



In Our Own Voices A Collection of Essays



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The editors of the Spring 2013 edition of *In Our Own Voices* present this new collection of exceptional essays written by California State University Fullerton English 99 students. The purpose of this journal has always been to celebrate the most excellent English 99 essays and to give the students who composed the selected essays an opportunity to take pride in their accomplishments and share their work with others. We trust that this edition carries on that tradition.

English 99: Developmental Writing requires students to fully engage in all steps of the writing process from prewriting to revising with the goal of helping students find and refine their voices in academic writing. Several essays were nominated for this publication, and we proudly present the most unique and well written in this journal for the purpose of showcasing the finest work produced by the English 99 program during the 2012-2013 academic year.

Thank you to all of the students and faculty who helped us compile this collection. To the readers of this journal, we are confident that you will enjoy reading these extraordinary essays, and we hope that they will inspire future students to strive for excellence in their own writing. Enjoy!

Editors: April Dominguez and Edward Yoo



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I was doing fine until the worst of my fears came. It began as any normal class day with the typical schedule of classwork, homework help, and lecture as the daily routine. Not until the teacher had noticed that participation was low did she ask the question that students try to avoid at any given time. “Who wants to go up on the board to do this example?” Silence overcame the classroom. The awkward silence only continued and my classmates shifted in their seats and gave me the look. The look that suddenly made me the center of attention for which I never understood. Looking down at my desk I tried to avoid eye contact with the teacher although it was obvious. Something as simple as an eraser took interest in me as I fumbled around with it in my hands to avoid the look of my classmates. I couldn’t understand why they wanted me to go up, not until the worst of my fears came up.

“Jenica,” called the teacher. My heart sank as my name was called as everyone exhaled a sigh of relief. My heart began racing. I didn’t know how to do this problem; suddenly the board seemed as if it was all in Chinese instead of a regular algebraic expression. I stood there for what seemed nearly a lifetime. I hardly remember what I wrote, but I know each time I started I would look back at someone for help. I stood there for a long period of time until the teacher understood I clearly didn’t understand the problem and sat me back down. Sitting back down I felt ashamed and embarrassed. I was never strong in math; in fact it was my worst subject. But why was it that everyone kept looking at me as the teacher asked for a volunteer.

Fumbling with my eraser, my fellow student asked “What happened up there?”

“I’m sorry what? I asked.

“What happened to you up there?” he asked again.

“Oh I just didn’t understand it” I said, a bit embarrassed.

“But why? You are Asian.” He said.

From that point the pieces came together. Everyone stared at me because they figured I could do it. They didn’t care to think that maybe someone else understood it; instead I was the first on their minds. Because I was Asian.

It’s been nearly seven years since that happened and it’s still fresh in my mind. My confidence in math only lowered since that day. Feeling ashamed to ask questions, I let myself fall behind because I didn’t want people knowing I never understood it. As simple as asking the teacher after class was something I felt ashamed of as well. My constant thoughts of being a bother stopped me from asking questions. It was then I realized that the call for attention was always on me. In high school people assumed I could help them with homework or they figured I’d be a good partner only to have failed results in the end. As more and more assumed, the more I began to shut myself out of discussions. Being a stereotypical outcast was something I thought I would never encounter at such a young age. I already knew math wasn’t my thing but only to feel more excluded as I was defined amongst my ethnicity made me feel like a lighthouse. A lighthouse that people reached to for help only to end up misguided in the end. Being Asian meant you had to know it all. Some may not find the comment offensive because it’s nearly a general statement saying, “You are smart so what’s so bad about it?” But in regards to that comment it only led me to feel ashamed because of an expectation I couldn’t fulfill. The disappointment of others lowered my own self perseverance and led to my own struggles, not only in math but in general situations.

I understand though how the stereotype was formed around me. Growing up from a strict cultural view by my parents I always had expectations. By being the oldest and a daughter I was viewed as very fragile in my family. I was to be held and cherished and be taught properly. Automatically I was set to have high standards to become a great mother for my own future family. Everything I learned I couldn't forget and I had to be the best at it above everyone else. As my younger brother was born it only led to more on my shoulders as if it wasn't enough. As school began my parents were beyond strict about my education and stressed the importance about having to be sent off into a high paying job and receiving tons of scholarships as I got older. Having to be the best at every subject in school people assumed I knew it all. I went through it all though just as everyone else. From counting from one to ten to learning my alphabets in order was where I started too. I wasn't sure why the basics of learning those suddenly pointed me out from the rest to be a master. I always understood the general expectation of success in education through my family, but to have that enforced and shouldered upon me amongst the rest was overwhelming.

The stereotype altered my own learning capability compared to everyone else. I felt separated from the rest. I was distracted by having to help others when I couldn't even help myself. I no longer felt like I was on board the same ship as everyone else. I set my thoughts as an Asian girl who let down her classmates and wouldn't be able to succeed in school anymore. As an Asian who couldn't be smart just like the rest. The misconception of it all led me to feel like a failure. But as the years went by I learned to deal with the stereotype more in a positive way. I always encounter situations similar to the one I had back in sixth grade, only to have a

different response. The response and feeling I get in the end isn't a feeling of failure but more on the side of determination. Replaying the situation I wouldn't have let it off with just a silence. All I had to say was, "Yes. I'm Asian, but math isn't my best subject and I need help." The simple words, "I need help," is all I had to admit to myself. It took me a while to realize that, yes, I didn't understand that certain problem; but it didn't mean I couldn't offer help with what I already knew. Besides, we could have both helped each other to learn the subject together and not alone. Yes, I had to step up alone to guide everyone out of the problem back in sixth grade but I could have taken the extra step to ask for help in the end. I made myself seem as if I was the lighthouse, but actually I was riding on the same boat as everyone else.

Many people, including myself at one point, believe that the idea of zombies is ridiculous and cynical. That the thought of someone coming back to life after death is foolish, and to a certain measure even humorous. However, when a zombie is viciously tearing and devouring the occipital lobe of your cerebral cortex, you won't be laughing. Now I know exactly what you are thinking: *This essay can't be serious*, or *Why am I wasting my valuable time reading something like this?* This is the exact reason why so many people end up murdered. As humans, we tend to underestimate the possibility of harmful situations like this one, and fail to recognize the advantages of being skeptical. Skepticism gets people thinking; this thinking creates awareness, an awareness that could ultimately save your life. Having spent numerous amounts of hours extensively researching zombies, staying awake all night watching zombie movies, and having read three books on this precise subject, I, Gloria Camacho am more than ready to take these pale skinned, flesh-hungry, walking dead demons into combat. What you are about to read is a survival guide for a zombie apocalypse everyone should critically take into consideration.

The first step to survival is gathering a survival kit and coming up with some type of emergency plan. Preparation is key, and if a zombie were to attack your house this moment you wouldn't want to be stuck without essential necessities. Water bottles, canned foods, first aid supplies, and hand sanitizer is what I primarily recommend keeping in this kit. Try to keep it as light as possible to avoid potential issues. You might be driven to collect important documents and photos throughout the apocalypse but you must remember that health and condition is worth more than identification and memories at this point. The only thing that you're accomplishing by collecting these items is wasting your time and taking up space in your kit. When chaos arises,

you won't be able to think logically and your survival will depend on whether you came up with an emergency plan. Pick two hidden and secure meeting places (If you roam with a group), and if any of you get lost you can meet at that designated area for more protection.

Although food and shelter, for apparent reasons, are very important to consider at a moment like this, don't, and I repeat, do not solely rely on this as your only plan for safety. You will most definitely need some type of weapon by your side. Most commonly, when people think of a zombie apocalypse a baseball bat is what comes to mind as a main source of weapon. However, we must not fail to remember that even though a zombie isn't a normal living, breathing, human being it still has a cognitively functioning brain. As the opponent, our goal is to completely demolish their brain in order to completely eliminate them once and for all. For the most effective and quickest results, I highly recommend using any type of gun for protection. Guns can range from pistols, rifles, and shotguns. Guns are my weapon of choice because they work great with aiming at far distances and ultimately will get the job done quicker. In most cases however, many don't have these types of guns in reach or simply can't operate them. This is absolutely fine because sharp objects such as screwdrivers, knives, or sharp pieces of metals can flawlessly do the job. However, these weapons aren't the best since you need to be up close and personal when using them and can ultimately increase your chances of being bit. Try using them when catching a zombie off guard. You're going to want to familiarize yourself with these weapons though, because not knowing how to work a gun, knife, etc. is pointless at a time like this.

Zombies are called the walking dead for a precise reason. They can't run, hop, jog, or

sprint. This gives us humans a great advantage. We are faster than a zombie, and although many of us aren't athletic the least we could do is dress properly. By properly I mean, running shoes, yoga pants, and track suits. Anything that you are most comfortable in. Ladies, please leave the high heels at home. For Pete's sake, this isn't a fashion show; this is your life we are talking about. Camouflage clothing is ideal in a situation like this. Hiding behind a bush or a tree allows you to carefully observe a zombie in action. Catching them off guard can also let you attack them successfully.

The fourth and final step to survival is perhaps the most vital of all, altering your state of thinking. You will be forced to undergo some terribly difficult situations and make life threatening choices. Everyone who you once loved and cared about is most likely injured or dead and crying over this will only make you weak and possibly a future victim. This is exactly why you need to create an egotistical sense of morale for yourself now. The only person who matters at this point is you. You will as well have to have confidence in yourself. You are no longer the small fish in the pond but the authoritative protagonist to your favorite videogame that is capable of overcoming any obstacle. At this point, only the strongest survive and those who are weak both physically and mentally are left behind. Don't rely on other people for your survival. This is your destiny and you are in total control: attack the situation. In the end, having the right mindset could ultimately determine whether you survive or not.

We basically live in a world that is constantly changing and progressing. Anything can be thrown at us when we least expect it. The best way to survive on this planet is to be aware and prepared. As I mentioned earlier, skepticism is essential and curiosity can lead us far. In the

potential occurrence of a zombie apocalypse, certain procedures involving, weapons, everyday provisions, and mental strength should be highly taken into consideration. Although, the thought of a zombie apocalypse may seem unimaginable for many, you don't lose anything by preparing yourself , because it's better to be safe than sorry.

You cannot escape me. I am everywhere, sneaking around in the shadows like a snake. I whisper in your ear, feeding you lies and empty promises. You can run as fast as you can, but you can never run away from me. You can hide in the most secluded place, but I will find you. But do not worry about that. I am not here to hurt you. Instead, I am here to give you the time of your life.

To help give you the time of your life, I want to tell you about my friends, friends that you may know yourself or someone you know knows them. They make you feel good, give you courage, and just help you escape your pain. They sound fun, right? Sure, they may break up a marriage, make you say things to your friend that you would never say without them, or just make you a different person all around. That is only a small disadvantage to having these two friends.

I am pretty sure you know my friend Al. He comes in many different forms, but is always the same. He gives you courage when you start to hang with him. When you go to a party, Al is always there. Everyone wants to play games with Al. He is the one who makes the party a party. He may also cause drama at the party, but let us not get into that. He may have gotten you in trouble in high school, but you had a blast with him in college. Al does not have a license. So you should not let him drive. He is a very good business man. He makes the bars money every single day and night. Al has also been around for a long time. From 1920 to about 1933, Al was an outlaw, but still managed to stick around in the underground. After 1933, he was welcomed back and everyone loved it. He is in many commercials. He is quite the popular guy.

My friend Drew is also quite the popular guy. He is the guy that makes you feel good and

relaxed. Sometimes, he will give you uncontrollable energy and even strength. But most of the time, he is here to make you feel good. He is partly legal and partly illegal. He works at pharmacies and can help you with sickness and pain. If you abuse him, he will stick around for a very long time. He will start to abuse you after a while and it will take a toll on your body. The thing about Drew is that you have to pay to hang out with him. People love hanging out with him so much that they will try to find money anywhere. If they do not have it, they will steal objects and sell them to get money. He is the kind of guy that you love to hang with, but are ashamed to tell people about that don't like him.

Now I have a core group of friends that I am sure you know too and may be ashamed to know as well. I want to talk about two very important ones. I am pretty sure everyone knows this first one, well at least the men do anyway. Her name is Lucy. Lucy is quite a beauty. She is almost irresistible. She comes into your life at an early age and starts to introduce you to things you know you should not be associated with, but continue to do it because it feels good in the moment. She is a player. She never sticks with one person. She will go to you when she wants you and then leave you in guilt when it is all done. She can lead to broken relationships and more human beings. Like me, there is no running from her.

I could not run from this next guy, Hyde. He has got to be the closest to me out of all my friends. Without him, the others would not even be in the group. He is that important. But he lets that importance get to his head. He is arrogant and thinks higher of himself than what he really is. He believes that because he got a hold on me that he has power over me. In fact, he actually came from me. He would not exist without me. No one else around him seems to even matter to him.

He wants all and gives nothing. Our relationship is bittersweet. I cannot go on without him and he cannot go on without me.

So I have told you about my friends. Have you figured out who I am yet? Maybe I should give myself a little deeper description like I did with everyone else. Like Lucy, I have been around since the beginning of man. The only difference between her and me is that I am older than her and have been around before humans even existed. I was there before the light, before the ocean, before the animals, plants, ground, everything. I had a nice place on a court. I was the number one of my kind. I was beautiful and was known for my music. But Hyde came along and became a bad influence on me. He got me kicked out. Now I am a prisoner in this pit I call home.

I took on a new form because the place I reside in now will not allow my old perfect form to exist. I was there when Adam and Eve were kicked out of paradise. I actually caused them to get kicked out. If I could not have paradise, then they couldn't either. When Pilot asked what to do with Jesus, it was me who yelled out, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" I gave Hitler the idea to kill the Jews. I cause all chaos. I wait in the shadows and whisper in your ear. I strike at your heart over time. Like lights dimming slowly, I pull you into the dark so that you do not even notice you are falling until it is too late. Once I pull a little, I let you get used to the dark, and then I will pull a little more. You can try to turn up the light, but I will always be there to turn them back down. I want to be your friend and have you listen to me and no one else. I control all evil and I am the worst one of them all. All evil comes from me and me alone. Not one evil act has happened without my approval or participation. I am the villain of all villains.

“I choose you!” A group of people yell dressed in costumes of their favorite character, as though it was Halloween. It is as if a new dimension opens every year from June 31 to July 4 at the Los Angeles Convention Center—a dimension that is part fiction and part reality called Anime Expo. Everyone seems to coexist with each other for once regardless of their culture, ethnicity, race, gender, or sexual orientation during the event. To passersbys, the anime fans seem childish, eccentric, and identifiable by their paraphernalia, but this is a misconception because anime fans are mature, diverse, and not always identifiable. Anime is a sanctuary that allows anime fan to escape the chaotic real world, just like reading a book.

Art is an important part of the Japanese culture. It does not only include the traditional Japanese art, but also anime. Anime is a mixture of traditional Japanese art and Western comics. Its purpose is not only to entertain its audience but to also depict the culture of Japan and its history. In every anime, there is always some aspect of Japanese culture, even if the anime is targeted towards children. For example, *Pokémon*, an anime intended for children, shows a Japanese cultural trait in which Japanese children catch rare bugs and then battle each other with them. In other anime classified as mature, its contents may contain elements such as gore, drugs, and nudity. A friend, who was unfamiliar with anime once asked me, “Are you watching anime porn?” when she entered my room. Being demoted to a pervert is not a term that I am proud of because, it is not true. An anime fan is mature enough to embrace such images as a part of Japanese culture.

For most Americans who encounter an anime, the first idea that comes to mind is that it's a cartoon only for kids; therefore watching anime is deemed childish. *Pokémon* seems to advocate

this misconception because, it does target children. However, anime does not only target children; it actually targets many different age groups, especially adults. Anime fans do not only watch *Pokémon*, but they also watch other anime that are more suitable to their age group. The anime *Case Closed*, a detective fiction about solving gruesome murder cases in each episode, such as decapitating people on a rollercoaster, is aimed towards older teenagers and adult. Another anime named *Bakemonogatari* is not as horrifying as *Case Closed*, but depicts naked figures of people, sexual content, and violent scenes in every episode. For example, there is a shower scene in the anime where they show the full figure of the girl and zoom into her butt and chest.

Japanese anime does not only target different age groups; they also have a diverse selection of genres. Many of these genres are serious and not childish. The different genres open up a new world for anime fans because it gives them an opportunity to witness a different world. For example, a famous historic anime movie called *Grave of the Fireflies* by Isao Takahata portrays how the main character, Seita, and his little sister, Setsuko, dreams and hope slowly fade away as they struggled in Japan near the end of World War II. The brutality and tragedy of war is shown throughout the anime to convey the message of how corrupt war is.

Anime fans like to analyze the anime like how writers analyze a book. Some anime may seem cheerful and adorable, but when the anime is analyzed, there are dark undertones in it. For example, in the anime film *Spirited Away* by Hayao Miyazaki, the main character, Chihiro, was forced to work in a bathhouse in an old amusement park in order to break the curse that was cast upon her parents. Although, throughout the whole film, the characters she worked for were all spirits that did not harm her, it actually hints at adolescent prostitution. There was a time in the

history of Japan where girls who worked in bathhouses were often prostitutes. Since the bathhouse is only for the male spirits of clients with an all female workforce, it hints that it is the traditional historic bathhouse. Another anime that has dark undertones is the anime film *My Neighbor Totoro*. It seems like a very innocent anime about a girl named Satsuki who encounters cute cat-like characters like Totoro and Nekobus when she goes on an adventure to find her sister, Mei. However, when anime fans analyze the anime much further, they realize that the anime is based on a murder case in Japan. Throughout the anime, there were ideas relating to the real murder case such as the description of Totoro and the correlation between the names of the character and the month of the murder. Both *Spirited Away* and *My Neighbor Totoro* are family oriented anime movies, yet in both movies have dark backgrounds to them.

Because of all the different kinds of anime, its fans often imitate the behaviors and speeches of the characters in the anime. To an outsider, anime fans appear to be speaking in a foreign language even when they are speaking English because they use many anime references. The jokes and vocabulary that anime fans say make no sense to someone who is unfamiliar with anime. “I choose you,” a phrase taken from the anime *Pokémon* would lead to many misconceptions. People would think that the person is crazy if he says, “I choose you” while pointing at them with a red and white ball. The action would seem eccentric to outsiders because who in their right mind would do that?

Sometimes anime fans can be identifiable by their style but most are not easy to identify because they come from different backgrounds. When people wear a shirt that has an anime character printed on it, people would often identify them as an anime fan. The music they listen to

and the books they carry could identify anime fans. Even though I have anime merchandise at home, I do not wear merchandise that contains anime in public and know many of my friends who do the same. It does not mean that we are not prideful of who we are, but some of the merchandise are expensive and rare.

There is no doubt that anime had flourished throughout the world over the last century. It has made a great impact on the entertainment history as well as on people's lives. In the United States, especially in California, being an anime fan is nothing to be ashamed of because there are many anime fans out there. Watching anime is not something to be shameful of because it's just like watching sports, reading a book, or going to an amusement park. It is an activity and a great medium for entertainment in which people can escape reality for a brief moment and enjoy being in a whole other fictional world.

School buses are an eye-sore. The sight of pee-stain yellow with black racing stripes sends shivers down my spine. I always picture this bus as a mobile holding cage for the offspring of rabid animals; somewhere I did not belong. This rolling bumble bee stung me every time I woke up from school. My mom forced me to ride the bus, since she was unable to drive me. Perhaps I would meet new friends. Maybe I will be popular and have my own paparazzi. I knew somehow I would impress my mother and by moving again to another apartment, I had another chance. We moved about every two years and each time I had the opportunity to start fresh. I could be whoever I wanted and no one would know my past self. The need to be of importance to my mother was the demise of our relationship. She was always busy with her “adult” priorities. She always believed I needed to be more of a social butterfly than a hermit crab. Her idea of me going through this metamorphosis was sending me off onto this ugly, odorous gas guzzler with my peers who glared at my blonde hair. If my mother needed me to ride this bus, so be it. Maybe she’ll finally find time out of her schedule to listen.

Moving into another new neighborhood meant that I had to ride a new bus route. Unfortunately, in order for me to get to school on time, I awoke two hours before school started, hopped onto the bus in front of the condo complex where I lived, drove to a notorious elementary school in sketchy downtown San Bernardino, then caught another bus that would arrive at my school. Gosh, I hated the bus schedule. As a short, round girth child, terror fueled my anxiety when meeting new people but taking two different buses was even more overwhelming. On top of that, I was already labeled amongst the neighborhood kids as “new girl” and “girl whose last name is not Rodriguez.” It was not my first time being an outsider and different from the rest. I

just wanted to fit in with people my age.

On the first day of taking my new bus route, it was apparent how the behaviors of these grade school children were not any different from others. These kids on the bus were rowdy and obnoxious like monkeys at the zoo. The holding cage seemed to amplify this idea of my longing to belong. One-by-one in a single file line, the grade school children piled in. My purple Jansport backpack was hanging off my shoulder. On my other shoulder, there hung my Scooby Doo lunch box. I climbed the stairs in slow motion, trying to buy more time. Of course, I was the last one in line. As I reached the top of the stairs, I glanced around searching for a seat. Every single seat was occupied. Boys and girls were laughing, shrieking, and throwing paper across the aisles. Everything came to a halt. All brown, black, and hazel eyes were glued onto me. I was the main event. They sized me down, made obscene gestures, created snarling faces and had their noses turned into the air as I paced down the center. No seat was available. I covered my face with my Hello Kitty notebook. The rose-colored cover blended with the flushed embarrassment on my face. *Was my mother aware she was sending me into the lion cage, having to fend for myself? What will mom think about this?* I felt the walkway getting narrow and my hands trembled as if I had Parkinson's disease. The monsters could smell the fear.

Suddenly, the voice of an angel called out.

"You...Gringa!"

Now I knew I was becoming delusional. The voice of an altered ego superhero that I created in my head was speaking to me, to convince myself that I could be saved from this chaotic mess. If I was ever going to have paparazzi following me as I dreamed before getting on

the bus, it would be from the scene I was causing. Everyone intently watched as if this was an episode of *Days of Our Lives*. I turned my body towards the sound of the voice.

“Come here. This spot is open.”

She grabbed her books from the window seat and scooted over. Dumbfounded, I hurried toward the same brown leather seat with my backpack and lunchbox. I stood at the opening of the bus seat and examined the seat. On the front of one of her notebooks was elegantly printed *Maria Vasquez*. I debated the pros and cons of the seat offered. She could be this beautiful, auburn haired angel helping out this poor stringy hair gremlin or she could possibly be Satan in the flesh. I went with the first assumption since she had not once curled her fingers into a fist or attempted to blacken my eye. I sat down in a stiff manner trying not to invade Maria’s personal space. She coiled her hair between her fingers ever so gently. I guessed she must have inherited her locks from her mother. The bus slowly left the curb of the street and continued to the next stop. The whole bus ride to the elementary school I had to transfer at, I watched Maria out of the corner of my eye, waiting for her to say more.

The whole bus trip to the first stop we were both silent. I guess it might have been because we had nothing in common or that Maria was just as shy as me. She had her ears pierced and had a long red scar along her forearm. Judging from the blasting of mariachi music pouring out of her headphones, I’m guessing she did not feel like starting up a conversation with a stranger especially with a gringa. I wondered where her friends were or if she had any friends. *Was Maria a new girl just like me?* The bus came to a complete stop. Woodrow Wilson Elementary. The name still makes me nervous. I grabbed my belongings and stirred up the

courage to wave to Maria as I exited the bus. Though, Maria did not wave back or smile in my direction, I could see a twinkle in her eye.

I waited for what seemed like an eternity in eleven-year-old terms. Woodrow Wilson had already been in session for the fall three weeks prior before my school. To entertain myself, I observed the field near the next bus stop. A class of third graders ran outside from the portables toward the freshly cut grass. A whistle was blown and the students were told to run five laps. Five laps?! She had to be kidding. She blew her whistle again and only a handful of the kids ran, some walked, and most did not move at all until their teacher started to articulate anger in her voice. I stood on the outside of the school, separated by a rusty chain-linked fence. I thought about how my school would be and if my teacher would make me run five laps. I prayed if that situation occurred that the other fifth graders in my class would not point and stare. My weight and lack of athletic ability would have not been a problem if mom allowed me to go outside. *"It's dangerous."* *"We live in a bad neighborhood."* *Blah, blah, blah.* Mother would just make excuses, not realizing the big picture.

The students ran and walked by, staring at me as if I was an alien from a far away planet. But there was one girl who started prancing over to the area of the fence I stood next to. Immediately, she glared to where I was standing and we locked eyes. She had long black hair that glazed her lower back. Her skin was the color of mocha, and she wore these pink Converse shoes that had green laces. The girl was not by herself. Her friends looked as though they could be her sisters. They approached the fence with words so foul, a statement so dirty, that they looked around to make sure that an authoritative figure was not around. The phrase the girls wanted to

shout was about to roll off their tongues with ease. At this moment, I took notice to their curiosity. Then, the pink Converse girl said a slur that I have heard before on T.V. but have never experienced in real life,

“White Trash!”

My eyes dilated bigger than the moon.

“White trash, white trash, white trash!”

They all chanted this phrase over and over until it was engraved in my mind. I could not fathom girls around my age, saying those words to a random stranger. *Is it the Scooby Doo lunch box? My purple backpack? My blond hair or blue eyes?* Something so foul, so disgusting, possessed these girls’ minds.

I spotted my bus coming down the street. Perfect timing. I hurried to the door and ran as fast as I could to the first empty seat, trying to tune out those witches’ high-pitched laughs. This time on my second bus, there were many empty seats, so I sat alone. Never have I cried buckets of tears before. I glanced from the front to the back of the bus. Only a handful of kids rode this bus and luckily none of them noticed my swollen face and blood-shot eyes. Already, I have calculated my list of friends as negative three. My destiny was to be the hermit crab. There would be no entourage that wished they could live my life. I never thought that I would wish for the mysterious Maria to have the same bus schedule as me. It was the beginning to this rollercoaster ride of my childhood.

The second bus ride was longer than the first one. Looking outside the dirty window, I daydreamed for what was yet to come. I would arrive at my new school, friendless. When recess

would roll around, I would be the kid who walked the perimeter of the field alone. When the lunch bell rang, I would eat my peanut butter and jelly sandwich in silence. Then I would ride the same bus route Maria-less back to a house full of boxes and blank walls. My mom would come home around dinner time and ask how my first day went. I would try to explain what happened: Maria, pink Converse shoes girl and her friends, and how horrible the bus is. She would look at my face with confusion, and question, “What did you say Honey?” Then I would whisper a melancholy, “Fine.” and proceed to walk upstairs, feeling her disappointment burning in my heart.

I was sitting on the couch with my ten-year-old brother, Julian, watching *The Batman Adventures* marathon on Cartoon Network one night. Villains like the Joker, Mystique, and Poison Ivy reminded me so much of the mean girls I knew in high school.

“Who do you think is the worst villain?” I asked.

“Harley Quinn!” he said.

“Really?” She’s not even the meanest villain!” I said questionably.

“Because she reminds me of this really mean girl who always made fun of me when I was in 3rd grade.” He said in a bleak tone.

Our conversation made me realize what connections fictional villains have to real life people. A villain can be anyone who constantly puts negativity in one’s life. They don’t always necessarily have to be people who are evil or who dedicate themselves to wickedness. There are villains all over the world whether it is at work, at school or in one’s own home. In my case, there were girls who were my high school villains. All they did was surround my life with negativity. Although these high school girls may not have intended to act like the fictional villains in Batman, X-Men or Spiderman, they had very similar qualities. More specifically, their condescending, manipulative, and deceptive ways impacted my life and showed me how to become a better person.

Condescending, sardonic, and viciously funny are the best words to describe Michelle. She was a senior, valedictorian, and one of the most popular girls in school. What more could she possibly ask for? Her confidence and condescending attitude made her believe she could push me around and humiliate me. She was seemingly devoted to making underclassmen miserable, and in

my luck, I was her biggest target. I'll never forget the time she humiliated me in front of the whole school during assembly. I was sitting on the top row of the bleachers with my friends and my crush, who I had a crush on since junior high. Michelle walked up on the stage and came eye to eye with me. "Is everyone excited for winter formal?" She shouted. The whole school cheered in excitement. "But before we get started," she giggled, "Bri Lorenzana would like to ask her biggest crush, Troy Gregg, to formal!"

"You've got to be kidding me." I whispered with shakiness in my voice.

"Will you two come up on stage to show everyone what a cute couple you guys would make?" She said with a smirk. My heart stopped and my eyes watered up. Everyone laughed and pointed as I jolted up and ran out of the gym. It was the most embarrassing thing that could happen to a freshmen girl. Just like the Joker, she thought it was funny to torture me and see me break down. Michelle's bullying made me a stronger person; it taught me to never let anyone put me down.

When I moved to California at the beginning of junior year, I met a vibrant and outgoing girl names Georgia. She was a social butterfly at school; she knew and talked to everyone. For some odd reason, I felt cool when she befriended me, considering I was the new girl and knew no one. She asked me to be a part of her clique, which always sat together at lunch. They seemed like the sweetest girls because they would always compliment each other and all of the other girls at school. I started hanging out with them every lunch and they would talk behind everyone's back, including their so-called "friends." I realized that the people that I thought were friendly weren't so friendly after all. The only thing that Georgia and her clique did was talk bad about

everyone, and sadly I was a part of it. Every single day, there was someone new to judge. Little did I know, even the girls I became close to had talked bad about me behind my back. In relation to the fictional shape-shifting villain, Mystique, you never knew if Georgia was being herself or being fake. They were all mean and superficial, people I didn't want to become or be a part of. It made me realize if I didn't want people talking bad about me behind my back, I shouldn't do it to other people.

Then there was Lea, the sweetest girl I have ever met. By just looking at her, with her perfect curly brown hair and her very stylish taste of clothing, no one would ever guess she used her five-finger discount for almost every piece of her outfit. In fact she was a mastermind at stealing and had a whole closet full of stolen items. Although I understood most people would consider her some kind of criminal, I was still her friend. Well, until the day she pressured me into stealing. Lea had a whole posse that she pressured and manipulated to think her way. There was a point in our friendship where she almost manipulated me to think stealing was fun, cool, and acceptable. Her exact words were ' "It will give you such a good adrenaline rush!" Which got me thinking, *How would the store possibly notice the missing clothes? And hey, of course I can get it for free, why pay for it?* I snapped out of that mindset as soon as one of the girls in Lea's posse was arrested for stealing a three-dollar ring. I realized that it is not worth jeopardizing my future for something I could simply buy and easily afford. Lea's ways proved to me that she wasn't a friend, but a villain to me and my peers. Lea was a clone of Poison Ivy, tricking anyone she wanted into obeying what she said and thinking that it was right. I learned to never let someone tell me to do something when I know it is wrong and feel uncomfortable doing it.

Having to deal with my high school villains wasn't easy, but there is one good thing I learned about myself. It is that I am a better person than those who put me down, and now I am stronger because of it. Remembering what I had dealt with in high school, I didn't want my brother to ever have to go through the same thing. I put my arm around him, "If you ever deal with another bully, don't ever stoop down to their level, okay?" I said. He looked at me with a sweet smile and nodded yes.

Throughout my childhood I was raised in a diverse community. I had become accustomed to the diversity of the culture that I matured in. I never fully obtained the knowledge of African American history, only the snapshot memories of Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks. While learning about Rosa Parks in the fourth grade I had encountered an incident where I was asked by a girl, why my hair had the texture it did. I had no response to her ignorant question. I felt as if I were a black sheep trying to gain the acceptance of others that I had nothing in common with. Where it becomes more difficult to understand, is why individuals from a similar ethnic background as mine would reject me for the person I am. Blacks that tend to have an uncontrolled advantage over their environment seem to be misread by other blacks in their culture and by those looking in at the black culture. I understand that history is a large component of the discrimination amongst educated and uneducated blacks, and the media constantly reminds the African American culture of the oppressing stereotypes that are faced.

There are individuals who have more opportunities and advantages in situations that they have no control over. They may be referred to as privileged. Privileged individuals in the black community tend to be misunderstood by blacks that are less fortunate than they are. The entire privileged scenario branched from slavery since the early 1800s, starting with “the house slaves” and “the field slaves.” Black slave women would be raped by their slave masters and birth children that were of a lighter skin tone. These children were still considered slaves even though their fathers were not; they still had that slave blood running through their veins. These biracial individuals became known as “house slaves.” These particular slaves felt that they were superior to the slaves who were of a darker complexion and worked out doors. They became known as

“field slaves.” Unfortunately the mentality of “the house slaves” and “the field slaves” unconsciously exists in a few of our black communities today.

In my generation there are still issues between the lighter complexion and the darker complexion blacks, but the deeper issue seems to be with the different advantages and opportunities certain blacks may obtain. Many blacks raised in ghettos, commonly have the experience of suffering in poverty. They may not have the same advantages compared to blacks who live in upscale communities. Education may not be easily accessed by less fortunate individuals, leading to the lack of their educational skills. Their education does not offer them a chance to demonstrate their educational capabilities. African Americans that may have had the advantage of being raised in an economically stable environment tend to have the ability to pursue their education more frequently. Some individuals that have the reoccurring issue of not being successful in academia will likely adopt an envious approach toward those that are more privileged.

This past year my family transitioned from attending a church in Riverside to becoming members of a church in Compton. This sudden relocation became a huge culture shock for me, especially when I introduced myself to my new congregation. I was introducing myself to a few members of the youth department in the church. Suddenly, I was interrupted by a young lady who said, “Why you talking like you white?” I was taken by surprise at the disrespectful comment that was made. I pondered on the statement for a few seconds, coming up with the conclusion that the young woman must believe that only people of the Caucasian decent are awarded with an education. According to her, to be an “official” black person, one is required to speak slang and

not articulate their words clear and properly. There are a few African Americans that have been able to receive an exceedingly well education, and have been questioned about how “black” they are due to the choice of their vocabulary. The media feeds off of the ignorance of some African Americans and the social construction of the black community. It perpetuates and enhances the negative aspects of multiple ethnicities. The media manipulates people into believing stereotypes viewed on television are factual, and accurate according to a certain culture.

There are some aspects of society that the media is responsible for. The media is liable for some of the misconceptions of several cultural groups. Each culture has stereotypes, whether they are about gamers, athletes, or a certain ethnic group. Ethnic stereotypes are frequently enhanced through the media, specifically the stereotypes of the black culture. In the 1830s *The Minstrel Show* became tremendously popular amongst the white working class. The show consisted of wealthy white men that dressed as plantation slaves and applied black oil or coal on their faces to mimic blacks. They would insult their intelligence, dancing, and cultural background to gain the superior role over African Americans. This offensive show has created an avenue for current shows to falsely portray the black culture. Television shows tend to stereotype black women to have difficulties in their relationships, to be short tempered, and to demonstrate excessively loud language. African American men are seen to be in constant struggle, lack in the ability to articulate vocabulary, and are portrayed to be thugs. Shows that are usually broadcasted on VH1 and BET express stereotypes similar to these. But many blacks are guilty of proving stereotypes to be “true.”

The majority of African Americans seem to poke fun at themselves. They call each other

derogatory names and act out in ways characters do on television. In the 90s there was a popular show called *In Living Color* that emphasized common stereotypes within the African American culture. Black men would dress up as women and degrade the self-worth of African American females. They would speak excessively loud, use slang, and act illiterate. The actors would overstress the features of the black men and women, similarly to the actors of *The Minstrel Show*. The actions of the black actors lead other ethnicities into considering that “all” blacks are perceived how the media portrays them. This affects the fewer blacks that have the advantage of receiving an education and are attempting to break down the stereotypical barriers.

Although some blacks struggle to overcome numerous stereotypes, their efforts seem to not be respected by other ethnic cultures. The African American culture is viewed under a humorous umbrella and as a mockery to some ethnic groups. Few blacks lack in the understanding of the African American heritage. Many refuse to receive a greater comprehension of the unique culture. By becoming more knowledgeable about one’s own culture, individuals take the authority to become more enlightened and acquire the ability to share their knowledge with other ethnicities. This results in a national awareness that all minorities are not chained to those many oppressive stereotypes, but are a part of a unique whole.

