

Creative Writing - Sample Student Personal Essays

Read the following student-written essays which have appeared in Tones. For each, underline sentences that you find particularly effective, moving, funny, etc. In the margins, jot notes about the writer's style and/or meaning.

Pancakes

By Nina N.

Pancakes—is there anything in the world that's better?

I think not.

This summer, my friends and I dedicated all of our time to this wonderful food. We were obsessed with pancakes. The mere utter of the word “pancake” or “syrup” would make us salivate. With a prize of pancakes, you could make us commit any crime.

And you may ask—why? Why pancakes? Well—why not? They're fluffy, they're sweet—they're perfect! Add some whipped cream, butter, and syrup—and you're in heaven!

Like I said, we were obsessed, but that might be an understatement.

So naturally, we set out to find the King of all pancakes. I mean, it's only so long you can go on eating at average Joe pancake shops before you go searching for The One, the Grand Daddy of all pancake restaurants: IHOP—the International House of Pancakes.

However, one of the many horrors of living in a (very) small and (very) residential town is that there are no stores (only a post office and a library) let alone an IHOP. So, we set out on a quest. After a few quick searches on the official IHOP site and a couple clicks on mapquest—we were off.

The closest IHOP was approximately an hour away. And for those grand 60 minutes, all we talked about were pancakes. Everything reminded us of pancakes. Ashlee Simpson's “Pieces of You” changes to “Pancakes for You.” We even made a “honk for pancakes” sign to hang on the back of the car.

We had gone completely insane.

By the time we actually reached IHOP, we were almost crying from anticipation. We even contemplated naming our kids IHOP.

Teenagers reputation of being obnoxiously loud is completely justifiable. Because when we ran into IHOP that day, I think our squeals of joy could wake the dead. I may be exaggerating (a bit) but we certainly terrified the bus load of senior citizens who were innocently enjoying some delectable IHOP.

We ordered every kind of pancake dish available. Chocolate, Banana Nut, Silver Dollars, Blueberry, Strawberry—all of them.

We took pictures with the pancakes, menus, waiters, everything.

It was a wonderful day. I don't think it's possible to explain how amazing those pancakes were. I didn't know food could ever taste that good.

Now, looking back on it, I don't think the type of food really mattered. It could have been jelly beans, celery, anything. It was summer vacation. We were young and stupid.

And it was perfect.

Baby (Don't) Got Back

By Jessica R.

I like big butts and I cannot lie!

Whenever Sir-Mix-a lot's iconic 1992 single blasts through my iPod speakers, an uncontrollable force overcomes me. It's as if my suburban white girl self has been overtaken by an unworldly force, and I am transformed into a foul-mouthed black man who can't help but show his deep appreciation for a curvaceous rear end. Despite my knowing all the words to said song – and frequently subjecting friends, relatives and the occasional stranger to my soaring rendition – I cannot help but disagree with its message. Now I wish I could indignantly say that the song's raunchy lyrics and blatant objectification of the female physique alone are what have caused me such outrage, but sadly I cannot. In fact, a decent number of the songs I have on my iPod are what my good friends

not so lovingly refer to as “ghetto music,” most of which contain similar suggestive messages as well as profanity that may appall the faint of heart. My strong feminist principles do not typically extend to the parameter of my musical taste.

I am really just disheartened because I have been anatomically cursed in a most embarrassing way. No, I do not have webbed toes or fingers, nor am I suffering from an unfortunate uni-brow or buck teeth. The cross that I bear is one that I, at one point, considered worse than all of those. I have what my friends refer to as a “pancake ass.”

I was blissfully unaware of my “little problem” until ninth grade began, when a new friend decided to point out the obvious difference in our rear ends.

“Yours is flat, mine sticks out more...like A LOT more,” she said and sniffed in superiority.

Up until that point in my life, I had never really paid much attention to what my butt looked like. I began obsessing over this new-found flaw, as many young women do. Suddenly I was inferior to the brigades of girls in my grade who suddenly looked like they were long lost members of the Kardashian clan. I longed for some of what I thought of as my “unfortunate thunder thighs” or my untuned stomach to be magically transferred to my backside. Every flaw, from the freckle on the bridge of my nose in between my eyes, to my freakishly long toes, became astronomical. It wasn’t that my friend’s comment suddenly shattered my self-esteem; instead, it falsely made me believe that there was something wrong with me.

Shake shake shake your money maker, Like you were shaking it for some paper.

This conveniently coincided with my new admiration for hip hop and rap music, which was suddenly overshadowed by a feeling of inadequacy whenever a music video for a favorite song would come on. Every song was a reminder that in order to be considered “attractive” or “fine,” I was supposed to have a certain body type. Music, movies, television, magazines and society all seemed to have this concept of the ideal woman, typically one with a large chest, a tiny waist, and of course, a big butt.

My girl got a big old booty, yeah! Your girl got a little booty, oh no!

I wondered, how was I supposed to embrace myself for who I am, while being constantly bombarded by a plethora of messages in rap songs that – often crudely – praise “the badonkadonk”? Where was the love for the “shawty’s” sorely lacking in the backside department?! Were we not desirable simply because our behinds are not worthy of their own zip code? These were very important questions in the mind of my fourteen-year-old self, ones that clearly everyone but I knew the answer to.

My high school career went on. I made new friends, lost some old ones, and realized that many of the people I was close with, had just as many insecurities as I did. Girls with curly hair wanted it straight, girls with straight hair wanted it curly, girls with small chests longed for D cups and girls with big chests wanted everyone to look them in the eyes when they spoke to them. Girls coveted the very things in others that others hated about themselves. I saw the harmful effects of media on the self-esteem of far too many friends as we maneuvered four years of fad diets, new hair trends and begrudgingly purchased gym memberships. All of it seems so dumb to me now, trying to fit this ridiculous mold of what the media has us convinced is ideal. Thankfully, I now realize that something silly about whether or not I had “a body like a coke bottle” – a phrase many popular rappers use today – is not the most important thing.

Now that I am seventeen, an age that I often feel is (and my parents often refute) one of great sagacity and worldly intelligence, I have realized that I was really annoying at fourteen, back when I thought it was socially acceptable to wear bedazzled t-shirts. Therefore, anything I said or thought at that time is irrelevant and most likely very incorrect, so I chalk it up to childhood silliness.

Besides, I’ve now expanded my musical tastes to One Direction who tell me:

Oh, oh! You don’t know you’re beautiful.

Voices & Villains **by Alex N.**

I have always hated Ariel. While other girls my age anxiously awaited “true love’s first kiss,” I cheered on every interference by the movie’s “villain” and my personal heroine, Ursula.

Like most Disney movies, “*The Little Mermaid*” is targeted at young girls, with Ariel marketed as the universal favorite character. I could not relate to her at all; even at seven, I already knew that I would give up my voice for nothing, especially a boy. Ursula was the only character I identified with, and I loved her. This admiration has been particularly telling of the rest of my life.

I sang along gleefully to Ursula’s major musical number “Poor Unfortunate Souls” and carried a “Little Mermaid” lunchbox. I still have the coordinating thermos; it features Ariel staring vacantly into some unknown distance, sporting an overly enthusiastic grin. It sits on my shelf, and when I look at it, I am reminded that life is incredibly unfair – Ariel did absolutely nothing to deserve to be featured on that mug. Although she was ignored by product development teams and pegged as a bully by viewers, I saw Ursula for what she truly was – an inspiration to independent individuals everywhere.

As a young girl, I began to apply her approach to my daily life. In the spirit of fostering my independence, my mother would always make me order for myself. I’d saunter up to the counter of our local bakery and expect immediate attention, just as Ursula would. My tiny figure hidden by the large glass cases of cookies and pastries, I was occasionally ignored by the counter workers. This never discouraged me though, as I would simply stand on my tip-toes and strain until I gained someone’s attention. I relied on my voice to help me obtain what I wanted, something Ariel could not do.

As I grew older, Ursula’s lessons became invaluable. I encountered some male peers who assumed all girls were “Ariels,” and they treated me as if I had no voice. They’d say things like, “It sucks that you’re a girl. You’ll never make as much money as me.” A few days later, these same boys asked me for answers on tests and I snarkily reminded them of my “female inferiority.” Invariably, my grades were always higher than theirs and I felt a wicked sense of delight, best illustrated by the look on Ursula’s face after she tricks Triton, the mer-king, into giving her the throne.

At seventeen, I am still influenced by my tentacled idol. As a junior, I sought leadership positions in many of my school’s organizations. I spent hours after school each day tutoring, organizing papers, and helping teachers to prove my ability. Like Ursula, I envisioned my goal and formulated a plan to achieve it, and then powered mercilessly ahead. I am now the president of two honor societies, editor-in-chief of both of my school’s publications, and the ruler of an underwater kingdom. Okay, I lied about the last one...

I want girls to know it’s okay to not be like the main characters in stereotypical Disney movies. I never want to see another girl pull an “Ariel” and blindly will away her voice. If I can inspire a future generation of Ursula lovers, I will consider my life a success.

As the movie draws to a close, I am giddy as Ursula capsizes Ariel and her prince’s love boat. However, I am the only person depressed by the ending; while everyone celebrates Ariel’s “happy ending,” I suffer the defeat of my beloved Ursula. In moments like this, I recall the thermos upon which her beautiful visage was denied exhibition, and I begin to grow weary.

Yet, I find solace knowing that Ursula is down there in her sea cave, plotting her return to power, and when that day comes, I will rejoice. Until then, I carry on her crusade in my daily life.

Big Cousin Tony **By Stacey B.**

“He’s a lazy bum.” That’s what they all say about my cousin Tony. They say he never does what he says he will, he never finishes the classes he signs up for in college, and he never shows any appreciation for what his parents do for him. But he wasn’t always that way. When I think of Tony, the real Tony, I tend to think of the little boy captured in time in my father’s home videos.

Brillo-haired, baseball cap wearing, knuckle-headed big cousin Tony. Four years older than I, he was my boss. Our eldest cousin Diana held the power over him, so it was only fair that he should have the same right with me. “You’re a Ghostbuster and you fall in the lava and we save you,” he would tell me after Diana had given him his instructions.

Sometimes Tony was my best friend. We played Ninja Turtles, and “house,” and he never gave up the opportunity to inform me of the latest news he had received at school which, in his mind, was a crime for me not to know. But he could also be my worst enemy. He would chase me around the house with my arch nemesis the tuna fish sandwich and force me to endure “big girl tests,” in which I was securely tied to a chair so I could not escape watching scary movies which were required for me to grow up properly.

I looked up to Tony. He was the smartest boy in the world to me. He could count to whatever number he wanted and read books with chapters. Because of him, I couldn’t wait to go to school. I couldn’t wait to discover the magical information that these teacher-people seemed to hand out to Tony. Even when I started school, I always seemed to be running behind him in a race in which I could never catch up, no matter how old I got. He was older than me and therefore automatically smarter. Then he got to high school and seemed to slow his pace. He graduated and stopped altogether. I realized one day that I had achieved my goal and passed him, but instead of victory I only felt defeat. The boy I had grown up with had drifted away and was no longer the cousin I had looked up to. Instead he was the cousin I wanted to have as little in common with as possible.

Times have changed, but the present Tony is not the one that lingers in my memory. I think I will always remember Tony fondly as the little boy wearing the green and pink hat with the T-Rex on the front, who was the first to tell me where babies come from.

Christmas Pageant **By Alex W.**

I’ve only ever been to church twice in my life. Once when I was very small with my soon-to-pass-away English relatives, and one final time five years ago. At the time, my dad was deciding whether to get American citizenship. He had decided to get it, but for some reason, when he faced the desk at the citizenship office, he promptly turned around, clutching his maroon British passport and accent with a renewed vengeance.

So it was in this post-national identity crisis that we went to church. After finding an Anglican church near his house in Westchester, he woke me up one Sunday morning in mid winter, before the sun had risen, and said it was time to go to church.

I got out of bed like there was a fire, probably thinking there was, so when I came down to the kitchen and saw my father dressed up, reading the paper, and drinking coffee, I was annoyed.

“Did you say *church*?”

I was exactly a product of my mother and father, two intellectuals who view religions like elections, weighing pros and cons, considering the issues and always, always cynical. At age thirteen, I had little use for piety. The only semblance of Christianity was around Christmas time, when we erected a large Christmas tree and wholeheartedly celebrated. The intellectual justification for this very large lapse in cynicism was “tradition.” But it was nice to sing carols about the baby Jesus while certifiably denying his divinity.

So there I was on an arbitrary Sunday morning when I should have been sleeping, facing my father who was trying to become magically Anglican again. I tried to talk him out of it, but his newfound religion confronted me with something I had yet to face in discussions with my parents. Righteousness and infallibility. His one compromise was not making me dress up.

In the car, I started to rattle off everything I knew about the Anglican Church.

“Hey dad, did you know it was invented by Henry the VIII?”

“Hey dad, did you know right after he made it up, he took all the church’s treasure and property?”

“Hey dad, did you know that the main reason he broke with the pope was to divorce his wife?”

“Hey dad, did you know I think that this church trip is stupid?”

He didn’t respond the whole ride, but when we parked and he turned off the car, he took a deep breath and simply said, “Alex, please behave. You won’t always have to do this if you don’t want to.”

I wasn’t thinking of my father’s identity, but instead the best way to get out of missing my lazy Sunday mornings. I thought that this was vindication; I had to pay this one price for placating my father. After this few hours, I was done.

We walked into the church, people staring at me in my dirty sweatshirt and jeans. We sat somewhere in the middle, on the hard wooden pews with strange looking apparatuses lined with red velvet pads. A man in a white robe stood at the front and began to speak.

I had always pictured church for the religious as an experience that was for the obliviously, stupidly happy. But as I looked around, I saw that most people there were about as interested as I was. It seemed like my father was the only one paying rapt attention. There were restless children bothering the women who were picking at their nails, who in turn kept poking the men that were fighting the urge to doze off. Even the robed man at the front wasn't intense about it. At one point he forgot something and disappeared from the stage for about ten minutes. When he came back, he had lost his place and led us straight into the psalms.

The singing was rather pleasant, as it always is when you can belt out words you've made up to go along with some sort of melody. But then we finished, and the critical moment was at hand.

"Please pray."

I noticed everyone get on their knees and place their hands on the velvety pads. The church grew exceedingly quiet and I saw people's mouths slightly moving.

I followed suit and got on my knees, elbow to elbow with my father. When I thought, OK, I'll at least try, all that came to mind was every athlete and actor who had thanked Jesus or the Lord for the victory. It didn't make sense, and I certainly wasn't moved.

I opened one eye and looked at my father, and was surprised to find him doing the same thing. He opened his other eye, looked at me and smiled.

The rest of the service was quick, pointless, and unmemorable. When we left the church, I shook someone's hand and ran down the stairs to the car.

We got in and he started driving in silence. More to be annoying than anything else I asked, "So what did you pray about?"

He laughed loudly.

"I was going to ask you the same thing. Actually, I was more thinking about you and me. I was the exact same at your age."

It wasn't until many years later that I really knew what he was talking about. He had gone to British public school, and was therefore subjected to compulsory morning prayers and church services. He told me later that he had always kept one eye open too.

Needless to say, we've never been back since, content to read the paper and talk on Sunday mornings.

Ohio

By Kristin W.

Once we went over the small green bridge that welcomed us, I knew we were there. I sat in the car with the window rolled down in the backseat, the wind blowing in my face. I stuck my hands out the window to feel the air. I could smell the salt water; it was a new taste, different from what I was used to. The streets were busy with joggers, people on roller blades, men fishing off of that same old green bridge. Ocean water surrounded me. This was my dad's new home and it would be mine on weekends.

Every Saturday, my dad would take us to the park across the street from his house. We held each other's hands and crossed the street. The streets were always busy. I called this the "ship park." In my whole ten years of living, I never saw a park in the shape of a pirate ship before. We would play the tickle game. Basically it was a game of tag and if he caught my brother or me, we would then be tickled to death. On the concrete of the playground was a painted map of the United States. One day, my dad walked us over to it. Every state was a different color. I would hop from one state to the other.

"New York, Hop.... Pennsylvania, Hop.... Virginia, Hop...Ohio, Hop..."

He told me to stop there.

Ohio.

"What do you think about Ohio?" asked my dad.

I shrugged my shoulders, looked up at my dad, the sun shining in my eyes. He handed me a white photo album, gold lining hugging the rim and corners of it. I walked over to the nearest bench and opened it. Pictures of my mother and father flowed throughout it. From my dad's first car, to my mom and dad holding hands, to their marriage. Water filled my eyes. I had never seen them both happy, happy together.

I didn't put the pieces together until he stopped showing up on weekends. He never told us why. I guess he was just afraid to upset us. The map was painted there for a reason. There are reasons for everything.

"New York, Hop.... Pennsylvania, Hop.... Virginia, Hop... Ohio, Hop..."

Ohio.

That's where he is.

That's where he left me.

PUBERTY: THE MUSICAL

By Andrew G.

In fifth grade, a time when the last remnants of the cooties were disappearing, the topic on everyone's mind shifted to puberty. At first, the association between puberty and fifth graders might seem completely foreign; after all, our class was the happiest when our teacher told us we could spend the whole period coloring.

Regardless, puberty's presence became increasingly tangible as the year progressed. In hushed voices, we would eagerly discuss Brian, a fellow classmate whose voice had recently acquired the habit of cracking on every other word. Fortunately, this meant that his frequent cheating on tests could no longer remain inconspicuous; his signature strategy of asking hurriedly under his breath, "What's the answer to question...?" mutated itself into, "WhAAAtts the aNNSw-", his voice sounding like that of a dying cow. At the time, we interpreted it as a sign of an upcoming apocalypse. The onlookers to the event would shake their heads and sigh towards the ground with such notable sadness that you might think his entire family had been killed, his house set on fire, his money stolen, his limbs fallen off, and a terminal disease contracted. This wasn't because we felt bad for him, but because we knew it only a matter of time before it happened to ourselves. Inwardly, everyone thought the same naive thought: "I hope that will not happen to me." As it later turned out, that was nothing but wishful thinking on our part.

Aside from the marveling at Brian's voice, the passage from gawky kid to teenager would have happened largely unnoticed had it not been for our school's burning desire to call attention to it. Once a year, the school hosted an event lovingly dubbed, "Maturation Night." The fact that they had called it a "night" revealed their true intentions: to put on a show. Had our school the budget for it, posters would have lined the walls. "Maturation Night!" the posters would have said, words written with bubbly letters above an acne-plagued face. "Bring your mom, dad, and even your grandparents!" All we needed was a score by Andrew Lloyd Webber and it would be a full-blown Broadway show.

While the event was free – what a bargain! – all students were required to have their parents sign a permission slip in order to attend. As if it weren't enough to come to terms with our changing bodies, we now had to tell our parents about our changing bodies. My strategy upon receiving the slip was to slide it across the table "important businessman" style to my mother who would ideally sign it without a word. My plan would have worked perfectly had my mother been sitting at a table, if I looked anything remotely like a businessman, and if I had the hand eye coordination to slide something across a table. My desired path of action having been thwarted, I resorted to Plan B: throwing the slip at her and running away as fast as I could.

The evening's performance was to start at eight, but our presence was required promptly at seven-thirty. Father and son both entered what was to be the theatre for the night's performance: the dinky cafeteria, decorated with filthy tables and an abundance of plastic chairs. It set the tone for the evening; the filthy table was clearly a symbol of the kids' filthy minds that were to be matured and the plastic chairs kept things gritty and uncomfortable and helped keep everybody on the edge of their seats – literally. All the fathers dwarfed the chairs.

When the cast arrived, a motley collection of underpaid school personnel who looked like they'd rather tell students about dead cats than the miracles of the human body, the audience fell silent and anticipation mounted. The school nurse informed us gently that the information to be presented during the evening was to focus exclusively on puberty and not sex. At that moment, it seemed all the parents let out a sigh of relief in unison, happy that there was one fewer topic to cause awkwardness. At the same, the fifth graders sat with mouths wide open having just heard the word "sex" used in public.

Each table was host to a packet with the words, "Maturation Night" written across it in bold letters. What ancient knowledge was contained amongst these packets? How many nights were spent painstakingly translating and transferring ancient Mayan secrets from dusty scrolls in an underground library? Apparently none, I concluded when I opened the packet and was greeted by a poorly drawn picture of a particular part of male anatomy.

The format for the show was as follows: one at a time, a speaker would make his way to the front of cafeteria, the clicking of shoes ringing off the floor, from which point he or she would prophesize in deep booming voices the changes that were to come. Voices would deepen, tempers would flare, individuals would start smelling like dying cats, etc. Out of all of them, the majority of the boys were horrified at the thought of their voices changing. Looking back on it, it was completely irrational. We should have been thrilled at the possibility of joining the ranks of deep-voiced celebrities such as that-guy-who-you-always-hear-narrating-dramatic-movie trailers. The once insignificant act of borrowing a pencil would become a scene worthy of an Oscar and reading passages from Shel Silverstein books would now be like the James Earl Jones recording of the Bible. Even funnier was the fact that we were all protective of our voices to begin with, which, for the record, all closely resembled the sound of Mickey Mouse on helium.

Perhaps the best part of Maturation Night, dramatically speaking, was the audience participation. It was exactly like a game show except no prizes were being rewarded and the questions asked included the stumper, "What fluids can pass out of the male body?" My friend Alec took pleasure in raising his hand at every question which he would answer correctly with a large smile on his otherwise small face. "Urine is one, right?" he said, to which the teachers would nod in obvious approval of his academic prowess.

In a section on anger management, the teachers suggested that we each find something we enjoyed to calm us down in, say, the event we felt like smashing a wall or stabbing a person. Armed with a mic, a teacher headed straight into the audience to hear some of these things from the crowd. It took me only two seconds before I realized he was walking straight towards me; after all, I only looked happy. The teacher stuck his face in mine, pressed the mic against my lips, pulled back his lips to reveal a set of yellowed teeth, and shouted, "WHAT CALMS YOU DOWN WHEN YOU'RE ANGRY, SON?"

I wasn't angry before, but now I certainly was. This man, besides violating my bubble of space, violated one of my rules of life: no man who is not my father shall refer to me as son. "Books," was the response I stammered before casting my gaze at the floor. This pleased the teacher who from that point continued his rounds of the cafeteria. I could breathe freely again.

The night ended with the teachers handing out a gift both appropriate and suggestive: sticks of deodorant. From the school doors, the audience poured out, the sound of grubby hands tearing off crinkly wrapping paper filled the air like the opening of presents on Christmas morning. When we had entered the building earlier that evening, we were a group of stupid kids. Leaving that night, we felt confident in making the transition to being stupid teenagers.

Declaration of Independence **By Tatyana B.**

"If you loved me, you wouldn't care what I wore!" I muttered to my mother. At thirteen years old, this was my first declaration of freedom, my first cry for independence, and the first time I made my mother cry so guiltlessly.

Looking at the photographs of my childhood, I see a plethora of ugly ruffled dresses, terrible haircuts, unflattering penny loafers and fluorescent spandex tights. For the first day of school one year, I managed to include several of these pieces in what I thought was a stylish outfit, perfect for making a first impression on the teacher who I would devote my unending affection to.

This time, the dress was chartreuse, a shade of green comparable only to the crackle pottery of the early twentieth century. On the left side sat a dainty moon made out of white smocking and opposite was an equally dignified cat. All around the collar, the base, and the awful puffy sleeves was more of this white ruffle. Making me less of a fairy princess and more of a grandiose bran muffin.

On my feet were penny loafers fit for my porcelain doll. Like the ruffles on my dress, they were blindingly white and delightful. Tiny flowers were punched out of the top and the hemming was done in the same shade of pink that I always dreamed my bedroom to be.

Until I reached middle school, I always believed that my mother was the perfect example of everything. And it was not that I changed my mind when I grew older, but I was merely embarrassed to admit it. Her choice of clothing now seemed outdated and I looked at my friends with the admiration that I once saved for her.

So when on that June morning, I put on a dress, I had every intention of wearing it to the eighth grade graduation. It was exactly what would be considered cool: blue with leopard print – exceptionally tacky. My mother objected.

Because it made me feel like I was the epitome of style, I pranced around my mother's bedroom gleefully in that dress. Its black straps wrapped delicately around my neck and my shoulders look feminine, something I had longed for endlessly since I had become tall. The hemming was also quite appealing. For the first time, I owned a dress that reached a satisfactory level above the knee. I wanted more than anything to create a final middle school memory of myself in *that* dress.

As I should have predicted, my mother found the dress to be heinous. After reminding her that *she* had purchased it for me, I realized that it had not actually been her decision. I had been learning to make my own decisions slowly. She hadn't approved of the dress when I picked it out, but she had paid for it.

I did not want to wear the floral print dress that she had picked out. It was no less pretty than the one I preferred, but it was not *cool*. But my mother remained firm.

"I will not come to see you graduate in that dress," she told me. And although I know better now, I was terrified that she was serious.

"If you loved me, you wouldn't care what I wore!" I screamed back. She complied. I got to wear the blue dress to the graduation. I won. I had made my Declaration of Independence and I had made my mother cry.

Mistress Mephistopheles

By Nic S.

It starts like regular day. Falling out of bed and stumbling around in the dark, half-open eyes until I fall onto the lamp and turn it on. My eyes close a little more. Tripping out of the front door to find the bus already leaving my stop. I walk slowly to my locker to waste time and meeting up with friends on the way.

"You're walking too *slow*! Speed up or I'm writing you a referral," teachers scream at me. *Slowly*, I think. I find my way into class and learn that I have an appointment with Mistress Mephistopheles, the seven-headed monster.

Shift into her office, the bland glorified cubical complete with pictures drawn by children (perhaps even her own) and pictures of her being happy with actual people.

She's never happy around here. She's never been happy around me, at least. Although her office has a door leading to it, I'm instructed to wait in her secretary's office until she's ready for me. I have no idea what that means because she doesn't have anybody else with her; she's probably opening her safe and taking out her "dealing with the kids" mask.

The hierarchy of teachers and school "officials" have accused me of something. The Mistress asks me if I repent my sins and I reply, "I didn't do anything." The mask breaks at the flanges around her neck a little bit and I continue aggravating the monster by trying to sound like I know what I'm talking about. Unfortunately, my own anger towards her will result only in my own harm; she is a monster, and I can't really be expected to destroy a monster all by my lonesome.

Her mask's flange tears a little more by her neck. I can see her insides, fueled by a deep rage saturated in her own monster blood. Black veins poke through the hole in her mask, her eyelids blink and don't open again. She's losing composure and that is exactly what I hope for. She tells me that I'm being disrespectful towards her and all I can think about is her own hypocrisy. I loathe this monster, and exposing her to the world for what she is, is all I can hope for.

Her mask cracks along her neck. She stands. "Leave," she says, but not before writing me a brand new referral, complete with her own autograph.

I can see her awful black tentacles poking under her desk, taunting me. She tells me to leave and they grab at my ankles. I skip a little, trying to move faster towards the door.

Once I emerge from her office, her little cave where she can feed on the emotions floating around this place, I turn around to close the door and see her pulling her happy mask on again, her meeting finished. The other mask lies on the floor, cracked down the center.

This sort of routine is absolutely normal. I go to the Mistress' office at least twice a week, and it always begins and ends the same way. Her heads always are about to poke their way out and scream "Hello" at me by the time I leave, and I'm always gifted with detention to try to ward me off from picking at her flanges again.

I never listen, but my disobedience is only partially due to my own stupidity; I tear at her because I know that I can. I know that I can annoy her and crack her freshly made masks, and the more that I aggravate her... the less happens. Her facade of being universally love is held up by stacks upon stacks of referrals. They act as pillars holding up her smiling face, now clad in newly printed masks, cackling.

Life is short...And so am I **By Danielle D.**

Standing 4 ft 11in. tall, I have spent a good part of my life looking up to people. I also have a difficult time shopping for pants, and I must research height requirements prior to attending theme parks. But like many things in life, I've had to make adjustments, and not only to my pants. I have to make up for my diminutive physique with a bold personality to show people that my physical size doesn't make me inferior.

Don't get me wrong; being short definitely has its perks. For one thing, I always get to be up front. I have the best views and I am always in the front for my dance recitals and cheerleading sidelines. I never have to worry about wearing any size heel and looking colossal. There are no heels that are too big since they can't possibly make me taller than 5'4. Because people assume I'm younger, I was able to run up to Mickey Mouse at Disney World as fast as the 10-year-old next to me without feeling the least bit insecure. I was able to say out loud that the Buzz Light-Year ride was more entertaining than the monstrous roller coaster without the people around me thinking, "Wow, this 17-year-old girl needs to grow up." I've learned to accept the fact that people see me as younger than I am. I figure in 10 years, when I'm 27, my short physique will have people thinking I'm 20.

Besides the quirks that may accompany being vertically challenged, growing up in an Italian family (which lacks tall relatives), I've never felt cheated by my short stature. Not only have I looked up to people physically, but figuratively as well. I admire my father's values, my mother's humbleness and my siblings' determination to obtain success. My cousin, who is two years younger than me, was put on hormone shots in 1st grade due to doctor's predictions that she would not reach 4'6. Now she proudly stands at 5'2, taller than me. I admire her buoyancy, for she acquired the most optimistic attitude through all her hardships. Although she's younger, I look up to her immensely due to her individuality and bold character. My family's traits inspire me to acquire them myself.

Life is, in fact, too short. I, for one, can honestly say that senior year always felt light years away. I remember the first day of high school, middle school, and even the first day of kindergarten as vividly as I remember the first day of senior year. I recall visiting colleges with my older sister and attending her graduation thinking, "Ughh, I have so long until graduation, it better go by fast." But if my four years of high school had gone by any quicker than it has, it would be non-existent. I believe that I do live my life to the best of my ability: I don't hold grudges, I laugh as often as possible, and I set goals then work hard to achieve them. I always try to greet people with a smile; I am spunky, charismatic and a vault when it comes to keeping secrets. I believe that I'm living proof that "good things come in small packages," and I hope my future is nothing *short* of great success.

My Freckles, My Self **By Jessica C.**

I hate global warming.

It is disastrous for the environment and the well-being of humans and animals alike. More importantly, it wreaks havoc on my skin. Yes, I'm talking about sun damage, freckles if you will. Those minute, yet glaring, brown dots that seem to stare me right in the eye when I peer into the mirror.

That is the embodiment of my past feelings for those endearing little spots on my face. If the eight-year-old version of me found out that I now refer to them as "endearing," she probably would have kicked me in the shin. But she would have had reason to, you see, because those freckles were an unwanted and dominating part of my physical appearance for what felt like an eternity.

While features such as my elevated height, or the fact that I had not yet grown into my ears or nose attributed to my pre-adolescent awkwardness, I blamed the freckles. Hardly *anybody* had them, and if they did, they didn't want them either. The dots qualified me for nicknames such as "spot" or "freckle-face" on all sports teams that I played on. I do mean *all*. Soccer, tennis, basketball, softball, lacrosse, swimming, you name it. Without fail, a

brilliant teammate, coach, or spectator would spy them lurking under my cap and BAM, branded. When inevitable moments of boredom ensued with friends, atop the list of things-we-can-do-to-not-be-so-bored was 1. Try to connect the freckles on Jess's face, or if the perpetual boredom did not relent, 2. *Count* them.

The dawn of adolescence introduced a new dilemma. It turned out that having freckles was not conducive to covering up blemishes with a girl's best friend: makeup. If you put some on one spot, there was a conspicuous lack of freckles there, which immediately called for "evening out" – a term coined by my sister. The actual result was a pseudo mask, which concealed *all* freckles, an idea I embraced at the time.

I may seem to possess an alarming amount of self-loathing at this point, but let me assure you that it was short-lived and it "built character," according to that ancient and borderline sadistic moral. But before I could comprehend this realization, I confined myself to the comfortable boundaries of my mask. I remained there until I looked at a picture and saw what I actually looked like. I was horrified to see that I didn't resemble myself and shocked that I had seen my method of concealment as a *solution*. There was a glimpse of my true self peeking out through my eyes and smile, but my essence was veiled by a synthetic sheath (which didn't even match my skin tone anyway). My small epiphany was not marked by an immediate or drastic transformation, but gradually my use of makeup waned, along with my insecurity. I couldn't tell you exactly when or why this happened, but I eventually started to *like* my freckles. I was fortunate enough to realize in later and more pivotal times that individuality often decreased as one's thirst for acceptance grew. I did not frown upon conformity, but rather resolved to preserve my own uniqueness.

After my revelation, my freckles seemed to get smaller, and lighter, and then became a welcomed staple of myself. Now they join some of my other idiosyncrasies, like my outtie bellybutton (shh!!), in fostering my self-confidence. It is this confidence that gives me the assurance to write an entire essay about what a beast of an adolescent I was. And the hope that it doesn't hurt my chances of getting into the college of my choice.