

THE CREEL:

BEST STUDENT WRITING FROM WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM 2017



WRITER OF THE WEEK : Jasper Mott

Personal Narrative:

PROMPT #2: Common Application Essay: Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.

-Limit your focus to one specific moment

Jasper Mott

December 11, 2016

Writing Across the Curriculum

Since the age of four, I have had a passion for acting, and the theater has been my stomping ground ever since. When I get on stage, sing my heart out, act like someone I'm not, and do it with people I care about, I am most happy. For a long time I was shy, awkward, and quiet, but through the theater experiences I have learned to be comfortable with myself. I've made friends upon friends from being apart of the acting community, and I've had amazing experiences. I've been apart of almost every theatrical opportunity I could, and from this I have learned that sometimes it can be tougher than what you'd expect.

As a freshman I never would have thought I'd be cast as a lead in a musical, but I was. Since this was my first year in a high school musical, I was a bit nervous and outside my comfort zone to say the least. I was flattered when I found out I was the lead, and my parents were incredibly proud, but I didn't know what I was getting myself into. It wasn't until the first rehearsal that I felt the pressure of carrying this play, and that caused tremendous amounts of stress. For a period of three weeks, my after school schedule was taken over by hours of rehearsal; this left me almost no time to do other things. Learning tons of lines and song lyrics on top of managing a larger amount of school work as a high schooler was not something I was used to.

By the time we were three weeks into production, I was pretty much over the whole idea of being an actor. I felt physically and mentally drained, and the lack of sleep I was getting was definitely unhealthy. I was really feeling the pressure of this role now, and I barely knew my lines even though we opened in two days. I often came home late at night and broke down to my parents about how I was feeling. Before I was cast as the lead I loved acting, but it was suddenly all ruined for me. I felt as if I could give up in that very moment, but I knew I had to pull myself together.

I woke up the morning of opening night feeling fine, but when I got to school I felt sick to my stomach. I could barely focus in class, and my nerves seemed to be rising with every breath I took. I felt so bad that I left school during lunch, and I ran to the toilet the second I got home. The stress of the show made me physically sick, and I didn't know what to do. At this point I was panicking, as I knew I couldn't let the cast down. A few hours of bed rest later, I drove myself back to school and prepared for the show.

I stepped onto the dark stage and awaited my cue atop a tall ladder. It seemed as if all of our hard work lead up to this moment, and I had never felt so nervous in my life. **Finally the accompaniment music began, the spotlights hit my face, and the red curtains welcomed the audience before them.**

+1 (triple parallel structure) I felt less nervous now that it had started, and the show seemed to fly by in a blink. Everyone was doing their their best, singing perfectly, acting amazingly, and suddenly the extensive rehearsals seemed worth it. We practically nailed the entire show, and I was blown away by everybody's performance, including my own. I

Before I knew it, I had said my final line, and it was time for curtain call. At this very moment, I remembered why I loved acting so much. There is nothing quite like being in front of a crowd, and hearing everybody cheer once the show is over. Standing hand in hand with the cast, for me, is the most rewarding part of the whole experience.

JASPER-

EXCELLENT NARRATIVE. YOU CONVEY THAT ACTING IS PARADOXICALLY OVERWHELMING AND EDIFYING.

IT ALSO CONVEYS YOUR COURAGE: YOUR WILLINGNESS TO OVERCOME ADVERSITY AND TAKE CHANCES. WELL DONE. THIS COULD SERVE WELL AS A COLLEGE APPLICATION ESSAY.

TO WORK ON: BRING US INTO THE MOMENT OF ONE SCENE OR A BACKSTAGE MOMENT WHEN FELLOW ACTORS SMILE AND ENCOURAGE YOU...

----FOCUSING ON ONE MOMENT WILL SERVE AS THE CLIMAX.

YOU RESOLUTION IS GREAT. YOU BRING BACK THE SENSE OF COMMUNITY.

ART ANALYSIS ESSAY: WRITER OF THE WEEK: ALEX STUESSI



The Curious Wanderer

Alex Stuessi

“I must stay alone and know that I am alone to contemplate and feel nature in full; I have to surrender myself to what encircles me, I have to merge with my clouds and rocks in order to be what I am” (www.wikiquote.org). In Caspar Friedrich’s *Wanderer Above The Sea Fog*, he illustrates that solitude is indispensable in finding one's self through nature by creating a lovely, vast escape of land through his use of colors, and perspective. This painting was created in the wake of the “Romantic Movement in 1880 when art ideals were being changed”; along with Friedrich’s other works, *Wanderer Above The Sea Fog* captures an intense and emotional focus on nature. (www.wiki.org). By looking at the **atmospheric perspective, contrasting colors**, and the **realistic elements** in Caspar Friedrich’s *Wanderer Above The Sea Fog*, **the painting’s message that one must be alone to contemplate, discover, and perceive the value of wilderness emerges.**

EXCELLENT OPENER, BRIDGE, PLAN AND THESIS.

In Friedrich’s painting, the **atmospheric perspective** conveys a sense of infinity that leads one to believe that there is more. (TOPIC SENTENCE) To understand the artist’s meaning of a painting it is helpful to look towards the perspective created by the painter. (LINKING SENTENCE) Friedrich’s technique of showcasing perspective leads the viewer not only to believe that there is depth and an “infinite” aspect to the painting, but it also gives us insight on what the man in the painting is seeing. By letting the viewer explore the vast escape of land that the man is seeing, rather than focus on the man entirely, Friedrich gives us a first hand view of what the man is seeing and what intense emotions accompany his vast perspective. (CONCRETE DETAIL) By gazing upon this painting and imagining it in real-life form, there is a sense of awe and fascination that accompanies it. This is important because it is

these emotions that lead the viewer to contemplate the seemingly infinite in nature, the enduring power intrinsic to immense natural forms like mountains and the hidden sea, and the presence of divine intentions in the vast scene. (CONNECT TO THESIS ANALYSIS)

- GOOD ANALYSIS AND FOCUS ON THE CONTEMPLATION OF INFINITY.

By exploring the idea that atmospheric perspective expresses a sense of infinity, Friedrich also develops contrasting colors to reveal the jagged sea rocks and mountains which opens up a whole new door of discovery. The jagged sea rocks may be a metaphor for something that is emerging, but not yet fully developed. This could be linked to the man's thoughts, and how he may have discovered part of nature's attributes; there is still much more that is masked from view. Friedrich mixes warm, light colors muted tones of blue to focus the viewer's sight on what lays below the sea fog. This could be a representation that there are more good things to come, but they just haven't been uncovered yet. The way Friedrich mixes and blends color leads the viewer to recall the hidden landscape and the wonder that travels with it.

EXCELLENT TRANSITIONAL TOPIC SENTENCE AND ANALYSIS ON THE WARM COLORS REPRESENTING HOPE.

In addition to using contrasting colors to evoke a sense of discovery, Friedrich's painting also emphasizes realism through his piece of art. GOOD TRANSITIONAL TOPIC SENTENCE. The man in the painting appears to be alone, and by his almost contemplative stance, one could argue, he is taking in every aspect of what he sees. By using realism to arouse the human aspect of the painting, the viewer can fully comprehend what the man is seeing. Awe, curiosity, and discovery are all human emotions that because of the painting's realism, can come to life. Had Friedrich decided to paint the landscape in fluorescent colors, or had given the man wings, there would have been a much different effect. It is from this realism that captures the emotional focus on nature and nature's power to evoke awe.

In addition to the powerful realism of the painting, Friedrich's atmospheric perspective and contrasting color, convey the solitariness that is necessary for contemplation and discovery of nature.

Caspar Friedrich reminds us that there is something good that can come out of being alone, and that it is actually a necessary part of life. People generally relate solitude to unhappiness, but by exploring Friedrich's ideas, people can shift their perspective and see the good in being solitary. As Caspar Friedrich would say, "I must stay alone and know that I am alone to contemplate and feel nature in full" (www.wikiquote.org).

ALEX---

REALLY WELL DONE. YOUR THESIS IS STRONG AND ALL OF YOUR ANALYSIS CONNECTS TO HOW THE PAINTING ADVOCATES FOR SOLITARY MOMENT IN WILDERNESS.

YOU HAVE MASTERED THE FUNDAMENTAL COMMONALITIES OF THE INTRODUCTION AND ANALYSIS PARAGRAPH WRITING.

YOUR TRANSITIONAL TOPIC SENTENCES AND CONCLUSION ARE EXCELLENT.

POETRY CLOSE READING ESSAY
WRITER OF THE WEEK: ALEX STUESSI

The Sycamore - Wendell Berry

In the place that is my own place, whose earth
I am shaped in and must bear, there is an old tree growing,
a great sycamore that is a wondrous healer of itself.
Fences have been tied to it, nails driven into it,
hacks and whittles cut in it, the lightning has burned it.
There is no year it has flourished in
that has not harmed it. There is a hollow in it
that is its death, though its living brims whitely
at the lip of the darkness and flows outward.
Over all its **scars** has come the seamless white
of the bark. It bears the **gnarls of its history**
healed over. It has risen to a strange perfection
in the warp and bending of its long growth.
It has **gathered all accidents into its purpose.**
It has become the intention and radiance of its dark fate.
It is a fact, sublime, mystical and unassailable.
In all the country there is no other like it.
I recognize in it a principle, an indwelling
the same as itself, and greater, that I would be ruled by.
I see that it stands in its place and feeds upon it,
and is fed upon, and is native, and maker.

The Sycamore: Healing through nature

Alex Stuessi

“Even darkness must pass. A new day will come. And when the sun shines it will shine out the clearer” (www.tolkein.com)

J.R.R Tolkien believes that even when the worst has come there is always a better tomorrow; he uses nature as a metaphor because of its powerful abilities of healing itself and those who surround themselves in it. The same essence that drives Tolkien’s belief can also be seen in “The Sycamore” by Wendell Berry. EXCELLENT BRIDGE “The Sycamore” is a poem that focuses on the divine beauty of nature and how it is capable of withstanding even the toughest blows. Looking closely at Wendell Berry’s “The Sycamore” allows a reader to see the poem’s central message that **one can heal by valuing the strength of nature and its capability of growth through the pain.**

WOW! THIS IS AN EXEMPLARY INTRODUCTION!

GREAT OPENER, BRIDGE, THESIS AND PLAN.

The life of the speaker seems grueling and sorrowful towards the beginning of the poem as he describes his place in the world as similar to the old sycamore. Showing the correlation the speaker has with the natural world, in the opening of the poem Wendell Berry creates an implicit metaphor to describe the relationship between himself and the tree; he writes:

In the place that is my own place, whose earth
I am shaped in and must bear, there is an old tree growing,
a great sycamore that is a wondrous healer of itself.
Fences have been tied to it, nails driven into it,
hacks and whittles cut in it, the lightning has burned it.
(lines 1-5).

At this moment in the poem, the speaker gazes up at the sycamore and connects it to his existence that has been guided by the earth through struggle and pain. The man notices the “nails, hacks, burns, and wire” that has been strung around the tree and recognized the ability the tree has to heal itself despite its many faults. From the beginning, he knows he must bear the same weight as the old tree whose earth is his own, and whose place is his own. The **visual imagery** of the “hacks and whittles” evokes a sense of

anguish as “hacks” has the connotations of cuts, slashes, pain, and agony. These connotations of the visual image are significant because they capture the raw emotion and sets up the poem for being one about enduring it all. While these words may be dark, the speaker also uses words such as “great” and “wondrous”. These words have the connotations of significant, inspiring, exceptional, special, and impressive. The positive connotations reveal that life always gets better; as the tree grows, it may entangle and hit obstacles, but will keep traveling until the tree is stable.

BRILLIANT USE OF THE CONNOTATIONS TO SHOW THE ENDURING PERSEVERANCE OF THE TREE.

While the beginning of the poem manifests the struggles of the old sycamore, the next few lines show that through it all, the tree still stands strong and beautiful. EXCELLENT TRANSITIONAL TOPIC SENTENCE! It is helpful to focus upon when the speaker considers how it is the “scars” of the tree that “(have) risen to a strange perfection”. He writes:

Over all its scars has come the seamless white
of the bark. It bears the gnarls of its history
healed over. It has risen to a strange perfection
in the warp and bending of its long growth.
It has gathered all accidents into its purpose.

(lines 10-14).

As the man continues to stare at the tree, he begins to appreciate its intricacy more, and sees the beauty in its “gnarls of its history”. When the speaker laments, “It bears the gnarls of its history...in the warp and bending of its long growth”, the harsh **cacophony** of the alliterative “b” sound emphasizes the words “bears”, “bark” and “bending”. These words are important because they describe the unpleasant experiences of the tree. The cacophony allows for a focused cathartic release of the pain, and thus enables the speaker to move to the good. These lines also show how the tree has “healed over”; words such as “perfection”, “seamless”, and “purpose” have the connotations of beauty, strength, ability, and intent. These connotations contribute to the poem’s central message that an observer can heal by valuing the strength that nature has in its ability to grow regardless of the pain.

The beauty of the tree emerging from such desolation not only shows its “strange perfection”, but also shows its ability to heal observers of the enduring tree. It is instructive to focus on the passage in which the speaker ponders to forces that create the tree. Evolving the idea that one can heal by being in nature and seeing its capability of growth through the pain, Wendell Berry writes:

It has become the intention and radiance of its dark fate.
It is a fact, sublime, mystical and unassailable.
In all the country there is no other like it.
I recognize in it a principle, an indwelling
the same as itself, and greater, that I would be ruled by.
I see that it stands in its place and feeds upon it,
and is fed upon, and is native, and maker.

(lines 15-21).

As the speaker still ponders below the sycamore, the poem transitions from being about the tree to being about the self and recognizing the tree's "dark fate" as something to admire and heal from. The last few lines of this poem show the significance and importance the sycamore has to the speaker. Wendell Berry starts off the first two stanzas of the poem by describing this seemingly destroyed sycamore, but in this last stanza shifts to a more positive outlook; the sycamore still "stands in its place and feeds upon it" despite its many misfortunes. There are many words used in these lines that support and help the reader understand the most significant message behind the poem. Words such as "sublime", "mystical" and "unassailable" all have powerful, awe-inspiring connotations associated with them. **The connotations of "sublime" are noble, magnificent, and divine. YES! Divine is the most significant connotation because it contributes the poem's central message that there is something almost godly in nature in its abilities to heal and produce beauty. YES! IT IS RULED BY A POWER AND PRINCIPLE THAT THE SPEAKER HOPES RULES HIM.** The word "mystical" also has the connotations of fascinating and spiritual; these connotations also lead the reader to see the grace at work in and around nature. "Unassailable" has the connotations of strength and invincibility and this is in keeping with the tree's aptitude to stay standing. This speaker thinks that the ability to heal comes from nature, and he views this sycamore as almost a godly presence in his life that feeds him hope.

By showing the sycamore as being of hope, light, and divinity, the poem conveys the message that nature's ability to heal from pain inspires humans to do the same. His connotations, visual imagery, and the harsh yet cathartic cacophony create a vivid description of the enduring sycamore. Wendell Berry reminds us that there is always going to be pain and darkness in life, but as J.R.R Tolkien says, "A new day will come. And when the sun shines it will shine out the clearer." In Wendell Berry's poem "The Sycamore" he reflects on the meaning of the tree's multiple scars and how **"it has gathered all accidents into its purpose."** Though the tree has many scars and has suffered much, it has a purpose in life and, therefore, needs to grow through the pain; looking at nature's strength to heal, one can heal with it.

ALEX-

OH MY! THIS IS ONE OF MY FAVORITE POEMS. LOOKING TO NATURE AND FINDING THE GUIDING PRINCIPLE OF ENDURANCE AND MAKING “BUFFETS AND REWARDS” WORK TO ONE’S FAVOR, AS HORATIO SAYS TO HAMLET IS A WORTHY PHILOSOPHY.

YOU HAVE A STRONG THESIS THAT THE POEM ADMIRES THE ENDURING POWER OF THE SYCAMORE. YOU CONVEY *HOW THIS MESSAGE IS DEVELOPED* BY ADDRESSING SOUND DEVICES, IMAGERY AND CONNOTATIONS.

BRILLIANT POEM. BRILLIANT ANALYSIS!

COMPARE AND CONTRAST PAPER

WRITER OF THE WEEK: Joe Hall '19

Alpine v Nordic Skiing

If you live in Sun Valley, odds are you've skied at some point in time. Skiing is the lifeblood of our town. It powers the economy, enriches our student athletes, and serves as the most common pastime in the Valley. There are many disciplines of skiing; primarily, they are divided into downhill and cross-country. Downhill skiing usually is classified as either alpine or backcountry. Cross country or Nordic skiing is usually divided into the skate and classic disciplines. Both main styles of skiing are practiced for recreation as well as fitness. While many athletes enjoy both kinds of skiing, they are quite different sports unto themselves. For all their similarities, the two sports harbor enough differences that people become passionate about defending one or the other as "the best." **While Downhill skiing is more commonly practiced in our country and allows people incredible access to the backcountry, Nordic skiing is better exercise, cheaper, and less impactful on the environment than its counterpart.**

Downhill skiing gives people the ability to carve turns down mountains at exhilarating speed and glide through fine powder snow on beautiful wilderness peaks. Recreational skiing is a great way to get outside and put yourself in the mountains, whether at a resort or in the backcountry. In 2015, over 13 million people skied in the U.S alone. (www.statista.com). The most popular form of skiing is alpine skiing. Alpine skiing involves sliding downhill on fixed-heel skis within an area that is usually groomed and has a dedicated ski patrol. Usually, this means a ski resort. Alpine skiing also is characterized by the use of mechanical help to get to the tops of mountains, usually by chairlift or tow rope. Alpine skis take many forms, but they tend to be between four and six inches wide, and are slightly shorter than the skier who uses them. Online, the price for a new pair of downhill skis ranges from slightly over \$100 to over \$1000, with the mean being around \$400. Including boots, poles, and skis, one could spend up to 700\$

on all the gear needed; this does not mean you could acquire all the gear for less by buying it used, however. Downhill skiers who ski at resorts must also buy tickets to use chairlifts; backcountry skiers also must buy skins and special avalanche safety equipment. As far as exercise is concerned, downhill skiing is strenuous on leg muscles but does not require aerobic fitness or upper body strength beyond that of an average adult. An hour of downhill skiing burns between 275 and 475 calories an hour, on average (www.calorielab.com). Backcountry skiing is harder to measure, but burns more calories on average because the skier normally has to climb up the mountain.

While downhill skiing has only really become popular since the invention of the chairlift, cross country, or nordic, skiing has been in use for thousands of years, first used by Vikings to hunt and travel in the winter. (good contrast starter) Adept nordic skiers can glide across the landscape at speeds upwards of 10-20 mph across varied terrain. Nordic skiing relies on the skier to propel themselves, sometimes uphill, with nothing but the power of their own muscles. Nordic skiing has become a popular activity in the U.S, because it is much slower and can be gentler on legs and joints than downhill skiing. Generally, there are two types of cross-country skiing. Classic skiing refers to the use of skis that somehow can grip the snow, letting an athlete stride but still glide over the snow. Classic skiing can also involve propelling yourself with just your poles. Skate skiing was introduced in the 1980's. It involves going from one ski to another, resembling ice skating. Nordic skis tend to be about 2 inches in width, with a binding that keeps the heel free. **Unlike downhill skis, a pair of nordic skis** can be bought for less than \$100, though models for serious competitors can reach over \$600. **(good contrast)** Not including clothing, the average cost for gear would run about \$450, although buying expensive, carbon-fiber boots and poles could easily make that cost more than \$1000. The upside is that nordic trails typically have a very small cost to use, or none at all. Nordic skiing is widely believed to be one of the best cardio exercises in the world (www.mensfitness.com). The combination of striding or skating along with pushing with the upper body causes almost every major muscle group to be used in nordic skiing. Particularly,

poling is especially effective at working out core and lower back muscles along with triceps and pectorals. An hour of nordic skiing can burn anywhere from 400 to over 1200 calories. Being primarily a cardio activity, nordic skiing also can improve aerobic and anaerobic fitness.

Having evolved from the same common sport and involving essentially the same thing, there are many similarities between these two styles of skiing. **Both sports depend on snow to glide smoothly across the landscape. Both sports are a popular way to get outside and enjoy nature during the winter. Similar to the way backcountry downhill skiers ascend mountains, nordic skiers propel themselves forward on trails. Nordic and Alpine skiing both enjoy a large competitive scene and are both popular winter olympic events. (good comparisons)** This being said, the two styles of skiing contrast each other greatly. **While downhill skiing is centered on using gravity, nordic skiing relies primarily on the athlete's own body.** While it is true backcountry downhill skiers may walk up slopes using skins, for nordic skiers going up hills is not just a way to get to the top of the slope; rather, it is just as much a part of the sport as flats and downhills. **Alpine skis have fixed heel bindings, whereas nordic skis only attach at the toe,** making it easier to stride. **Unlike alpine skiing, nordic skiing features no mechanical help.** On top of that, nordic skis are generally cheaper and lighter than their downhill counterparts. The average price for a pair of nordic skis online is between \$100 and \$300, while downhill skis cost more like 300-700\$. The fact that nordic skiers typically do not have to pay for expensive lift tickets or backcountry safety gear also lowers costs. Unlike downhill skiing, nordic skiing is very much a cardio exercise. Nordic skiing also involves much more use of the core and upper body muscles. An hour of nordic skiing can burn almost twice as many calories as a similar amount of alpine skiing. Finally, there is the little-discussed factor of environmental impact. Many ski resorts rely on fossil fuels to run groomers or provide the electricity to run their chairlifts ; snowmaking is also a big factor: the snow guns at Sun Valley use 28 gallons of water per minute, each, over the course of an entire season (www.mensjournal.com), resulting in the use of millions upon millions of gallons of water being used. While nordic ski trails may use diesel-powered

groomers too, they rarely use snowmaking and, without needing to run chairlifts, use a fraction of the electricity. Looking at the facts, nordic skiing is better for the human body as well as being more sustainable of the environment. **(great contrast starters)**

After comparing downhill and nordic skiing, it is apparent that nordic skiing is not only cheaper, but is better exercise and has a fraction of the environmental impact of its counterpart. It is important for people to look at both sports equally, since downhill skiing is much more popular at this point in time; if people don't consider nordic skiing, they may think of skiing as a whole as overly expensive and less desirable than other forms of exercise. In the end, however, both disciplines of skiing have equal value in the hearts of those who love them. Whether you love the adrenaline rush of rocketing down a slope, the meditative rhythm of powder skiing, or the challenge of powering up a steep hill, skiing will always continue to capture people's hearts and inspire them to play outside.

JOE-

THIS WAS AN EXCELLENT COMPARE AND CONTRAST PAPER. INSTEAD OF DIVING INTO DESCRIPTION AND NARRATION, YOU EMPLOY TESTIMONIALS AND STATISTICS TO DETERMINE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TWO SKI DISCIPLINES.

THIS WAS VERY WELL DONE, INFORMATIVE, AND FLUID.

YOUR PREFERENCE FOR NORDIC SKIING WAS APT AND WELL SUPPORTED.

PERSUASIVE PAPER WRITER OF THE WEEK: Joe Hall '19

Standardized tests - All children left behind?

The average student in America's big-city public schools takes some 112 mandatory standardized tests between pre-kindergarten and the end of 12th grade (www.washingtonpost.com), an average of about eight a year. Standardized tests have been used since the mid 19th century, but their use has spiked after 2002's "No Child Left Behind" (N.C.L.B.) policy. Since then, America has gone from 18th in math globally to 27th, with similar losses in science and reading. There are a lot of factors than could have led to these losses in student performance, with the rise of standardized tests among them (standardizedtests.procon.org). Standardized tests have been embraced by administrators, but the reality is that they degrade the quality of teaching and both the emotional and intellectual growth of students. **Our country should lessen the impact of standardized tests on students to promote good teaching, lower stress, and bring value back into the fine arts.**

Create counterargument: Standardized tests have been increasingly used in public and private schools over the past several decades. Proponents of standardized testing rightly say that they are a great way to evaluate huge amounts of students and encourage consistent quality across many different teachers. Many parents approve of standardized tests, and students seem to think they are fair. 93% of parents say standardized tests "should be used to identify areas where students need extra help" and 61% say their children "take an appropriate number of standardized tests." (www.AP-NORC Poll.com) Standardized testing provides data that helps improve education as a whole is by being consistent across public and private schools. Finally,

standardized tests can ready students better for rigorous college curricula, as well as the standardized tests that many professionals are required to take. (standardizedtests.procon.org).

Concede: Standardized tests may be the best way to fairly measure student achievement in subjects such as math and reading.

Converse: With all these advantages, we should wonder, “What’s the catch?” The catch is that standardized tests are killing individuality, quality and integrity, and placing a bigger emphasis on mindlessly drilling than teaching students how to be productive, healthy workers. Many students see standardized tests as highly stressful, and the increasing need for test preparedness is especially destructive to young children’s childhoods (standardizedtests.procon.org). Despite being lauded as fair, standardized tests can be unfair towards those learning english as a second language and kids with special needs. Despite the increase in use, standardized testing has not improved America’s academic rankings as opposed to countries such as Finland, which does not use standardized tests and consistently has the best students in the world. There is evidence that standardized tests do not significantly improve student understanding (standardizedtests.procon.org). They also cost a lot of taxpayer money and are notorious for expensive scoring errors (standardizedtests.procon.org). Standardized tests have begun to matter so much for college admissions that they have become a huge source of stress for students. Imagine being a gifted student leader, artist, or athlete with a unique set of skills that don’t necessarily include test-taking? Is it fair that we can determine the futures of America’s diverse youth with shallow, right-or-wrong questions? On top of this, standardized tests are “dumbing down” curriculums to make room for more math and basic language. They

don't value the arts, creative writing, or many sciences. The use of standardized tests devalues teachers' individuality, which hurts both them and their students.

Standardized tests have a place in a large country like the USA, but they cannot become a replacement for professional teachers. Their content may be fair for most students, but they block out time and money that could be used for the Arts, Sciences, and other creative disciplines. Standardized tests should be used sparingly as a tool to analyze specific subjects over a large number of students, but cannot become a one-size-fits-all solution. **Call to Action:** Instead, we should treat the valuing of innovative, creative teachers and students as an investment that will pay off our country's intellectual debt.

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Joe's Reflection: I really like persuasive writing. While literary analysis is interesting, it sometimes seems like there's no point, you can prove pretty much anything you want if you pick and choose language. Contrast that with persuasive writing. Not only is this type of writing easier to apply to real-world issues, it fully requires you to form two sides on an

argument and makes it seem like your interpretation actually matters next to those of others. This essay, I feel like I did a good job of summarizing the counterargument and providing logical, emotional, and ethical appeals in my argument. In the future, I would want to work on making my proposal more clear in the beginning.

The Downfall of Oedipus the King

MIXED PATTERN REVISION:

persuasive argumentation, compare and contrast, close reading

GOOD OPENER: Imagine waking up one day, not knowing your world will forever be changed, and eventually learning that huge parts of your life have been filled with lies. This happens to Oedipus in Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex*. After the town of Thebes has been struck by the Plague, Oedipus tries his best to find the killer of Laios, as he is the one who has cursed the city. In a short matter of time, his world is suddenly changed entirely when he finds out he is married to his mother, and he even killed his father, Laios. Sophocles' famous play, *Oedipus the King*, connects to Aristotle's definition of a tragedy through several different elements. The plot's high stakes, gruesome spectacles, and extreme catharsis towards the end of *Oedipus the King* convey the idea of a tragedy because of the way his world is ruined due to his tragic flaw of hubris. **GOOD EMBEDDED PLAN AND THESIS**

CREATE THE COUNTERARGUMENT: While there is evidence that shows how this could be a tragedy, there is also some evidence that shows how falls short of being a tragedy. Relating to Aristotle's definition of a tragedy, every story must include characters that are *believable, courageous, and brave*. To say the least, Oedipus and the other protagonists featured in the play are very shy of these qualities. Does it seem sensible that Oedipus marries his mother, sleeps with her, and doesn't realize it until the end? Not in the slightest. This would be an example of the fact that there are some instances that lack believability. Also, if Oedipus were really courageous and brave,

avoiding the conflicts that were presented to him wouldn't be the way to handle the situation. **Concession: It is true that** the play is lacking this feature of creating believable characters. **GOOD PERSUASIVE ARGUMENT: SUMMARY OF THE COUNTERVIEW AND CONCESSION: Oedipus causes a lot of the setbacks in this play on himself; he did not have to killed his father. It's also reasonable that the whole play wouldn't be the same if that one instance had not occurred.**

Converse: Although there are several components to the definition of a tragedy and at least one that *Oedipus Rex* does not achieve, Aristotle states that the most important is "The Plot" itself, and the play follows the plot of a tragedy. The first example of this is very apparent in the beginning, as the audience/ reader is introduced to this world being affected by the plague. Expressing concern for the fact that Thebes is struggling, Oedipus says:

Why, Children,

Why are you here?

Why are you holding those branches tied with wool,
begging me for help?

(lines 23-27).

This quote establishes the idea of a tragedy, as the stakes are immediately high considering the population of Thebes is surrounded by this dire sickness and the "begging for help" addresses the devastating plague. Aristotle's definition of a tragedy states that the plot must have a beginning, which is shown in this quote, and a moment of high stakes which is represented by the plague in this scene.

Similar to the way in which the plot must include high stakes in order to be a tragedy, the text must then includes a complex story that incorporates a twist.

GOOD TRANSITIONAL TOPIC SENTENCE Shocked as to what he has learned about his past, Oedipus says:

Light light light
never again flood these eyes with your white radiance,
Oh Gods, my eyes. All, all
The oracles have proven true.
I, Oedipus, I am the child
Of parents who should never have been mine-doomed,
Doomed!
Now everything is clear-
I lived with a woman, she was my mother,
I slept in my mother's bed, and I
Murdered, murdered my father,
The man whose blood flows in these veins of mine,
Whose blood stains these two hands red.

(lines 1492-1505)

This is the moment the entire premise of the play takes a sharp turn and leaves Oedipus shocked and not knowing what to do. Connecting to Aristotle's definition of a tragedy, this moment signifies the middle of a series of pitiful events, and also a complex story/ twist. Before this moment, Oedipus had no idea he had married his

mother and killed his father. He had heard that Laios was killed when he crossed paths with bandits, not knowing that he was actually his dad. This cursed whomever had committed the crime. Everything comes full circle; Oedipus basically cursed himself. This plot structure of middle, climactic events exemplifies the definition of a tragedy.

While Aristotle argues that a plot consisting high stakes identifies a tragedy, he then qualifies that the spectacle, or special effects, must be contributors to a tragedy. It is helpful to look at the moment when Oedipus gouges his eyes out in despair for killing his father and sleeping with his mother. Narrating what horrifying events follow, the Servant says:

That's when it happened-he
ripped off the gold
brooches she was wearing-one on each shoulder of her
Gown-
and raised them over his head- you could see them flashing-
and tilted his face up and
brought them right down into his eyes
Cursing his two blind eyes over and over, he
lifted the brooches again and drove their pins through his
eyeballs up
to the hilts until they were pulp, until the blood streamed out
soaking his beard and cheeks,
a black storm splashing its hail across his face

(Lines 1648-1653)

Although this scene is probably even more unbearable for people who are experiencing the play in person, the description of Oedipus gouging his eyes out is still overpowering and is a dramatic special effect. Connecting to the tragic elements of spectacle and special effects, the words “blood,” and “soaking” render the gruesome effects of this messy moment. These words have connotations of horror and excess respectively.

GOOD CLOSE READING BY CONNOTATION Providing further evidence as to how *Oedipus the King* is a tragedy, this gut wrenching and cringe worthy description and word choice supply special effects along with severe remorse.

In addition to developing special effects, Aristotle’s definition of tragedy indicates that a tragedy must also include unity of action. It follows that there must be a moment of catharsis -an emotional purging by a character and / or the reader. Reflecting on his Oedipus’s life and all that he had learned about himself in the past day, Sophocles writes:

O citizens of Thebes, this is Oedipus,
who solved the famous riddle, who held more power
than any mortal.
See what he is: all men gazed on his fortunate life,
All men envied him, but look at him, look.
All he had, all this man was,
pulled down and swallowed by the storm of his own life,
and by the god.

Keep your eyes on that last day, on your dying.
Happiness and peace, they were not yours
unless at death you can look back on your life and say
I lived, I did not suffer.

(Lines 1977-1988)

The way Sophocles ends the play leaves audiences questioning whether they've lived their lives to the fullest, as Oedipus says "Happiness and peace, they were not yours unless at death you can look back on your life and say "I lived, I did not suffer." **good quote from the quote** The passages is stating that Oedipus had lived his life happily, until in a matter of hours he learned the truth about his horrible actions with his mother and father. It's very sad to think about how everything has changed for him, and it's tragic whether you connect it to Aristotle's definition or not. However, Sophocles also speaks highly of Oedipus, reminding Thebes and the reader that he solved the riddle and possessed more power than any mortal, but at this point he is defeated and powerless knowing how badly his hubris-his excessive pride- led to overvaluing his decision making.

In addition to the catharsis in these few lines, there is deeper meaning in the choice of words as well. In these final moments, Oedipus uses the word "suffer" to describe the fact that he has lived his life to the fullest. SUMMARY OF COUNTER VIEW: The word "suffer" has connotations of extreme pain, hurting, and unbearable anguish. GOOD CLOSE READING! CONCESSION: For some, extreme pain is living life to the fullest. CONVERSE: But is it true that Oedipus

has not suffered to a loss of his self worth? It seems like he has been suffering excessively, considering all that he's been through towards the end. He discovers dark secrets about his family and his actions and even feels the need to stab his eyes out. This is tragic suffering and a loss of his sense of self worth.

To put the whole series of events into perspective, just think about how you'd react if you were Oedipus. You wake up one day feeling good, but you later find out that your entire city is affected by this terrible disease. You take it upon yourself to find a way to fix this, as you are the voice and leader of all these suffering people before you. The day continues, you talk with friends and have a good time, when suddenly you begin to question who the killer of Laios is. After further investigation you come to the conclusion that *you* are indeed his son, and *you* killed him when you crossed paths a few days ago due to a terrible prophecy. Wow, you never saw that coming! You're devastated, but is the news over? No, not at all. You're wife turns out to be your mother, and when she learns this, she commits suicide despite the fact that you're her son. This day isn't going very well. At this point you're very depressed, you feel everything's your fault, and you don't know what to do. Why not stab your eyes out? Is this not the definition of tragic?

Beyond ending on a cathartic moment, the entirety of Sophocles famous play, *Oedipus the King*, contains ups and downs. The plot's high stakes, gruesome spectacles, and extreme catharsis convey the idea of a tragedy because of the way his world is suddenly ruined. The plague that affects the city of Thebes represents the plots high stakes, the moment Oedipus learns the truth exemplifies the play's complex twist, the gruesome scene when he gouges his eyes out shows the play's special effects, and

the connection to living your life to the fullest provides a moment of catharsis. Overall, this play follows many of the criteria of Aristotle's definition of a tragedy, and the ending's message sums up the idea of unhappiness or despair for those with too much pride. Oedipus Rex is a powerful tragedy.

JASPER-

**GOOD WORK ADDING NARRATIVE, PERSUASIVE ARGUMENTATION, AND
CLOSE READING TO THIS PAPER ON OEDIPUS.**

**I HOPE YOU SEE THE VALUE OF MOVING IN AND OUT OF WRITING PATTERNS
TO ADD COMPLEXITY, DEPTH AND DIVERSITY TO YOUR WRITING.**

