In 2000, more than 4 in 5 households with a computer had at least one member using the Internet at home" (U.S. Department of Commerce 2). These changes are due largely to the increased power and decreased cost of computers. David D. Thornburg makes this comparison:

A 1980 model Cray supercomputer was the fastest machine of its day. It cost \$12 million, weighed 10,000 pounds, consumed 150 kilowatts of electricity—and had only 8 megabytes of RAM and operated at a speed of 80 MHz. You can't find personal computers that poorly equipped on the market now. A typical personal computer today has about twice the raw power of that \$12 million Cray and can be purchased for \$2,500.



Even these figures—from 1998—are laughably out of date. My computer has a gigabyte of RAM and runs at 1.9 gigahertz, and it cost me less than a thousand dollars. More and more people have access to the Internet in their homes; it's only logical that they would use it to find other people to converse with and date.

The online dating industry has grown by leaps and bounds in the last few years. *CNNMoney* staff writer Shaheen Pasha writes that although the growth of the industry has slowed, there is still positive growth. There was 19 percent growth in 2004 and 77 percent growth in 2003. There are currently nearly a thousand dating Web sites. Additionally, one in a hundred Internet users visits online dating sites (Pasha). Chat rooms are also plentiful, and singles visit them to interact with other singles. The newest kind of chat room is the niche site, which focuses on some specific quality, belief, or interest such as religion or ethnicity (Pasha). Another development is the introduction of social networking sites such as MySpace and Friendster, which don't try to match singles but rather link users with friends of friends. Of course, socializing—whether online or off—often leads to dating (Pasha). With the increase in places to meet others online, the online dating scene has been thriving.

The inherent dangers of dealing with strangers is one of the major reasons that online dating has been looked down upon. That is all changing. Michael Bazeley mentions the online ratings and review systems that have been around since the Internet got started; eBay's user feedback system is a perfect example. Bazeley refers to these as "reputation-management systems." This model has been applied to the Internet dating scene on sites like TrueDater. This site lets users give feedback on others to warn and inform. Other sites like Opinity allow users to list their user names from other sites, making it easier to track them down (Bazeley). The Web is now being used to research everything from pictures to credit reports, according to Rebecca Heslin of Gannett News Services. In a USA Today.com article Heslin states that "technology has made anonymity largely a thing of the past." With online background check sites, Google, and specific Web sites for singles doing searches such as TrueDater and Facebook, you can find out virtually anything about anyone without ever leaving your home. These tools have led to an increased awareness of the person on the other computer and therefore more comfort about potentially dating him or her.

The world of conventional dating isn't going to go away; technological advancements have just given singles another option to explore

the possibilities and find meaningful relationships. At some point there must be some real-life interaction, and only then will daters be able to judge the effectiveness of the online arena. Even so, more and more people are finding that online dating is just as viable for meeting people as going to church or bars. In a recent study released by the University of Bath, Dr. Jeff Gavin and associates found that Internet dating can be just as successful as more traditional dating, with 94 percent of those surveyed seeing their “e-partner” more than once. Of those surveyed, 18 percent were together for over a year (“Internet Dating”). With the combination of increased ownership and usage of home computers, the saturation of Web sites that cater to singles, and the ready availability of tools to research people and ensure safety, online dating has definitely shaken off its stigma to become a mainstream tool to help singles meet their potential partners.

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# *Causes of the Homeschooling Trend*

Angela Heiderscheid

Imagine this: You are a parent to a seven-year-old daughter. Your mornings are always relaxed—you never have to rush to get dressed or finish breakfast. After your morning routine, you and your daughter sit down for “school.” You then turn into your daughter’s teacher. You and your daughter work on science, math, language arts—even physical education and music. By the end of the afternoon, your workday is done. Does this scenario sound appealing?

This situation is known as homeschooling. Since 1995 the number of homeschooled children has increased dramatically. In 1995 the U.S. Department of Education estimated that there were between 500,000 and 700,000 homeschooled children. By 1999 the number of homeschooled children had risen to approximately 850,000. Currently, the United States has as many as 1.7 million homeschooled children—an estimated 3.4 percent of the school-aged population (Basham). In fact, “America’s home schoolers collectively outnumber the individual statewide public school enrollments in each of 41 of the 50 states” (Ray). In Minnesota, there has been a steady increase in the number of homeschooled children. In 1995 there were 10,519 students homeschooled in Minnesota. By 1999, that number had grown to 13,459, an annual growth of 19 percent (“Growth in the Number”). As these statistics show, more and more parents are viewing homeschooling as a viable option.

Many parents who homeschool do so because they believe their child is in need of some kind of special education, whether because their child is disabled or gifted. At home, children can have one-on-one instruction, increasing the probability of higher academic achievement. In fact, a survey done in 1999 by the National Household Education Surveys Program stated that the number-one reason that parents homeschooled was to “give their child a better

education.” This was 48.9 percent of respondents, or approximately 415,000 parents of homeschooled children (Bielick, Chandler, and Broughman). As one parent stated in the survey, “Many people make this decision because of the difficulties with our current school system, [or] because their children have differing learning styles” (Basham). As the statistics show, many homeschooling parents do succeed in giving their children a better education. According to Patrick Basham, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute, “By grade eight, the average home schooled student performs four grade levels above the national average.”

Another reason parents homeschool their children is that they want to teach them a particular set of values and beliefs. The National Center for Education Statistics’ 1999 study showed that parents gave “religious reasons” as the second most common reason they homeschooled their children. This applied to a total of 327,000 students, or 38.4 percent of homeschooled students (Basham). In public schools, no religious views are taught, and students are discouraged from talking about their religions. Parents who want their children to be taught the family’s beliefs along with their education often choose to homeschool. Parents can then have control over a set curriculum that includes the family’s religious beliefs.

In recent years, concerns about safety have increased parents’ interest in homeschooling. In 1994, one in four American public school students had been a victim of violence at or near school (Basham). This caused many worries among parents and students. There was a “heightened interest in safer schooling immediately following the April 1999 tragedy at Columbine High School” (Basham). In addition to keeping children safer, homeschooling also reduces peer pressure. When parents homeschool their children, they know that their children are not being pressured to participate in dangerous activities. Parents can relax knowing that their children are in a safe place—at home.

Some people think that only rich families are able to homeschool. This belief is clearly false. Of homeschooled children, 1.6 percent, or 262,000 students, live in families whose household income is \$25,000 or less. Only 148,000 homeschooled students have parents with incomes of \$75,001 or more (Basham). Homeschooled students come from all economic brackets and walks of life. Poor families and rich families alike can reap the benefits of homeschooling: “Regardless of family income, home schooled students score between the 82nd and 92nd percentiles on the SATs” (Basham).

In summary, the increasing trend in the number of homeschooled children has been steady since 1995 and is unlikely to decrease in the near future. Patrick Basham states that “home schooling is a thriving educational movement in the United States” (15). Every year, more parents are realizing that public education is not right for their children, whether this is because their children need special education, because they want to teach their children their religious beliefs, or because they believe their children will be safer at home. Clearly, the reasons parents want to homeschool their children are important ones, and home-schooling does seem beneficial to students. This is shown by the advanced performance of homeschooled children and the 19 percent annual growth in numbers of homeschooled children.

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# *Declining Coral Reefs: A Real Problem*

Amber Ripplinger

What is coral? An underwater plant? Stone? In fact, corals are minute animals called polyps living together in colonies and coexisting in a symbiotic relationship with algae. The algae provide the polyps with the oxygen and other nutrients they need to survive, and in return, the polyps provide the algae with needed shelter and food (Tanglely 26).

Rivaled only by tropical rainforests, coral reefs host the widest assortment of life on Earth, including mollusks, urchins, and tropical fish. Corals are the “animals that helped make the world,” and whether we know it or not, coral reefs and the life they support are important to us (Chadwick 29). Unfortunately, these living environments are as fragile as they are remarkable. Coral reefs have begun, undeniably, to decline due to problems that can be directly linked to humans.

One of the most pressing and enigmatic problems facing coral reefs is the global phenomenon of coral bleaching. Corals “bleach” or turn white when they lose the algae that give them their characteristic brilliant coloring. It was originally thought that the polyps were expelling the algae, perhaps as a result of hurricanes or local diseases among the coral. Researchers now know enough to conclude that this may not be true. In her article “White Plague,” Laura Tanglely suggests that “the algae could actually be leaving on their own in response to inhospitable conditions” (28).

At first, scientists had little, if any, idea what was causing corals to bleach on such a massive scale; however, it is now generally accepted that major causes of coral bleaching include agricultural runoff, overfishing, and natural disasters such as hurricanes.

Agricultural and logging runoff brings tremendous amounts of soil to the seas via rivers and streams. This obscures sunlight, inhibiting the photosynthesis process of the algae and weakening the coral that derives nourishment from it (Chadwick 31).

Far more disturbing than the problem of agricultural runoff, however, is the damage done by overfishing. For years fishermen in the tropics have been using cyanide and homemade explosives to fish in the coral reefs. Cyanide fishing involves squirting cyanide into the coral, prying it apart with a crowbar, and extracting the stunned fish. With explosives, one lobs a grenade into the coral and gathers the fish (Chadwick 31). Fishing with cyanide and explosives makes the fisherman's job infinitely easier, but at what cost to such a fragile ecosystem? It is no exaggeration to say that if the coral reefs of this world were destroyed, all the life they support would become extinct. Multitudes of fish depend on corals as a source of shelter, safety, and food, and millions of people depend on these fish as a major food source, particularly in developing countries.

Along with the environmental stress placed on coral reefs by overfishing, natural causes such as El Niño and hurricanes also play a role in coral bleaching. El Niño, a warm current that appears every three to seven years in the eastern Pacific Ocean, can cause the water temperatures to rise above the corals' tolerance level, and hurricanes can cause physical damage to the coral colony. Some researchers, however, believe that corals are resilient enough to handle this abuse and will be made hardier because of it. They even suggest that the corals need periodic stresses like these to start anew. The process can be compared to that of a forest fire, which wipes out the old, unhealthy vegetation in forests, giving new life a chance to grow. As David Kobluk, a geologist at the University of Toronto, puts it, "reefs are robust and can take a lot of punishment. They rebound like an elastic band" (Tangley 30). Researchers feel, however, that the majority of the damage done to the coral reefs around the world is largely caused by humans. Studies have shown that bleaching is a recent problem: corals show no evidence of bleaching before the past fifteen years, when the interaction with humans began in earnest.

Reefs are immeasurably important to humans for more reasons than that they are a major tourist attraction. Used in houses and institutes, cement and art, coral has also provided us with medicinal advances in "compounds active against inflammations, asthma, heart disease, leukemia, tumors, bacterial and fungal infections, and viruses, including HIV" (Chadwick 30). To put the crisis into perspective, coral reefs deposit calcium carbonate at a rate of about three millimeters a year. Time is not on their side; reefs grow infinitely more slowly than the destructive forces surging behind them, and at the rate we're tearing them down, they can never catch up. So how

to balance humanity's dependence on reefs for our pressing needs and the reefs' dependence on us for survival? The answer may not be as complicated as some think. The key lies in understanding that the fragile balances of nature must not be upset, and that humanity can coexist in harmony with those balances.

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# *Interpreting* 10 *Stories*

The essays in this chapter were written in response to the following assignment: *Write an essay interpreting some aspect of a short story. Aim to convince readers that your view of the story is interesting and adds to the ongoing conversation among those who read stories and write about them. Back up your interpretation with reasons and support from the story.*

# *Death Becomes Her*

Dana Jordan

Dealing with the death of a loved one is very difficult. Mrs. Mallard, the main character in “The Story of an Hour” by Kate Chopin, illustrates the complexity of grief. In the story, Mrs. Mallard is told that her husband’s train has crashed and that her husband is among those presumed dead. Knowing that Mrs. Mallard suffers from a heart condition, her sister Josephine and her husband’s friend Richards anticipate that the news will shock her and fill her with grief. As expected, Mrs. Mallard cries, but then unpredictably pulls herself together. I believe that Mrs. Mallard is an optimist; although the shocking loss of her beloved husband devastates her, she is able to look toward her own future. This optimism explains her private celebration of her freedom.

Most people wallow in grief when their spouse dies. But Mrs. Mallard is not “most people.” In her room, all alone with nothing but her thoughts, Mrs. Mallard sits in front of an open window letting herself relax. Like the author, Kate Chopin, I feel that Mrs. Mallard has been through a lot in her short lifetime and has learned to look on the bright side of things and learn from all of her experiences. Although she did feel pain for the loss of her husband—she “wept at once, with sudden, wild abandonment, in her sister’s arms” (para. 3)—Mrs. Mallard chooses not to dwell on his death. Instead she takes in the nature outside her window, the partly sunny sky, trees budding, and birds chirping as she breathes in freedom (para. 5). Her outlook is positive as she thinks, “There would be no one to live for her during those coming years; she would live for herself” (para. 14). Chopin is probably referring here to the expectations of women in the era (the late 1800s). Women had certain duties as wives to sustain the family’s social status. Thinking for themselves and making decisions without their husbands’ consent

was unacceptable. Therefore, the death of Mrs. Mallard's husband would be the only way for her to become free without also incurring the disapproval of society. Mrs. Mallard accepts this new freedom with open arms.

Some may argue that Mrs. Mallard's response to her husband's death is inappropriate. They might claim that a woman should mourn the death of her husband for months or even years, at which point the widow might remarry and resume life as normal. I believe, however, that Mrs. Mallard should feel no guilt for her concealed feelings. The story suggests that Mr. and Mrs. Mallard had been married for several years, during which Mrs. Mallard was loyal to her husband. She knew that her husband had loved her very much; her reflection on his face, "the face that had never looked save with love upon her" (para. 13), tells us that. Because of this security, she can accept his death and move on with her own life.

While Mrs. Mallard is still sitting in her room thinking self-assertive thoughts, Josephine, concerned about her sister's heart condition, demands that Mrs. Mallard open the door immediately. Josephine thinks her sister will make herself sick with anxiety and sorrow. On the contrary, Mrs. Mallard is "drinking in the very elixir of life through that open window" (para. 18). It is here that Chopin gives her readers Mrs. Mallard's first name; Josephine calls her Louise. I trust that Chopin wants us to think of Louise with her own identity, rather than as simply "Mrs. Brently Mallard." The story continues with Louise reluctantly opening the door for Josephine. The sisters walk downstairs, where Richards is waiting for them. As Louise descends, "there was a feverish triumph in her eyes, and she carried herself unwittingly like a goddess of Victory" (para. 20). She doesn't look like a grief-stricken widow would, with her face hidden behind a black veil of mourning, but as a woman who is ready to take on the world—climb mountains or maybe write a novel.

Because of the reader's view into Louise's perspective, only the reader knows Louise's true feelings. She doesn't want to deal with the reality outside of her room. When Josephine insists that she open the door, Louise responds, "Go away. I'm not making myself ill" (para. 18). Louise is in fact excited and happy, but she can't tell anyone else that. It would be unacceptable for a woman to be happy after her husband had died. It is the reader's secret that Louise is excited about her new liberty. By this point in the story the reader is hanging on every word and silently cheering for Louise, hoping no one notices the "feverish triumph in her eyes" (para. 20).

In the end, it turns out that Brently Mallard wasn't really on the train. He surprises everyone when he unlocks the door and walks in as Louise and Josephine are coming down the stairs. Brently, unaware of the accident, is surprised by their reaction. Josephine screams and Richards tries to hide Brently from his wife. But none of the characters are prepared for what happens next: Louise's heart cannot sustain the shock of seeing her husband alive, and she dies of a heart attack. Her doctors assume that she died "of joy that kills" (para. 23), but they are mistaken. It is only after the transformation from "Mrs. Brently Mallard" to "Louise" that she dies. Louise is so overwhelmed with the disappointment of seeing her husband alive that her heart is broken. The dreams of the future that she and the reader shared are broken, and that loss is too much for her. Optimistically, I would say that either way, now Mrs. Louise Mallard is "free, body and soul, free" (para. 16).

# *Death Becomes Her (Section Draft)*

Dana Jordan

In her room, all alone with nothing but her thoughts, Mrs. Mallard sat in front of an open window letting herself relax. Most people wallow in grief when their spouse dies. But Mrs. Mallard is not “most people.” Like the author, Kate Chopin, I feel that Mrs. Mallard has been through a lot in her short lifetime and has learned to look on the bright side of things and learn from all of her experiences. Although she did feel pain for the loss of her husband, Mrs. Mallard chose not to dwell. Instead, she took in the nature outside her window and breathed in freedom. “There would be no one to live for her during those coming years; she would live for herself” (para. 14). Here Chopin is probably referring to the expectations forced upon women of the era, the late 1800s. Women had certain duties, as wives, to sustain a certain social status. Thinking for themselves and doing things without their husband’s consent was unacceptable.

The story suggests that Mr. and Mrs. Mallard had been married for many years. Mrs. Mallard felt no guilt about her new feelings of liberty, as she was loyal to this man throughout their marriage and had known he had loved her very much. She looked forward to being free to live her own life.

# Death Becomes Her (Section Revision)

Dana Jordan

Most people wallow in grief when their spouse dies. But Mrs. Mallard is not “most people.” In her room, all alone with nothing but her thoughts, Mrs. Mallard sits in front of an open window letting herself relax. Like the author, Kate Chopin, I feel that Mrs. Mallard has been through a lot in her short lifetime and has learned to look on the bright side of things and learn from all of her experiences. Although she did feel pain for the loss of her husband—she “wept at once, with sudden, wild abandonment, in her sister’s arms” (para. 3)—Mrs. Mallard chooses not to dwell on his death. Instead she takes in the nature outside her window, the partly sunny sky, trees budding, and birds chirping as she breathes in freedom (para. 5). Her outlook is positive as she thinks, “There would be no one to live for her during those coming years; she would live for herself” (para. 14). Chopin is probably referring here to the expectations of women in the era (the late 1800s). Women had certain duties as wives to sustain the family’s social status. Thinking for themselves and making decisions without their husbands’ consent was unacceptable. Therefore, the death of Mrs. Mallard’s husband would be the only way for her to become free without also incurring the disapproval of society. Mrs. Mallard accepts this new freedom with open arms.

Some may argue that Mrs. Mallard’s response to her husband’s death is inappropriate. They might

a. By shifting the second and third sentences to the opening position, Jordan gives the paragraph a clearer focus.

b. By including a textual reference to Mrs. Mallard’s violent grieving, Jordan heads off a possible objection from readers—that what Jordan sees as “looking on the bright side” might actually be heartlessness.

c. Jordan adds an introduction to this quotation that contributes to her point about Mrs. Mallard’s optimism.

d. Jordan explains herself more fully.

claim that a woman should mourn the death of her husband for months or even years, at which point the widow might remarry and resume life as normal. I believe, however, that Mrs. Mallard should feel no guilt for her concealed feelings. The story suggests that Mr. and Mrs. Mallard had been married for several years, during which Mrs. Mallard was loyal to her husband. She knew that her husband had loved her very much; her reflection on his face, “the face that had never looked save with love upon her” (para. 13), tells us that. Because of this security, she can accept his death and move on with her own life.

e

e. Here, Jordan explicitly addresses the potential objection that she began to anticipate above (the view that Mrs. Mallard’s reaction to her husband’s death is actually disloyal and heartless, not, as Jordan maintains, life-affirming and optimistic). Jordan goes on to counterargue for her position.

f

f. By including a textual reference to Mr. Mallard’s steadfast love for his wife, Jordan demonstrates that Mrs. Mallard was an exemplary spouse, thus implicitly refuting the possible objection that the widow was betraying her husband by so easily accepting his death.

g

g. Jordan reworks the final sentence of this paragraph to provide a stronger conclusion to this section of her essay.

# *Symbolism in “The Story of an Hour”*

Lynn Brockway

“The Story of an Hour” by Kate Chopin, published in 1894, illustrates the difficulties of life for married women of the late 1800s, who had few freedoms. Symbolism plays an important role in the story, helping readers understand what the protagonist, Mrs. Mallard, experiences emotionally after she hears of her husband’s death in a train accident. When Mrs. Mallard gets the news from her sister, Josephine, she weeps immediately—and publicly, in view of her sister and her husband’s friend, Richards:

She did not hear the story as many women have heard the same, with a paralyzed inability to accept its significance. She wept at once, with sudden, wild abandonment, in her sister’s arms.

The moment she accepts the news is the moment she must also face a life alone in a world where the man is the overseer of the house and controls the woman, whose utility lies in cooking and planning meals, giving birth, being ornamental, and otherwise pleasing her husband. Clearly, the news is a shock to Mrs. Mallard. Yet the story promises brighter days ahead:

When the storm of grief had spent itself she went away to her room alone. She would have no one follow her. . . . She could see in the open square before her house the tops of trees that were all aquiver with the new spring life. The delicious breath of rain was in the air.

Awaiting Mrs. Mallard in her room, away from the view of others in the household, is an open window and “a comfortable, roomy arm-chair.” These physical amenities comfort Mrs. Mallard in a way that neither her sister nor her husband have done. The new spring life that Mrs. Mallard can see through the open window symbolizes a new beginning. Her husband’s death has given her rebirth, making



her suddenly aware of her surroundings. The rain is described as “delicious,” suggesting that while her earlier weeping might have been a sign of mourning for a life past, it also signifies the washing away of marital sorrows and augers something new for this young woman: growth and a fresh start.

When Mrs. Mallard sinks into the armchair, “pressed down by a physical exhaustion that haunted her body and seemed to reach into her soul,” the armchair acts as a close friend or confidante. Its arms are always available to comfort and console, possibly unlike those of Mrs. Mallard’s late husband, whom “she had loved—sometimes.” Mrs. Mallard is immediately soothed as her body sinks into the inviting chair.

The reader does not know how Louise Mallard has interacted with the world outside her window before this scene, but we do know from the opening sentence that “Mrs. Mallard was afflicted with a heart trouble.” She looks up through the window, where “there were patches of blue sky showing here and there through the clouds that had met and piled one above the other in the west facing her window.” Given the Christian belief system prevalent in America at the time this story was published, the patches of sky might symbolize her husband’s passage to a world beyond. However, the clouds are in the west, and that direction suggests ending: as the sun is setting, so her husband’s life has set. Mrs. Mallard can joyfully anticipate a new dawn in the east tomorrow.

The open window and the view beyond symbolize freedom for a young woman married to a man about whom she had mixed feelings. She thinks of his “kind, tender hands folded in death; the face that had never looked save with love upon her, fixed and gray and dead.” Even though Mrs. Mallard is thinking that she will weep again when she sees her husband in his coffin, the phrase “fixed and gray and dead” has a double meaning. It suggests that Brently Mallard was a man older than his wife, in spirit if not in actual years, and that his presence held her back from full emotional and physical freedom. Mrs. Mallard is described as “young, with a fair, calm face, whose lines bespoke repression and even a certain strength.” The word “repression” shows that Mrs. Mallard has not always expressed herself openly in this marriage, in her husband’s house. Could this fact be the cause of the heart trouble mentioned in the first sentence of the story? She did love Brently Mallard sometimes, even though he (or cultural circumstances) kept her somewhat imprisoned. Brently Mallard’s

death, as contemplated by his widow as she looks through the window, is an opening to a new world, a new beginning.

Even the protagonist's tears indicate her ambivalence: "She sat with her head thrown back upon the cushion of the chair, quite motionless, except when a sob came up into her throat and shook her, as a child who has cried itself to sleep continues to sob in its dreams." Her sobbing like a child represents the idea that while her husband's death saddens her, her crying is reflexive, responsive to the general situation rather than to any fundamental loss. She cries like a child who doesn't have the comfort it wants and who is unable to articulate its desires in any other way.

At the end of the story, when Mr. Mallard walks into the house, demonstrating that the report of his death was mistaken, Louise Mallard's heart affliction is fully revealed. The oppression of her marriage and the hope of freedom finally break her heart. She has walked down the staircase with "a feverish triumph in her eyes" after "breath[ing] a quick prayer that life might be long. It was only yesterday she had thought with a shudder that life might be long." But her hope of freedom is dashed when Brently Mallard, presumed dead, opens the door and enters,

a little travel-stained, composedly carrying his gripsack and umbrella. He had been far from the scene of accident, and did not even know there had been one. He stood amazed at Josephine's piercing cry; at Richards' quick motion to screen him from the view of his wife.... When the doctors came they said she had died of heart disease—of joy that kills.

In the span of an hour, Mrs. Mallard has gone through dramatic changes of emotion. She realizes that her life has changed drastically because of her husband's demise. At first, symbols such as the open window and the comfortable, roomy armchair point toward her freedom and a good life with a new beginning. But the symbolic meaning of heart disease—in this case, the disease of not being free to love and act openly—proves to be Mrs. Mallard's undoing. Brently Mallard opens the door with a "latchkey," which could indicate his ownership of the house and his means of controlling entrance and exit from it. He is holding a "gripsack," a small briefcase—symbolic of his "grip" on the household and on his wife's life.

The irony of the (doubtless male) doctors' explanation—that Mrs. Mallard had died of joy—indicates to readers the ultimate

paradox of Mrs. Mallard's situation. A mallard is a type of duck, and the name "Brently" sounds like a conjugation of the verb "to bend." Throughout her married life, Mrs. Mallard has had to b(r)ent her will, her desires, to those of her husband, as baby ducks follow their mother. Her life has been difficult even though it has probably been financially comfortable, and for an hour, she had felt the hope of joy. But after the promise of release indicated by the open window, the cleansing rain, and the setting sun, this nineteenth-century wife is "bent" so far that she succumbs to and dies of the symbolic heart sickness that afflicted her during her husband's life.

# *“The Story of an Hour”*

Edward King

“The Story of an Hour” is about how our minds control us. Most of the story takes place inside the mind of a woman, Mrs. Mallard, who experiences a roller-coaster ride of emotions after being informed of her husband’s death. Mrs. Mallard feels grief, then fear, then joy and relief. Meanwhile, her mind moves through a storm of thoughts that reveal her hidden intentions. The reader is left with a sense of just how successfully human beings can deceive themselves in order to fulfill their subconscious desires.

The story seems straightforward but is actually layered with meaning. For example, the first thing we learn is that Mrs. Mallard has “heart trouble” and that therefore “great care was taken to break to her as gently as possible the news of her husband’s death.” The implication is that Mrs. Mallard’s heart trouble is a medical problem. However, as the story reveals, her affliction is not so much medical as emotional.

When Mrs. Mallard’s sister, Josephine, and her husband’s friend, Richards, break the news to the new widow, she weeps “with wild abandonment,” showing no sign of shock or disbelief. Her over-the-top performance reveals that Mrs. Mallard does not care for her husband, as she would have Josephine and Richards believe. The fact that her grieving continues even when she is alone in her room seems to suggest that her first outburst was authentic. However, her continued grieving is only evidence that she had falsely convinced herself that she loved him. After all, Mrs. Mallard spends just one sentence of her lengthy internal monologue thinking about how she had loved Mr. Mallard—“sometimes.” In a matter of minutes, she goes from weeping in “wild abandonment” to almost forgetting she was married.

The Mallards are a wealthy family. Outside of Mrs. Mallard’s bedroom window is an “open square” with beautiful trees. One must

consider that this story was written at the turn of the century—few houses had “open squares” in front of them in 1900; those that did belonged to wealthy families. Mrs. Mallard reflects on the scenery outside the window: the “tops of trees,” a “street peddler,” and a lot of blue sky with puffy clouds. The fact that Mrs. Mallard can see a number of trees and the tops of those trees suggests one of two things: either this is a very densely planted square with unusually short trees, or the window she is looking out of is very large and very high off the ground. Mrs. Mallard lives in a mansion.

Moreover, Richards receives a telegram in the newspaper office with Brently Mallard’s name “lead[ing] the list of ‘killed.’” The authorities most likely derived this information by making a list of who bought tickets and crossing off the names of the survivors. Sorting through a crashed train would have been very time consuming, especially in 1900, and the authorities would have wanted to get the news out as soon as they could. The fact that Brently Mallard’s name was “leading the list” implies that he was an important person—the newspaper would want to write a story about a wealthy person’s death.

The excitement and feeling of freedom Mrs. Mallard experiences sitting in the armchair in her room is thus caused by her realization that all of Mr. Mallard’s wealth will be left to her. When Mrs. Mallard finally descends the stairs and sees her husband, the tremendous loss that she experiences after having felt so ecstatically free sends her volatile emotions into a whirlwind that her physical body can no longer support. Her heart stops then and there.

Thus “The Story of an Hour” shows how humans can use their minds to manipulate themselves into believing complete fallacies to fulfill subconscious desires. Mrs. Mallard decides she would rather die than lose the fulfillment of her long-hidden wish. Heart disease—the joy that kills—is when one’s heart fights for its deepest desires and loses.

# *Lost in Translation: Melodrama Across Cultures*

Brant Goble

Despite much ballyhooing about the rapidly shrinking circumference of our world and the creation of a “global community,” the differences between Eastern and Western cultures are still very real. Sandra Tsing Loh’s “My Father’s Chinese Wives” subtly explores some of the real and not-so-real differences between Chinese and American cultures in two areas, drama and comedy, where the cultural line of demarcation is particularly pronounced. “Let us unpeel this news one layer at a time,” says the narrator as she begins to tell of her father’s imminent engagement (para. 3). This is, no doubt, the best way to examine the insights of this author—one layer at a time.

From the moment the narrator’s father is introduced, he is presented as something of a melodramatist, although not one without humor. “I’m just your crazy old Chinese father,” he says, with what might be imagined to be a certain pride, making abundantly clear how he would like to be perceived (para. 7). “Old” seems to be an adjective the father uses with relish, describing himself as “old now” and an “old, old man” (para. 7). The father’s other favored term, “crazy” (para. 7), seems to be in his mind synonymous with “cheap,” another self-descriptive adjective he uses (para. 60) with an almost irrepressible pride.

The father enjoys playing the role of the eccentric and misunderstood patriarch, seeming to take every opportunity to widen the gap of understanding and culture between himself and his family. Even the simple act of walking through his garden, “shuffl[ing] along in broken sandals,” and his very public exercises are opportunities for him to reinforce the perception of himself as an outsider (para. 5). Much of the misunderstanding between this man and his daughters is inevitable, if only because he is so intent on cultivating it.

Were this not enough, the father’s choice of where to live (and it can be assumed he had some choice in the matter) seems to have been

made at least partially to distinguish himself as uniquely Chinese. One of his wives, the would-be entertainer Liu, may well have been driven away by the father's self-imposed isolation from the other members of the Chinese community. The father admits, "There were no other Chinese people in Tarzana," the Los Angeles suburb where he lived (para. 60).

The inheritor of the father's theatrical tendencies is the same daughter who professes an almost irrepressible contempt for him—Kaitlin. Despite their outward dissimilarities, Kaitlin and her father are not as different from one another as they might like to believe. Both are intent not only on casting themselves in unambiguous roles—his, that of the thrifty, inscrutable oriental, and hers, the role of ambitious, extravagantly spending career woman—but on playing their respective roles to the hilt.

Neither Kaitlin nor her father is, at heart, a materialist. For them, things are a means to a dramatic end. The father has spent his life avoiding expense. Not even willing to buy a briefcase, the father prefers to use an empty cereal box—no doubt an inconvenience in the rain. However, he is "philosophical" when Liu takes ten thousand dollars and his car in their divorce—the same car he was unwilling to spend the money to insure (para. 60). Ten thousand dollars is almost certainly enough money to subsidize a lifetime's worth of paper towels, yet this loss leaves the father undeterred in his quest for a wife.

Ultimately, the reader is left suspecting that the father is not succumbing to senility (indeed, it is not hard to imagine the very intelligent, focused light in his eyes), as he is simply getting a bit too tired or lonely to keep up his act.

For every ounce of thrift that could be squeezed from the narrator's father, Kaitlin has purchased a brand-name pound of extravagance. Her divorce, her designer clothing, even her therapist—what are these if not props to display money, the totemic burdens of success? Her choice of words reflects her deliberate modernity: "He is totally unqualified to sustain a marriage," she says of her father—she sounds, quite intentionally, like a counselor evaluating a patient (para. 41).

As much as the narrator's father and sister enjoy playing their roles, their dramatic natures might not be so easily recognizable to the reader if the narrator's dislike of being seen as a type did not so readily contrast with it. The narrator "shivers" to think of herself as an object of desire for Fred, a writing workshop classmate who idealizes Asian women. It would be entirely understandable for any

woman to be uncomfortable when hearing the considerably older Fred voice his erotic fantasies. The narrator suggests that her discomfort is amplified by a full order of magnitude because she has been typecast. It is being singled out for her race—much as Fred italicizes the Japanese words in his novel about a cross-cultural romance—that makes the narrator shiver.

In the end, the narrator's wit cannot desiccate the old man's leathery hide, nor can Kaitlin's acidic sarcasm dissolve it, but Zhou Ping, the determined farm woman, manages to plow through it. The father may well have gotten "old, old" (para. 7), and in his younger years—those earlier, angrier days when, after finding out that his wife bought him an expensive Christmas present, "his face was a mask of disgust so extreme it was almost parodic" (para. 42)—he might have proven unbearable even for Zhou Ping. Perhaps, however, the problem was more fundamental. While the narrator was somewhat aware of her father's dramatic flair, saying that her father "almost seems to be over-acting this lizardly old part. He milks it," she never does find humor in her father's behavior (para. 8). No one else seems to have recognized the melodrama for what it was—certainly neither Kaitlin nor the narrator's mother, who was reduced to hysterics by her husband's relentless unkindness.

Zhou Ping is, without a doubt, more used to hard work and struggle than the daughters or their mother and is better suited to dealing with a difficult man. However, Zhou Ping's defense may have been even simpler than that—she may have been the first to recognize a Chinese opera player when she saw one.



# *A Note on the Copyediting*

We all know that the work of professional writers rarely appears in print without first being edited. But what about student writing—especially essays that are presented *as models* of student writing? Do these get edited too?

While it's easy to draw an analogy with professional writing and simply declare that “all published writing gets edited,” there are some important differences between student and professional writing. For one thing, student writing is presented *as student writing*. That is, it's offered to the reader as an example of the kind of writing students can and do produce in a writing class. And since most students don't have the benefit of a professional editor, their work may not be as polished as the models they see in textbooks.

For another, unlike professional writers, students rarely have the opportunity to participate in the editorial process. Companion readers like this one are compiled while the main text is being revised, at a time when the authors and editors are immersed in the work of the text and don't have time to also supervise twenty-five or more student writers. For this reason, students are usually simply asked to sign a statement transferring to the publisher all rights to their essays, subject to final editing, and don't see their work again until it appears in print. For these reasons, editing student writing is problematic.

But publishing student essays without editing is equally problematic. Every composition teacher knows that even the best papers, the A+ essays, aren't perfect. But readers of published prose, accustomed to the conventions of edited American English, aren't always so generous. The shift in tense that may be seen as a simple lapse in a student narrative becomes a major distraction in a published piece. Rather than preserve that tense shift in the interest of “absolute fidelity” to the student's work, it is more in keeping with the spirit and purpose of the

enterprise to edit the passage. After all, the rest of the evidence indicates that the student is a strong writer and that he or she would likely accede to the change if it were called to his or her attention.

The editing of a student essay is not a violation of the student's work, then, but really a courtesy to the writer. True, some essays require more editing than others—perhaps because the student did not have as much opportunity to revise—but none in this collection has been altered significantly. In fact, every attempt has been made to respect the students' choices.