

Best of Freshman Writing

Volume 14

Student Voices

Editor in Chief
Jim Manis

Editor
Suzanne Harper

Best of Freshman Writing is a publication of the Pennsylvania State University.

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Best of Freshman Writing: Student Voices is a publication of the Pennsylvania State University. All of the student essays contained herein were produced by students registered in English 004, 015 and 030, within the campuses of The Pennsylvania State University, during the academic year of 2008-09, and the essays appear here with the writers’ express written permission. No portion of Best of Freshman Writing may be reproduced in any fashion without the express written permission of the authors.

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Best of Freshman Writing

Volume 14

WELCOME to the fourteenth volume of *Best of Freshman Writing*. For the past several years we have been publishing student writing with the intention of celebrating the work of our students and of sharing it with others for a variety of instructional purposes. We accept student essays from PSU campuses (see the list on the back cover), from students in English 004, 015, and 030.

Many of our readers have asked about our editorial guidelines, which we publish on our web site (www2.hn.psu.edu/faculty/jmanis/bof.htm). We only accept essays produced in the courses listed above, and the essays must be submitted by faculty members from the campuses. In other words, *Best* is not an “open submissions” publication.

Some faculty have asked if we will accept short stories or poems or essays produced in other courses. The answer is quite simply no. Other Penn State publications are better suited for this purpose.

At the end of each fall and spring semester, we send out an email call for papers to the various campuses within the university, but our final deadline for papers is May 15 of each year. The papers must be typed and double-spaced, with the student’s name on them. All documentation should be in MLA parenthetical style and verified by the student’s instructor. Faculty should gather the students’ papers and send them in one envelope from each campus, along with a signed publication agreement form, which can be downloaded from our web site. (*See above.*) The student’s return address should also be included so that we can send him or her a copy of the publication in which his or her essay appears.

We hope you like this edition of *Best* and that more of you will participate in its production in the future by submitting essays to us. We are all very curious about student writing throughout the system. *Best* provides a meaningful link between faculty and students throughout the state. Let us know what you think about it. We want your suggestions and help.

Editorial Staff

Editor in Chief

Jim Manis – HN

Editor

Suzanne Harper – SW

How to contact us:

Write to

Jim Manis
Penn State University
76 University Drive
Hazleton, PA 18202-
1291

Phone:

570.450.3189

Email:

jdm12@psu.edu

Best,

Jim Manis

Kate Trowbridge

English 4

PSU – Berks

Encomium: His Music Is Me

I AM NOT THE TYPE of person who is motivated to follow my dreams, nor am I the type of person who is easily inspired. I thought this would never change; that this is the way I would always be because that was my mentality up until the age of sixteen. Martin Johnson changed that. Martin is the lead singer of the fairly successful pop-punk band, *Boys Like Girls*. The day I met him, my life changed.

Martin Johnson is by far one of the most inspirational people in my life. By discovering his band at an early stage in their career, I was able to watch them grow up and achieve what I knew they could always achieve. The first time I saw *Boys Like Girls* play was at The Silo in Reading, Pennsylvania. There were about seven other people in the audience that day. I remember being scared to talk to any of them, but I faced my fears and ultimately met the four boys who would have the biggest impact on my life thus far. Before I knew it, I spent the next two years going to nearly all of their shows on the East Coast. The moment when I realized how far they'd actually come from that first day was this past summer.

I attended their show at Festival Pier in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. This is one of the largest outdoor venues in the city, and they sold it out. I can still remember being brought to tears during that show. Listening to everyone in the audience singing along to their lyrics was incredible. I don't think I've ever been more proud of anyone in my entire life. Watching Martin and the rest of the band go from playing to seven people to 25,000 people is one of the most amazing things I have ever been able to witness. He is living proof that dreams don't have to stay dreams, that they can become reality. Without him, I wouldn't be as driven or as motivated as I am to achieve what I am setting out to achieve.

Martin has always been there for me—not in person per se, but through his music. Nearly everything I've ever felt, he has too, and there is a song to prove it. "We'll scream loud at the top of our lungs, and they'll think it's just 'cause we're young. And we'll feel so alive." I've always been able to completely connect with those lyrics, which are from the song "The Great Escape." There comes a time when a person needs to grow up and leave what he or she knows behind, but first having one last night with some friends. I just experienced that by gradu-

ating from high school and moving on to college. I would be lying if I said starting college wasn't terrifying, but knowing that Martin experienced the same emotions made everything seem okay. There is something so mysterious about the healing power of music, and he was always able to put exactly what I was feeling into a song. It's always been a comforting thought to know that whenever I am having a bad day, and my friends don't understand what I am going through, I can turn on *Boys Like Girls* and know that everything will be okay.

Along with amazing music, Martin has given me other people whom I never would have met otherwise. I've gained three best friends from the mere fact that we listened to the same music. These three people understand me like no others do, even though I've only known them a short time. I am truly blessed to have them in my life. I was also able to meet two other musicians through Martin. They are two of the nicest guys I have ever met. I haven't known them for long, but they have quickly become two guys I can't imagine my life without. They are so good to me, and I just hope that one day I can return the favor.

All of *Boys Like Girls* changed my life, but it was Martin whom I made the deepest connection with. I am a completely different person now than I was when I met them two years ago. I am confident, much more outgoing and, for once, I am not afraid to live out my dreams. I don't think "thank you" will ever be enough for all he has given me during the past two years of my life. I've thought about what I would be like if I never went to The Silo on that last Friday of September 2006. It doesn't matter how many times I think about it, I always arrive at the same answer. It's rather simple: I just wouldn't be me.

Heidi Crain

English 4

Penn State – DuBois

More Women Math Teachers, Please

CURRENTLY forty-eight percent of all mathematics bachelor degrees go to women. The majority of math teachers are male. This world needs more math teachers who are female. I would make an excellent math teacher. This is evident because I love math, I love helping people, and I would love to increase the number of female math teachers.

First, I love math. I have always dreamt of being a math teacher since I was in junior high. Attending math class was always my favorite part about junior high and high school. As long as I can remember, math has just been my best subject. When I would receive my report card, my math grades were always an A. Crazy about and in love would describe my feelings for math. Everyone always called me the math geek; I didn't mind this nickname at all because math was something I loved and enjoyed doing. I guess that math just comes easy to me. The thing that intrigues me the most about math is knowing I will never forget what I have learned; it is something I will take with me and use everyday. My favorite part about math is factoring; factoring is the process in which one is given a big equation and breaks it down into two smaller quantities. For example, x^2+4x+4 equals $(x+2)^2$.

Second, I love helping people. I believe that math is the number one area that people need help in. A good way to help someone is by teaching and guiding them. I receive a sense of fulfillment when I help someone. I have always loved helping people, but knowing that I can help them with something that I'm good at is important to me. Many people in this world struggle with math and are afraid to ask for help. My number one goal for when I become a math teacher is to make myself as available as much as possible to my students. Whether that means staying late after school or even making study groups for them. Math is the easiest subject once the basics are known. I remember needing help with the math on the SATs. My math teacher at the time was Mr. Camberg. He helped me by making practice tests and study guides and staying after school with me. Due to all this help he gave me, I scored a 500 on the math portion of the SATs. I wish to help people the same way he helped me.

Finally, I would love to increase the number of women math teachers. Throughout my whole high school career, I only had one female math teacher. I believe in the whole high school, there were only four or five female math teachers. Girls need a role model in the classroom whom they can look up to and learn from. My role model was Mrs. Wolf; she was my algebra III teacher my senior year in high school. Simple and easy would explain how she taught math. Her teaching skills were amazing, and even a third grader could understand what she was explaining. If the class did not understand what she was discussing, she would draw pictures, use real life examples, or use 3-D objects to illustrate. Mrs. Wolf demonstrated to me that I could become a math teacher. I wish I could be as good a role model for younger girls as Mrs. Wolf was for me.

Clearly the evidence presented here demonstrates that I would make an excellent math teacher. If I become a

math teacher, my number one objective is to be the best role model that I can be. Encouraging younger women to become math teachers is my main goal. I want to prove to everyone that women are just as intelligent as men; even when it comes to hard material like math. More female math teachers are just what this world needs.

Katie Delhunty

English 4

Penn State – DuBois

The Curse of the '96 Olds

IN THE UNITED STATES, most adolescents over the age of sixteen have access to cars. The new drivers, depending on the gender of the driver, usually want cute or cool cars, depending on the gender of the driver, such as Tempos, Escorts, or Cavaliers. These cars always look nice or fit the teenager's attitudes. I bought the complete opposite, a 1996 Oldsmobile, a car that has never been in my dreams and never imagined myself driving. My car is unattractive, falling apart, and eats money.

My car is one of the ugliest cars I have ever set eyes on. Although it is described as navy blue on the title, it is more of a disgusting green. One look at my car and I want to puke, which will reflect the color of the car precisely. The color might not be so bad if it did not have rust to compliment its humiliating shell, along with a gaping hole on the passenger's door.

Furthermore, my car is falling apart. If its not one part on my car that is breaking, then it is another part breaking my piggy bank. I have had my car for two years, and in those two years I have replaced seven power steering pumps. Putting at least two bottles of power steering fluid in my car a week, I am starting to become more than a little frustrated. When I hear the low whine my car gives off when I turn the wheel, I know it's time for a new pump—again. When I'm not bent down under the hood of my car, pouring power steering fluid into the pump, I am pounding on my dash trying to make my radio, which is always fading out, work. One minute I will be listening to my favorite song on the radio, and the next I will be listening to static. On the way to school is the worst time, and my radio's favorite to go out. This quirk would not be so bad if it were not a forty-five minute drive and the person in the passenger's seat would not then feel the need to sing the whole way to school.

Finally, my car is a waste of money. With my car always breaking and always falling apart, I am continually dumping money into it. Not something I enjoy doing. Most people like putting money into their cars if they are buying new rims or painting their cars a new color, like fire engine red, to give it a sign of youth. I, on the other hand, am spending money on hand-me-down doors and new gas lines. I am never spending money on cute floor mats with my favorite cartoon character on them or ones that have colorful flowers. Instead, I spend my hard earned cash on the use of the car wash vacuums, putting one quarter in at a time, trying to scrub the dirt that is forever engraved into the carpeting. If it is not the little things emptying my bank account, then surely my alternator just broke and is calling for some big bucks into the repairman's pocket.

Even though my car moves me from point A to B, I don't think I will ever be able to come to like it. Seeing most people riding around in their nice and shiny new cars, I always dread climbing into mine, never knowing what will fail on it next. My car is not only ugly, falling apart, and a waste of money, but it is also my worst nightmare.

Lily Yu
English 15
Penn State Abington

A Day to Remember

AS A GIRL, I never thought that an airplane would crash into the two towers that always stood before my eyes, The World Trade Centers. The buildings became second nature to me. I would see them every weekday morning upon my departure for school and every weekend on the Path Trains to Newport Mall in New Jersey. They were my guide to make sure I was headed in the right direction, until September 11, 2001.

That day I had just started at a new school because I was no longer considered an elementary student. I attended a middle school in midtown Manhattan, roughly seven miles from the Twin Towers. My mom had walked me to the bus stop early in the morning and made sure I was on the bus, and after I arrived at school and finished advisory and part of my first period class, at 8:46 a.m., the first plane crashed into one of the towers. At 9:03 a.m., a second plane crashed into the other tower. From where I was located, I was too far away to be able to hear the impact of the crash. I did not even have the slightest idea of what had happened, but from the faces of my teachers, I could tell that they probably knew but were not allowed to tell us.

I even managed to switch to my second period class without knowing what had happened outside. Not even a single word was mentioned; however, I realized that there was an unusual number of sirens outside the window. I imagined it was probably a bad fire or something, but about halfway into the period, announcements about early pickups started being constantly blared from the loudspeaker system. My classmates were starting to leave the room, and soon the halls filled with students, but I still had no idea what had happened. It wasn't until after third period began that my name and my friend Linda Tom's name were announced and we were told to go to the office for early pick up.

We rushed downstairs and saw our mothers worried. I ran to my mom and asked her what happened as she was signing me out for the day. I remember her words clearly. They first sank into me as a joke. She said, "You will not believe this, but the twin towers got blown up." I wanted to tell her to shut up and thought to myself what kind of lie was that? I ran outside immediately. I could not believe what I was seeing—huge clouds of smoke, rushing ambulances, people covered in dust, some bloody. It felt

like I was part of a movie or dream. I was hoping that time could rewind and that everything had not happened. I ran to my mom and held her hand because I was more frightened than ever. My hands were as cold as ice and my mind was confused. I thought my life was going to be at stake on that day, because I knew anything else could happen at that point.

The next thing on my mind was how we were going to make our way home. The whole city was in chaos. Streets were flooded with people. Since I had a student pass, I asked my mom if we could hurry to the bus stop, but that was impossible. Even public transportation was designated to rush victims to hospitals. My mom even told me she took the bus to pick me up and the bus driver would not even let her off because they needed to rush to the closest hospital. She had to nag the bus driver to let her off by saying that she had to pick a little girl up at school.

We began our walk on Twenty-First Street and walked about an hour and a half back home. The streets were crowded with people whose faces looked puzzled, but what frightened me was how they were fully covered in dust from the buildings. I began to wonder where my brother and sister were. Their school was closer to the Twin Towers than mine. My mom told me they were safe because my dad had picked them up while she picked me up. At that point, I felt a little more at ease.

When we arrived home, the rest of the family was relieved to see us. My sister told me that the teachers in her school became hysterical. The students were in the school yard lining up to go inside to begin classes, and every student and teacher saw the planes crash into the towers. Some of the teachers rushed into the building in tears and left the students in the school yard.

I knew my family was safe, but what about everyone else? I needed to make sure my friends were fine, too. I rushed over to the phone to try to call my friends, but the phone had no dial tone. Luckily, I was able to turn on my television, which kept showing the planes flying into the two buildings.

Eventually, my mom had to go back out because she needed to buy groceries. I decided to go along with her because I wanted to look at the burning towers again. Stores were packed with people buying groceries to stock up in case they were not able to buy anything for a while. I didn't go into the store while my mom shopped, but just stood outside waiting for her, staring into the thick black clouds of smoke.

September 11 is a day that will remind me of what I witnessed: people ran frantically and covered in blood or dust, debris flew in the air, ambulances and fire trucks

rushed up and down the blocks. Although this day has had a stronger effect on some people more than others, everyone has been affected. Walking through the streets of City Hall in New York City just isn't the same anymore. There are no longer those two giant buildings to guide me when I roam around downtown. When I go back to visit Ground Zero, where the towers once stood, all I see is debris. Things just are not the same as they used to be.

Rebecca Walters

English 15

Penn State – Abington

In Heroes We Believe, D-A-N-C-I-N-G

“FORTY-SIX on our feet, hear the music, feel the beat!” The Penn State Dance Marathon is beginning. The dancers are ready to endure the 46 hours of standing, without sleeping, without caffeine, all for the kids. That's our chant, our motivation, for the kids, FTK. We have waited months for this weekend. We have had countless fundraisers and activities all to raise money for the Four Diamonds Fund. Finally, the weekend has arrived, and we can not be more pumped.

The marathon began at 6:00 p.m. on Friday, but we were awake way before that. Our day started around 10:00 a.m. when we began prepping for the event and meeting people that we would be seeing all weekend. Finally, it was time to stand outside the Bryce Jordan Center (BJC); we had to be the first ones to enter so we could have the spot that we wanted. We stood outside for two hours, in shorts and sweatshirts, huddling to keep each other warm. Finally, the doors opened, and we dashed to the stands. First we saw all of the 708 “dancers” parade across the floor through the human tunnel. (The human tunnel is a huge line of people stretching from outside and across the floor of the BJC, all to welcome the dancers.) Then the countdown began—ten, nine, eight—it was almost time—seven, six, five, four—this was it, the last seconds they could sit—three, two, one, STAND. The weekend had officially begun.

The marathon started with videos of previous THON weekends, and we realize just how incredible it really is. To think that college students raise millions of dollars a year for this cause is amazing. Throughout the rest of the

weekend there were various events and performances to keep the dancers and “moralers” happy. (Moralers are people who are there to help the dancers. Each dancer is given a moraler by University Park, and then people from their organization take shifts on the floor.) My first shift was during the all U hour, the BJC was flooded with blue and white. When I stepped out onto the floor, it was like a natural high. I could not believe that what I was witnessing in the stands was ten times better face to face. The energy was unbelievable. During this time our THON family was also on the floor. Each organization has at least one family that consists of a child that has or has had cancer. Our THON child is Mary Smith. (Real name withheld.) She is truly an inspiration. Mary was diagnosed at the age of two with medullablastoma. She is now five years old and cancer free. She is our guiding light and helped us through the weekend more than anyone.

Soon it was the wee hours of the morning. We learned the line dance, listened to information about THON and sang some of our favorite songs. Our dancers were tired but still standing. The line dance clearly motivated them to keep going. About every hour the morale captains would be called to the stage, and the entire building would break out into dance. It is about a four-minute routine reflecting on events that happened during the past year. The lyrics range from “Philly storms to victory, end the drought since 83,” to “Britney cleans up her act, says Perez that’s a fact.” It is so much fun to learn, and even dancers in the worst mood, at the lowest point, can not help but be hyped when hearing the music start.

As Saturday afternoon approached, the dancers began to sink into low points and struggled to stay awake. It was about 24 hours now, and their bodies started to tell them to rest. They ignored it, knowing they had to keep going for the kids. As Saturday night arrived, we anticipated the pep rally starting. All of the sports teams turned into dancers and put on a show for the entire BJC. It is one of the most entertaining hours during THON weekend, because the athletes behave as complete fools. This event also keeps the dancers busy because they are allowed to vote for their favorite act. This year, the men’s hockey team won. It provides a glimpse of how many people are involved in THON, not just the dancers and moralers, but also every sports team. Half the stands are filled with fraternities and sororities, clearly diminishing the reputation they have for only partying with one another.

Throughout Saturday night and Sunday morning, we really had to work to keep the dancers happy and up-

beat. They were drained and their feet killing them. Massages, piggyback rides and tennis balls used for foot massages kept them from giving up. Different cultural groups did dance routines, and some groups sang. The theme this year was “classics,” so we were all singing along to Disney songs, feeling like little kids again. The best parts were probably when they would play “Zombie Nation,” “Hey, Baby,” and “Sweet Caroline” because the entire building would break out into song. Soon enough there was the chanting of “WE ARE” from one side of the room and “PENN STATE” from the other. They probably heard us outside and 20 blocks away.

Soon it was twelve noon on Sunday and family hour was beginning. The last four hours were here. Each THON child, along with their THON chairs was walked across the stage of the BJC. It was such a moving thing to see. Some of the children were so full of energy and others couldn’t hide the pain they were feeling. During this time we also watched videos of children who had beaten cancer. We even saw Mary featured. I don’t think there was a dry eye in the house during this moment. The stories were touching, and just to know that these small children battled this horrible sickness, and had won is inspiring. Next came possibly the most disturbing video of them all, the remembrance video. This one honored all of the children we lost during this fight against pediatric cancer.

Once they were finished making us cry, they decided to pump us up again, with someone we all know and love, Joe Paterno. This was his first THON in many years, and his speech made us realize how proud we should be of ourselves. He said, “Fifty-eight years at Penn State, I’ve never been more proud than right now.”

Finally, we were in the final minutes of the weekend. Everyone was antsy. We knew the total was going to be announced any minute. We watched the morale captains line up the cards on stage, and not even they knew what numbers were on the other side. The count down began. Ten, nine, eight—no one could stand still—seven, six, five, four—silence took over the room—three, two, one—they lifted the cards. Penn State had raised \$7,490,133.87. Screams and tears took over the BJC, and we Penn State students knew that we had made a difference in the lives of many children. “Seize your heart, now’s the time, Dream Forward, THON ’09!”

Vanessa Kattouf

English 15

Penn State – Altoona

A Pencil without a Point

JANUARY 12, 2009: If I remember correctly, I had many gregarious butterflies playing Freeze Tag in my stomach, which was, coincidentally, stuck in my throat (thank goodness for the close proximity of a water fountain). Yes, it was the first day back to school after winter break, and unlike the myriad of students throughout the bustling hallways horsing around and dashing about, I was the only one carrying a map of the campus—and actually needed it. It was not only my first day back to school but my first day at a *news*chool, and, to put it delicately, I was about to pee myself.

Let's pretend, momentarily, that English class was a job interview; despite my nervousness, I came with experience. After working as a features editor on my high school newspaper, I had already discovered that I had an adoration for little did-you-know facts and would flash my creative license quicker than a sheriff with a badge. Previous English classes had taught me about alliteration, poem analysis and vocabulary builders (two of which I've already utilized—woops, that makes three).

One detail, however, that I lacked immensely and completely was a writing persona. Although this problem doesn't appear to be too *The Young and the Restless* or *As the World Turns* (thank my lucky stars that I don't have a long-lost sister or evil twin), as a student serious about writing, it mattered to me; it just did. Absent was the signature to my writing, and I felt like a pencil without a point.

As soon as I set foot into my freshman English/seminar class, I was overcome by an atmosphere fit to even the most struggling of writers. Throughout the course, I learned about and experimented with both close and open-prose writing. Not only did I discover that I favor the latter a great deal more, but I was just down-right more comfortable with that style of writing. Close-prose writing, although perfect for a business letter, simply did not suit me or my writing. It was around this time that I started making use of my middle name, Joy, because I believed that it helped me identify my writing to a goal—as corny as this sounds, I promise it's the utmost truth;—I wanted people to find joy in reading what I wrote. I began practicing my belief in Everyone-Should-Learn-to-Laugh-a-Little-ism through my writing, and as much

as I loved it before, I found myself having considerably more fun with essay-writing, not only in this class but also in others.

Writing about gender issues offered me a chance to take possibly-tabooed subjects and insert a bit of humor: a side note here, a minor observation there, stir vigorously and enjoy. As far as freewriting is concerned, if it had a hand, I would shake it. Never before had I realized how quickly my mind pirouettes from one thought to the next. Upon re-reading my freewriting, it would never escape me how I'd have to omit the usage of punctuations and sometimes even proper spelling *just* to keep up with my rampant thoughts! Usually during the “half-way point,” I'd already have an essay idea brewing in my mind and would use the remaining minutes to chisel out the details.

When I walked into this class, I felt like a little girl who hadn't quite grown into her high heels, tottering across the carpet to take her seat in the back. Upon completion of this course, I've exchanged those heels for a pair of now worn-in, albeit stylish, sneakers. I am immeasurably comfortable with the writer that is slowly beginning to emerge; and, as for that pencil without a point, I threw it away and bought a pen instead.

Michelle Bottone

English 15

Penn State – Berks

College Dating: Reality or Illusion

COLLEGE can be an arena for many things other than academics: alcohol, drug use, but most of all, sex. If students are not careful, they can be caught in an ongoing rollercoaster of college dating. As I sit here on Valentine's Day beginning to write my cultural analysis essay on the complexity of college dating, I cannot help but pick up my pen and generate a list of ideas. All I have to do is look around and recognize that my roommate drove for hours to spend Valentine's Day with her boyfriend of three years. Additionally, another good friend traveled to extend her moral support to her boyfriend of three months at his rugby game. I then wonder what the standards are for a girl to be considered dateable in college or to be girlfriend material. How does one become

placed into the column of being “dateable”? The current college-dating playground is more bizarre than ever because of our instant gratification generation that is overwhelmingly influenced by the ubiquitous media.

I am a member of a generation of pervasive texting, web cams, and fast food. All these are instant and, to complicated things further, boys generally view dating differently than girls. Recently, a friend of mine began socializing with an upperclassman, who took her to the movies and occasionally to dinner. Seemingly, everything was going well between them until she revealed to him that she was a virgin. In response, he said he did not want to date a virgin because he did not want to have to deal with the awkwardness of a first time sexual encounter. I believe his attitude was actually that he did not want to be burdened by any potential consequences stemming from a more intimate relationship, not wanting any emotional strings possibly generated by my friend or their mutual heightened sexual status. Furthermore, he did not want to deal with any sort of obligation.

I often wonder what happened to the traditional dating structure and values that my parents’ generation had. They had romance, intimacy, and love; where did it go? Now the present era’s practice is what we like to call the “weekend hook up.” The novel, *The Naked Roommate: And 107 Issues You Might Run Into in College* characterizes the weekend hook up perfectly: “I love you Friday, I love you Saturday, but don’t call Sunday” (220). The novel portrays just how college relationships are strictly based on convenience. Moreover, college males are evidently no longer instructed by their fathers to treat a woman with respect or to commit to one woman by having her as a girlfriend. My parents’ generation was taught that purity and intelligence were attractive and highly valued. The “good girls” were the ones the boys ultimately wished to date, become their girlfriends and eventually marry. Nickie Hill, a college freshman, declared to me, “The media portrays that college is supposed to be random hook ups.” We live in a world now where sex is casual and everywhere. If someone is not pressured by a significant other, then they are pressured indirectly by friends, acquaintances and the media to conform to this game of “musical chairs” dating an no commitment intimacy.

I have personally heard of college dating situations where girls have lied about their virginity so that a boy would date them. The males in my generation apparently are not inclined to devote time, effort, or money in forging a special bond with the opposite sex. The media at present portrays unemotional, unattached sex as perfectly normal. What happened to wanting to get to know

and develop a special bond with someone of the opposite sex? It appears to be completely out of fashion.

Entourage, a hit television show on HBO, tells the story of Vincent Chase, a famous actor from Queens. The series explores his life in Hollywood along with his boyhood friends who are mainly along for the ride. The show has its comic side to it; however, in many aspects it degrades women. The male characters use extreme vulgarity when referring to women and view them solely as sexual objects. In many scenes sprinkled throughout its episodes women just “put out” at the drop of a hat. This is an example of how the media represents that it is acceptable to have emotionless sex with as many partners as possible. This unmistakable message is promoted every week by this popular Emmy-award-winning television show.

The media needs to be responsible and parents should urge their sons and daughters to strive for real, meaningful relationships. All relationships that are worthwhile necessitate commitment and compromise. Furthermore, unprotected, casual sex poses significant health risks. While students are in high school, parents can control when their children go out and when they return home. In college, students alone control when they eat, sleep, and party. Some students demonstrate that they are ready to handle these responsibilities and realize that freedom without responsibility is a recipe for disaster. In my opinion, it all comes down to priorities.

Francis Cannella

English 15

Penn State – Berks

Earth to NASA, the Space Race Is Over

ON JULY 20, 1969, two men landed on the moon, and the famous words “That’s one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind” were spoken by Neil Armstrong as he took the first steps on the moon. As America watched and listened to the broadcast, it released a feeling of ease to the country from the tensions with the Soviet Union. Today we look back on that moment and take pride in the innovation and exertion of the people of our National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). From that day on NASA would continue to

astound us by sending more satellites into space, discovering new planets and eventually start the building of the international space station. With many projects in motion, NASA seemed to be the highlight of the world for some time, but today the light has been overshadowed by extensive spending, shuttle disasters, and unsatisfying results. These troubled economic times have Americans focused on the problems at hand on earth and not the ones in the skies. With that in mind, one expert believes it is hard to understand why our government spends billions of dollars on NASA programs when the money could go to other government programs (Chaikin). This is why I believe the United States government should withdraw all *major* spending on NASA programs that do not focus on earthly problems until the economic troubles are solved.

Poor education in America is a topic our new administration has taken to heart, trying to fix the many cracks that lie within the foundation of the system. Recently, NASA has sought to pull funding from a K-12 program “eliminating \$12 million for a competitive educational grant as part of a spending shift affecting its overall elementary and secondary education program.” Instead of receiving 32.1 million dollars in 2008, the program would be given 23.8 million dollars decreasing their funds by 26 percent. *Education Week* says money spent on other areas of education such as in universities would also be cut, showing a 21 percent decrease in that area. Although all these cuts would seem to give NASA more money and ask less for the program, their overall budget “would rise 2.9 percent to 17.6 billion in fiscal year of 2009, under the Bush administration’s budget plan” (Trotter). These problems are now being passed on to America’s new administration, and if they are smart, they will reconsider. Taking knowledge away from future generations is not a good place to start when trying to reconstruct budgets for future failures.

With years of continued use, instruments break, lines bust, and fuses blow. This is why another NASA program asking for money deals with the replacement of our current space shuttles. John Schwartz of *The New York Times* says NASA is working on a new shuttle called Ares I, which would be used for moon and deep space missions but “technical troubles have dogged the design process for the Ares I, the first of the rockets scheduled to be built, with attendant delays and growing costs.” According to *The New York Times*, this new system called Constellation would be debuted in 2015, five years after the end of the original space shuttle program. NASA’s 17 billion dollar annual budget would skyrocket to keep the project running on time, as they will have to fight for

more money from the Obama administration (Schwartz).

As the old saying goes, when the poor get poorer, the rich get richer. This refers to the future of space exploration and the best alternative for NASA that lies within the hands of entrepreneurs, not the government. Glenn Reynolds of *The Wall Street Journal* wrote about how in 1996, Peter Diamandis a communications entrepreneur, started a competition called the X prize. It was later renamed the Ansari X Prize after the two people who put up the ten million dollar prize, Amir and Anousheh Ansari: “The challenge to competitors: Develop a spacecraft able to carry three people to an altitude of roughly 62 miles—generally regarded as the point where airspace ends and outer space begins—and safely return them to Earth, then repeat the trip within two weeks.” The first recipient of the prize was Burt Rutan, an aerospace engineer for his SpaceShipOne that met the challenge in 2004. After Rutan brought hope to the competition, many other “NewSpace” entrepreneurs decided to join the race such as John Carmack, creator of the popular video game Doom and PayPal founder Elon Musk, who has started the SpaceX program (Reynolds). These private sector CEOs are finding a new way for space exploration that seems to bring about more productive research than NASA taking the people’s money out of the equation.

In NASA’s mission statement, hope is offered to those who love looking up at the night skies and their passion to go out into the dark abyss we call space. Their statement talks about what the organization has really been doing these past 50 years:

NASA’s mission is to pioneer the future in space exploration, scientific discovery and aeronautics research. To do that, thousands of people have been working around the world, trying to answer some basic questions. What’s out there in space? How do we get there? What will we find? What can we learn there, or learn just by trying to get there, that will make life better here on Earth? (Wilson)

All are valid questions but billion dollar questions. People like Representative Mark Udall of Colorado in 2006 defended these types of remarks saying, “Cuts threaten to make NASA irrelevant to the aviation of the world. Aeronautics within NASA is largely hidden from public view” (Watkins). NASA is a big part of our government, but what they are striving for are answers to questions that come at a great cost. Funding for future earth based aeronautics is understandable since flight is a big part of people’s lives. NASA projects like this dealing with tech-

nologies that directly affect our lives would still receive funding under this proposal.

Looking back in time, there seems to be an agreement that the age of searching for little green men is over other than trying to find the ones that are missing from people's wallets. Of all the ways to spend billions of dollars, the last place it needs to go is into NASA's no results program. Other than searching for threats that would be catastrophic to earth with telescopes that we already have here on the ground, I cannot see why we need billions of dollars to go to the moon. Maybe it is time for NASA to focus on subjects dealing with the present and not the far away future, leaving it up to the rich to find the next way to go into space. The next time the government needs more tax dollars dealing with a new project for an institution that directly affects the needs of our country, just think of NASA. They have plenty to spend.

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Kelly B. Strunk

English 15

Penn State – Berks

Which Is More Manipulated: The Food or Children?

ACCORDING TO the *New Oxford Dictionary*, to manipulate means to control or influence a person or situation) cleverly, unfairly, or unscrupulously; the key word is *unfairly*. This comes into play with the fast food industry and how they are said to manipulate children and their families. Eric Schlosser makes it very clear in his book *Fast Food Nation* that the fast food industry is targeting and manipulating children and their families, disregarding their best interests. In keeping with Schlosser's perspective I believe that the fast food industry has taken marketing to children too far. They have taken advantage of their innocence and influenced them to love as well as become loyal to their product that does no good for them.

In hopes of creating brand loyalty, many fast food companies have implemented the "cradle to grave" plan. With this plan companies wish to instill a feeling of nostalgia with aspiration to create a lifelong customer. With research they have found that a child can recognize a brand symbol even before the child can recognize his or her own name. The advertisements have also specifically targeted children by giving them specific reasons to ask for the product from their parents. "The aim of most children's advertising is straightforward: get kids to nag their parents and nag well" (Schlosser 43). Marketing teams want kids to whine, but specifically for their product. There are too many marketing teams out there carefully studying how to market to children. Marketing teams see what works best and manipulate the children to want their and only their product. "Years ago sociologist Vance Packard described children in American society as 'surrogate salesmen' who had to persuade other people, usually their parents, to buy what they wanted" (Schlosser 43).

The fast food restaurants also make going to their establishments the easy and convenient choice. The food is cheap; the kids love it; they receive a free toy, and there's a play place. What more could a child or parent ask for in a restaurant? The child, nothing. The parent should be smarter than that though. The parent should be seeing through the happy-go-lucky commercials that make fast food seem like not only a good choice, but also a fun

choice. The parents should see the immense lack of nutrition and wonder about the mystery meat, but sometimes the marketing teams are all too good at what they do. They can manipulate a child so well that the child can manipulate his or her parents. Parents do not want to deny their children something they enjoy, especially if it is seemingly light on their wallets.

“Michael Pertchuk, head of the FTC, argues that children need to be shielded from advertising that preys upon their immaturity. ‘They cannot protect themselves,’ he said, ‘against adults who exploit their present-mindedness’” (Schlosser 46). Parents, however, need to be more aware of what their children are doing and monitor it more carefully. Although they cannot guard their children from all of the advertisements, they can shield them from some. It is not fair to put all the blame on the advertising targeted at their children. Tell them the effects of the things that are being advertised and tell them why it is bad for them. Pertchuk makes a very good point in telling how the market unfairly preys on children and how wrong it is, making it necessary for parents to be all the more vigilant.

The hidden effect that the fast food industry has on children is beginning to truly threaten the future of Americans. The advertising to the young children is only helping this manipulation of children; not only is this wrong, but also unjust. They are not old enough to know better, let alone know the difference between a commercial and the actual program. There should be strict laws enforcing what can be said to children through the media and how often. Parents should do their part as well by telling the children the difference between what is good for them and what is not, as well as telling them the harmful effects of fast food. Taking advantage of a child’s young mind is unethical, therefore wrong.

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Ryan Schannauer

English 15

Penn State – Berks

Preserving a Memory

ALL TOO OFTEN we forget. Various tragedies affect our world and within a short amount of time, they are a distant memory. We watch global struggles and catastrophic events from the safety of our homes. Why should we bother to concern ourselves with issues we have no control over? We are desensitized; it is easy to forget. History is marred by atrocities that live on through the memories of those still alive to tell about them and through art, literature and movies. Remembering and learning from our mistakes is the only way to ensure they do not occur again. Natasha Trethewey wrote “The Gulf: A Meditation on the Mississippi Coast after Katrina” to show Americans that the tragedy in the South has not ended. She writes to help us see beyond ourselves, to see our human brothers and sisters who are in danger of being forgotten. We were all fixated on our televisions when Katrina was news but now most of us have turned away, returned to our lives and our own problems. Trethewey’s piece begs readers to not only remember Katrina “the storm,” but to remember the people and the history of the region that are being buried under the pouring of new concrete.

The beginning of Trethewey’s piece seems confusing, the writing choppy and full of loose ends, scattered and broken like the coast. Initially, it is hard to find the true reason for her story; there are a few potential narratives, so it is difficult to pin down the dominant one. She travels home to Gulfport, her native town, some time after the storm to see her family. Along with visiting her loved ones and telling their stories and emphasizing their struggles, Trethewey plays the role of journalist. She attempts to sort through the rubble of the storm, through the broken people. She interviews a woman, the security guard at her hotel, who comments on the overall neglect of the government in assisting the needy in the area. The woman also talks about how the buildings that are being rebuilt and repaired the quickest are casinos and expensive beach condos, not exactly what the predominantly poor to middle class citizens of the area need (9). The woman’s accusations are reinforced with researched information; the reader starts to guess what type of stance Trethewey is going to take. She also includes a conversation that she had with a waiter; he calls Katrina “a cleansing” (qtd. in Trethewey 14). Her tone following the com-

ment alludes to the story becoming one based on racial discrimination. She, a black woman, subtly implies that the waiter is a white male who is glad the storm cleansed the region of unwanted citizens, mostly African American (14). Rebuilding the coast with structures that the majority of the people native to the region cannot afford or do not need will force them to leave the area. This thinking implies that the decisions that are made following Katrina will cause the “cleansing,” not the actual storm. The discussions Trethewey has with random civilians allows the reader to draw his or her own conclusions about what kind of story she is trying to tell. The reader might think that she is going to take a position against the government or against racism in the south. She uses her interactions to build a platform on which she places her main narrative.

“I am duty-bound to serve as their emissary, transmitting the history of their disappearance” (40) are the words of Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel. He wrote many pieces of literature in remembrance of his fellow Jews. He was duty-bound. This, too, is why Natasha Trethewey has written “The Gulf.” She writes, “Remembrance is an individual duty as well—a duty native to us as citizens, as daughters and sons” (26). She writes to honor her heritage, to honor those who have died in the storm and those that are still struggling today. She writes because it is her duty. Her writing encases the pre-Katrina region in stone; it quietly begs a reader to remember the way things were. The second and largest chapter in her story is titled the “Past.” Trethewey tells the stories of her family from her grandmother, to her uncle, to her brother. She honors them by placing their stories and the history of Gulfport in a time capsule, this writing. Nothing will stop the re-building of the coast. Many things will be forgotten and covered up in the process but the story, as Trethewey knows it, will live on through her piece. At the conclusion, she visits the grave site of her deceased mother. It had been awhile since she visited, so the area was overgrown with grass and weeds, the grave hard to find. “My own negligence had revisited me, and I stood there foolishly, a woman who’d never erected a monument on her mother’s grave” (Trethewey 26). This subtle metaphor is for us, the readers. We are like Trethewey, and the grave is like the forgotten region of Gulfport, being buried under new development. Trethewey vows to place a head stone here after realizing she had forgotten. She is asking us, without actually asking, what we will do to remember the victims of the storm.

The cultural memory of our nation is fed, in large part, by media. We remember things as they are told to us. Most Americans had no direct interaction with the re-

gion or the people affected by the storm. The truth is that Katrina will be remembered as a horrible storm that ravaged New Orleans. We will remember the images of the broken levees, the horrible floods, and people standing on the roofs of houses. We all watched the looters, the helicopter rescues, the homes painted with red Xs, and the thousands living in the Louisiana Superdome. America will remember the storm and those who suffered. The dead will not be forgotten, they will be honored. Unfortunately though, the small towns that were washed away will only be remembered by those who live to tell the stories and through art like Trethewey’s. The face of old Gulfport has a place in the annals of history because of “The Gulf.”

The events caused by Katrina have a place in America’s collective memory. Each of us may have a different point of view, but we will all remember the storm. Trethewey need not worry; her coast, her people are not forgotten. As a nation, the most honorable thing we can do is to make sure that this disaster never happens again; we must rebuild and prepare. The process may not please or benefit everyone, but it had to start somewhere. America sympathizes with and prays for those who suffer. Each of us has lived through innumerable changes in our lives. We have only our memories to remind us of our past, our heritage. The new face of the coast cannot erase the history of Trethewey’s people; her piece does its part to ensure that they live on.

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Brittni Sowers

English 15

Penn State – Harrisburg

The Escape

Think . . . What would it be like to be separate from society? For freedom and sanity . . .

To be truly free is to be able to live life without the influence of others, without obligations, and without the fear of being rejected. It's to fearlessly live for the moment without regret and never to look back. It's pursuing what is intuitively right and never letting go. Many souls are bound by their own fears and emotions—restricting them from the very essence of true freedom.

Annie Dillard, author of "Living Like Weasels," looks at the world in a unique way that most people might overlook. In her intriguing essay, she portrays how a brief glimpse of a small creature changes her life. "'Twas a weasel." She describes how she and the weasel made eye contact—a sort of brief connection, even. Dillard admires the weasel's lifestyle of living in necessity. She believes that the weasel is not bound by restrictions of a society such as ours, does not second-guess its instincts, and lives for the moment. The weasel, she says, attacks what feels right and never surrenders it even if it ultimately leads to demise. She believes that the weasel possesses freedom in its truest form.

As the day slowly died and faded into a winter's night, I walked down a road in attempt to escape the vexations that rummaged through my mind. I couldn't see the stars emerge for yet another visit because it was slightly foggy, and the sky was of a gray hue. The road was outside my house, which was surrounded by land and several other old houses. There was a large pond across the street. It wasn't visible. And it wouldn't be until the snow melted away, for it was frozen and covered with a light blanket of snow. The snow appeared to have an alluring blue tint to it. It was all slightly ominous in a way, but at the same time, it was more of a peaceful atmosphere. Every time I encounter an atmosphere such as this, I become lost in reverie wondering how it can be unimagined; it was so surrealistic. It was as though it was a different world.

Around the pond is an open field, and behind the pond lies a wooded area. It is a popular place for various nocturnal creatures to surface at dusk. I walked further down the road and noticed two bunnies dancing in circles in the field. They were small and brown. I watched them for a little while, and they appeared to ignore everything around them, even a car as it drove past. Still, they were

performing their dance, unthreatened by their surroundings. They were living for that present moment, paying attention to only each other as they continued their little circle dance. They didn't need to worry about what anyone thought of them for dancing in the middle of a field. Their lives seemed simple, and I must admit that I was slightly bewildered that they risked their lives simply to have the joy of dancing with each other. I started to walk in the opposite direction after a couple of minutes for fear of eventually making them scurry away from their own little world.

As I walked away, I started to think of other creatures I have seen in the past. They struck a little curiosity within me. What was going through their minds? I once saw a solitary owl with a missing eye, silently observing those who passed it by. I have seen many a squirrel whose last vision was probably a roaring cylinder. More than likely, they did not wonder "what if" or "why"—they simply dove for whatever they were pursuing upon instinct. These creatures possess real freedom. Sometimes the consequences are morbid, and other times they are jubilant. In either case, they all tell a story of how they can sometimes appear stronger and braver than we humans. Can we dance in an open field without questioning ourselves?

I believe people should escape from society. At least, they should do so occasionally for the sake of remaining sane. Even for brief moments—just to give themselves time to observe and admire the uncorrupt beauty around them, and time to collect their thoughts. Perhaps they will come back with a better understanding of themselves and the world around them, and perhaps they will adopt some of nature's way of enacting life. Fear not the consequences, for they might be good. Without risk, one will never know.

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Tyler Kerlavage

English 15

Penn State – Wilkes-Barre

Um Diddle Diddle Diddle Um Diddle Ay

“Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious,” a word popularized by Disney song writers in the mid 1960s, is somewhat paradoxical in nature. Sometimes (albeit falsely) touted as the longest word in the English language, it is perhaps one of the most memorable and popular words still in use today. The song that popularized the term has spawned numerous covers, parodies, gags, and even litigation, since it was first introduced into popular culture by those ever so delectable minds at Disney decades ago. Yet, through its veritable and undeniable success in pop culture, the word has remained an enigma. It is seemingly eternally shrouded in the mystery of its own origins and its very definition. What does “supercalifragilisticexpialidocious” actually mean? Many facets of its existence must first be examined carefully in order to truly grasp and define it.

In order to gain a sharper perspective on the definition of the word, it is important to first examine it through an historical context. To fully understand any word, one must delve headlong into its history to discover when, by whom, and how it was first brought into the general lexicon and popularized. It is a common belief that supercalifragilisticexpialidocious was simply devised by songwriters Richard and Robert Sherman for use in the Disney film *Mary Poppins*. However, this notion is incorrect. In 1965, a court dismissed accusations that Disney had stolen and profited from a song, “Supercalafajastickespeealadojus” after it was discovered that many variants of the word were known and in use prior to the 1960s, despite arguments to the contrary from the plaintiff (Life Music, Inc. v. Wonderland Music Co.) So, if the word was not simply “made up” for a musical piece, where exactly did it originate? One must look towards songwriters Richard and Robert Sherman for some sort of clue of its beginnings. Since they did not simply conjure the word up, there certainly had to be some sort of inspiration for such a crazy ridiculous word. However, they provide little evidence as to where the word came from other than the fact that they were introduced to it as boys at a summer camp in the 1930s. One of the brothers has stated, “The word was first coined in 1918, and was supposed to be even bigger and harder

to say than antidisestablishmentarianism The word as we first heard it was super-cadja-flawjalistic-espealedojus” (qtd. in “Real”). The origins of the word have never been fully pinpointed, and from there the historical trail goes cold, other than a satirical piece that suggested the term dates back to turn-of-the-century coal miners who coyly used it to request “the works” from prostitutes (“Real”).

As the origins of the word are suspect at best, often amounting to nostalgia at times, and thus, only muddying the waters further, it is necessary to focus on the piece in which it appears: the ditty from *Mary Poppins*, “Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious.” One must consider the context in which the word is used. A small narrative runs throughout the verses of the song describing the almost magical, enchanting effect the word has and how it has had life changing effects on one of the protagonists, since it alone has saved a shy boy’s stressed and often physical relationship with his father and also wowed a girl so much that she actually became his wife, all because of his mere usage of it (*Mary Poppins*). This provides evidence that the word, in fact, does not simply mean “impressive” or “fantastic,” as it is most commonly defined (“Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious”). On the contrary, it is only implied that the word can be a fantastic article used in order to impress others, as in the above character’s case. Yet, since these two scenarios are rather dissimilar, the nebulous quality of the word is not truly reduced by these examples, it is only rendered a little less cloudy.

While context certainly provides reasons as to *why* the word is used, in what situations, and what the effects of it are, it does not lead to a clear-cut definition; instead, it merely rules some possibilities out. The song itself is of little help in defining the term in an absolute sense, as it only makes passing references to its usage. Never once does it utilize the word in a concrete way. Thus, it is necessary to turn a calculating eye towards the word itself and decipher just *what* the word is, in order to properly define it. What is it essentially comprised of? At first, it seems to be gobbledygook, only resembling a real word in structure and pronunciation. Yet, looking closer it does, indeed, have roots in standard language metrics. Perhaps a comprehensive dissection is in order. The first root of the word is “super,” which can be defined as “above” or “being of a preferable quality” (“Super”). “Cali” has its etymological roots in Greek and is defined as “beauty” (“Cali”). “Fragilistic” most likely refers to something of a delicate quality (“Fragile”). “Expiali” possibly has a root in the word “expiable,” which means “to atone for” (“Expiable”). Finally, “docious” is often taken to mean

“educable” (“Docious”). Put together, the word is most accurately defined as something akin to *making amends for great, fragile beauty through educability*.

As strange as it may appear at first glance, such a definition actually seems to coincide with the characterization of Mary Poppins. In the film, she is depicted as a beautiful woman who is capable of impressive physical and intellectual feats, yet one who, in her role as a nanny, almost seems to take on the features of an asexual creature. Clad to the neckline in heavy, almost cumbersome clothing, Ms. Poppins is often viewed more as a work of art—a beautiful statuesque figure—than a sexual ideal. It is through this persona (that of the stereotypical “unthreatening female”) that Ms. Poppins demonstrates her true intellectual capacity. While cast into the role of the nurturing mother-esque figure, providing attention, care, and tutelage to her charges, Poppins quietly rebels against the chains of a paternalistic and patriarchal society and is the catalyst toward a change in perception as the educator of children (i.e., a new generation). The song makes the pronouncement “you’ll always sound precocious” not merely to fit the rhyme scheme but, more importantly, to insinuate that one may use the word in order to “show off.” This, the promotion of children being precocious and outspoken, is a break from the societal ideals of the time—that of a child being seen and not heard. Hence, we see the meaning behind the aforementioned transformation the word caused in the life of the boy (he became *noticed*), as well as why it is so often defined as a “wow” word, since it is like a verbal exorcism of social restraints. Thus, Poppins, through her position as nanny, caregiver, and educator, takes the historically female role of nurturer and uses it to encourage curiosity and boldness. Her word is more than just fourteen syllables blended together haphazardly; “supercalifragilisticexpialidocious” soars with non-confinement, non-conformity and empowerment. The word itself even looks practically *explosive*.

It is hard to imagine that a word so commonly referenced, and of such legendary, almost iconic status, is so poorly understood and often undefined. Such is the paradoxical nature of supercalifragilisticexpialidocious. It is not necessarily surprising that an accurate definition is mostly absent, as important keys to its past—such as who coined the term and in what historical context—are seemingly lost. And it is only fitting that a fictitious word has a nearly nonexistent definition and past, but it is clear that the common definitions of the word, such as fantastic and impressive, are rather misplaced and distorted from context. Instead, one must look towards the only cues for its true meaning: the etymological roots of the

word. Only by breaking the word down to its base forms does one obtain at least a figment of an accurate definition which truly suits the usage of the word in the given scenarios ... that of a subversive proclamation of individuality: “So when the cat has got your tongue, there’s no need for dismay! / Just summon up this word and then you’ve got a lot to say!” (*Mary Poppins*).

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Jordan Broody

English 15

Penn State – Wilkes Barre

Who Ya Gonna Call?

WHEN YOU see a spook, specter, or a free-floating phantasm, who do you call? Well, that's easy—*The Ghostbusters*! The paranormal is no challenge for this team; they can handle a one hundred-foot marshmallow man, Vigo the Carpathian, or any other freaky case. Perhaps you have never heard of these ectoplasm experts? In that case, let me explain. *Ghostbusters* was a hugely popular movie in the early 1980s about three New York scientists who start a ghost capturing business, a movie that spawned a ghost loving franchise for years. They turned the scary concept of ghosts into a comedic, entertaining, inventive movie. But what does it actually take to become a Ghostbuster?

First you must have some sort of knowledge base pertaining to the paranormal world, have access to a proton pack with at least a half life of five thousand years, and a state-of-the-art ghost containment unit. But e careful, you're holding a nuclear accelerator on your back! Let's not forget you need a Ghostbuster jumpsuit, just in case you get slimed by ectoplasmic residue when you have direct contact with an apparition. I would also suggest buying an old New York City firehouse, because you'll probably be busy since that city seems to be bursting with ghoulish activity. However, before we take a ride on a massive viscous slime river underneath Fifth Avenue, let's talk about the bills you will have.

As a Ghostbuster, you're most likely going to cause immense amounts of damage to all of your surroundings; it is a good idea to have a good relationship with the mayor so they don't arrest you. As Peter Venkman from *Ghostbusters* would say, "Back off, man, I'm a scientist." You would probably want to have about twenty million dollars handy for such political greasing. Furthermore, you are going to have some serious electric bills. You could, as Ray Stanz does in the movie, sell off some property that your parents left you. Whatever you do, try to keep out of the EPA's sight and consider working the odd birthday party in between your gigs. At the very least, put your likeness on a mug or balloon and offer them to your clientele as promos. Remember, the ghosts that you will be catching don't exactly have checking accounts anymore, so the customer must be king (employ a *kind* secretary—avoid anyone named Janine)! Of course, this is all a fun fantasy, and we can't really do

any busting in real life ... or can we?

Actually, we can do some sort of ghost capturing in today's world. It's called Paranormal Research, and it's a growing study. There are many actual ghost tools involved in the process of becoming one of these researchers. The website *Paranormal Research Tools* lists a set of tools you'll need. The first one is an EMF detector. This device carefully detects the surrounding area of wavelengths, as well as any possible ghost trails. Then, you need infrared thermometers. This item illuminates backgrounds to measure light levels and will help your specter visibility. Let's not forget the digital cameras and noise recorders. With these tools, you will be prepared to catch any phantom on tape or record the sounds that it makes. Now that we have an array of tools, let's start!

It's best to start your ghost hunting activities with a place that you think is haunted, or where many people have allegedly witnessed a ghost. You want to then set up during the day, so you are ready for the best time to spot a ghost ... night. Once the cameras are in place all over the area or building that you are in, you can begin recording. Basically, it is all by chance that you would see something of this nature; there is no real way to draw it out or set a trap as they do in *Ghostbusters*. Instead, use your set of observation tools for a sighting.

The cameras must cover the whole area, and you must continually scan the infrared wavelengths to see if you're going to pick something up on the local ghost frequency. I would also suggest grabbing some night vision goggles so you don't hurt yourself walking around in the dark. After doing constant scans, recordings and research on the general history of the area, you must compile all of your data and study it. From there it is up to you to determine whether or not there is enough evidence to suggest a haunting. Also, be ready to address scores of debunkers who will proclaim it all a hoax.

An actual ghost hunter experiences the paranormal differently than a Ghostbuster. According to The Atlantic Paranormal Society, an organization pertaining to real life experiences, ghost hunting is dangerous. The surroundings of most of their investigation sites are often dilapidated and, since it has to be done at night, there are further potential dangers due to poor visibility. Furthermore, people may want to steal your equipment, since it is expensive. This doesn't even take into account the element of actual visceral fear that even the experts must contend with. In reality, this is not just a job, it's an art. You must know your ghost and its "thinking" pattern so you can try to predict what it's going to do, as much as that is even possible. Also, you must be prepared to do quite a bit of research on the site in order to try to find

which areas have a history of the paranormal and need to be targeted. Finally, you need to have a strong mental state, since many of the stories you will encounter will be disturbing.

If I had a choice, out of the two ways of catching ghosts, I am going the *Ghostbuster* route, since I idolized this movie as a child and have always wanted to suit up, cause insane damage, be sarcastic, and save New York City. However, I would be careful not to cross the streams!

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Eric Kleist

English 15

Penn State – Wilkes-Barre

The Black Hole of the Housing Market

YOU SEE IT everywhere you go—people losing their homes due to foreclosures and being forced to mail their key back to the bank. What’s causing this epidemic that is ravaging the entire length of so-called Main Street? There is more to it than meets the eye, and there is considerable blame to go around. In reality, consumers have misjudged their buying power, but the mortgage companies have also perpetuated one of the biggest frauds ever witnessed in the housing industry.

Paula Taylor is one of many who recently lost their shot at the American Dream when she lost her home. Despite only making \$1,600 a month, she was able to purchase a \$250,000 condominium. Likewise, Delores Parker Jackson obtained four condominiums at a price

tag of a mere \$1.3 million. Was she packing monetary heat? No, she was far from it. In fact, she has many kids, makes a monthly salary comparable to Paula Taylor, and has filed for multiple Chapter 11 bankruptcies (Hansen).

This mortgage meltdown is like concentric circles being formed out of the water: it keeps spreading. These two women are not alone. Their story is being replicated across the nation. In places like Fresno in California, there is the emergence of shanty towns that are reminiscent of the Great Depression and are a direct result of people losing their homes. Indeed, there are depressing images of people who now live in tents out in the open, recycle cans for money, and eat desperate meals consisting of eggs, onions, and chili peppers (McKinley). In New Rover, New Mexico, there are over 500 houses for sale in a neighborhood of 5,000 homes with price values on said homes dropping from \$200,000 to \$100,000 (Schoen).

Future implications of this are cyclical in nature as well. People are out of homes and are fighting just to survive. As a result, they only buy what they need. This in turn leads to a slowdown of cash flow from the consumer to businesses. Businesses that specialize in entertainment and other non-essential commodities will lose profits. A loss of profits will lead to job losses as companies seek more conservative spending. These estranged workers could encounter hard times finding employment; America has been losing jobs at a rate of about 650,000 per month for the last few months (Yen). No job means no mortgage payment after unemployment runs out, which could lead to more foreclosures. Furthermore, these estranged people will become burdens on cities as the cities will now have to support them in some way, all while no longer receiving tax money from them. This in turn can lead to the cities cutting jobs due to a loss of revenue on their part. Investors will withdraw from these non-essential goods producers as the companies will be unable to pay fair stock dividends due to lower profit to cost margins. Fewer taxpayers will make it arduous for the federal government to pay back the cost of these bailouts, so the federal government will be forced to aid these people to bring them back up; thus, they can pay the tax money to pay off the bailout, which is estimated to be at \$37,000 or more per person (Harper). Of course, the government may, ultimately, have to let these people fall by the wayside since they can only pump money into a failing system for so long before it sinks. Now, the future may not happen in exactly this manner, but being prepared for the worst is definitely a wise idea, since almost all roads seem to lead to a severe depression.

The above is the effect, but what actually caused this

mortgage crisis and the ensuing recession? How can Paula Taylor and Delores Parker Jackson take out such hefty mortgages? According to Harvard law professor Elizabeth Warren, the people with the mortgage company faked Taylor's income to a high monthly income of \$7,300 over her modest \$1,600 (Hansen). They did this because these mortgage company representatives received commissions by taking these risky mortgages since the people who take out the loans must pay higher interest rates on the mortgages. This inevitably leads to more profit for companies like Countrywide Mortgage. Yet, underwriters are the people who must first analyze the information of the potential mortgage buyer to determine if they qualify for the loan. Should they not have stopped this? In the end, they signed off on many of these risky mortgages because they were given incentives or threats, and sometimes they were overruled by the executives in the company itself (Hansen).

On the national level, there were more triggers to the problem, such as Congress making it easier to obtain mortgages in 2004. Now Congress is trying to rectify their end of the problem by using the recent bailout to give people a chance to lower their interest rates. Additionally, the bailout gives people the ability to refinance even if they cannot afford their current mortgage (Hansen). But will that not lead to more problems by allowing them to keep houses that they could not afford before the crisis?

Wall Street has performed some uppercuts of its own. Mortgage-backed securities were put into bonds, which were then given to investors by investment banks like Bear Stearns and Lehman Brothers so they could collect interest off of it. The problem was that no one went back to see where Wall Street actually received these loans from in the first place (Hansen). Wall Street actually received these loans in a rather direct manner. For instance, Lehman Brothers Holding, Inc. went to check out First Alliance Mortgage Co. to see if they could move into their risky subprime lending business thirteen years ago. Lehman proceeded to lend the mortgage company approximately \$500 million and helped sell more than \$700 million in bonds backed by First Alliance customers' loans. Later on, First Alliance Co. kicked the bucket (Hudson). This is a problem because collapsing mortgage companies make it harder for more level-minded consumers to find a mortgage. It also puts the workers at First Alliance out of work. Due to the high default rate that stems from the risky credit of the mortgage customers, these bad loans can be lost investments for companies like Lehman Brothers. In the end, the investment of the mortgage securities saw their value plummet as de-

faults became more commonplace (Donsky). This inevitably leads to a loss of billions for behemoths like Lehman Brothers, which no doubt led to their ultimate demise.

Nonetheless, you still have to lay blame on people like Delores Parker Jackson for having the naïve belief that she could actually afford condominiums worth \$1.3 million while not even making \$2,000 a month. Americans like her seem to have poor financial skills if they think that their annual budget can afford such grandiose payments. Trying to purchase upper class homes when you are near the poverty line is not the best case of common sense. Even though the mortgage representatives are surely at fault too, consumers should always read the fine print and the details of the mortgage to see if the payments would be maintainable in the long-term, factoring in possible job loss, more kids, and so forth. All too often people from the middle class try to hide under a pretense of appearing to be wealthy by having a big home, the most expensive gadgets, and fancy cars. Why? Americans try to be like those rich and famous people on TV, which is, ultimately, foolish. People have to live within their means (if not below it) and not buy mortgages that could cost more than what they will make in their whole lives.

As one can see, there are many problems coming from this mortgage mess. The blame cannot be placed on one person or group. Buyers, mortgage sales personnel, executives, underwriters, investors, investment banks, and Congress can take their own slice of the blame cake (and it is not chocolate either). This problem is highly unlikely to be fixed in the near future. There must be an overhaul in mortgage policy and a complete elimination of the fraud. Investment banks should look at who is taking these mortgages out instead of blindly trusting the company that lent them out. People should have financial training in school to make wiser decisions. Plus, Americans as a whole should cease endorsing the idea of instant wealth and instead focus on realistic expectations with a hint of optimism. As for me, I plan to live at best in an apartment for my first few years out of college and wait until I am financially secure enough to afford a mortgage. I really do not want a slice of the blame cake.

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Franceska Sweeney

English 15

Penn State – Worthington Scranton

What I've Learned from Horses

MY EDUCATION was a blur of graded papers, philosophies of people who died many years ago, and cafeteria food (which, by the way, is still stuck to the lining of my stomach). Don't misunderstand me; I generally liked school. I worked hard to do well in my classes, fit in with the other students, and never missed the honor roll. But what many didn't know about me was the talent I had outside of school, a passion that burned inside of me, the education that helped me become the person I am today.

Perhaps, the information that I learned outside of that brick building was more of a real education than any I could have received from books or slide shows. Respect was the first lesson I was taught by my very large instructor, named Bailey, who happened to be a palomino-colored Quarter Horse. I learned that in order to have Bailey perform specific tasks I had to ask her in a certain way. I could not thump on her sides harshly or tug on the bit in her mouth. If I did ask her in an incorrect way, she would let me know by bucking and running straight through the fence. Needless to say, I spent many hours redoing the fences I had destroyed in my pursuit to become a well educated person. It was a lesson in the respect of another person's (or animal's) space. However, when I did give the correct cues she would in return give me the same respect by performing what was asked. It didn't take long for us to perform as a team. In fact, when the Girl Scout troops would come to ride for their badges, I would watch that palomino mare buck and run through the fence as each girl had her turn in learning to respect. But being able to prance around that ring on such a beautiful horse was quite the reward for learning such a small lesson in life.

There were times that my large instructors taught me how to discipline myself. This discipline was found in cleaning stalls. Believe me when I say it was a painstaking task. I would have to pick each individual cluster of manure with a pitch fork and place it into a "muck" bucket. It was by no means fun. Not to mention, there were thirty stalls that no only had to be cleaned but also bedded with saw dust. At times, I found myself thinking that this task was impossible and all I really wanted to do was go ride, but there is no glory without hard work. If I wanted to ride badly enough, I would finish the stalls without a word of complaint. That was just what I did. I

learned to be disciplined and work for the things I want. It showed me that not all things in life come easy. Sometimes a person has to work until every muscle in his or her body is screaming for relaxation.

I even learned a new language. No, not Spanish or French. I mean horses can't communicate like humans, but they can communicate. I believe Keebler was my next instructor. He taught me to slow down, listen to what was going on around me and pay attention to the body language that each animal was displaying. In order to understand these massive creatures, I was going to have to pay more attention. Horses don't speak words, but they move their ears, adjust their breathing, and use their eyes to explain their emotions. When Keebler would lay his ears flat on his neck, start to snort, toss his tail in the air, and widen his eyes enough so I could see the whites, I knew he was upset and scared. At that point, he needed comfort and reassurance, not someone being upset with him or frightened because of his behavior. This all took time to understand, but once I had mastered it, I was able to interpret both horses and people better. Since then, I have the confidence to go up to people and introduce myself because I know how to approach them by their body language.

One of the most important lessons I learned during my education was humility. When I started showing horses competitively, I learned that winning a blue ribbon wasn't everything. Each team of horse and rider goes into that show pen and gives it their all. They work hard and ride hard. The preparation that each team has done is an immeasurable amount, but only one can win the class, and the final decision is based upon what the judge likes. When I would come out with a blue ribbon and my friend, who had worked just as hard, came out with a fifth, I learned to say things like, "You had an awesome ride in there. Don't worry. You will place higher next time." But I didn't just learn to say these things; I meant them. I learned to be humble when I was so excited and happy that I could jump out of my skin. However, I didn't rub it in a friend's face that I had beaten them in a class. Instead, I encouraged them to keep with it because they were doing just as well. They also knew how to be humble and would use the same humility toward me when they won a class.

Love is one of the hardest lessons to learn, in my opinion. Horses are probably the greatest teachers of how to love. If Jake was a person, he would have his doctorate in teaching love. His heart was big, and he always gave the most of himself for the sake of educating others. In order to teach love, he first introduced me to the art of letting go and having a little fun. Jake, a chestnut-colored Quar-

ter Horse that was used as a cow horse, had learned firsthand the ways of a hard life and was never too keen on me dolling him up for a fancy horse show. He would much rather be ridden bareback through the woods or cow pen. In the end, he always had his way. It was a tough love, but one I never tired of as he raced to the fence to greet me when I came to take care of him. Through his love he taught me to be selfless and make hard decisions. When his knee cap shattered, it was in his best interest to be put to sleep. He was in unbearable amounts of pain. It was then that he taught me one of the most helpful lessons of life: to put someone else's well being in front of my own feelings. To me, he was a great teacher of life and all the beauty and disaster that makes up our world.

Toad was my last instructor. Determination was the lesson he taught me. Being the hard headed horse that he was, he showed me that I must never give up and that I had to be determined in order to reach my goals. If I lacked determination, I would never make it. I would never accomplish the things that I wanted to do in life.

These are the lessons I remember most about my education. The grades, philosophies, and cafeteria food made a wonderful mesh of memories, but the information I took away from that brick building was not as powerful as the lessons I learned outside of those walls. It was my passion for the horses that made me the person I am today.

Joanna Myers

English 15

Penn State – York

A Distorted View

A CALL FOR WAR resonates throughout the forest, thousands of arrows shoot through the air, trees disintegrate into flames, blood spills. Such a vivid scene appears at the beginning of *Gladiator*, a powerful film depicting ancient Rome (*Gladiator*). As a result of the movie's compelling plot and unforgettable scenes, it becomes extraordinarily difficult for a viewer to separate fact from fiction. Historical events, although predominant in many motion picture themes, such as *Gladiator*, are often incorrectly documented and portrayed to suit a filmmaker's interests and to please an audience. Americans are influenced by these distorted views and may come to view history through Hollywood.

For a film to be profitable, it must appeal to a large audience (Stoddard). In 2008, *The Dark Knight* appeared in theatres across America, earning a grand total of \$529,143,070 in the box-office, second only to James Cameron's *Titanic*, which earned \$600,779,824 in 1999 (*The Internet Movie Database*). These movies, with their potent elements of adventure, terror, and romance, were obviously favored by millions of people. A viewer may feel fear or wonder while watching the powerful performance of Heath Ledger in *The Dark Knight*, or experience deep sadness when the *Titanic* takes one last glimpse at the moonlit sky. Movies communicate with one's emotions, connecting the viewer to the character on the silver screen (Moore).

Consequently, when filmmakers create a movie based on an historical event, they tend to adapt the event to appeal to an audience with specific interests (Stoddard). Although *Titanic* is an unequivocal depiction of that fateful April 14 night, James Cameron fabricated the story of the two lovers, changing a simple documentary into a heart-breaking romance. This causes the movie to attract a broader audience with many predilections instead of appealing merely to intellectual history buffs. Disney does this, too, in its film *Pocahontas*. In the movie, Pocahontas is shown as "seductive and precocious ... [a girl] who stalks [John] Smith like a wildcat and then rolls with him in the grass" (Strong 196). However, according to historical documents, including the personal diary of Smith, Pocahontas was only twelve years old when the colonists arrived from England (Sullivan 6). Moreover, Smith is illustrated as a handsome, ambitious young man

who falls immediately in love with the beautiful Pocahontas (*Pocahontas*). However, according to research by historical author George Sullivan, Smith was "a short man with a thick beard" (30), and an adopted brother to Pocahontas (39). Yet these fanciful changes attract young viewers; they can watch yet another flawless Disney relationship and grow up imagining Pocahontas's real life was as picture-perfect.

Besides changing the story, movies also tend to change or condense history's chronology, especially for dramatic effect (Morrogh). A 1998 film about Queen Elizabeth I's reign, adequately titled *Elizabeth*, meshes the events between 1558 through 1580 into a "seamless, interconnected mass [allowing] the viewer to be excused for imagining the whole sequence to be no more than the first year of Elizabeth's rule" (Morrogh). Nevertheless, unless a screenwriter wishes the movie to run for several hours, this is unavoidable. Years must be meshed into minutes; decades of time must be crunched together or else completely omitted in order to satisfy the finite time span in which a movie was allocated to run (Morrogh). However, viewers do not realize the information they miss and understand history as only the incidents highlighted in the movie, completely unaware of a motion picture's tendencies to skip through history as if playing hopscotch.

Historical motion pictures also depict current public views on gender, culture, and, specifically, race, both positively and negatively (Stoddard). A notable example appears with Hollywood's representations of the Native American. As Wilcomb E. Washburn of the Smithsonian Institution writes, "The image of the American Indian, more than that of any other ethnic group, has been shaped by films" (ix). Hollywood has stereotyped the image of Native Americans, making them appear as anything from savages, as in *Hopi Snake Dance*, to anti-American war veterans such as in *Billy Jack* (Jojola 12-13). Depending on the current public position, Hollywood altered the Native American image (Jojola). Such is also the case for the African American. In films such as *Glory* and *Amistad*, the filmmakers attempted to "raise public awareness of historical racism" (Stoddard). Although *Glory* and *Amistad* emphasize the struggles of Africans and African Americans during the Civil War Era, the image of the white American is not portrayed as malicious, and the United States government is represented as fair and justified in the matters of slaves, which is historically untrue (Stoddard).

Motion pictures have the unfortunate tendency of emphasizing the role of the majority represented in its audience, which in most cases is the white, middle class American (Stoddard). Despite a plot centralized around Afri-

can Americans, as stated before, *Glory* and *Amistad* do not condemn white Americans. The purpose of each movie was, indeed, to present racism, yet in a way that would not offend a “white audience.” If American viewers were chastised for their ancestors’ behavior, the movie would never become successful (Stoddard). Again, such is the case for Native Americans. Typically, movies made strictly from an Indian’s point of view had minimal box-office success, yet ones with a starlet playing the main role, such as *Dances with Wolves* starring Kevin Costner, make a substantial profit (Jojola).

Viewers must recognize a filmmaker’s biased views and wade through the dense fabrication of Hollywood to find fact and comprehend history (Woelders). Adam Woelders, a middle school history teacher, studied his classes by conducting group discussions to determine the effects of historical films. Students, including his own, he discovered after making his observations and the collecting students’ responses, are influenced by the views broadcast by film, and come to believe everything they see (Woelders). He concluded students must develop a critical thought process and the ability to analyze the differentiating views presented through Hollywood (Woelders). If students “draw conclusions” from what they see and critically evaluate the information being put forward, they can gather a better understanding of the past (Woelders).

The way one thinks at a young age will affect how one thinks in the future. Young students who watch an historical movie are less likely to contradict its views and research the accurate history; therefore, they are more likely to believe the movie to be true than an older student or adult (Woelders). However, if a student develops strong “critical thinking skills” in school, they become more prepared to judge the legitimacy of historical media outside of school. As Woelder states, “Students’ understanding of history may be shaped less by their social studies teachers than by the powerfully ubiquitous, historically themed media images they passively consume outside of school.” In spite of the efforts of teachers to promote such analytical skills, some students still grow up thinking Rose and Jack really did exist aboard the *Titanic*, for no one challenges their views. Because motion pictures play on emotions rather than thought and contain very little “analytic reflective thought” and “detailed exposition,” it is necessary that the viewer assemble those traits, whether by individual research or by developing an analytical eye for deception (Moore).

An advanced critical thought process prevents one from drawing inaccurate conclusions (Stoddard). Several analytical questions such as “How does the work compare

with works by others?” and “What cultural, economic, or political forces influenced the work?” will allow viewers to analyze the work and decipher it from fabrication (Aaron). Viewers must not be “swept in’ by narratives, ideas, and perspectives” (Woelders).

The primary goal of filmmakers is to make money; therefore, they do what they must to create a profitable film (Stoddard). Whether they adapt the film to a specific audience, alter history’s chronology, depict current, biased public views, or emphasize a majority’s role, they constantly misrepresent history on the big screen. Viewers watch, and often believe, these stories are true, for images appearing in movies are habitually true-to-life and are presented as graphic displays of history never seen before (Moore). However, if viewers learn to critically examine a movie, paying attention to the objective information rather than the emotional draw, they can intelligently separate fact from fiction (Woelders). They can then enjoy the entertainment aspect of any film, while still maintaining a firm grasp on reality and the past that forms it.

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Tyler Breneman
English 15
Penn State – York

The Central Manor Bakery and Grille

IF YOU HEAD west out of Millersville on State Route 999, you will come to the Central Manor Bakery and Grille. It is a small restaurant and convenience store and has one of the best bakeries around. Although it may appear run down, it does a good business with a large supply of faithful customers. Central Bakery and Grille is a place where friends and neighbors can gather for a great meal.

The site where the Bakery and Grille now sits was originally a covered wagon stop. It was known as the Green Tree Inn and owned and operated by Jacob Mann in the 1840s and 1850s. The inn would have provided a rest stop for weary and thirsty travelers heading west from Millersville and Lancaster towards Columbia to cross the Susquehanna River at Wright's Ferry on the old covered bridge. In the 1890s, it was known as Brenneman's Hotel.

At some point in the early 1900s, it was called Red Rose Grocery and had a bar and a butcher shop. They would even deliver groceries to a few homes in Washington Borough. There also were two gas pumps right out front of the store. Today, however, the bar and gas pumps are gone, and the only remnants of the butcher shop are the tracks on which the cows were hung for butchering, in the dark and dusty basement of the barn.

The barn still stands the same as it has from way back when. Its exact age is uncertain, but its manufactured stone block gives it a distinctive look and puts its age at some point in the twentieth century. The slate roof looks to be in good shape, and the peeling white paint on some of the wooden siding boards gives the barn a slightly weathered appearance.

To the west of the barn sets the substantially sized main building. A dated Coke® machine rests on the front porch, dwarfed by a more modern Pepsi® machine on the right. The left side of the porch is empty, now that the phone booth has been taken away. At the center of the porch, a wide set of steps descends to the small yard at the corner by the road. The steps serve no longer as a means to access the porch, but function more as a place for kids to sit and eat ice cream cones in the hot summer months.

The Central Manor Bakery and Grille is simply re-

ferred to as “The Mart” by the locals. Every local knows that the left door is the correct door to enter through, even though both doors are the same and go to exactly the same place. Once inside the front doors, to the right is an upright refrigerator with pies and cakes. Beyond that are several booths for restaurant seating. The bar wraps around from there and provides a good view of the kitchen, which is in the main room. On the left, as you enter the main doors are snacks and a limited selection of grocery items, such as bread, milk, and cheese. In the back is a large room with tables and booths for restaurant customers. Pictures of Lancaster county scenery and heritage dot the walls. These paintings vary from time to time and provide good conversation pieces for customers.

The bakery is in the very back of the building, out of sight of any customers. There are two large oven units, an enormous mixer, and large refrigerators. All the cakes get iced and decorated back here. The mixer can make up to five gallons of icing at a time! Soups, salads, their famous sweet tea, pies, and feature meals are all made back there.

The food is excellent. They offer many sandwiches, burgers, soups, main dishes, appetizers, and of course desserts. Their prices are very reasonable. A great meal can easily be enjoyed for less than eight dollars. Turkey Hill ice cream is also available for dessert: either hand-scooped, in a sundae or in a milkshake. Thursday nights are “specials.” Options include stuffed chicken breast, pork, chicken and waffles, turkey and filling, just to name a few. Meats come with choice of potato, a vegetable, and rolls. People flood the Mart Thursday nights for a heaping plate full of the country cooking.

Lucy Nissley wakes up each morning at three-fifteen to start in the bakery. She meets her daughter, Holly, there and they begin to bake the cakes and other sweets for the day. By 6:00 a.m. the farmers are starting to trickle in. Some of them, having come straight from the barn, smell as if they’ve brought a cow along with them. The drink coffee and talk about the latest community gossip: who’s buying what farm, how the hired man broke the tractor, and how much corn is going for.

By 8:00 a.m. most farmers have left for work. Soon the homemakers and the senior citizens begin straggling in. Middle-aged women gather for breakfast with friends. They talk about their children, their husbands, sports, and politics. Two senior couples eat together and reminisce about the good old days, their medications, and their health problems.

The place slows through the midmorning but picks up again by noontime. Now is the time that the blue-

collar workers come in over their lunch hours. Some farmers return again too. The teenage waitresses zip hurriedly around to try to keep up with all the orders. The men at the counter are always teasing them or making some joke, but the girls enjoy it. One waitress, when asked to describe The Mart, said, “It’s like one big dysfunctional family. Everyone likes to fight with each other and have their little feuds, but really everyone loves each other.”

The waitresses learn everyone’s routine. Mr. Frey comes in early for coffee and then always forgets his coat and the tip. Harold always orders a cheeseburger and the soup of the day and leaves a tip of 62 cents. To the surprise of his waitress, he left a 64-cent tip one day. The waitress thought he left more because he liked her joke, but who knows. Then there’s the lady that always comes rushing in just before closing time and seems to think that her food should have been ready and waiting for her.

Beyond just being a place to eat a good meal, The Mart is somewhat of a step back in time, like a visit to a small town café in the fifties where everyone knows everyone and they like it that way. Check it out and you may be pleasantly surprised.

Kim Frey
English 15
Penn State – York

225

SPRING GROVE HIGH SCHOOL is an average, humdrum high school, with one small exception. That exception is located at the fourth door on the left in the second hallway on the right; it is room 225. While the other classrooms are homes to monotone teachers and monotonous décor, this room has energy-filled Mrs. Hoffnagle and a colorful environment. Gifted seminar students, who need enrichment projects to keep their minds occupied, and National Honor Society members, the academically elite of the school, inhabit the classroom throughout the school day.

Room 225’s morning starts at seven-fifteen. Students wait outside of the room’s door as the “beep” of Mrs. Hoffnagle swiping her pass card alerts them to her coming into the building from the parking lot. Her high heeled shoes can be heard making a scrap-tape, scrape-tap sound before Mrs. H, as the kids prefer to call her, rounds the corner and is visible. The petite woman with

wavy brunette hair, tan skin, a jean jacket, Capri pants, and matching necklace, bracelet and earrings, walks quickly because the school traffic has, once again, almost made her late.

"Morning!" sings Mrs. H. The tired students mumble a hello as she unlocks the classroom door. The room, an empty shell since yesterday afternoon, is now filled with life.

As motion detecting lights turn on, the room's decorations become visible. The walls are painted the same tan and blue as all of the other classrooms, but the similarities stop there. The desks are arranged in four groups of five with Mrs. H's desk by the bench painted to look like Van Gogh's "Starry Night" on the wall opposite the door. The bulletin board on the wall above the bench has a blue paisley fabric covering and holds a list of seminar project ideas, three different number puzzles, two optical illusions, a quote by Thoreau and a Penn State football poster. The door's wall, covered by cabinets and shelves, has old seminar projects from previous students displayed at the very top, craft supplies such as construction paper, glue and scissors arranged in the middle, and students' books and binders stored in the cabinets and drawers by the floor. The other two walls are nearly covered with dry-erase boards. The one wall's boards are used by students as creative drawing space as well as by Mrs. H for a listing of National Honor Society news. A portion of the other board in the front of the room is used for more student creativity, and the remainder is used for a list of dates of important high school events like the end of the marking period, homecoming, and the PSAT.

As homeroom begins, a variety of students enters the room; they do a variety of activities. Ten girls and one boy are assigned to room 225 for homeroom because they are some of the Honor Society members. Calmly, they sit at the desks and finish the homework that was forgotten in a locker the afternoon before or just talk to the other homeroom students. Other Honor Society members not in the homeroom drop in to check the board for the latest NHS event or service project. Younger students in seminar rush in carrying stacks of binders. These kids have lockers in hallways far from any class they attend during the day, and the room's one large drawer provides a wonderful storage facility. They dump the binders they're holding in exchange for others already in the drawer.

Some of these kids have problems with the community locker. As one student digs through the mess inside, he says, "Man! Brookhart took my calculator again!"

"I'll see him later today, Ryan; I'll tell him you're looking for it," responds Mrs. H. She doesn't even need to look at who's speaking to answer. Mrs. Hoffnagle is a

rare teacher who knows all of her students by voice, first name, last name, classes, friends, and activities. She greets everyone as they come in the room.

Eventually, the bells ring for all students to be in their own homerooms, and Mrs. Hoffnagle's room clears of its many guests and all chaos. The quiet homeroom students stand for the Star Spangled Banner and the Pledge of Allegiance. After announcements, the next bell rings signaling students to move to period one.

The friendly, stress-free atmosphere felt in the room during the day is strained in the morning periods. A kind "Hello" greets everyone, but it is required only by an exhausted sounding, "Hey, H." Binders are opened hastily by students to retrieve an unfinished assignment and a rubber-banded stack of flashcards begins to be memorized. When one student notices the flashcards, he asks, "Is that test today?"

Mrs. Hoffnagle rolls her eyes and whines, "Trey! You need to start writing these things down. Do you want me to find you a planner?" Many high school teachers don't care if a student isn't doing very well in their classes; they think it's the student's responsibility alone to complete assignments and know due dates. Mrs. H is different; she not only cares about someone missing her weekly seminar projects but also the homework, tests, and projects of all of her students' other classes.

"She's our cheerleader. Mrs. H wants to see us succeed, and she wants to help us reach that goal. It's nice to have someone like that at school," explains a junior named Jane. "I can go to H if I have a problem with school or anything, and I can, sometimes, get work done in here."

The "sometimes" is understood because as the morning progresses, the noise level of the room heightens. People are doing less and less homework and more and more goofing off. Devon thinks that "It's a fun place to be. You can just hang out and relax, and nobody yells at you for it." He looks at a book of brain teasers. Some other students are adding their thoughts to the boards in the back of the room and laughing loudly.

The two dry erase boards have questions written at the top leaving the rest of the board for answers. The questions change weekly, asking students to write things like "New Reality Show Titles" or "If you could put anything in a fortune cookie . . ." On the one board, written answers include "How Stupid Are You?" "Slow kids running with cake away from dangerous animals," and "The Life and Times of Brian Sheehari" (a seminar student). The other board has written answers of "an engagement ring to make someone's date really awkward," "the fumes from this cherry scented marker," and "a fortune that makes sense."

When asked about her favorite aspect of room 225, Skyler answers, “The boards of questions. Oh my gosh!” she laughs as she reads a new comment. “They’re so funny. Why is someone obsessed with Brian?” Sitting beside Skyler is Whitney. When asked her favorite part of room 225, she hesitates and says, “I’m not in seminar; I’m not supposed to be here. I just followed Skyler.”

“And that’s why you love the room; you can come in anyway,” Skyler responds.

The teacher is asked about her favorite part of the room. She’s quiet for a few seconds and finally says, “The people. There’s always somebody in here, so there’s always life.” She continues as she writes a pass for a student to go to his locker. “Each person brings something special to the room. You know what? One day last year, it was the last period of the day, you know, when it’s so crowded and loud in here, and I just stood back and watched everybody. I even”—she starts rooting around in her desk drawers—“made a list of what everyone was doing. Here it is: juggling, playing chess, working on robotics, Googling Irish drums, building with Legos, solving a Rubik’s Cube, having a political discussion, building a bridge, composing music on a laptop, and studying for a Chem. Two test. It’s a place where you don’t have to be structured but . . . you need a pass!” She shouts the last part as a student tries to leave without that necessary piece of paper.

When period four comes, the room is quiet for the only time in the day, a shell of its usual animation. Mrs. H turns off the lights and locks the door so she can go to lunch. Kids come to the door to talk to her or drop off a book in the “locker” and become frustrated that they forgot about the lockdown.

As soon as period five arrives and brings the afternoon classes, the usual hustle and bustle of the room starts once more. At Spring Grove, the periods overlap during the lunch periods, so people are coming in and out of the room every ten or twenty minutes for the next two hours. The really brainy students, who don’t have the attention span to sit through lunch, come and start intense games of chess. Seniors, who are just arriving at school because of morning Dual Enrollment College Classes, come with their lunches and *The New York Times* they just purchased at Rutter’s. Again, kids stop in to swap their morning binders for their afternoon binders out of the “locker.” A few kids try to finish work, mostly the homework assigned in the morning so it doesn’t need to be completed at home.

Then twelfth period starts. Any calm in the room left over from the quiet morning classes is completely gone. All chairs and all desk-top seats are taken, mostly by freshmen with their one lone study hall and the seniors who

didn’t want to leave today during senior release time. It’s loud; it’s crowded; it’s seemingly out of control, and yet everyone is enjoying her- and himself. All of the activities listed by Mrs. H earlier happen as well as many others. Rachel, a senior, tries with futility to complete an assignment and says, “Mrs. H’s classroom is definitely a fun place. We all get along, and there’s always something to do. It’s like a safe zone; there are no stresses or pressures that we feel in other classes.”

A line forms by the door as the minutes until two-thirty slowly pass. Mrs. H yells, “Get inside the door! You guys can’t leave yet.” An outsider would be surprised at the reactions to H trying to enforce the rules. The kids actually listen and retreat into the room; there are no sneers or rolled eyes when she gives directions. Seminar kids might have know-it-all attitudes in other classes, but they’re good kids who just need a little wiggle room to goof-off and explore. Mrs. Hoffnagle provides that in room 225. The bell rings, and the room empties, becoming a shell once more.

Nicole Legenski

English 30

Penn State – Berks

Penn State Dreamery

NICOLE NERVOUSLY pushed open the door of the Penn State Dreamery. She ambled through the maze of filled table, past the sterile freezers of ice cream, to her place in line at the counter. As she looked around, she observed the others excitedly chattering and eating their frozen confections. But soon her eyes were drawn to the wall opposite the counter. It was covered from top to bottom with an assortment of portraits—presumably of men and women who had been at the Dreamery before. There were hundreds of them, each with expectant eyes intently gazing upon her. In the center of the collage, there was a shelf upon which sat a golden-gilded banana split with the inscription: “Your dream, your cream. One bite at a time.”

“So, Nicole, you’re here,” a chipper voice behind her said. She turned to see a heavy-set man in a blue and white paper hat. A dimpled smile and jovial eyes adorned his face. “You’ve made it—the Penn State University Dreamery. You’ve worked hard to get here, and I’m sure you’ll continue to work hard to succeed.”

“Thank you, sir. I’m very happy to be here.”

He smiled and continued with fresh exuberance: “You’re here to receive what thousands of graduates before you have gone on to achieve—the baccalaureate banana.” He motioned reverently toward the shelf amid the pictures. “Yes, the great golden baccalaureate banana—that’s what will get you ahead in life. It’s why those people’s portraits grace that wall. It’s why you’re here. It’s why everybody is here,” he said glancing at the filled tables.

“Yes, sir,” she said, looking around the Dreamery sheepishly. “But I have to admit I don’t know where to start. I’ve spent so much time planning how to get here that I don’t know what to do now that I’m actually here.”

Again the dimpled smile grew on his face. “Why, that’s all right,” he said as he reached under the counter and pulled out a fresh banana. “First, you have to choose a flavor of ice cream. Ice cream makes the banana much better,” he said, pointing to the obnoxiously extensive freezer. “We have Communications Crunch, Engineering Espresso, English Eggnog, Science Strawberry Cheesecake, Business Butterfinger, Management Marshmallow ... the list goes on. What’s your choice?”

For a few minutes, it was all Nicole could do to look back and forth at all the flavors. She walked up and down

the freezer, considering each flavor carefully, but after rows and rows of them, they all started to look the same. Finally, she walked back to the man in the paper hat.

“Well, they all look and sound so good. I’m not sure that I can choose just one. How about one scoop of Music Mint ... um ... one scoop of Engineering Espresso, and ...,” she desperately scanned the flavors again. “And a scoop of English Eggnog, please.”

“Very good choices!” he said as he scooped the multi-colored spheres onto a silver tray.

“Thank you,” she replied, unconvinced. She then watched the man slice the banana onto the glossy conglomeration. When he finished configuring the banana just so, she reached out to take the tray.

“Wait!” he shrieked, violently jerking the tray away from her, and then adding indignantly, “It’s not finished yet!”

“Oh, I’m sorry!” she cried. “What else does it need?”

After eyeing Nicole for a moment, he continued with his former jocularity. “Well, to make your banana a *real* experience, you need to add some things to it.”

“What things?”

He smiled and took the tray to a different part of the counter, Nicole trailing behind him. He placed the tray down next to an assortment of serving bowls, each one filled with a different kind of topping.

“These toppings will round off your banana split and make it really impressive!” he beamed. Nicole stared forlornly at the many bowls of toppings.

“They will?” she asked, her eyes darting from each bowl to the next.

“Oh, yes! Your banana split’s practically *nothing* without some toppings! Let’s see ... would you like some Step Team sprinkles?”

Nicole wrinkled her forehead in thoughtful consideration. “Sure, that sounds good.”

“How about Chess Club chocolate pieces?”

“Lay ‘em on,” was her quick reply.

“Christian Student Fellowship fudge?”

“Of course!”

“Honors Club caramel?”

“Yummy!”

“Penn Players peanuts?”

“How fitting—I’ve always been a little nutty!”

“And whipped Commuter Council cream?”

“As if anything else would do!”

As he piled the toppings onto her already-melting banana split, her enthusiasm began to wane. Soon she began to feel somewhat overwhelmed—and a little sick to her stomach.

“Excuse me, where can I get a spoon ... and a Pepto-

Bismol?” she asked as she continued to gape at what *used* to be an innocent banana split.

“You can find the eating utensils over there,” he said with a grunt as he handed her the tray. “Whew!” he sighed with relief when he dispatched the heavy load to its owner. “Over there by the Counseling Counter . . .” he pointed and then added, “You should be able to find an antacid there, too.”

She thanked him, got her spoon, grabbed some Pepto-Bismol, and sat down. For a while she simply gawked at the questionable mass of quickly-melting chocolate-covered gloop before her. She observed the others who had already begun to eat their ice cream, and she quickly began to envy those who were nearly finished. Soon her eyes were drawn once again to the wall of portraits. As she contemplated the hundred sympathetic, encouraging smiles, she felt a peculiar satisfaction, and with newfound enthusiasm, she picked up her spoon and extracted a morsel of Engineering Espresso topped with Honors Club caramel and a Chess Club chocolate piece.

“One bite at a time,” she told herself. “One bite at a time.”

Matt Bachman

English 30

Penn State – Brandywine

The United States’ Failure to Sign the Rights of the Child

IN 1989, the United Nations signed and passed the Rights of the Child treaty, a groundbreaking document at the time. In doing so, the UN was attempting to address a growing and disturbing trend of child abuse worldwide. All across the globe, children were being used as soldiers, laborers, and participants in illegal pornography. Worse than the blatant abuse was the outright neglect of these helpless lives. Children were not being educated, not being fed, and ultimately were not being cared for. The Convention on the Rights of the Child was the United Nation’s attempt to encourage countries to provide merely the most basic care for their children (a child being defined as anyone less than eighteen years of age).

To date, 192 countries have signed the Rights of the Child. The United States is currently the only nation with a working government that has not signed the treaty. “Why

not?” To many people, this is an extremely good question. Human rights groups like UNICEF and Amnesty International have expressed utter outrage over the United States’ failure to sign what appears to be an extremely philanthropic document. George W. Bush’s administration was the latest to address the issue. In 2001, E. Michael Southwick (the United States’ ambassador to the United Nations) told the assembled nations that America does not need to sign the Convention on the Rights of the Child. He cited the fact that child protection in the United States is already “among the best in the world” and continued to say that signing the treaty would actually be detrimental to America’s government system (Anderson). “We believe that the text goes far when it asserts entitlements based on economic, social, and cultural rights,” Southwick said, saying that each country needs to create rules “pertinent to their own goals . . . and circumstances in their own countries” (Anderson).

Family-oriented groups like the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) completely support the United States’ decision to not sign the Convention. They agree that it would be extremely detrimental to our government, saying that the treaty would give far too many rights to children who would, in turn, not know how to handle them properly. The HSLDA claims that the Rights of the Child would give anyone under eighteen years of age the legal rights to unsupervised abortions and contraceptive access, the rights to assemble, and the right to join gangs. Stated simply, they claim, this Convention gives children the “right” to disregard their parents. The group takes this notion one step farther, saying that ultimately this would lead to the total usurpation of parental authority.

Phyllis Schlafly, the famous activist and author, has presented another argument for not signing the Rights of the Child treaty. If signed, Schlafly argues the Convention will infringe upon the rights we as Americans already have as the UN treaties “do not respect our American philosophy of individual rights” (Schlafly). Furthermore, this treaty would become the “law of the land” in America, overriding the Constitutional laws we currently adhere to (Schlafly). This would not bode well for us, Schlafly states, as international courts are often biased against the United States.

This is not to say that everyone agrees with the United States’ decision, however. Several groups, in fact, feel very strongly that America is making a colossal mistake. The United States is one of the worst countries in the world at providing necessary care for children, they argue. The poverty rate among children in America currently sits at 22.9 percent—the highest in the world (only four other

“institutionalized” nations have rates over 10 percent). Of the 31 donor nations providing aid to needy countries, the United States ranked last through 1994. Through not signing the Convention, these groups state, the U.S. is merely reinforcing the notion that childcare is not important in our country. Children deserve the same legal and moral rights as adults, they continue, and these children cannot lobby for those rights for themselves.

Advocates of the Rights of the Child also claim that the treaty itself in no way attempts to overtake any ruling document of any country. Howard Davidson, director of the American Bar Association’s Center on Children and the Law, is one of the biggest proponents of this theory. Davidson feels that there are “widespread misconceptions” about the UN convention on the Rights of the Child that are spread by “a very small number of organizations” (Davidson). He points out that the United States has made accusations that the treaty would usurp the rights of parents, although no other country has made similar claims. He also states that the Rights of the Child never gives children any rights to sue their parents (which had been claimed), nor does it give the UN “any authority over American families.” Rather, Davidson says, the treaty only aims to explore the “unmet needs of children both in the United States and abroad” (Davidson). Furthermore, by not signing this treaty, he argues, the United States is actually sacrificing the rights of American children, rather than protecting them.

Finally, advocates claim, the Rights of the Child treaty is working! When implemented correctly, this document has proven to be invaluable in providing necessary care and protection for innocent children. All across the world, countries are using this treaty to provide increased vaccinations, new child care laws, updated justice systems, and new educational programs. Similarly, the number of children used in pornography, wars, and labor has been drastically reduced. The only reason the Convention is not working in other countries, they claim, is because those countries have not taken the necessary steps to actually enforce it.

In theory, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is harmless. In fact, it is extremely beneficial, encouraging countries to update and improve the current regulations they have regarding child abuse. It became rapidly apparent, however, that one country did not feel that way. Despite assisting in the construction of the treaty, the United States remains the only developed country out of the 192 enrolled in the United Nations not to sign the Convention. We cite the wording of the document as our main concern, saying the treaty would be-

come the “law of the land” if signed. In not signing and ratifying the Convention the United States has created a firestorm of controversy. Human rights advocates are furious over the United States’ apparent nonchalance over the children’s rights issue, saying our country is in desperate need of new legislation regarding children. To this day, however, this issue has not been resolved. It has not been publicly addressed in the latest presidential election, and thus the controversy remains.

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Rita Krater

English 30

Penn State – Fayette

The Purple Fiddle

THE HISTORIC TOWN of Thomas, tucked into the hills of West Virginia and reached by winding roads that never seem to end, appears to be in the middle of nowhere. It is worth the effort to find, however, because of the Purple Fiddle. A converted general store, the café, mountain market and live music spot seems to invite travelers in for a cup of coffee or an ice cream cone with a door that is always open. It is easily recognizable by the large balcony and the carved moose head above the door. You walk down the deserted street with closed shops and a washing machine converted into a flower box and step into the café. Thomas is so quiet that I sometimes have the feeling that the Purple Fiddle is the *only* place left open in a ghost town. Despite the lack of action in the rest of the town, there is something happening every night at the Purple Fiddle. The café is a place that takes pride in offering an atmosphere of Appalachian music and tradition.

The first things that a person notices upon entering the Purple Fiddle are the fiddles hanging on the wall. They come in all sizes and colors. I can visualize the general store that it used to be, as I walk over the ancient and uneven floorboards past the long counter with the tall shelves behind it that used to hold necessary goods for the people of Thomas. The ceiling is surprisingly high, and it gives the small café an open and airy feel, at least until later when the music starts.

If you are hungry, you can settle down at one of the mismatched tables and choose from various kinds of wraps and sandwiches with plenty of vegetarian options or have an ice cream. The Purple Fiddle boasts shade grown, free trade coffee, many different kinds of locally brewed ales and beer, and pure cane sugar Jones soda. You give your order to one of the various young people who work there, and who look like they would have been hippies if they had been born at the right time. The refrigerator is plastered with bumper stickers of past bands that have performed at the Purple Fiddle. Other stickers advocate organic farmers and proclaim love for the mountains. The walls are full of flyers for upcoming shows, and there is a place to sell, trade and buy used CDs.

Around supper time, a crowd of regulars comes in and pulls some tables together for a game of cards and plenty

of beer and gossip. When it is time for a show to start, people pack inside the small café and spill outside if the night is nice and warm. Cats of all shapes and sizes run in and out and even lie on the stage while the band is warming up. A waitress travels around from group to group, collecting money from those who are planning to stay for the show. Shows are very affordable, and sometimes they are free. As soon as that night's featured artist appears, everyone quiets down and turns the chairs around to face the stage. Groups are always willing to make room at their table for another person, but you have to be early to snag the old church pew directly in front of the stage. The atmosphere is friendly and congenial.

The first show that I saw at the Purple Fiddle was a blues concert featuring Sue Foley, a singer popular in Canada, and Peter Karp. I was crammed onto a bench with my parents, my little brother and my friend Nicole. The people at the table behind us had good-naturedly moved their chairs to see around us. The lights dimmed as the artists settled on their chairs and finished tuning their instruments. The music I heard that night was much better than any blues I had ever heard on the radio. The notes from Sue Foley's blues guitar vibrated right through everyone listening, and Peter Karp played the keyboard like he was putting his soul into it. The soft light glinted off of Sue's gaudy rhinestone hair clip as she and Peter sang wonderfully depressing songs about love lost, bad weather, disappointment, abandonment, and long roads ahead.

Halfway through the two-hour concert, the artists took a break to drink some beer and mingle with the audience. Nearly everyone went outside into the chilly night to take a break from the slightly too warm interior of the café. We met a young woman who worked at the Purple Fiddle and her basset hound George, and we listened to a man telling Peter Karp about how he used to go to college with Peter's older brother. Before the show started up again, we paid a visit to the restroom with chalkboard walls. We added messages and then sat down for the next hour of blues music.

The concert was so enjoyable because of the intimate atmosphere that the Purple Fiddle provides. It felt like the artists were singing especially for you, a feeling that you cannot get in a huge concert hall full of screaming fans. Though some people complain about the crowdedness and the lack of any food that you can make a decent meal of, I think that these add to the charm. You feel a kinship with the people who make the long ride out to Thomas for an experience that they know they cannot find anywhere else. The concert ended with a fairly upbeat song, and the waitresses got up and danced without caring what anyone thought.

After the concert, it was time for the ride home. The drives to and from Thomas are almost enough to make me want to stay home. Almost. Not only do the winding, twisting roads make me queasy, West Virginia is the state where everything concerning the Moth Man was supposed to have occurred. The Moth Man is a supernatural being that appeared to people in a West Virginia town and prophesied the collapse of a bridge that killed many people. A movie was made about it, and I made the mistake of watching it. It was very foggy while we were driving home, and my father, who knows my phobia, could not help mentioning it. “This is just like the part of the movie,” he said, “where Richard Gere is driving through fog and the Moth Man appears out of nowhere and makes him crash his car. Remember? His eyes were bright red.” We went round a turn and two points of red light appeared, but they were just the taillights of a car. It was a very long ride home.

Still, Moth Man country or not, I know that I cannot stay away from the Purple Fiddle. Nicole and I are planning to go back when a favorite band of ours, the Spring Standards, come in January. The Purple Fiddle is more than a cool place that provides new and lesser known bands a place to play. It represents a different way of living and a merging of old and new. People who share the same values of simple living and musical appreciation can come together. Instead of the general store becoming just another empty building, it is just as alive as it was in 1915. Thomas, West Virginia would certainly not be the same place without the Purple Fiddle.

Yidi Li

English 30

Penn State – Greater Allegheny

Improving Immigrant Children’s Academic Achievement through ESL Classes

WITH THE TREND of globalization, the increasing population of immigrants comes to be an apparent phenomenon in the United States. Many foreign-born students make important contributions to American schools as they bring a more diverse and multicultural background for U.S. education. However, many of the immigrant children meet a series of difficulties at school as they are living in an English as a second language (ESL) environment. According to a study at the University of Alberta, some immigrant students having trouble with “mastering the English language” are incorrectly treated as “language-impaired” and are put into “special education services they don’t need” (pars. 1-2). The best way schools can help immigrant children succeed academically in an ESL environment is to provide immigrants with ESL classes since they benefit students in solving communication problems, acquiring a cross-cultural identity and improving writing skills that are important for their overall academic career.

Having professional instructors and appropriate teaching methods. ESL classes help students overcome barriers both technically and psychologically while communicating with others in class. ESL classes set goals for immigrant students different from that of native speakers; they place more emphasis on listening to and speaking English because those two skills play an extremely important role in practical communication. Another influential function of ESL classes is that they encourage immigrant students to speak more English and that can diminish their level of mental distress. In the article “Identity and Language Functions: High School Chinese Immigrant Students’ Code-Switching Dilemmas in ESL Classes,” Ziaoping Liang describes a type of “pressure” immigrant children experienced when being asked to speak English in class as “they were afraid of making mistakes in front of others and getting laughed at” (151). As what is believed by linguists, “instead of comparing their skills to those of monolingual English-speaking children,” immigrant students should “be compared to the skills of their peers; other youngsters who are also

learning English as a second language” (University of Alberta, par. 10). Therefore, through creating an English learning environment where more students are at the same level, ESL classes assist immigrant students in properly evaluating their language ability and feeling more confident about their class performances.

In addition, ESL Classes help immigrant children “acquire a second identity” (145) while learning English as their second language. Based on Norton Peirce’s theory, Xiaoping Liang states that “language constructs and is constructed by identities and that ‘second language learning in some respects involves the acquisition of a second identity’” (145). By providing learners with language skills, ESL classes help them develop an English culture-related perspective, from which immigrant children can have access to deeper understanding of the culture and can adjust better to an English environment. Moreover, as the immigrant children step further into English society with the knowledge they gain from ESL classes, they begin “organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world as they speak” and gradually obtain their “second identity,” which advances their social integration (Liang 145).

ESL classes also take the responsibility to improve immigrant children’s writing skills—an important technique that could make a difference in their overall academic performance. Limitations of common education, such as “inadequate teaching materials and crowded classrooms” (American Psychological Association, par. 3) make immigrant children who have less knowledge of written English compared with native-born students feel helpless to some degree, for they could not receive targeted advice in normal classes. Kenneth Anderson, Cathy Benson and Tony Lynch’s “Feedback on Writing: Attitudes and Uptake” indicates the importance of “one-to-one dialogue between teacher and student” on written work by ESL college students, finding out that “there were more improvements to the text in areas which had been discussed than in those which had not been” (3). ESL classes, enjoying a significant advantage of small size, provide students with increasing opportunities to engage in “one-to-one feedback discussions” which might “constitute a more favorable context for ‘cognitive apprenticeship’ than whole-class instruction, partly because students are under less social pressure, and partly because the teacher can adjust feedback to the student’s ZPD [Zone of Proximal Development]” (3). Thus, the progress immigrant children make in English writing benefits their study of other academic fields as well as their lifetime education experience.

While ESL classes are a start, they may not completely

help immigrant students deal with several obstacles other than a lack of English proficiency that they may experience on their way to achieving academic success especially in their first few years of adaptation. An alternate solution is involve parents so they can understand and help their children overcome obstacles to learning. Those obstacles, involving “bonding with deviant peers,” “drug use” and “sexual promiscuity” (Bhattacharya 77), as Gauri Bhattacharya states in “The School Adjustment of South Asian Immigrant Children in the United States” are related to “familial values, cultural traditions, and social norms” (78); thereby, she emphasizes the importance of “having parents become partners with teachers in efforts to improve the school adjustment of immigrant Asian children” (84). She defines this model as a “parent-school linkage” and suggests that “effective family communication” should be accomplished to keep children feeling positive about school life (83). Bhattacharya depicts the effectiveness of her “linkage” between parents and teachers: “The convergence of their missions and values helps ensure that they communicate the same message—the importance of education—clearly and explicitly to children, which facilitates adjustment to school” (78). In short, the connection between parents and teachers contributes a strong emotional support to immigrant children to assist them overcoming difficulties at school.

Nevertheless, based on Bhattacharya’s study, the “parent-school linkage” method has some limitations when being applied to make immigrant children achieve academic success in an ESL environment. First, the study focuses on immigrants from Asia who “usually have stronger family influences that help them in school” than immigrant children from other regions, according to Wen-Jui Han’s study (American Psychological Association, par. 10); thus, the restriction of the study population decreases the method’s effectiveness. Second, the method magnifies the role parents are playing in children’s academic life. The excessive requirement of “family communication” (Bhattacharya 83) does not take the actual conditions of parents into account since it ignores their different educational backgrounds and personal characteristics. In other words, the solution fails when the bridge between parents and teachers is unsuccessfully built due to the lack of education of parents. Incorporating ESL classes in school, by contrast, is a better approach in helping immigrant students excel academically. ESL classes, set up in English-spoken countries like America, do not treat immigrant students from various countries differently; they pay more attention to students’ performance while contacting parents if necessary, and Bhattacharya concludes “the low level of proficiency in English was

found to be a critical factor in low achievement and school failure” (Bhattacharya 77). In that case, attending ESL classes appears to be more effective than depending on emotional support from family and school to immigrant students as it solves their top-priority problem—the lack of English proficiency.

Through an effective learning process in ESL classes, immigrant students may improve their English language skills and accomplish academic goals in an ESL environment to a great extent. However, if their lack of language proficiency stems from an instinctive resistance towards an alien environment, other aspects rather than merely enhancing their language abilities should be taken into consideration. Should more multicultural resources be available at school to make immigrant students feel more integrated and should more psychological intervention be involved to help immigrant students lessen fears and anxieties in an unfamiliar environment? These and many more lines of inquiry into language acquisition can be valuable issues for future study.

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Joshua Detar

English 30

Penn State – New Kensington

Kites

In *The Kite Runner*, Khaled Hosseini places an emphasis on “kites” in the title and throughout the story. While reading, I noticed various instances that demonstrated the importance of kites. This led me to investigate some possible explanations to my question: What was the purpose of kites in the story?

First, Khaled used kites to initiate the storyline. Amir and Hassan are in a kite tournament when the last kite’s string is cut. Hassan then goes to retrieve the fallen kite. Amir calls out to Hassan, “Come back with it!” (67). Hassan finds the kite but is confronted by Assef. Assef tries to take the kite, but Hassan remembers how important it is to Amir. When Hassan refuses to hand the kite over, Assef takes his anger out on Hassan. “I’m letting you keep the kite, Hazara. I’ll let you keep it so it will always remind you of what I’m about to do” (73). Hassan is then raped by Assef. Amir saw what Assef did to Hassan and feels guilty for not stepping in. “I watched Hassan get raped. A part of me was hoping someone would wake up and hear, so I wouldn’t have to live with this lie anymore” (86). Amir’s guilt about what happened to Hassan is so great that he can’t stand the sight of Hassan. “I’d hear Hassan shuffling around the kitchen in the morning, hear the clinking of the silverware, the whistle of the teapot. I’d wait to hear the door shut and only then I would walk down to eat” (87). Amir treats Hassan cruelly and eventually forces Hassan to move away. “I watched Baba’s car pull away from the curb, taking with

it the person whose first spoken word had been my name” (109). The encounter in the alleyway over the kite changed the lives of Hassan and Amir and guided the plot for the remainder of the story.

Next, the kites are used to change relationships between characters. Baba, Amir’s father, was largely disappointed in his son, but when it came to fighting kites Amir had a chance to impress his father. “Baba and I lived in the same house, but in different spheres of existence. Kites were the one paper thin slice of intersection between those spheres” (49). Amir sees his chance to intersect his father’s sphere by winning a kite tournament. Baba believes that Amir will win the tournament, and Amir does not want to fail Baba. “Baba was telling me about the time he’d cut fourteen kites on the same day. I smiled, nodded, laughed at all the right places, but I hardly heard a word he said. I had a mission now. And I wasn’t going to fail Baba. Not this time” (56-57). When Amir is triumphant and is the winner of the kite tournament Baba no longer was embarrassed about his son. “Then I saw Baba on the roof. He was standing on the edge, pumping both fists. Hollering and clapping. And that right there was the single greatest moment of my twelve years of life, seeing Baba on that roof, proud of me at last” (66). Baba and Amir were happiest together when they could share the experience of fighting kites. Amir and Hassan’s relationship changed also; instead of being best friends, Amir grew to hate Hassan. “I want you to stop harassing me. I want you to go away” (88). This all was started because Amir didn’t stand up for Hassan. Amir cared more about the kite than he did about Hassan’s health. “He had the blue kite in his hands; that was the first thing I saw. And I can’t lie now and say my eyes didn’t scan it for any rips” (78). Eventually, Amir and Hassan’s close relationship evaporated into a painful acquaintance. “He asked me to read from the *Shahnamah* and I told him I’d changed my mind. Told him I just wanted to go back to my room. He looked away and shrugged. We walked back down the way I’d gone up: in silence” (87). In all those cases, kites had drastically changed the boys’ relationship and how they perceived each other for better or worse.

Kites also start the process of healing. Sohrab had been molested, beaten, hadn’t spoken to anyone in a year, attempted suicide, and saw his parents killed. “So they took him [Hassan] into the street—and ordered him to kneel—and shot him in the back of the head” (219). A child that would have experienced such traumatic events wouldn’t be expected to ever recover, but Amir notices a glimpse of hope when flying kites with Sohrab. “Do you want me to run that kite for you?” His Adam’s apple rose

and fell as he swallowed. The wind lifted his hair. I thought I saw him nod” (371). Sohrab’s reaction gave Amir hope that Sohrab may be able to lead a happy life. Amir also was able to bring around a healthier relationship with Baba after winning the kite tournament. Baba opened up more towards Amir. “I buried my face in the warmth of his chest and wept. Baba held me close to him rocking me back and forth” (79). Baba also decided to treat Amir with gifts more often. “‘Why not!’ he said. Later, Baba agreed to everything I asked” (81). Kite fighting helped these pairs of characters connect with each other in a positive way and was an important factor in the healing process.

The kites also help the reader to understand a foreign culture. Kite tournaments were a big deal and winning a tournament was very prestigious. “Every winter, districts in Kabul held a kite-fighting tournament” (49). Even the building of kites was considered very important. “For a while, Hassan and I used to build our own kites” (50). The boys would always show off and tell stories of kite fighting glory. “I remember how my classmates and I used to huddle, compare our battle scars on the first day of school” (50). These kites provided a background in the pastimes that Afghani’s enjoyed, but after years of turmoil in Afghanistan “kite tournaments” became few and far between. When Amir returns to Kabul he discovers that along with prosperity and happiness that kite fighting is a thing of the past. “But you won’t find kites or kite shops on Jadeh Maywand or anywhere else in Kabul. Those days are over” (246). The absence of kites in Afghanistan helps the reader to understand how the oppressive Taliban regime could suffocate even the simplest aspects of Afghani culture.

Khaled Hosseini needed kites in order to tell the story. He cleverly uses kites to change the entire plotline, alter relationships, heal, and reveal a mysterious culture to the reader. Although the author presents a variety of possible answers, I believe that in the end the author intended for kites to be the catalyst of change for the various relationships. Without changing the dynamics of the relationships between characters, the story would have been much less exciting and Amir wouldn’t have needed to be “good again.” Khaled takes great care when he uses the kites to divide the characters early in the story, which sparks tension and eventually leads to Hassan’s death and the redemption of Amir.

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Brian Kerrigan

English 30

Penn State – Worthington Scranton

Leaving the Scene

THE BEATEN PATH to the stream is well worn from use, but there's no one else here this early in the morning. I can see the mist rising when I arrive at the water's edge and the heron down the stream a bit at the next pool. He stares at me, and I tell him that I'm not here to take any of his fish. He gives me a knowing look that says there's enough fish here for both of us.

Soon I assemble my four weight fly rod, peel the line off the reel, string it through the guides, and tie on my leader. Examining the insect life, I see that mayflies are hatching, so I choose my mayfly pattern, and after removing the fly from my box and tying it, I step out on the water. With each step I see the small waves forming as I disturb the calm pool. I can feel the coolness of the water through my waders as I carefully maneuver along the rocky bottom of the stream toward a spot that may hold some fish. Scanning the surroundings, I settle upon an area with a tree overhanging the water and a large rock pile jutting out of the stream. This is excellent cover.

After stripping some line off my reel, I raise my arm over my head to begin my cast. I move my arm back and forth like a whip until my fly lands just upstream of the rock pile. My fly drifts down past the rock pile and under the tree, and I see a bright flash in the water just below my fly. A fish has just struck my fly, and I jerk the rod tip back in excitement. Slack line. I missed him. I cast again in the same spot, and he strikes again just as the fly passes under the tree. More cautious this time, I ease the rod back and feel pressure. He's not getting off so easily this time. He splashes and fights as I strip in the line and net the fish. He's a beautiful native brown trout, but small, only about ten inches. As I go into his mouth to retrieve my fly, I notice that he's been gorging on mayflies. I release the fish and continue.

I keep casting to the same spot and catch fish intermittently. On the empty casts, I focus on my surroundings. I can hear the birds chirping, the deer rustling through the woods. I see the mayflies hatching by the hundreds on the water and feel the cool breeze in my face. I can smell the fish on my hands and am aware that I am an integral part of my surroundings. Then I hear a loud splash.

When I turn, I see the ring from a fish that had just risen, but it's not like the others. It sounded more vio-

lent, and its ring is much larger. I reach into my vest, take out my polarized glasses, and focus on the area where the fish rose. Then I see him. He's a big brown trout, much bigger than any of the fish I've caught. This is the one I've been waiting for all morning. I angle myself toward the ring and cast just upstream of it. The fish swims towards my fly and looks at it. I am hoping, praying, practically begging for him to take it, but he turns away. I strip in my line and cast again. This time he comes up and stares at the fly for an agonizingly long time before turning away. I do not give up, though, because right now I want this fish more than anything. I cast again, letting my fly drift tantalizingly close to his mouth. He strikes my fly, and I pull my rod back excitedly. Slack line. I missed him. I cast again, and he strikes again. This time I don't miss.

As soon as he feels the pressure, he darts downstream, stripping out half of my line before I can thumb the reel to slow him down. The fight has begun. I raise my rod as high as I can, then lean as far forward as I can without taking pressure off the fish as I reel in the slack line. He's still fighting hard, but I'm making progress. When he gets near me, I take out my net, but he sees it and takes off again. He has some fight left in him, but he soon tires. I bring him in and net him. He's a twenty-five inch native brown with the most beautiful colors I've ever seen. I contemplate taking him home, but decide it's better to leave him so I can fight him again another day.

I decide to leave on this high point. I cut my fly and return it to my vest. I reel all of my line back onto my reel and disassemble my pole. I wade towards the shore and exit the water. I make sure I take everything I brought with me, leaving the scene as it was when I arrived. And I wave goodbye to the heron, who gives me a look and flies away, as though he were waiting to leave with me.

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