



**First Year
Writing Prize 2017**

Sponsored by the Writing Colleagues Program and the
Center for Teaching and Learning

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OPENING LETTER

This year, for the first time, all incoming first-year students engaged in a common read, *Citizen* by Claudia Rankine. In many ways, this year's First Year Writing Prize entries embody the spirit of Rankine's book-length poem. Experimentation in form, careful attention to language, and a commitment to social justice characterize the nominated essays. In *Citizen*, Rankine asks: "How difficult is it for one body to feel the injustice wheeled at another?" This crucial question animates the writing highlighted in this booklet: Kevin Lin's "Catcalling" offers a nuanced and deeply empathetic meditation on how one young man comes to understand the intrusive, and fundamentally patriarchal culture of catcalling. Bart Lahiff's "No [Wealthy White] Child Left Behind" draws on careful research and personal reflection to identify inequities in public schooling, and to identify more egalitarian and just educational policies. Other nominated essays explore the loss of a homeland, publicly funded art, the legacies of slavery in notions of work, and the environmental impact of every-day consumer products. This year's collection of nominated essays makes clear that good First Year writing is not primarily defined by strong organization or innovative diction—though those help—but by the ideas that animate and drive the writing. Whether it's in a research paper, a narrative, or a fact sheet, these First Year writers are striving to understand and address injustice.

This year's nominees recognize that courageous writing cannot be crafted alone. Each cover letter submitted by a nominated student acknowledged the support he or she received from peers, Writing Colleagues, Writing Fellows, and professors in developing as writers. Indeed, this prize celebrates not only the accomplishments of individual writers, but also the community of writers who support, challenge, and learn from them. It celebrates professors who ask students to write about things that matter; peers who help one another brainstorm, revise, and edit late into the night; and the Writing Fellows and Writing Colleagues, who, through patience, perseverance, and skill, demonstrate the value of collaboration and revision. Together, these constituencies help shape a vibrant, collaborative, intellectually rigorous, and politically engaged culture of writing at Hobart and William Smith Colleges.

Many writers were involved in the process of discussing and selecting the prize-winning essays. Abby Arky, Nick Metz, Emily Perkins, and Audrey Roberson, were careful and insightful readers of the

nominated essays. Additional thanks go to the Writing and Rhetoric Program, the Center for Teaching and Learning, the First Year Seminar Program, and the Provost's Office for their support of this event and commitment to creating a vibrant culture of writing at HWS. We'd especially like to thank Will Hochman '74 whose commitment to student writing has made this prize possible.

We are equally grateful to the many students who submitted essays for the First Year Writing Prize. It was a pleasure to read such stunning examples of First Year writing and learn from the challenging questions, intellectual energy, creativity, and dedication that our students bring to the page. We hope that you will gain as much pleasure as we have from reading the writing of these exceptional First Year students.

Hannah Dickinson
Assistant Professor, Writing and Rhetoric
Director, Writing Colleagues Program

Ingrid Keenan
Assistant Director, Center for Teaching and Learning

FINALISTS

Emma Consoli

Nominated by Professor Melissa Autumn White

Alexandra Curtis

Nominated by Professor Anna Creadick

Lauren Downes

Nominated by Professor Amy Green & Professor Jim MaKinster

Adrian Giannattasio

Nominated by Professor Cheryl Forbes

William Gladstone

Nominated by Professor Janette Gayle

Mike Goulart

Nominated by Professor Stacey Philbrick Yadav

Lucas Harris

Nominated by Professor Ben Ristow

Claire Haudrich

Nominated by Professor Heather May

Margaret Hollister

Nominated by Professor Jim Capreedy & Professor Laurence Erussard

Khanh Le

Nominated by Professor Sherri Martin-Baron

Colin Maczka

Nominated by Professor Janette Gayle

Sarah Marino-Babcock

Nominated by Professor Janette Gayle

Hugh Mckenny

Nominated by Professor Laurence Erussard

Hugh Mitchell

Nominated by Professor Anna Creadick

James Monaco

Nominated by Professor Tarah Rowse

Anna Moreau

Nominated by Professor Beth Kinne

Jordan Raivel

Nominated by Professor Jim MaKinster

Martin Roeck

*Nominated by Professor Ashwin Manthripragada &
Professor Karen Frost-Arnold*

Brian Schaumloffel

Nominated by Professor Stacey Philbrick Yadav

Rachel Slagle

Nominated by Professor Robin Lewis

WINNERS

OF THE

2017 FIRST YEAR WRITING PRIZE

Bart Lahiff

“No [Wealthy White] Child
Left Behind”

*Nominated by Professor Craig Rimmerman
PPOL 101: Democracy and Public Policy*

Kevin Lin

“Catcalling”

*Nominated by Professor Ben Ristow
WRRH 100: Writer’s Seminar*

HONORABLE MENTIONS

Charles Kilvert

Nominated by Professor Rob Carson

Ethan Luschen-Miskovsky

Nominated by Professor Chris Woodworth

Dianna Wassouf

Nominated by Professor Sherri Martin-Baron

Quotes from the

“Andres Serrano: Pissing Away Tax Dollars”

by Ethan Lushcen-Miskovsky

Nominated by Professor Chris Woodworth

FSEM 12: Banned and Burned

Art is a way for people to express concepts and feelings that do not fit into words, it's a way to communicate and experience unfamiliar cultures and identities, and it's a way to make people reflect on difficult, but important questions. Piss Christ served as commentary. The aesthetic choices Serrano made while taking the photograph posed the idea that Christianity was being exploited in modern American culture. Regardless of any ideological opposition Serrano's point of view may face, it is hard to argue that he was just pissing away taxpayers' money. The freedom to create is priceless, and it's a burden taxpayers must be willing to carry.

“What Follows the Funeral?” by Charles Kilvert

Nominated by Professor Rob Carson,

FSEM 191: Moby-Dick

As each whale killed for its oil is discarded into the ocean, a new menacing ghost surfaces in the world ready to haunt another ship in the far-reaching business of whaling. In the first lighting of the Pequod's try-works, there is a description that foreshadows a haunting of the ship. Ishmael describes the scene by saying, “By midnight the works were in full operation. We were clear from the carcass; sail had been made; the wind was freshening; the wild ocean darkness was intense. But that darkness was licked up by the fierce flames, which at intervals forked forth from the sooty flues, and illuminated every lofty rope in the rigging, as with the famed Greek fire. The burning ship drove on, as if remorselessly commissioned to some vengeful deed” (302). In this moment, the Pequod seems to possess a vulnerability about it that truly surfaces once the reader pictures a lone burning light in the midst of an endless black substance. One may think that the situation the Pequod finds itself in has a spookiness that suggests a haunting of the ship. But who or what is haunting the Pequod and what is its intention?

Honorable Mentions

“Resilience In The Face Of Adversity”

by Diana Wassouf

**Nominated by Professor Sherri Martin-Baron, WRRH 105:
Multilingual Writer’s Seminar**

When Mama told me that we would be moving out of Syria to the United States, I did nothing, but remained quiet. These words that came out of her mouth stung me like a bee. I left the balcony without saying anything and went straight to my room. Syria was getting worse day after day. The news that used to make me crawl and hide under my blanket from seeing shrapnel and body parts, I would no longer have to listen to and watch. Wanting to be able to sleep in my room without fearing that someone would climb the balcony and be able to take my life away. Hearing people getting kidnapped every single day in my village created anxiety in my Mama’s mind. Seeing the fear in my Mama’s eyes and telling me and my brothers “no more sleeping in your own rooms”. The fear of having to step out of my house door to go to school because you never know when “those people” would appear. Hearing bombs and beloved ones getting killed, seeing the caskets of young children, going to funerals to give condolences to people. This was the storm of thoughts that was going on in my head.

JURORS

Abby Arky WS '17, Writing Fellow, 2014 Writing Prize Finalist

Prof. Geoffrey Babbitt, Department of Writing and Rhetoric

Alex Cirra WS '17, Writing Fellow

Quinn Cullum WS '18, Writing Fellow

Prof. Hannah Dickinson, Department of Writing and Rhetoric

Prof. Cheryl Forbes, Department of Writing and Rhetoric

Prof. Amy Green, Department of Writing and Rhetoric

Prof. Susan Hess, Asst. Director of the First Year Seminar Program

Ingrid Keenan, Asst. Director, Center for Teaching and Learning

Clayton Lyons HO'17, Writing Fellow, 2014 Writing Prize Finalist

Prof. Sherri Martin-Baron, Department of Writing and Rhetoric

Prof. Nick Metz, Department of Geoscience

Prof. Emily Perkins, Writing Colleagues Coordinator

Prof. Ben Ristow, Department of Writing and Rhetoric

Prof. Audrey Roberson, Department of Education

Taylor Rugg WS '17, Writing Fellow, Winner of the 2014 Writing Prize

Julia Sipos WS '18, Writing Fellow, Winner of the 2015 Writing Prize

Prof. Maggie Werner, Department of Writing and Rhetoric

Diana Weston WS '17, Writing Fellow

No [WEALTHY WHITE]

CHILD LEFT BEHIND

Bart Lahiff

Prompt

The film, *I am a Promise: The Children of Stanton Elementary School*, presents the viewer with a number of problems facing that Philadelphia inner-city school. Identify and explain those problems with details from the film and from class discussion. Do you think that the policy recommendations that David Kirp offers in his book, *Improbable Scholars: The Rebirth of a Great American School System and a Strategy for America's Schools*, would address the problems identified in the film? Why or why not? Explain with details from Kirp's book. What specific policy recommendations would you offer to address the problems identified in the film? What would it take for your policy recommendations to be implemented? What are the barriers? How might the barriers be overcome? Explain with particular attention to issues of federalism and the role of the federal government in addressing the concerns raised by the film and by Kirp's book.

Cover Letter

It is a true honor to be nominated for this award which rewards excellence in academic writing among First Year Students. Truthfully, my success is more a testament to those who have supported and taught me throughout my life. To my friends, family, all of those in between, thank you for helping me become comfortable in being uncomfortable.

I view writing as the physical manifestation of thought and to capture the right turn of phrase is to catch smoke with your bare hands. For writing is amorphous and fluid, it is to make real the shadows of ideas that are latent in the mind. To be recognized not only for the content of my paper but for its ability to convey the need for education reform is a humbling experience. Designing and implementing effective education policy is perhaps the most important task facing our nation, the implications of which have the potential to shape the course of our nation's history. This assignment taught me a great deal about education policy, public policy as a field, and forced me to confront my own history and position in the world.

Education is a field rife with polemics, as though buzzwords will improve test scores, as talking heads debate the legitimacy and capacity of our nation's schools. So, many of the earlier drafts were concerned with clearing away the minutiae of politics for the sub-

stance of policy. Much of my paper was informed by a rather sacred conception of education, forcing a distinction between schooling and education. Schooling is simply relaying facts to passive students as they memorize trivialities, while true education forces students to analyze the real world. Education is the process by which people develop their analytical skills in the hopes of deriving fulfillment throughout their professional and private life. It is to walk out of the ancient caves of ignorance into a world illuminated by logic. It is the physical representation of the Allegory of the Caves, to be educated is to be liberated from the shackles of ignorance that are imposed upon children. While this philosophical understanding of education was an important place to begin, the issues soon became those of implementation. It is a fairly well agreed upon decision that education of students is a noble undertaking, it is the actual implementation of this policy that sows division.

As the drafting process wore on, I began to understand that public policy has two dimensions, the first normative and the second empirical. The question of “what policies should we pursue?” is as crucial a question as “how can we implement these policies effectively and equitably?”. However, this paper taught me to emphasize the latter. It does not matter whether our leaders endorse the ideals of education, if that speech does not translate to policy. Identifying the problem is only the first step of twelve, while making steps to fix this problem comprises the remaining eleven. Given the nature of our government, understanding the distinction between philosophy and praxis necessitated sharpening my language. But it soon became obvious to me that “EDUCATION” as an academic issue did not exist *et ceteris paribus*, as though suspended in the ether of academic interlocutions. Public education policy must be applied to chaos of reality, it has to attempt to account for the endless array of factors that influence people from all walks of life unequally. How can we truly discuss public education if we do not address the deconstruction of the American middle class and the loss of economic security. How can our government suggest that competition between rich and poor students is an accurate barometer of intelligence, ignoring the spectrum of household stability between socio-economic classes. These issues have never exclusively been the province of academia in my life, I have lived and worked in communities like that of Stanton Elementary School.

An added dimension of this assignment was my own experiences in Philadelphia public schools. I, like the children of Stanton Elementary, faced issues of underfunding and lack of attention. School was the alternative to juvenile detention center, and many of my classmates seemed to prefer the latter. This paper forced me to engage with a part of my past that I try to avoid. However, it also afforded me the opportunity to engage with these memories in a healthy manner while adding a narrative dimension to piece. Rather than deny this

part of my history, I have accepted it as an integral facet of my character. This paper forced me to reconcile this past with a present saturated in privilege which prompted a few questions about my life and my luck. Under my own standard for education, this paper was a truly educational experience. It challenged my academic abilities as well as my character, forcing introspection and analysis of the status quo. education, this paper was a truly educational experience. It challenged my academic abilities as well as my character, forcing introspection and analysis of the status quo.

Essay

The question of education policy is central to the maintenance of a robust democracy, such as in the United States. Not only are those who are more educated more likely to vote and become wealthy, but fundamentally our democracy is predicated upon the unfettered exchange of ideas between different groups. In order for this discourse to be productive, citizens of the United States must have a base level of education. Unfortunately, the quality of education available to many Americans remains deplorably low, specifically in urban school districts. The film, *I am a Promise: The Children of Stanton Elementary*, showcases a district in Philadelphia that seems to typify this unsatisfactory level of education. Entirely comprised of minority students, this district exhibits many of the classic failures of America's public schools. As an alumnus of three of Philadelphia's schools, the first public, then private, and then a charter school, I am uniquely positioned to speak to the quotidian issues that plague the struggling district. The deleterious effects of poverty, which plagues this and many other urban districts, have worked in tandem with one another to produce an overall poor quality of education. Poverty has exacerbated the education policies of President Bush's administration, which emphasized competition to ensure high quality. Punishing schools with lower test scores disproportionately harms students who do not have access to the resources available to wealthier districts. Professor David Kirp's *Improbable Scholars: The Rebirth of a Great American School System and a Strategy for America's Schools* outlines alternative policy responses through the example of Union City, New Jersey. Kirp's analysis of the successes and failures of the Union City district parallels many of the problems that plague the Stanton Elementary school. The lesson of Union City is the importance coalition building between students, teachers, and parents, which will ensure that each family and student both understand and encourage the value of education. Specifically, hiring a community liaison, universal access to Pre-Kindergarten programs, and creating a culture of abrazos will help to bridge achievement chasm between wealthier and whiter districts, and their poorer districts who house larger populations of African Americans.

Philadelphia is my home. I was ensconced in the City of Brotherly Love during the formative years of education, and the schooling I received made an indelible impact on my academic career. What is unique about my experience is the variety of schools that I attended, which gave me insight as to the quality of education in public, private and charter schools in the municipality. Prefacing these experiences is the admission of my own bias, as none of the schools I attended were facing the same magnitude of problems that Stanton Elementary, as well as countless other anonymous schools, continue to face. However, many of these issues are universal to urban schools. Most obviously: the students' unstable home life and its effects on academic performance. I was witness to this trend when I attended J.R. Masterman Elementary School, one of Philadelphia's public schools. This school invited students from throughout the city of Philadelphia and was a point of socio-economic intersection. Students who hailed from the neighborhoods of Bridesburg and Frankford, which tended to be poorer, had radically different home lives than the richer neighbors. This created an achievement gap that followed socio-economic contours, as the wealthier students were able to access the necessary resources to perform well. This chasm of achievement between students is analogous to the racial achievement gap outlined by the film *I am a Promise: The Children of Stanton Elementary School*, which has been diminished in many areas despite the best efforts of the 43rd and prospective 45th Presidential administrations.

Students with more unstable home lives, who are traditionally impoverished, are not able to do as well academically as students with stable home lives. The fallacious presupposition of "No Child Left Behind" is that America's student body is socio-economically homogenous and therefore all in relatively the same position to take standardized exams. First, the act implies that all schools receive the same amount of funding from the federal, state, and local governments. However, the majority of funding for public schools comes from local property taxes, which enables increased levels of local control over school districts. This creates an asymmetry of funding for impoverished districts, who collect less revenue from local and municipal taxes. Additionally, the act has advocated for charter schools as the free-market based solution to inadequate access to quality education and poor performance on exams. However, the failed example of the Youngstown school district in Ohio demonstrates that the model of Boston's charter schools cannot be applied injudiciously as "eighteen of the twenty reporting charters that receive funding from Youngstown received F or D grades" (Cohen). While the example of the Boston education system should serve as a model for expanded education as it services all members of the city irrespective of class, the charter school program cannot be applied on a national level. Schools are fundamentally different enterprises than other services, as reforming schools is more difficult than changing other sectors. The product of

education is not simply a service; the stability of public schools help to establish some consistency and dependability that urban students desperately crave. By changing schools multiple times, students are forced to readjust to a different culture and community, thereby undermining their involvement in the school. President Bush arbitrarily established a standard end result for each grade level, willfully ignorant of the variance of living conditions between each student and their starting points. The “No Child Left Behind” act created a vicious negative feedback loop; poor performance on tests restricted the funding available to struggling schools who are then less able to invest in policies that will reverse their scoring trends. This vicious cycle is most poignantly demonstrated in the Stanton Elementary School district.

Stanton Elementary School is a Chapter One school, a designation granted by President Lyndon B. Johnson’s “Elementary and Secondary Education Act” (ESEA), as part of the legislative package commonly referred to as the War on Poverty. Chapter One of the ESEA, which is arguably the most influential education act passed by the United States Congress, details how impoverished schools can qualify for increased funding from the Federal government. In order to qualify for this increased funding, which does not entirely make up the gap between rich and poor districts, over forty percent of students must live below the national poverty line (ESEA). Over ninety percent of students in Stanton Elementary school live below the national threshold, and very often live in single-parent households. While this provides increased funding from the national government, the school must pursue alternative forms of funding. Given the rampant poverty that the vast majority of students live in, the school is unable to fund the support systems that many students need, as they are besieged by urban decay, violence, and abuse. In many cases, students are unable to access many of the basic services needed to ensure holistic success, such as adequate physical and emotional health care.

Invariably, students of Stanton Elementary suffer from poor nutritional literacy and tend to suffer from malnutrition. Students who begin their morning with a soda and other sugary foods are going to be less able to focus, as students are not getting the needed nutrients to support daily cognitive and physical functions. Increased sugar intake levels induce hyperactivity among every age group, especially young children. An added dimension to this issue is the lack of care for learning disabilities, specifically ADD and ADHD, among the school’s poorest. Increased sugar levels, in conjunction with a lack of access to medical care, intersect with one another to prevent students from achieving their full potential. This cruel intersection demonstrates the inequality ignored and exacerbated by President Bush’s education policy. While Principal Burney cannot hope to provide every deserving student with quality healthcare, she can improve the school’s curriculum on nutrition. By improving students’ nutritional

literacy, Principal Burney can hope to establish good dietary habits during students' formative years. Additionally, the school could reinforce these educational programs by offering a source of healthy food during lunch and breakfast. Often times, poor students do not have the necessary resources to buy healthier foods, which tend to be more expensive than less nutritious substitutes. The most important effect of this dense concentration of intractable poverty is how it prevents communities' support for education.

The film showed school officials acting without the support of the community, which severely inhibits the ability of the school to enforce policies that will benefit students. In many cases, the quality of education systems is reflective of the communities that they serve. Quality education is the product of qualified teachers and administrators, energized and driven students, and proactive parents. Parental support of education is integral to a successful implementation of policy because much of learning takes place within the home. Children need to be taught to value education as a pathway to escape cyclical poverty, a sentiment that is better communicated by parents than teachers. Education must be seen as a journey of liberation, to free the mind from the quotidian burdens imposed by poverty. The best way to enfranchise parents to the education system is to hire a community liaison, who acts as an emissary between the parents and the administration. Mrs. Katnik, the liaison for George Washington Elementary, restores the agency of parents to shape the landscape of their children's education, and encourages future investment in local schools. She provides parents with a voice to the administration and in so doing allows them to effect positive change for their children.

While parental support is important to convey the benefits of a good education to students, parental support will help ensure students are being studious. There is a greater tendency for students to do their homework, thereby reinforcing the lessons they learned that day, if parents assist their children doing homework. This reinforcement is indispensable to many fields of study that build upon the rudimentary skills taught in elementary school, and prevents the creation of splinter skills. Splinter skills refer to gaps in the curriculum that leave students with incomplete skill sets. For this reason, curriculum standardization is an important step in making sure that all students are similarly prepared for higher levels of education. Broadly, the objective of education policy has been to improve performance, typically measured by standardized exams, and reduce racial achievement gaps. *Throughout Improbable Scholars: The Rebirth of a American School System and a Strategy for America's Schools*, Kirp argues that the reforms enacted in the Union City School District could be adjusted to help other struggling schools, such as Stanton Elementary.

Kirp emphasizes the importance of incremental change in the reformation process, as well as policies that are tailored to each

school district's specific demographics and challenges. Approximately, Union City spends a total of \$18,000 per capita, which enables the district to offer universal pre-kindergarten, smaller class sizes, and bilingual education. Union City maintains small class sizes, allowing for each student to receive the necessary attention to perform well academically. In Union City, given that the plurality of students do not speak English, bilingual education has a higher rate of return than in other districts. Bilingual students in other districts are often not given the proper support structure to facilitate the assimilation process. These poor dual language programs exacerbate the struggles that many immigrant students already face, while Kirp argues that this approach to bilingual education creates lasting fluency, as well as integrates students into the school community. Integrating marginalized students into the school community helps to improve these young immigrants' view on school, thereby making them less resistant to reforms. While it is important to cultivate this culture of unity among the students, it just as important to unify the faculty of failing schools districts.

In order to produce faculty that is united and satisfied with their work, Kirp highlights the success of support systems for teachers in Union City. Specifically, the mentor program incepted by Principal Les Hanna has proven to be extremely successful in helping younger teachers cope with strains of their environment, as well as forge intergenerational connections between teachers. New teachers in Union City are paired with veteran teachers, who often impart experienced wisdom which "helps to close the gap between knowing and doing" (Kirp 55). Having inveterate teachers as a resource for nascent teachers helps to prepare educators for the chaos of reality in an urban school classroom which fails to resemble the clinical of graduate school. This facilitates the successes of younger teachers, as well as develops interpersonal relationships between generations of educators. If teachers feel supported when challenges arise, they will be better able to withstand a crisis. This improves the morale of the faculty, who no longer feel overwhelmed by their jobs. Stanton Elementary could benefit from a similar infrastructure, given the low costs associated with the program.

Reinforcing the school's sense community by providing necessary support systems for faculty members is best implemented by allocating time for teachers to develop lesson plans. The benefits of this collaboration are expressed by Kirp's exaltation of the "Dream Team": Union City's third-grade teachers. Their continued success is the result of years of discussion and close friendship between passionate educators. Conversely, the failures of the school's sixth-grade teachers to produce favorable test scores is the result of "no teamwork within that grade" according to the captain of the "Dream Team", Alina Bossbaly (Kirp 63). The inextricable connections which now link the luminaries of the third grade to one another were forged

in the crucible of mandated and weekly brainstorming sessions. During these periods, educators can design the grades' yearly curriculum or discuss how best to teach a topic in the upcoming week. Improving and expanding channels of dialogue between faculty, though inexpensive, can help to increase the quality of education in the absence of federal and state support.

The collection of reforms implemented by the Union City School District have greatly improved their quality of education and have the possibility to make great improvements to the quality of education offered by their failing Philadelphian counterpart. However, the resources available to the Union City district enable increasingly more ambitious projects that are infeasible for Stanton Elementary School to pursue. While integration between students, parents, and faculty to the school community creates a bedrock of support for education, it is nearly as important to integrate Stanton Elementary with the city's local government. Stanton Elementary student body is a motley assemblage of the nation's most vulnerable groups: racial minorities and the urban poor. As a result, there is very little political capital among federal officials to enact education reforms that would provide disadvantaged schools with the needed influx of money that would support the necessary reform efforts. Strengthening relationships between Stanton Elementary and the Mayoral office will help to increase funding for the district, as is demonstrably proven by the importance of Union City's political juggernaut, Mayor Brian Stack, in financing his school district's meteoric success. Building coalitions with local and state officials around the issue of education is an excellent way to manipulate the United States of America's federal system. The relative autonomy of the states allows for smaller school districts to pursue sources of funding external to the national government.

David L. Kirp's *Improbable Scholars: The Rebirth of A Great American School System and A Strategy For America's Schools* articulates the importance of unity between the faculty, student body, and parents of a school when attempting to improve the quality of education available to the youth of America. Kirp's analysis marks a strict divergence with American education policy in the twenty-first century as he rejects the tools of privatization and competition as destructive to their intended objective. Rather than force students to compete with one another, education policy should be designed with the intention of encouraging students to enjoy the process of learning. This can be achieved by hiring a community liaison, expanding access to pre-kindergarten programs, and encouraging a culture of abrazos. Kirp's policy solutions would be effective in mitigating the problems outlined by the film *I am a Promise: the Children of Stanton Elementary School*, as shown by the example of the Union City school district. Additionally, measures such as expanding nutritional literacy, expanding mentor programs, and adhering to the creed "slow and steady wins the race" will help to improve the overall quality of education available to the

youth of America's urban centers. These youth represent the last untapped resource of American ingenuity and innovation if properly trained by our nation's schools. It is our imperative as American citizens to support education reform efforts as we all enjoy the benefits of an educated population, increased income levels, and a healthier democracy.

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First-Year Writing Prize Nominees on Writing

Normally when I sit down to write any kind of paper, I need the pressure of a deadline to get my creative ideas going. But this paper was different. I sat down to write this paper days before the deadline, not because I wanted it out of the way, but because I was excited to reflect, and passionate about the material I was going to be writing about.

- EMMA CONSOLI

I realized that while the overlying practice in Moby-Dick was very close to my heart, the challenge was analyzing one man's interpretation of a true story and using his thoughts to support my hypothesis. "This is not a research paper" I had to keep telling myself; this was my chance to give my opinion on a story about an industry I had learned so much about.

- CHAD KILVERT

Developing a piece of written work is like building a puzzle, which is built by constructing a border to frame the pieces, assembling the most significant elements, and then finally filling in the background to connect the major ideas. Writing, likewise, begins with erecting a frame of understanding. ... With the final piece placed, whether this be a puzzle piece or a punctuation mark, glancing over the completed masterpiece creates a feeling of immense satisfaction. Artistic reflexes, critical impulses, and inspired instincts navigated the puzzling process to reveal the fully-thought out, all-consuming, and creative idea that sat hidden in pieces.

- NICK MCKENNY

Writing an outline was never something I was really fond of in high school, [but] my professor showed me how there are different types of outlines, and I realized that it wasn't that outlines didn't work for me, it was just I that was never taught how to write them the way that did work for me. I started to view outlines as less of a structured road map, and more as a very choppy first draft. I began to organize all my scattered index cards of information into a logical order and ultimately, my outline started to take shape.

- ALEXANDRA CURTIS

CATCALLING

Kevin Lin

Prompt

As you have learned through your reading of *Citizen* (Rankine) and *Between the World and Me* (Coates) for the course, narratives capture personal stories and larger cultural and historical moments. In the narratives you have read, the writers have surrounded their own stories with the stories of others. In addition, the writers have chosen to relate their stories to issues that relate to culture as a whole. For this assignment, you should write a narrative that tells a story that discusses the intersection between the world and you, and especially moments when you came to some new sense about how knowledge of culture has developed in your life.

For this assignment, you should focus on your story rather than a theme or idea. The story should demonstrate the ability to use evocative detail and showing rather than telling. Use your story as a vehicle into a conversation that centers on language and culture. Ideally, your story will help the reader to reexamine what they know about these issues and push the conversation into a new direction. This essay is a personal narrative that uses story to examine your life and the culture and people that surround you. Be imaginative and honest and take risks in your writing.

Cover Letter

When I began the revision process, I had a few ideas on what I wanted to revise. Looking back at the piece, there were places where I felt the readability was lacking and sentences just felt plain unwieldy. During the revision process, I tried to focus on those awkward areas by reading them aloud. By doing that, I got a better sense of where it fit into the general flow of the whole paragraph as well as what exactly about the sentence was off, whether that meant the word choice or position of a word. That also meant trying to move away from more technical, explanative language when I told my story. I probably didn't get to do all of that, but it's a gradual process. Narratives should read smoothly and that is exactly what I wanted to work on most as I began revising this latest draft.

My conversation with a Writing Fellow also illuminated one of the shortcomings related to readability. We agreed that the variety of sentence length was greatly lacking and that contributed to an overall monochromatic reading. After all, when we talk and tell stories, the sentences aren't all the same length. They're short and long. They're breathy and they're fast-paced. They're sad and they're happy. Variety makes the reading richer so that was another aspect I focused on in my reading aloud. I wanted there to be a much more natural flow to

the storytelling.

One of the glaring changes in between this version and the last is that this version has more. Even though there was a maximum for pages in the original prompt, I felt that to do the scene and my experience justice, I needed to write more and go over the six-page limit. I didn't want to limit the story and the lessons I found in it. On the other hand, doing so could hurt my essay. One of the greatest weaknesses of adding more content, especially in a draft like this, is that it's pretty experimental. Obviously, you're working off what you had and trying to address the deficiencies so it's not completely random, but at the same time, the words are completely new. They may suffer from the same roughness or disconnect that the earlier drafts had. The experimental aspect is exhilarating though because I felt the growth as I typed with abandon.

At the end of the day, I wanted to tell a story about the time that I felt my privilege in such a visceral and vivid sense. The assignment gave me an opportunity to put the relatively recent incident on paper. I don't think I captured the full extent of what I felt. I expressed a fraction of the intensity that I had had in mind, but that's part of writing. The reality of your work never quite matches up with the vision of your work. This is probably my fourth draft of the assignment and although the changes overall feel somewhat small in my head, I still feel like I'm getting closer to the vision I had for the story. As I figure out what exactly I want to write, I'm learning more about who I am as I work through ideas. I stumbled a lot. But on the way, I had fun writing this and I hope that you can find some pleasure in it as well

Essay

Rounding the last corner of the labyrinth of the West 4th St subway station, I had finally left the humid haze that accompanied the subway system behind me. My friends, Clara and Jiayi, followed as we climbed the stairs out. In typical Millennial fashion, their phones were out and their focus was solely on the phones. Like most other Tuesdays, they lagged behind while I surveyed the area. Not much had changed in the West Village. Unattended children played basketball in the park nearby. Business people weaved through the haphazard crowd to their next appointment. College students were pulling up their latest foodie Instagram post. The West Village had always been known for the vibrant, diverse population that frequented its awkwardly thought-out sidewalks. There are strange people in the West Village so I avoid interaction completely. I inadvertently broke that unspoken rule as we brushed past a homeless woman.

She yelled out, "Your boyfriend has a nice ass."

I turned my head around, unsure if the remark was for me. As the homeless woman grinned at me, I knew it was for me. My face burned up. My friends looked at each other, comically devoid of any expression. Clara gave a short snort while Jiayi gave a short, shrill

laugh, accentuating the offhanded comment. As I tried to laugh it off, I scratched the back of my neck and looked down to the ground. I couldn't put my finger on it, but the whole thing just felt strange. I wanted to run the hell away when I realized she was talking about me. *Just don't look at me again.* The restaurant was in the opposite direction so we had to go back. Even though Jiayi offered to cross the street to avoid her, I had decided to take the same route back. That didn't stop my body from shuddering as she smiled at me once again.

After our meal, we sauntered into Union Square, playing Pokemon Go. Even as the sun had set, Jiayi was adamant on staying there until we found at least one more catch. The three of us stood there, alternating between apps on our phones, disregarding the mutual decision to walk around. Ensnared by our screens, we didn't even see an older man stop in front of us.

A disheveled older man had stumbled in front of us and had chosen to stop for a second. Clearing his throat, he had gotten our attention almost instantly. An unrecognizable odor followed him as he began to talk to us. He reached out with a hand in front of him, cueing for either Jiayi or Clara to offer their hands for a greeting kiss. Out of pure politeness, Jiayi gave her hand and he kissed it. She hid it behind her back, trying to isolate the point of contact from the rest of her body. That hand came close to her skirt, but suddenly shifted away. She was torn between rubbing it off or leaving it to prevent more contact. Unfortunately, it didn't end there.

"Do these young ladies belong to you?"

He was talking to me. My mind went blank, unable to process what exactly he had just said as if the neurons in my brain responsible for transmitting information short-circuited. My arms went slack. My throat wouldn't respond with anything. Even if it did, my brain suddenly lost its ability to form sentences. Buried into my chest, his words seemed knock the wind out of me. I couldn't come up with anything. I just stood there for what seemed like an eternity. Begging my throat to say something as a last resort, I gave a low, nearly inaudible croak.

"No sir. We belong to ourselves."

I gazed at Jiayi, mouth slightly ajar. Her pink hair was slightly matted over her face, but some of her features were clearly visible. Her mouth was curved downwards slightly, hiding the full extent of her fury, but her eyes flared with piercing seriousness. The bubblyness, so prevalent in her personality, had faded from her eyes. She stared furiously at the older man, but it seemed as if she were trying to look past him. Rather than entertain his misguidance, she wanted to leave this mess. Clara had remained silent through the event but she tugged at Jiayi's jean jacket, prompting us to leave this ugly mess. Her face was plastered with an exasperation that aged her. I'd never seen them like this. I'd never seen anything like this. *Had I?* I cut my reflection short as I realized they were walking away and I ran after them. I caught up and my breath got caught in my throat. I felt a pressure, an aura of

indeterminable spirit emanating from them.

We strolled along the edge of the park, alluding to the experience lightly, but I realized they weren't as fixated on it as I was. It was a mild incident. At least that's what they told me. People have said and done worse to them. For Clara, she had hopped off the train and started for the exit when a man made an advance on her. After politely declining, Clara winced as the man began to scream and call her a bitch. She didn't turn around to respond. For Jiayi, she remembered a time when she was walking by herself in broad daylight and a passing man did a double take. He had followed her for ten blocks and stayed hot on her tail, as if she would confess to him that it was love-at-first. Instead at the end of the eleventh block, she turned around and shouted that she had a boyfriend. He backed away slowly as if he didn't believe her excuse. I mean at the time she didn't, but that didn't mean she had any obligation to say anything. None of these men knew them. They just saw something they wanted.

The irony was almost palpable. My small moment was incomparable to what they faced. Yet negative feelings still clawed away at me. It felt uncomfortable to even be in my own skin. In that moment, I felt like I was in a zoo exhibit, being gawked at by complete strangers. I didn't know this person, but her comment snuck past my skin and burrowed beneath it. There was something dehumanizing about the way she talked to me. And it was then that I began to see it. I didn't see it to the same extent my friends did. I probably never would. I saw the fear, frustration, and pain they faced in every interaction they had.

I was the proverbial frog in the well. I had never realized how vast the sky of sexism and my privilege was. My privilege as a man gives me safety. It gives me a feeling of real security no matter how I feel. But there was no one there to physically impose their will on me. What I felt in that moment could have only been a fraction of the fear women feel when their being is stripped away from them. Women could be followed, harassed, or assaulted because our society makes these practices okay. It's human nature to do such things. The pain that comes with being made into nothing more than an object can only be unbearable. In those moments, their body does not belong to them. It belonged to the unsafety of moments created by men. Even voicing their feelings creates an opportunity for men to deny them their feelings. *It's her fault for dressing so provocatively. She should appreciate it. It's a compliment really.* No matter what, women are caught up in the thorns of a pervasive perverseness.

They had left. As they did, I wished them a safe trip home. What did I even mean when I said that? I always said to switch up the ways I say goodbye. It shows that I care about them. I do care about them. But I never thought about what it meant in practical terms. It meant being able to take the train. It meant being able to turn down a man's advances without the fear of violent backlash. It meant being able to walk along sidewalk at night without the fear of confrontation.

When these things happen, they somehow manage. Objectification and cat-calling and sexual assault are inevitable aspects of their experience. Their identity is deeply linked with the assumed weakness of their sex. It was a rude awakening, shattering my picturesque view of the world and sending me back to the nightmarish reality of casual sexism.

Opting to take the bus, I stood under the glass canopy of the bus station. I still couldn't believe what the messy man had said to us. I think I had always known. I had always known that as a boy, I was given more opportunities, advantages, privileges than girls. My sisters never forgot to tell me how lucky I was to be born a boy in Chinese culture. *Mom never celebrated our birthday like she does for you. Mom wouldn't give us that much money. Mom used to hit us much harder.*

The privileges of being born a boy in Chinese culture is steeped in a history I don't have a good grasp of. My mom never really celebrated my sisters' birthdays once they moved to America for a few complicated reasons, but when it came to my birthday, it had to be a big bash. Sushi at the best, most expensive place in the neighborhood was in order most of the time. If my oldest sister bought a new pair of boots with her own money, my mom would complain to no end about her wastefulness. If I wanted a pair of sneakers, I would casually bring them up. My mom would offer to buy them for me. After a small back-and-forth, her credit card would be out and we would be on the check-out page. Even as I grew older and got into trouble, she would slowly move away from hitting me and instead just fume silently. Maybe her parenting evolved, but more likely, I was enjoying the privileges of being a boy.

The male privilege in Chinese culture has historical and economic roots. Farm hands were absolutely necessary, given the strong agricultural focus in rural communities. Boys seemed like the obvious choice. They would stay, live, and work on the farm for the entirety of their lives. Girls were different. They were married off to a boy and essentially another family. That meant that they wouldn't even be good to provide consistent manpower once they got older. Thought to be physically weaker and a net loss from the moment of birth, girls were unvalued. And so, even hundreds of years from the sexist undertones of Confucianism, the Chinese love their sons more than their daughters. We adopted this legacy of sexism. And I wasn't sure where I fit into it or if I even fit into it.

It was naïve and idiotic to think that I was better than the system. I do not live outside of sexism. I live within the confines of its suffocating walls. There's something different about the sexism I perpetuate though. It's a mix of my experience as a Chinese-American, New Yorker, brother, friend, and much more. I can't just pick and choose which parts of my identity will fight against sexism and which won't. There's an intersectionality to sexism that cannot be ignored. Complicated, multi-faceted factors compound sexism. They also mask

it from the privileged, pushing them to think that everything is fine. None of it is.

The usually long bus ride went by like a blur as if an unknown force was impatiently willing my long day to its conclusion. The bus lurched to a stop next to a green pole adorned with a sign labeled 'E 97th St.' and time seemed to return to its linear nature. Electricity ran through my legs as I tried to rise from my seat. I winced slightly, not displeased with the feeling, but surprised by its suddenness, as I began to recount the events of today. My mouth became dry as I recounted that scene of speechlessness. In that moment, I was stuck between what was right and what was easy. My indecision had survived because the decision had been made for me in mere seconds. My laconic behavior marked my recognition of my privilege. I saw my privilege and how complex it was to live in a world where daughters were cast aside.

Sexism is complicated. That doesn't mean don't get involved though. It means try to get involved. Understanding my identity and the privilege I have allows me to stand upon a precipice. Upon that precipice, I have the power to be an ally to women. My sisters and friends don't need me to make the case for them because they're more than capable of proving that obvious truth of equal worth. But that doesn't mean I can just sit back and not help them as they rip the thorns from their sides. I know what I have to do. I can't not say anything next time. The artifice or wittiness I employ is irrelevant. I just have to show that I stand in solidarity with them, dressing their open wounds with words as they continue to fight for their own place. With that, sexism will begin to unravel at its seams.

First-Year Writing Prize Nominees on Writing

Compiling my actual final paper was a magical process. As I went back through each step of my project, I was so proud to see where I began with my very first prewriting assignment and what that page and a half had turned into. My favorite thing about my paper here is that it is my own. It isn't perfect, and there are a lot of places where I would love to go back and do more research if I had the time.

- ALEXANDRA CURTIS

Before I even started revising, I felt like I had a large amount of research and not enough real estate to work within. Some paragraphs felt like lists of facts that spilled over to the next page, and to try to add in voice while staying near the limit took a lot of edits, cuts, and re-writes.

- JAMES MONACO

Professor Forbes ... wanted me to change the entire piece. For a minute, I felt frustrated, but then I smiled and realized, the work I was doing was for no one but myself. ... I was playing a game with myself; I was competing with myself to see how well I could write.

- ADRIAN GIANNATTASIO

I would often take apart single sentences within my essay, rewriting or restructuring them until I was satisfied. My revision process illustrated the unique additions each new pair of eyes can make to an essay, a lesson I hope to continue utilizing in my future.

- MARTIN ROECK

In the process of writing this paper it became clear to me that learning can also happen while you are being tested, and that learning never truly stops. As I began to write, I repeatedly made new realizations and connections among various aspects, providing me with a series of mini "enlightenments" which aided me in furthering my analysis and forging new and more sophisticated arguments. This experience not only helped me to see my future college experience differently, but I also came to appreciate, and look forward to, such moments of realization and greater awareness.

- JORDAN RAIVEL

Writing a narrative essay does not just allow you to express yourself, but it gives you the opportunity to understand yourself better.

- DIANA WASSOUF



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