

Common Application Essay

I arrived at Terry's wearing a tie-dye shirt, a Dollar Tree notebook wedged under my arm as I absorbed the surroundings of his first floor apartment -- a Rottweiler snarling on the yellowing lawn, a paper sign reading "Rooms 4 Rent" in the upstairs window, a pickup truck flaunting painted flames parked in the small asphalt lot ringed by a chainlink fence. I felt small, but I knocked.

At the time, I was eleven and we were living in Kenosha, Wisconsin, my mother's liberal, bluecollared hometown, a setting reminiscent of *That 70's Show*. Generations of factory workers supplied dimly lit bars with hardworking and humble energy. Loudmouthed conversations of colorful family friends constantly filled our home, exposing my brother and I to a full-bodied human experience. Through the varying lives that entered my own, storytelling filled the disparate gaps between us, cultivating an impulse to discover as much as possible about the stories that both connected and divided us.

This developing passion for storytelling was supported by my fifth grade teacher. Our elementary school was established by laborers aiming to instill capability in future children by exposing the artistry inherent beneath urban decay. They took us to the Milwaukee Symphony, taught us how to fold paper cranes, and helped us craft haikus, while our friend's father was arrested for assault, a teenager was murdered at our favorite ice cream stop, and a gunman paused in the park across the street. I was moved by the concept of creativity being able to affect our perceptions of our surroundings, becoming especially inspired by books and poetry. I grew restless, brimming with youthful angst, yearning to learn more about writing. One August

afternoon, my teacher asked if I was ready to do something about the person I was becoming and provided the address of a retired journalist named Terry Lawler who, she explained, was equipped with more resources than she could offer. Thus, I showed up to his doorstep and timidly knocked.

A large, bald man answered the door, his happy face framed by a beard, wearing twin hoop earrings and a Hawaiian button-up beneath a Harley Davidson jacket. He smelled like cigarettes, the sparsely furnished room behind him like newspaper and the air fresheners that hang from rearview mirrors in cars. “Do you know what an old soul is?” he asked.

I looked up at him. “Yes?”

“I think you’ve got one, kid. Come in.”

I spent every afternoon the next few weeks sitting at Terry’s plastic table while he spun circles in his office chair, quoting stories and lecturing me on things like the validity of poetic symbolism, the rhythm of minimalist fiction, and how to hone the credibility of my own voice. But that month was saturated with finality -- our school went bankrupt and closed. The nearby middle school was temporarily shut down due to a drug epidemic, so my family decided to move to Minnesota, where my mother used to live, for a new chapter. On my last day at his makeshift office, Terry brought me a copy of Burton Raffel’s *How To Read A Poem*. “You underestimate yourself, you know,” he said as I slipped the book into my backpack. “Your words are powerful.”

Months later, after we’d moved into an apartment in the cold glossiness of Minneapolis and I began sixth grade at a public school, I heard that Terry died unexpectedly. His departure provoked the beginning of an understanding about what I could do with my life: what he did. He

utilized his passion for creative writing to reveal the raw power of the world to those who would otherwise be unable to see it, those stuck in that town. The book is a constant reminder that I can contribute to the global dialogue about what we can do with our lives, helping others like Terry did, with my passion for language.

Supplemental Essay Example for Colorado College - *“The Block Plan at Colorado College has a tradition of innovation and flexibility. Please design your own three-and-a-half week course and describe what you would do.*

“If you have to ask, you’ll never know” was Louis Armstrong’s definition of jazz, but also answers the question of how music communicates a story. Across genres and decades, songs have illustrated emotions of the human condition. “Say Anything” will explore the evolution of self-expression that began with the mixtape, guiding students to become artistic critics while they discover how to produce their own meaningful playlists. The first two weeks of the course will cover the history of the mixtape and its effect on society. “Perhaps the most widely practiced American art form,” as essayist Geoffrey O’Brien believes, the mixtape is a homemade compilation of self-produced tracks created without parameters posed by record labels. Students will examine the resurgence of the mixtape through DJ Drama’s Gangsta Grillz series and 50 Cent’s “The Lost Album”, among others. Additionally, the class will debate the importance of modern mixes, remixes, and interludes. As publication platforms for self-made music become more accessible, millennial artists are often disregarded — for example, those culturally known as “SoundCloud Rappers”. But if the origin of the mixtape is rooted in accessibility, students must contemplate what constitutes serious music and how younger voices contribute to the mixtape movement. Discussions will turn to the romanticization of youthful pain throughout modern American song — from members of the tragic 27 Club, to lyrical examples like M.I.A.’s declaration that bad girls “live fast, die young”, to the newer legacy of Lil Peep’s “emo hip-hop” genre — and the role of controversy in music. By the third week, the course will shift towards

the distinction between the mixtape and the playlist, a medium popularized by programs such as Spotify. In order to cultivate vivacious playlists, architects must decide what's creatively important, so students will absorb artistic works to inform their musical taste. Course readings will include Frank O'Hara's *Lunch Poems* to discern the importance of popular cultural references in American art; *A Visit From The Goon Squad* by Jennifer Egan to understand the emotional impact of musical storytelling; and *Now and Then*, a spoken word collection by Gil Scott-Heron, to analyze the power of bold, lyrical rhythm. Additionally, the class will periodically visit the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center to explore new exhibits, studying how thematic voice can create non-verbal narrative. Each student will keep a journal in which they describe personal moments they feel could be represented by specific songs. Peers will workshop one another's playlists in consideration with their decided theme, critiquing how the tracks shape an objective and the story of the set. Music restores our faith in communication, allowing us to explore the deeper roots of our existence. At the end of this course, students will present their robust playlists alongside their emotional intention. They will be equipped with the artistic confidence to move forward in a musically saturated culture with a sharpened sense of intuition, a heightened aptitude for self-expression, and a concrete understanding of how music can illustrate what we have yet to define.