

Fall 2003

## Skunk River Review Fall 2003, vol 15

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# THE SKUNK RIVER REVIEW

VOLUME 15

*FALL 2003*

A CELEBRATION OF STUDENT WRITING

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Welcome to the 2003-2004 edition of  
***The Skunk River Review!***

In 1988, two visionary educators and editors, Beth Baker-Brodersen and Dayna Pittman, published the first edition of *The Skunk River Review*. At that time, their primary goal for the publication was to celebrate student writing. This celebration has steadfastly continued for the past 15 years by providing composition instructors and their students with an annual collection of student writing at DMACC to be read, enjoyed, and used in the classroom.

This year, we received many excellent examples of student writing, which made the selection process enjoyable, yet challenging. Students from various DMACC campuses submitted essays from the College Preparatory Writing II, Composition I, and Composition II classes.

We hope you gain greater insight and understanding from the writings in this publication. Analyze them...discuss them...react to them. But, most of all, *enjoy reading and celebrating* this year's student essays.

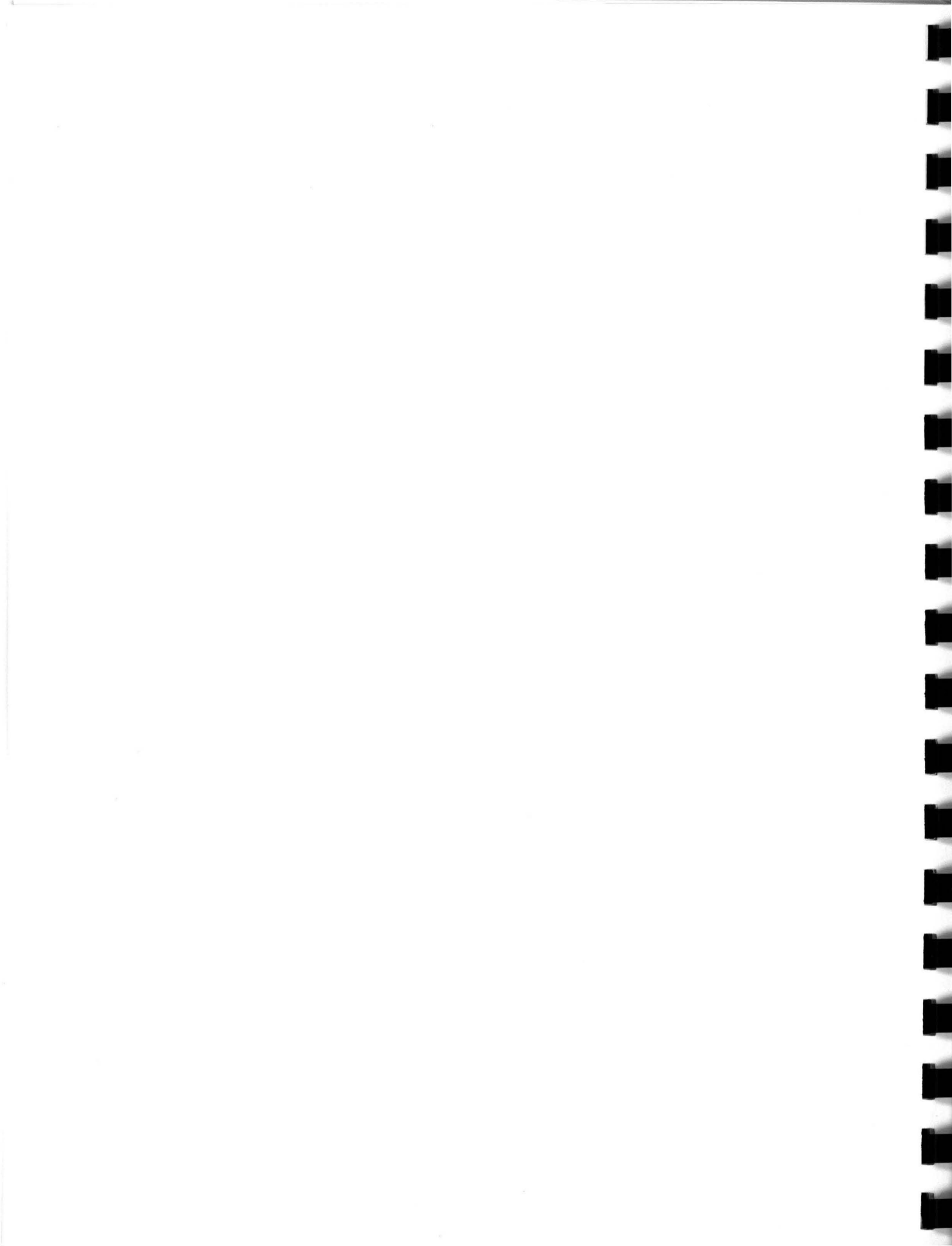
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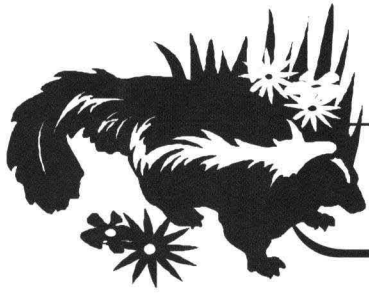
- To all of the **DMACC students from College Preparatory II, Composition I, and Composition II** for their creativity and outstanding essay submissions.
- To all of the **writing instructors at all DMACC campuses** for their steadfast support and use of *The Skunk River Review* in their classrooms throughout the year.
- To **Rob Julander and the students in his graphic arts class** for their originality, vision, and collaboration in the overall design and production of this publication.
- To **Glenda Johnson and Shirley Sandoval** for their expert support and administrative assistance.
- To the scholarship committee—**Barry Benson, Dale Norris, and Ami Yaro** for their time, expertise, and contribution to the selection of this year’s scholarship finalists.
- To **Curt Stahr** for his ongoing support and direction to provide an award winning cover photograph taken by one of the students in his photography class.
- To **Jim Stick, Dean of Sciences and Humanities**, for his leadership and contributions to help make this year’s publication an overall success.
- Special thanks to previous editor, **Eden Pearson**, for her support, guidance, and dedication.
- To the following instructors who contributed time and effort in submitting their students’ essays:

Barry Benson  
Janice Cook  
Bonne Doron  
David Gavin  
Pat Granstra

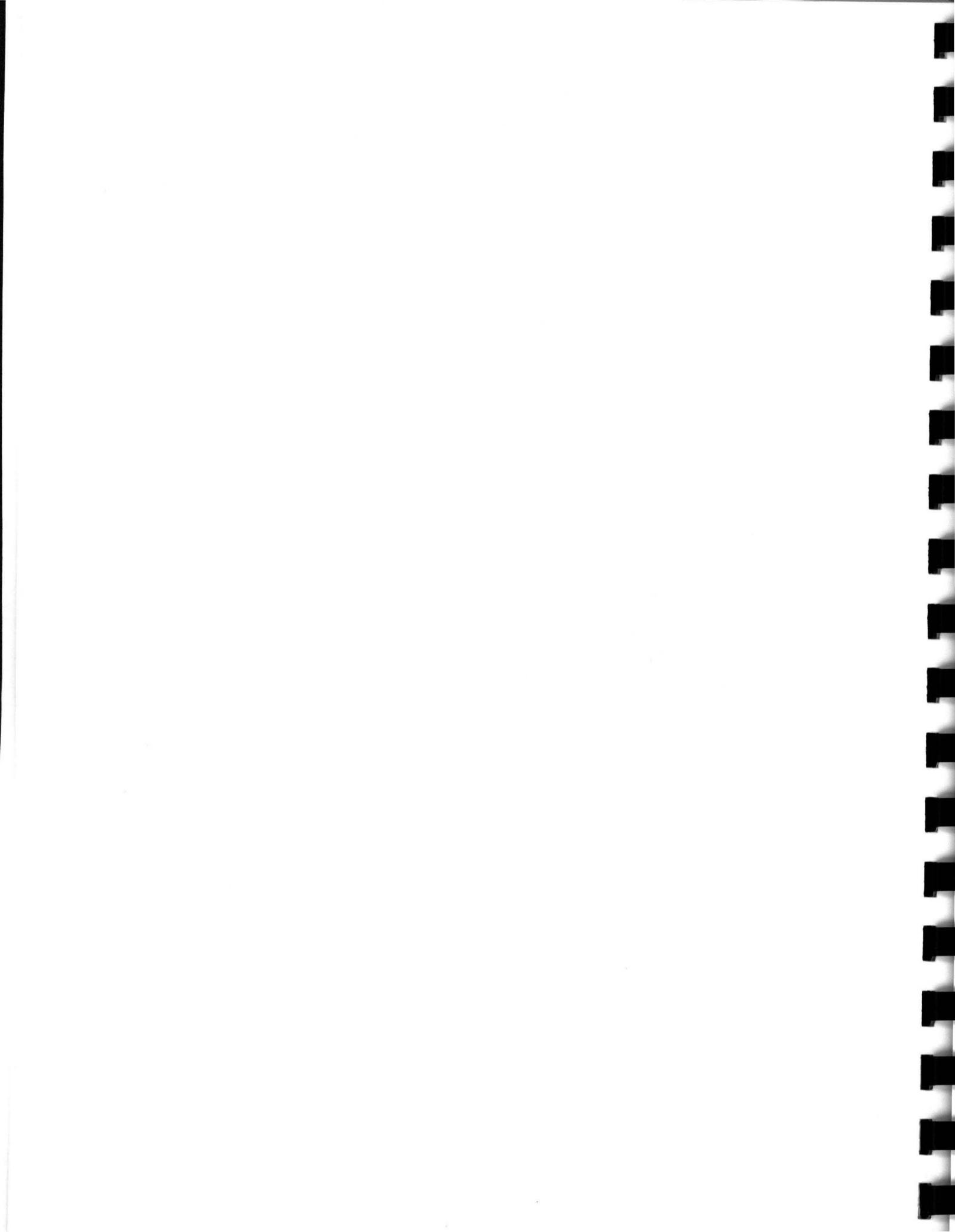
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Sara Waddle  
Sharon Witty





**College Preparatory Writing II**



# *The Major Goals in My Life*

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by Tammy Andrada

An essay on setting goals.

Until about two years ago, I had never set a goal in my life. I guess my mindset at that time was they weren't that important or necessary for me. Now at the age of 41, I believe goal setting is important for my personal well-being and development in life. Looking back on my life and seeing the attitudes and failures I have had, especially when I had no goals, I can see how those thoughts brought much self destruction and negativity in many areas. I now realize the importance of goal setting and the three major areas that I must apply goals to my life. I believe I must have physical, psychological, and spiritual goals to maintain balance and to have success in life.

Physical fitness today is very important to me because I have gained a few pounds, and I am feeling very sluggish and worn out. I always looked and felt very good in the past. Unfortunately, over the years, I made a lot of bad choices. I abused drugs and alcohol for a time and had no desire for physical activity. My body had taken a beating. My health and looks had declined. I was feeling very old, unhealthy, and beat up. Just recently, I decided to set a goal in the area of physical health, so I might bring back those feeling of youth, good health and well-being. Today, I am working out on a daily basis: walking, running, biking or weight lifting. It has only been a short time, but I can feel the difference already. Setting a goal has helped me

to stick with this commitment, and I have faith that eventually I will reach my goal of feeling and looking healthy again through being physically fit.

Psychological health is another area in which I need strengthening. In the past, I surrounded myself with people who did not challenge themselves and only lived for one thing, and that was to get high on drugs. Being around these people got me feeling very low. I felt I was going nowhere. This is why I had to wake up and change things and set some goals so that I might better my life. This is also why setting a goal of overall psychological health is so very important to me. In obtaining this goal, I have decided it would be beneficial for me to be around positive people and environments. I really do believe that people become products of their atmospheres. If I chose to surround myself with problem people and negativity, then I believe I become that way. Now I choose to surround myself with intelligent, challenging people. I also have decided to continue to pursue my education. It has changed my life. Today, I have so much self-confidence and esteem that I did not have before, and I feel that I am meeting my needs psychologically.

Last but not least, I believe spiritual growth is extremely important. In my life, this is the most important goal of all. For many, many, years I felt as if I was in a spiritual limbo. I had something lacking in my life but could not quite put my finger on it. I

felt as if I had a void which needed to be filled but could not find anything that would fill it. Due to the drug and alcohol abuse, I was also battling depression. The depression was a cycle that seemed never ending. I could not change the cycle nor change my ways of living no matter how hard I tried.

One day I was so tired of the unrelentless patterns of destruction that something came over me, and I asked Jesus to come into my heart. It is so hard to believe that doing something so simple can change a person forever, but it did for me. My life has never been the same since. It has changed me in every

way. I stopped hanging around those people who were going nowhere. I enrolled in college. I started attending church as much as I possibly could. I guess that is where they coined the term "Born again" because I was, and I am. I now have a spiritual goal of building a strong, personal relationship with Jesus, and this is something I work on continuously.

Pulling all three of these goals together is essential for me. Before I had no goals, my life was truly a mess. Today, I do have goals; my life is meaningful, bright, and I have a sense of direction and success.



# *Negative Ways Television Affects Families*

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by ZengChoua Lee

A persuasive essay about issues relating to the family.

Today's families are affected by television in many negative ways. The effects of television on family life include issues such as children's educational development, violence, and their social behavior.

Children's educational development is affected by television in many negative ways. One negative way is children do not watch enough educational shows; they use television as an entertainment. Television also limits vocabulary building and discourages critical and creative thinking. For example, more and more children would rather watch a movie about Pearl Harbor than read a book about Pearl Harbor. How can children build up their vocabulary when all they do is watch the television screen?

Another negative way television affects young children today is the television violence. Parents allow their children to watch too much and watch whatever they want. Children can be harmed by this violence. Many copycat suicides and murders that happen today are based on television. Many children watch a lot of television violence and think it is okay to do violence since it is on television. For instance, wrestling, a television sport that is popular with young children, is not happening around the world in children's backyards. It is called backyard wrestling where the children beat each other

up with chairs, slam each other on tables, and jump off ladders onto each other. This kind of violence that is watched on television can end up killing someone.

Finally, television also affects children's social behavior and what they do with their spare time. Watching the set is an antisocial experience that discourages conversation and desensitizes children to violence. Spending too much time in front of a television makes the children antisocial, making them not socialize with others. More children would rather stay inside and watch their favorite cartoon show than go out to play with their friends or play school sports. It cuts them out of the real world and makes television their only world. Children now spend most of their time in front of a television, and it makes them antisocial and inactive.

Since television came out on the market, children's educational development has been affected, the television violence has made a lot of children violent, and the social behavior has been affected by making them antisocial. Parents have to limit their children on how much television they can watch and what kind of shows are right for them at certain ages.



# *My Angel*

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by Carl Kohler

A narrative essay about a significant event from the past that brought about a greater maturity and involved making an important decision about the future.

Since I was young, I have always wanted to have a family someday. Even though I have lived through abuse most of my life, I have yearned to express my feelings towards a little one of me. I never could have imagined what was going to happen in my life once I turned sixteen and the impact it has made on my life now. This story is extremely personal, and it comes from the bottom of my heart. I have faced death eye to eye and have defeated it for now. Two years ago, I wouldn't have been able to write or tell the following story about my daughter because of the hurt it would bring. However, I have been able to come to grips with what I thought was going to be the death of me, and now I am able to express the overwhelming sensational feelings that my sweet baby girl gives me.

In December of 1999, I met a very intriguing and captivating girl who took my heart away. We started dating, and it became very serious very fast. My life became extremely stressful and drug-induced, which basically took over my entire life. I felt emotionally beaten down, and I became reckless with everything surrounding my life. I blamed the world and disliked the people in it for all of the abuse I suffered growing up. My girlfriend and I were having unprotected sex frequently. I never stopped to think about any of the consequences that I was causing or any of the safety concerns which might happen to come along. For some

strange reason, I didn't seem to care about anything except sex and drugs. Sex was one of the ways I was able to release my pain and frustration out on. This was my own path to self-destruction, which would eventually drop me in a deep and dark depression in the future.

Then, in April of 2000, I found out something that would change my life forever in ways that I could have never imagined. My girlfriend was pregnant, and for once in my God-forsaken life, I was left speechless. My hands trembled, and I began to sweat uncontrollably. I felt like crying, but the tears wouldn't come. The atmosphere around me seemed to stand still, and everything seemed to be less important to me at the time. My life didn't have any meaning to it, and I tried to commit suicide a few times by overdosing and slitting my wrists, but failed. I felt so cold and so alone. The day I learned I was going to be a father seemed like an eternity of anguish, which felt like a sharp knife twisting inside my heart. At this point, time stood still, and I felt paralyzed with emotions flooding my soul deep within.

My girlfriend and I were able to go through five months before our parents found out about the pregnancy. When her parents found out that she was pregnant, they forbade her to see me ever again. Even though they said we couldn't see each other, we saw each other behind her parents' back, which escalated the seriousness of our relationship.

It was then that I proposed to her, and we became engaged. The first thing that ran through our minds was to have an abortion. I am very thankful that we didn't go through that because I wouldn't be able to live with myself. After deciding to keep the baby after an attempted miscarriage, which made me feel less than a human, we decided to give up our child for adoption. It took a few months, but finally, I was stubborn enough to convince my girlfriend. Ultimately, it became the hardest decision I ever made.

Finally, the day arrived when my daughter, whom we both thought was going to be a boy, was to be born. I didn't know what I should feel. I was nervous as can be and unaware of what was to come. The thing I learned right away was that no one really teaches or tells me how I should feel or how to react. I wish I could have had a manual that would walk me through every step to take and which would explain all of the emotions that I was feeling. As I was on the elevator going to my girlfriend's hospital room, I felt very fretful and overwhelmed by a euphoric sensation. I began to sweat and shake uncontrollably from the fear of the unknown. Everything seemed in slow motion, and the air had a musky smell. As I entered the room where she was staying, all my shaking stopped immediately, and I became very relaxed. As I looked into my girlfriend's eyes, I saw her anticipation of what was to come and the anxiousness plaguing her. I played card games with my girlfriend for about four hours until she went into labor. That is when my whole life changed, and for the first time, it seemed to have meaning to it.

The doctor came into the room and started helping with the birth. Everyone was asked to leave the room, but I stayed, holding and supporting my girlfriend as she went through this stressful time. My pulse was racing as I watched an experience that was like nothing else in the world. As time passed, I would glance up at the clock on the wall behind me, and it seemed as if time had

stopped for this one moment. My emotions were swirling all around in me like a funnel cloud. As I was holding my girlfriend's hand, I was suddenly struck with this selfless feeling that I had never felt before.

Finally, our child was born, and to our surprise, it was a girl! She was born nine pounds and two ounces, which was surprising since her mother was only a hundred and twelve pounds before the pregnancy. I can't name girls' names, and I had already picked a boy's name. I was going to name the baby Corey James, or "CJ," for short. Since it was a girl, my girlfriend named her Katie Ann. I was so full of emotions that I started to cry. My girlfriend had never really seen me cry because I always hide my true emotions from everyone. She turned to me and said, "You're crying." All I could say was, "I know." I then smiled and kissed her on the lips. My mouth was very dry, and all I could taste was stale saliva. At that very moment, everything that ever happened to me, good or bad, didn't matter one bit.

For that one moment in time, nothing could go wrong, and it was the happiest day of my life. The atmosphere was pleasant and calm. My heart beat faster than it ever had in my life, and it felt bigger than I could handle. As I fed my baby girl and changed her first diaper, I knew this was my one, true blissful moment. However, like all moments, sometime or another, this seemingly never-ending period of time had to end. Three days later, my girlfriend and I reluctantly signed over our parental rights, which will be permanent forever.

The day I signed my parental rights over was the most difficult and selfless thing I ever had to do in my life. I held my beautiful sweet baby girl in my arms and kissed her on the forehead for the last time. Then, I whispered to her, "I love you" and in tears, I gave her my last hug. My parents held their gorgeous granddaughter with proud eyes. I had to be one of the proudest fathers in the world. But, there was also a growing pain inside my heart.

pain which engulfed me. If I didn't have my purpose for living, then there was no reason for me to live.

For the next two months, my girlfriend and I did nothing but fight with each other because of the loss of our daughter. She blamed me for it, and I blamed her. Our relationship became pointless after all we had been through. We finally split and ended our year and two-month relationship.

I began to realize that I had just lost the two most important people in my life in a two-month period. I overdosed on twenty plus pills and slit my wrists. I also did a lot of hardcore drugs to ease the burning fire that was destroying the frail, lifeless, and deafening silence coming from my heart. I had also hung myself as well as tried to shoot myself. I have shed my own blood many times for the sake of not feeling like I belonged. A few days after the horrendous breakup, I had drunk a lot of alcohol and took over 20 pills as well as some cocaine.

The next day I was sent to rehabilitation for six months. Life had no meaning to me anymore because I realized that the only reason I was alive, then and today, was because of my daughter. I had lost all hope, and my whole world was crashing down around me. I felt helpless and that I couldn't breathe. It was now or never to reach out and grab help by the hand because it was my last chance.

While in treatment for my drug abuse habit, I learned different techniques and ways to control my emotional state. I also found out that I had a gift, or so I was told, in rehabilitation. I would write lyrics in my spare time, which was a way for me to vent the cursed and vast emotions I was going through because of both of my losses: the loss of my daughter and the loss of my girlfriend. I somehow transformed the lyrics into poetry. As of this date, I have written 67 poems in a year and a half. I have written about the

events and people in my life. Most of my poems are depressing and sad. Only recently have I written more happy and positive poems. I have written several poems about my daughter, but it has taken me two years, as I have only recently been able to express my thoughts and feelings concerning her. After six months in rehabilitation, I had most of my demons under control.

I have learned a lot about feelings and priorities in life. Before my daughter came into my life, I didn't really care about anyone or anything. At a time when I thought it was the end of the world, I realized that everything happens for a reason. Maybe the reason for all this happening to me was to learn what love is and, for once in my life, care about another human being besides myself. I have had everything that I ever needed in my life, and I have lost it all. The other side to this is that I have given my child to a family who couldn't have one. From all the letters they have sent me, they are very happy and in love with her. For once, I have figured out what my one reason for living is. The only reason I am alive today is because of her, and because of that, I have been able to move on in life. I am furthering my career as well as looking forward to that one day that I will hopefully be able to see my baby girl all grown up and to see how beautiful she has become. I take pride in her, and she is my motivation to succeed wherever possible in anything I do. I feel ecstatic knowing that my sweet and innocent beautiful baby girl is somewhere out there and in great health. No matter where I go from here on out, I know that even though she is not physically with me, she is near. Now, unlike before, I am able to express my deep feelings I have for my daughter. She is my baby, my daughter, my "Angel." Bottom line is she will always be in my heart, and I will love her forever.



# *The Love of a Daughter*

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by Noumoua Lynaolu

A narrative essay about a significant event from the past that brought about a greater maturity and involved making an important decision about the future.

I don't think people can say with absolute certainty that they know the exact moment their lives changed forever. I am one of those who can. It wasn't necessarily while I stood in my friend's stuffy, little bathroom shakily holding the pregnancy test in my hand as the little window turned pink...or the six tests after that. Pink. Hmmm. How ironical that shade of color seems now. Nor was it when my baby's father shamefully and blatantly admitted that he had no desire to do right by either our child or me. Frankly, I wasn't all that surprised. In the haze of what I thought was the darkest moment of my life, having to go through the motions of surviving abandonment and exploring the adoption process by myself and finally... finally, searching desperately long enough for strength within myself and allowing myself to accept the gift of motherhood—has been a true blessing. It is the best decision I have ever made.

However, being abandoned by my baby's father while I was three months pregnant was definitely not a proud moment in my life, or his. But this test of faith was there for a purpose. It was necessary to harden my resolve to make it somehow. Don't get me wrong; I wasn't always this generous with my opinion of what happened when I told him I was pregnant.

I remember the room swaying crazily as the walls moved closer and closer to smother me, when over the phone one day he uttered, "You can't handle it. I think you should give the baby up for adoption. I don't want a kid!" I thought, you don't want a kid? Oh sure, it's easy to say that when you aren't the one with a life growing inside of you. Just thinking about it now still makes my heart quicken. I'm not sure what made me angrier; the fact that he had the audacity to say those words to me, or the fact that there was a huge part of me that kind of believed him. As the room continued to swirl frighteningly around me, I could feel the air leave my lungs and breath abandon my swollen, impregnated body. My palms started to sweat as I frantically clutched and released the hard handle of the phone. Unsatisfied, I remember thinking how much I wished it were his spineless neck instead of a helpless plastic phone. I quickly found out how handy anger is during times like that. In those desperate moments of numbing shock, I now know, I would never have survived that cruel and intentional betrayal if all I had to rely on were the helpless and exhausted energy of sadness. No matter how debilitating anger is to one's soul, I tasted anger like never before. Anger served its purpose by fanning the embers of survival to keep it burning... one day at a time.

As my small bubble of hope dissipated

and my waistline expanded, I knew denial was no longer a friend to me. At five months pregnant, I finally found the tattered and desperate courage to consider my options. As far as I was concerned, these weren't really choices at all. They were like... death sentences. This was going to be the penalty I would have to pay for my stupidity. I considered the only options I had: 1) abortion 2) adoption 3) motherhood. I knew abortion was out of the question, however, not because I had religious reasons or noble intentions. I confess the truth is that in the midst of all the countless angry nights I spent praying, my main concern was whether I could emotionally survive it alone or if I could respect myself after all was said and done. Respect myself. Humpf! It was ironic that after all that had happened I could still be stuck on that mute point. But, I was.

As it turned out, I had a lot left. Looking back on it now, respect was a very quiet but true friend during those difficult days. I remember feeling so deathly alone. I talked aloud at times to keep myself company. Between the desperate prayers and regretful tears were the mad ramblings at fate; even mumbling helped to break up the monotony of cruel silence. God was often the silent partner who listened in on my one-sided conversations about suicide and pain. If only the walls in my apartment could talk, oh, the stories they could tell.

Adoption was the next option on the list. I spoke with two different adoption attorneys and one adoption agency. Through the agency, I was able to interview two separate families who would have made wonderful parents. The day of the first meeting, I was positively beside myself, but during both meetings, I was pretty much numb throughout. After all, how comfortable can it be talking about giving up a child? It was quite possibly the most self-loathing moment of my life, yet I could not bear to just let this meeting pass me by. After all, it was not an accident or a chance meeting that we would find ourselves for one day out of our lives sitting in a mock cheerful room sharing our dreams for this child, my

child. Knowing deep down with a gut-level intensity that I owed it to both of us to endure and explore this desperate option, I wearily sat down and questioned the families addressing their concerns. I remember the unwelcome thought inconveniently popping into my mind throughout the whole ordeal echoing the words inside my brain: Isn't it surreal? Isn't it like a bad dream? There were times during those meetings that I thought for sure I had walked out of the room only to look back and see my pale face talking with the beautiful, financially set, well-manicured women who dreamt of being me while I wondered how I could ever compete with them.

In addition to the counseling with a therapist twice a month, a service that was offered on a voluntary basis, was the chance to meet with other women who had once been me. I had the privilege of getting to know two courageous women who volunteered every month to help mothers like me make the right choice. They weren't employed by the agencies; they shared their time because they knew the heartbreak I was going through because, at one time, it had been they who sat where I now sat. Each had made the heart-wrenching choice to help complete another woman's dream of having children. Each had personally lived through the full journey of lengthy interviews and experienced first-hand the whole energy draining process. It was these two angels who held my hand through nervous meetings with the hopeful couples, the piles of paper work, the counseling, and the barrage of endless, personal questions. They held my hand through everything, including the tears and doubts.

It was on one of these visits for counseling that I was shown into a small room with white walls that screamed of stale boredom. While I sat and talked with these two mothers, I glanced around the room where my child's future would be determined. For a moment, I wondered just how many times had desperate mothers sat here before me. My heart hurt at that thought, but it mostly hurt for my child who never asked for any part of this drama. I saw that outside the pas-



tel ruffled window was a large, green alfalfa field. I could tell it was ready for harvesting. The couches faced one another with a coffee table in the middle. The white calla lily silk flowers sat in the corner with a layer of dust on their leaves. They looked wilted, under appreciated, and I remember tiredly thinking to myself, I know how you feel. I was surprised to see candles burning. They smelled of homemade apple pie. I don't remember when I put my hands on my belly or how long they had been there, but in that precious moment, I felt her kick. It was the first time I actually distinguished it as a kick. That's when I knew that she belonged with me. It wasn't a big bolt of lightning, and I wasn't sure of anything before that moment, but by the time I left the building that traffic-happy afternoon, I knew I had decided to become a mother. It wasn't finding out that I was pregnant and alone. It was the moment she kicked me to let me know she was here to stay. I guess it's true; occasionally, everyone does need a good kicking.

On June 29, 2003 at 9:07 pm, Arabesque Tshavntug Lynaolu was born at Mercy General Hospital in Sacramento, California. She weighed 8 pounds, 3 ounces. Although she came with no manual or directions, I welcomed her with all I had—all of my hopes for our future and love forever. Forever seems like a long time, but in a span of a few hours, I had gladly committed to the concept of

eternity. I knew in that instance, beyond a doubt, that when my turn eventually comes to journey over to the other side, my last breath will be the whisper of her name. Just like that, the meaning of life up to that moment had changed.

Everything people say about motherhood is true. It's crazy, happy, miserable, joyful and painful. She has been the light of my life. She makes me laugh and cry. She doesn't know it, but it's because of her that I am who I am. It was all worth it. Some days are easier than others. The only easy part is the love. In the beginning, there were countless times I wondered if I had made the right decision, especially during those long nights when she would scream at the top of her lungs, and I couldn't seem to do anything right. There have been many moments when I wanted to just get drunk to numb out the sobering reality of motherhood. Ironically, I don't even drink. We have managed to survive all of the trials and tribulations together thus far, and I know that together, we can survive anything. I have no grand illusions about our journey ahead, but I do have the most important thing... hope. I can only do my best as her mother to help prepare her for the world and help the world prepare for her. Marilyn Monroe once said it best: "In the depths of winter I finally learned that within me there lay an invincible summer."



# *Can You Repeat The Question?*

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by Megan Northouse

An essay that answers the following questions: What have you learned over the years? How did you learn these lessons? What experiences have made you the person you are today? How do you learn best?

**D**on't talk to strangers! Stop, drop, and roll! Sharing is caring! These are all things that I learned and heard often in preschool. It didn't matter if Mom and Dad were saying it, or if the teacher was saying it, only that I had better remember it. All of us begin to learn from the moment of birth, and we continue to learn our entire lives. Each one of us is so unique, that all of us learn in a discrete fashion and at an individual pace. The most fitting way for me to learn is through a combination of three learning styles: visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning.

Visual learning means that people learn best by seeing the information. They can easily recall and comprehend information presented in pictures, charts, diagrams, number, words, phrases, or sentences. They also have strong visualization skills and visual-spatial skills involving size, shape, texture, angles, and dimensions. Visual learners pay close attention and learn to interpret body language. They have a keen awareness of aesthetics, the beauty of the physical environment, and visual media.

When I learn through visual learning, I picture the subject in my head. A great example of this would be anatomy class. Here, it is important that students can recall and visualize where certain muscles, organs, or bones are so that they are able to determine the cure for an illness. Usually, the

class has a plethora of charts and diagrams that must be memorized for success. I have also become a visual learner through body language. If my father's eyebrows are raised after he's seen the cell phone bill, I've quickly come to learn that I'm most definitely in a heap of trouble. Moreover, I have come to learn that I am in trouble or other such things through hearing or auditory learning.

Auditory learning is when individuals learn best by hearing. People who are auditory learners can accurately remember details or information heard in conversations or lectures. They have strong language and oral communication skills. These skills include well-developed vocabularies and appreciation of words that enables them to carry on conversations and be articulate. They have "finely tuned ears." They may find a foreign language relatively easy. Not to mention, they hear tones, rhythms, and notes of music and often have exceptional musical talents. I have always excelled in the area of foreign language and music because of this type of learning.

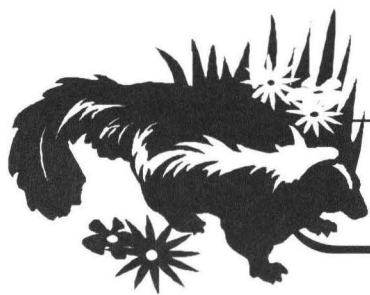
I am the perfect example of auditory learning. Though I have only taken three consecutive years of French, I have never had any trouble learning it. It seemed simple for me, and in the seventh grade I received my first "A+ +." Tones, rhythms, and notes of music are the biggest part of my life because I have always been involved in

activities that required some sort of music. I played the piano for eight years, the flute for seven years, I was in swing choir for four years, and I've been singing, in a choir and by myself, for as long as I can remember. Auditory learning is a great way for me to understand things, but that is only the second type of learning that has assisted me in my learning experiences. The third type of learning that I've found in my life is kinesthetic learning.

Kinesthetic learning can be referred to as "hands-on" learning. There are many people who learn best this way. They learn by using their hands or by full body movement. They learn best by doing. These people learn well in activities that involve performing such as dancers, actors, or athletes. Working well with their hands in areas such as repair work, sculpting, art, or working with tools, they are well coordinated with a strong sense of timing and body movements. Furthermore, they often wiggle, tap their feet, or move their legs when they are sitting and are often labeled as hyperactive. I wouldn't consider myself hyperactive, but in middle school, I was involved in many activities I learned through kinesthetic learning. I played volleyball and tennis in eighth grade. If the instructors only told me how to spike the ball or how to perform a correct backhand, I still wouldn't know how to do it today. They showed me the correct body positions and how they would progress as I neared the ball, making

sure it stayed in play. I took part in those sports, but I am not a true athlete. I am an artist. I love art in its every form, but one of my favorites is that of sculpting. I took a few art classes in middle school, and it was pertinent that I learn by using my hands. Again, the instructor elaborately described how my hands could shape the clay and any subtle move would create a completely different piece; if I pulled upwards, the piece would grow taller, and, if I cupped my hands over the piece, it would become shorter. Kinesthetic learning is not the type of learning I prefer because it takes more energy and more concentration, but it doesn't make me want to stop learning altogether. I have always enjoyed learning, and I always will.

As I mentioned before, everyone has a different learning style. If they are a visual learner, they can easily recall and understand printed material. Visual learners also have strong visualization skills. An auditory learner has strong language and oral communication skills. This type of learner has "finely tuned ears." Let's not forget our kinesthetic learners who learn the best by using their hands. They learn well in activities and by performing. No matter what style of learning a person may prefer, learning is something that is fun and can sometimes be dull, but that process only makes things more interesting. Learning is amazing, it is everlasting, and as George Santayana once said, "The wisest mind has something yet to learn."



# Composition I



# *The Joy of Soy*

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by Holly Hansen

A researched, information essay.

When Iowans drive by a field of soybeans, they may not know how every single soybean is used. Most people probably think soybeans are used mainly for livestock or humans in the world. Although large amounts of soybeans do go for food production, they are also used in many other ways. Some Iowans may not realize how much their everyday routines revolve around soy-based products. Ever looked on the back of a sunscreen bottle or a paint container? These products just might be made of soy. Sunscreen and paint are among the many new soy-based products on the market. Cleaner, glue, crayons, markers, fuel, countertops, and even automotive seat cushions are now being made from soybeans. Actually, in London, Ohio, there is a building called "The House that Soy Built." This house has a kitchen, bathroom, and living room that showcase the multiple uses that soybeans have for everyday life ("A World of").

In the last ten years, soy-based products have exploded into the market. This explosion has occurred because soybeans have many benefits for consumer health, the environment, and children. However, Iowans may not be aware of the numerous products made from soybean oil and the benefits of these products.

Soy provides many health benefits for both males and females. The soybean can be described as a nutritional powerhouse. Many studies have proven that soy-based

products provide great nutritional content and contain a wide variety of nutrients that are important for the body. Therefore, soybeans could be one of the best foods to add into a diet. Soybeans are the only plants that have all the essential amino acids our bodies need, which makes them complete proteins and cholesterol free. The proteins improve blood pressure and protect the body from many digestive-related cancers, such as colon and rectal cancer. Soy's fibers help regulate glucose levels, which is advantageous to those with diabetic conditions and kidney disease. If anyone is seeking better health, soy protein is a great way to start (Klatz).

For women, soy helps maintain hormonal balance and is a rich source of isoflavones. Isoflavones are estrogen-like substances found in the soybean plant. For women looking to ease menopausal symptoms, soy can be an effective way of treating such symptoms as hot flashes, night sweats, mood swings, depression, and forgetfulness. Soy can also reduce women's risk for breast cancer. The soy protein prevents toxic estrogen metabolites from forming in the breast, which starts the cancer (Klatz).

Soy is important not only in the female diet, but also in the male diet. Heart disease is a major health concern for both males and females because it causes more deaths in the United States than any other disease. Soy protein can help lower the risk of heart disease in numerous ways. Soy protein can

lower the, so to speak, "bad cholesterol" and the risk of hardening arteries as well as decrease blood clotting. This also reduces the risk of heart attack, stroke, and prostate cancer (Klatz).

Iowans may think incorporating soy into their diets could mean serious changes in the way we eat, but this is false. Researchers have concluded that a consumption of only fifty milligrams of soy protein per day has a great effect on lowering cholesterol (Klatz). This means that just small changes in the consumer's diet could mean huge health advantages later on.

Incorporating soy into a diet is fairly easy since many products rich in soy are on the market. Tofu can be used in soups, dressings, sauces, or chopped up and thrown into stir-fry. Texture any meat, such as hamburgers and meatballs, in soy protein. If consumers are looking for something quick, they can try a soy-based frozen dinner. These dinners come in Mexican, Italian, and Asian varieties. Consumers can also drink soy milk, have a soy shake, or add soy creamer to their cups of coffee. The list of soy-based foods is growing more and more every day. Therefore, it is becoming easier for consumers to add soy to their diets (Petusevsky).

Soy protein benefits not only our health but also the environment. Many soy-based products are on the market today, ranging from polyvinyl chloride (PVC) pipe to hydraulic oil ("A World of"). Products built with soybean oil are usually stronger and last longer than those products built with traditional materials. Take soy-based housing insulation spray, for example. The soy-based insulation has fewer toxins than traditional sprays, making the soy-based spray safer for workers to install and for home owners to care for. The soy-based insulation also provides better insulating qualities than any other on the market. Soybean oil can lower the amount of money home owners spend on energy bills. A new soy-based roofing coat named Green Grip has been designed to reflect ultraviolet rays and reduce the amount

of energy it takes to cool the house ("New Soy-based").

Farmers are continually learning about new developments and new projects from conferences and conventions. Actually, this past week my dad attended a seminar in Clear Lake, Iowa, that was focused on alternative farming. One subject discussed was soy-based adhesive. Heartland Resource Technology in Olin, Iowa, has developed a soy-adhesive used for ply-wood, cardboard, and any woods. The glue that is on the market right now is phenenol-formalyde, which is a petroleum-based product. This glue costs \$0.38 per pound to produce. However, the new soy-based adhesive only costs \$0.09 per pound for usage. The difference between these two types of glue is that soy based has stronger bonding strength, lasts longer, and has a faster curing time. One other advantage that the soy-adhesive has over traditional adhesive is that soy adhesive is a renewable resource where as traditional oil-based adhesive is not a renewable source (Hansen).

Along with soy-based products, a soy-based fuel is now on the market. This fuel is called bio-diesel and also has many benefits to the United States, Iowa, and the environment. This fuel is a clean-burning alternate fuel produced by resources in the United States, and many plants are being built in Iowa. Bio-diesel contains no petroleum; therefore, the product is much safer to consumers. The flash point of bio-diesel, which is the degree at which the fuel ignites, is nearly half the degrees of traditional diesel, thus, making bio-diesel the safest fuel to handle, store, and use. Bio-diesel can be produced from any fat or oil, in this case, soybean oil (Mescher).

Bio-diesel is environmentally friendly for several reasons. Bio-diesel exhaust is less harmful to humans. The soy-based diesel gives off seventy-eight percent less carbon monoxide than regular diesel, which is better for human health. Bio-diesel emits fewer polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PHA), which are shown to cause cancer. Other major benefits of bio-diesel are that it



is simple to use, non-toxic, poses no threat to human health, and is biodegradable (Perkins).

Bio-diesel can benefit consumers in more ways than just their health. Bio-diesel has been proven to allow consumers' automobiles to go longer between oil changes and tune-ups. Since bio-diesel is a cleaner fuel, it cuts back on the amount of maintenance each vehicle needs. Because of lower maintenance, this means smaller vehicle repair bills. Not only does bio-diesel benefit consumers; it also benefits children. Many school districts across the nation are investigating the cleaner bio-diesel. They feel the use of this fuel would benefit those children riding on

school buses to and from school, and situations where buses are idling, waiting for children to load.

Bio-diesel may also improve our domestic energy security. This fuel is "home-grown," so to say. Soy-diesel is a renewable source here in the United States and Iowa. The United States might then become less dependent on foreign countries for oil.

As Iowans drive by a field of soybeans, I hope they see the benefits each little pod out there offers: benefits to consumers, their health, their children, the environment, and even the country as a whole. Within that field lies a whole new world of soy-based products that can benefit not only Iowa, but the United States in numerous ways.

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# *Ever Been Lost? Not Anymore*

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By Robert A. Parsons

A researched, information essay.

Thirty years ago, a marvelous enhancement to our worldwide navigational system was created and has been widely overlooked until a few years ago. This relatively new navigation tool affects nearly everyone in some way, but many people are unaware that it exists. This system is one of numerous spin offs from technology created by the military that eventually reaches us, the common citizen and consumer. This technology, the Global Positioning System (GPS), might save people's lives, keep them from getting lost, and can make recreation activities more convenient. Because of its numerous applications, The Global Positioning System provides substantial benefits for all of society.

To understand the uses and benefits of the technology, some basic understanding of the system is required. Therefore, we will look at some brief history, the components required and the basic concept of operation. With an understanding of basic system operation, we can look at some fascinating applications for its use.

The Global Positioning System is a satellite-based navigation system originally developed for military purposes by the United States Department of Defense. Initiated in 1973, GPS was created to reduce the then rapid increase and spread of navigation aids (Kruczynsk, sec. "History"). Various branches of the military and other government agencies were virtually littering the planet with land based navigation aids

and markers. While increasing navigation accuracy, GPS overcame the limitations of many existing navigation systems and increased national security and transportation safety. GPS works in any weather condition, anywhere in the world, 24 hours a day. Switching to a space-based system eliminates enemies and others from sabotaging navigation by destroying land-based navigation aids and markers. The Global Positioning System is operated and maintained by the United States Department of Defense. No subscription fees or setup charges are required to utilize the system.

GPS consists of three types of components: satellites in space, control devices on land, and receivers on a craft or carried by hand. "The space component includes the satellites and the Delta rockets that launch the satellites from Cape Canaveral, in Florida" (Kruczynsk, sec. "The Parts of the GPS"). Powered by solar energy, twenty-four satellites orbit 12,500 miles above the earth's surface traveling at speeds of roughly 7,000 miles an hour. This orbit distance and speed, in conjunction with the earth's rotation, make the satellites appear stationary. On land, "the control component includes the master control station at Falcon Air Force Base in Colorado Springs, Colorado (Kruczynsk, sec. "The Parts of the GPS"). The control segment ensures that the satellites' orbits, atomic clocks, and broadcast signals remain within acceptable limits. When adjustments are needed, maneuvering

commands are transmitted to small rocket motors onboard the satellite. The satellites continuously broadcast data with their exact location and the time each signal was sent. The third component in the system, a receiver, detects these satellite transmissions and calculates the position of the receiver. GPS satellites circle the earth in a precise orbit and transmit signals to earth. Essentially, the receiver's computer compares the time a signal was transmitted by each satellite with the time it was received. The time difference of each signal is processed using complex mathematics to calculate the operator's exact location. Information is then displayed for the navigator or transferred to another computer or device.

A GPS receiver must be locked on to at least three satellites to calculate a position in latitude and longitude and track movement. If one recalls geography lessons from grade school, longitude, also known as a meridian, is "the distance east or west of the prime meridian" ("longitude"). The prime meridian runs from the North Pole to South Pole through Greenwich, England. Latitude is "the distance north or south of the equator measured along a meridian" ("latitude"). Both longitude and latitude are angular measurements made in degrees, minutes and seconds, displayed on the screen in that format. With four or more satellites employed, the receiver can also determine altitude above sea level. Altitude information is usually determined because the receiver normally obtains information from five to twelve satellites at one time. Once the user's position has been determined, the GPS unit can calculate other information, such as speed, bearing, track, trip distance, and distance to destination. The entire system is remarkably accurate. Time can be figured to within a millionth of a second, velocity within a fraction of a mile per hour, and location to within a few feet.

The computer in the receiver can be programmed in latitude and longitude coordinates of selected destinations, such as campgrounds, harbors, airports, and fishing areas.

This allows the receiver to display the bearing and distance to a destination. These programmed positions are called waypoints.

Now that basic knowledge of the system has been addressed, its numerous civilian and military applications and benefits would be useful to know. One major benefit of this technology for the military is ordnance delivered on target, with pinpoint accuracy that reduces civilian casualties and collateral damage. GPS satellites transmit latitude and longitude coordinates to bombs and missiles, so the ordnance can guide itself to a preset destination. "GPS equipment has been integrated into fighters, bombers, tankers, helicopters, ships, submarines, tanks, jeeps, and soldiers' equipment. In addition to basic navigation activities, military applications of GPS include target designation, close air support, smart weapons, and rendezvous locations" (Kruczynsk, sec. "The Parts of the GPS").

Although The Global Positioning System was originally intended for military applications, the government made the system available for civilian applications in the 1980s. Over the years, it has attracted a broad spectrum of users. GPS receivers, some as small as cellular phones, are operated frequently on boats, ships, airplanes, automobiles, ambulances and fire trucks. This allows the user to find addresses, routes, and remote locations efficiently and accurately. This technology has advanced to the point that some private passenger automobiles now come equipped with a GPS system.

Onboard navigation was one of the new automotive technologies in the 1990s. By using the global positioning system, a computer in an automobile can pinpoint the vehicle's location. The onboard navigation system integrates with a special compact disc player or computer. After the operator inputs the destination (waypoint), a display screen shows a digitized map of where the vehicle is relative to the location the driver wants to reach. The computer directs the driver to the destination, offering alternative routes if needed.

A company named OnStar uses this technology. Maybe people have seen this application in automobile commercials. Cars equipped with the OnStar system enable the driver to receive roadside assistance at the touch of a button. By touching a blue OnStar button, a satellite locator beacon turns on, enabling a system operator to locate the vehicle, map its location, and, if necessary, direct repair or emergency workers to the scene.

In another form of transportation, pilots use GPS to guide their airplane. As a student pilot, I am currently learning the uses of the GPS in relation to flying. My flight instructor stated, "The GPS allows a pilot to land in fog with only one mile of visibility and with 300 feet ceiling (above ground cloud cover). The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) is currently testing GPS to certify precision landings with only one-half mile of visibility and 100 feet ceiling" (Valbracht). A friend of mine, who is also a pilot and aircraft owner, told me that his favorite function of the GPS system is being able to enter a destination's coordinates and then just fly in the direction of the displayed heading arrow (Jackson). He also pointed out that a nice feature is the ability to couple the GPS with the autopilot. The GPS feeds heading, speed, attitude, altitude, and distance information to the autopilot system. This reduces pilot workload, especially during a long flight.

There are other uses in transportation for GPS. Trucking companies can track the locations of their trucks and make better decisions on routing. This allows them to respond efficiently to companies requiring their services (Microsoft Encarta, "Electronic Commerce"). Another transportation application is satellite-tracking devices mounted on locomotives to identify a train's location, direction and speed. This data is sent to the railroad control center. Railroad controllers use this information to control the distances between trains operating on the same tracks (Microsoft Encarta, "Electronic Commerce"). Controlling these trains reduces train wrecks that then reduces ship-

ping costs for businesses and lowers the price of goods for consumers.

Consumers are not only interested in lower prices; they are also interested in safety. Various scientists are using GPS in different ways. Scientists that study earth movement (Seismologists) map past tremors and earthquakes to help predict future quakes. "These scientists measure movement along major faults tracking the relative movement of the rocky crust a few centimeters each year" (Microsoft Encarta, "Earthquakes"). Meteorologists at the national weather service utilize GPS information along with other satellites for weather data and tracking. This information is extremely helpful in tracking and predicting hurricanes, tornados and hailstorms. The weather person on television can display weather tracking and warning maps for viewers, alerting the public of dangerous situations.

Surveyors are also using GPS for distance measurements and coordinates, especially over rugged terrain. I was visiting with a young lady a few days ago; she told me a story of how her brother thought he was getting overcharged while renting farmland (Hansen). She described how her brother was getting charged for renting a certain amount of land. After a few seasons, he didn't think that he actually was farming all of the land that he was paying for. He used a GPS to record the location of the corners of this field, plotted it on paper, and did the math. Sure enough, he was paying for land that he did not have. After confronting the landlord with his facts, the land was surveyed and his payments adjusted, thus reducing his cost of producing a crop. The surveyors used various methods to survey this field, including GPS technology.

The Global Positioning System offers farming and agriculture other uses also. Precision farming utilizes GPS and geographic information systems (GIS) in the collection and transmission of data as a farmer plants, fertilizes, and harvests his crops. Combines and other harvesting machines equipped with electronic scales, which are linked to a GPS,

measure yield as a crop is being harvested. A computerized yield map locates to within one yard the spots in a field where the yield is highest and lowest. The next time that field is planted and fertilized, the farmer adjusts seeding and fertilizer application rates according to information displayed on the yield map in his tractor. This increases crop production while reducing the amount of both fertilizers and seeds. Also, GPS helps farmers comply with environmental regulations that require a buffer area free of pesticides between crops and nearby streams. Pesticide spraying equipment can be programmed to turn off when it reaches the buffer zones and turn back on when clear of the protected area.

Outdoor enthusiasts are one of the fastest growing groups of people to utilize GPS. They use it for many applications including safety enhancement and navigating accuracy. Boaters use it for navigation and to locate favorite fishing spots. I had a co-worker ask me a couple days ago if I could show him how to operate a GPS. He purchased one to take to Canada fishing, so that he, his sons, and grandsons would not get lost. Plus, he wanted to mark good fishing spots once they found them, so they could return another time. Also hunters use it to locate hunting plots, stands, and trails. I operate my handheld GPS to locate my deer stand during pre-dawn darkness. At the end of the evening hunt, I employ it again to direct me precisely to my Jeep, parked over a half mile away.

Mushroom hunters have been known to use GPS to locate their favorite harvesting spots. Backpackers, hikers, and skiers navigate trails with the system.

Although GPS currently has many applications, this technology has a bright future for numerous other functions being developed. Computer technology eventually may lead to intelligent transportation systems. Automobiles equipped with computers and displays would automatically receive route location and traffic information. Predictions for the future include fully automated systems with traffic completely controlled by computers. Drivers would instruct traffic control computers where they want to go and the computers would operate the car, delivering it to its selected destination" (Kruczynsk, sec. "The Future of GPS").

A noteworthy technology, GPS has many current applications that most people do not realize or notice. A large amount of potential for expansion also exists with this technology. The Global Positioning System is for all to benefit from using the numerous applications of this amazing technology. Someday it might save a life, keep someone from getting lost, and help one navigate to a favorite location. In conclusion, a final thought that I learned as a young Boy Scout: If your destination is nowhere, you get there in a hurry. If you don't know where you are, then you are nowhere.

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# Choosing the Right Vehicle

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by Vitaliy Pidlisnyak

A researched, information essay.

Purchasing a car today presents a real challenge for most of us. We often have a hard time picking a car among hundreds of car brands sold today. One of the hardest tasks is to determine exactly what car each of us needs. This task is extremely important because purchasing a new car has its financial, social, and environmental impacts. To look at these impacts more closely we can take two vehicle types that are different in size, price, and many other criteria and compare them. Let us consider these two types of vehicles—subcompact and sport-utility vehicle (SUV).

What is the subcompact car? The word subcompact consists of two parts—sub and compact, which tells us that the subcompact car is compact, yet even smaller than this. In fact, the car size of this class ranges between 85 and 99 cubic feet of passenger and luggage volume (U.S. Department of Energy).

Fuel economy makes a subcompact car cheap to operate. For example, Chevrolet Metro rates at 39 mpg in city driving and 46 mpg on the highway. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the top fuel economy cars are VW Golf Diesel, VW New Beetle Diesel, BW Jetta Diesel, Chevrolet Metro, Suzuki Swift, Honda Civic, Mitsubishi Mirage, Suzuki Esteem, and Saturn S (Oldham 1).

Like any other car, a subcompact car has its advantages. Besides being fuel efficient, it looks sharp, especially the sedan. The subcompact sedan has enough space for four

adults to travel in relative comfort. Also, because of its maneuverability, a subcompact car can go just about anywhere, and it is easy to park.

Why would one buy a subcompact? The cost is the main reason. The domestic subcompact such as the Metro is quite affordable—the base retail price for a new Metro ranges from \$9,000 to \$11,000. Compared to other car classes, this price is pretty reasonable. Being able to drive a cheaper car has many advantages. Let's take, for example, an average American family. Due to their low prices, subcompact cars provide entry-level alternatives. The average family experiences high financial burden when it comes time for a young member of the family to buy his or her first car. In this case, a small and inexpensive car is the best solution to the problem: less gas payments, lower monthly payments for the car, and less financial pressure from the high interest rates charged for financing the car. The families that need multiple vehicles would have a significant financial relief.

Like any other types of vehicles, subcompacts have disadvantages that make them less appealing. Crash test results are disappointing for small utility vehicles. "Only one of 10 small utility vehicles crash tested by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety in Arlington, VA earned a good overall rating" (Wingo 27). The subcompact discussed above is vulnerable in a collision with a heavier vehicle—and just about everything

a heavier vehicle—and just about everything else on the road that is heavier.

Now, let us look more closely at bigger vehicles like SUVs. SUVs are powerful, truck-like systems with large engine volume that have all-weather and “off-road” capabilities. These cars are much more expensive than subcompacts and are less economical. Typical SUVs have 6 or 8-cylinder engines, and many of them have four-wheel drive power train (Heraud 1).

Today SUVs are popular because of their off-road capabilities, and people who drive them feel the prestige of having cars that can do it all. In addition, SUVs have the traditional benefits: a roomy cargo area, lots of road clearance, and a commanding view. Of course, SUVs can brag about their comfort. For example, a Chevrolet Blazer has plenty of room for the whole family. Climate control is equally effective in heat or cold. Plus, an SUV, such as Blazer, is a powerful machine that provides convenience of its towing abilities (“Sport –Utility Vehicles” 53).

Still, SUVs have some definite disadvantages. Statistics show that SUVs in general are more likely to roll over than are sedans because they are high and top-heavy. Another disadvantage of SUVs is that they are pricey. For example, the base retail price of a new Chevrolet Blazer ranges from \$25,000 to \$32,000. Imported SUVs are even more expensive.

People pay thousands extra for the four-wheel drive and heavy-duty construction that allow these vehicles to go off-road, but few SUV owners ever drive them off-road. Those who do go off-road often fall prey to illusions of unstoppable fueled by fantastic TV commercials. Real off-roading takes place at about 5 mph (“Sport –Utility Vehicles” 54). Most people do not really need the rock-climbing capability of 4-wheel drive. “Consumers do not use these vehicles for capacity, and most purchase them merely as costumes” (Baldwin 79). Yet they pay heavily—SUVs put many people in debt. Moreover, the service of SUV class car is

much more expensive than the service of an average sedan car.

Finally, the big disadvantage of SUVs is high fuel consumption, which makes this type of vehicle a gas-guzzler. For example, Dodge Ram 1500 consumes 14 to 19 mpg (Carey 96). The more fuel a vehicle consumes, the more carbon emissions it produces, polluting the environment. For this reason, full-size SUVs have become more of an environmental concern.

Scientific evidence strongly suggests that the rapid buildup of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere is raising the earth’s temperature and changing the earth’s climate with many potentially serious consequences. This change in the earth’s climate is largely the result of burning fossil fuels such as coal and oil. One of the most important things you can do to reduce global warming pollution is to buy a vehicle with higher fuel economy. This is because every gallon of gasoline your vehicle burns puts 20 pounds of carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas pollutant, into the atmosphere. (U.S. Department of Energy).

Americans bought a record number of SUVs last year, but high gas and SUV prices at a time when wallets are shrinking turn consumers into accidental environmentalists (Springen 13). Hopefully, American consumers will finally realize the reality of environmental impact of each SUV on the road.

I personally was thinking about environmental impact and my family’s needs while shopping for vehicles. As a result, my family has two vehicles: Honda Prelude and Buick Riviera. The Honda is a compact 4-cylinder car, and it is more economical than the Buick, which is a 6-cylinder sedan. I drive the Honda for two reasons. First, it saves fuel money and the environment since I drive more miles per day than my wife. Second, my wife has less driving experience, and I think she should drive a safer vehicle. The Buick is a newer and bigger sedan, and it has all safety features that most SUVs have.

Today's automobile market offers many choices, and it is hard to pick the right vehicle among hundreds of brands sold everywhere. All vehicles have differences in price, comfort, safety, and environmental impact. Before making a purchase decision, think hard whether you really need the SUV's capabilities. If the answer is "no," then remember that you win financially, and you also help to save the environment when you choose a subcompact car. By choosing the right vehicle, people can really make a difference in their family budgets and in the environment.

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# People Above Numbers

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by Joanna Smith

A profile essay that tells an informative and interesting story about a person, place, or activity based on personal, firsthand observations and/or interviews.

The receptionist at Agnew, Tunink, and Associates knows the key to success in accounting is people skills. As I walked in to the brightly lit office, she was casually chatting with an associate but looked up and smiled as I approached her tall desk.

"Hi there. Are you here to see Connie?" Her voice was pleasant and friendly.

"Yes, I have a 2:30 P.M. appointment with her."

"You can go ahead and have a seat. I'll send her out in a few minutes."

She smiled warmly and proceeded to greet an associate returning from lunch. I couldn't help but notice how familiar the associates were with her and how easily she handled phone calls as she chatted briefly.

Momentarily, Connie Muell, Certified Public Accountant (CPA), greeted me with a handshake. A small, quiet woman, she didn't seem promising as an interviewee, especially coupled with my preconception of accountants: boring, stodgy, and extremely exacting. Her hand was surprisingly warm and soft, not at all unwelcome. I began to think accountants were human after all—maybe even kind. Indeed, she appeared almost motherly in her khakis and peachy patterned sweater. She led me past several, large filing shelves filled with color-coded, manila envelopes to her office in the back of the building. She gently shattered my bias against accountants by immediately making me feel comfortable and welcome through

offering me one of two maroon chairs in front of her desk. Her ease with me, joined with the friendliness of the receptionist, instantly alerted me to a concept Connie later verbally confirmed: the hardest (and most rewarding) part of accounting is working with people, not numbers.

Connie told me briefly about her financial training, which she described as fairly typical: a four-year degree in accounting, 150 tedious credit hours to become a CPA, in addition to 15 years of experience as a public accountant. She verified the importance of these steps, especially the CPA certification, in becoming a proficient and recognized accountant, but she particularly emphasized the significance of people skills.

"You need to have good people skills" because CPA's work with such a large variety of people. "People think all you do is punch numbers all day and it's really boring." Each client's situation is just as diverse as the clients are themselves. Due to the private nature of finances and taxes, many clients are nervous when they first come to see Connie. She works first to put them at ease before she delves into their financial situation. "People skills are needed to build a trusting relationship with the client." This confiding nature relaxes clients, a considerably large and weighty task because "people compare getting their taxes done to going to the dentist. It scares them to death."

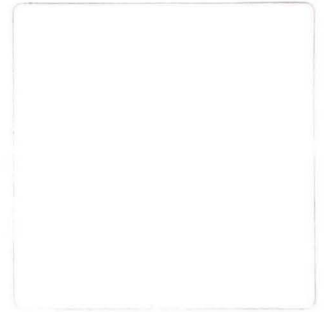
Communication is key in both the relationships and financial statements. On the financial side, Connie enjoys working with numbers, manipulating them to communicate a message. "I really like it, but I'm crazy!" she commented with a disarming laugh. She also has to help her clients make sense of the information they already have in addition to the information she provides. Most clients just find relief in knowing she has seen worse cases than they are.

"Some people don't have cash in their checking account." She mentioned the biggest thing they can do for their accountant is keep all records "in some kind of order, not just thrown in a shoebox." She tries to take a suggestive approach when dealing with people's organization of financial records, so as to be more persuasive, but "some people you can't change."

I was able to witness her casual people skills in practice as she took a quick phone call from her boss.

"Hello? Oh hi, Bill. Yes, she's here. I think we're almost done. Sure! No problem. "Bye," she said in a completely relaxed manner. I could see from that one conversation what an asset she must be to his company. Her ability to be direct, yet gentle has the potential to steer many financially adrift people to shore.

I had previously imagined an accountant would find his or her sole pleasure in filling little boxes with numbers, but Connie's favorite part is definitely interacting with clients. "Some people really appreciate you, but some don't. I enjoy the positive feedback and appreciation from clients the most." While "punching numbers" gives a feeling of satisfaction, the reward she receives for a job well done is the praise from the clients she has helped.



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# Vain Endeavors

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by Logan Smith

A personal essay about a meaningful experience.

The clouds thundered in like chariots as a storm interrupted my stroll through SoHo. Instead of making a run for the hotel, I ducked into the nearest shop without caring what it held. I stood there in the doorway for a moment. The chill shivered itself away as I wiped the rainwater from my glasses. After fully recovering, I took a quick look around and found myself inside a silver boutique. A closer look ended my daylong search. The ring was perched on a glass hand in a spotlighted case across the room. It was like a photograph of the one in my imagination: an oversized silver band with simple, crisp lines and an accent that was primitive, yet sexy. This was the object that my shopping frenzy had failed to produce. I brought my mother to see it the next morning, and when we left, it was mine. If I had known that I would lose the thing, I wouldn't have become so attached to it. But the ring immediately became my most coveted possession and I was infatuated. The infatuation lasted for about nine months.

December in the Rocky Mountains is bitter cold even during a mild winter. A friend, Bobby, had convinced me to live with him in Vail for the ski season, and the weather that year was anything but mild. Defeating this kind of cold was impossible, no matter how warmly we bundled ourselves. It was New Year's Eve, and the temperature was "obscenely" below zero. This presented a problem as I prepared for the evening. A boxing match played out in my mind with

boxing match played out in my mind with practicality in one corner and stylishness in the other.

"Should I dress warmly at the price of not being able to show off my nicest duds?" I said aloud.

"I don't care. You get dressed slower than my grandma!" Bobby growled, unable to be patient any longer. My roommate had been ready for a half-hour, and my lack of haste drove him mad.

"Or should I surrender climactic rationality and go for glamour?" The town was a magnet for the well dressed, and the evening's festivities were to be glamorous indeed.

"Why the hell is this taking you so long? Hurry up, dammit!"

"You're right. How could I possibly go out on a night like tonight without sporting the latest fashions?"

Style won the fight, and I was ready to go. As I walked to the door of our studio apartment, I stopped. I thought again of the beloved ring that I had decided against wearing. I dreaded its possible loss or damage, but it worked social miracles when I wore it. It was too unique to go unnoticed by curious young ladies, and therefore too necessary to me. I slid it over my finger as I ran to catch the elevator. We hit the ground floor and walked out into the night. The chaffing cold fueled Bobby's temper.

"We could have been there an hour ago if you weren't so damn picky."

"I said I was sorry, all right. It's not like the bars are closing any time soon, so what's the hurry?"

"You know what the hurry is!" He spat. "I want to see Britney, man! That's the damn hurry!"

I knew what his reason was, all right. He had explained it to me several times.

Britney Spears was in Vail for the holidays, and she was allegedly ringing in the New Year at our destination: a nightclub called The Underground. "Forget Britney," I thought as we took a left through the parking lot. "Survival is enough reason for me to hurry." The short distance to the Village seemed to stretch on through the blistering freeze, pushing us a little faster. Just a few more blocks to go. The ring on my cold-shrunken finger slid around with ease. As we walked over the covered bridge, our goal was in sight. My skin felt like a freezer-burned top sirloin. I would have done anything to get inside, but we still halted at the door. The manager must have heard about the night's supposed guest of honor and adjusted his cover fee. It was Vail after all, and we expected high prices. High prices meant twenty or thirty dollars at other places. Bobby and I stared, teeth chattering, at the sign.

"Fifty damn dollars just to get in! That's absurd!" I stammered.

But vanity was tending bar that night, and it served me a potent cocktail. The right mixture of desperation and hypothermia proved intoxicating. My mind went foggy, and the cost seemed worth it as we paid and entered. The warmth restored the flow of blood to my brain, and with it came intelligent thought. "What were you thinking?" it said. "Look at what your money bought you." If the club hadn't been in a basement, the mass of people crammed inside would have toppled the four walls outward. Bottles were breaking everywhere, showering the place with alcohol and glass. The mob endlessly shoved to get back

and forth across the room. We could barely move, let alone enjoy ourselves. Britney was nowhere in sight. The fifty-dollar dent in my pocket was the only reason I stayed as long as I did. I drank with Bobby until the regret was unbearable, then worked up the nerve to leave.

The cold went unnoticed as I trekked through the snow. Back at the apartment, I didn't feel like waiting for my roommate to get home. With no reason to stay awake any longer, I got ready for bed. Part of my routine was to take my ring off and set it on my nightstand. Even though there was nothing on my finger to remove that night, my mind was too busy to notice. Maybe it was the depression of the evening that had just ended. Maybe it was the guilt of wasting my hard-earned money. Whatever it was, I had missed it. I faded into sleep, not knowing that the ring was gone forever.

The next several days were a blur. When I discovered the ring was gone, I scoured the town, but there were too many places where something that small could be hiding. It was like trying to find a nickel in a snowdrift. I gave up. In losing a ring, though, I found part of myself. I had been emotionally attached to an inanimate object, irrational about the way I dressed, and irresponsible with the money I had earned – my character flaws on display, waiting to be recognized. Fate had to play thief to make me see them. Otherwise, I might still be wasting my time and energy on vain endeavors.

That jewelry shop in midtown Manhattan was eventually rediscovered. I replaced the lost ring with a new, slightly different one. The ring's physical appearance had changed, but there was something less visible. There was something deeper. The new ring was not a prize to me; it seemed more like a burden. Another infatuation would never develop. I would never again waste my efforts by needing something that is so easily taken away.



# *The Chinese Shar-Pei: The Rarest Dog in the World*

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by Charlene Summers

A concept essay that appeals to a specific audience, follows a logical plan, uses clear definitions, utilizes various writing strategies, and presents information based on expert sources.

When people ask me what kind of dog I have, their second question is usually "What is a Chinese Shar-Pei?" The response I usually give is, "They're wrinkle dogs." This always seems to sum it up for people. Chinese Shar-Peis are best known for their wrinkles; however, there is much more to a Shar-Pei than just its wrinkles. A "wrinkle dog," miraculously saved from extinction, has been dubbed "dogdom's comeback canine" because in 1973 there were only twelve Chinese Shar-Peis in the world (Sharon Pflaumer 14). Thanks to some dog-loving Americans, these Shar-peis were brought to the United States to be bred, thus ensuring the survival of the species. Though Shar-Peis have been called "the rarest dog in the world" (qtd. in Pflaumer 14), they were not accepted into the American Kennel Club (AKC) in their own classification until 1992—almost twenty years after arriving in the United States (*Chinese Shar-Pei*). However in 1996, the AKC reported the Chinese Shar-Pei was ranked thirty-first out of 143 breeds in popularity, with 12,178 dogs registered (Pflaumer 14).

Although close to extinction in the 1970's, the Chinese Shar-Pei has survived for hundreds of years, and at one time thrived. The origins of the Chinese Shar-Pei began in China; however, because the Chinese government placed such small value upon dogs, there is little documentation

regarding their true origins (Pflaumer 14). Further adding to the lack of documentation, the Chinese government heavily taxed dogs as a "luxury" item, and, as a result, the Chinese citizens did not report their Shar-Peis. The AKC speculates that Shar-Peis have existed since the Han Dynasty, around 200 B.C., serving as guard dogs to the emperors. This is evident when an owner watches the domesticated Shar-Pei. Watching for intruders, the Shar-Pei guards its master by sitting with its back to him or her.

It has been reported that Chinese Shar-Peis were also used as fighting dogs, placed in a pit and forced to fight another dog, and sometimes other animals, such as lions and bears, until one is dead (Jo Ann Reddit 16). Unfortunately, Chinese Shar-Peis have many physical characteristics that support this idea. Shar-Pei translated to English means "sand skin." Shar-Peis do not have soft, fuzzy coats; they have a bristly coat, which feels somewhat like sand and is uncomfortable in the mouth of another animal. The folds and wrinkles of Shar-Peis prevent another animal from grabbing onto the dogs or penetrating their skin and causing serious injury. In addition to their many wrinkles and folds of skin, their skin produces an oil, called mucin, that is distasteful to enemies. These characteristics, Pflaumer speculates, in combination with their sunken eyes and flapped-closed ears, makes the Shar-Pei a

good-fighting animal, making them “less vulnerable to injury” (14).

Contrary to their fighting heritage, Shar-Peis are loyal, territorial dogs and, therefore, will alert their master of a stranger or if something is out of the ordinary. Their goal in life is to protect and to live up to their owners’ expectations. The Shar-Peis’ owners are just as much companions to the Shar-Peis as the Shar-Peis are to their owners. Because their lives revolve around their masters’ lives, Shar-Peis want to be with their masters all the time. Although Chinese Shar-Peis are usually friendly to everyone, they will choose one person to be their favorite (Pflaumer 14). Pflaumer goes on to say, “Because the breed is very owner-oriented, it would rather be with its human family than with other dogs” (Pflaumer 14). Shar-Peis are aloof with strangers unless the stranger is posing a threat to their beloved owner. The Shar-Pei is simply not interested in anyone other than his or her master.

In addition to being owner-oriented, there are several characteristics that make Chinese Shar-Peis good companions. They prefer to stay indoors as they are unable to handle extremes in temperatures. My Shar-Peis go as far as to cry when left outside for more than five minutes, or worse yet, refuse to go out in the rain. Because Shar-Peis prefer to stay inside and only require being let outside a few times a day, they are ideal in any living environment, including apartment living. Chinese Shar-Peis can require demanding amounts of care because they are susceptible to severe ear infections and the constant attention that is required if they have allergies. Although allergies are very common and require constant care, they are easily controlled by medication, medicated shampoos, and allergy shots.

Shar-Peis are also clean animals, easily house broken (trained in general, actually), and only require a bath every six to eight weeks. Furthermore, they require brushing only twice a year because they “blow” their coats, shedding twice a year and completely shedding in two weeks (Reddit 55). When

Shar-Peis “blow” their coats, they leave patterns of their bodies where they were lying on the floor. Reddit advises when Shar-Peis are shedding, “You may want to insist your dog stay off the furniture because [its] short bristly hair sticks in the upholstery and is very difficult to remove ” (Reddit 56).

However, the one characteristic that sets Shar-Peis apart from other breeds is its intelligence. “They’re very clever dogs always looking for a way to get or do what they want—and they’re smart enough to figure one out. In fact, if owners aren’t careful, their dogs will train them” (qtd. in Pflaumer 14). Furthermore, Shar-Peis are stubborn animals, similar to that of a mule, perhaps due to their extreme intelligence. For example, when my Shar-Peis are outdoors, and I think it is time to come in, I could call them for an hour; they will not move until they are ready. Shar-Peis easily get an “attitude” and easily become upset with their masters if, for example, they were gone too long. In fact, Shar-Peis might be “unfriendly” for several days.

Unfortunately, Shar-Peis have several chronic health conditions, which means their average life expectancy is only eight to ten years, lower than that of other canines. One of these health conditions is eye entropion, a disease where the eyelids roll in due to the weight of the heavy brow, causing the bristly hair to rub against the cornea. Most of the time, this disease is treated with reconstructive eye surgery. If not treated, the dog, more than likely, will go blind. The most serious condition for this breed is Shar-Pei fever. This is a condition where the dog has brief, unexplained, episodes of high fever; painful joint swelling, especially of the lower mandible, or jawbone; shallow breathing; and diarrhea. It is thought this disorder is the “result from an inability to regulate the immune system” (Pflaumer 14) and is inherited. Oral medication is required to treat Shar-Pei fever. If the disease is left untreated, within seventy-two hours, the dog will die.

In spite of the chronic health problems and once being near extinction, the Chinese Shar-Pei is gaining in popularity, not only in the United States, but worldwide. We have some Americans to thank for that, and for giving us the gift of the unique and wonderful Chinese Shar-Pei. The Shar-Pei has mysterious beginnings, adding to its charm and appeal as a companion. These wrinkle dogs are loyal, intelligent, and easy to take care of, making them a good choice for a pet. The Shar-Pei, with its charm and out-of-the-ordinary personality, is the “rarest dog in the world” (qtd. in Pflaumer 14).

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# Beautiful Day

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by Keri Thompson

A remembered event essay.

What a terrible, hot, sticky day, I thought as I pushed sweaty wisps of hair that had managed to come loose from my ponytail, off my forehead. I slid two fingers underneath the Styrofoam and plastic oven on my head that is usually called a riding helmet. The air around me was so hot and muggy, it felt as though I was wrapped in a steaming, wet blanket. The hot sun that shone through the tree branches overhead felt as though it was baking the sweat into my skin. Ahead of me, fifteen small heads clad in white helmets bobbed up and down as the dust rose up under the sixty hooves of their mounts. Interspersed between them were the dark colored helmets of wranglers and assistant wranglers, who were there to insure the safety of the group of third and fourth grade horse campers on this afternoon trail ride. The campers, as always, seemed unaffected by the heat. I could hear their chatter and laughter ahead of and behind me.

I gave a short check on the reins to keep enough space between my mount, Java, and horse in front of us. Java was my best friend Chelsea's horse- a huge and dark bay thoroughbred monstrosity! Standing at sixteen hands high, riding Java sometimes felt like walking on stilts. He was quite a bit different in temperament and size from my own little white Arabian, Josie. I had left her back at the barn in order to give her a much-deserved rest. She had already been on two trail rides this witheringly hot day, and

although Arabs are bred for their ability to tolerate heat, I wanted to play it safe. When Chelsea had offered the use of Java, I hesitated briefly. Java was a fairly well-behaved horse, but he was large and unpredictable and required an experienced rider. Only four years old, Java was a child in a sense, and was always a bundle of energy and nerves.

"How's Storm doing for 'ya, Morgan?" I called to the small girl riding ahead of me. An adorable petite little blond, Morgan was one of my favorite campers this week. Each time she and her cabin-mates would come to the horse barn, she would run up and give me or a huge hug and bright smile.

"He's great!" Morgan enthused, looking back just long enough to flash me the excited smile of a horse-crazy girl realizing her dream. "I love Storm! He's so cool! I'm going to be really sad when I have to leave him tomorrow."

"He'll be here next summer," I assured her, "waiting for you to come and make him behave."

Morgan laughed.

The sun hit me in the eyes as we came out of the trees, and I squinted until they adjusted to the light. I turned Java left, following the leader on the path back to the barn. To my right, ran a long, barbed-wire fence, followed by a massive expanse of cornfield. To the left, were the woods from which we had just emerged. I settled back in the saddle. The ride was more than half over, unbearable heat, the ride was enjoyable.

and Java was behaving well. Aside from the unbearable heat, the ride was enjoyable.

Suddenly, the sound of hoof beats filled my ears, and I heard a girl scream behind me. I didn't even need to look back to know what was going on. My reaction was instantaneous, and I sat down deep in my seat and braced myself. Java instantly tensed, like a tight coil preparing to spring, and I immediately hauled back on the reins. I was fairly strong but not compared to a thousand pound animal. I knew if I didn't keep him in control now, I'd never be able to regain it. But it was too late. Java leaped forward, his first few strides powered by his strong back legs which thrust us forward so quickly my head snapped back. It all happened in a mere few seconds, but each second felt like an eternity.

My mind scattered in a thousand directions, picturing the chaos that was ensuing ahead of me. The group of third graders panicked, screaming and crying as each horse took off. Terrified, I pictured myself atop Java careening into them. I hauled back harder, yanking the left rein in a desperate attempt to avoid anyone and everyone in our path. Then suddenly, I felt Java drop his head down and throw himself in a massive buck. This is it, I thought. It's over now. I've completely lost control.

I felt like a rag doll being whipped around as I went up and down. It was the strangest experience. I felt as though I was moving in slow motion, up and down. I blinked and saw the ground getting farther away. I blinked again, and it was coming back at me again. Suddenly, Java was heading into the trees, taking me with him, and I realized that I was at serious risk of hitting a branch or limb, possibly breaking my neck and dying. Well, that's not going to happen. I thought, I'll be safer on the ground. The next buck Java gave, I placed my hands firmly on the pommel of my saddle and pushed off, flying through the air. I curled my back and neck forward, bracing myself for the impact. The ground was a lot farther down than I had anticipated, and the weightlessness I felt while flying through the air quickly came to a sudden and jarring

end. I landed hard on my side in a clump of bushy weeds at the base of a tree. I had made it! I could hear Java, now free of me, tearing through the woods at a terrific speed. I wondered where he thought he was heading, and feared that he might step on a loose rein and injure his mouth or trip over a fallen tree and break a leg. But for now, he was out of my control, and there were more important matters at hand.

I rolled out of the bush that had served as my crash pad and stood, making a mental check of all my limbs. All were accounted for with minimal pain! Unbelievably, I was not seriously hurt. Thank you God, I breathed a quick prayer. Now I had to see about everyone else- especially the campers. I was afraid they hadn't fared as well as I had. I had been fortunate.

Emerging out of the trees, I came upon a chaotic mass of people and horses. There were campers on horses, campers on the ground, campers still mounted, and panicked campers trying to dismount. They were all crying-every last one! The other wranglers on the trail were trying to make their way to the fallen campers while attempting to maintain control of the ones still mounted. Some of the horses were gone. The rest of the horses were on edge, their ears straight up and swiveling around. I knew they could probably still hear the loose horses running. They were probably all trying to determine what kind of monster was out there making their friends run for their lives! For once, I could not laugh at the usually comedic flight instinct of horses. This time it wasn't funny.

Surveying the situation, I could see only three downed campers. What a relief! I had imagined emerging from the woods to see a complete disaster scene with campers on the ground and their horses nowhere to be seen. The first camper I came to was Morgan. I kneeled down beside her.

She too was trembling and sobbing but was sitting up on her own, which was a good sign.

"Are you okay, Morgan?" I asked. "Does anything hurt?"

She nodded and hiccuped, her tear-stained face streaked with dirt.

"Where?"

She held up her wrist, still sobbing.

"Can you move it?"

She moved it. *Well, it's not broken.* I thought. Morgan began to regain composure, wiping the tears off her face with the backs of her hands. I reached out to her.

"Can you get up on your own?"

"No," Morgan sniffed pathetically, the tears starting afresh.

I lifted her up into my arms and stood. Morgan clung to my neck, still trembling.

While I had been attending to Morgan, the other wranglers had begun sorting out the mess. We consulted over what had just happened and what we ought now to do. I would later learn that apparently during the trail ride, the wrangler riding behind me had reached up to scratch her chin and had accidentally unbuckled the chinstrap of her helmet. This caused the helmet to fall backward, landing squarely on her horse's rear. Her horse took off and started the whole chain of events. It ended up that only three other campers and one other wrangler had been unhorsed. No one was seriously hurt, save the bruises we'd all be feeling in the morning. However, the

campers who had fallen were now too traumatized to walk all the way back to the barn. We consulted quickly and decided to let them stay back with the other horseless wrangler. Someone would return with a truck to pick them up once we had returned to the horse barn.

"I'll walk behind," I said, thinking it better to walk than to sit around and wait to be picked up.

Before long the trail ride had started moving again. The sun continued to beat down from overhead, and I could see the helmet-clad heads bobbing up and down. The dust rose underneath my feet and began to stick to my sweat.

I walked along beside, Morgan still in my arms, until they had passed us completely. I now faced a long trek through the sweltering heat while carrying a sixty-plus pound crying child, and my best friend's beloved horse was probably still tearing around loose in the woods. But I was okay, and Morgan was okay, and miraculously everyone had escaped unharmed. I looked up into the blue sky above and again breathed a prayer of thanks to God. As I did so I suddenly realized . . . it was a beautiful day.







## Composition II



# Health Insurance: Why Aren't All Americans Covered?

by Stacie Hartley

Proposing a solution essay that achieves the following: (1) The proposed solution will solve the problem. (2) It is feasible. (3) It stands up against anticipated objections or reservations. (4) It considers and rejects alternative solutions.

A cough, a snuffle, an ache or a pain may be a reason for a person to see a doctor. All of us at one time or another may need to go to the doctor. However, a person without health insurance oftentimes will remain sick simply because they may not have the means to pay the out-of-pocket expense for seeing a doctor.

It's a rude awakening when a person realizes he or she is responsible for his or her own medical coverage. Children are oblivious of the amount their parents spend on doctor office visits and the cost of prescriptions that likely follow. It is not until they start their first job as adults that people realize the cost of health insurance.

Our health care system is a mess, and it's time for a solution. It's time for the legislature to reform health care, as we know it, for all Americans. I propose that the government regulate the cost of health insurance with the intention that insurance premiums would be determined by an individual's or family's annual income. The legislature would refer to an individual or joint tax return, and the amount of insurance to be paid would be determined by the number of dependants claimed and total of the net income earned at the end of the tax year. The local government for each state would then determine the amount a family or individual would pay for health insurance for the upcoming year. The amount a person pays

for his or her health care coverage would be reevaluated each year, and if a person is employed, but doesn't file his or her income taxes, he or she would not be eligible for health insurance coverage. This proposal would insure that all Americans would have medical coverage. Also, if every American had health care coverage, the self-employed would be able to meet the expense of health insurance, and a person with a preexisting health condition would be able to obtain adequate health care coverage. My proposed solution on health care coverage for all Americans would force the health insurance companies to provide affordable policies for every person, not just the healthy and young.

We live in an age where the young and healthy along with people who obtain exceptional medical coverage at their place of employment appear to be the only ones who obtain adequate health care coverage. The fear of losing insurance locks millions of Americans into dead end jobs, and they may avoid starting their own business because of the high cost of offering health insurance coverage.

The President's Health Security Plan Book writes, "Every day a growing number of Americans are counted among the more than 37 million who go without health insurance-including 9.5 million children. Millions more have health care coverage so inadequate that a serious illness will devas-

tate their family savings and security" (2). It's shocking that "In 1997, more than 43 million people-almost one in five non-elderly Americans-had no health insurance" (Hassle 244). Although there have been some efforts made by legislation to improve health care reform, there are 37 million Americans still without health insurance.

Seth Godin, author of Clueless About Insurance, writes, "If you are neither elderly nor poor and do not meet other, very specific qualifications, you must pay all your medical costs or get insurance" (3). Regrettably, most Americans don't have the financial means to pay for health insurance, especially if they are already struggling to pay their everyday needs. After a person pays his or her house payment, car payment, car insurance, electric, gas, and groceries, there is little money remaining for a person to pay for health insurance costs.

Whether or not people want to think about health insurance, they are more than likely going to be asked about their coverage at one time or another. "At the root of the problem lies our health insurance system, which gives insurance companies the right to pick and choose whom to cover. Risk selection and underwriting-the practice of identifying the healthiest people, who pose the least risk-divide consumers into rigid categories used to deny coverage to sick or old people, or set high premium rates" (The President's 3). Insurance companies are able to charge smaller businesses higher rates than big corporations. This leaves the self-employed or small business owner to pay a significantly higher premium than a person who receives health insurance benefits at their place of employment. Insurance companies are the ones who are determining the amount a person should pay to remain healthy. Also, if a person works for a company and receives health insurance benefits, the coverage a person receives may not be affordable and adequate.

My proposed solution would also insure health care coverage for people who have a preexisting condition. According to the book

Winning the Insurance Game, "Many people who have had the misfortune to experience serious illness find that exclusions for preexisting conditions often keep them from reaching the promised land of health insurance coverage" (136). The exclusion because of preexisting conditions makes it almost impossible for various people to obtain a health insurance policy at a cost they can afford. More likely a person would be turned away from receiving coverage. "A preexisting condition is often defined as the existence of symptoms that would cause an ordinary prudent person to seek diagnosis, care, or treatment within a five-year period, or a condition for which a physician either recommended or rendered care" (Nader 143). Insurance companies often will insure people with preexisting conditions, but the policy would have areas of exclusion which would make the policyholder responsible for all costs related to their medical care. Insurance companies have the right to know the genetic makeup of their policyholder and are able to raise their rates accordingly. With my proposal, everyone would be insured regardless of preexisting condition status. Furthermore, the bitter disputes over preexisting conditions would reach an end for health care consumers.

Under my proposed solution, Americans would be healthier overall. Preventive care would be an option for all people. Before preventative care was available, "Women with breast cancer were more likely to have the disease diagnosed in the later stages, when it's less treatable" (Rovner). If all people have health care coverage, they would be able to find out about a potential illness in the early stages when it could be treated effectively, which would significantly decrease the cost of treatment, and the number of patients in hospitals and emergency rooms would decline. Nader writes that with preventive care, "You may be able to spot a serious disease at an early stage, thereby increasing your chances of effective treatment and cure." Also, "It is far less expensive to treat a disease when it's a molehill rather than a mountain"

(161). People may never know they have a serious disease or illness, but if they had insurance under my proposed plan, they would be entitled to preventive care.

A person may have the perception that if another individual doesn't obtain health insurance coverage, he or she is either poor, doesn't have a job, or maybe just doesn't want to spend the "just in case" money. The perception one person has about another person who doesn't obtain health insurance coverage is often a misconception. "Most of the uninsured are not poor, nor are they unemployed. That's because many of the very poorest Americans, along with those who cannot work because of disability, are covered by Medicaid" and "Nearly two-thirds of the uninsured said they did not have coverage because they could not afford it" (Rovner 203).

There are a number of additional solutions that may help our current health care crises: doctors not having contracts with HMO's, poverty guidelines being changed as they currently stand, smaller businesses offering health insurance to their employees, and insurance companies providing group plan rates for the self-employed. Doctors are paid to have contracts with HMO's and independent groups that coordinate care for a large number of HMO patients for a fixed, per-member fee. To be eligible for Medicaid, a family of three living in Iowa must make less than \$13,665 a year. Most families earning less than \$13,665 a year would have a hard

time making ends meet, and having money left over for health insurance would be impossible. The guidelines in Iowa only help the poor; therefore the self-employed along with students, children and single parents are left with no affordable health insurance coverage. Many Americans don't realize the contributions the self-employed make to our community. The self-employed have to pay the full amount of their premium, but if a person works for a company, the employer pays a portion of his or her premium. The President's Health Security Plan Book writes, "Prompted by ever-rising costs, employers of all sizes have reduced health coverage benefits, raised deductibles, limited coverage and switched to hiring more part-time and contract workers in part to avoid paying health benefits. Sometimes without realizing it, workers sacrifice wage increases for health benefits, making a tradeoff between what they deserve and what they need. What many Americans fear most about losing their job is losing their health insurance (5).

The problems of our health care system are endless: "American health care is choked by paperwork and strangled by bureaucracy. Administrative costs are higher in the American health care system than any other country, and rising rapidly" (The President's 7). Under my proposed plan, the legislature will insure that all Americans, no matter their income, place of employment, and preexisting health conditions, all people would have health insurance coverage.

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# *A Legal Remedy to the Problem of Graffiti*

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by Matthew Kunert

An argumentative essay.

The issue of graffiti as a malicious form of vandalism to personal or public property is being dealt with all across the U.S.A., from Los Angeles and San Francisco to New York and Washington D.C., and has inspired specific penal codes in order to curb the epidemic. In San Francisco for example, graffiti is considered a felony if the damage incurred exceeds \$400 (San Francisco 2); keeping in mind that a piece of graffiti is usually very large, and considering the cost of paint and labor to replace a graffiti damaged wall, felonies are not uncommon.

This is a problem as it can seriously damage the credibility of many up and coming artists who, with multiple convictions, may be denied access to art institutions or not respected in more credible art circles. The presence of graffiti in one's neighborhood can be quite serious, since some (by no means all), can be a sign of gang behavior in the area ("Graffiti" 2). This alone would be enough to prompt one to take action against all forms of graffiti and even condemn graffiti, as a whole, a crime. This is a narrow-minded look at a growing subculture of individuals whose sole purpose is to create graffiti, a phenomenon which can be better understood by looking at some of the possible causes.

While graffiti which is present in areas dominated by gang activity, is undoubtedly gang affiliated, this does not explain its presence in non-gang affiliated neighborhoods

and communities, and will serve as the focus of this essay.

Graffiti "art" as an underground culture and movement, which has literally exploded across the landscape, can be easily witnessed by examining a row of boxcars while traveling on the highway. An important question arises as a result: if graffiti is gang related, what's the purpose of spray painting train boxcars, which aren't affiliated with any neighborhood or turf? This question can be easily answered by looking at the so-called "culprits."

Those who create graffiti and are not affiliated with any gang refer to themselves as "writers." According to veteran "writers" at [artcrimes.org](http://artcrimes.org) (graffiti oriented Web site), the term came about since all graffiti is basically about words and writing words on surfaces, and the fact that the term "painter" is far too common (Farrell 2). When taking a look at these "writers," it is important to understand the diversity amongst these modern day artisans, or as one "writer" put it:

All kinds of people are doing it. It's always been that way. There is no race that does it more than another, no age group can really be credited with graf[fiti], and no socio-economic group is responsible, either. Graffiti is one of the few movements that I have been involved in that includes people from all backgrounds, with one goal in mind...Getting Up [term for "getting up" on a wall or spray painting it]. (Farrell 2)

The motivation possessed by many of

these "writers" is to explore new avenues of art, as art has always sought to question and transcend traditional mores and values associated with popular culture. They do not seek recognition, except that which comes within their own communities, but rather, wish to inspire awe and beauty in otherwise bleak and run-down areas.

Consequences of failing to solve this epidemic could result in a number of circumstances. Among these would be the arrest and conviction of many young artists, the expansion of graffiti "turf" into more contemporary and upscale neighborhoods, and the potential future destruction to private and public property.

In order to prevent further damage and arrests, the solution proposed is one that has already been practiced to a limited extent and with much success. It involves the implementation of "legal walls," which, when placed in the community, will provide a legal opportunity for these "writers" and artists to display their talent.

These "legal walls" can be erected in spaces already present in the community such as parks or plazas. The city of Des Moines already has Nolen Plaza, which publicly exhibits pieces of art, such as the Umbrella. Perhaps the walls behind the fountains could be deemed legal for graffiti writers to display their artistic abilities. Only these "legal walls" would be ever changing, since "writers" would constantly be re-using the space by "refreshing" the walls with new projects, which would include the large and intricate murals graffiti artists are known for.

Many may object to this proposal by saying that it would only serve to publicly embrace and endorse vandalism in its most violent form (the intentional destruction of

private property), but a clear distinction needs to be made. As opposed to words scribbled on a wall in a juvenile fashion, with no aesthetic beauty whatsoever, images produced by graffiti artists tend to draw the eye to the piece, not push it away, as the term "vandalism" would insist. If anyone has ever witnessed the completed work of an experienced "writer," one would be hard pressed to find any other word than "art" to describe it.

A correlation can also be made between the implementation of skate parks around the country (in order to give skateboarders a place to practice their sport away from the complaints of the community), and the proposed solution to the problem of graffiti. One of the major complaints voiced in communities about skateboarding was the damage done to property as a result of "skaters" using their business or home as a place to practice their sport. Many laws came about as a result but the most effective measure by far was the implementation of skate parks. This gave skateboarders a friendly place to congregate and practice in a legal environment. Similarly, this will be the purpose of "legal walls:" to give "writers" a safe and legal place to practice their artistic skills and abilities.

Other solutions such as the implementation of new laws to combat graffiti or establishing neighborhood volunteer groups combat "writers" by taking pictures of graffiti before removing it and then supplying any information to the police. These measures only serve to put more people in jail and pose no real solution to the prevention of graffiti in their neighborhoods besides intimidation. Do any more people need to be arrested, fined, or possibly put into jail for creating what so many so plainly see as art? This persecution is the true crime.



After fully considering the problem and every possible solution, “legal walls” seem to be the most logical solution. Why deem illegal one of the most popular and influential products of American culture in recent history? Since many “writers” show no signs of stopping, “legal walls” would provide a safe and legal environment in which they can create and display their work. Where else would you be able to frequently witness the total creation of large-scale works of art from the beginning of a project to its completion? Only with a handful of other artists would this be possible and usually only on specific, pre-arranged occasions. However, graffiti “writers” would constantly be creating, giving anyone the opportunity to witness their work at times convenient for the viewer, not the creators.



Figure 2. Photograph of artist (Bed a.k.a. wow123) with his work.

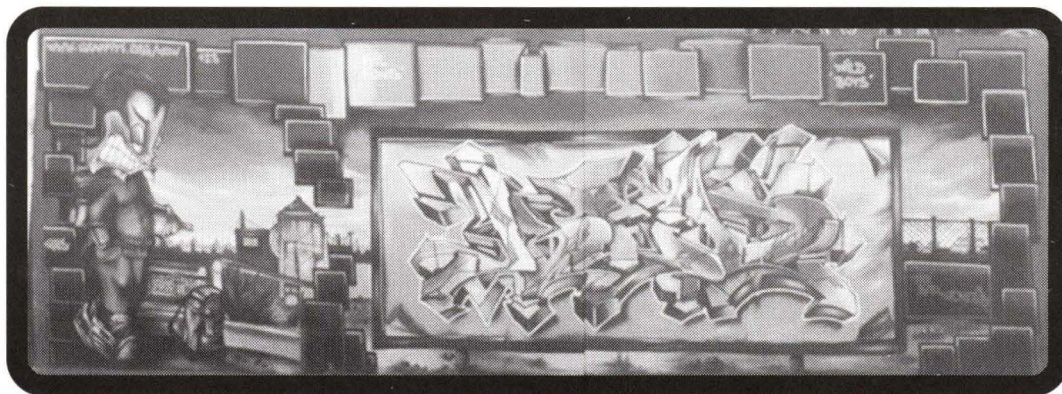


Figure 1. Example of a large mural piece common in graffiti art. Artist's name is Bed a.k.a. wow123.

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# Seven Days of May

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by Mihneta Lisinovic

An essay about personality, character, values, politics, or religion (PCVPR), using four of those five elements in the text without mentioning the words.

How many wars have devastated our country? Balkan is the territory where many countries left their scars: Turkey, old Austria-Hungary, World War I, and World War II. Too many, I think. But that was the past. Thinking about war, I can say that it is the most horrible thing that can happen to one country and to their people. I had never believed that a war would happen in my lifetime and to my country.

I was in disbelief when the war was happening in Slovenia, not in my country. I did not believe when the war was happening in Croatia, not in my country. I did not believe when the war was happening thirty-five kilometers away in the city of Derventa, not in my town, Kotorako. But when the bomb exploded two kilometers away from my house, I started to believe that the most horrible thing that could happen was already happening. It was the first of May 1992 at 4:05 p.m.

After that, all was delirium—a delirium that I would not want to have anyone ever experience. The first day, Serbians wanted only to warn us, so they sent to us only about thirty bombs. But they also cut electricity, water, and the telephone. They already surrounded our town, so it was impossible for us to leave. We were all confused, afraid, and unprepared for what was happening. We stopped thinking about usual things; we were thinking only how we would hide from

the bombs, and we hoped that the Serbians would not come into the town.

The next days were spent in my father-in-law's cellar. The cellar was made for food storage. It was a room two meters by six meters. The room did not have any windows, and that was its advantage in this situation. The cellar had only a small door, so we had to bend if we wanted to enter. We had removed all that was inside the cellar before and brought in two mattresses and blankets. This room was not big enough to fit seventeen people. The air was stale, moldy, and hard to breathe. But during the night no one wanted to go outside. We all stuck together and waited.

This night was a never-ending nightmare. In this nightmare, I do not want to eat, or drink—all I do is just listen. I listen to hear where the bombs are now landing. During the day, they did not send as many bombs as during the night.

My brother-in-law made the comment, "We are not on Serbian schedule right now."

"Who is?" I asked.

"They are coming from the city, Dobo, so the first on their schedule is the town, Grapska."

The words, "My best friend, Alma, lives there," stopped like a stone in my mouth, not allowing me to breathe. "What will happen with Alma and us, too?" I thought, looking at

with Alma and us, too?" I thought, looking at my son.

Grapska was about eight kilometers away from my town. Between us was the river, Bosna. The third day we heard, at first, many detonations from Grapska. That lasted for about three hours and ended. Many of us were looking over the river to see what was going on, but it was impossible to see. After some time, we saw smoke and fire in many places in Grapska. We were afraid to think what was going on over there. The fire and smoke lasted until after midnight. In the cellar that night, nobody, even one child, spoke one word. We all prayed, begged for the people over there and for ourselves.

The next morning, we had heard that one woman and one sixteen-year-old boy had escaped over the river to our town. They were talking about what was happening over there, and it was hard to believe: women raped, children slaughtered in front of their parents, and, after that, parents were killed, people who were alive and closed in cellars had been burned, and many, many other things.

One thing that most depressed me was that the people who were doing such things were not only people from Serbia, but people from our neighborhood—people we had been living near all these years. That was hard to believe, that people with whom we went to school, worked with together were responsible for such awful things. Some people were doing this because of politics, some because of religion, some because they were scared if they did not go along, they would be killed, and some had long-time hatred for us Moslems and did not like to have us in their neighborhood.

We were all afraid to die. We were all looking at each other for an answer, but no one was giving an answer to us. Our town of four thousand people was surrounded, and we waited for our destiny. This was the never-ending agony.

In the next two days, we saw two more towns ending like Grapska. Now, between the Serbians and us was only one little village. We were all asking the questions: "What

now?" and "Are we going to sit and wait for our destiny?"

It was the night of May 6, 1992, when we heard the people in the city hall had decided that we had to try to escape. They told us, that in the early morning, mothers with children, old women, and old men should take the chance to escape from the town. It should be in early morning when the Serbians were sleeping, so they would not see our movement.

The morning of May 7th, we were very quiet. We knew that all of us couldn't go because we all could not fit into the vehicles. It was uncertain what would happen with those who would go and with those who would stay.

I was the last one who stepped into the truck. My husband was looking at me, and for the first time, I saw tears in his eyes. The convoy started moving. My husband was trying to keep abreast with us, but when that was impossible any more, he said to me, "Take care of Sanel."

"I will," I said, but he could not hear my silent words.

The dirt road was very bad, so the convoy was moving very slowly toward the city of Bosanski Brod. Usually Bosanski Brod was about two hours driving, but this time, we were driving for about six hours. That was because we were driving around to avoid Serbian checkpoints.

When the truck stopped, someone told us we were in Bosanski Brod, and that we could step outside. My next-door neighbor, Amira, stepped out first, and after her, my son, then me. As soon as my foot touched the ground, I heard the siren. Somebody told us there was an air attack, and that we should move fast. The trucks were already gone, and only Amira, my son, and I were standing there. Would this ever have an end?

One lady called to us to go into her home and to hide until the alarm ended. So we went. She was trying to ask some questions like, "Who you are?" and "Where are you coming from?" But we could not talk. We were silent. The words did not come from our

lips. She gave us something to eat and drink.

After some time, the lady brought us to the other people from our town. It was already 4:00 in the afternoon. Some people in charge told us that we were not safe if we stayed there, so we should go to Croatia. They told us that we could not go over the bridge, and that we should use a rubber boat. They had few rubber boats, and we were too many, so it took about four hours for all of us to cross over. After we all got over, they distributed us to the school gym. They gave us

blankets and something to eat. Also, they told us that we could stay there for a night, and that tomorrow we should move toward Slovenia because they could not take any more refugees; they were already full.

We were like pawns in a chess game, doing what we were told to do, without words, silent. We would not know where we would go tomorrow, but we were safe.

We all were left wondering what would happen with our husbands, sons, fathers, friends, and the others who did not come with us.



# *An Alternative to Standardized Testing*

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by Jenna Monthei

A resource paper using APA documentation style.

Standardized testing has been a topic of discussion for some time now. Many people feel that standardized tests are quite useful and give the public, as well as school officials, the information that is needed in order to make informed decisions on the future of the students. However, at the other end of the spectrum, there are those who say that these tests do not give valid or accurate information as to what a student knows. While standardized tests may be useful to compare students to students, portfolios are a better way to assess students and should be used instead of standardized tests to make important educational decisions.

There are many well-known standardized tests such as the Stanford 9, Metropolitan Achievement Test, and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. They are called "standardized" because they are administered in the same way with the same directions to all children taking them. The majority of these tests are in a multiple choice format.

There are advocates who say standardized testing is the only way to go. They also say standardized tests are the only tests available to tell exactly how a student measures up, both in comparison to other students in the school and to other students in other schools around the state and country (Bennett, Cribb, Finn, 1999). The scores are recurrently used to tell the quality of the school and to let teachers know what skills

need to be worked on for the overall class of students that were tested. What the public doesn't know, however, is that a teacher's salary is frequently based on how well his or her students do on these high-stakes tests. These high-stakes tests may cause teachers to stoop to cheating or altering answer sheets before sending them off to be scored (Kohn, 2000, p. 28). Others may merely coach their students while they are taking the tests (Kohn, 2000, p. 27). Many teachers have gone to strictly teaching just for these tests (Kohn, 2000, p. 29). They teach the formulas and the basic skills needed to do well on these tests. But do they teach the students any life skills, skills that are going to benefit them in the future? Other teachers teach for the right answer, not the ability to apply the information. According to Levine, Lowe, Peterson, and Tenorio,

Standardized tests also ignore the skills and abilities needed to function in a complex, pluralistic society – such as the ability to work collectively in various social and cultural contexts, to adjust to change, to understand the perspectives of others, to persevere, to motivate, to solve problems in a real-life context, to lead, to value moral integrity and social commitment (Levine, Lowe, Peterson, Tenorio, 1995, p. 177).

Teachers also look for the right answer, not the actual mental capability to apply what information they have been teaching. This type of behavior shows that some teachers are teaching for test scores, not life lessons.

Standardized tests possess clear and straight questions with clear and straight answers, having no real correlation or resemblance to problems those students will face in the real world. It appears that standardized tests only validate that a student is able to memorize a few formulas or a series of procedures, without really grasping the understanding of what they are doing. Better yet, maybe the student never memorized the formulas at all; they got lucky and picked the correct answer by chance.

Multiple choice tests are possibly the worst type of a test that could be administered (Kohn, 2000, p. 17). With a test that is strictly multiple choice, it is unclear whether the student really knows the information or if the student is just a good guesser. Perhaps the student just flat out doesn't care and is just making a pretty picture out of the dots on the answer sheet. Yet another problem may be that the student merely does not understand how the question is phrased.

As seen in many math classes, there are two kinds of students: the first are those who know the formulas, can complete the whole process and generate a correct answer, but who have no idea what the answer tells them or how to apply it. The second type of student is the one who can apply the information and who has the knowledge of how and why this process is performed, but makes some small, mathematical mistake and produces a wrong answer. The second type of student is then often labeled by the teacher or thought of differently. A superintendent in Florida observed that "when a low performing child walks into a classroom, instead of being seen as a challenge, or an opportunity for improvement, for the first time since I've been in education, teachers are seeing [him or her] as a liability. Needless to say, if educators resent children who are likely, for one reason or another, to perform poorly, they cannot establish the nurturing relationship with those children that will enable then children to trust them (Kohn, 2000, p. 28)

This type of behavior is not helpful to the students' self-esteem and is certainly not

going to help them perform better on any type of standardized test. Another factor in the scores is motivation (Cookson & Halberstam, 1998). The students know that these tests aren't really doing anything for them, personally. They are not getting them into a better school, and no one is handing out cash rewards to the top ten percent. Furthermore, no amount of extrinsic motivation can influence students to really try if those students don't want to.

Other problems that children face when taking tests are those things that are programmed into their personality. Each person has a different style of learning. Some may be visual learners or auditory learners, while others may be tactile or kinesthetic learners. Visual learners prefer to see and use visual cues to recall what they need to know. Auditory learners do best when they hear information they need to understand. Tactile learners prefer to touch, handle and manipulate things in order to better understand, and kinesthetic learners need concrete, hands-on experience (Cookson & Halberstam, 1998, p. 15-21.)

Not only do the students face the problems of how they learn, but they also have to deal with psychological factors. Some students are just bad test takers, while others experience test-anxiety. This nervousness "can significantly undermine the performance" (Cookson & Halbertam, 1998, p. 19).

"Clearly, standardized tests neither measure excellence nor foster it in our schools (Levine, Lowe, Peterson, Tenorio, 1995). These tests are not telling anything about the real intelligence of a student, then why subject them to these tests? If these tests have proven that they don't tell what children know and don't know, then educational decisions should not be made by looking at these standardized test scores. The fact is that life changing decisions should not be based off of these tests.

Portfolio assessment is a much more favorable source for evaluating a student's placement. A portfolio is "a systematic and organized collection of evidence used by the



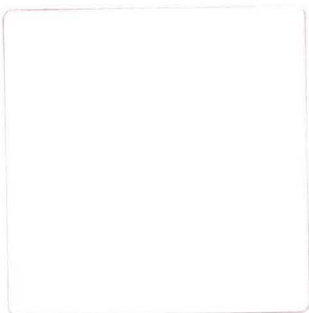
teacher and student to monitor growth of the student's knowledge, skills, and attitudes in a specific area" (Portfolio assessment, p1). Portfolios capitalize on students' natural tendency to save work and become an effective way to get them to take a second look and think about how they can improve future work (Kupper-Herr, p1).

Teachers and administrators alike have learned that portfolios can provide valuable support for quality teaching and improved learning in many ways (Office-administrative, 1993, p. 1). Those who have observed how traditional multiple-choice tests narrow curriculum are determined not to tolerate continued dominance of multiple choice items in any area that would influence curriculum and instruction (Office-administrative, 1993, p. 2). Many educators find themselves willing to try portfolios as a way to support reform of both curriculum and assessment (Office-administrative, 1993, p. 2).

When portfolios are in use, they provide an opportunity to compare work with other works by the same student, focusing in on individual progress and growth (Office-administrative, 1993, p. 2). Many teachers,

educators, and researchers believe that portfolio assessments are more effective than "old style" tests for measuring academic skills and informing instructional decisions. "Portfolios are valued as an assessment tool because, as representations of classroom-based performance, they can be fully integrated into the curriculum. And unlike separate tests, they supplement rather than take time away from instruction" (Office-classroom, 1993, p. 1).

All portfolios—across these diverse curricular settings, student populations and administrative contexts—involve students in their own education so that they take charge of their personal collection of work, reflect on what makes some work better than others, and use this information to make improvements in future works (Office-classroom, 1993, p. 3). Portfolios can also serve as a vehicle for enhancing student awareness of strategies for thinking about and producing work, both inside and beyond the classroom (Office-classroom, 1993, p. 3). It is for these reasons and many others that portfolios should be instituted in the classroom, replacing the "old style" of standardized testing, when it comes to evaluating and assessing students.



Standardized tests have been discussed in many classrooms and homes. There are opposing sides to every story. Some feel that standardized tests are necessary; some feel that there has to be a better way out there to test students' intelligence. Standardized tests may be useful to tell where the students are compared to each other, but these tests should not be used to make important decisions. If the situation ever arises that "the school wants to test your child [...] be extremely careful in how these test results are interpreted and what course of action the school suggests" (Bennett, Cribb, Finn, 1999). It is important for parents to ask the decision makers to take a close look at works that the student has produced over a period of time before accepting their final decision.

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# Simmer It Down Now!

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by Adam Pirillo

An expository essay explaining how to do something.

As you enter your home late in the evening, absolutely starving, the fresh aroma hits you in your face. That's right! Before you left for work in the morning you put some potato soup in the crock pot. Now that you are tired from the long day, all you have to do is pour some soup in a bowl, sit down, and eat it. The last thing anyone wants to do after a day of work is to come home and cook dinner. With a crock pot you can prepare a meal in the morning and let it slow cook all day long, then all you need to do is enjoy it when you get home.

A crock pot is a great cooking tool that very few people use today. Cooking with a crock pot is very simple. The low temperature of the crock pot cooks food at a slower rate. Cooking slower may not sound like it would be a beneficial thing but it really is. One, food will have more flavor, and meat will be more tender. Two, it cooks at such a low temperature that it is very hard to burn your meal. Once the main ingredients are in the pot, just walk away and let it cook for the next 5-8 hours. The possibilities of food you can cook are endless, but we will be learning how to make Nordic Potato Soup with Ham, a recipe found in the Sunset Crockery Cook Book. These instructions also contain the questions and comments my roommate Danny had when we made this recipe last week. Learn from him. This recipe is simple.

First, you will of course need to have a crock pot. Then start with the ingredients needed for the soup: three medium-size thin-skinned potatoes (about 1.5 lbs. Total), one smoked ham hock (about 1 lb.), dry dill weed, grated lemon peel, ground white pepper, chicken broth, cornstarch, and whipping cream. You can also use one large onion in this recipe, but since this writer hates onions I have omitted them.

Peel and dice the potatoes.

"Do you need to cut the potatoes all the same size," asked Danny when we made the recipe last week.

I explained to Danny, "Yes, you want to try and dice the potatoes all at the same size, about one inch cubed, so that way they will all cook within the same amount of time. If you have different sizes then when you're ready to eat you might have some slightly uncooked potatoes."

Put all of the potatoes in the crock pot, throw these ingredients in as well; the whole ham hock, 1 tbsp dry dill weed, 2 tsp grated lemon peel, ? tsp white pepper, and 2.5 cups chicken broth. Believe it or not, after you do that you just need to place the lid on and cook it at the lower setting. Crock pots typically have two settings low and high. Now all you need to do is let it cook until the potatoes and ham are very tender when pierced. It will take about 5-8 hours, depending on which temperature setting, high or low, you use.

I stressed to Danny, "Whatever you do, please do not lift the lid off the crock pot several of times. I know you might be worried it will burn, but the more you lift off the lid the longer it will take to cook."

He responded, "Why will it take longer?"

Because it cooks at such a low temperature you lose a lot of heat by removing the lid. You can open it to stir, maybe twice in the 5-8 hours," I explained to him.

When the potatoes and ham are tender enough, lift the ham hock out of the pot, and set it to the side until cool enough to handle. While you are waiting for the ham to cool, take out about one cup of the potatoes with a little bit of the broth, and puree it in a blender or food processor, then pour it back into the crock pot. Now, in a small bowl, mix 1 tbsp cornstarch and 1/2 cup of whipping cream; then blend that mixture into the crock pot, and increase the heat to high. By this time the ham hock should be cool enough to handle. You can prepare the ham by tearing or dicing it into bite size pieces. While you are doing

this trim the fat and discard the done. Once you are done with cutting the ham up, stir it into the soup.

Danny asked, "How do you cut the ham?"

"I like to tear the ham because it gives it more of a homemade look. But dicing the ham with a knife is less sloppy. It is up to you. It does not change the taste either way."

As soon as you put all of the ham back into the pot, cover it back up and let it cook on high for twenty minutes, stirring two to three times. This recipe will make about five to six servings, so once the twenty minutes is up all you need to do is serve and enjoy.

It is typically best to prepare this in the morning and let it cook during the day. While it cooks you can go to work, school, or just run some errands. If you do not have enough time in the morning, prepare the first stage of ingredients, except for the ham and chicken broth, the night before. In the morning, throw in the ham and chicken broth and turn it on. Either way, by the time you get home – you will be thrilled to have dinner already cooked.

# *Merry Christmas to America's Public School Children*

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by Vivian Schwab

An argumentative essay.

The Bill of Rights says that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof" (Berman). Most Americans will recognize this as part of the First Amendment of the United States Constitution, which entitles Americans to freedom of religion. Traditionally, it was understood that this would prohibit an official government church. This principle was important to the country's forefathers since they had left Europe to escape mandated worship in the official government sponsored churches. However, public confusion about this amendment began in 1962 with the Supreme Court decision banning state-sponsored school prayer (Riley). Educators assumed that if prayer was banned from school, then any religious reference should also be banned. In many public schools today, the First Amendment is now being interpreted as freedom from religion, specifically Christianity. This assumption is false. Government documentation, court cases, and even the opinion of the American Civil Liberty Union (ACLU) prove that it is both legal and appropriate that schools are allowed to discuss religion and religious holidays as part of America's history and culture.

The confusion about the interpretation of this amendment has become evident, when it has become common for school principals to send teachers a memo in December forbidding them to use the word "Christmas" or

sing Christmas carols in their classrooms (Buehrer). Mary Hauser, a school librarian in Southern California said, "Just as December started, the principal put in his weekly bulletin that, 'we're approaching Christmas and you are reminded that you are not allowed to have any religious songs or crafts or activities revolving around Christmas because this would offend some people'" (Buehrer). Ignorance or misinformation is keeping many administrators and teachers from even using the word "Christmas" (Buehrer). They fear that a student who is offended may have legal grounds to take either them personally or the school district to court.

Most teachers do not understand that the government allows them to teach about Christianity in the classroom. When teaching about other countries and cultures, religion is often included in that study. Students learn to associate Hinduism with India, Buddhism with China, Islam with Iraq, and Judaism with Israel. It is just as appropriate to learn that Christianity is a part of American culture and history (Buehrer). Teachers mistakenly assume that talking about Christianity or Christian holidays is illegal and prohibited in public schools.

Sensing this confusion in 1995, President Bill Clinton directed Richard W. Riley, Secretary of Education, to consult the Attorney General in order to provide a written statement to schools addressing the extent to which religious activity was legal

and appropriate. "Guidelines for Religious Expression in Public Schools" is the result of that directive by the President. In these guidelines, Riley makes it clear that schools may teach about religion and religious holidays as long as they are not encouraging or soliciting religious activity (Riley). Riley writes, "Public schools may not provide religious instruction, but they may teach about religion, including the Bible or other scripture: the history of religion, comparative religion, the Bible (or other scripture)-as-literature, and the role of religion in the history of the United States and other countries all are permissible public school subjects." He continues, "Similarly, it is permissible to consider religious influences on art, music, literature, and social studies. Although public schools may teach about religious holidays, including their religious aspects, and may celebrate the secular aspects of holidays, schools may not observe holidays as religious events or promote such observance by student" (Guidelines). Riley sent a letter and the complete guidelines to every school superintendent in order to eliminate confusion. Educators learned that although the First Amendment prohibits the practice of religion in public schools, it is appropriate to teach about religion's influence on the culture which includes religious holidays (Riley).

The ACLU staunchly supports each individual's right to religious freedom and they frequently bring cases before school boards or lower courts when individuals feel that religion is being promoted within schools

(Ask Sybil Liberty). But even the ACLU agrees that teaching about religion is not the same as promoting it. The American Civil Liberty publication "Ask Sybil Liberty About Your Right to Religious Freedom" says the First Amendment "means that while they can teach about the influences of religion in history, literature and philosophy – they can't promote religious beliefs or practices as part of the curriculum" (Ask Sybil Liberty). In *Florey vs. Sioux Falls*, the federal court ruled that "music, art, literature and drama having religious themes or basis are permitted as part of the curriculum for school-sponsored activities and programs if presented in a prudent and objective manner and as a traditional part of the cultural and religious heritage of the particular holiday" (Buehrer).

With these statement from both the ACLU and *Florey vs. Sioux Fall* there should be no doubt among teachers and administrators that teaching about religion and religious holidays is legal.

It is therefore, the lack of information or misinformation has led both educators and the general public to believe that celebrating Christmas and its history is illegal. "The Guideline for Religious Expression in Pubic Schools," *Florey vs. Sioux Falls*, and even the ACLU's pamphlet make it clear that teachers can discuss religion and religious holidays as part of America's history and culture. With these clear guidelines, teachers should not be afraid to sing Christmas carols or even read the biblical account of Christ's birth. Merry Christmas to America's students!



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## *Race, Culture, and Origin: Relevancy in Intercountry Adoptions*

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by Tammy Wilson

An argumentative essay using research as support.

Intercountry adoption is an issue that has been debated since the end of World War II (Simon and Altstein 5). According to "The Adoption Forum," "a permanent, loving family is every child's birthright, yet many children worldwide are denied this basic right. Intercountry adoption offers a stable, loving family to children who otherwise would not have one" (1). Children in countries all over the world, some in orphanages and others living in unstable families, are in need of a family. These children deal with life-threatening problems every day, which include poverty, domestic violence, poor mental and/or physical health, and parents who abuse drugs and/or alcohol. Not enough parents are willing to or capable of adopting these children, and not enough organizations are capable of helping support and provide for the children in their countries of origin. "The Adoption Forum" claims "[t]here is persistent criticism of intercountry adopters—for 'exploiting' third world babies; for allegedly tearing them from their culture; for supposedly exposing them to racism" (1). Intercountry adoption is a way to get children into homes where the children will have a loving family environment, regardless of culture, race, or the country of origin.

One argument opposing intercountry adoptions is that children are deprived of their culture when put into families that have different cultural beliefs or backgrounds.

Also, it is said that the children stand a great chance of an irreparable loss without cultural influence, including the possibility of great mental harm (Freundlich 98). "The Adoption Forum" argues the opposition and claims that "[t]here is little culture to be gained from sifting through a rubbish dump to survive, without school, without family, without hope—suffering from malnutrition, sickness, and total exclusion" (1). Children adopted from other cultures actually appear to deal with the identity issues faced by all adopted children better than most other adopted children. Researchers believe children from other countries deal with adoption issues better and sooner, usually before their teen years because the children cannot pretend to be like everyone else. Many of the children adopted from various cultures are often able to overcome the cultural gap ("Adopt" 1). Also, it has been argued that culture does not have near the effect on the child as what some opposed to intercountry adoption claim. As quoted in Adoption and Ethics: The Role of Race, Culture, and National Origin in Adoption:

Hayes, for example, minimizes the impact of racial and cultural differences between parents and children and contends that adoptive parents' promotion of their children's racial and cultural identification is unnecessary for positive psychological adjustment. Bartholet appears to agree with this assessment, drawing from the research a conclusion that there is no evidence that the

absence of a satisfactory ethic and cultural identity presents psychological harm to the international adoptee. (99)

Parents adopting children from different cultural backgrounds are now made aware of the importance of the children knowing their roots. With our society being so mixed, it is easy for families in large cities to get involved in many cultural groupings ("The Adoption Forum" 2).

Another issue often brought up in intercountry adoption is that the children are a different race than those adopting them. One of the arguments used by those who claim race is an important factor in adoption is that the community from which that child was born, the race to which that child belongs, is being deprived of valuable future resources: its children. Another claim made is that it is impossible for white families to raise children of other races in an atmosphere that would allow for the children to obtain an identity related to their race rather than to the race of their adoptive parents (Simon and Altstein 37). McRoy and Zurcher, Jr. disagree, claiming that "[t]he child learns and picks up cues for behaving from his or her parents or other significant persons in the environment. If the parents have normal frequent contact with blacks and if the child in turn has similar experiences, he or she is likely to develop positive racial self-feelings" (134).

Also, those opposing intercountry adoption claim that the children are being exposed to racism. What those making that argument do not add is that racism is something the children would more than likely have to face at some time in their lives regardless. Racist people exist everywhere, so whether or not children are adopted from a different country will not determine if they will ever be exposed to racism. Also, there are ways to help children deal with racism. All they need is help and support from family and friends to deal with the racism, which will hopefully someday help to eliminate the barriers of prejudice. Children adopted interracially have a tendency to handle the transition as well as, or even better than, most other adopted chil-

dren. Researchers assume the transition difference to be because the children adopted from a different race cannot act like the people around them. The children have to deal with their race, so typically adjustment to adoption can be accomplished at younger ages for children adopted from different races than for those children who were not ("Adopt" 1).

The children's country of origin is another factor that is argued in intercountry adoptions. The people who make this claim believe that the children should be raised in their country of origin. This argument is made because some people feel that those adopting the children are trying to steal their resources. However, Bartholet argues:

It seems clear that the debate over international adoption has little to do with genuine concerns over risks to children. Children are being sacrificed to notions of group pride and honor. . . .[sic] Sending countries can talk of their homeless children as 'precious resources' but it is clear that the last thing these countries actually need is more children to care for. (qtd. in Freundlich 95)

Many of the children who could be adopted by parents from foreign countries would live lives of extreme poverty in dysfunctional families, in institutions, or even abandoned on the street. Some claim that the adopters are exploiting third world babies, but is providing children with an education, a family, and love really considered to be exploitation? ("The Adoption Forum" 1) Bartholet states:

There can be little doubt that overwhelming numbers of children in the poor countries of the world are living and dying in conditions which involve extreme degrees of deprivation, neglect, exploitation, and abuse. These are real problems of the children of the world. International adoption should be seen as an opportunity to solve some of these problems for some children. (qtd. in Freundlich 94-95)

There is no logical reason to deny children a family. Intercountry adoption issues such as culture, race, and country of origin should not be a prime consideration when deciding whether children can be placed with families. These children deserve to have a loving family and grow up under reasonable conditions. Children can be raised regardless of any of those situations or differences and have perfectly normal lives, if not better than the lives they would have back in their own countries. Regardless of the adoptive parents' cultures, races, or countries from where they plan to adopt the children, the children have the right to grow up in a family environment, an atmosphere of love, happiness, safety, and understanding.

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