Style and Voice

**Activity One: Ranking characteristics of Identity Formation**

Rank These

from Most being a 9 to

Least being a 1 in how

You think they have affected your sense of a personal identity

Physical Characteristics

Experiences

Economic Circumstances

Family

Genetics

Environment

Friends

Education

Geography

Religion

Explain why you rank one item the highest and why your ranked one item the lowest.

**Activity Two: Simulation**

***Three Identical Strangers* Simulation, 50 points formative**

**Scenario**:

**Part One Dialogue**

Each member of your group is a different person from below. Write out a conversation from these 6 people in response to the events depicted in the film *Three Identical Strangers*. Each member of your group should be a different person. Each person should speak twice for at least two sentences each time.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Marty | An adult who was adopted through the agency and wants to know if they have a twin |
| Pat | Marty’s parent |
| Sam | A family court judge in New York City |
| Carson | An attorney for the adoption agency |
| Madison | A researcher psychologist who wants to look at the findings of the study |
| Trunchbull | A principal for a school for students who are twins and have behavioral problems |

Write out the dialogue

**Part Two: Nurture vs. Nature**

Each person selects two articles and reads them. In your group you may all read the same two articles or read different articles. Discuss the articles in your group and write your response:

In America do you think an individual’s life experiences are more the result of nature or nurture or a combination of the two? Provide specific examples to illustrate this. (one per group)

Write your response and post to google classroom

[Ted Talk](https://www.npr.org/2016/07/15/485709299/how-do-nature-and-nurture-combine-to-make-us-who-we-are)

[What Makes Us? The Guardian](https://www.theguardian.com/science/2018/nov/11/nature-or-nurture-debate-three-identical-strangers-film)

[Are we products of Nature or Nurture The Guardian](https://www.theguardian.com/science/2015/may/19/are-we-products-of-nature-or-nuture-science-answers-age-old-question)

[Are Siblings More Important than Parents The Atlantic](https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/11/the-science-of-sibling-rivalry/570811/)

[Age Old Debate of Nature vs. Nurture Very Well Mind](https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/11/the-science-of-sibling-rivalry/570811/)

[You Are Shaped by the Genes You Inherit](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/25/science/children-parents-genes-education.html)

**Part Three: Study**

Your team has been tasked with finding out the degree to which nature or nurture most affects children or teens. Select one area to research such as athletics, schools, relationships, self-esteem, behavior, etc. Create a study for how you would study whether nature or nurture has the most influence.

The study should have the following elements

* Objectives (statement of what you want to find out)
* Where the study would take place
* Who or what you would you study
* Steps and procedures, you would take (at least five steps/procedures)
* Explain why it would be important to study nature vs. nurture in this area



Three Identical Strangers Simulation Rubric 50 Points Formative

Dr. Gingrich, AP Lang and Comp, SP 2019

Group Member’s Names:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Area | Superior | Effective | Adequate |
| Interview 10 points | Focuses on topic with appropriate, convincing and sophisticated insights and details 10 points | Focuses on topic with appropriate and convincing insights  9 points | Focus on topic with some detail, may be insufficient in responses or limited in coherence 0-8 points |
| Nurture vs Nature Response 10 points | Supports position with appropriate, convincing, and insightful examples  10 points | Supports position with appropriate and sufficient examples  9 points | Support may be limited, insufficient or unconvincing    0-8 points |
| Proposal 30 points | Clear, well- formulated and insightful plan for studying the issues of nature vs. nurture  29-30 points | Clear and well-formulated plan for studying nature vs. nurture  27-28 points | Has a plan but details may be limited, insufficient or unclear  0-26 points |



**Activity Three: AP Analysis Prompts Mairs and Alexander**

Part One: Read and annotate the passages in the following two prompts.

In the following passage Nancy Mairs describes why she refers to herself as a cripple. Read the passage carefully. Then write an essay that analyzes the rhetorical choices Mairs makes to convey her purpose to the audience.

I am a cripple . I choose this word to name me. I choose from among several possibilities, the most common of which are "handicapped" and "disabled." I Line made the choice a number of years ago, without thinking, unaware of my motives for doing so. Even now, I'm not sure what those motives are, but I recog- nize that they are complex and not entirely flattering. People -crippled or not-wince at the word "cripple," as they do not at "handicapped" or "disabled." Perhaps I want them to wince. I want them to see me as a tough customer, one to whom the fates/gods/ viruses have not been kind, but who can face the brutal truth of her existence squarely. As a cripple, I swagger. But, to be fair to myself, a certain amount of honesty underlies my choice. "Cripple" seems to me a clean word, straightforward and precise. It has an honorable history, having made its first appearance in the Lindisfarne Gospel in the tenth century. As a lover of words, I like the accuracy with which it describes my condition : I have lost the full use of my limbs. "Disabled ," by contrast, suggests any incapacity, phys-ical or mental. And I certainly don't like "handi-capped," which implies that I have deliberately been put at a disadvantage, by whom I can't imagine (my God is not a Handicapper General), in order to equalize chances in the great race of life. These words seem to me to be moving away from my condition, to be widening the gap between word and reality. Most remote is the recently coined euphemism "differently abled," which partakes of the same semantic hopeful- ness that transformed countries from "undeveloped" to "underdeveloped," then to "less developed," and finally to "developing" nations. People have continued to starve in those countries during the shift. Some realities do not obey the dictates of language. Mine is one of them . Whatever you call me, I remain crippled. But I don't care what you call me, so long as it isn't "differently abled," which strikes me as

pure verbal garbage designed , by its ability to describe anyone, to describe no one. I subscribe to George Orwell's thesis that "the slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts." And I refuse to participate in the degeneration of the language to the extent that I deny that I have lost anything in the course of this calamitous disease; I refuse to pretend that the only differences between you and me are the various ordinary ones that distinguish any one person from another. But call me "disabled" or "handicapped" if you like. I have long since grown accustomed to them; and if they are vague, at least they hint at the truth. Moreover, I use them myself. Society is no readier to accept crippledness than to accept death, war, sex, sweat, or wrinkles. I would never refer to another person as a cripple. It is the word I use to name only myself.

In the following passage from the book Fault Lines Meena Alexander describes how living in different places has shaped her identity. Read the passage carefully. Then write an essay that analyzes the rhetorical choices Alexander makes to convey her purpose to the audience

The plate glass window that protected me inside the place of delicate teas and sharply flavored asparagus, tuna fish sandwiches with heapings of scallions and mint, glinted back oddly in my face. I caught my two eyes crooked, face disfigured.

What would it mean for one such as I to pick up a mirror and try to see her face in it?

Night after night, I asked myself the question. What might it mean to look at myself straight, see myself? How many different gazes would that need? And what to do with the crookedness of flesh, thrown back at the eyes? The more I thought about it, the less sense any of it seemed to make. My voice splintered in my ears into a cacophony: whispering cadences, shouts, moans, the quick delight of bodily pleasure, all rising up as if the condition of being fractured had freed the selves jammed into my skin, multiple beings locked into the journeys of one body.

And what of all the cities and small towns and villages I have lived in since birth: Allahabad, Tiruvella, Kozencheri, Pune, Delhi, Hyderabad, all within the boundaries of India; Khartoum in the Sudan; Nottingham in Britain; and now this island of Manhattan? How should I spell out these fragments of a broken geography?

And what of all the languages compacted in my brain: Malayalam, my mother tongue, the language of first speech; Hindi which I learnt as a child; Arabic from my years in the Sudan – odd shards survive; French; English? How would I map all this in a book of days? After all, my life did not fall into the narratives I had been taught to honor, tales that closed back on themselves, as a snake might, swallowing its own ending: birth, an appropriate education – not too much, not too little – an arranged marriage to a man of suitable birth and background, somewhere within the boundaries of India.

Sometimes in my fantasies, the kind that hit you in broad daylight, riding the subway, I have imagined being a dutiful wife, my life perfect as a bud opening in the cool monsoon winds, then blossoming on its stalk on the gulmohar tree, petals dark red, falling onto rich soil outside my mother’s house in Tiruvella. In the inner life coiled within me, I have sometimes longed to be a bud on a tree, blooming in due season, the tree trunk well rooted in a sweet, perpetual place. But everything I think of is with ghosts, even this longing. This imagined past – what never was – is a choke hold.

I sit here writing, for I know that time does not come fluid and whole into my trembling hands. All that is here comes piecemeal, though sometimes the joints have fallen into place miraculously, as if the heavens had opened and mango trees fruited in the rough asphalt of upper Broadway.

But questions persist: Where did I come from? How did I become what I am? How shall I start to write myself, configure my “I” as Other, image this life I lead, here, now, in America? What could I ever be but a mass of faults, a fault mass?

I looked it up in the *Oxford English Dictionary.* It went like this:

Fault: Deficiency, lack, want *of* something… Default, failing, neglect. A defect, imperfection, blameable quality or feature: a. in moral character, b. in physical or intellectual constitution, appearance, structure or workmanship. From geology or mining: a dislocation or break in the strata or vein. Examples: “Every coal field is … split asunder, and broken into tiny fragments by faults.” (Anstead, *Ancient World,* 1847) “There are several kinds of fault e.g., faults of Dislocation; of Denudation; of Upheaval; etc.” (Greasly, *Glossary of Terms in Coal Mining,* 1883) “Fragments of the adjoining rocks mashed and jumbled together, in some cases bound into a solid mass called fault-stuff or fault-rock.” (Green, *Physical Geography*, 1877)

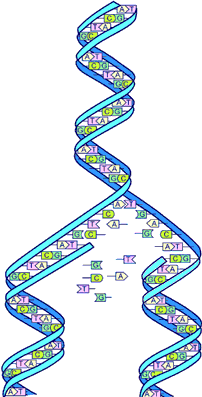
That’s it, I thought. That’s all I am, a woman cracked by multiple migrations. Uprooted so many times she can connect nothing with nothing. Her words are all askew. And so I tormented myself on summer nights, and in the chill wind of autumn, tossing back and forth, worrying myself sick. Till my mind slipped back to my mother – amma – she who gave birth to me, and to amma’s amma, my veliammechi, grandmother Kunju, drawing me back into the darkness of the Tiruvella house with its cool bedrooms

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Question | Mairs | Alexander |
| What is the purpose of the passage? |  |  |
| What rhetorical strategies does the author incorporate into the passage? |  |  |
| What key terms and words does the author define in the passage? |  |  |
| How does the writer convey main ideas through independent clauses? |  |  |
| How does the writer use punctuation and text features to achieve a purpose? |  |  |
| How does the writer convey clear relationships between ideas within and across sentences? |  |  |
| How does the writer arrange clauses, phrases, and words to emphasize ideas? |  |  |
| How does the writer arrange sentences in a text to emphasize ideas? |  |  |

Part Three: Writing

Write two paragraphs in which you analyze the rhetorical choices the author makes in order to convey their purpose regarding their identity. Have a clear thesis, examples of rhetorical choices, and analysis of how the rhetorical choices convey the author’s purpose.

**Activity Four: Cultural Background and Identity Paper**

Gingrich, SP 2019, AP Lang and Comp

**Value: 100 points Summative**

**Papers should be between 1000 and 1500 words**

**Rough Draft: (points will be deducted from final grade for drafts which are less than 1000 words) Due end of period, Friday, January 25th**

**Second Draft: Due end of period, Friday, February 1st**

# **Background issues:**

# In this project you are to research and write about your background, heritage, or culture. You may define background and culture however you want—this could be based on where you live now, your family history, community involvement, participation in a group or activity, national ancestry or ethnicity. The paper should be a minimum of 1000 words. In preparation for the paper you should do the following and include information from each of them in your paper. In the paper summarize the information that you have found and explain how you think the information has been a part of shaping your identity.

**Research Methods:**

**Interview**: interview someone who you consider having a similar background to yourself, family member, community member, someone with similar interests. Write a list of 7-10 questions that must do with areas of interest in which you are concerned. Conduct the interview and take notes on the responses.

Artifacts: find a possession or artifact that has some meaning for your family, the culture you are studying, or yourself, and tie in how that has a personal meaning for you.

**Stories and myths**: find at least one example of a story, myth, folk tale that has relevance for your cultural group. This could be one that you read or find from another source, this could be a story that you have been told over the years by a family or community member, this could be a story that your interviewee tells you during the interview, or this could be a story that you invent.

**Research**: find three sources that present information on your background. Sources could be books, articles, movies, television clips etc. Each source should be used (one passage at least) in your essay. Include a works cited page for the sources. This is due with your final draft. 20 points will be deducted form your essay if this is not included properly.

**Paper elements:**

Write a paper in which you explain how your identity is informed or shaped by your group identification. Within your paper consider the following questions:

* Define what identity means-you can consider articles listed below to do This
* What is the group with which you identify? What attributes does the group have? (this portion should consider the research methods and illustrate an explanation of them)
* How do other group’s perceive your group?
* How has this group identification shaped your identity? (this could include values, perceptions, perspectives, goals, relationships, etc.)
* Are there other identifications which shape your identity?

**Scoring Criteria:**

* Illustration of use of research methods
* Description of group
* Insight into the group effect upon you
* Development
* Organization
* Voice and originality
* Written clarity

**Articles on Identity**

[The Real You is a Myth](https://theconversation.com/the-real-you-is-a-myth-we-constantly-create-false-memories-to-achieve-the-identity-we-want-103253)

[Choose Your Identity NY Times](https://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/14/magazine/choose-your-own-identity.html)

[Speak for Yourself NY Times](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/10/opinion/sunday/speak-for-yourself.html)

[Can We Choose Our Own Identity The Guardian](https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/aug/31/who-owns-your-identity-kwame-anthony-appiah)

**Where Does Identity Come from Scientific American**

<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/where-does-identity-come-from/>

:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Person you will interview-questions you will ask them—when and where will you conduct the interview |  |
| Artifact that you will use and where you will find |  |
| Names of articles or research you will use |  |

**Rubric for Identity Paper**

**Name:**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Category** | **9/8 Sophisticated**  **10 points** | **7/6**  **Effective**  **9 points** | **5/4**  **Adequate**  **8-7 points** | **3/2/1**  **Inadequate**  **6-0 points** |
| **Content x 3** | Takes a sophisticated position that clearly defines the personal identity of the author and elaborates upon that identity vividly through descriptions of details regarding the social group derived from research. Explanation of the identity has support that is appropriate, convincing, and insightful. | Takes an effective position that clearly defines the personal identity of the author and elaborates upon that identity through descriptions of details regarding the social group derived from research. Explanation of the identity is appropriate and convincing. | Takes an adequate position that clearly defines the personal identity of the author and elaborates upon that identity with sufficient support. Explanation of the identity is appropriate and sufficient. | Explanation of the identity and support for that identity through description of membership in a group is limited, unconvincing, or insufficient |
| **Voice x 2** | Strong personal voice and expression of original ideas | Effective personal voice and expression of some originality | Adequate voice but may need more originality of expression | Writing lacks much cohesion of personal expression |
| **Research x 3** | The paper fluently synthesizes different research elements into the essay and blends those sources into the essay in a sophisticated fashion | The paper effectively synthesizes different research elements and clearly uses those sources in the paper | Sources are used but the synthesizes of the sources may be limited (one or more sources may be missing) | Sources may not be used or the connection between the sources and the topic of identity may be uncertain |
| **Organization and Writing Style x2** | The paper has a sophisticated organization and a mature writing style  \*9 essays will be particularly strong in style, use off sources, or sophistication of written style | Effective written style though not flawless;  7 Essays will have stronger support or a clearer written style | Adequate and clear writing though style may be functionary and show little flair | May have significant errors which impede comprehension |

Sample Identity Paper 1

Molded Through Culture: the Muslim American Experience and its Place in My Identity

When approached with the question “Who are you?”, one might immediately regurgitate

a pre-compiled list of basic identifying factors such as one’s name, basic interests, and other

basal forms of public identification. These are what are known as self-schemas according to

Judith Howard of the Sociology Department at the University of Washington. Self-schemas can

be defined as pre-dictated and organized knowledge about the basic characteristics of an

individual specifically set aside in order to serve a publically identifying service. For example, if

someone was to ask you to introduce yourself, you might include your vocation or perhaps a

hobby in addition to your nominal identity. Therefore, you leave your impression to be uniquely

identified by a person or a group by what you offered in your self-schema. In addition to this

pre-ordained identifying list is what is known as a group-schema. These are shared experiences,

ideas, or a subscription towards a certain stratified group that has already been identified in

society such as gender, political affiliation, religious convictions, etc. These two create a modern

formula as to who you are in comparison to others, more specifically as “socially distinguishing

features that a person takes a special pride in or views as unchangeable but socially

consequential” (Fearson, 2). In essence, this means that one’s chosen presentational identity is an

implicit link to already known social identifiers that are consequential to interaction; such as one's beliefs or other factors that may dictate the way the rest of the interaction is handled. Thus,

in terms of socialization and introduction of oneself in a social setting, one’s identity is

essentially reduced to these two elements: self-schema and group-schema. While this makes the

infinite spectrum of human psyche much more relatable and comprehensible on an external

interactive basis, it largely redacts the minute yet monumental contributing factors that spark

each human as unique in terms of identity. The question of what precisely qualifies as a

contribution to identity is daunting and more than likely holds an unattainable answer, seeing as

identity runs deeper than simply genetic code. Each experience that one faces as they mature and

autonomously develop impresses certain lessons, traits, and eventually identifying characteristics

that will be used later in life to contribute towards one’s identity. This is even more daunting of a

task when contextualized into cumulative human history. Up until recently, and not even

completely globally, one’s identity was assigned due to class, rank on feudal hierarchy, or caste.

Only recently have humans begun to complicate and diversify their own personal identities, as

societal development has granted them the liberty to do so. Ergo, in order to ease the existential

crisis faced with holistically identifying oneself, humans have placed their identities in the hands

of one another. In order to identify themselves, they have created an equation of identity in

which the plethora of factors that make one’s identity up all boil down to a relation. The relation

refers to pre-established “social categories and the sources of an individual’s self-respect or

dignity” (Fearson, 2) from those categories, essentially translating one's identity through the

shared experiences of others.

One contributing consequential social group that has translated my identity is that of

Muslim Americans. The conundrum in this is that technically it is not just one category, but

rather a category within another. Not only have I isolated a nationality, but I have from that

derived yet another identifying specificity of a religious conviction. In theory I could continue to

isolate specificities until they translate my identity with complete accuracy and precision,

however, the amount of contributing factors that have shaped me in addition to the broad

identification of Muslim American is insurmountable, if not infinite, just as is everyone’s

personal identities. The definition of Muslim American is quite self-explanatory: it is the shared

social categorization of those who are of American descent, nationality, citizenship, or

inhabitance who were raised, converted, or practicing the faith of Islam. While this identity can

be beheld by quite a significant amount of people (roughly 3.45 million Muslim inhabitants of

the United States), each individual connotation may vary; ever so slightly or ever so drastically.

As a matter of fact, no ethnic or racial group in the Muslim American community makes up a

majority, which is demonstrative of the wide range of other identities and diverse contributions

to this social identification group. Intrinsic shared qualities of those who subscribe to the identity

of Muslim American can be inferred to be those of Muslim teachings and upbringing, which in my experience has been built upon and around the five pillars of the Islamic faith. They are: ​lā ʾ ilāha ʾ illā llāh mu ḥ ammadun rasūlu llāh (there is no God but God and Muhammad [peace be upon him] is his messenger), to fast during the holy month of Ramadan, to give alms to the poor,

to pray the five prayers of the day, and to embark upon the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in

your life. Muslim culture is largely based upon those pillars in that most Muslim Americans have

the shared experience of praying, share a monotheistic faith, actively are taught to be charitable

and patient as well as practice discipline during Ramadan. My experience growing up within the

Muslim community has not just been based on the scripture of the faith, but of the innate

qualities that it creates which has helped shape my morals, interactions, and the way I, as well as

many others in the Muslim American community, conduct ourselves. In re of the combination of

two outward identities ( the American nationality as well as the Muslim faith), a unique

culmination of geographical and spiritual attributes can be observed in through those that

identify with this group. Not only are the traditional Muslim values of humility, modesty, and

subservience conveyed, but so are intrinsic American values of independence, privacy, and

inherent equality. One instance that has anecdotally been told by many Muslim American

women that well summarizes the intersectionality of these two identities is the empowerment and

self-expression of the hijab. The portation of a hijab, or traditional headscarf, is a personal choice

in the Muslim faith, but many Muslim American women are interpreting their choice to wear it

in traditionally American terms. In Western spheres of scrutiny of Muslims, many times the hijab

is regarded as oppressive or indicative of a despotic culture. In true American fashion of the

expectation of respect and equality of one's personal identity, Muslim American women have

combated such connotations by fiercely and proudly wearing their hijabs as a symbol of their

own independence while simultaneously conveying their faith and spiritual identity.

The perception of Muslim Americans in Western culture has been highly visible in modern times of the global era we find ourselves living in today. ​The new generation of Muslim Americans born to immigrants have been raised into the American ideals, granted the rights of

this county by birth, thus the expectation to be afforded the rights of this country is seen as an

indelible right of many Muslim Americans. This highlights a generational discord between born

and naturalized Muslim American citizens in that those who immigrated to this country and did

not grow up with the rights of a U.S. citizen ingrained in their identity are willing to suffer racism, xenophobia, and Islamaphobia, because they believe it is a necessary evil known among

immigrant communities as the “American tax” that one must endure in order to enjoy the right of American citizenship. ​Growing up as a natural born citizen of the United States, it has been a fundamental belief of mine that I, as an American and as a Muslim, should not have to worry

about not being protected by my rights as a citizen when I am faced with instances of hate, and

that is demonstrative of my identity as an American. In terms of comparative politics and human

relations, identity “plays a central role in work on nationalism and ethnic conflict” (Fearson, 1).

Muslim American identification hasbeen recently been faced with a bombard of stigma and

profiling as radical and western-hating terrorists. As a matter of fact, this perception has been so

inflated and harmful, that the years following the 2016 election saw the largest spike in hate

crimes since the 9/11 attacks. According to CAIR, “...anti-Muslim bias incidents and hate crimes

are up 83 and 21 percent respectively…” since the beginning of 2018. However, biases from

Western culture are not the only afront to those of Muslim American identity. As a dual identity

social group, Muslim Americans face warped perception from non-western Muslims as well.

Growing up, it was difficult for me to find a comfortable space in society that conformed to my

complete identity and fulfilled both halves of what it meant to be Muslim American. Facing

marginalization from other Americans for being Muslim is one common theme to most Muslim

Americans, and the subconscious feeling of “not being American enough” was one facet.

However, an additive to the outsider condition is that we are often regarded as “too Western” or

““too Americanized” by those of the Islamic faith that haven't been shaped by American

nationality as part of their congenital self-identification.

This projection of Muslim American is not simply what I relate to others in order to

better identify myself socially. It has bred a unique melange of nationality, spirituality, language,

and culture that has not only shaped me but helped contextualize my cumulative experiences

through the scope of identity. It has been a sense of pride in my heritage and has led me to find

community in others with shared exposure to contributing factors that make the Muslim

American identity. In my experience, my personal specificity of life hasn’t just merely created a

distinctive form of social identification, but it has specified and molded my own mannerisms,

conduct, and qualities that make me who I am. I carry with me lessons of faith in constant

balance and constrast with my upbringing in liberty, which I personally believed have been my

own answer to the age-old question: “who am I”?

ﻮاُ ﻬَ ﻘْ ﻔَ ﻲ ﯾ ِ ﺎﻧَ ﱢﺴ ﱢﻦ ﻟ ﻣً ةَ ﺪْ ﻘُ ﻋ ْ ﻞُ ﻠْ اﺣَ ي و ِ ﺮْ ﻣَ ﻲ أ ِ ﻟ ْ ﱢﺮ ﺴَ ﯾَ ي و ِ رْ ﺪ َ ﻲ ﺻ ِ ﻟ ْ حَ ﺮْ ﱢ اﺷ بَ ر َ ﺎلَ

"My Lord expand for me my breast and ease for me my task and untie the  knot from my tongue that they may understand my speech”     (Dua for good grades)

Sample Identity Paper 2

Espresso Yourself

It’s a hole-in-the-wall type of place. Across a street, down a brick alleyway. A multicolored sign standing awkwardly in the middle of the brick sidewalk promising coffee and a word I don’t quite recognize – *valor*.

Coffee. A drink I don’t understand quite yet. It’s strong and dark, tolerable only when masked by foamy milk and sweet caramel syrup. For me, a treat for a once-in-a-while; although the majority of my country requires it to function daily.

My backpack droops slightly, heavy with textbooks and binders. Notebooks and worksheets. I should get going; logic and the drooping sun, threatening to set, tell me to continue down the brick sidewalks along the busy streets on my way to the local library. But my achy back and school-prompted fatigue tells me otherwise, so I’m compelled to enter. It couldn’t hurt to get a bit of caffeine in my system.

Five minutes later, I emerge with a steaming cup in my hand. It’s white and flimsy, yet strong and valiant, decorated minimally and containing a revitalizing array of character. Espresso, steamed milk, caramel, cardamom. I turn the cup in my hands and let a hesitant smile slip, spotting the peculiar word again on its front – *valor*.

~

Valor is defined as the trait of having great courage in the face of danger or battle. You wouldn’t think it’s something people of our society would tend to possess considering the sedentary nature of the average lifestyle. Jobs requiring danger and physical courage have grown scarce, and the ones which still do are strictly regulated by the government. The average citizen faces minimal daily risk, and social contract and law have fostered order. The progression to society and urbanization has generalized the modern lifestyle into one of safety and ease without the prominence of violence and danger which plagued the lives of our ancestors.

But in the same, our society requires valor in its own way. For, as violence and barbaric danger has slipped away, as society has gained massive control in dictating lifestyle, in has crept pressure and hardship – financial, academic, occupational, legal. Blaring alarms and early mornings followed by late nights with notebooks and papers and textbooks. For students, due dates, constant assessment, report cards, the pressure to graduate and, for some, move on to college. Promotion, evaluation, and the threat of dismissal for professionals in the work environment.

People act quite differently when under pressure. Some thrive – dance under the stress, power through it, display great courage in its face. Many simply crack; take the easy way out, live lives of mediocracy and ease but lack the experience of recognition and accomplishment.

The ones, however, who choose danger; the ones who take on difficulty, who pursue high-reaching careers and graduate top in their classes and embrace their primal thirst for challenge, typically find themselves reliant. Almost nobody can tolerate the late nights, early mornings, and generalized pressure which come with the pursuit of the modern lifestyle without leaning on some sort of pick-me-up. A reason to crawl out of bed in early mornings, even before the sun himself has arisen.

For the majority of the country, the energizer is coffee. It’s become a profound aspect of the common lifestyle. Wake up groggy, mug of coffee. Another in a to-go-cup and out the door. Refill at work to keep the fatigue from creeping in. It’s a wicked cycle.

Others perceive coffee drinkers as wide-eyed, jittery, energetic individuals. Morning people. We walk slightly quicker on the sidewalks, are the first in the office, and seem to lack the typical fog of morning weariness which irks so many working Americans. Those of us who choose to caffeinate don’t simply make up a mere fraction of the country; our group has grown to be a whopping majority. The Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health reported that fifty-four percent of Americans over the age of eighteen drink coffee every day, drinking an average of 3.1 cups per day (Harvard). Financially, the United States spends an estimated $40 billion on coffee each year (Harvard).

I became a part of the vast group of coffee-drinkers at the mere age of fourteen – my freshman year of high school. With an AP class and four honors classes on the weekdays as well as a part time job at the brink of dawn each Saturday and Sunday, I found myself with an abrupt abundance of late study nights and early morning shifts. It began with the occasional iced coffee while studying at Starbucks, but these Starbucks sessions grew more and more consistent and regular. Many shots of espresso later, I was in tenth grade with two AP classes, a heightened workload, a new coffee spot and an espresso machine of my own. Quite the lethal combination.

But after dozens of mochas and caramel lattes – hot and iced – my coffee-drinking grew to be about more than just energy and vitality and caffeine withdrawals. It became about weekday visits to new cafes, about the reassuring walk to my favorite coffee shop, about feeling compelled to pursue academic success and about feeling strong and courageous in the face of academic battle. I’d begun to feel like part of a community – *my* community – primarily after discovering a peculiar hole-in-the-wall coffee shop in my own town, downtown Alpharetta, known as Valor.

I liked the taste of their espresso. The way they steamed their milk. Topped it off with caramel cardamom and slapped it into a funky cup. It was the perfect latte.

However, my frequent return to this newfound coffee shop wasn’t simply the quality of their coffee, but the values, attitude, and overall mood of its existence. The owners – three young guys, passionate about community outreach and ethical business tactics – sought to make each customer feel valued. They got to know you; asked about your day, inquired about your intentions. Upon my returns, they remembered my name. My order. Asked about my job, school, academic workload and studying plans for the day.

Although I made frequent trips to the spot, I never asked about the intentions, goals, values they possessed in running their shop. For that reason, I had many inquiries on a windy, lively day in the midst of January when I had the opportunity to interview one of Valor’s owners – Ross.

Apprehensively scanning my list of questions with uncertainty, I inhaled the shop’s features. Clouded by a smell reminiscent of vibrant coffee bean, the small shop even more smelled of community. Outreach and interaction. Petite enough inside to cram people close together. Almost uncomfortably close, yet brilliantly close. Breaking the threshold of boundary. I was uncertain whether my questions could encapsulate the rich atmosphere of community essence which was so densely abundant here.

*How has owning a coffee shop shaped your ties with the community? How has it altered the relationships you have with those surrounding you?*

“It’s cool to have a place where people can come in and make their day better. Even if it’s just in a small way. You build them up, and the hope is that they leave and, in turn, go build up the people around them.”

*What is your main goal here? What compels you to do what you do?*

“I like the idea that everyone in here feel seen. And loved. And *cared* for. It gets me psyched.”

For them, coffee isn’t about the money. It’s not about the way it tastes, about the way the caffeine makes them feel and about the way it warms them up on the inside. It’s about community. About the *love* of people. It’s about providing customers with both a warm beverage and a positive attitude to start their mornings because, in this day and age, the local café is commonly the first place someone goes upon waking; the first interaction someone has to start their day.

It is the culture and simplicity of local coffee shops such as Valor which tightens and fosters not only the community of coffee drinkers, but the community of people. Arian Horbovetz described in his article, “The Power of the Coffee Shop” how local coffee shops are, “local alternatives to Starbucks” and the way they, “bring people around a simple, daily routine” (Horbovetz). He described them as, “places we visit on the way to work” or “comfy places to study” or even “meeting places for good friends” providing a “loose, cozy, commitment-free venue where everyone can feel comfortable” (Horbovetz).

My favorite coffee shop serves that exact purpose in downtown Alpharetta, and it has too served its purpose in shaping my own identity. I’ve been exposed to entirely new perception of my hometown – one of admiration, of wonder, and of value. I’ve found comfort in its presence, and I’ve learnt to value the hidden gems and centers of community which make my perspective of downtown more precious.

Most impactful of all, I’ve built relationships within my local community of coffee drinkers and learned to treasure the people I interact with. It’s easy to love those who you see on a daily basis – your family, friends, coworkers, schoolmates – but being exposed to this community has altered the way I value even the most seemingly insignificant interactions with others. Looking forwards to the friendliness which radiates throughout the shop, the goofy smiles, the constant positivity and the high standards of customer service that they’ve implemented has taught me to apply these positive interactions with customers at my own job.

Local, hole-in-the wall coffee shops form the hearts of downtown communities. They’re atmospheres of productivity, interaction, community building, and revitalization for all aware of their presence. For me, they’ve become centers of growth in identity and personal empowerment.

~

Coffee grinds in the palm of my hand. They’re coarse and dark, slightly damp, smelling reminiscent of distant early mornings and street lights with a hint of darkish chocolate and brown sugar. The blend name on the package says “Freethrow – *It’s a slam dunk*”. The label on the bag from which they came tells me that the coffee originated in Guatemala and Ethiopia. They’ve traveled rather far from home.

I, on the other hand, haven’t traveled far from my origin. In fact, I’ve stayed put in the same, small town all my life. Downtown Alpharetta. A bubble with particularly low crime, top schools, and minimal economic trouble.

My parents were present, but let me be. They taught me to be smart, to be strong, to be driven, and to pursue my personal values to the best of my ability, yet they enforced no boundaries or molding of their own on my identity. Rather, I was allowed to dictate, grow, and develop my own identity with unfailing support no matter where I went. They praised me when I wrote poetry and stories as a young child, supported me when I explored a vast plethora of sports, understood when I quit them all together for my interest in cooking, and allowed me to regulate my own grades and academic progress from the time that I received my first report card. Self-regulation and self-advocacy were instilled deeply into my core of values.

Through the years, I took on the hardest classes possible and held myself up to the highest standards with regards to academics. By freshman year, school was a battle – a battle over numbers and report cards, eighty-nines and nineties, grade point averages and PSAT conversions.

Productivity became a frequent affair – early mornings, late nights, and long school days were sacrificed to it and sleep became rather scarce. Drinking coffee, however, made the late nights bearable and the early mornings endurable.

Coffee chains and marketers thrive off of the mindset of constant productivity, especially in buzzing city areas in which people – particularly workers – are expected to be productive at all times. Krystal D’Costa, in her article “The Culture of Coffee Drinkers” asserted that, “we’re surrounded by coffee and caffeine” because our society has morphed into one in which there is a, “demand for productivity at all hours” (D’Costa). For many, including myself, coffee doesn’t solely get the day started, but it, “gets us through the day” (D’Costa).

Coffee’s origin is widely associated with the legend of Kaldi the dancing goats. It tells the story of an Ethiopian goatherd called Kaldi who, “observed his goats prancing and frolicking about” (Lokker). Upon investigating, he saw that the goats were, “merrily eating the red berries and shiny leaves” of a tree which he didn’t recognize. After trying some of the berries, he joined the goats in their dancing and became the “happiest herder in happy Arabia” (Lokker). A monk soon passed by the caffeinated crew of frolickers; Kaldi told him about the berries, and the monk realized that they were the “answer to his prayers” (Lokker). Trying the berries, he realized that, “when he ate the berries, he stayed awake” and he thus decided on “drying and boiling” them to “make a beverage” (Lokker). According to the legend, coffee was thus introduced to human society and soon spread throughout all of civilization.

Perhaps, like the Monk, Kaldi, and his dancing goats, I fell in love with coffee for its highly stimulating, fatigue-numbing, almost drug-like properties and addictiveness. It is a quick solution for getting us through “non-optimal periods for productivity” as it “tends to cross from the bloodstream into the brain quickly” allowing us to “feel its effects relatively quickly” (D’Costa).

When my nights grew late with studies, when work mornings and alarms came painfully early, the boost of caffeine provided by coffee became my crutch. It made the days bearable, numbed me to fatigue, and compelled me to persist.

The generalized, almost daily exposure to caffeine was a small price to pay for the academic success I experienced in return. I could focus, concentrate, tune in; be present with the work and tolerate the long periods of concentration. In fact, its impact on my identity has been far more lasting and precious.

I’ve been molded into someone who values productivity, academic success, and the pursuit of my absolute best in everything that I do. My goals have been reshaped and realigned; rather than put in the bare minimum effort and thus receive the bare minimum results, I strive to put my best effort into every situation. My perception of my own self has shifted drastically following my partaking in the consumption of coffee. It provided me with a means of reaching my academic goals; after reaching those goals, I learned to recognize and perceive strength, persistence, and a passionate will for success within myself which have bubbled and dwelled internally for too long.

Perhaps I have traveled far from my origin. Not geographically, like my favorite Ethiopian coffee grinds, but internally. In the way in which I perceive myself and my identity, in the way I value my community, in the relationships which I’ve formed, in the academic values I’ve developed, in the drive I feel to succeed, and in the way I handle adversity. Perhaps I’ve traveled exceptionally far from home.

The ride here has been bumpy. Exhausting. It’s required me to portray a *hell* of a lot of valor. I frequently pause and contemplate why I persist in fighting such a constant battle; why I continue to push my own thresholds, test my own boundaries, wake up early, work long hours, and take on such challenge particularly in academics.

But then I consider what my everyday latte has revealed about my identity. I *thrive* under pressure. I *like* difficulty. Paired with a bit of caffeine, challenge keeps my days motivating, my brain spinning, and my heart content.

~

*I’m not quite sure who I am.*

That’s slightly daunting, considering that I live in a society in which, by my age, I’m expected to have at least the slightest idea or taste of my own identity. Identity, simply put, is the internalization of values, pursuits, and perceptions which are inflicted upon us by culture and family and should align with one’s “authentic self” in order to achieve fulfillment (Heshmat, Ph.D.). I know that I like challenge. I like adventure and difficulty. I like solving issues and situations which make me think; I like hardships which make me learn, grow, and adapt. I like versatility and diversity; periodic change which fosters exponential personal progress. I value learning and education, the pursuit and power of knowledge.

I like the serenity of the countryside on summer evenings, but the way the city bustles with productivity on winter mornings. It makes me feel exponentially powerful. I like colorfully scented candles and the vastness of nightfall and the primal tranquility of nature.

I like the occasional simplicity of a cold brew iced coffee, and the depth of an iced latte. The soothing warmth of a hot caramel latte and the harsh bitterness of espresso to wake me up when I need it.

All of these values, these desires and likes, however, solely blend into a peculiar sort of mish-mash of color and character and ambiguity. My identity, who I am, is still a densely gray area. Psychologists tell us that harnessing the meaning of life and internal joy is as simple as acquiring one’s identity, choosing one’s purposes, and fulfilling those purposes. As if life, in its deeply confounding complexity, is as simplistic as the plot of a Disney movie. It’s comically pathetic.

I’m not in a rush to find the essence of my identity like some sort of clear truth of certainty. It’s far too fluid and complex to be harnessed and implemented like concrete. I’d rather spend my life pursuing irrational, passionate desire than live solely with the intention of understanding myself.

I am a lot of things. Daughter, sister, coffee-lover, strained student, young worker, challenge-chaser. But in the same, I am *not* a lot of things. Perhaps, one day, espresso, time, and my portrayal of valor will blend together to reveal the peculiar thing which society calls my identity.

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