

***Note from the Elevated School: this is a review on a former student's draft. They gave us explicit permission to use their work, and we have edited key details for privacy. Note that we will NEVER share your writing or edits publicly without permission.***

*Student Activities List:* [\[Link Omitted\]](#)

*Student Comments:* I want to show that I was very sad. "Role model essay"

**What have you done to make your school or your community a better place? (350 words)**

1 Junior year, I asked my Spanish teacher, Sra. L, if she wanted to borrow my copy of "the Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe", and she told me that she's already read all of his writing—and all his letters to his wife too.

3 Yet, her intelligence doesn't manifest as aloofness or superiority. She is grounded by a willingness to listen to the world around her and grow. One of the first things you notice about her genuine interest in those around her. While other teachers struggle with students' names a month into the school year, she comments on a shy student named A's unexpected sense of humor or another named E's lovely smile.

One of the things I admire most in her is her ability to see the best in people. That's why recently I've been trying to offer more empathy than judgement. I aspire to be cool through warmth and connection, not aloofness.

4 Her mindset makes me believe that one day, I'll also know every autoretrato of Frida Kahlo, read every literary piece of Borges in Spanish, and memorize every revolution in Latin American history. My admiration for Senora transcends deeper than the typical perfunctory relationship between teacher and student, as a second mother, a role model, and a friend.

A random day in early February, she left school for an emergency: the very sudden and very unexpected death of her nephew. In my own grieving of a former classmate who was so unjustly and unexpectedly taken from the world, I could only imagine the pain she felt. I remember after she returned to school 2 days after the sudden news, I found her in the hallway. She cried while I hugged her, describing how her nephew had just been accepted into the Naval Academy a day before his death. I wanted to be there for her, like she had for me— when I ran crying to her classroom during a rough day a few months prior.

I understood the closeness of her relation to her nephew because I had witnessed it firsthand. The year prior, J was in my Spanish 4 class with only 8 students total. It was only a class of 8 people. I witnessed how he was proud of his culture, even going on the news to discuss his Navajo heritage. In class, he would always raise his hand in the middle of the lecture, so Sra. basically had a catchphrase of "esperame J".

I had never experienced the profundity of a community grieving before. The whole school came together to help pay for hospital bills or write letters of condolence. Sra's desk ended up decorated with gifts and letters of sympathy, I contributed my own heartfelt letter and various gift

cards to bring to J's mom. My tightknit AP Spanish 4 class of only 8 students reconnected to remember him after a year of slowly drifting apart. People come together during grief as pain forces people to recognize the small pieces of beauty around us.

In studying psychiatry, I hope to help people not through psychoanalysis and rational advice, but through empathy and solidarity in times when they're most needed. In studying culture while I learn the Spanish language, I will appreciate the legacy of my former friend who was always so unapologetically proud of his own Navajo heritage.

Hey A 🙌

Thank you for trusting me with this essay—it's lovely to be able to see other parts of your story through these supplements! Your voice is incredibly heartfelt here, and I can really feel your admiration for Sra. L and the emotion behind this experience.

Also, I love your idea of conveying *sadness* through this piece, as it would help anchor your narrative in vulnerability and emotional connection. That's incredibly powerful.

That said, the UC prompt is asking specifically what *you* did to make your school or community a better place. Right now, the essay spends more time describing someone else's impact on you than on the actions you personally took.

You do mention some thoughtful things (writing letters, supporting your teacher, reconnecting classmates, etc), but if you'd like to keep this topic, we'll need to restructure the draft so that **you are at the center of the story**—showing us how you stepped up during a time of grief, how you created moments of connection, and how your empathy shaped the school community.

Alternatively, this could also be adapted for a different UC prompt (like Prompt #8 about what makes you stand out), where the focus on emotional leadership and personal growth would be highlighted more naturally. Either option could work—we just want to be sure your strengths come through clearly and directly. Happy to help with either path!

### **Moving on to some feedback on how you can elevate this essay!**

Right now, this draft reads more like a tribute to your teacher than a reflection on your own impact. To better match the prompt and showcase your voice as an influential leader and change-maker, we'll want to shift the focus slightly toward:

1. What *you* did in the face of grief—emotionally *and practically*
2. How you *supported* others or helped the school community heal
3. What you've learned about leadership, grief, and empathy
4. What this reveals about the kind of presence and impact you bring to your community

Below is a possible outline that may help you reorganize your ideas more clearly:

**Hook (~50 words):** Start with the hallway moment: you hugging your teacher and seeing her grief. It's a personal and moving anecdote, and really putting us IN the scene can be a captivating hook.

**Inspiration (~50 words):** Share why you admired Sra. and how her emotional intelligence shaped the kind of leader you aspire to be.

Here's an example of a brief anecdote + inspiration section that you could reference (I implore you to make it a lot more captivating and engaging in your own voice):

*When I hugged my spanish teacher, Sra. L in the hallway, I didn't expect her to cry in my arms. Two days earlier, her nephew—my classmate J—had died suddenly. Seeing my teacher, who had once devoured all of Poe's love letters and memorized Frida Kahlo's autorretratos, and who often inspired me to \_\_\_\_\_ brought to tears, shattered me. At that moment, I realized how much she had given to our community. And I knew I wanted to give something back.*

**Your Impact (~150):** Describe your concrete actions: writing the letter, contributing to J's family, reconnecting your class, holding space for others who were grieving. If you initiated or led any of these efforts, say so directly!

- **What specific actions did you take to help others process grief, feel supported, or reconnect with one another after J's death?** (Ex: I know you mentioned writing heartfelt letters, which is awesome—can we expand on this detail and add even more context on things you did to support other classmates as well? Even creating space for people to process their emotions and practice listening intently is compelling given your area of interest!)
- Moreover, **How did this experience change the way you showed up for others afterward—either inside or outside the classroom?** (Ex: Did you listen more? Reach out to others going through hard times? Develop a new sense of responsibility in emotional spaces?) → show me how this experience with J and your teacher shaped you on a fundamental level!

**Reflection/Future Vision (~100 words):** Reflect on what this moment taught you about community, healing, and solidarity. End with a note about how this shaped your goals (e.g., studying psychiatry, being someone who offers empathy in hard moments).

All that said, this essay has some great potential and I think with a few structural and focus shifts, this piece will become even more impactful ✨ I'm honored to support you on your journey and excited to see how this evolves!

Last but not least, to help with your writing journey, feel free to check our successful University of California (UC) example essays! We kindly ask that you do not share this document with others.

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Y190aqqSFgvLbal7zJ498ZHhZHaB28G4cE71ZMXckE4/edit?usp=sharing>

Given the points above, I'd rate this essay as a ~5/9 in its current stage.

- For more on rating, please see the [attached rubric](#).
- Please note that our scale is quite harsh! Kevin and Jeff's essays were around 6.5s (and Jeff's was featured in the NYTimes). Furthermore, many of our students have gotten into top Ivy League schools with just a 6!

Sincerely,  
Vennela

