

Student Writing Samples

**“FULL”
VERSION**



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Collected by Steve Peha



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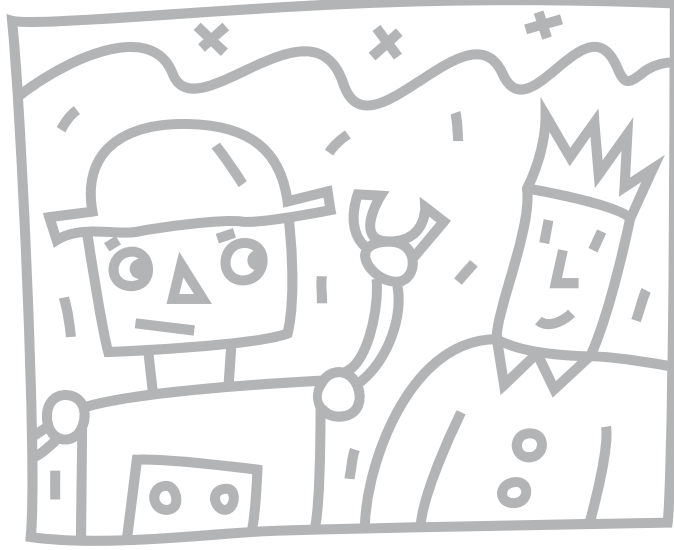
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“Every study of young writers I’ve done for the last twenty years has underestimated what they can do. In fact, we know very little about the human potential for writing.”

—Donald Graves, *A Fresh Look at Writing* (p.99)



Kindergarten

Writing

Kindergarten Personal Essay

I am at the lake shlane pool lrlen how to swim. With my mom + dad sister and grandma grandpa uncale + ante. I lrnede how to swim with a buch of footey stuff but now I can swim with only a swimyn tobe. You have to ceep your chin under wader and not get to panicy.

I am at the Lake Chelan pool learning how to swim with my mom and dad, sister and grandma, grandpa, uncle, and auntie. I learned how to swim with a bunch of floaty stuff but now I can swim with only a swimming tube. You have to keep your chin under water and not get too panicky.



I went kmp and we at lch out st. I got to driv the motr hom wn I wnt kameg and we stop and got sm chs brgers and sam org pop. And we got bk on the ro. Then we went to bed. Then I wot up and I wat a wroud then I went insid and then wan I was in the motrhm I had lneh.

I went camping and we ate lunch outside. I got to drive the motorhome when I went camping and we stopped and got some cheeseburgers and some orange pop and we got back on the road. Then we went to bed. Then I woke up and I walked around. Then I went inside and then when I was in the motorhome I had lunch.



I em playing basketball. I love to play basketball. I just shoot. I like to play ugest my bruthr. Sum times I win. Sum times he plays ese. My bruthr tot me to play basketball he told me that wen you stop grebling you cant start to grebling again.

I am playing basketball. I love to play basketball. I just shoot. I like to play against my brother. Sometimes I win. Sometimes he plays easy. My brother taught me to play basketball. He told me that when you stop dribbling you can't start dribbling again.

Kindergarten Fiction

7

The Greyt ship

Wans Ther Was a ship. it Wit forthr Then iney ship in The wrald one day Ther Was a ship reys. But The ship onr got up leyt in The day And The ship reys strdid rlle in The day so He Got a alorm clock. The necs day Was The ship reys and He got up rlle The nexcs day The ship reys be gan And He wan The ship reys and He wan a goldin cap and He ollso Be cam a Greyt Fishr min. That niyt he jrempt That he was The Best Fishr min in The wralld. He Jrempt He cot a shorck and it solowed Him But The necst day He cot all The Fshe He wntid and He livd oll His layf

The End

The Great Ship

Once there was a ship. It went farther than any ship in the world. One day there was a ship race. But the ship owner got up late in the day and the ship race started early in the day so he got an alarm clock. The next day was the ship race and he got up early. The next day the ship race began and he won the ship race and he won a golden cap and he also became a great fisherman. That night he dreamt that he was the best fisherman in the world. He dreamt he caught a shark and it swallowed him but the next day he caught all the fish he wanted and he lived all his life.

The End



First Grade

Writing

First Grade Writing

Dear parents,

If you did not here about the fire here is all I know. Theare waer 300 familys with no homes beacuse of the fire. You could see the fire from Seattle. They couldn't put out the fire because they hade no sprinkalers. I am mad because fires can kill pepol. Next time buy some sprinkalers.

Sincerle,

Albert



I got a shot in my hip. It hurt. I was limping. Because I could not straighten my leg. I got a shot because I had strep throt. It hurt to swlo. Strep is going around. My doctor said she had to have 15 kids get a shot. You should drink lots of fluids. So you won't get sick. If you cannot swllo and your throt is puffy, than you have strep. You should get lots of rest. And get a shot. Because the shot will make you better faster then the medicine.



My Dad Told Me To Clean My Room

My dad told me to clean my room. The next day I came home from school. It was a mess. My mom told my brother to clean the room. I had to make my bed. That's all. I got to have as much fun as I wanted. And I hate half a bag of Cheez its and watched Zoom my favorite show. It took my brother 15 minutes.



Hey! I got E-mail from the President!

I got E-mail from the president on Aug. 29 1997. The time was 2:30 P.M. I told him I see too much violent stuff on T.V. He said that he would talk to the T.V. company. You can E-mail the president to. The website is www.whitehouse.gov

First Grade Writing

Halloween

I went to a Halloween party. My friend Tianalexa invited me. I made my own cookie. When they had a piñata I broke her head off. We Read some Books. At first we ate food. We decorated pumpkins. The party was a Black and orange party.



Casa Bonita

I'm in Casa Bonita. Ther are cliff Divers. The divers dive backwards. I got wet Wen The divers dived. The Divers thing is kind of like a show. I ate french fries and Honey. We ate in a cave. Ther are places That are scary! It is fun! I went this year. Ther are coins That you put in a game and you play it. I did it when we wer leaving. we wint ther two times.



I Seen a accident

This happened to this guy. He was going to sleep and he crashed in to the light Pole. And the fire truck and cop cars and cop truck came to my moms work. Me and Mom saw the accident. Flat tire and gasoline fell off. and I saw the wires and the wires were shock. Wow what an accident!



Second Grade

Writing

Second Grade Writing

On Christmas vacation I played with my German Shepard Brandy. I sprade water at her. I wrestled her and I played soccer with her. We set down together, we telled jokes to each other, we played and played intell I had to go into the house and eat lunch. When I was done eating I went back outside and I read her a book called Flubber. I played tag with her and I taged her 10 times and she taged me with her tail 11 times so she beat me. Then me and her said all of the 12 months 5 times. Then we sang a song then we said the 7 contenents 10 times. We pretended to be a car but I was a car and she was just a regyler dog.



BOOM!!! The trunk slamed. Bang!!! The car door slamed as we got out of the van. Buses lined up on the side-walk. The screches of the buses got annoying. Screch!!! Screch!!! We walked and walked until we found a place to sit for the parade. I saw a Grease van and someone threw me a dafudle. The dafudle petals were soft, and it smeled pretty. A Titanic float sailed by. All schools had cheers. One school's band was star-wars. A dummy was shot out of a cannon. It made me jump!!! We ate snacks at the parade, like sandwiches and juice and carouts. They were good. The parade was two-hours. We sat on a blanket. Things blew every where when [the] float went by whew-clunk. Finally the parade was done. We put the blanket in the trunk. BOOM!! It slamed agin and we drove away as I thought how much fun I had.



Back-hand-springs

Wow! I was doing my back-hand-spring and I landed it! Floor exercize is my favorite event to gymnastics because of all the tumbling. The tumbling makes you get very excited! Gymnastics can also be a nerve-wracking sport because of having to compete. When your in your tank top leotard for practice the sun feels great! I was just about to do another back-hand-spring when I stopped myself. I was getting too excited! Finally I did one! As you can see I LOVE gynmastics!



Swimming

It seems like we never go swimming at Fife pool! There is a tun of fun things to do at the pool! Like a basketball hoop and two big slides. When we went there, the carpets that we found were 8 feet long! My Brother Ashton and I had a birthday party at the Fife pool! We used up all the carpets as a big long train! My Dad pulled the first big carpet in the water. Then the hole birthday party got the rest of the carpet. We hung onto the carpet in frunt of us! By then we had a big train of carpets. I was in the frunt car wear my Dad was going CRAZY. I felt like I was going to fall off the carpet! But was I going to fall off?

Second Grade Writing

The Mariners Game

On Saturday, May 23 1998, I went to a Mariners game. It was the Seattle Mariners vs. the Tampa Bay Devil Rays. The score was Mariners 3 Devils Rays 7. The Devil Rays hurt us bad. I got disgusted because we lost. The best part was when I got my giraffe beanie baby signed by Alex Roderiegez. The baddest part was when the Devil Rays got ahead. At the beginning my mom blurted out "Hi Alex". He grinned, looked up and said "Hi". For the rest of the game, my mom kept her eyes on Alex Roderiegez. At the Kingdome, I ate some Twix candy bars. This woman, behind us, named Dana, was crazy about Dan Wilson. She liked him so much she says "he's a beautiful thing. DAN WILSON." Dana screamed, "go Danny." But she didn't mean me.



The Titanic

It is April 10th 1912. Two years before my great grandma was born. The Titanic is going to travel all the way from England to America. Newspapers call the Titanic "The Wonder Ship". The Titanic had restaurants, a post office, even a gym with a toy camel ride. The Titanic has another nickname, The rich man's specail. The Titanic has lied on the bottom of the Atlantic ocean for 86 years. This guy name Robert Ballard found the Titanic. It was pretty close to it's destnation when it sank. It was sad because only 1,100 people survived. The people who survived got on a ship called the Carpitha.



Drug Bust

By where me and Danielle live, they had a drug bust. Drug Busts are when police come and search drug dealers houses. It is very scary when they have a drug bust because you could get stolen by a drug dealer and never come back. So lock your doors when they have a drug bust around where you live. It was closer to Danielle's house. It was kind of close to David's house. It was really close to Kasey Bell's and Katie Bell's and Kelsey Bell's house because they live less than ten yards away. It was boring because you had to stay inside. You couldn't take one baby step outside. Remember, if there is a drug bust by your house lock your doors!



Ashes filled the air when I was around the camp fire. Crackle, crackle, it went. Ashes flew up in to the air and once they got too high and it got too cold. And they disappeared. At first they were red burning hot. I roasded hot dogs and marshmelos and I like mine burnt because it gives it more taste some time. I like to peel the burnt stuff off of the marshmelos because there is melty stuff in side of it. I make s'mores out of it because it is sguishier so it is easier to sguish it. It tastes better. When you put water on the fire it goes sizl sizl and it sparks. Oh Yeah! Here is some thing really funny. My hair still smells like smoke. I love campfires.

Trying Dialog and “Chapters”

Disneyland

Chapter 1

“Yeah! We’re going to Disney Land tomorrow! Yeah!” I said. “Yep!” said Mom “5 A.M.” “5 A.M.”? I said “No way mom 5 am is too early” “No it isn’t” said Mom “Any ways I bought something for you so you won’t be bored on the airplane.” Then I said “What is it? Tell me.” “Al-right” said mom “I’ll tell you. Its called Word Games” Then I said “I always wanted it.” “Why?” said Mom. “Because it looked like fun.” I said.

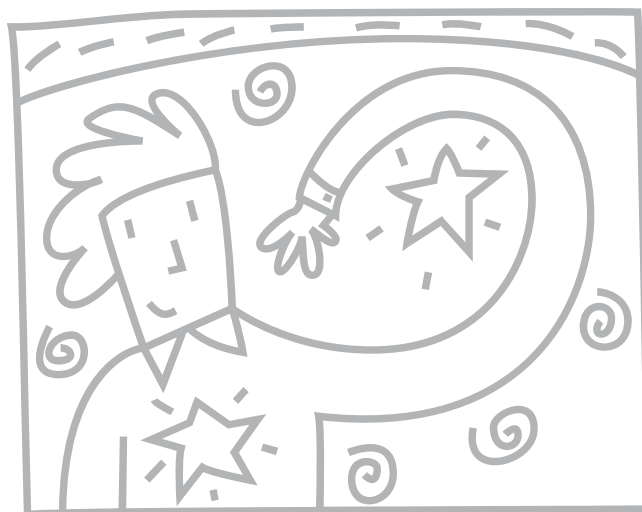
Chapter 2 The Boring airplane

On the airplane, I was bord. Then I remembered about my toy that my mom got me. But when I tried it, it was really noisy. That’s why I stopped.

Chapter 3 Arriving

“Finaly, we’re there”! I said. Then we got our stuff. Then we walked and walked untill we got to our hotel. Then we got everything organized and then we went to Disney Land. And guess what? I’m not going to tell you what kinds of rides I rode. Ha ha ha. Well all right, I’ll tell you. I went on the Snow Monster, Splash Mountain and different kinds of rides but I can’t remember the names. And I’m so lucky because when I got off Splash Mountain they let me go on it again. And we did the same stuff the next day, and then the next. But the last day we went in the honted house. Inside it the picters turned into nice ones and scary ones. Then there is a ride in it and when you go on it there is a mirror and one person turns into a skeleton in it and I turned in to the skeleton in the mirror. The we got out and went to our hotel room and packed our stuff and went on the airplane again. This was really exsiting to me. In fact, it was the best days of my life. And I’ll always rember it.

The End.



Third Grade

Writing

Third Grade Writing

How My Situation Turned Out

I got this assignment to do. I had to write about an event that I regretted. But I didn't do it. I didn't tell my parents about it. Meanwhile, Ms. Stromberg asked me every day about this assignment.

I didn't do this assignment because I couldn't think of anything to write about. I didn't ask my mom for help, because I thought she would get mad at me.

When Ms. Stromberg asked me about my work, I just rolled my eyes. I hoped it would go away. However, what did happen, was Ms. Stromberg sent home a note which I didn't give to my parents.

Finally, Ms. Stromberg talked to my mom about it. When my mom heard about this, she got mad and hurt. She was mad because I didn't do my work, and hurt because I thought she would get mad at me if I asked for help.

I had to do this work until my parents were satisfied. I didn't get any books all weekend and no TV all Friday. I got very mad. I got so mad, I didn't think I'd ever read again.

I feel totally dumb. I should have gone to my parents for help.

It was all my fault. I learned that I shouldn't lie because it gets me into worse trouble. In the future I'm not going to lie. If I have a problem, I'm going to tell someone about it, and ask for help.



Ashes All Over

The day after Thanksgiving my family had a reunion for my grandmother on a boat because she died of cancer about a month ago. We were all sitting in a circle, reading letters about her and saying memories. Then from oldest to youngest, we went outside, and threw a rose and a cup of grandmother's ashes out into the water. I asked if I could go alone so I could have a special time with grandmother.

When it was my turn I went outside, said a few words and threw the rose. Then I picked up the cup and filled it with ashes. But I threw the ashes a little crooked and they fell on the bumpers, and because the wind was very hard the ashes blew back all over me and the boat.

Everyone inside was laughing really hard, I was even laughing myself! I thought it was because of what happened. But then my mom told me that she did the same thing to my grandfather 4 years ago. She said that she had twisted her hand a little, and it all flew back all over her and my aunt Shelly. That made me laugh even harder, and my mom said that grandma Jin always liked a good laugh! I think everyone got a good laugh.

A little bit later I got to have the extra roses to throw outside and say what I wanted to say. I had a wonderful time that day.

Third Grade Writing

Surprise Snowstorm

It was a snowy day in January. It was a Surprise Snowstorm with about 6 inches of snow. Grandma and grandpa came over from Ellensburg. Mom and grandma went to a baby shower and my sister Julia had our friend Lil over. Our grandpa wanted to see my dad's jobsite and we had to go over Whitney Bridge hill to get there. The roads were very icy so when we got to the top of the hill, I felt a big lurch and dad yelled "hold on"! But it was too late. We slid into the ditch.

Two other cars slid to the side of the road. Grandpa's truck did too, a few yards ahead of us. Dad got out of our truck to go help put chains on grandpa's tires. But when he got in, the chains fell off and the truck skreeched and slid to the bottom of the hill.

Dad's truck's tire had popped off, so dad, Dyllan (my other sister) Lil, Julia and I jumped down from it toward grandpa at the bottom of the hill. I sat in the sled with Dyllan to calm her, dad pulled us and Julia and Lil carried grandpa's chains. We started down the hill and a big truck passed by. When we started walking again, I slid on my knees in between some abandoned cars by the road. I felt the cars moving and one hit my head. I could not do anything but crawl through the tires to the ditch on the other side. Quickly, a man pulled me out.

I learned that the big truck had bumped into the cars causing them to move.

Everyone was okay. Julia and Lil had been in front of the cars. Grandpa gave anyone who wanted one a ride and dropped them off where they wanted to go. Then we went home. That is a story I will never forget!



Recorders

Screech, screech, screech! The first time we tried to play the recorders it sounded like a lion running his claws down a chalkboard. In other words we made a TERRIBLE noise!

See, a recorder is an instrument with a very high pitch. If you don't blow in it correctly, it does sound pretty bad. After Mrs. Romland told us there is a special place for our tongue to be, we understood why we sounded so bad. She said the place was right behind your upper front teeth, and then she said once your tongue is there, put the recorder up to your mouth and try to say "too, too, too, too". It's called tonguing. Then we almost got the right sound.

A recorder looks like a short skinny tube with one hole on the bottom, and 7 holes on the top.

There are a few different types of recorders. The one we are playing is called the soprano, it is the smallest with the highest sound. Another is the alto, it is bigger with a lower sound. Next comes the tenor, it is bigger yet, with an even lower sound. Last but not least is the bass, it is the biggest of them all and the lowest sounding too.

The recorder originally came from Europe. It has been an instrument for over 100 years. If you think it is related to the flute, it's not.

A Good 3rd Grade Book Review

“Ramona Quimby, Age 8” by Beverly Cleary

Touch of the flu! Egg in her hair? Poor Ramona!

“Ramona Quimby, Age 8” is a nine chapter, one hundred and ninety page book about an eight year old girl in third grade. She started school with a surprise gift from her dad, only to have it stolen by a boy she called “Yard Ape”. One day at lunch she tried to be cool and show off for her friends by cracking an egg on her head and found herself in a big mess. When flu season hit she learned how awful it felt to throw up in class. She and her sister learn about using good manners at the dinner table. As time goes on Ramona and her family solve their problems, and learn to be more caring for each other. They also learn to be more considerate for each other when time alone is needed.

My favorite part was during a scene where Ramona’s class is at lunch,

“She took a firm hold on her egg, waited until everyone at her table was watching, and whack—she found herself with a hand full of crumbled shell and something cool and slimy running down her face.” (“Ramona Quimby, Age 8”, Beverly Cleary, p. 60)

I thought that was funny because she wanted to be cool like the rest of her class, by breaking a hard boiled egg on her head. But guess what, her mother was in such a hurry she gave Ramona a raw egg! Whoops!

I think the one thing the author wants me to know is that when my family may be having problems I can be of help by obeying them and not fussing, disturbing, and/or annoying them.

I liked this book because the author chose strong, powerful, descriptive words that made gross, imaginative pictures in my mind. Like in her lunch scene at school,

“something cool and slimy running down her face”,

and at her dinner scene at home,

“One edge of her meat was covered with tiny bumps.”

“Ramona Quimby, Age 8” is one of the best Beverly Cleary books I’ve ever read because it pulled me in better than any other book in her series. (I have read 6 of her books.) It made pictures in my mind (Word Choice) and sounded like a real person wrote it (Voice). It also sounded good as I read it, flowed easily from sentence to sentence (Sentence Fluency), and sounded like a real 8 year old girl’s life. These traits made me want to keep on reading until the end of the book.

I recommend this book to good readers who enjoy good long lasting chapters*.

*Max. 25 pages.

Strong Voice

Chores!

Chores! Chores! Chores! Chores are boring! Scrubbing toilets, cleaning sinks, and washing bathtubs take up a lot of my time and are not fun at all.

Toilets! When you're scrubbing toilets make sure they are not stinky. I've scrubbed one before and I was lucky it didn't stink. I think toilets are one of the hardest things to scrub in the bathroom because it is hard to get up around the rim.

Sinks are one of the easiest things to clean in the bathroom because they have no rims and they are small. I have cleaned one before and it was pretty easy.

Bathtubs, ever washed one? They are big, they are deep, and it is hard to get up around the sides. The bathtub is the hardest, I think, to wash in the bathroom.

All chores are boring, especially making my bed. Cleaning my room is OK because I have to organize, and I like organizing. Dusting is the worst: dust, set down, pick up, dust, set down. There are so many things to dust, and it's no fun.

Chores aren't the worst but they're definitely not the best!



Attack of My Older Brother

I just hate it. I mean really, really, really positively hate, being taken by surprise. Just thinking about it makes me shiver.

Boy, I've been taken by surprise lots of times, lots of ways, by many different people.

In my opinion, I think the worst surprise I have been through must have been when I got home from school and expected to see my older brother waiting for me or watching television. But no, my brother wasn't home (at least it seemed like it to me) so, I yelled for my dad outside. No dad. Poor me scared without a brother or father (yeah right) and right when I was walking to my brother's room, boom! Ahhhh! I screamed, my brother jumps out of the closet in the hall. I was really frightened. I'll never forget that, it will scar me for life.

After that I figured out my dad was outside somewhere where he could not hear me.

I have also been taken by surprise many other times but none of them as worse as "The attack of my older brother."

It is so annoying when they do it more than once. Example: Laura jumps out of the kitchen and scares Trish and then she leaves. Seconds later Trish passes by the kitchen again, Laura screams "Raahh," Trish doesn't scream but is now annoyed.

Getting taken by surprise happens most unexpected.

I think I will get scared more if you don't make it so fancy, make it original. Example for original: She jumps out screaming "Raahh," is original. Example for fancy: He jumps out screaming, "Ooga, Booga," along with streamers, confetti etc. That is way too fancy.

Me, Trisha Arnold, will give you some advice that I learned: don't take it seriously. It might be scary but, go be free, live along with your life, that's the best cure. Even for "The attack of my older brother."

Third Grade Writing

How to Eat Fried Worms

Eyuuuuuuuu! Nasty! This book was very gross at the beginning because the bullies made a bet with Tom. The bet was for Tom to eat fifteen worms for 50 dollars.

What brought me in to the story was the lead which was “Hey Tom where were you last night?”

As I got further into the story it kind of made me want to try a worm ‘cause in the fifth and sixth chapter it says, “The worms were okay”.

During the eighth and ninth chapter Tom got a very bad stomach ache from all those worms. Tom didn’t only lose 50 dollars he lost energy from those worms because when he got the stomach ache he couldn’t do anything. How he lost is he missed his worm.

When Tom’s mom learned about the bet she punished him by sending him to his room till dinner.

The author included lots of detail. It made really wonderful pictures in my mind from the long and descriptive words that the author used. I think the author wrote this book to tell us not to bet. It is a bad thing to bet because it can hurt your body.

I recommend this book for readers who like adventures and interesting stories.



Teeth Don’t Make Good Brakes

Flying through the air on my bike was a very frightening moment. It was a Wednesday and my family was celebrating my dad’s birthday.

My friend, my cousin Laura, and I decided to go bike riding.

I started going faster and faster not knowing what was going to happen. And I flew off my bike. What made me fall off? Maybe my bike tire hit a rock!!

Then I noticed I chipped three teeth. Ahhhh!!!!

As we were walking back I was bleeding a lot and aching all over. Finally we got home. I got ice on my lip which was swollen. My cousin Jessica called the dentist and we went there right away.

Nobody was at the dentist’s office except for me. He numbed my lip so I could have a good night sleep.

After we were done at the dentist we went to the store to get straws for me to sip juice. My dad and I stayed in the car while my mom and my brother went inside. After we went to the store we went home and I went to sleep.

The next two days I didn’t go to school.

From now on I will be more cautious when I ride my bike.

“Double” Book Review

King Midas and the Golden Touch

by Judy Rosenbaum

The Chocolate Touch

by Patrick Skene Catling

These two books are about some greedy people. One is a boy named John Midas, the other is a man named King Midas.

John LOVES chocolate. I mean absolutely LOVES chocolate. And the king was filthy rich with gold. Well, one day they each got a taste of their own medicine, because they were so greedy.

“One day John was going to a friend’s house, but then for a change he went a different way. Only two blocks along the unfamiliar street, John came to a small corner candy store.” (The Chocolate Touch, by Patrick Skene Catling, page 11-12)

And that’s where his chocolate touch began. Whatever he put into his mouth it turned to chocolate. And the king?

“Well one day Midas was sitting in his treasure room dreaming about his gold. In his dream he saw a shadow fall across the piles of valuable gold coins, he looked up and saw a stranger standing near him.” (King Midas and the Golden Touch, by Judy Rosenbaum, page 2)

And that’s where his golden touch began. Whatever he touched with his hands, it turned to gold.

They liked their touch . . . for a while.

Then one day a terrible thing happened!

Now you read the rest of the book to find out what the terrible thing was.

And when you are done reading this book, you will find out it teaches you a lesson about greediness.

By the way, there are some parts you should know about. Like the time John turned his trumpet to chocolate, and the time King Midas turned his food to gold.

Both of these books pulled me in with a good lead!

The Chocolate Touch started with “Most of the time John Midas was a very nice boy. Every now and then, of course, he broke a rule.”

King Midas and the Golden Touch started out with “Once upon a time there was a very rich King named Midas. He lived in a fine castle with his daughter Marygold.”

I wanted to read the whole book in one day because it got really exciting and interesting with the fun and powerful words the author used. The Chocolate Touch had a little more detail and action than The Golden Touch because the book was longer by 80 pages.



Fourth Grade

Writing

Fourth Grade Writing

Middle of the Night Surprise

I woke up swiftly. My senses were blurred, except for my hearing. All I could hear was the sound of footsteps stepping on the creaky board in the hallway. I waited for the footsteps to go into the living room.

I walked as lightly as I possibly could but no matter how hard I tried, I still made noise. I slipped past my parents room and entered the living room very cautious. I searched the room and found nothing. I went into the kitchen to find three small wrapped presents on the table.

I sleekly ran back into my brothers' room. I brought them into the kitchen. We opened the present and found three sheets of paper. One piece had little lines with symbols under them. The other two made up the key. I pieced together: on January 8th we are going to. The last I spelled out loud. "D" "I" "S" "N" "E" "Y" "L" "A" "N" "D"!! I got up to see my mom. I jumped for joy and was thrilled out of my mind.



When I Grow Up

... I tried to run, but I couldn't. The monster seemed like it was growing by the minute! And then, the most horrible thing was about to happen. . . I screamed and sat bolt upright up in bed. I gasped swallowing huge amounts of air. I'd just had the most horrible nightmare ever. I'd never been so scared in my life!

Still gasping, I called "Mom!" My mom came sleepily into my bedroom and sat on the edge of my bed. "What is it sweetie?" she asked, her voice full of concern. Tears swelled up in my eyes as I remembered the ghostly monster from my dream. "I . . . I had a nightmare." I finally managed to say. "Poor thing," my Mom said sympathetically as she gave me a hug. "But don't worry," she said, "you will stop having them when you grow up." I nodded my head in agreement. Although inside I secretly felt that I wouldn't. After my Mom left, I lay on my pillows and started to think.

People—mostly grownups—were always telling me that things would happen, or I would like something better when I was "grown up." Apparently they thought being grown up meant liking everything and knowing everything. Well I most certainly did not!

Personally I thought growing up meant having responsibility, and trying to make good choices, etc. I wondered if my life would be different as a grown-up. I mean I knew I would be older, and more mature, but would I be prettier? fatter? skinnier? would I choose to get married? or get a job? Then I realized something. I was nine years of age. Right now none of that stuff mattered. I didn't need a husband because I had older siblings! I didn't need a job because my Mom and dad provided for me. The only job I had right now was to be a kid. And that was just what I was going to do.

Fourth Grade Writing

Day of Destiny

It was a humid day in July, the Key Bank sign said that it was 85 degrees outside. That day my mom drove me to The Smithfield Theater. I had an important job to do. The job was more of a personal goal. It was to make people laugh.

The catch was that if I was to stand up in front of a theater of people and tell a couple of jokes then I would get to see the movie “Mission Impossible” free.

When I got to the theater I was sweating like a pig. The librarian that signed me up was dressed in a clown suit. She said, “Are we ready to make people laugh?”

I feebly answered, “Yes...”

When I got inside the theater a guy was already telling some lame jokes. Then, when everyone was seated he called my name, “C’mon down Zachary Williams!”

As I reached the first step to the stage I had about a hundred butterflies in my stomach. By the third step they multiplied. But then, very abruptly, when I reached for the microphone all of the butterflies disappeared. When I was done telling the jokes I didn’t turn red or anything, I just smiled. I noticed the size of the crowd and unexpectedly I knew what I was going to be when I grew up, I knew why God had put me on this green earth, it was because I was going to become . . . a comedian.



January 20, 1993

Dear Mr. President,

Today was probably one of the most important days of your life. The speech you gave was very, very hopeful, sincere, and thoughtful.

There are two main issues that I think you should focus on. First, I would like you to work on getting more money to go into schools. I would like to see every school in Washington, and every other state, with enough learning space, tools, and good teachers.

I would also like to see the government working for the people instead of the people being servants of the government. The people should not be out there, working their heads off, just so that they can give the government the little amount of hard-earned money they have. The government should be by the people and for the people, instead of by the people and for the politicians.

You must have a very hard job and I know you won’t be able to do everything by yourself. I hope that you will have plenty of support. I know that you will do your best to do well as President, be able to make good judgements, and make our country into the country that it was meant to be by our founders.

My best wishes to you and your extra-hard job.

Sincerely,

Mindy Franklin

Fourth Grade Writing

The Beach House

I will always love my grandparent's beach house. The way the waves role over the gooey sand, and the way the sand weaves in between your toes. The way we pick up barnacle-covered rocks and watch the sand crabs scurry away, and how we dig for clams and end up knee deep in the never ending sand.

I'm not the only one to share these pleasures. My aunt, uncle, cousins, family, and of course, my grandparents also share this. In the summer we play volleyball, baseball, and badminton. At my grandparent's 4th of July party we go out on the boat called Sea Biscuit. At night we snuggle up in our blankets and toast marshmallows in the campfire while we watch the fireworks explode in the star-filled sky.

We have bullhead fishing contests to see who can catch the most bullhead. Then we throw the bullheads back into the salty blue-green ocean. With one final splash they say goodbye to the unfamiliar world. Then they disappear to somewhere known to only the fish and the crabs.

We go to a sand bar a couple houses down where we collect sea shells and sand dollars. We fly over the bar, our feet touching every grain of sand, leaving a sign that we were there. Gathering shells and dollars in our pockets, we head back to the place we love with all our hearts.

When it's time to go, none of us want to leave. As I say my goodbyes, I think of all the fun we had, and what fun we will have next time.



Kids Need Their Recess!

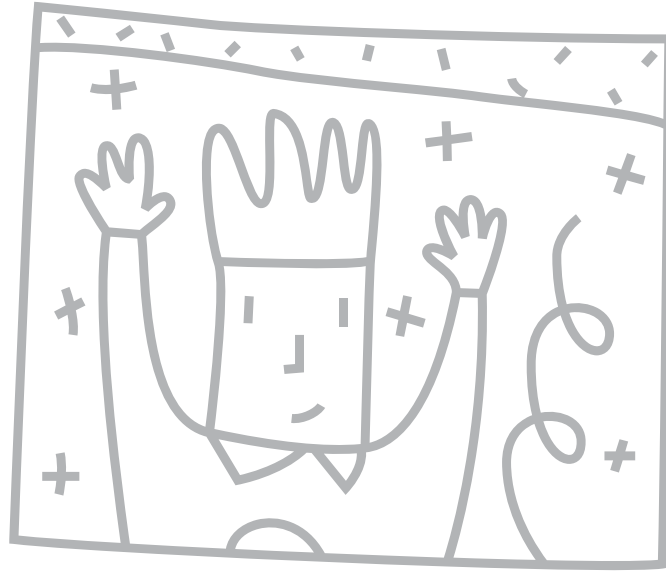
“Michael, please tell me. . .” This is a child's average day in the classroom. The teacher asks a question, the child answers. But children, as we all know, seemingly cannot sit still for long periods of time, and as the average school day lasts for about six hours, they need a break. This is only one of the many reasons that recess was created. Why now take away possibly one of the greatest inventions (besides the wheel) ever to come about?

Recess was meant to take the energy out of kids so they'd come back to the classroom ready to learn. If we take away even one recess, children may be too energetic and hyper to even pay attention to the lesson. The “art” of passing notes will most likely increase and kids may learn even less *without* recess!

It's not just a matter of education, lots of parents agree that children should enjoy their youth while they still can, and live a “worry free” life before they must face the “real world.” After all, you have to admit, being cramped up in a desk all day is rather uncomfortable, not to mention boring. So, not only do kids need recess to learn, they need it to maintain their youth.

As you've probably heard on the news, lots of kids are complaining about too much homework lately. This is the main reason that some people want to take away recess, to cover the homework during this time. But most schools have a 15 min. recess in the morning and a 30 min. recess in the afternoon. How much more learning can you pack into 45 or 30 min. anyway? Recess isn't enough time for any heavy duty learning, it's just enough for kids to get their energy out.

So, I come to my conclusion: Kids need their recess!



Fifth Grade

Writing

A Sticky Situation

Bad Bad Mud

I come to you today with some good advice: DON'T WALK IN MUD!!!

It all started when Melissa and me were walking outside, with umbrellas in hands, rain boots, rain jackets, and no fear from the rain. We were set for anything. At least that's what we thought. But the real truth lay before us!

Melissa asked, "Can we go into the cow pasture?"

"Sure," I said.

"Ok, let's go on the count of three," said Melissa.

We both said together, "One, Two, Three." We both took off like we were being chased by a ghost!

We had run to the edge of the barn and came to a halt. There before us was a pasture full of mud!

Melissa said, "What are you stopping for?"

I said, "MUD!"

She said, "Look just follow me. You won't get stuck, I promise!"

Before I could say Yes or No, she was off! My heart was pounding. A little voice in my head kept saying, "Don't do it," "Don't do it," over and over again.

Melissa was going deeper and deeper into the cow pasture. She wasn't sinking so why would I? *It's just a bunch of dirt*, I said to myself.

So I took one step, then another and there I was in the middle of the pasture. Actually standing there in mud!

"Melissa," I said. "This isn't so bad."

Wait, what am I feeling? Thick, cold, gooey, watery, mud! I was sinking as fast as a light bulb burns out. I felt like someone was pushing and pulling me under. My fear was coming true! I started yelling for help.

Melissa heard me and came running over to see what my problem was.

I told Melissa, "The ground is sucking me under!" "Quick pull me out!"

She tugged and tugged at my boots, but the mud was winning. We both started screaming for help!

To the rescue came my sister Jennie and my cousin Natasha.

They grabbed a hold of me and all pulled. Out I popped, but my boots remained.

I stepped on my umbrella and then pulled my boots out.

My feet were now black and freezing. I put my boots back on and made a mad dash, barely touching the ground, and I was out of the gate!

To Melissa I said, "Score one for mud and I'm out!"

Another Disaster Story

The Crash

It all started on a hot sunny day. I didn't think anything was going to happen, but boy was I wrong!

"Want to go for a bike ride?" my friend Lisa asked me.

We had just gotten to a really cool camp ground. It had a swimming pool, but the part that I liked the most was the cabins. They were surrounded by tall trees. There was a little trail that I thought would be a perfect place to run away to and have a romantic night with a boy, but enough of that mushy gushy stuff.

"Sure!" I responded as I was already getting my bike and helmet. We wobbled onto the road. We peddled as fast as we could so when we went over pot holes or the turtles, we would bounce off our seat like a bouncey ball.

Around the corner, over the bump! Ok here comes the turn. At first it looks like a nice turn, an ordinary turn, but that is exactly what it wants you to think. Here we go! I felt like I was going 100 m.p.h. CRASH! BOOM! BANG! My so called legs or what was left of them were squashed between two unmoving cars. The bony stems that were dangling from the rest of my body were unmovable.

"OWWWWWW!" I screeched, but what I did not know was that five angry people were staring at me.

"What happened here?" probably one of the biggest guys in history said.

"I'm sooo sorry about the car!"

"Well it's not my car, and I'm glad!"

The car on the left had a black streak from side to side from my handle bar.

The big hairy son of a God (I call him that because he was so big) walked me back to my camp site.

Later that evening . . .

"Sarah you have to come. YOU crashed into the cars so you WILL come." The horrible words came from my own dad's mouth.

"No! No! No! This isn't happening."

I imagined a guy about two times bigger than the first, but to my surprise the humungus person I had imagined was a skinny stick!

The skinny stick said that no harm was done. All it needed was a coat of paint. So I guess that I lived happily ever after except that I couldn't walk for the rest of the trip. Maybe that camp ground wasn't so cool after all.

Negotiating with Mom

Louder and Louder It Goes

“What?! What?! I can’t hear you.” My music was blaring too loudly. “Let me turn it down!”

“Joe, this is the second time I’ve told you to turn your music down!”

That’s my mom. She is ALWAYS nagging me to turn my music down. I somehow have to convince her my loud music should be able to be as loud as I like it.

At first I was very weak. Every time I blasted my music, she would come in and tell me to turn it down. I would sadly mope over to the stereo and turn it down, and then apologize. That was when I realized I had to take action or risk some kind of lifetime psychological complex for not being able to stand up to people.

“Joe! Joe! Turn that music down!”

I could barely make out those words, but when my mom busted into my room I knew there was going to be trouble.

“Why don’t you ever turn your music down?” she yelled. “It seems like you are becoming deaf. The less you can hear it, the more you turn it up. Is that right?”

“No, it’s just that I like the music to be exploding with noise. You can’t tell me when you were a kid, you didn’t practically blow your speakers out listening to the Beatles or whatever you listened to.”

“You’re right, I can’t,” she admitted. I had her now, I thought. “But still, that doesn’t mean you have to blast yours.”

“Well, what do you expect me to listen to? Beethoven?”

“Well . . . Would that be so bad?”

“Yes! Of course it would. How about I can blast my music while I do my chores? Then you could go outside or something.”

“Well, okay, but if it doesn’t work out, you will pay the price in a way that you can’t imagine.”

From that point on my life has been good. Except for the chores. I think my mom got the better end of the deal on that one.

A Tunafishy Story

Tuna Can of Death

Chapter 1 – The attempt on my life

I walked into the kitchen and asked “What are we having for dinner?”

“Tuna Casserole,” she replied.

“Mom, you know I hate tuna,” I said unhappily.

“Come on John, give it another try. You haven’t had any tuna fish since last year.”

“OK, I’ll give it a little try,” I whined.

I went and sat down at the dining room table. I picked up my fork and tried to scoop up some tuna. The minute my fork touched the disgusting food, I knew something was wrong.

“Mom, this stuff’s stale!” I shouted at her. “Let me see the date on the can.”

My mom brought out the can the tuna came out of. I silently read the date.

“Eeeewww!” I cried out. “The date says 2/1/96!”

“Whoops,” said my mom. “I thought it said ’97. I’m sorry,” she said apologetically.

“This stuff could have killed me.”

Chapter 2 – The tuna can lives

That night, I woke up hearing voices.

“Rats, he noticed my date. Couldn’t you have ‘accidentally’ cut off my date?” a voice said angrily.

“If I did that the mother would have thrown me away,” another voice replied.

I can’t believe it! I thought to myself. *The tuna can lives, and the can opener is in it with him!*

The tuna can spoke again. “Let’s get him now! We’ll sneak into his room and you can cut him with your blade!”

“OK!” the opener replied.

I snuck out my window and went into my garage. I grabbed the sledge hammer and went back into the house.

When the tuna can and the can opener opened my door, I ran towards them waving the sledge hammer and screaming “Yaa, death to tuna!!!”

My mom came running into the room to find me smashing the can opener and a tuna can to itty bitty smidgens.

“What are you doing?!” she yelled. “You’re grounded!”

Epilogue

I didn’t care about getting grounded. What I did care about is destroying tuna. Today I am still against tuna and probably will be for a long time to come.

There's No Place Like Home

On a dark December night in 1776, as he led a barefoot brigade of ragged revolutionaries across the icy Delaware River, George Washington said, "Shift your fat behind, Harry. But slowly or you'll swamp the darn boat." He was talking to General Henry Knox (they called him "Ox" for short). There's a painting of George Washington where he's standing up in a boat scanning the riverbank for Redcoats. I always thought he just wanted a good view. But I guess the reason he was standing was because he didn't have a place to sit down.

Finding a seat in his own boat was hardly the worst of General Washington's problems. It was cold and wet and icy, and his men were tired and didn't have warm clothes to wear or even enough food to eat. The Revolutionary War was hard on everyone, but it was hard on Washington most of all because he wanted to be home with his wife and children.

From 1759, until he was called to fight in 1775, Washington lived with his wife, Martha, and her two children. Washington loved his big farm in Mt. Vernon, Virginia, and although he was one of our country's most brilliant generals, he was really just a farmer at heart. In a letter he wrote to a friend in England, he said, "I can nowhere find such great satisfaction as in working on my plantation." He didn't even want to be President. He said he would feel like a criminal going to his death if he took office. But after everyone voted for him, he felt it was his duty to accept.

Washington was our President for the next eight years, but during that time he just wanted to get back home. He would spend weekends there whenever he could, and he made sure he got reports on the condition of his farm. He also liked getting letters from his family.

Then, in March of 1797, Washington finally got to go home for good. There were no more wars to fight, and John Adams was going to be President. Washington had been a good President, but he was tired of it. Even his granddaughter noticed how happy he was to be home. In a letter to a friend she wrote, "Grandpa is much pleased with being once more Farmer Washington."

I always used to think of George Washington as a soldier and a politician, and I guess I always will. But he was really just a farmer. He reminds me a little of Dorothy from *The Wizard of Oz*. All she wanted to do was get back home. And finally the Wizard told her she could just click her red shoes three times and say "There's no place like home." But George Washington and his men didn't have shoes when they went across the Delaware River. Maybe if they did, history would have turned out completely different.

Fabulous Fifth Grade Fiction

The Tragic Asparagus Story

Chapter One

The very first time I saw asparagus I hated it. I had never even tried it before, and I still hated it! I tried to pretend like it was not even there and just eat the rest of the meal, but when I was about to get up my dad looked over at my plate and immediately said, “No, you may not go ‘till you have eaten all of that asparagus.”

I knew right then and there that there was no way out of it. I lifted a minuscule bite to my mouth and tasted it. YUCK!!! Gross! I made a hysterical face and pushed my plate towards the center of the table. There, after a couple of minutes of thinking, an idea suddenly came to me.

Slowly, I scraped some of the food into my napkin and put it in my cat’s food dish. She ate the asparagus and after about half an hour threw up. My mom and dad knew it had been from the asparagus. I got sent to my room. I knew they thought that they were teaching me a lesson, but they weren’t. I could still hate the look, smell, and taste of asparagus.

Chapter Two

I must have fallen asleep last night without knowing it because when I woke up it was morning. That is, another boring, rainy, Saturday morning.

I could smell the leftovers of breakfast from the kitchen, so I got up and slipped into my robe and slippers and started running up the stairs. Halfway up, I suddenly stopped. What if mom and dad were still mad at me for feeding the cat asparagus? As soon as the word “asparagus” came into my head a horrible taste filled my mouth. Again I was tasting that gross disgusting taste.

I ran up the rest of the way and went into the kitchen and went to the fridge to find something to drink. After drinking half a quart of eggnog I felt much better. I went into my brother’s room where he was playing with a football. He looked up when I came in the room.

“Hi,” he said, “wanna score some touchdowns?”

“Uh, no, I’ve got better things to do with my time.” Then I asked him, “Where’s mom?”

“How should I know?” was his response. I took about fifteen minutes to look for mom and didn’t find her. So I got washed and dressed and ate a P.B.J. Then I sat down wondering what on earth to do. A few seconds later my mom came into the room and sat down on the sofa with me and said, “Honey, I know you didn’t mean to make the cat sick but you should have used your brain!”

“I know, I know,” I complained. We had a long conversation. Then after a few minutes mom got up and said, “Oh by the way, we’re having asparagus for lunch!”

NO!!!

Fabulous Fifth Grade Fiction

The Tragic Asparagus Story, Continud

Chapter Three

“Alex! Lunch is ready!” my sister called from the top of the stairs.

“Coming!” I called. Although I wasn’t coming. I needed time to think. If they were serving asparagus for lunch they could forget it! I was not eating asparagus again, and that was final!

* * *

I was sitting at the table with a cold plate of icky asparagus in front of me. It tasted like moldy brains. Everyone else had excused them self ages ago leaving me all alone to finish my disgusting lunch and mourn. I wondered if anyone felt sorry for me. I checked my watch, 1:30! I’d been at the table for an hour and twenty minutes! I decided there was nothing else left to do but finish up the asparagus.

So I got a glass of juice from the fridge and started eating, taking each bite with a gulp of juice afterwards. Finally I was done!

I jumped up and started down the stairs to my room. I sat down at my desk and took out a piece of clean stationery and began writing. I was writing to QFC because I knew they had asparagus, I had been shopping there several times. This is what my letter said:

Dear Mr. Store Manager,

I would like you to throw away all your asparagus. It is causing tragic hazards in my house. If you would like to contact me my address is 1823 Allen Ave.

Your asparagus hater,

Alex Carter

After I was through I folded up the letter, dropped it in an envelope, and put on a stamp. I wanted just to leave it on my desk and give it to the mailman when he delivers, but I just knew that one of my pesky siblings would get into it. So I slipped on a sweatshirt and walked down to the corner mail box and mailed my letter myself.

Chapter Four

“Alex! Alex! ALLEEEEXXX!!!” Hmmm? I had been stuck in a great book and hadn’t the slightest clue what was going on around me. I put a marker in my book and ran outside where my sister had been calling me.

“What’s the big idea? Are you trying to make me deaf?” I asked with a slight scowl.

“No, I just wanted you to know mom is going shopping.”

“Oh, is that all?” I said with another frown. Hmmp! I stalked back to my book. The book I was reading was called *Aliens Invade Vegetable Gardens*. Perfect for my problem. I planned to find a solution to the asparagus situation and then naturally I would fix it! Fifteen minutes later I put away my book and went to dinner.

As soon as I walked in the dining room I smelled trouble. I looked down at my plate and saw what I smelled! Brussels sprouts! I gave a loud tragic moan and knew this was going to be another story written by Alex Carter. But for now, I would feed my brussels sprouts to the fish.

I Wonder What Ken Thinks of This?

Dolls of Doom

I hate Barbie dolls. The worst things are the commercials. They have annoying little songs that they run in the background while these girls are going “Wow! Her braid changes color!” and giggling their heads off. I had the little jingle for that dumb “Pet Doctor Barbie” running in my head for two weeks straight. Why did the song stop then? They came out with a new one!

My sister has this weird one where the legs change from that weird orangey-pink skin color to some sort of sparkly black when you put the doll in cold water. “When the water’s cold, Barbie dives right in; her wet suit magically appears on her skin!” Wet suit, shmet suit. I tried spraying the legs of the doll with some cold water, and it looked like either a whole bunch of moles or some weird case of skin cancer.

More and more keep coming out, more “Dolls of Doom”, as I call them. Sure, they’re selling by the thousands. But they only keep them interested for a month, and then they ask for another, and the cycle goes on. Pretty soon, some little girl’s room will be filled with Barbies. If that happens to my little sister, her room will cave in on mine, which is right under it, unfortunately.

When I’m old enough, I’ll join the Army and get myself an M-1 tank or a fleet of Harriers or something, and raid Mattel. Or maybe I’ll make them make a doll like “Militia Barbie” or “In the Navy Now Barbie.” Pretty soon, all the little girls in America will be saying: “I wanna Barbie, not a GI Joe!” Down with the dolls! Nuke every Fred Meyers or Toys ‘R’ Us that carries them! Let the revolution for a Barbie-free America begin!

More Fifth Grade Fiction

Cokie & the Special Place

“We’re moving.”

That’s what she told him. He couldn’t believe it! He had just made the basketball team and was making more friends.

“What!” He exclaimed.

“I’m sorry Jessie, but your Dad got a new job in Oregon.”

“I wish you would stop dragging me around like a doll!” he yelled.

He ran upstairs and slammed his door. His basketball poster fell down and he kicked it into his closet. He flopped down onto his bed and soon fell asleep.

* * *

KNOCK, KNOCK!

“Who is it?” Asked Jessie.

“It’s me,” said his Mom.

“Go away,” Jessie grumbled.

“I didn’t decide to move to Oregon, your Dad’s having a hard time,” said his Mom. There was a long silence. “Good night, Jessie.”

* * *

The sun gleamed through the window shining on Jessie. He went downstairs and poured some cereal into a bowl. He stared at his cereal and let it go soggy. He went back into his room and started to pack up his toys and clothes. His family was poor and he was used to moving.

Later, the moving men came in and loaded his furniture into the moving truck. Jessie climbed into his family’s tiny white Toyota and slumped onto the back seat. He stared out of his window and silently said goodbye to his old house. He fell asleep holding onto his basketball.

Jessie woke up to see the white Toyota turn into a gravel road. After a minute the moving truck turned onto a driveway and a grey and blue two story house stood in front of him. He slowly got out of the car and went inside the new house. He found his room on the second floor and started to unpack his stuff.

Later he decided to go look around. He packed a sandwich and went outside. Up the road was some woods. He followed a faint path into the woods where he saw an old shack. Jessie opened the door and something jumped at him.

“AHHHHHH!” yelled Jessie.

More Fifth Grade Fiction

Cokie & the Special Place, Continued

He tripped on a stone and fell onto his back. He opened up his eyes to see a cat standing on his stomach. It was tan colored with a stripe of white on its forehead. An old collar that said "COKIE" was strapped onto the cat's neck. Cokie got up and ran back into the old shack. Jessie followed Cokie into a room. He leaned against the wall and sighed. All of a sudden the wall made a grinding sound and a whole book stand appeared where a moldy wall had been. He ran to the books and started to read a book called "THE MYSTERIOUS VISITOR".

A tiny switch was half into the wall. He pushed it and the books disappeared and the moldy wall was back again. He raced back to his house and was half way up the stairs when his Mom asked, "Where have you been?"

"Oh, just exploring the woods," Jessie said grinning.

* * *

He visited the shack many times to read the books. But one day when he was reading a book called "ONCE WHEN I LIVED IN SPACE" someone said, "So you found it."

Jessie whirled around to see his Mother walking into the old room.

"How did you know I was here?" demanded Jessie.

"Before you were born, my grandparents used to come here. They lived up the road. When they were kids they made this place. Grampa was an electricity nerd and he must have built this," she said, marveling at the bookshelf. A single tear slid down her cheek. "Then they forgot about it."

"The library in town is running out of books. We can sell about half of these to the librarian and she'll give us enough money to pay the rent and help us buy some new things," said Jessie's Mom.

"Can I keep Cokie?" asked Jessie.

"Sure," said his Mom.

"I guess moving isn't so bad" said his Mom.

"I guess not," said Jessie grinning.



Middle School Writing

A Friendship Story

A Bitter Friendship

It was a gorgeous morning that first day of fifth grade. With the sun happily peeking over the slight wind, my new dress shone with radiance. My heart was pounding deep inside my chest as I walked into the class. I poked my head nervously through the door and surveyed the chaotic scene that lay before me. Kids were rushing about, kids I'd never seen before.

I saw her. Anna, with her long blonde hair set back in a headband, her tall athletic frame standing at attention. I could tell right away that she had authority. She was the best, had always been the best, and she knew it.

I was intrigued. Nervously, I tiptoed around to the teacher and waited for Anna to notice me. Her cool lips were puckered in a sophisticated pout as she took me in. Her blue-green eyes looked quickly over me with an instant air of disapproval. I could almost hear her commenting.

“What a baby. A pink sundress? Go back to kindergarten, sweetie.”

Not a great first impression, as these things go, but as time went by, you could almost feel her disgust rising.

The first time I had her over was great. We walked to Hy-Vee and laughed the whole way. Anna always made me laugh. We shared our secrets and I felt myself starting to really enjoy her company. After two or three months, we were actually good friends. If only it would have stayed that way.

By sixth grade, we had become best friends. I think it hit us both by surprise because we are totally opposite in every way. She's blond, tall and lean. A rebel. I'm short and dark. Responsible is an understatement.

Although we got along well and spent a lot of time together, I always felt inferior around her. It was as if I had to work twice as hard as she did to keep our friendship together.

I remember the time my mom took us to the Plaza. We went to the Nature Company. Anna commented on a rock she really liked. I guess she expected my mom to buy it for her, but she didn't. Later I heard her tell another friend that my mom was a cheap Jew. I'll never forget the icy pain and shock, the fear that ran through me at that moment. I ran away and cried.

A Friendship Story

A Bitter Friendship, Continued

Our relationship was much like a tranquil volcano. Everything was fine on the outside, but there was always an underlying current of the disaster that was waiting to happen.

To the outsider, we were inseparable. What they didn't know was that in three years of friendship, she hadn't invited me over once. I was always the one to do the inviting, the planning.

Anna had a best friend before me, but after almost 7 years of friendship, Anna was "dumped." I guess inside I was always wondering if Anna really liked me, or if I was just a simple replacement.

By seventh grade, things with Anna were very rocky. I had heard from mutual friends that she had been talking about me behind my back. After a while, it seemed the only nice words spoken were when we were face to face.

She was too domineering. She always made me feel stupid. In her mind, she was better and I was worse and that was that.

One evening at the beginning of our eighth grade year, the tremor hit. Anna spent the night and the whole evening we watched T.V. or read. We didn't talk once. Finally I couldn't stand it anymore.

"Anna," I said, "This is so stupid. We don't talk, we hardly ever do things together anymore, this friendship has been worn out for a long time."

"I'm sorry you feel that way," was her only reply. Five minutes later, Anna had left my home and my life.

My whole world seems to be more on track now that she's gone. My self-confidence and my general attitude have improved immensely. I do miss her sometimes. How could I not after three years of friendship? All I can think is that I was a good friend to her. Our relationship didn't survive, but we'll always have the laughs . . . and the tears.

Two Short, Clever Pieces

The Last Day of School

I sat in my desk, sweat dripping down my face. I shut my eyes tight, then opened them. I looked at my watch: 11:27. Three minutes! Three minutes until I heard a sound, a sound that would set me free for three months of total nothingness. Ms. Smith rambled on about pi and figuring out percentages. 11:28. I stared at my watch. I looked as the seconds ticked down to freedom from SCHOOL! 11:29:50. 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, 0 BRRRIINNNGGG! The bell rang! I pulled on my backpack, tore out of the room, sprinted down the stairs, sped down the hallway, and bounded out the door. I dashed home and picked up a snack. I popped a video into the VCR, turned on the TV, and relaxed. Ahhh. . . what a glorious day!



Gum: A Vicious Cycle

Have you ever noticed that someone is always chewing their last stick of gum? For me it has gotten to the point where I'm starting to believe that gum is bought one stick at a time. Be assured that if you ask someone for gum their reply will be, "Sorry, this is my last piece."

A second phase of this strange phenomena is a sudden and inexplicable excess of gum. Every now and then, for no logical reason that I can understand, I will encounter a person who is freely giving out gum. Beware of the stampede call from these people: "Anyone want some gum?" This question, simply translated, means "I have found the mother load of single sticks. Come! Help me chew them."

The third and most deadly phase is the need for gum. The symptoms start small and grow without warning. They creep up on the victim with: "Does anyone have some gum?" Soon the victim realizes that no gum is to be had. He disappears from the playground screaming, "I need gum! Please help me!" Years later you find him on a street corner begging. He tugs at your coat, "Please, can I have a stick of gum?" You reply: "Sorry, this is my last piece."

An Essay Only a Mother Could Love

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My Mom

“Company halt!” yelled the drill master. My mom stopped and went into position. Her dog-tags clinked as she moved.

My mom. I would say she was a true hero. At least I think she is. Her life sort of dazzles me. She told me many stories about how she danced in the Nutcracker in front of the King and Queen when she was seven.

Now, my mom wasn't born in America. She was born in Denmark. She went to America after she married an American man (my dad). But before she met my dad she had an interesting life. Then again she has an interesting future from that time. Some of these things she make her famous to me. I think that my mom is a true hero from all the things she went through.

My mom was able to live through a lot of things when she was in the Danish Army. You see when my mom joined the army it was a very pregitist time. Most of the men laughed at her because she was a woman. But she showed them! She servived many wilderness tests that most of the men couldn't do. She did drills better than anyone! My mom even became the first Danish woman to ride a tank! My mom is in the World Book of records! I think that is really cool!

My mom spent four years in the Army then retired. I don't know if she fought in any war, but she made the serviver list! She also got a ton of medals. I am so proud of my mom. Not a lot of women joined the Army when my mom joined. So in one way my mom is a heroine for all women.

After my mom's encounter with the Army, my mom had a restless life. Three years after mom had retired she met a man named David. They fell in love and a couple months later they got married. “You may kiss the bride.” Ewww! After the honeymoon my dad had to go Louisiana. He was still in the Marines and he was stationed there. So they moved to the gator state.

Nine months later “Pop!” I came into the world. Really, I came a little early, but I'm glad! Who wants to be born on April 15, tax day! Anyway, two years later my dad was restationed to Massacuttes. But another two years later my mom got a deploma at Harvard. There was a big celebration and I ate all of the cake. Burp! Then finally my dad retired from the Marines. He got a lot of medals too. Soon my dad wanted to move again so we moved to Lynnwood and stayed there. Now we live a happy life. Whew! After all this stuff I would pass out! My mom must be very tired!

Well, now my mom works with a business that helps people make money. Dad helps her too. I'm in the sixth grade doing a writing exam and everything else is okay. My mom used to have a job, but she wanted to be her own boss.

I really think my mom is a hero. She didn't save the world from aliens. She didn't stop a bomb. All she did was be herself. She worked hard and had fun. And she still does.

So listen people who think they are heros. Listen up movie stars. This is my mom. My hero. Through all the stuff she went through I think she deserves a gold medal.

My mom. My hero. And I know that she will always be.

A Tale of Two Siblings

An Eight Pound Rival

“Oh my God,” I exclaimed, “What’s John doing out there? Why is he on his hands and knees, Mom?” I looked out the big kitchen window, wondering if my eight year old brother was all right. He was on hands and knees in our back yard looking rather distressed. Then he threw up. I ran out to see what happened. John stood up and smiled. I was panicked.

“You have to come inside now! What happened?! I asked, almost screaming.

“I ate too much at breakfast. I want to keep playing. I’m not sick, Ellie!” He pouted at me for the next five minutes until agreeing to come inside with me or, as I threatened, mom would be mad. The minute we got inside he started acting like an angel. *Little brat.* I thought. *I hate him.*

This typical incident was just yesterday, but I can still remember the morning of March 2nd, 1969, a day that has affected my life more than I ever could have suspected. To me, a five year old girl, it seemed pretty simple: Mom was having a baby. I couldn’t comprehend the implications this would have on my life.

When I woke up that morning I went downstairs to demand breakfast, but, instead, grandma was there, and said bluntly, “Your mom’s at the hospital having the baby.”

“Oh,” I thought, completely unaffected. I called my friend, Jakie, who lived across the yard, to come over and play. Jakie was my best friend, and she flipped out wondering about the baby and what was going on. Then I started to get curious about “it” too. My sister, who had already gone through the birth of a younger sibling (me!), seemed less than enthusiastic. I started to miss my mom, something that had rarely happened before.

When Coral, my mom and Dad’s closest friend, pulled up in our driveway, everyone told me that we were going to the hospital to see my mom and my new brother. I felt my first pangs of jealousy.

We all ran to see my mom, who had been in labor all night. I jumped right into the bed next to my exhausted mother as soon as we got into her room. My brother was being weighed and measured, but we got to hold him soon. I was secretly scared because he was so small and delicate. He looked sort of gross, but everyone else seemed to love him, so I didn’t say anything. You could barely see his face because of all the wrinkles. *Gross!* I thought in disgust! His whole body was covered in wrinkles, and he was on the redish side. We decided to call him John Jordan Stro-sahl.

John (now “Johnny-Jordan”) grew up to be a superbly cute baby — to my disappointment. He had golden blonde baby curls spilling off his head which reminded me of the foam on a coke. Big, round, sapphire eyes lit up his face — as if he need it with such a great big, gummy smile. That’s what has bugged me most for all these years. Frankly, John *was* the cutest baby, and I knew that the amount of doting time we got wasn’t equal; this made me pretty mad.

A Tale of Two Siblings

An Eight Pound Rival, Continued

For the next eight years, John dominated all the attention. Every time there was an argument, or even a fight, Mom took John's side. I had to share a room with A.J., my older sister, for a while after John was born, and then I had to share a room with the Devil himself. I was not impressed. So what? Yeah, he's extremely cute and only four years old, *but he was annoying me!!!!* Who made up the rules about how the youngest gets first priority and who gets to start off in mom's bed anyway?

In fifth grade, I expressed my resentment in a poem:

*My brother is on the bed right next to me.
He's singing and playing his new kazoo
And making me mad all at the same time.
I want him to SHUT UP!!!
He's telling me how much better at things he is than me.
He's putting down his Kazoo. YES!
But now he's biting the cat.
I take his kazoo and start biting him with it.
My Mom comes in the room and starts yelling at ME. Jeeze.*

Through all this I didn't realize how much I loved him. Even being the attention-stealer that he was, he was a good companion, also. We had so much fun goofing off together, and I loved playing airplane with him. This was a game where I put him on my legs and he pretended to be flying.

John grew up to be a lot like me which made us extremely compatible, but it was hard because I had to share the limelight. He was very silly and a natural performer, so I felt like there was no more room for my silliness; he took silliness to a whole new level. John and I were frequently sent from the dinner table for being loud, obnoxious, or rowdy. Most times we left the table snickering, and ready to play some more. I was especially good at bullying him and that made me feel better about having to share the limelight. I really enjoyed having a buddy everywhere that I went with the family, even if I wasn't nice to him all the time. I really do love him and always will. He is very entertaining and funny and he has a good heart. I'm trying to accept that he didn't mean to dominate the center stage all the time, that's just one of the many lovable assets of his personality.

Now, I'm looking at John, over the mess on the kitchen table, wondering if he's all right, because he's only eight years old, and that was a lot of throwing up to do. Then he gets to go out and play with his friend, just like he wanted. I feel a little cheated. Would I have gotten to go back out if that was me? I really wish he could have the experience of a younger sibling, just so he would know how I feel.

Amazing Language and Imagination

The Food War

Simon Wilken was snacking down on a plum with great gusto. He kept a heavy supply of them in his room. Some of the plums he ate weren't finished; they littered the carpet under his king size bed. Simon's favorite fruit and vegetables were part of his everyday life. His parents thought good nutrition was important so they owned a fruit & vegetable store and literally stuffed their son until he'd burst.

When Simon went with his family to their cabin, the pantry back at home came to life. Bananas formed a crude ladder to the floor. Grapes tumbled down to form a cushion. The pineapple almost made a dent in the floor as he came down. Quickly as they fell, the oranges and apples scrambled into a cupboard and came out with scissors. The raisins didn't stay long in that suffocating bag. The brave and gallant colonel mango led the procession into the kitchen while the kiwis defended the rear.

Mushroom scouts peered into binoculars from their perches on top of the refrigerator. They noted the movements of the great fruit horde and calculated where they were going. Half of them fell back and reported to the head tomato. "Sir, the 'orde is moving southeast at a fast march. I reckon they're goin' fer the stairs."

"Dismissed," came the reply of the tomato. He ordered the carrot to send a couple of radish messengers to the pineapple and ask him what he was doing. The strong radishes scaled the refrigerator with surprising agility and speed. They wanted to make sure the pineapple saw the white flag. A couple of strawberry guards escorted the radishes to the makeshift tent the pineapple was in.

"Sir," came the voice of a strawberry, "three radish messengers to see you."

"Send 'em," the pineapple requested.

The radishes were hesitant and stammered but somehow got out their message. "E chief too-mato want t'know whurr you're goin'."

"Tell him we were going to rescue the casualty plums up in the monster's room. We hate it when plums are half eaten and thrown about. Either no plum should be eaten or all of a plum should be eaten," stated the head fruit. "Your master, Chief Tomato, can come with us if he wants."

"Thank'ou kindly, zurr," came the grateful reply from the radishes as they climbed quite easily up the piece of lettuce that hung down for them.

Soon the whole vegetation mass swarmed the refrigerator to join the fruit horde on their dangerous mission. Greetings were made and as quickly as they met they were off. A dozen onions and peaches rounded the doorway to the stairs. A horrifying shock met them. A huge orange tabby was perched on the stairs snoring loudly. I watched through half closed eyes and kept up the pantomime.

This is the introduction. The full story continues for over 20 pages!

A Classic Bike Wreck Story

The Day I Went Down Sand Hill

One thing that changed my life forever would have to be the day I went down sand hill. It was summer, and like most summers it was stiflingly humid.

It all started about 8:00 A.M. It was hot enough to fry bacon on the sidewalk, not to mention my brain, so I went to ask my mother if I could go down to Church Lake. She didn't see any reason not to go, so she said it was all right.

I asked Anthony if he wanted to come with me, and he did.

Both of us, in a fit of excitement, raced for our bikes in anticipation of the cool slap of water against our bodies.

We had no idea that something really bad was going to happen, so we raced ahead to see who would get there first. He was in the lead, ahead of me about three feet when I noticed that the big hill was approaching.

We stopped at the top of the hill and looked down at the curving surface of the road.

Excitedly we both took off down the hill, our bodies stiff with adrenaline, and the pure glory of going 40 miles per hour on our bikes. The wind hit our faces with soothing coolness as we raced down the hill, but then I noticed that I was about to crash in to a corner.

In a fit of panic I slammed on the brakes, in hopes of escaping the fate of crashing, but the tire locked up, and I started to skid out of control.

I fell off my bike and started using my bare leg to stop me from crashing into the ditch, but as most people know, skin, blood, and muscle don't make good brakes.

As I was tearing up my leg, my life seemed to flash before my eyes. Bits of memories crammed in between my screams of anguish and pain.

When I approached the bottom I stopped sliding. I got up and took a look at my leg. There, where a perfectly good leg had been, was a bloody mess with pieces of road bonded in with muscle tissue.

Staring with horror I screamed. A passerby heard me and saw my leg. All the while, Anthony just stared at me like the dolt that he is.

The guy that saw me took us home. Now every time I approach a hill I am cautious.

Poor Bill...

A Hard Worker: Bill Gates

You all know Bill Gates. When you hear that name you think “Billionaire” or “Lucky,” but you haven’t really looked deep enough. Bill is more than a rich, lucky businessman. He has worked very hard to get where he is today. When he was in college, he thought long and hard about a problem. And then he thought of how to fix it.

Bill Gates is an inventor. He did what all inventors do: they think of a problem, and invent a way to make it better or easier. Bill thought of computers, how they didn’t do anything that an ordinary person could use them for. So Bill invented software for a computer. All of a sudden, people could make spreadsheets to handle calculations! They could type things just like a typewriter except with perfect erasing tools!

But before this happened, work was necessary. Bill and a friend or two spent all of their working (and sometimes sleeping) hours working on turning this dream into reality, and after months of intense work they finally finished with products that helped millions of people worldwide.

Being an inventor is great, but to profit from it you must be a good businessman. And Bill Gates is that, also. Not only is he good at business, he is good at marketing and advertising. That is how he was able to get some of the smartest minds in the United States to join his entrepreneurial escapade, Microsoft. That good business mind of Bill’s soon had his company selling a whole lot of this new “software” to people around the United States.

Still, Bill released breakthrough after breakthrough, introducing Windows, a software program designed to make personal computers even more user friendly. And making billions of dollars didn’t stop him. If most people were him, they would probably just leave the company and say, “I don’t need to deal with this anymore; I’m a billionaire!” But Bill Gates stays at Microsoft, even being attacked by lawyers, worrying about other competition, and trying to stay ahead. Business is really war.

Today he still faces a score of problems. People confronting him in anti-trust lawsuits, and other companies trying hard to pull Microsoft down from its “king-of-the-hill” position. Many people still think Bill is so lucky and that he has it easy, but he doesn’t. Money isn’t everything.

Bill Gates is my hero because he is a hard worker, and a smart and careful thinker. If I had to choose someone whom I respect a whole lot, it would have to be him. Never giving up, always working on and on, putting up with the criticism. Putting up with the public’s opinion of him. Just letting them push him around when he could just say, “That’s it. I quit!” and leave. Still, he goes through with this every day. And people say he has it easy. Wow, I don’t want to know what their idea of “hard” is!

A Cute Dog Story

My Little Fat Friend

Surprised at what he looked like, I found out what love at first sight truly means.

I had been wanting a pug since I was four. To my amazement I would get one.

As my parents, my friend, Randi, and I drove up the gravel path of my mom's old work partner Nancy Degraff, I found out what all my hard work had paid off for.

Opening the door of our red car my heart was pounding rapidly.

Inside the house I could hear the soft barks of two small girl pugs which were the grandmother, Porcia, and her half sister, Munchy.

Hearing the barks of their Jack Russel Terrier, Nancy helped me find out which bark belonged to the pug I would get.

Walking up to the door and hearing the soft crackling under my feet, I could see the dark shadows racing about the old house.

"Come on in," a sweet voice called. As we walked in it felt like one hundred little dogs were zooming around me licking me, rubbing against my legs, and trying to get on my lap.

As Nancy cleared away all but the one I wanted, she announced, "This is Sherman."

As I looked at him my heart melted. Looking at his little smudged in face, and little white spot on his chest, I just about died.

His all black fur and the cock of his head made me run over to him and throw my arms around his chubby little body.

One thing did stand out about him. He was way bigger than I had ever imagined he would be.

Even though he was chunky, I still loved him. I learned that Sherman's not like other dogs. He's got his own way of doing things, and his own way of looking. That's what makes him special.

Yet to my surprise he's the perfect dog in every way.

Fitting Fanfare For a Fine Fielder

My Hero: Jay Buhner

The deafening crowd was packed into the Kingdome on sold-out Buhner Buzz-Cut Night. Hundreds of people were outfitted in brand new buzz-cuts and were enjoying the Mariner game.

“And now, Jay Buhner!” the announcer blared over the microphone.

The friendly, 6 foot 3 inch fisherman slowly stepped to the plate. The first pitch was fired over like a bullet from a gun.

“Jay swings, connects, and belts the ball deep into left field. It’s going, going, gone! Goodbye baseball! Another homerun for Jay Buhner!” the announcer bellowed, excitement running through his voice.

This is why Jay Buhner is my hero. He’s pounded over forty homeruns, three years in a row, and has achieved many other amazing feats, too. Jay hit a 479 foot homer at the new Yankee stadium on July 25th, 1991, the longest hit in its history. He was the first Mariner to hit for the Cycle (a single, a double, a triple, and a homerun in one game), on June 23rd, 1993 against the Oakland A’s. In 1996, Jay earned his first Gold Glove award. Last season, at an exhilarating game in Fenway Park, he vaulted over the wall in right field into the bullpen to catch what would have been a colossal homerun.

Jay Buhner is happily married, and has one son, Gunnar. Issaquah is his pleasant home in the off-season. He drives the best sport-utility vehicle ever made, a rugged Hummer. That is exactly the car I’d get if I had all his money.

I think that Jay Buhner is a true hero. The Seattle Mariners would be lacking an excellent right fielder without him. I hope he stays in Seattle for the rest of his baseball career.

Interesting Organization

The champagne bubbles up overflowing the crystal wine flutes. Suddenly, the doors to the limo open unfurling a sea of flashing lights.

* * *

A flash of lightning illuminates the harsh emptiness of the night. In an orphanage children cry mournfully. They are starving.

* * *

A deep plush, red carpet floods your eyes. Smiles, laughter, cheers bombard the senses. A happiness unknown before now thrives within you.

* * *

The mud runs thick beneath you in this stench-filled alley. Rain batters your body. With each step your feet plunge into the thick goo. You tug at your feet to relinquish them from the mud and each time you whisper, “just one more” but you must keep going for the children wait.

* * *

You feel as though your feet are gliding across the ground. You’re now waiting, the two people on stage say, “and now the Oscar for best actor goes to . . .” then an ominous silence flushes through the building. The anxiety within you bubbles and churns, as you almost let out a scream of anticipation that just couldn’t be held in when your name is announced for the world to hear. You jump into the air and throw your hands up. As you stare blindly out at the crowd all you see are their eyes staring back at you with praise and congratulations. Your whole body is numb with happiness.

* * *

The door to home is a bombed-out hole in the wall. All you carry with you are two loaves of bread. Inside you are met with a void of darkness. From a corner the flicker of a candle dimly lights the room. 30 children await food. Now all you feel is sadness.

* * *

These are two different people in two different worlds. One a celebrity, why? He’s seen around the world, mobbed wherever he goes, his every move is the paparazzi’s life.

The other a hero, why? He is selfless. He chose to walk down a different path in life, a path of hardships, poverty, and hunger.

Someone doesn’t have to be a superhero to be like this. He could be a five-year old giving up his allowance, or a person becoming a mentor, or someone’s grandma taking in a stray dog. These are the everyday heroes.

A celebrity, on the other hand, is famous. Not for some humanitarian act but for acting. Acting is the art of becoming someone you aren’t. Just because you portray a hero doesn’t mean you become one.

An actor acts. A hero helps. The actor becomes famous and the hero does not. And that’s just it: heroes don’t care about the credit they just care.

Expository Essay

Cheaper Products? But at What Cost?

Right now I want you to pretend you are in a store. As you walk around, you see that some products are much less expensive than others. Now, look at the labels on these cheaper items. You will probably notice that many of these labels say, “Made in China,” or “Made in Honduras.” Have you ever stopped to wonder why products made in these countries are so much more affordable than things manufactured right here on American soil? Well, before you buy another inexpensive article of clothing, pair of shoes, sporting good, carpet, or any other product, you might want to think this through.

Child labor has long been banned in America, but out of sight should not mean out of mind. Over 200 million children world-wide work full time in conditions not fit for an animal. That means that they do not play sports, they do not attend school, and they do not have fun. These children are prisoners.

Take, for example, Pakistan and India. In these countries, a “bonded labor” system forces child laborers, some as young as four years old, to work for a single employer for many years. They are sometimes literally tied to their loom to ensure they are not slacking off. In return for their servitude, they receive a place to sleep and just enough food to sustain them.

In Honduras, 13% of the workforce is between 12 and 15 years old. There are no laws restricting the ages of the employees, nor are there any limits on the hours they can work. It is not uncommon for a 13 year old child to put in a 14 hour day with no break. However, Honduran employers are required to have a night school for their young laborers to attend.

Children put to work weaving carpets, making soap, or any other number of jobs are never paid in full for their toil. Here in the U.S., the minimum wage is over five dollars an hour. In countries that hire minors to do the dirty work there is almost never a minimum pay requirement. In Haiti, children are, on average, paid 28 cents per hour. In Sri Lanka, the median is 18 cents. Vietnamese and Chinese children should not expect their wages to exceed 11 cents.

These numbers are truly tragic. Before you buy something made in a country that condones the labor of young children who work for pennies just so that you can have a more inexpensive item, please think about the situation you are contributing to.

Homeward Bound

Walking Home

Walking home from my bus stop is often an adventure. I never know when I am going to encounter a big dog, an angry neighbor, or perhaps even a killer tree.

It was a beautiful day. The sky was blue with only a few lacy clouds, the air was cool and fresh. Crisp leaves were crackling beneath my feet. It would have been a wonderful day to walk slowly, enjoying the weather. Unfortunately, I had forgotten my coat and the otherwise nice weather was chilling me to the bone. To make matters worse, my back was hurting from a ligament I pulled during soccer practice earlier in the week. So despite the pleasant surroundings, I was feeling rather miserable.

Then my mind began to wander, as it often does. I began to think of my science class where we were studying the brain and had just discussed the idea of hypnosis helping with minor pain. I also remembered that hypnosis and meditation were similar. Thinking of this reminded of a talk I'd once had with my step-dad about meditation. I put these thoughts together and came up with my great idea for the day: to relieve my suffering from the cold and my back pain, I would meditate while walking home.

Being the whimsical person I am, I decided that I would try this idea, disregarding the protests of the saner, more logical voice in my head. To begin with, I concentrated on warmth. I thought of fires, of warm houses, of summertime. I slowed my breathing to promote a more relaxed state. It was all going rather well, I was actually feeling warmer and my back wasn't bothering me as much. I smiled.

Then I realized my nose hurt. A few seconds later I figured out the cause: I had run into a tree. Not just any tree, but a big rough-barked tree. I immediately jumped away, hopping in a circle, yelping with pain. Next I sat down and felt my nose to make sure it wasn't flattened (it wasn't). To show the tree my rage, I kicked it, resulting in a hurt foot. I glared at it menacingly, figuring that it couldn't hurt me any more if I just looked at it.

I'm sure the big dogs and angry neighbors were all getting a good laugh by now. And so I continued home: cold, aching back, hurt nose, bruised foot.

Note to self: no more meditating while walking.

Where There's a Rill There's a Way

The Life of Randy the Rill

Hi, my name is Randy the Rill. You may not have heard that word before, so here's a little background. A rill is a very small stream. Some rills are the kind that just drain an area when it rains. That is important, so there won't be floods. My sister, Rhonda the Rill, is of this type. But, aaahh, back to me. I'm pretty important, too, ya know. I drain a small pond just east of Wilkeson. If I wasn't here, he'd just burst.

Besides keeping that guy in business, I also support a variety of animal life. There is a family of deer that lives on the ridge above me that consists of a mom and two fawns. I occasionally see the father around also. But every morning, those two cuties come down to one of my larger pools to drink. Boy, that *really* tickles! At least they don't wade through me. I also support a healthy population of cutthroat and resident steelhead. There is a population of caddis and mayflies that also hatch here. The fish I mentioned earlier do a good job of keeping them under control. In turn, the fish are the first choice of the raccoon family (you should see the little tikes try to catch those cutthroat). Some other animals that I support are salamanders, toads, frogs, snakes, rabbits, and squirrels.

I also support many plant varieties. The ferns do a good job of keeping my waters cool, and the old spruce log that fell built a pool with a nice cascading waterfall that does a good job aerating my waters, along with the other waterfalls I own. The pool I just mentioned is deep, with a pebbly bottom, and crystal clear water. The wide selection of moss and lichen does a good job of keeping the soil around me from eroding away. The lush forest around me is perhaps the prettiest in the world. The wild blue huckleberry around me is in full strength. On a warm sunny day, I can smell the light fragrance of them.

In the lower reaches of me, I meander through a little dell, lush with tiny grand fir only 2 ft. high, huckleberry, and wandering strawberry. The bright green club moss is in abundance here, carpeting the fertile topsoil. Here and there a little red newt pauses in its courting, and when alarmed, scurries for the shelter of a nearby nursery log, where wild mushrooms sprout up like groups of little elf umbrellas. Under a nearby fir, a small mouse pauses in its search for food, where rattlesnake plantain produces perfect cover.

In the open, where the sun has penetrated the old growth spruce, wild mint and clover create a sweet smelling perfume. Another plant I'll mention is — My gosh, is that thunder I hear? That pond is in for a beating now! Well, no time to talk! I have a pond to drain. Will I ever rest?

Wise Beyond His Years

Teenage Nostalgia

I can't remember the first time I climbed that tree, or even any time that I wasn't able to. It was a mulberry tree, growing between my house and the Smith's house. Actually, it was a little closer to theirs.

It wasn't always the center of our play — we played other games like hide and seek, baseball, tag, leaf fights, we had mulberry feasts — but it was always there. Ty, the oldest, would climb up close to the top, then Lisa, second, then Tanner, who is actually the youngest, and finally me, content on the first or second branch.

I remember jumping contests and strange pulley-like contraptions to haul mulberries, and some autumn days when we just collected the leaves and made beds out of them with blankets we had snuck from the house. We would convince ourselves that we could spend the night out there in our leaf beds, but it never happened.

About once a year, Mr. Smith would get some idea that he wanted to cut down the tree, and every year, we would all scream and gasp, "No! You can't!" One year, he even managed to get out his chainsaw and walk up to it before we all ran out, me from my house, Lisa and Tanner and Ty from theirs, yelling and screaming and standing in front of it. I don't think he ever would have actually cut it down, but he wouldn't give up without an argument from all of us. I think he let us win and brought it up the next year just to see what we would do. Another game, I guess.

Growing up the way I did, I will always think that my childhood was the best that anyone could ever have. I went to kindergarten and elementary school and middle school in Camden, but I grew up in Lagrange, with Lisa and Tanner and the tree, in my house on the river.

I am not nearly an adult now, but I have already grown up. It will never be like that again. It will never be like anything more than once, so the only thing to do is enjoy every moment of life, no matter what, because in the next minute, it will change and you will be on to a new part. Everything is a memory, and while I sit here reminiscing over what was then, I know I'll be reminiscing again in just a few years over what I am doing right now.

My father says that the day a thirteen year old is nostalgic, he will fly around the world. Well, Dad, you better start your trip. It's still three days until my fourteenth birthday.

A Tribute

The explosions and gunshots were definitely getting worse. Not only was the enemy advancing, the scatterfire was starting to take a toll on the men. Lieutenant Jim Osborne was running out of options. He ordered the tanks to take out enemy clusters and to destroy the missile trucks coming this way. He then ordered an airstrike of the surrounding area, hoping to finish this soon. He called a general retreat, took out some troops coming from behind a dune, and then retreated himself. He could already hear the roar of the F-16 coming this way. 20 minutes later it was over, but the scene would forever etch itself into Jim's mind. 19 troops dead, and more than 80% of the rest injured. The U.S. would pay dearly for this.

In 1990, most of America knew when we routed Iraq's army. How we got away almost unscathed. Almost. My Uncle, Lieutenant Jim Osborne's unit, the Falcons, was once one of the best fighting units in the Marines. They would infiltrate enemy missile silos, destroy chemical plants, and otherwise make themselves a thorn in the lion's paw. But it all changed during the Gulf War. Their mission was Top Secret: my Uncle still cannot tell me what he did, but they infiltrated Iraq's eastern borders on November 29th, 1989. They stayed hidden for about 6 weeks, not seeing anyone until the enemy just sort of showed up. They ambushed the Falcons and basically slaughtered them. It was horrible, a black mark on America's military record. After that, the Falcons who survived were disbanded, and everyone was sent home.

When my Uncle came home, you could see the shadows beneath his eyes, a haunted, frightening face looked upon you as you gazed back up at him. He had taken a bullet in his arm, which was slung, and a deep scratch etched itself in his face, and he looked old and worn.

I was 5½ at the time, and, not understanding what had just happened to my Uncle, I ran to him, and asked him what happened to his arm. He told me he got hurt, but that he would stay home now. My family came up behind me with tears in their eyes, and they hugged him, and told him they loved him. He stayed at my house for about a year after that, trying to get enough to buy a house of his own.

When I was older, he told me what really happened. His troop had come out of some foothills when approximately 300 Iraqi soldiers ambushed them. Jim's troops were slaughtered, and Jim himself was lucky to make it out alive. He would have flashbacks every once in a while afterwards, too. It would be horrible to watch him, it was like someone watching a horror movie without anyone else seeing it.

Six years after Jim got back, he got married to Susan Patchler, a woman who knew one of his troops in the Gulf War. They bought a house together, and I think their son just turned 3. Jim had gotten his life together in just six years after being psychologically unfit to live on his own.

And that's why I admire Jim so much. In the Gulf War he was a brave leader. Afterwards, he had the courage to live with his skeletons over and over again. He got his life back.

I don't know if I would have the courage to do that. Jim is so strong, it makes my mother cry every time we talk about it. I fashion my life after my uncle, even though I doubt I would be staying as strong as he. I secretly wish I was. Because someone who works from his lowest point up to a life filled with family and friends is someone who is richer than Bill Gates by far! He earned his life, and loves it dearly. He would risk everything if he could save it. I salute you, Lieutenant Jim Osborne. May your bravery and courage be passed on so that someone else may look up to you and yours, and honor them as I do.



High School Writing

An Unusual Point of View

What Do I Have To Look Forward To?

I've never understood why so many of my friends were in such a hurry to grow up. When I look around at the adults I know, growing up doesn't seem like much fun. My parents always seem worried about things. If it's not me or my brother, it's the house or the car or work, or something having to do with one of *their* parents.

And other adults don't seem much happier either. My friend's parents seem to have just as many problems to deal with. Whenever I visit after school, the moms look tired, and you can forget about even talking to the dads for a couple of hours after they get home from work, if they even get home at all. (In fact, I don't think I've ever met the fathers of some of my friends. It's as though they don't even exist.)

I'm not saying that every adult I know is like this. It's just that most adults never seem to really be able to enjoy anything without worrying about it, too. No matter what I'm doing with my parents, they always seem bothered by the thought that something bad might happen, or that they might be doing something wrong. Sometimes things do go wrong, but mostly things turn out OK. Nothing really bad has ever happened in our family, but my parents always seem nervous about things, or unsure of themselves, as though they don't really know what they're doing.

From my point of view, being an adult doesn't look so good. Get up, go to work, come home, go to sleep, try to get the kids to do whatever it is you want them to do. And on the weekends maybe you get up a little later, but it's basically the same thing: work around the house, take care of the kids, etc. Who wants to do that? I look at everything my parents have to do and I wonder what's the point? Is this really what I have to look forward to?

I guess it's hard being an adult. When you're an adult, you're in the middle, and there's no one to help you out on either end. You've got kids *and* parents to take care of, and nobody around to take care of you.

I guess the hardest part for me in imagining what life will be like when I grow up is looking at all the adults I know now, and not seeing anyone who seems really happy. I don't know a single adult who likes their job: my mom and dad don't, my friends' parents don't, and I don't think my teachers do either. All I ever hear from adults are complaints. And even though I know most parents really love their children, they don't seem to show it very much, and so I wonder if having children is really as terrific as everyone says it is.

Everybody's always talking about adults being good role models for kids, but maybe kids should be models for them. Maybe we could teach them a few things about how to have a good time and enjoy life. It's worth a try. I'd hate to think that the way growing up seems to me now is the way it's going to be when I get there.

Friends for Life

He was great, a one-of-a-kind guy. Stand-up, Church-going, humble, butt-kicking kind-of-guy, that John Lytle, Lytle with a 'y', thank you very much. John Lytle, my brother, *blood* -brother that is. I knew him through fourth and fifth-grade, when we lived in Gresham. He was a friend of a friend, and when we met, we just hit it off. We were best friends. We knew each other for only three months before we started acting like we'd known each other all our lives. Three months into the fourth-grade before we decided we'd wanted to be blood-brothers, and were going to do it pretty much like the Indians had. So, we set it for the next Friday night, when I was staying the night at his house.

Friday approached, and finally arrived. At 11:45 pm, when all was quiet and his parents were asleep, we crept out to the hollow in the woods, just in back of John's house. With us, we took two candles, a small, stainless steel pen-knife, two large bottles of root-beer, and a small book of matches. We packed all of this in a small blanket.

At 11:55 pm., we arrived at the hollow, and began setting up. We laid the blanket down and put the candles down into the moist dirt at both ends.

At 11:58 pm., we started. First we did sort of a chant we wrote. It read: "I (Mark, John) do solemnly swear, body and soul, to defend my blood-brother and help him in time of need, and to keep him clean and good." We read this at the same time, and, when finished, shook right hands while putting the left one on each other's shoulder. We then lit the candles. After that, we got on our knees in the middle of the blanket. First John used the pen-knife, then I. We both made a small incision in the middle finger of our right hands. A moment later, at midnight, we pressed our incisioned fingers together and let the blood flow into the other.

At a minute past midnight, we were brothers. We took out the root-beer and toasted each other and our newfound brotherhood. After that it seemed we had a mind link. We knew when the other was angry and didn't wish to converse with anyone. But again we knew when the other needed someone to talk to, if they were depressed or whatever. But we always just automatically knew when we saw each other. We never had to say a thing. We knew when we were around each other too much, when we needed a week or two with our other friends.

Because of this, this way we realized we needed time off from one another, I think we were better friends than most. However, aside from being blood-brothers and American, we really didn't have that much in common. He liked the Beatles, I liked Hall & Oates. And while he was darker in skin and hair color, and a little shorter, too, I was sort of fair haired and light-skinned, and a little taller than he is. From our friendship, I know now what they mean by opposites attract.

John was the best kid I ever knew. There when I need him, gone when he knew I needed to be alone. And I feel darn privileged of having the extreme honor of being his blood-brother. I just wish we could have carted him along when we moved here to Canby. God bless his soul.

I'm never going to forget him.

Two Good Short Essays

In my old, battered black wallet I carry many things. A letter from a friend. My lunch ticket. My social security card. Many other tidbits and items as well. There is one thing however, which I prize above all my possessions. It is a photograph. It's small, and the photographer was not good. That does not matter. What matters is the person in the photograph. His name is Bill Stevenson.

We first met almost two years ago, when I moved to Vancouver. It was my first day and the school was the largest I had ever been to. I was nervous.

I walked into my first class slightly late. I took a seat. Looking around, I noticed several people staring at me. I don't like to be stared at, so I was uncomfortable.

Since it was the first day of junior high, the teacher took it easy on us. We played a game of what is called Trivial Pursuit. The room was divided in half for teams.

The person behind me, a muscular blond guy, made polite conversation. When a question came to him, he answered it correctly. "Guess how I knew that?" he challenged. I confessed I didn't know. "We have the game at home," he said grinning widely. "I've had that question before."

So, that little picture is my prized possession. It reminds me of my best friend and his family. Whenever I see it, I think of Bill. And then I laugh. Bill Stevenson, your quite a friend.



In Praise of Ancient Vehicles

As I step out of the pick-up it hits me, the smell of manure drifting down from the barn. A sliding glass door swishes open, and clomping down the ramp is my boss, Robert Taylor.

"Put your lunch in the van, Steve. I'll be there in a minute."

I turn and walk toward the van, an old '69 green and white Dodge Sportsman, covered with an inch of dust. When I open the door and peer in, it reminds me of a walk-in trash can. The floor lies out of sight underneath a sea of garbage. I kick some garbage out of my way and hop up in the seat.

Before long, here comes Rob, clomping across the driveway. He opens the door, groans as he gets up into his seat, cranks the motor over, and the motor sputters to a start, filling the air inside the van with the smell of burnt oil. My first impression is that we won't make it out of the driveway, but we sputter out onto the road, and head toward town.

When we pull into the circular drive, I peer through the dust-smudged window to find that the tractor is still there. On the side it reads "Massey-Ferguson," but with Robert, it's hard telling what it really is.

As I sit down in the seat I adjust the hunk of foam rubber to a comfortable position. Once I have accomplished this, I sit down and start cranking on the prehistoric starter. Slowly, and then more rapidly, like a steam engine building up speed, the black smoke rolls out of the pipe functioning as a muffler and away we go.

Challenges of an Only Child

Harder Than You Think

I walk up the hill with my friends, then turn into our cul-de-sac, go to the front door, put the key in the lock, turn, and step in. The house breathes a kind of spooky hello as I set my books down and go to the kitchen where the inevitable note is waiting: “Have a snack. Be home soon. I love you.” As I’m munching cookies, I think how I’d like to go out and shoot a few hoops if I had someone to do it with. You can play Nintendo by yourself, but it isn’t the same. So I forget that for now. I should be doing my Spanish homework anyway. Too bad I don’t have an older brother or sister to help conjugate all those dumb verbs. I could call a friend, sure, but if I had a brother or sister, I’d have a built-in friend.

While I’m feeling so sorry for myself, I hear my friends Denise and Kevin across the street. She’s screaming bloody murder because he is throwing leaves in her hair and threatening to put a beetle in her backpack. She has just stepped on his new Nikes. I do not have these squabbles. I guess the big advantage, if you call it that, to being an only child is that my life is my own, nobody “borrows” my CDs or my books or my clothes. I also get a bigger allowance than I probably would if I had siblings. My parents take me everywhere, from the mall to the East Coast. Maybe they wouldn’t if they had other kids. (On the other hand, it would be more fun going if I had someone my own age.)

All these great advantages are overshadowed by one big disadvantage, though, and it’s the main reason I would change things if I could. When you are an only child, your parents depend on you to be the big success all the time. You are their big hope, so you cannot fail. You have to be good at sports, popular, and have good grades. You need a career goal. You have to have neat hair and clothes that look pressed. You have to have good grammar, clean socks, good breath, and table manners. If you’ve ever felt jealous of somebody who is an only child, don’t. It’s a lot of pressure. I often wish for a little screw-up brother or sister my parents could worry about for a while.

So, while having a neat room with nothing disturbed is great, I’d take a brother or sister in a minute if I could. The big irony is, if I had that mythical brother or sister, I would probably be wishing myself an only child again the first time my baseball shirt didn’t come back or my stereo got broken. Life is like that. What you don’t have always seems to be the thing you want.

Short Persuasive Essay

An Education Lasts a Lifetime

Education is a key element in developing the skills necessary for a successful life. Too often students are more involved earning a paycheck than spending time on their academic studies. Students need to realize that their highschool classes will prepare them for a brighter future.

A highschool student's time is very limited. Homework and extra curricular activities are time consuming and if a student adds a job into this busy schedule, less time is devoted to their academic studies. The effects of this could be receiving lower grades or not taking challenging courses. A job would also limit the amount of time a teenager has for social activities and sports, thereby causing a withdrawal from friends and the highschool community.

The job environment is not always beneficial to the student. In most cases the wages are low and the hours are long. Sometimes employers can be very demanding and schedules are not flexible. The skills being used may not be beneficial in furthering their career, and they might become comfortable with the paycheck and not strive to reach their full potential.

Money is the root of many problems associated with teenagers. A paycheck gives a student the power to purchase many commodities including cars, clothing and electronics. They may also be exposed to drugs and alcohol. Students are being introduced to a new environment and the challenge of managing their money comes into play.

Teenagers already have enough pressures and stress in their lives and they may find it difficult to juggle academics along with their work schedule. High school is a time of growth both mentally and physically. Students should focus their attention on their studies so they can one day achieve their dreams.

A Remembrance

Dusty Books

The smell of old, dusty books reminds me of my father. An avid collector, he had many books, most of which went unread.

He owned books on everything from medicine to Vietnam to several sets of encyclopedias.

When I enter one of his haunts, such as Powell's, I am carried back to a time when the two of us were happy.

I see him standing by a shelf, thumbing through a medical journal, or opening his wallet to pay for yet another purchase, knowing full well that Mom would lecture him on "wasting money on books you never read anyways!"

Strolling past rows and rows of books, I remember how, after the cancer struck, he came less and less and read fewer and fewer books. They became just part of the scenery, collecting only dust and memories.

Near the end, perhaps knowing he would never get to read them all, he gave almost all of the books away, keeping only a few and treating them with an almost holy reverence, as if any crease or mar would destroy them totally. Gone was the man who would brush aside a huge coffee stain, replaced by one who would fly into terrible rages at a bent corner or creased spine.

I have read a few now, after he is gone, and each time it brings back a hurt like a sore that refuses to heal. But I suppose it is a quest of sorts, because if I can take on his thirst for knowledge, cheerful smile, and willingness to help others, then like a match in the darkness, I will bring a little light into the world. And if that light touches others, maybe it will spread far and wide, to light up the heavens for millennia to come.

I think he'd like that.

A Horse, of Course

Will was Right

The sweat on your brow. A layer of dust on your face. Out in the woods. Somewhere. And on a horse. Of all the places in the world, I feel best on a horse. Listening to the clip-clop of the hooves. Swatting at flies. (Which probably doesn't sound appealing to most people but, when you're on a horse, everything's enjoyable, even swatting flies!)

Not everyone likes being around horses, which is hard for me to understand. Some people are deathly afraid of them. The girl I'm going to tell you about is one of those people.

Two years ago, I went on a four-hour ride, my longest yet. I remember it distinctly. We were at Simpson Stables, just at the edge of the Mt. Henderson wilderness area. Only one other person would go on the ride besides the trail guide. Her name was Jennifer. I think she was 11 or 12 years old and I doubt she had ever been on a horse in her life. At first I thought she must be a pretty good rider because she had great boots and she was, after all, on the four-hour ride. I was soon proven wrong.

I mounted Pal, my mighty, beautiful, smart horse, with no problem. Jennifer, on the other hand, didn't have any luck. With the help of two trail hands, the red-faced girl finally got her foot in the stirrup. Then, with one last might heave, the dazed Jennifer struggled the rest of the way onto her weak, ugly, dumb-as-a-doornail horse, Van. The name explains him completely. (Just think of an old, beige, Volkswagen van.)

As soon as Jennifer got on her beige Volkswagen, her proud rancher-type grandpa and not-so-rancher-type grandma came to take a picture. She managed a faint smile. Then Van shook his head and snorted, and Jennifer grew pale and grabbed the saddle horn tight. After that, I realized that the only reason she'd agreed to the trail ride was to please rancher-gramps.

As we headed away from the gate, the sun felt warm on our backs. Birds flew everywhere. Jennifer, however, wasn't enjoying any of this. Getting on was only the beginning of her troubles. Whenever we loped the horses, Jennifer would hold Van in check, screaming at the top of her lungs for him to slow down. No wonder we didn't see any deer.

Half an hour after setting out on the trail, I lost faith in the trail guide, too. He took out a round container from his back pocket, opened the lid and pulled out a wad of tobacco. After a minute or so, a long stream of tobacco juice shot from his mouth, gumming up the nearby grass and trees. And as if that wasn't enough, he pulled out a pack of cigarettes and lit up — in the middle of a dry, drought-stricken forest! There went all my faith in the only other normal person on the ride, blowing away like his cigarette ashes. I thought he must be insane. I was sure the whole forest would go up in flames. Fortunately, he knew enough not to put it out in the middle of the pine needles.

In spite of everything, I enjoyed myself, listening to the horse's hooves and the squeak of the leather saddle, rocking to the rhythm of Pal's smooth gait.

Someday, I'm going on the ideal trail ride. This is how it would be. My family and I would set out on our own horses for a three or four-day ride near Henderson or someplace with hardly any people. There wouldn't be any smoking, silly trail guides, and no Jennifer. Just the family, the horses, and the wildlife. I think Will Rogers was right when he said there was nothing as good for the inside of a person as the outside of a horse.

Writing About a Place

The Hill

There is an old hill on my Grandma's property. The hill is grown over with grass, dead stinging nettles, and skunk cabbage. There is an old rickety bridge that you have to jump off to get safely to the ground because blackberries block the way.

After the bridge you have to walk through matted dead grass, then you get to an old cedar tree. You cut through the small trail around the cedar tree to get to the road-like flat slanty path to the field. You sneak through the long dead grass. Finally you reach the fence. Be careful not to let the big white dog see you looking at the horses. (He thinks he owns and is guard of the fence and all things on both sides of it.) For a better view, go to the funny shaped tree, it works as a good lookout, and it's a safe place where the neighbor dogs can't get you. (No matter how hard they jump.) From the tree you can see a lot — my Uncle's horses (down the hill) the Kapowsin and the Shady Ridge creeks, the place where the creeks meet together, the trail (both of them), the two bridges, the neighbor's houses, Mr. L's cows, and all the other trees and fields.

When you're done looking around (and when the coast is clear of the big white dog) you can jump down and head for the one still usable trail that my mom made and used when she was little. I'm not sure how its possible that the trail is still there but I think the coyotes, deer, possum, skunk, rabbits, mice, and snakes use it, and keep it there.

Be careful when you go down because if you're behind someone pesky, pushed aside branches will slap you in the face. When you get to the waterside, sit down, listen tot he rushing, slurping, sound of water, the lapping against the sandy bank, the birds chirping, watch for animals. If you stay still and quiet the animals will relax and come out of hiding, and the birds will start chirping.

Walk back to the big cedar tree and wander eastward, up the busy hill and you will find yourself in the cemetary. If you don't want to go there, go west and take a swim in the icy water. (If you don't freeze.) When you're really cold, dry off. If you want, catch a couple of crawdads. Then, go home and fry your crawdads, and eat them, and think about your day on the hill.

If the Shoe Fits

Big Person's Shoes

I remember walking through shopping centers while my mom looked for shoes. I always wished I would grow another inch or two so my feet could fit into the wonderful “big person’s shoes.” My mother would look over several kinds, then, after choosing her favorite, ask the clerk for the left shoe. I longed for the day when I could try them on, just like she did.

Being able to wear shoes with heels represented a grown-up to me. I wanted to be an adult in the worst way. Sometimes after we had gone shopping, I would sneak into my mother’s bedroom. Then quietly, so no one would hear, I would slip the new shoes out of their box and onto my feet. What I used to think was a grand and ladylike gait, was really an unsteady wobble. I would saunter over to the full length mirror to admire my shoes — well, her shoes. Then I would twirl around and cast condescending glances at the closet, nightstand, lamp and other furniture. I would pretend these things were some of the other fourth graders in my class at school.

One Saturday afternoon, I was destined to spend the day at a shoe store in town. Sitting in the back seat, I started to think about fancy shoes. Upon arriving, I discovered large signs that advertised a sale at the shoe store. Grudgingly I dragged in. After a few minutes, I noticed something. My mom, who wears a size 8½ was looking in the size 5½ section. Suddenly, I straightened up and looked at her again. Yes, she was there! I couldn’t believe it, maybe she was looking for shoes for me. “Megan,” said my mother “Would you come over here for a moment?”

Immediately I leaped to my feet, and in a flash I was by my mother’s side. In her hand was a shoe, the most beautiful that I had ever seen. It was black patent leather with a dazzling red bow on the toe. “Honey, would you try this on?” she said.

Immediately I said yes. The shoe fit perfectly. It was made for me. I looked pleadingly into her eyes for the sparkle that meant I could have them. Then she said, “Clerk, would you please get the mate for me?” I just couldn’t believe it! I was the luckiest girl in the whole fourth grade!

When we got home, I tried on the shoes with my best dress. Then I went into the kitchen and twirled around so my father could see. I didn’t know what he would say. I stood and bit my lip waiting for the inevitable to come. To my surprise he said that I was turning into a pretty young lady! I will remember that moment forever.

A year or so later I grew out of the shoes. I regretfully packed them in a box to give away. A girl who lived next door was to get my shoes. A few months later I was at a school carnival and saw the girl wearing my shoes. They were a size too big and they flopped around. Even so, I could see the glow on her face. She was wearing “big person’s shoes.”

I Couldn't Have Said it Better

This is Why I Write

Thoughts pound in my head, day after day, until I get them down on paper. Each idea brings out a slice of what's inside of me.

That may mean hours of writing fiercely, while thoughts flip through my head and new ideas emerge. Other times it means crumbling up pages of crossouts, or retyping one page over and over until I'm satisfied with how it reads. Then there are times that are maddening; I can't go forward or backward, instead I stare at a blank page for hours.

Still I write. I can't imagine how I could stop.

Writing is power. I control my writing. It's as stable as I am. No one can change it, except for me. I make all the decisions. Other people give me advice, but I'm the one who puts the words on the paper.

As a writer, I am free. No one tells me what I can and can't say. I have to decide what part of me should be written, how much of me I want to share. There are no rules or boundary lines to follow. Some things aren't meant to be written, but the only way to learn what they are is by writing them.

Writing isn't all facts. The facts are what can be taught, but the rest comes only from the writer. Teachers can give us guidelines, advice, and encouragement that we'll treasure, but the heart of a piece comes from us. Writing is more than following rules and advice; it requires that the writer follow her heart.

Writing expands me. It stimulates my mind. When I write, I feel alive, I want to know everything. I'm always acquiring new skills. Soon after I started writing I needed more answers than I could get from my English book or from my parents. I started learning by studying how other people wrote, and then picked up on my own mistakes. I pored over every bit of information I could find. A lot of the time I improved subconsciously, absorbing new vocabulary and techniques from all around me.

My writing is always changing. Sometimes I'm half way through a page, and I'll just rewrite it completely. What I find interesting about writing is that I can see myself growing along with it. It makes me look at the world through different perspectives, and helps me understand myself.

My writing gradually grows. I spend hours trying to capture the core of myself within the empty pages of my journal. Over time, my writing becomes more structured as I carefully choose every word that I use to make them fly right off the page into my readers' minds.

Writing is my companion. It's what I do in my spare time. On rainy summer days, while my mother works, my father is outside, and my sister is at a friend's house, I write. I pour out my deepest secrets, my strongest feelings. This is what I do. This is why I write.

Aren't Parents Great?

The Sand Dollar

In yesteryear, when Moby Dick was just a tadpole, and the seas rolled and thundered over the jetties and onto the shore, I searched for my first sand dollar still hidden somewhere in the ever stretching Naragansett Beach.

I'd been going there since I was a toddler, not finding much more than sea weed and empty crab shells, which were picked clean by the screeching sea gulls, nature's best garbage man. Now I was five, I could run and search on my own, no more holding hands with Mom and Dad. I could run with the big kids down the beach with the wind roaring in my ears like huge jet engines.

I was in search of the still fashionable sand dollar, that naturally perfect disc with a dotted star on top and a hole in the center of its flat bottom. While in town the first evening of beach-combing, I spotted just the box I wanted for my collection of valuables. It was not just a box, but a red cedar chest approximately 4 by 8 inches and designed like a treasure chest. Mom and Dad thought it was just what I needed.

I couldn't wait for morning to come. I could hear the waves beckoning to me through the partially open window in my room. Like counting sheep, the waves took their toll.

Clam digging started early before light, my parents went while the tide was still out. I looked for shells. I found all different kinds: broken crabs, empty clams because the sea gulls got to them first, but still no sand dollars. After lunch, Mom and Dad decided to help me find some sand dollars, but first, Dad said he had to stop at a store in town to get some things for dinner. He left me to go ahead and look for sand dollars with Mom.

When Dad got back he helped me look, too. I was looking up and down, around rocks and in tide pools. Then I spotted it, partially sticking out of the sand; I found it, my first sand dollar! It was probably the only one on the beach for 50 miles. I put it in my treasure box.

This shell still sits in my box along with years of awards, pins, buttons from athletics and scouting, and a Swiss army knife I found in the woods where I used to live. These things keep a warm link to my past.

Naragansett Beach, I found out years later, doesn't have sand dollars, but the local souvenir shop does, kept in reserve for moms and dads who want to help their children build a memory.

A Jog and a Dog

Having already stretched and run a fourth of my distance, I arrived at my favorite spot and halted. It was the beginning of fall, the leaves of maple trees swirled down around me, crunching under my weight as I strode toward a gigantic tree trunk. Sitting, just taking in my surroundings, I noticed dusk turning to dark and decided to start home.

As I moved to stand up, I saw something crouching across the road. I took a step back, it took a step forward. Fear hadn't registered yet, but my curiosity had. Walking forward to get a closer look, I recognized Bear, a neighbor's friendly black lab. Sighing, I reached to pet the dog, but stopped short as a low rumble in the animal's throat grew to a loud growl.

I quickly pulled my hand to safety and backed off. Staring at the dog, I shrugged my shoulders in bewilderment, turned, and walked away. The clicking of the dog's claws on the pavement followed. Thinking nothing of it, I resumed my jogging, only to have the gigantic Labrador growling right at my heels again. Scared now, I broke into a run, and that's when the dog bit me, hard into the flesh of my leg.

I fell to the ground, screaming in agony. The owner of the dog came out, wondering what the noise was about. Yanking on the dog's collar, the man struggled to pull the vicious animal off of me, which after several tries he managed to accomplish.

While all this happened, another close neighbor who had witnessed the incident called 911. It was decided afterward that the dog had contracted rabies and he was soon put to sleep. I was given a series of shots and a few stitches only, and after a couple of years, my leg healed, but the scars remain on both the inside and out.

Romeo and Juliet Movie Review

A Perfect “Modern Classic”

For conservative Shakespeare lovers, the sound of a *Romeo and Juliet* updated for the 1990s is enough to evoke cries of blasphemy. Admittedly, the thought of the Bard’s timeless story of two young lovers being updated for an age group that doesn’t have the attention span to read a Dr. Pepper label, much less deal with iambic pentameter, is frightening. However, director Baz Luhrmann manages to pull off an adaptation of the classic that neither waters down the brilliance of Shakespeare nor bores the average modern day audience. By casting the young and talented Claire Danes and Leonardo DiCaprio, and sticking with the Shakespearean verse, Luhrmann creates a perfect “modern classic.”

The “Two households, both alike in dignity” reside in fair Verona Beach, which represents modern-day Los Angeles. The battle between the two families is made evident by weapon-toting thugs whose cars sport “Montague” or “Capulet” license plates. A billboard examined closely advertises L’amour, not Coca-Cola. Such seemingly hokey touches are not so; rather, they add to the realism of Shakespeare’s language in a present-day setting.

After one makes the easy adjustment of mentally balancing lyrical verse with the dazzling eye-candy setting and fast-paced action, *Romeo and Juliet* is entirely captivating. Claire Danes and Leonardo DiCaprio are not just drool-elicitors for both the sexes, but strong actors who have the ability to speak Shakespeare’s language and draw the viewers into the tragedy. Although spoken differently, the verse is just as striking as in the theater. The innuendo is obvious when DiCaprio whines about being left unsatisfied in the balcony scene; Danes’ crooning about “my only love sprung from my only hate” is breathtaking. Danes does not allow DiCaprio to steal the show as a Juliet would be apt to do; she too gives a striking performance as Romeo’s passionate yet innocent desire.

John Leguizamo plays perfectly the troublesome villain, Tybalt, and Harold Perrineau as Mercutio is a hilarious addition. The beauty and tragedy of the play begin at his death, as do the emotional movie-goer’s tears. One can cry all the way to the end of the film, as the lovers share a coffin in a candle-lit cathedral. Danes’ realistic sob at the realization of her lover’s death causes a snicker from the average moviegoer, and the scene is altered a bit from its original form, but the emotion-packed climax is handled well.

Not everyone will appreciate this new *Romeo and Juliet*, which, with its actors and its modern look, is clearly aimed at a younger audience. However, it is clear the film is more than bait for mall rats. The new version combines gripping action with the classic original verse to create a modern, open-minded Shakespeare-lover’s dream. And even if one is not inclined to iambic pentameter, its two-hours traffic is exciting enough to keep those who only have the patience to read the Cliff Notes version from squirming in their seats.

Great College Entrance Essay

I AM...

I am a dynamic figure, often seen scaling walls and crushing ice. I have been known to remodel train stations on my lunch breaks, making them more efficient in the area of heat retention. I translate ethnic slurs for Cuban refugees. I write award-winning operas. I manage time efficiently. Occasionally, I tread water for three days in a row.

I woo women with my sensuous and godlike trombone playing. I can pilot bicycles up severe inclines with unflinching speed, and I cook thirty-minute brownies in twenty minutes. I am an expert in stucco, a veteran in love, and an outlaw in Peru.

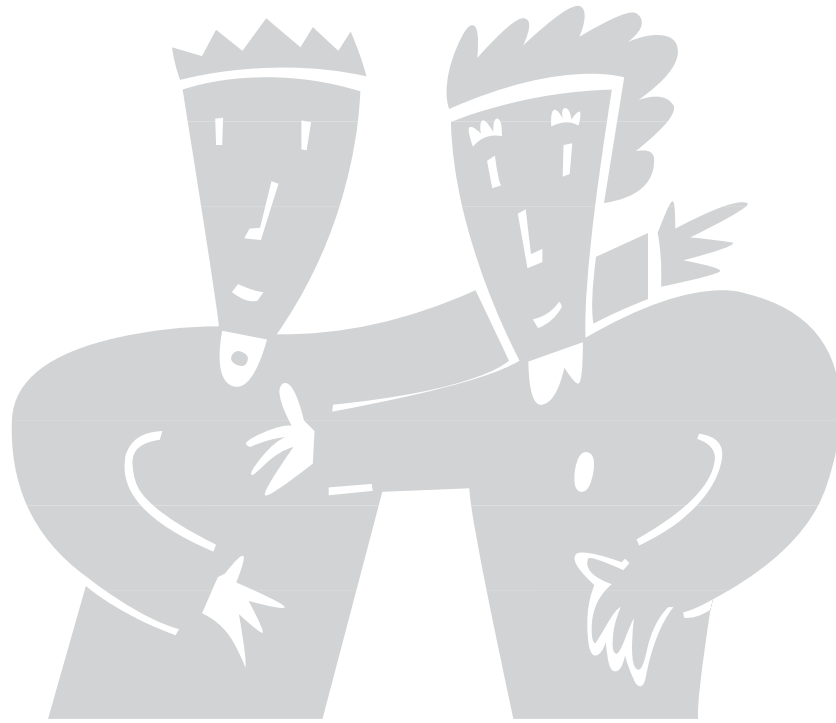
Using only a hoe and a large glass of water, I once single-handedly defended a small village in the Amazon Basin from a horde of ferocious army ants. I play bluegrass cello. I was scouted by the Mets. I am the subject of numerous documentaries. When I'm bored, I build large suspension bridges in my yard. I enjoy urban hang-gliding. On Wednesdays, after school, I repair electrical appliances for the elderly free of charge.

I am an abstract artist, a concrete analyst, and a ruthless bookie. Critics worldwide swoon over my original line of corduroy evening wear. I don't perspire. I am a private citizen, yet I receive fan mail. I have been caller number nine and have won the weekend passes. Last summer I toured New Jersey with a traveling centrifugal-force demonstration. I bat .400. My deft floral arrangements have earned me fame in international botany circles. Children trust me.

I can hurl tennis rackets at small moving objects with deadly accuracy. I once read *Paradise Lost*, *Moby Dick*, and *David Copperfield* in one day and still had time to refurbish an entire dining room that evening. I know the exact location of every food item in the supermarket. I have performed several covert operations for the CIA. I sleep once a week; when I do sleep, I sleep in a chair. While on vacation in Canada, I successfully negotiated with a group of terrorists who had seized a small bakery. The laws of physics do not apply to me.

I balance, I weave, I dodge, I frolic, and my bills are all paid. On weekends, to let off steam, I participate in full contact origami. Years ago I discovered the meaning of life but forgot to write it down. I have made extraordinary four-course meals using only a mouli and a toaster oven. I breed prize winning clams. I have won bullfights in San Juan, cliff-diving competitions in Sri Lanka, and spelling bees at the Kremlin. I have played Hamlet, I have performed open-heart surgery, and I have spoken with Elvis.

But I have not yet gone to college.



Let's work together to
make your teaching
the best it can be.

Please contact me any time!

Even the best workshops and teaching materials can't meet the needs of every teacher all the time.

That's why we need to stay in touch. Send me an e-mail any time you have a question.

*I'll do my best to get back to you quickly with answers, additional teaching materials,
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Please send suggestions, questions, and corrections to:
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