

ACT I, Scene II

The Introductory Reflective Essay

[The UGA Main Library, Tuesday afternoon, HANSINI and HER THOUGHTS]

HANSINI

High school took a toll on me as I drifted through crowds I could never quite fit into. I was plagued by the toils of a cultural clash between Sri Lankan culture and American culture and all the expectations of the two. I pressured myself immensely to give into the figure of the model minority—I did my work on time, studied for hours, wrote notes in pretty colors until my wrists were medically diagnosed with ganglion cysts. I was essentially a shell of who I am now academically. I stuck strictly to what was expected of me and I never truly gave myself the chance to discover my own voice beyond the confines of College Board's AP Lang/Lit rubrics. Throughout this semester of English 1102 in the creaky building of Park Hall, I destroyed the chains of high school expectations and I truly developed as a writer beyond rubrics. I learned how to grow beyond the three-prong thesis and five paragraph essays, and I learned how to truly incorporate my voice into my writing.

Before being thrown into the world of writing papers for college, high school papers kept me stuck to College Board rubrics. With full points on nearly every paper I wrote, I never pushed myself beyond learning how to write more than what was expected of me. My time in English 1102 pushed those boundaries and I truly learned how to write essays effectively. In my First Essay, I struggled a lot with growing beyond the three-prong thesis. I was unsure with where to start if I wasn't writing an AP-style essay. In my original idea, I wanted to start off with the three-prong thesis and work from there to develop the format of my essay. I found myself still stuck in the AP-style writing so I wrote three points down, but I worked with it to develop a

more concise and effective thesis. I jotted down the idea for my thesis the way I would usually write it saying “This passage impacts the story through point one, point two, and point three.” I used this as a start to recognize what the bigger idea of my essay is and use that for my thesis instead to be more concise and effective. My final thesis for the first essay goes, “This particular passage impacts the story by humanizing what is perceived to be the cruel inaction of the people of Omelas regarding the suffering of the child, making the audience relate and reflect on their own human experience of sacrifice for the greater good.” I completely avoid the three-prong thesis because of the encouragement to grow past such high school expectations, which is already a start for the development of the format of my essay and my mindset of growing out of what high school wanted out of me.

Before this class, I would strictly write three points and call it a day for my thesis. I would have my introduction, three body paragraphs, and my conclusion, and that would be it. For my first essay I did end up still writing the five-paragraph style, unsure of how exactly I could split up my essay into more than three body paragraphs. By the third essay, titled “Reflections with Tommy,” however, this would change drastically. I grew out of needing the three-point thesis as the basis of the structure for my essay, but I learned how to use it as a tool to guide how I would structure my essay beyond three body paragraphs.

For my original draft, I developed a chart focusing on the six points of my essay, which all started with the characteristics Tommy from “Never Let Me Go” shares with me. I then developed a basic thesis for my second draft going “Tommy’s character from “Never Let Me Go” resonates with me a great deal through his experiences of feeling outcasted, being sentimental, and wanting to be validated and accepted.” This helped me structure my essay beyond five paragraphs and I started recognizing where I needed to split my essay into more than

three body paragraphs. I would write a paragraph for Tommy and then a paragraph for reflecting on myself, effectively drifting away from having large, chunky body paragraphs that try to condense all the information into just three paragraphs.

As I started drifting away from the AP-style expectations and the confines of high school, I developed a greater sense of creative freedom when it came to organizing my essays and truly conveying what I want to convey. In high school, I would stick to what the teacher wanted to hear, stifling my own creativity and voice in the process of pleasing expectations. I was never asked to go beyond what they wanted to hear from me, and I was never encouraged to write beyond the three-prong thesis and the five-paragraph essay. I struggled with breaking the formality of writing essays and finding my natural flow and voice, which would help me format my essays as I figured it out slowly. I started relearning how to write and how to find my voice, and I started recognizing that essays are supposed to be tools to convey a message that I as a writer must convey to my audience. I didn't need to hold back like I did in high school, and I could simply write how I wanted to with respect to the formality of essay-writing without stumping my own creativity and thoughts.

I especially demonstrate incorporating my own voice into my writing throughout my final essay, "Reflections With Tommy." I show truly connecting back to my voice and what I want the audience to take from my essay in the following excerpt, which is from the conclusion of my essay:

"Everything about him feeling singled out, wanting to be accepted by his peers, and being sentimental all resonate with me a great deal. I felt socially isolated growing up around people so vastly different from myself and I struggled with wanting to fit in the same way Tommy struggled with such similar matters. Despite those struggles, we share the similarity of

sentimentality and feeling connected to people through remembering and valuing the little things about life. In essence, Tommy's character truly helped me reflect on my middle school years which played such an incredible role in shaping my feelings of social isolation, wanting to fit in, and sentimentality, and I can honestly recognize my significant growth since then with a little more respect towards myself and my differences.”

This essay really pushed me to find my voice as a writer, especially in reflective essays. Before this essay, I would find myself trying to separate my voice from my writing as much as I could. It would end up sounding robotic and monotonous, almost. If the essay was strictly about Tommy, I would've written more along the lines of “Tommy faces hardships in the small matters of life as his character deals with being outcasted, being sentimental, and craving validation from his peers” instead of incorporating my personal reflection into this thesis or conclusion in general. I genuinely developed as a writer who now knows how to make greater connections with my voice, even if it's not necessarily reflective writing.

Throughout the course of English 1102, I developed skills and unlearned and relearned how to write more effectively while I thrived as a human, student, and writer. I learned how to break free from how high school taught me to write in strictly three-point theses and five-paragraph essays. I broke free from the formality of AP-style essays which expected a completely different writer out of me that isn't true to myself. I found my voice and learned how to connect my writing to the greater world beyond what's on a piece of paper in front of me. Despite the fear of having to let go of all that I was used to in all my years of grade school, I find myself appreciating myself as a writer for once. I've grown a great deal since the depressive slump of high school literature and I'm nurturing a love and passion for literature again, and this time I'll never let that flame die out.