

Bobby:

State: California, USA High School: Private boarding school, 100 students in graduating class Ethnicity: Asian
Gender: Male
GPA: 4.0 out of 4.0 SAT: Reading 750, Math 750, Writing 800 ACT: n/a SAT
Subject Tests Taken: Mathematics Level 2, Biology E/M, Literature
Extracurriculars: Nonprofit director, Editor-in-Chief of student newspaper, Senior Editor of literary magazine,
Art Prefect, varsity baseball player
Awards: Williams Book Prize, National Merit Scholar, AP Scholar with Distinction, Scholastic Art and Writing
Regional Gold Key
Major: Government

ESSAY

Bold white rafters ran overhead, bearing upon their great iron shoulders the weight of the skylight above. Late evening rays streamed through these sprawling glass panes, casting a gentle glow upon all that they graced—paper and canvases and paintbrushes alike. As day became night, the soft luminescence of the art studio gave way to a fluorescent glare, defining the clean rectilinear lines of Dillon Art Center against the encroaching darkness. It was a studio like no other. Modern. Sophisticated. Professional.

And it was clean and white and nice.

But it just wasn't *it*.

Because to me, there was only one "it," and "it" was a little less than two thousand miles west, an unassuming little office building located amidst a cluster of similarly unassuming little office buildings, distinguishable from one another on the outside only by the rusted numbers nailed to each door. Inside, crude photocopies of students' artwork plastered the once white walls. Those few openings in between the tapestry of art were dotted with grubby little handprints, repurposed by some overzealous young artist as another surface for creative expression. In the middle of the room lay two long tables, each covered with newspaper, upon which were scattered dried-up markers and lost erasers and bins of unwanted colored pencils. These were for the younger children. The older artists—myself included—sat around these tables with easels, in whatever space the limited confines of the studio allowed. The instructor sometimes talked, and we sometimes listened. Most of the time, though, it was just us—children, drawing and talking and laughing and sweating in the cluttered and overheated mess of an art studio.

No, it was not so clean and not so white and not so nice. But I have drawn—rather, lived—in this studio for most of my past ten years. I suppose this is strange, as the rest of my life can best be characterized by everything the studio is not: cleanliness and order and structure. But then again, the studio was like nothing else in my life, beyond anything in which I've ever felt comfortable or at ease.

Sure, I was frustrated at first. My carefully composed sketchbooks—the proportions just right, the contrast perfected, the whiteness of the background meticulously preserved—were often marred by the frenzied strokes of my instructor's charcoal as he tried to teach me not to draw accurately, but passionately. I hated it. But thus was the fundamental gap in my artistic understanding—the difference between the surface realities that I

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wanted to depict, and the profound though elusive truths of the human condition that art could explore. It was the difference between drawing a man's face and using abstraction to explore his soul.

And I can't tell you exactly when or why my attitude changed, but eventually my own lines began to unabashedly disregard the rules of depth or tonality to which I had once dutifully adhered, my fervor leaving in its wake black fingerprints and smudges where once had existed unsoiled whiteness. It was in this studio that I eventually made the leap into a new realm of art—a realm in which I was neither experienced nor comfortable. Apart from surface manifestations altogether, this realm was simultaneously one of austere simplicity and aesthetic intricacy, of departure from realism and immersion in reality, of intense emotion and uninhibited expression. It was the realm of lines that could tell stories, of colors and figures that meant nothing and everything.

Indeed, it was the realm of disorder and messy studios and true art—a place where I could express the world like I saw it, in colors and strokes unrestrained by expectations or rules; a place where I could find refuge in the contours of my own chaotic lines; a place that was neither beautiful nor ideal, but real.

No, it was not so clean and not so white and not so nice.

But then again, neither is art.

Emily

State: Pennsylvania, USA High School: Private school, 120 students in graduating class Ethnicity: Asian

Gender: Female GPA: 3.91 out of 4.0

SAT: Reading 800, Math 780, Writing 800 ACT: n/a SAT Subject Tests Taken: Mathematics Level 2, Biology M, Chemistry, Spanish

Extracurriculars: Varsity tennis captain, varsity swimming captain, Mock Trial captain, Student Council Officer, A.I duPont Hospital Volunteer

Awards: Diamond Challenge Grand Prize Winner, Lincoln Scholarship Essay, National Merit finalist, National Honor Society scholarship finalist, Pennsylvania Governor's School for the Sciences Scholarship

Major: Human Developmental and Regenerative Biology

ESSAY

Clear, hopeful melodies break the silence of the night.

Playing a crudely fashioned bamboo pipe, in the midst of sullen inmates—this is how I envision my grandfather. Never giving up hope, he played every evening to replace images of bloodshed with memories of loved ones at home. While my grandfather describes the horrors of his experience in a forced labor camp during the Cultural Revolution, I could only grasp at fragments to comprehend the story of his struggle.

I floundered in this gulf of cultural disparity.

As a child, visiting China each summer was a time of happiness, but it was also a time of frustration and alienation. Running up to my grandpa, I racked my brain to recall phrases supposedly ingrained from Saturday morning Chinese classes. Other than my initial greeting of “Ni hao, ye ye!” (“Hello, grandpa”), however, I struggled to form coherent sentences. Unsatisfied, I would scamper away to find his battered bamboo flute, and this time, with my eyes, silently beg him to play.

Although I struggled to communicate clearly through Chinese, in these moments, no words were necessary. I cherished this connection—a relationship built upon flowing melodies rather than broken phrases. After each impromptu concert, he carefully guided my fingers along the smooth, worn body of the flute, clapping after I successfully played my first tentative note. At the time, however, I was unaware of that through sharing music, we created language of emotion, a language that spanned the gulf of cultural differences. Through these lessons, I discovered an inherent inclination toward music and a drive to understand this universal language of expression.

Years later, staring at sheets of music in front of me at the end of a long rehearsal, I saw a jumbled mess of black dots. After playing through “An American Elegy” several times, unable to infuse emotion into its reverent melodies that celebrated the lives lost at Columbine, we—the All-State Band—were stopped yet again by our conductor Dr. Nicholson. He directed us to focus solely on the climax of the piece, the Columbine *Alma Mater*. He urged us to think of home, to think of hope, to think of what it meant to be American, and to fill the measures with these memories. When we played the song again, this time imbued with recollections of times when hope was necessary, “An American Elegy” became more than notes on a page; it evolved into a tapestry woven from the thread of our life stories.

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The night of the concert, in the lyrical harmonies of the climax, I envisioned my grandfather, exhausted after a long day of labor, instilling hope in the hearts of others through his bamboo flute. He played his own “elegy” to celebrate the lives of those who had passed. At home that night, no words were necessary when I played the alma mater for my grandfather through the video call. As I saw him wiping tears, I smiled in relief as I realized through music I could finally express the previously inexpressible. Reminded of warm summer nights, the roles now reversed, I understood the lingual barrier as a blessing in disguise, allowing us to discover our own language.

Music became a bridge, spanning the gulf between my grandfather and me, and it taught me that communication could extend beyond spoken language. Through our relationship, I learned that to understand someone is not only to hear the words that they say, but also to empathize and feel as they do. With this realization, I search for methods of communication not only through spoken interaction, but also through shared experiences, whether they might involve the creation of music, the heat of competition, or simply laughter and joy, to cultivate stronger, more fulfilling relationships. Through this approach, I strive to become a more empathetic friend, student, and granddaughter as finding a common language has become, for me, a challenge—an invitation—to discover deeper connections.