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6/3/2015

Masterpiece Academy Response

He looked around at his peers. They had finally gotten through the year; only two weeks left in high school. They had finally acquired a degree of responsibility. Did they honor their learning environment? Did they deserve it and earn it? *Yes, he thought, we did. Even if we may not have completed every assignment, we have been honest about it. That's how you earn trust; why you deserve it.* That's how he had honored the level of trust given to him- by being honest when he wasn't trying his hardest, and by trying his hardest when it counted.

His class blog was a decent size and of moderate organization- a scattering of assignments here, a cluster of assignments there. The reading of the novel *Brave New World* showed him a world of conditioned characters, and all the while he recognized his own conditioning alongside that of the characters. It described a part of him; a mirror image of his academic growth over the length of the course. He found himself in "Macbeth" as the title character, murdering his friends, family, and superiors. He lived in *Great Expectations*; while not in a state of poverty, he saw himself growing emotionally and mentally as Pip did.

Looking back on the length of the course, he realized he had reconnected with a passion for social justice. As it unfolded, looking at Darren Wilson's face- his 'injuries'- and then Mike Brown's body lying on the pavement for hours without being covered, a trail of blood flowing down the pavement between his shoes infuriated him. He couldn't believe he lived in such a world. As he tried to comprehend the daily racism and evil that he had just begun to recognize in full the year past, he tied his English course into his

daily learning. Its open-sourced formatting allowed him the freedom to study what he believed was important.

It wasn't reading from a textbook; it was reading from a textbook written by the universe- humanity, nature, nonexistence... It taught him more than he knew at the time. It was only now, looking back, that he understood the lessons the world had been teaching. He took notes but couldn't read them, until he began to speak the language. He then knew the future: he would continue to listen to Earth's cries, and continue to read its scripture. Nature became a Bible he could actually believe in.

Socially, he knew he could never change the world individually. He could, however, try. He could participate in protests when issues tore his community open. He could become a journalist and try to expose official corruption. He laughed to himself, knowing such a thing would never happen. It didn't matter. He jerked his head to the side as the noise of people talking drifted in from the open classroom door. He straightened upwards as they filed into the room. They would be giving masterpiece presentations. He had, the idiot that he was, not signed up soon enough for the week he wanted, and he ended up signing up for the day of the final. He'd be near last- for now he'd observe.

The presentations flowed smoothly over the days, and he enjoyed them. It was, for him, interesting to see what their passions were, even if the particular presentation left him bored. Others kept him captivated. As he watched he began to see a theme running through the presentations- empathy and human existence: culture, life stories, even comedic videos analogous with daily life. He found an overwhelmingly positive tone running through the majority of the masterpiece presentations; most were uplifting and not very negative.

Melisa and Victoria co-interviewed multiple homeless people while roaming the streets in Santa Barbara. They found that outer looks do not always coincide with who a person is on the inside. A quote he found interesting from Melissa was "Homeless people are more honest and open about their

backgrounds.” He thought about this. *Many don't have family. They have nothing to hide, no reason to be ashamed. They're a community, caring for one another.* Victoria asked them a question he found similarly intriguing: “What passions do you have that others may not know about?” He thought, *How many homeless people actually get asked this? Not many. Most people ignore them; couldn't care less what all of their passions were.* The project showed a level of empathy that he found repeatedly in subsequent presentations: it was really quite profound.

Mellany and Daniel's presentation, entitled “Life Goes by so Fast,” took the winding path of life's twists and turns. Starting with the innocence of childhood, the aspects approached were things everyone has at some point strived for: the bonds of friends and family, the necessity of relaxing once in a while to keep yourself sane, being artistic, and even exploring.

Brenissa's presentation specifically focused on exploring, though as a form of meditation. She discussed how she used the activity to positively impact her life, when going through tough times and illness. Again, a deep connection between happiness, humanity and nature is highlighted.

He laughed aloud at Miles', Emilio's, and Eric's presentation of two comedic videos. Miles successfully did what his masterpiece was to begin with- to make people laugh. Eric's delivery of the last line of the first video, “What an asshole,” was spot on. He enjoyed the videos as well- they were creative, and expressed things nearly each of us has experienced before: real-worldly in other terms.

He sat back and watched his peers and smiled. He glanced at the ground. He was no hero, had completed no hero's journey. Any heroic intentions he may have had faded with time, but he was glad to see that some of his peers were indeed heroes. His response to a call to adventure was a handful of Viibryd, four milligrams of Klonopin, and 130mg Vyvanse. He found no mentor- took no journey- but nonetheless ended up enlightened, in a sense. He learned that you don't need to complete a hero's journey, so he took that of the villain.