

Cooper Blackham

Ms. Layton

English 1010

16 September 2021

Writing about Writing

School is starting up again, which is already bad enough, but I also have a college-level class of my least favorite subject, English. And I know that you may be thinking why I would take a difficult class of my least favorite subject. To that, I say that the only one semester long class enticed me more than the difficulty shied me away. English class, especially the topic of reading and writing, has always been the worst part about school, and I don't think a college class is going to change the way I feel about it.

To my non-surprise, in the starting weeks there is already a pretty big writing assignment to work on: a literacy narrative. I gloss over the requirements.

"Four pages, one-thousand words, double spaced with MLA format. This isn't anything new." I whisper to myself. To me, this was relatively familiar territory. Just the year prior at the end of the school year, I did a personal narrative in my English class. What I shared with that assignment, and what I share with most English writing assignments, the most difficult task is figuring out what I want it to be about. But with my experience with this kind of assignment, I already had an experience that I felt comfortable writing about. I proceed to scroll through more of the requirements. I was met with Step 1: Choosing a topic. As I read through some suggestions that we could write about, my heart sank.

“Any early memory about writing, reading, speaking, or another form of literacy that you recall vividly.”

“The origins of your current attitudes about writing, reading, speaking, or doing something.”

“A literacy task that you found (or still find) especially difficult or challenging.”

I knew “literacy” was in the name of the assignment, but I didn’t realize that the subject had to relate to it. My opinions and past experiences of writing were already overwhelmingly negative, but to write... about myself writing, I don’t think it can get worse than that.

After I read the topic suggestions and realized that what I was initially going to write about wouldn’t fit those requirements, I kind of mentally shut down. But this was something I needed to face, and if the first assignment in this class was all it needed to make me feel this way, it didn’t speak well for how I would perform in this class.

When I come up blank in English class, somebody I could look to for guidance is my mom. Ironically enough, my mom absolutely loves reading and writing, and that was something that didn’t pass on from her to me. She doesn’t go a day without reading, she will read hundreds of books a year. She reads multiple books at a time, and whenever she is walking around the house, she has an earbud with an audiobook playing at all times. On top of that, once she is done reading a book, she will recap her book and write up a book review... for fun. That is something that is just unfathomable to me. Nonetheless, she has always been a great help to me in assignments like this, and she probably knew more about my experiences with reading and writing than I did.

My mom and I sat across the crescent-shaped granite table top from each other as we brainstormed my past literary experiences. One thing that we were both aware of was despite my loathing of the subject, I was still pretty good at it and received good grades in English throughout the years. I think there is a strong correlation between someone's least favorite subject and their worst subject, but that wasn't the case for me. Aside from some struggles with reading comprehension, I was pretty good in English class, and a really good writer. In the 5th grade, when our teacher required us to get a minimum score of 24 on our assignments in Utah Compose, I went above and beyond multiple times with scores of 27, 28, and even a perfect 30 once. Unfortunately, even with good grades and praise from my teachers, when the next writing assignment came by, I dreaded starting it.

My mom tried coming up with some positive experiences I had with either reading or writing, because they can't all be negative. Right?

"What about the book *Hatchet*? I remember you really enjoying it, and you even read the sequels to it," my mom inquired. It is true that I really enjoyed *Hatchet* by Gary Paulsen when I first read it. Even before I read it, it really stood out to me on the bookshelf at my home, with its bright green cover fading from light to dark, and a silhouette of a hatchet to top it off. I first read it in 5th grade as a class-wide assignment. We read the book with dark green tissue paper covering the light, dimming our surroundings and immersing ourselves in the forest the main character was in. And when I read ahead at home, I unintentionally immersed myself into it by being in a dimly lit room and sitting on a dark forest-green chair. Later on in school, we had to do a writing assignment on a book of our choice, and I decided to re-read *Hatchet* and write about it. *Hatchet*, to this day, is the only book that I have re-read and read the sequels to.

“Yeah, it is probably my favorite book I have ever read. But there is one big issue -- I don’t even remember the main character’s name,” I reply.. If I can’t name the main character in what I think is my favorite book, then to consider that any other book had an impact on me is slim to none. Despite my mom’s best efforts, I only read and wrote when it was required.

“Do you remember the custom bookmarks you made for the books you read?” questioned my mom. “Maybe they made reading those books more enjoyable.”

“I remember making them, but I think I enjoyed designing and coloring in the bookmarks more than I enjoyed reading the books that they were for, “ I answered. Back in elementary school, when I started reading a new book, sometimes I would make a bookmark that I can use solely for this specific book. I remember doing it with some of the books from the *I Survived* series, *My Zombie Goldfish*, as well as *Hatchet*. But that was just artistic, and none of the experience had to do with me enjoying reading.

My mom felt prompted to dig up some of my previous works of writing after we talked. Among all of the writing I had done, the most notable were some journal entries from when I was very young, and letters I sent to my brother when he was on a mission from 5th - 7th grade. Looking back at what I had written, I was a completely different writer than I am today. It seems unfair to compare my writing from when I was a child to how I write English assignments, but they were just so unfamiliar to me. My writing was very expressive with using all caps and exclamation points, and of course there were the spelling errors. Even when I was younger, these were all involuntary, and it was my mom trying to urge me to write. In 2019, she had me write up a trip to Seattle, as well as a summary of what happened when I won the fantasy football league I

was in. It may always take my mom's push to start writing, but the absence of a letter grade at the end of it made it that more tolerable.

I have made my feelings about reading and writing pretty clear throughout this. I didn't get to everything that irks me, like my struggles with the SRI test, the absolute absurdity of metaphors in novels, as well as the made-up symbolism; but the picture is there. In comparison to all the other main classes you take in school (math, science, social studies), English is much different. In those classes, there is always a definitive answer, but in English, everything is subjective, and every person could have a different perspective. So combining that with something personal is really intimidating to me.

During the process of writing this narrative, I came to realize that I took the term "Literacy Narrative" too literally, and I could have written about any experience that I learned from. But, I was too far deep, and forcing myself to change topics once again probably would have resulted in another mental blockage. However, I was still able to find out something that I have always just brushed past. Whenever I heard the terms "reading" or "writing," I automatically associated those words with school, English class, books, and essays. I always looked upon it with a pessimistic view instead of looking on the bright side. Without reading, I wouldn't be able to look up stats in NBA and NFL games, I wouldn't be able to read the cards in games that I play with my family, I wouldn't be able to read the subtitles when I watch anime. Without writing, I wouldn't be able to text my friends and family. I have never really enjoyed reading or writing, and I don't think this is going to change. But with this assignment, I think I will be more aware that I am fortunate to have these skills, and thankful that I have them.

