



WESTERN RESERVE ACADEMY

COLLEGE ESSAYS 2020

Introduction

The College Counseling Office is very excited and proud to share with you our annual College Essay Collection. For the eighth year, we engaged our seniors in a blind essay competition, and the essays contained here include the three top place winners.

Though these few essays were deemed to be the best submissions of the 29 entries into the competition, it is worth sharing that these topics and these qualities are commonplace in the work of our students here at WRA. We feel amazingly fortunate to work with such talented and multifaceted students. I hope you will feel their energy and enjoy their stories.

I would be remiss not to thank the committee who evaluated the submissions: Chief Financial and Operating Officer Tom Arnold, Director of Enrollment Management Jenni Biehn, Head of School Suzanne Walker Buck and Assistant Head of School for Advancement Mark LaFontaine.

Enjoy the essays!

Jillian Nataupsky
Associate Director of College Counseling

AMIE LY '20 (Emory University)

1st Place



Prompt: "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."

To the Writers of Ratatouille,

Watching this animated Pixar film is like eating a bowl of my mom's Vietnamese pho noodle soup, packed with punching flavors that spark a deep and familiar warmth in my belly. Somehow, the story you weaved is so powerful and universal that I, an Asian American girl born into a restaurant business, am surprisingly able to relate to Remy, an animated, talking culinary rat. Despite our differences, watching Ratatouille reminds me of rewatching a home video of my childhood. Instead of watching Remy crack an egg, I see a memory of my mom cooking my favorite after-school snack, fried egg with soy sauce and rice. The egg, sizzling with crackling breaths in the oil. Me, perched on a table giddily watching with legs swinging back and forth in anticipation, and my mom, softly singing and tapping her six-inch heels to an old Chinese song. Yet, Ratatouille not only resonated with the foodie part of my heart, but its famous motto, "Anyone can cook," also taught me that once you realize you are the head chef in your kitchen, that only you have control over your life, you can truly create a fusion of anything you are passionate about.

I am kind of a stir-fry of two cultures. I am not fully Chinese, yet I am also not fully American; instead I sit in an awkward bicultural mix of vegetables. My American friends may see me as Amie Ly, but to my Chinese family, I am known as Ting Ting. Nicknamed after my full Chinese name Li Bao Ting, which translates to "plum, treasure, and grace," I embraced being the plum-treasure-grace baby of my family as they filled my chubby, perpetually rosy cheeks with similarly plump steamed dumplings. However, when I reached middle school age, the comfort of their dumplings' loving warmth quickly cooled as soon as I arrived at middle school. My classmates snickered as my parents hollered after me in their heavily accented voices, "Have a good day, Ting Ting!" and my face heated up to a Chinese New Year envelope shade of bright red. As a minority in a predominantly white school, my voice was always silenced by my classmates' racial jabs like when they mockingly stretched their eyes thin or asked me if my restaurant served dog. Hearing someone say "Ting Ting" no longer felt like a term of endearment, but a stinging mark of shame for the "yellow skin" my classmates stitched onto my identity.

Yet, despite my insecurity as an Asian American, I knew I could no longer fold up my "Asianess" into a fortune cookie and hide it away forever. I finally decided I was going to live by Ratatouille's motto that I can cook up my own fate, that only I can take control of my own narrative-my sense of belonging.

And I did.

Whether it was earning awards for speaking about Chinese and Western cultural strains or being sponsored to study in China and witnessing tensions there firsthand, I found passion in representing the two identities with which I once struggled as an Asian American. Now, as an ambassador of my school's Chinese language program and Mandarin Club, I am a voice for race matters pertaining to Asian Americans and went on to co-start my school's Asian American Association. Even trying out for the school musical and landing the supporting lead for the first time, I became more than "that one Asian girl."

So, I want to thank you, writers of Ratatouille, for not only creating a beautiful animated movie that still sparks a child-like awe in my heart, but also for inspiring kids like me that no matter what race, religion, gender, socioeconomic class, or any other limit society tries to impose, that as long as there is passion, anyone can do anything. Anyone can cook.

Sincerely, a fellow passionate (and always hungry) foodie,
Ting Ting

ELLIE FRATO-SWEENEY '20 (Wellesley College)

2nd Place



Prompt: Share an essay on any topic of your choice.

An itemized list of the contents of a dusty box in my attic that I found while cleaning:

ITEM 1: A letter from when I was seven addressed to the President. Topics discussed: Sweden's single-payer healthcare policy, the swine flu vaccine, my recent sickness, and how he could best reach me with a response.

ITEM 2: An issue from my second grade newspaper, The Ink. Article title: "An Interview with Mr. Traycoff the Reading Teacher." Key quote: "Why do you have a moustache?" "Because they're cool."

ITEM 3: An old Webkinz stuffed animal. Type: frog. Condition: let's call it "well-loved."

ITEM 4: My first grade New Year's Resolution sheet. What would I change in the world? I would make "peace for eternity." Why, I was asked? Because "the USA wastes money on artillery for war when there are starving and homeless people to help [instead]."

ITEM 5: A poster for my elementary school student council election. On two of the four corners was a crude drawing of my face, while on the other two, there was my twin brother's face with a line through it.

ITEM 6: The results of that election... Let's move on.

ITEM 7: A letter to Starkist from my little brother Carter. Date: 2012, when Carter was five. Key passage: "PLEASE stop using big nets to kill dolphins/green turte turtles. You are hurting the world, though you don't mean to."

ITEM 8: A letter to Starkist from me. Date: the same day as Carter's letter. Key passage: "I am very concerned, and so is Carter. You may have gotten a letter from him already. Anyway, back to the point..."

Back to ITEM 7: "Carter"'s letter to Starkist. Handwriting analysis: same as mine. Conclusion: I forged a letter in Carter's name and then referenced it as my own.

ITEM 8: A printout of an email. Key passage: "Dear Mrs. Libby Frato-Sweeney, On behalf of the State Department, we would like to congratulate you on your selection as a Fulbright Distinguished Teacher to Vietnam. You and your family's half-year stay will foster new understandings between two cultures and help to..."

ITEM 9: A plane ticket stub.

ITEM 10: A crinkled 20,000 banknote, roughly the equivalent of 80 US cents.

ITEM 11: A book my friends in Vietnam had printed of pictures of all of us together going out to eat, walking around Hanoi, studying in school together, or just laughing.

ITEM 12: My acceptance letter to Western Reserve Academy.

The dusty box is full, but my life didn't end there. I went off to a boarding school where everyone is passionate about their interests and there are tons of opportunities to pursue them. Over my almost four years, I have participated in political debates and gone to see candidates speak, worked for three years and counting as an editor for the school newspaper, The Reserve Record, studied abroad in Guatemala speaking only Spanish, and, along with my twin brother, been elected student body co-president.

There was a myth in my mind that I had only recently cultivated these passions. But when that dusty box came down from the attic and I saw everything inside, I realized that the story I was telling wasn't new, but one I had been writing all my life. Since this discovery, I've realized that no matter what I do in life, I'll have a strong foundation. While I may be putting the contents back in the box, I won't be doing the same with what they represent. And whether I go into politics or computer science or film or Spanish or anything in between, I'll know who I am and where I stand.

Oh, and I'll probably have to fill a few more boxes.

SURAJ DAKAPPAGARI '20 (The Ohio State University)

3rd Place



Prompt: 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.

A Different Kind of Avenger

When I was 11, I wore my Captain America costume to school on Halloween. He was my favorite superhero; he was strong, he was powerful, and he looked cool doing pretty much everything. I'm not sure I looked as cool and the costume my mom bought at Party City for \$30 was the kind of uncomfortable blend of polyester and nylon that itched my skin incessantly, but I loved it. I loved how the vibrant blue and red colors that were across the suit caused a stark contrast with my dark brown skin.

On that day, I walked into my classroom as the superhero I dreamed to be, and saw my fellow classmates' eyes slowly settle on me. But rather than see excitement and envy, I noted confusion and alarm, and a shadow of disgust, as if I had committed an inexcusable act.

"No," Joanna Dipronio said to me. "You can't be Captain America, because Captain America is American, duh." Joanna was known for being sassy and opinionated, and I wasn't equipped with the right defensive shield to protect me from what she said. I maintained my silence, trying to think in the next five seconds how to defend the fact that I was born in this country, but all I could say was, "I am American."

"No," she said. "You're not like AMERICAN American."

As I got older, I got used to statements like this. I was the only Indian kid in my school, and out of fear of being ostracized or what I thought was self-preservation, I allowed this coded racism to occur. But not on that day. I took out my colored pencils and a single sheet of notebook paper and unknowingly began my first act as the superhero Joanna said I was not allowed to be. After five minutes, I had placed a cheaply made rendition of the Indian flag beneath the star and confronted my villain. "I'm Captain India America, and who are you supposed to be?"

I don't remember what Joanna was for Halloween that day, but I remember that this was

the first day that I decided not to let someone else dictate who I was and what was acceptable for me to do and be. I am brown and I am a theatre kid, I am brown and I like beef, I am brown and I enjoy wearing pastel colors, I am brown and I am an athlete, I am brown and I love superheroes, I am brown and I am American, I am brown and I belong right here. It is these types of experiences that drive my passion for social justice and politics. As president of my school's Desi club, I am able to provide a space for South Asian students to celebrate their cultural heterogeneity and help them wear their own flag with pride. However, it is not always easy to display that same sense of strength and courage. There have been times when I have been weakened by a distasteful Indian accent, the all too common tech support joke, or by the absurdly inappropriate terrorist joke and I would just shrug off that kryptonite. Sometimes the world's villains will try their hardest to break the shield, and they will succeed temporarily, and all I can do is lay there and take the beating, but the important response is to fix your shield, proudly wear your armor, and wait for the next battle, ready to save the world, and all the color in it.