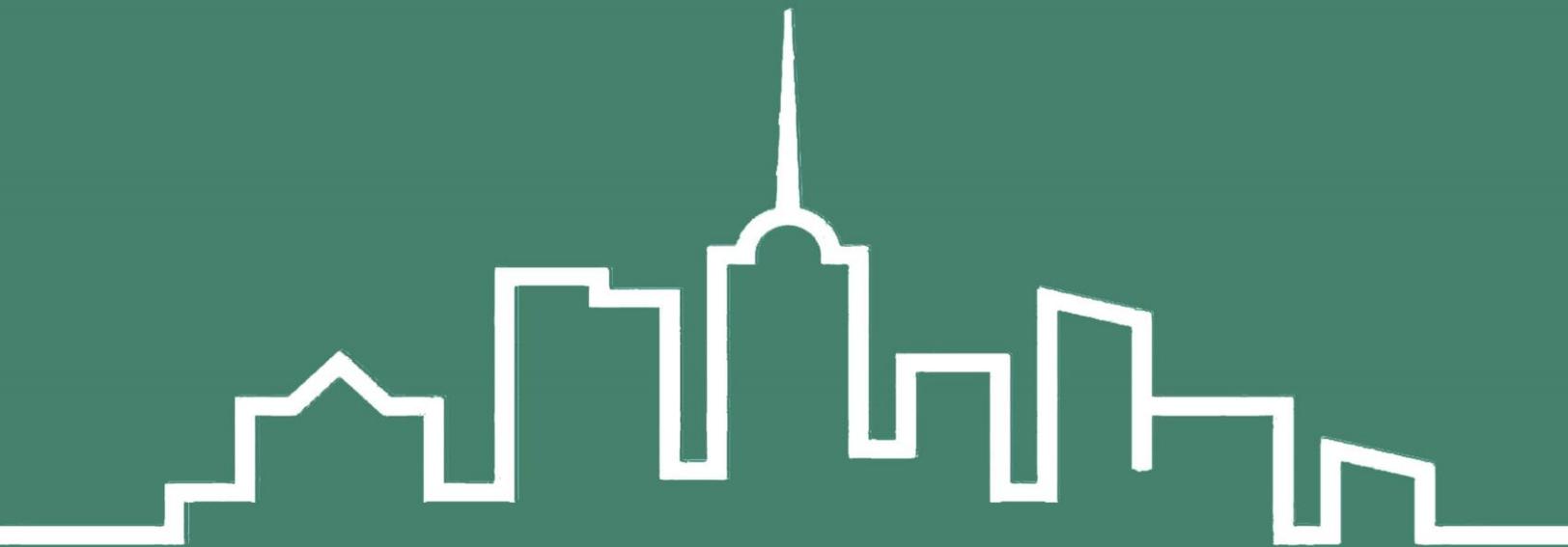


How they got into the  
**Ivy League**

A decorative border of white flowers and vines framing the title.

**25** Successful  
Personal Statements

**CollegeNation.org**

# Introduction

If you are even considering applying to an American college, you are well aware that the process is quite laborious. From researching schools, to test prep, to test taking, it is easy to become overwhelmed. Writing a personal statement essay is perhaps the most daunting aspect of the entire college application process. Your test scores may be perfect, your transcript spotless, your activity sheet full of awards and accomplishments, and your recommendation letters may extol your intelligence as well as your virtues, but without impressive essays, all the aforementioned is rendered null.

Fear not! This ebook presents examples of personal statement essays that got [College Nation](#) clients into Ivy League universities. By perusing these essays, you will understand how to present yourself as the type of student an admissions officer is looking for. You will learn what is expected from your college admissions essays and how you can play upon both your strengths and weaknesses to shape yourself into an ideal candidate for admissions: an introspective, self-aware young man or woman with the ability to grow from the vicissitudes of life.

# Personal Statement 1

*Accepted into: Yale, Dartmouth, Cornell, Columbia, Brown*

The first time that I attended a water ballet performance, I experienced a synesthesia of sorts as I watched the swan-like movements of the swimmers unfold with the cadence and magic of lyrical poetry, the precisely executed sequences melding with the musical accompaniment to create an ethereal beauty that I had never imagined possible. “You belong out there, creating that elegance with them,” I heard the quiet but powerful voice of my intuition tell me. For the next six years, I heeded its advice, training rigorously to master the athletic and artistic underpinnings of synchronized swimming.

I flailed and plunged with all the grace of an elephant seal during my first few weeks of training. I was quickly and thoroughly disabused of the notion that the poise and control that I so coveted would be easy to obtain. During the first phase of my training, I spent as much time out of the water as in it, occupying myself with Pilates, weight training, and gymnastics in order to build my strength and flexibility. I learned things about the sport that outsiders seldom realize: that performers aren’t allowed to touch the bottom of the pool, relying on an “eggbeater” technique also used by water polo players to stay afloat; that collisions and concussions are all too common; that sometimes the routine demands staying underwater for so long that the lungs burn and the vision becomes hazy. My initial intervals in the water were marked by a floundering feeling that seemed diametrically opposed to the grace that I sought. I began to question whether I was really cut out for the sport.

I persisted through all of this and slowly but certainly I saw myself progress. My back tucks became tight and fluid, my oyster maneuvers controlled and rhythmical, my water wheels feeling so natural that I could have executed them in my sleep. Moreover, I became comfortable enough with my own role in the water that I was able to expand my awareness to the other members of my team, moving not just synchronistically, but also synergistically. During one of my first major performances, our routine culminated as I launched myself out of the water in a powerful boost, surging upward on the swelling currents of the symphonic accompaniment. I owned the elegant arc that I cut through air and water, my teammates and I executing the leap with the majestic effortlessness of a pod of dolphins frolicking in the sea. I reveled in the thunderous applause at the conclusion of our routine, for it meant that I had helped to create the kind of exquisite beauty that I had so admired years before.

Though I never would have guessed this at the outset of my training, synchronized swimming has provided one of the central metaphors of my life. The first and most fundamental lesson that I learned was persistence, which I absorbed humbly and viscerally by way of aching muscles and chlorine-stung eyes. More subtly and powerfully, the sport also lent me an instinctive appreciation of the way that many parts interact to form an emergent whole, an understanding which I have applied to every area of my studies, from mechanical systems to biological networks to artistic design. I have become cognizant of the fact that, as when I am in the water, my own perception of myself is narrow and incomplete, that to really understand my role in life I need to see myself in terms of my interactions with those around me. Six years after my training began, I still pursue the sense of harmony and unity that synchronized swimming has instilled in

me, riding the soft swells of destiny forward as I move on to the next phase of my life.

## Personal Statement 2

*Accepted into: Columbia, UPenn, Dartmouth, Brown*

Every night when the clock struck seven, I was tormented by the “entertainment” Mary provided. In oversized pants and a dazzlingly shirt, she would sing and dance awkwardly to Latin music. Mary was my host mother last year during an international exchange program in La Porte high school, and apparently, also a salsa aficionado. Upon hearing that I had taken piano lessons for over ten years, she encouraged me to take part in the school’s annual musical.

“It’s the biggest party of the year! Cathy, you’re good at this. Just go for it and have fun!” Unable to say no to such an enthusiastic face, I nodded, auditioned, and eventually scored a role in the chorus. It was a backstage role, which might be the only reason I had so quickly acquiesced to Mary’s request.

Practices went smoothly—I made several new friends and shared laughs with the other cast members. Just one day before the performance, however, the director announced an unexpected change: the chorus members were to perform in the middle of the audience instead of just standing behind the orchestra. While most of the others cherished the chance to publicly display themselves, I became uncontrollably anxious. The memory of my last stage performance haunted me.

You see, my first (and only) piano concert was a catastrophe. At first, the notes flowed smoothly from my fingertips, effortlessly dancing across the ivory keys. Unwisely, I lifted my head from time to time to steal a glance at my parents and teachers in the audience. Trying to distinguish their emotions through their facial expressions, I found my attention gradually drifting. Before long, the melody completely escaped me! Empty-minded and petrified with embarrassment, I froze on the bench for the longest two minutes of my life before dashing offstage. All I could see when I finally mustered the courage to peer out from behind the curtain was the disappointment in my parents’ eyes and the overwhelming darkness of the stage.

Since then, I have avoided such public shows, lest I re-experience such humiliation and fail to meet others’ expectations. But this time, it was too late to quit. I had already made a commitment to not only Mary and myself, but to the entire cast of the musical. Despite being just one member of the chorus, every voice mattered and my duty simply could not go unfulfilled. So, I rehearsed repeatedly that evening. Unfortunately, the more I practiced, the more nervous I became, and the more mistakes I made. My nerves were shot.

The dreaded moment still came. I stood in the darkness like before, awaiting the guillotine. Unintentionally, my eyes found Mary’s face in the audience, and it was a sight to behold: it gleamed with appreciation, joy, and grace as her body swayed to the music. Her rhythm was not perfect, but it evoked my remembrance of my initial impetus to practice music. Something in me

changed in that moment, as I observed Mary freely surrender.

Spellbound, I sang naturally and danced harmoniously. For the very first time, I did not feel that I was performing for someone else, neither my parents nor my teachers, but for myself. Even when the music ceased and the applause rose, I was still singing. Not until the other choristers came to hug me and roared with excitement did I realize that I had successfully completed the show.

For years, I had been a timid girl always content to hide behind others and blaming my diffidence and cowardice for my lack of familiarity with the circumstance I faced. Now, I realized that what intimidated me were never actually the expectations from my parents or the audience's gaze, but rather, my inner insecurities. With the new understanding of music as a means of creative self-expression, I finally embraced my newfound strength and maturity.

## Personal Statement 3

*Accepted into: Yale, UPenn, Dartmouth, Columbia, Brown*

Spencer looked directly at me rather than at the camera for the first time, her pale blue eyes muted and melancholic.

“To my parents, it's like losing me,” she explained, “as though the child they raised had died and a stranger had walked into their family.”

I glanced again at the questionnaire, which I had developed as a guide for the interviews that I was conducting for a documentary film I was making on transgender issues, a much-talked-about topic at the time. I was intrigued on a personal level, my fascination leading me to conduct extensive background research on the subject, focusing especially on criminal justice and anti-discrimination legislation. I hoped to become a pundit who could compassionately educate viewers on transgender individuals' struggles and rights. On the basis of my research, I compiled a questionnaire that I believed would elicit important insight into the plight of the transgender individual.

My first scheduled interview was with Spencer, who sat down in front of the green screen and politely deflected my attempts at small talk, no doubt anxious at the prospect of revealing her transgender identity, of which few people outside of her family were aware. I dutifully moved down my list of questions, and Spencer dutifully produced the same facts and figures that I had encountered in the academic papers I had reviewed while preparing for the documentary. It became clear to me that I needed to break through the cold objectivity and impersonality that had suffused our conversation, so I abandoned the next item on my questionnaire in favor of a simple inquiry regarding how Spencer's family had reacted to her “coming out” as a transgender individual.

It was at this moment that Spencer locked eyes with me and equated her decision to change her

gender to a kind of living death in the eyes of her family. Spencer's candid confession led, in turn, to more personal, interesting, and original questions. I was awed by the raw truth of Spencer's story, which included therapy her parents had forced her to undergo; her mother's continued rejection of Spencer's decision to take puberty-delaying drugs that would facilitate her eventual gender reassignment surgery; by the precious refuge she took in a gender-neutral bathroom near her house, which she fled to as the one location that accepted her true identity completely, shielding her from the scorn and criticism of the outside world. In the face of such sad and shining virtue, of such intimate and potent human connection, I quickly abandoned my role as wannabe pundit, adopting instead my true identity, that of faithful listener and humble ally.

The golden rule of my film education was that stories must always be told truthfully, and the documentary I made on transgender individuals was the first time that I fully lived up to this fundamental precept. During this and other projects, I love feeling myself becoming part of a story, connecting with the people who populate it and exploring their fervor and their frights. I convey these elements to my viewers through light and sound, blessed with the vision and the technology necessary to render such intimate revelations accessible to my audience. Filmmaking has allowed me to share my own passion and perspective on a wide range of topics, from scientific advancements to social justice. The results of this particular quest for truth were that Spencer was able to “come out” to the whole school and that the school itself decided to transform its sex education curriculum to embrace transgender individuals.

When the lights go out and the screen lights up, I hope that I can give my audience insight into the complexity of a human mind, celebrating with them the beautiful, difficult, defining diversity of the world—the way I did when Spencer looked at me for the first time, on that day that now feels so long ago.

## Personal Statement 4

*Accepted into: UPenn, Dartmouth, Cornell, Brown*

Can a beauty turn into a beast? In my first year of high school, my classmates would praise my porcelain skin and lovely face. My smile was like sweets, spreading dopamine to others. During breaks, girls would ask me to accompany them to grab snacks, and boys surrounded me asking for academic help. After class, we would play badminton, and I even joined the cheerleading team. Feeling like the center of my group, I savored school life.

Alas! Perhaps Maleficent envied my beauty and put a curse on me. When I awoke one fateful day in the tenth grade, the surrounding areas of my eyes and jaw were covered in a painful rash. I didn't want to go to class, as I feared tarnishing the impression my friends had of me. I couldn't even look in the mirror: I didn't recognize the horrid reflection. The sorceress's power was so strong that the medicines prescribed to combat my diagnosed Atopic Dermatitis proved useless. Rashes covered my whole body within months. The itch made sleeping impossible; I lived in a zombie-like state. My skin resembled a hundred-year-old tree bark, and when I shook my arms,

scurf fell like snowflakes. I felt helpless and disappointed, not only with my physical condition, but also with my friends' attitudes. They promptly ignored me, except to flash despising eyes. I was alone, walking in the dark hallway listening to girls' ringing laughter in their rooms. The popular girl had turned into a monster.

After that semester, my condition became so severe that I had to be hospitalized. The AD had turned into Erythroderma, and doctors wanted to inject me with medicines that would cause life-long reliance and have harmful effects on my kidneys and liver. I refused, unwilling to put my long-term health at risk for short-term alleviation of symptoms. Instead, I decided to only take the anti-inflammatory treatment while exercising, as my background in alternative medicine had led me to believe that allergies often stem from weak immune systems.

At first, I could only do gentle exercise like hiking. Every time I sweated, the itch felt like millions of ants running through my body. I had to grit my teeth and divert my attention to resist the impulse to scratch. The biggest motivator that steadied my faith of persistence is the last line of Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind: If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?* When I came across that line one ordinary afternoon, it was imprinted in my heart. I would repeat the line like a mantra when hope seemed dim. Determined to become healthy again, I continued exercise and finally witnessed miracles. The itch gradually diminished and I perspired more, which meant that toxins were being expelled. Then, I worked my exercise up to badminton and tennis. I am now fully recovered, with no recurrence.

However, when I went in for a routine hospital check-up, I noticed countless allergy patients, which stimulated me to help. On weekends, I would head to hospitals and send them skin-care handbooks and creams. Most importantly, I shared my recovery story to ensure them that nothing is insurmountable. I also set up a social media platform to reach more people. In forums, patients' parents could share their pains, solutions, preferred creams, and medical tips. Seeing their thankful notes and patients' happy faces, I realized the worthiness of my experience.

This experience taught me that no matter how difficult adversity seems, confidence, persistence, bravery, and hope can direct me to light. No matter how powerful Maleficent is, good always trumps evil. This experience also helped me realize the importance of making social contributions, and I hope to found my own charity for helping AD patients in the future. Now when I look in the mirror, not only do I see a beautiful reflection, but I also see an altruistic, fierce, modern-day Princess smiling back at me.

## Personal Statement 5

*Accepted into: UPenn, Columbia, Brown*

I simply couldn't hold back the deluge of tears that flooded like water through a leaky dyke. Our new music teacher, Ms. L., hadn't shown up for the orchestra rehearsal, and we had been plagued with problematic microphones and harassed by security guards who insisted on closing up early. Accustomed to how our old teacher had helped us prepare, we had focused on perfecting the

pieces, paying little heed to tedious administrative issues. Consequently, we were facing a grim and disordered reality as the big night of our annual concert.

When I vented to a close friend, he told me my frustrations fell under the umbrella of the “small stuff,” which he believed must be compartmentalized for the sake of emotional survival. I recalled the recurring pings of the microphones, the off-putting demands of the new teacher, and the last-minute editing of emcee scripts and I knew that in this case sweating the small stuff was a necessity.

The rest of the arrangements for the concert proceeded with much sweating on the part of all concerned, which was not only a result of Singapore's warm weather. Ms. L.'s approach to things was radically different from what I had grown accustomed to, and we butted heads over issues as trivial as the color schemes of the posters and the prospective candidates for emcee. Many members of the orchestra had given their grudging acceptance to Ms. L.'s new regime, but I maintained my obduracy. I found it difficult to accept that “this is just the way things have to be,” a phrase that I believed was often employed to absolve ourselves of personal and communal responsibility.

As I meandered home in the balmy Singapore weather, I turned on some Janáček, whose melodies have never failed to bring me comfort. I started to ruminate on the orchestra issues in a logical, quasi-detached way, as the soothing music spread across me like a gentle painkiller and rendered all related negative emotions remote. I realized that the problem with refusing to deal with the small stuff as it arises is that this becomes the accepted norm. Within the shadow of this norm, we often confuse weakness with resilience, continuing to make concessions, unable to back away from the Faustian bargain that we make in exchange for short-term comfort.

My playlist reached Sinfonietta when I had finally plopped into bed. The piece begins and ends with a phalanx of fanfares—not the usual grandiloquent kind that you hear in festivals, but one that connects a subtle web of melodious relationships, branching out into many variations on the original theme, so that its return at the end of the work seems not just a glorious, riotous coda, but also the logical conclusion to a compelling symphonic process. It begins subtly, even quietly, intertwining shifting musical ideas to create a cinematic effect, moving somewhat counter to the conventional symphonic principles, paving the way to the sheer, blazing thrill of the coruscating brass salute at its very end.

The Sinfonietta created an epiphany for me—a sense that I had to find a way to create order from chaos, beauty and meaning from broken pieces. The solution, I realized, was neither relinquishing focus on the small stuff, nor ignoring the reality of the situation, but finding compromise by maneuvering deftly through it. By understanding the needs of the various parties involved, I could navigate toward a Nash solution that, although not ideal, was the best that the situation allowed. Later that night, I took out my cello and played a part of the Sinfonietta in silence, feeling the music ebb and flow, rise and recede like water moving over rocks whose sharp edges had been smoothed by grace and time.

## Personal Statement 6

*Accepted into: Yale, UPenn, Columbia, Brown*

After 21 hours of flights and bus rides, I was finally smack in the middle of downtown Concord, standing in a record shop called Pitchfork. It was a cozy little shop that smelled faintly like McDonald's and had hardcore rock music on, with a cashier whose belly was so big that his suspenders were audibly tearing.

I surfed through the racks, hoping to see some familiar names of American pop icons, such as Taylor Swift and Justin Bieber. As I flipped through thousands of records, however, I was only greeted by simple yet extremely American-sounding names like Bob Dylan, Billy Joel, and Paul Simon. There were also some oddly familiar graphics that were almost too abstract to be true: a prism with dispersed light; a crotch wearing tight black jeans and unnecessarily visible zippers. *This must be true American pop culture.*

The mixture of smell, sound, and visuals gave me a strong dose of America. I could feel my feet moving and my head shaking to the guitar riff, the drumbeats, and the singer's tearing voice. Everything about this shop clicked in my heart, so I purchased a box of albums and a turntable and spent months in my room soaking up this addictive American music. I wanted to become part of this culture!

It took me a couple of school dances to realize that my perception of America was a whopping thirty years off. As one of my peers put it, I had the music taste of an old man. Instead of modern America, I was living in the time of Afros, bell-bottoms, and disco-skating rinks.

Since then, I always walk past Pitchfork with my heart aching from a failed, anachronistic assimilation, until one day, I saw my engineering teacher, Mr. Wardrop emerge from the shop. We chatted about my situation and he invited me to a session in his lab, where a group of oldies, young and old, gathered together for some quality lunchtime music.

Surprisingly, these people didn't listen to music quietly as I did. They rambled about their family fishing trips, about their experiences through the Cold War, and their Christmas traditions. Although half a century apart, people in this group bonded over the memories that these songs carry.

I soon realized that the American thing about these songs, which were mostly made by British artists, were the American memories they created. What my peers possess and I don't are memories of a grandfather nagging about 'Nam and parents who grew up wanting to become rock stars. What I didn't have were the unpleasantly long road trips and the tense Thanksgiving dinners with foul-mouthed drunk uncles—the moments when music flows and continues like a tradition.

This group encouraged me to really live this country, to drive up and down I-93, to learn the pronunciation of obscure Massachusetts town names, to knock on doors and get to know my community. This group, which is now the Music Appreciation Society, crafted my American

memory that usually takes decades and generations to foster. As all of us share a shiver to Dylan's desperate cry for peace and Fleetwood Mac's gentle whisper of love's bittersweet nature, we are all reminded of the memories that makes us who we are in this country.

I guess I did assimilate after all.

## Personal Statement 7

*Accepted into: Dartmouth, Brown*

Growing up, I took no interest in Barbie dolls. Instead, I would strut about with my beloved remote-control cars and transformer toys, jump up and down on the sofa with other boys, and roar like Mufasa on all fours in the kindergarten playground until concerned adults would chide, "How can a girl be as naughty as boys?" Yet my coming of age witnessed my steadfast rebellion against such social dos and don'ts. *Why couldn't a girl be like boys?*

Soccer was my first step to fight such stereotypes. It was almost like a ritual for me during the European Champion Club's Cup to wake at three am and watch the game in the freezing February winter. As I enthusiastically started a discussion about the game with the boys in my class the next day, however, I received no more than their taunts. "Girls know nothing about soccer. You can't even play soccer!" Trying to prove them wrong, I started to join my dad's weekly games at the amateur club, juggling, scoring a spinning goal, mastering every new trick, and enduring the subtropical humidity. As I finally earned my place on the school soccer field, I became the only girl warming up in a group of boys before a match. No one could help but stare at the only flapping ponytail on the field!

After conquering more physical arenas, I started to extend my exploration to another male-dominated field—competitive gaming. Yet prejudice emerged almost instantly: seeing my feminine avatar, other male players, in the worst-case scenarios, would immediately quit the game before it even started; when teaming with me, they would either be patronizing or blame me for every loss. Infuriated by their unfair stereotyping, I changed my username to a gender-neutral one. And as I tactically triumphed over my enemies, scoring aces and penta-kills and eventually leading my team to victory, I would then reveal my identity as a girl. Seeing their astonishment, I gained an unprecedented sense of accomplishment.

Yet, my supposed invincibility in both physical and intellectual domains was soon faced with an insurmountable challenge – cooking. As someone who despised all feminine traits for years, my hands were tied in the kitchen. The chiffon cake that was supposed to puff high and fluffy turned out as thin and solid like pancake; the sugar in the sweet and sour ribs became carbonized instead of caramelized. Hearing of my woes, my friends advised me to simply give up. "Arwen, just accept the fact that girly is not your thing."

Having been a fighter of gender stereotypes for years, I ironically became another stereotype in people's eyes. Is femininity something I should break away from? Is embodying masculinity the

only way of proving myself? I itched for an answer, and mastering cooking seemed to be my very first step. Consuming dozens of charred chiffon cake and scraping dozens of burnt woks, I painstakingly endeavored to develop my culinary talents. When I finally brought the fluffiest chiffon cake to my friends, I once again received the expected look of shock – yet this time, I aimed not at proving them wrong, but at proving myself capable of putting on any identity I desired.

One's character goes far beyond the limited factors defined under *male* and *female*. Every Saturday, I would start with a drenching yet fulfilling soccer practice; in the afternoons, I would devote myself to playing DotA with my friends; around dusk, I would remove the marinated beef from the refrigerator to prepare a big dinner for the family. Now, I have found an answer for my rebellion: to go beyond the troubling two-dimensional definition of an individual and to embrace the undeniable fluidness of identity.

## Personal Statement 8

*Accepted into: Harvard, Princeton, Yale, Columbia, UPenn, Cornell, Brown*

“Not so nasty now!” I thought with satisfaction as a pleasant organic aroma drifted upward from my experimental apparatus, within which reddish pupae squirmed with the distinctive discomfort of all newborn beings.

Two years earlier, I had subscribed to the commonly-held notion that flies were disgusting and harmful pests. After all, they hang around garbage, are dirty and smelly, and spread dangerous bacteria. One day, my father brought home a hundred flies in a glass container. Although I wanted nothing to do with them at the time, this event marked the beginning of my unlikely passion for insects.

I learned from my dad that the larvae of flies, called maggots, will feed on decomposing organic material, which they transform into organic fertilizer and animal protein. Intrigued by this concept, I decided to do an experiment to validate the environmental effects of the loathsome creatures. Under my father's careful tutelage, I placed a waterlogged sponge in a small container, making sure that the sponge occupied nearly all of its volume. This way, I knew, the flies would be able to perch on the sponge to drink without drowning. I created a cube-shaped metal framework using thin wires, fashioning it so that it optimized visibility without allowing the flies to escape. Meanwhile, my father made an egg-gathering container containing crusts of wheat and ammonia. With our experimental set-up ready to go, we added the flies, half male and half female, and prepared to track the outcome.

For two weeks, I patiently observed the processes unfolding. For the first three days, the flies buzzed around their enclosure, seemingly without purpose, and nothing of note seemed to happen. By the fourth and fifth days, however, large amounts of eggs appeared in the egg-gathering container. These were tiny, white, and spherical, their clusters forming strange runes and sigils. Three days later, the eggs morphed into wiggly maggots whose reek was intense.

Struggling to overcome my nausea, I collected the maggots and scattered them over the food scraps, covering them with a transparent container to ensure that they did not escape. Imperceptibly but inexorably, something was changing. When I removed the containers two days later, some of the maggots had become reddish, ellipsoid pupae. Most amazingly, the foul smell had disappeared from the container, implying that the maggots had in fact transformed the decaying organic material into more palatable elements!

Having experienced my first major entomological excitement, I was inspired to share the bug that I had caught, so to speak. I reported on my experiment at school and was encouraged to find that my peers were more interested in it than I had expected. Out of continued curiosity, I founded the Biodegradables Environmental Science Club, as part of which I repeated my initial experiment several times both to instruct new members and to collect data on different variables. When I look at newborn maggots now, I feel not revulsion, but rather interest and wonder. Most gratifyingly, I have seen other club members experience the same shift in attitude as we put science into action together. With time, our club became popular enough that we decided to organize a “Pest Camp” for this coming summer, during which we will teach younger students how to transform what humans have always been bothered by into some of nature's best gifts.

Much to my surprise, I have been changed from a girl who screamed at any kind of bug into a budding entomologist who finds insects captivating and beautiful. Though they might at first glance appear to be the lowliest of this world's creatures, flies and maggots have much to teach us about life: That the value of raw material can rarely be assessed at first sight (or smell!), that nature can transform coal into diamond, and that science can weave spider webs into steel.

## Personal Statement 9

*Accepted into: Cornell, Columbia, UPenn*

History has always been my greatest interest, yet through my years of learning I have come to understand that teaching history is anything but an easy job. My years of suspicion were confirmed in the first class of my history tutorship. With students resting their chins on one hand like a half-hung telephone and staring at me with blank, unfocused eyes, I knew I had to figure out some way to grab their attention. I returned home that evening with the best intentions, yet after I opened up my fifth blank Microsoft file in a state of pure frustration, my concentration and confidence faded. It seemed strange that even though I was surrounded by various historical artifacts in my father's library, I was unable to garner inspiration from such an ambience. I was like a waif lost in the crowd until I noticed a thick, familiar album that whisked me into a remembrance of the days my father and I used to spend pouring through its crisp pages.

When I was a child, instead of fairy tales, my father would tell me stories about the antique porcelains in the album. I obtained an unexplainable pleasure from sitting on his knees and unraveling the intricate veils from those charming porcelains, the intense aroma of which indicated their historical nature. But not until I climbed the two-meter tall shelf to see the

porcelain jars atop it did I begin to discover the real source of my father's pleasure. Holding a reading glass and a dictionary of seal characters, I would stand on the table for hours trying to understand the depictions on the jars until I was convinced it was impossible. Frustrated, I would relent and ask my father, who patiently illuminated whatever mysteries I came across. Inspired by his brilliance, I started my journey of learning Chinese calligraphy in hopes of one day being able to appreciate the porcelains like my father did.

Spurred by these sweet memories, I stood up and headed towards the shelf. My eyes strayed to a section that had been my favorite as a child, one containing fragments from a porcelain vase that I had accidentally broken long ago. Although shattered, every piece represents a moment of the Stone Story with its vivid painting. Throughout childhood, I tried many times but failed to glue these pieces together, yet always found it exhilarating and thought-provoking to rearrange the broken segments and build my own Stone Story in different ways.

That was it! I rushed back to my computer and without hesitation abandoned the clichéd presentation format that only showcased my personal interpretation of historical events. I began typing up my plan for centering the course around storytelling. This way, everyone could present their opinions and imaginations by telling stories just as I did for myself based on the vase debris.

My new plan for the tutorial class proved itself effective almost instantaneously. Students were filled with passion when they presented their own understandings of history. As we dove into the history of the African Americans, various perspectives were introduced: the "musician" in our class turned his sight to the connection between aboriginal African music and modern genres such as jazz and blues; the feminists actively explored the sufferings of African American women, highlighting their importance in combating racial discrimination; our "poet" probed into Walt Whitman's attitude towards slavery with an in-depth reading into his poetry. Everyone found their respective niche and together, we weaved an intricate and fascinating picture of African American history with our diverse conceptions.

History is like a broken vase. Its ultimate "truth" is always irretrievable, and thus any one-dimensional interpretation of history is prone to be problematic. Nevertheless, true historians get close to this "truth" by viewing the fragmented facts through different lenses, forming diverse perspectives, and seeing more clearly what history means for our present-day interpretations of the world.

## Personal Statement 10

*Accepted into: Yale, Cornell, Columbia, UPenn, Dartmouth, Brown*

What I most remember about my arrival in California is the ubiquity of the color yellow. It was mid-autumn, and golden leaves piled on the side of the road, crackling when I jumped on them. I shortly became close friends with a blonde German girl named Pauline in my elementary class, who invited me to pick ripe lemons from her family's lemon tree. I remember holding a plump fruit under the sun, admiring how it glistened in the yellow light. The first English song that I completely understood was Tie A Yellow Ribbon Round The Old Oak Tree. The song told the

story of a man returning home from prison, hoping with all his heart that his wife still loved him; the yellow ribbon symbolized her positive answer. Yellow was the color of hope, anticipation, and enjoyment.

Two years later, I returned to China, and my world was red. Every day I wore a red scarf, the item all my peers were wearing to symbolize the country; the outer casing of scholarship medals were bright red, and they had a fuzzy texture. In Chinese celebrations, crimson lanterns hanged on doorknobs, each with a candle glowing inside, lighting the streets with warm rays. During Chinese New Year, I received red envelopes containing lucky money from my parents and elder relatives that carried their best wishes to me. Red was the color of prosperity, happiness, and tradition.

Every color had its own characteristic and emotion that linked to my memory in some way. I've started to think more about colors and the emotion that they carry in my artworks. If I'm in a joyous mood, my painting will be full of orange, red, and yellow; however, when I am feeling blue, my paintings will have a grayish tone. At that point in my life, I was satisfied using different shades of the same color in my paintings.

As time went on, I started to feel that my painting lacked authenticity. There didn't seem to be connections in my works: the colors were singled out, with clear, sharp boundaries around the outlines. My emotions are not sheer blue or complete green with straight lines surrounding them. No one color dominates me; my emotions are the result of a mixture of colors—all of equal importance—that synthesize, connect with, and interact with each other. Realizing this, I embarked on my search for a new way of painting that resembles the way my emotions are formed.

I found the answer in watercolor. When my paintbrush touches the paper, the color diffuses on the page, another tint of a different color touches the first color, and a connection is formed. The colors seep into each other slowly and then stop, almost like water seeping into soil. When the colors dry, an irregular edge forms between them; this random, spontaneous natural interfusion is what makes watercolor breathtaking. The colors take on a life of their own.

Watercolor is now more than a reflection of my emotions—it has inspired me to become a person who can effectively interact with those around me. In the end, life is about interacting with others, as humans are by definition social beings. Connections are vital to building relationships; in a society, different roles are of equal importance, and we need different elements to form a community. Just like how watercolor depicts emotions, the roles in our communities are not defined in straight, rigid lines. Rather, through interactions and communication, people can flux between roles and groups, creating a fluid society. Thanks to watercolor, the way I interact with others will enable me to lead a more colorful life.

## Personal Statement 11

*Accepted into: Yale, Cornell, UPenn, Dartmouth*

My sixth birthday dinner was illuminated by a magical dish—baked orange-spotted grouper. Beneath that nose-tickling scent of cooked garlic and the refreshing herb sauce was a tantalizing sweetness. Crisp shredded ginger and spring onion contrasted with the slightly seared, golden fish skin. I could not wait to grab my first slice, even dismissing the Chinese tradition that I should serve my parents first. The dish soon vanished before our eyes, yet the flavor lingered in my mind and has become one of my most cherished childhood memories.

The memory of that flavor continued to tantalize me as I grew up. Every year on my birthday, my father would take me to that same seafood restaurant. Every time I browsed through the menu, I noticed that the price of the orange-spotted grouper increased while the prices of most other fishes, once as costly as the grouper, decreased. I asked the owner why the groupers were so expensive. Apologetically, he replied that because groupers can only survive in a very specific environment, they are much more difficult to raise than other types of fish.

This experience aroused my curiosity—why were groupers so difficult to raise? I researched until I learned about concepts of DNA polymerase and gel electrophoresis, which concerns the dissection of DNA and DNA analysis. I began to speculate that a virus might be the culprit. If we could extract the DNA of the virus, we might be able to solve the problem. To verify my hypothesis and gain hands-on experience of analyzing DNA so that I could take a concrete step in the direction of solving this mystery, I applied for an internship at the South China Sea Institute of Oceanology, where research on viruses killing orange-spotted groupers are conducted and where vaccines are created.

Working as a research assistant and under the guidance of my colleagues, not only did I learn to use equipment that had previously only existed for me in a textbook, but I also gained an appreciation for the importance of observation and intrepidity in a young scientist. Daily, I repeated monotonous experimental procedures to find the unknown virus. Most of the time, we ended up getting nothing. Every day, the pungent odor of buffers and agarose solution strongly contrasted with the lovely image of the grouper dish in my mind, infusing the lab with a pleasant, imaginary aroma. Like the path to revolution, the path to deliciousness is arduous. Still, with a firm belief that I would find the key to increasing the population of farmed groupers, I kept trying. During the following experiments, I photographed every result to record the brightness and the length of the bands, identifiers of the DNA's characteristics.

One day, the results finally captured my attention. The bands were bizarrely long and had a slightly different hue than I was used to. I immediately compared it with all the others. *That's it!* Believing that this DNA segment belonged to the virus, I immediately informed my colleagues. We redesigned the DNA primers, confirmed the difference, and found out the unknown virus SGIV. The lab is now designing vaccine for groupers based on the virus, and I feel honored to continue this research to help more people enjoy the delicacy of orange-spotted groupers.

From this experience, I have come to understand that all science is not necessarily as metaphysical or complicated as string theory. Science can also be as down-to-earth as designing detergent or figuring out a vaccine so that more people can afford to enjoy a delicious meal.

Our vaccine is now used by some fish farms, and we have already heard promising results. Some

farmers even sent us groupers as a token of gratitude. The deliciousness of literally tasting the fruits of one's labor is simply unparalleled!

## Personal Statement 12

*Accepted into: Yale, Columbia, Cornell, UPenn, Dartmouth*

Law enforcement officers are the first fence to impose public justice; meanwhile, this common notion holds them to higher standards and closer scrutiny in the justice system. The unique nature of the job can easily incite tension and often puts police officers under the spotlight. Therefore, when I heard about the controversies around ex-NYPD Officer Peter Liang's indictment in early 2015, I curiously searched for more information.

In addition to familiarizing myself with the case's details, I began examining different perspectives on social justice in social media groups. As I saw myself agreeing with some arguments of each side, I wondered if such a case could ever be handled to satisfy everyone's sense of justice. As we all hold our own values, it's impossible for people to converge on a single belief, or a definitive justice. Instead, the justice system is based on compromises and the essence that people should be treated equally.

It didn't take me long to discover that Liang was the first NYPD officer indicted for a fatality in over a decade. Compared with other cases in which officers were set free of indictment due to "a lack of credible evidence proving the intentionality of shooting" in court, this case seemed to have gotten a harsher-than-usual response. Unable to determine the rationale behind this disparity, I was perplexed and irked.

Eager to explore justice and raise awareness to the peculiarity of this case, I began sharing news articles and writing about my opinions on this in my school's community forum. At first, my opinion seemed to be on the opposite side of campaigns against police brutality. However, as I went to different lunch tables and debated with those who dismissed my thoughts, I actually convinced many of my peers of my viewpoint: Liang's indictment (and later conviction), due to its unusual deferral in comparison with other cases, distorted fairness, the cornerstone of a common law system. If we couldn't restore this relative justice, people would fear getting different punishments for the same act. If we couldn't respect precedents, the justice system would be more vulnerable to manipulation by individual power. However, I realized that merely talking in abstract terms wasn't enough. To have a real impact, I needed larger platform.

Luckily, I didn't have to wait long. A few days after Peter's conviction in February 2016, I came across [savepeterliang.org](http://savepeterliang.org). A white background with just a few grammatically incorrect sentences, the website was barren and boring. However, one sentence at the bottom of the page caught my attention: "Looking for more minds and hearts." I immediately drafted an email to the contact address and attached my latest writing piece. When I was about to hit "Send", however, I hesitated. How much impact could one website actually have? How much time would I need to put into this project? A series of questions flooded my mind, and I lifted my finger from the

mouse.

At the same time, I reflected on my initial motives for wanting to become involved. While police violence that violates people's rights must be stopped, it is also important that we work to make sure that political pressure does not blur the justice system. With a crisp click, my email was on its way. After getting on board, I edited the site's content and addressed the uniqueness of the case. I also created an online petition and worked with other volunteers to gather signatures for the judge. Before the sentencing date, over 20,000 people had signed our petition.

While it's impossible to say that my efforts had any influence on the judge's decision, this experience strengthened my understanding of justice and the justice system: the best referee is not one who goes hard or soft on fouls, but one who is consistent. A definitive justice is hard to find, but fairness is always a resort. When the equality of justice gets violated, I'll always stand up.

## Personal Statement 13

*Accepted into: Cornell, Columbia, Dartmouth, UPenn*

Enter Ava. Tall, thin, clad in black, eyes hardened by a mask of charcoal eyeliner. She struts nonchalantly in her combat boots, looking so incongruous (and dangerous) in the school. Appearances can be deceiving. More than a nonconformist, Ava would turn out to be the most courageous and independent girl I've ever met.

I first met Ava at an art exhibition in Oregon. It surprised me that a girl so punk-rock could love still life paintings. Since then, we became friends and she would tell me her stories. She told me of her travels to Germany alone when she was just fifteen, how she devotes herself to gender inequality and LGBTQ issues, and how she swears to stop the demolition of old houses in Kyoto. Ava also told me that growth is the process of constantly breaking and rebuilding one's current outlook, and that the only way to do this is to leave one's comfort zone.

Ava's words shocked me. I realized that I had been stuck in my comfort zone for a while, and I did not want to leave it. For example, on the morning of my first Thanksgiving in the US, I was treated a bowl of white rice, without any side dishes or even a glass of water. That moment, I missed my mother's Japanese dishes, made with love and care. I missed my buddies, not people who just treated me as a bookish Asian girl. I doubted my decision to have left behind the country I knew, to enter a nation where cultures collide.

Ava made me realize that I had wasted precious time gingerly safeguarding my sensitive inner world and didn't realize that those around me tried to care for me in their own way. Even the host family assumed that I, a Japanese girl, would prefer rice over pizza. Slowly, I started to empathize and see situations from other perspectives.

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Due to my fascination with Spanish culture, I attended a camp in Barcelona last summer, which was the most unforgettable experience. Starting from Placa de Catalunya at 8 am, my friend Sarah and I, who had also been admiring Gaudi's works for a long time, walked along the Paseo de Gracia. We went to Casa Batillo, La Pedrera, La Sagrada Familia, and finally reached Park Guell twelve hours later. Gaudi's architecture was simply fascinating; I was amazed by his magical use of curves, light, and genius ideas from nature. However, Barcelona shines not only because of Gaudi, but also the vintage buildings, the cozy sunlight, and the warm smiles on people's faces.

We decided to measure the city with our feet. Using a map as guide, we walked five miles. Rather than talking, we looked and experienced with our hearts. When this walking meditation ended, I felt a strong connection to Barcelona, as if I'd been acquainted with the city for a long time. I discovered a different me. I would never imagine walking five miles to explore a city with only a map, or traveling alone in Spain. I forgot my non-professional Spanish and the fact that I was a total stranger to the city. I even forgot my resistance to approach strangers. When I asked a passing elegant old lady for directions, when I danced to the music with buskers on the square, I was inexplicably satisfied.

Humans' greatest fear is uncertainty. Our comfort zones represent safety and ease. However, after constantly reaching beyond my limit, I found that Ava's words were true: leaving one's comfort zone is really the only way to grow. Stepping outside the boundaries of comfort, a much more glamorous and expansive world awaits. I hope that through the upcoming years, I can discover the art world of major international cities, further expanding my mind and heart. As Ava and this trip to Barcelona taught me, everybody is welcome by world, and I am no exception.

## Personal Statement 14

*Accepted into: Dartmouth, Cornell, Brown*

It was a cloudy spring day with mosquitoes in the moist air, yet I was thrilled. For the first time in my life, I was going to plant a tree.

Dad and Grandpa shoveled a hole in our front yard. I gently lifted the sapling and placed it into the dirt and filled up the hole. Mom stabled the sapling with a few poles. Grandma watered it. For years, it grew in our yard, nurtured by sunlight and tropical rains, producing a kind of tart, juicy fruit named *wampee*. Twice a year when I pick the wampee, I am reminded of those in my family who planted the tree with me.

My grandparents anchored the roots of my life. Grandpa was enlisted in the army for five years and later worked as an engineer in the ship manufacturing industry. Yet, he never lost his passion for literature and calligraphy. He taught me how to recite classical poetry, tucking me into bed with stories and parables. In contrast, Grandma spent her adolescence moving across the country

with her family. Away from her hometown, she became independent and persevered in the face of challenges: bearing the hot weather and spicy cuisine, practicing burdensome physical tasks, and fitting into a new community. As the roots of my family tree, Grandpa and Grandma gathered experience from hardship, absorbed the marrow of life, and eventually passed them on to my parents and me.

My parents are the supportive trunk of the family tree. Inheriting the trait of persistence from my grandparents, they founded an International Trade Corporation that exports household appliances. For the past ten years, they have achieved recognition in the local industry and made millions of dollars in annual trade volume. My parents were hands-on entrepreneurs: they worked long hours, negotiated deals with factories, trained new employees, and built relationships with clients. Though I did not witness the beginning of their entrepreneurship, I have seen the stack of contracts in their bedroom and heard their voices on the phone as the dinner on the table grew cold.

Growing up under the sufficient moisture and fertile soil my family provides, I am increasingly aware of my responsibilities in the family business. Using statistical knowledge and information gathered from my family firm's database, I conducted marketing research about the electrical fans we produce and export to Latin America. I noticed that the United States, which has been importing most fans made in China, would be a potential market for expansion.

Moreover, since electrical fans are a seasonal product, I recommended my parents to export heaters to countries like the U.S. as well, since in such way the firm would run more evenly and profitably during the full business year. Through this experience, I was able to learn more about our firm's operation, which is a micro-representation of the international trading system. I learned to write proposals, contribute ideas, and assist my parents.

This summer, I went back to visit the wampee tree. The rising sun kindled the sky, and where we planted the sapling stood a leafy tree laden with fruits. Looking back, I have come to see how my family has shaped my identity from childhood to adulthood, just like the sapling that has transformed into a tree. The roots went deep, like my grandparents who nurtured my mind fundamentally; the trunk was erected steadily, like my parents spreading nutrition into my every veins. My grandparents have taught me the importance of traditional values, both cultural and personal. My parents have nurtured and protected me while allowing opportunities for me to develop multiple interests and widen my horizon. Their support enables me, the leaves, to reach the light and the air. Now, I will be replanted across the Pacific, where I hope to be nourished by the soil of my future college and blossom into someone my family would be proud of.

## Personal Statement 15

*Accepted into: Yale, Cornell, Dartmouth, UPenn*

I used to think that my camera only captured scenes of life; in fact, it delivers voices, voices of powerless children from Liangshan, one of China's poorest regions. Every time I look through my Canon 7D's viewfinder, I'm eager not only to capture but also to convey and create, hence

empowering the lives of others.

### **Capture.**

A group of kids playing rope-less tug-of-war. Bad angle, awkward placement, could've used a larger aperture with a higher shutter speed. It's not a great shot, but it pictured the fifteen-year-old me trying to immortalize a moment. The girls interlock their hands, some wrap their arms around those before them, some clutch to others' shirts. My hands feel the friction between their hands and the nylon. My scapula aches as the girls lean back. Innocent laughter echoes around me. The rope-less tug-of-war might seem dull to us, but their faces sparkled with glee. They didn't have much, yet they lived with gratitude.

From this point onward, every year these kids, who had never seen a camera before, patiently await my envelope full of photos: photos of them chasing hogs, photos of them planting potatoes, photos of them doodling on ragged walls, photos of them waving goodbye.

### **Convey.**

A girl clings fast to the window frame, the glass separating two worlds. The texture of the pitifully smeared glass, the placement of the dreadfully-welded iron...these elements jerk at viewer's heartstrings. Hope glides in those gazing eyes, penetrates the blurred glass, and incites tears. Their hope, enthusiasm, and desire were never smothered by poverty but rather kindled by life's extremities. She hopes to break through that glass, to tear down that rusty iron frame, to crack open the restraints set by destitution, to finally emerge into our world.

Indeed, we dwell in opposite worlds. We have high technology and sports equipment for entertainment; we travel thousands of miles to the Caribbean, to the Alps. They have nothing but a backpack, maybe a few pencils; the adjacent town four hours' walk away is the farthest they've been; eating three meals a day is a privilege. Everything we take for granted is mere fantasy to them.

Her eyes planted seeds deep in my heart. These seeds prompt me to sow their dreams in other hearts. These seeds prompt me to fundraise, to study architecture, to one day build them better schoolhouses with clear windows that do not separate, but join, our worlds.

### **Create.**

A monochromatic background draws attention to the heart-rending shoes. The torn clothes, dangling threads, and cracked rubber document the hours the kids walk to school. The dim and coarse concrete illustrates their lackluster background: childhood. We all must tread up and down countless muddy knolls through our trail of growth. However, these kids don't have our Timberlands to soften the journey; they don't have a GPS to navigate the road. They only have the roughly paved dirt road wriggling into the village. They have thorns and lurking vipers. They have loot—woodchips, dirt, rocks, lichen—that their shoes collected, proof of their experience and strength. We pray that they will walk out of the dirt road, out of the dark shadow, and pave a wider, smoother, brighter future.

Glancing through these old photos, I found myself treading through my own muddy trail of growth. Desire, wonder, and desperation were vividly conveyed through texture, lines, and

colors. My photos morphed into powerful and touching storytellers who narrate my emotions and those of the otherwise ignored. Through these years, I gushed with pride at seeing the kids grow, a series of my photos reposted 600,000 times, and over 30,000 volunteers sign up to teach at Liangshan.

The word “grown” has now become less abstract. The camera—the responsibility—has grown heavier on my shoulders. I’m not sure whether it’s the camera itself or the development it captured that weighs me down, but it’s a weight I embrace.

## Personal Statement 16

*Accepted into: (Oxford), Columbia, Cornell, UPenn, Brown*

“Where do you think you belong to, Chongqing or Canton?” In whichever city I happened to be, this was the most frequently asked question I encountered during numerous family meetings every Chinese New Year. Stuffing myself with mouthfuls of food was the best way to avoid the following awkward silence. Hastily wiping away the soup dripping down my chin, I mumbled under the gaze of countless of relatives, their eyes brimming with anticipation. “I...I have no idea,” was all I could lamely utter.

I wasn’t lying. Having spent the first six years of my life in Chongqing and the next eleven in Canton, I have learned both dialects and grown used to the flavors of both cities. My family is a peculiar composition featuring two different tastes: my Chongqingnese mom, hot-tempered, addicted to chilies; my Cantonese stepdad, even-tempered, fond of every flavor but spicy. I savor the zesty flavor of Chongqing hotpot during mother-daughter dinners, while feeling a delicious shiver of pleasure when I sip the fresh and mild stock of Cantonese hotpot in my stepdad’s hometown. The two cities have been so intertwined in my memories that I can hardly tell which one I belong to. Yet this is not the case for my parents: their rooted cultural backgrounds have endowed them with distinctive accents, different tastes for food, and unique temperaments.

The other day, I saw a split pot in Wal-Mart which was divided by a copper slice in the middle, resembling a “yin-yang” symbol. After bringing the pot home, I stewed a spicy Chongqing broth in one half and a thin Cantonese stock in the other. The two coexisted peacefully in one pot, one hot and dense, the other mild and light. My family resembles this yin-yang pot, with my Chongqing mom and Cantonese stepdad living together in harmony, yet maintaining unique attitudes towards life.

My mum and stepdad have grown to love this pot. Gorging myself with food from both halves while my parents choose their preferred soups, I suddenly find the answer to the where-I-belong-to question. Experiencing the values of both cities, I am the copper slice in a hotpot. I belong to neither half, yet I have direct experiences from both, enriched with the profound system of the two values. It is my existence that allows the two broths to coexist peacefully. I have helped each broth preserve its unique flavor while breaking down cultural barriers so that they have become more tolerant of each other. Bombarded by a constant ebb and flow of flavors from both sides, my copper slice absorbs both tastes. As I dip my spoon into one half, my taste buds explode,

reminiscent of my stepdad’s upbringing. I dip it into the other half and am transported to my mother’s childhood. Being the copper slice in the middle, I am free to delve into whichever culture suits me most the moment. I have a multiple-entry visa between these two distinct worlds, and I plan taking advantage of it.

“I belong to the middle,” I answered without hesitation the next time I was asked. My relatives shrugged, obviously not content with my strange, vague answer. But I like being the cooper slice between the Chongqing and Canton broths. Why shouldn’t I be able to taste both worlds, to experience life from two different cultural viewpoints? Likewise, I hope to be the hyphen in “Yale-NUS”, experiencing both the East and the West simultaneously. With my experience of living in China and studying under an American system, I wish I can better the understandings between different cultures, facilitating everyone to coexist harmoniously in the Yale-NUS campus and working towards a better future.

## Personal Statement 17

*Accepted into: Harvard, Princeton, Yale, Columbia, UPenn*

No one is ever really his or her “own” person. Rather, we are all products of a larger societal context and upbringing. The world I come from—my family, my community, and my school—has shaped me into the girl I am today, presenting me with experiences and opportunities which have allowed me to unearth my passions.

My parents introduced me to animation when they took me to watch *Finding Nemo*. I loved the movie so much that I begged my parents for the DVD, which I have seen at least thirty times. This charming film left a deep impression on me, both visually and emotionally. The advanced computer graphics presented the sea in such a unique way that each frame was resplendent with beauty. The more animated films my parents took me to, the more my love and fascination for CGI animation grew. Movies such as *Kung Fu Panda* and *Up* taught me invaluable life lessons, such as the power of faith and the importance of family, respectively. Through animation, my family built a castle of love, imagination, and wonderment. These movies continuously shape my dream: to be an animator, employing advanced computer technology to create art which will hopefully spread optimism and happiness to viewers.

My school allowed me to share my passion for violin with others. Standing onstage before the chamber ensemble, I took a deep breath and raised the instrument to my shoulder. I slammed the bow on the strings and was instantly transported into Vivaldi’s *Spring*. The movement advanced from the joyful chirp of birds to the languorous flow of a fountain to the climax- the tempestuous storm. All eyes were on me, the orchestra’s soloist; as lightning and thunder clashed, my fingers frantically danced across the strings. The storm calmed and the piece ended with a slow vibrato. Thunderous applause brought me back to the real world. I beamed with pride, honored that my classmates and teachers had delighted in my performance.

My community has instilled in me a sense of belonging. Since 2014, I volunteered at a primary

school. During my last class, I decided to teach paper-cutting, as art is usually not emphasized in the curricula of smaller schools. I patiently watched an eight-year-old, Min, clumsily cut along the pre-sketched lines on a triangular piece of folded paper. After twenty minutes, she unfolded her work, exhilaration spreading across her face. "A snowflake! Whoa, how beautiful!" To my surprise, she placed her masterpiece in my hand and covered it with hers; I could feel her warm fingertips transmitting her appreciation. At this endearing gesture, the word "community" transformed from a vague notion into a tangible one. Through actively volunteering in the community, I created a strong bond with the local school and its students.

Consciously and unconsciously, my world has provided me with opportunities and unforgettable experiences which have given rise to my potentials. I have discovered what I love- animation- and have learned the value of contributing to one's academic and local community. I hope that when I enter a new world, university, I will discover more fields of interest. Be it a programmer or an animator, an artist or a professor, I know that my world will support me in becoming who I want to be.

## Personal Statement 18

*Accepted into: Dartmouth, Cornell, Columbia, UPenn*

A mother's love is something more often than not, taken for granted. A mother's sacrifice—time, money, energy—for the sake of her child is a given in most parental relationships. However, growing up, my mother practiced a draconian child-rearing method, which caused me doubt her love for me. You see, my father left my family when I was just two years old. My entire life, I believed that it was my mother's sense of bitterness at not being able to hold onto a family that caused her to speak to me so harshly and maintain an icy distance.

As I found no comfort in my mother, I had no one to share my day-to-day events with. If things at school went poorly, such as a bad grade on an exam, my mother would rap me over the knuckles or make me stand in a corner. If I pushed it and answered back, she would send me to bed without dinner. Rather than simply making an imaginary friend, like most children my age and lacking maternal comfort would do, I found solace in the only outlet I could: the arts.

When I was five, my mom enrolled me in drawing lessons. Sheets of sketch paper overflowed with elements from my overactive imagination- detailed, wordless stories. As I grew older, the process of creating helped me develop a habit of doing things earnestly and persistently. After school, I would escape to my room and draw for hours. When I am lost in the world of art, images in my mind materialize as sketches on a page. The feeling of satisfaction when I realize that my pencil or brush has accurately recorded my inspirations is inexplicable and incomparable. When I am in the art world, a world in which creativity is King, anything is possible.

A couple of years later, my mother decided that it would be prudent to take music lessons, as she probably realized that academics were just not my forte. I chose the violin, which provides a

totally different aesthetic experience than drawing. With the organic dynamics of tempo and notes come either fervent movement or peaceful tranquility. Whether picking up the pace in one of Bach's Partitas, meditating almost religiously on Pachelbel's Canon in D, or reveling in self pity while playing a minor key, I learnt to interpret each piece for myself. I learned to interject my full emotions into the familiar notes, sprinkling each piece with my personality.

As an artist and a violinist, creative aesthetics are as essential as air. Expressing myself through art allows me to share what I deem visually or aesthetically pleasurable with others in the hopes they that will derive joy from my works as well. Having such a creative outlet of self-expression saved me from an otherwise emotionless existence. No matter what my mood or thoughts, there were multiple ways of conveying them either through my sketching pencils or through that hollow wooden instrument. The arts became the means by which I grew on my adolescent process of self-discovery.

By the time I decided to set off to high school in the United States, I was much more self-aware and developed than before. My artistic skills had empowered me with confidence to handle daily tasks on my own as well as hope for the future. However, the day of my flight, I received jarring news: my mother confessed that she had been suffering from cancer for the past XX years. However, she did not want to burden me with the stress and sorrow that comes with such a dreaded disease, so she kept quiet. She admitted that her strict ways of raising me were to guarantee that I would be able to take care of myself and earn my own living in the likely case that she did not survive much longer.

Upon hearing this news, tears started to uncontrollably flow from my eyes. I forgave my mother for having been so strict and thanked her for the seemingly little ways that she demonstrated her love—spending precious money that could have been used on her treatments to keep me in art and music classes—that in reality, made the world of difference in determining my fate. Thanks to my mother's sacrifice, not only have discovered my passion for the arts, but I have honed my art and music skills through years of lessons and practice. On a larger scale, I have become self-sufficient and am mature for my age, which I noticed while living in St Paul's dorms with other boys my age. Despite not having been the warmest of mothers, in her own way, my mother helped me grow my wings to fly toward a better future, one in which she may not be a part of. And that, I will never take for granted.

## Personal Statement 19

*Accepted into: Cornell, Columbia, UPenn*

The black water, filled with a mélange of industrial raw materials but showing no signs of life, aroused in me a sense of unease. The gray grass, covered in colorful, organic garbage but no flowers, disturbed me. It wasn't until a weekend last spring, when I finally returned to my native village, a small town near Jiangsu, that I had my impression of Chinese rural communities profoundly overturned.

The scenery wasn't tidy or beautiful like it was in my memories of times past. Rather, it had

become a place of utter rubbish, dirty and disordered. The river where I had learned how to swim, once clear and bustling with playing children and even teeming with fish, was now dark, green, and silent. It showed no signs of marine life or human activity—only flies and floating garbage. Plastic bags floated upon the water's surface, soda bottles replaced reeds, and the river took on the look of a literal liquid trash bin.

Equally astounding was the fact that the villagers—both adults and children alike—seemed to have grown accustomed to this new state of affairs. To my dismay, they dumped their garbage at random, as if the world were their personal trash bins! I was horrified at the amount of reckless littering that I observed—not only in the river, but also along the sides of the roads. Every hundred meters or so was a new little “pile” of trash, competing to see which could mount highest, even though there were actual trash bins around. How could people simply act as if man had not invented trash bins? How could man disrespect nature so blatantly and shamelessly? How could one not care about what one's hometown looked like? Dwelling on the similar scenes that I had witnessed throughout my life in China, I realized that the pollution of my village was unfortunately not a single, isolated, or accidental phenomenon. Rather, it was the norm, as was this disturbingly flippant attitude toward one's physical environment.

As soon as I returned from my native village, I decided to take action. I gathered together seven like-minded pals from my high school, and we set to work on the problem. We chose six typical villages around Jiangsu as our field survey destinations and carefully designed our survey parameters. I divided our group into three teams, each responsible for two villages, and we spent three weeks visiting, observing, surveying, and recording. We obtained a number of gruesome photos of pollution and interviewed local villagers as well as public officials, focusing our efforts on finding information and documentation about plastic and other daily pollution, tree-felling, and river pollution.

We spent two weeks integrating the information we had gathered and writing up a proposal in which we detailed the current village pollution problem using representative data and photo evidence. We also analyzed the likely causes, stating our belief that the rapid economic development of rural areas, which had not been accompanied by expansion of the public environmental consciousness, was a key driver of the problem. Therefore, the proposal that we submitted to the government's advice e-mail address centered upon getting local government authorities to devote publicity to the issue. We made numerous additional recommendations regarding other measures that could be taken, including limiting plastic use, investing in more advanced garbage delivery and disposal systems, increasing penalties for tree felling, and implementing a strict fine system to help prevent river pollution.

We weren't sure whether the government would immediately see the value in our proposal or whether all of its suggestions were even feasible at this time. However, the more important thing is that we have noticed this issue, drawn attention to the problem, and done what we could to help. We won't stop our efforts until Chinese villages are on their way to being restored to the pure, pastoral communities of my childhood.

## Personal Statement 20

*Accepted into: UPenn, Dartmouth, Columbia, Cornell, Brown*

Clang!

The dumbbells crashed against the floor. I turned to see Moka lying on the bench, her arms dropping downwards.

"How was that? Good, huh?"

Moka glared at me, panting.

"It's good when you feel the pain," I say. It's proof you're alive."

"Then I've never been so 'alive,'" Moka retorted.

It's been a few weeks since I first dragged Moka to exercise with me. Everyone in school was shocked that Moka, the stereotypical CS genius and antisocial library dweller, was frequenting the gym.

It all started with a random discussion about a math problem. Moka was explaining the solution, which nobody else had thought of.

"If the thought process can be compared to a tree, each branch develops when a certain assumption is made. You may think you've enumerated all the possible situations, and upon finding no feasible solution, you give up. But you actually didn't realize that your initial assumptions were false, so you've reached a branch where no solution exists."

"Interesting perspective," I said.

"When you deal with these kinds of things all day, you have to try to make some meaning from it."

"You never get tired of solving theoretical puzzles?"

"Sometimes. But it's not like I have anything better to do."

"Like you just said, if you limit yourself to doing things you're familiar with, your life will never change. You may think you've tried everything, yet you wonder why things turn out as normal. Maybe you can try things from the earlier branches."

Something in this must have resonated with her, for the next day Moka met me at the gym after school. Watching her sweat on the elliptical, I realized that she was an outlier, her willing attitude a pleasant surprise. The only others in the gym were athletes; it occurred to me that those who benefit most from exercise are those who also resist it most. They think the gym is just a

niche for jocks, somewhere they don't belong. Inspired by Moka, I determined to see more students using the gym.

So, I signed up as a gym leader and was given the opportunity to give grade-wide talks about my personal fitness journey. I organized weekly training sessions for girls, in which I give either a 40-minute Pilates or Spinning class during lunchtime; also, if there is a newcomer to the gym, I make sure that they know how to use all of the machines in proper form. My efforts have made the gym a less intimidating place for my peers, and I am proud to notice a significant increase in the number of people coming to the gym during my shifts as gym leader.

In particular, I've been focusing on encouraging more girls to hit the gym, as in gyms girls are a rare species, usually only found in the aerobics corner, steering clear of heavy lifting as if weights were the plague. They believe they are intrinsically weak, and this self-fulfilling prophecy is difficult to rectify. Having been there, I know that the best way to overcome the fear couldn't be simpler: (pardon the cliché) just take it one step at a time. Another problem with girls is that many attempt to "shortcut" weight loss through eating disorders, which are rampant in Asia, especially amongst teenagers. To persuade girls to get fit in a healthy manner, I devoured psychology and sports science books, and reminded them that if they wanted to have a better body, there is no replacement for time or effort.

My personal influence may be small - there's a limited number of people I can speak to, as well as a gym holding capacity - but the changes nevertheless make me feel warm and fuzzy. I'm on a mission to not only develop gym rats, but more so to build muscle and character and to help the other Mochas of the world "feel alive."

## Personal Statement 21

*Accepted into: UPenn, Cornell, Brown*

### **The Initiation**

Sitting inside an Indian restaurant for the first time, I tweaked my imaginary mustache and tapped the tip of my fountain pen against the cream-colored paper. I was mentally prepping myself to document whatever would hit my taste buds first.

"May I take your order, Ma'm?" The genial restaurant owner with a real mustache kindly brought me back to earth from my food-critic daydreams.

"Uh... yeah... I'll have the...."

I skimmed the menu before I found a combination of letters that made sense.

"... curry fish head," I finally mustered.

Back then, I didn't know that that dish was simply a Singaporean adaptation of an Indian dish, but who cares? It sounded exotic and exciting to this slipshod foodie.

However, when the food arrived, the smell of spices and the “Pantone” overwhelmed my olfactory senses. The cauliflower, cabbage, eggplant, kidney beans, and fish were mashed into a monochromatic, soup.

Coldplay’s, “they are alllllll yelloooow” came to mind, and I chuckled.

My initial fears faded fast. After all, nothing could be worse than that aloe vera with meat soup I tried when I was ten. With newfound courage, I fished a suspension from the soup.

I opened my mouth and closed my eyes, bracing for the worst. I finally understood what “spicy” meant. After a brief dizzy spell during which I wanted to simultaneously faint and burst into tears, I started to notice the base note of various spices. And then, a slight euphoria started to spread throughout my body. “The effect of endorphin triggered by chili in the soup,” meticulous neuroscientists would say. I need no explanations. That fateful meal, I fell into a headlong love affair with Indian food and spices.

As I pushed away the empty plate, it dawned on me that this was a love I’d been seeking all my life.

## **School**

Despite this newfound love of spiciness, I was quite aware that Life doesn’t do a 180 with a single decision. If I wanted more spiciness, apart from changing a restaurant, I would have to start ordering spicier dishes.

Joining Math Interest Group (MIG) was definitely such decision, one I almost found too spicy. I was plagued by an inferiority complex among the club’s Olympiad veterans and almost wanted to quit, to retreat back to my comfort zone, to reduce the spiciness to mild.

Then, one day I noticed MIG’s shabby notice board pinned on the least strategic location in school. The papers on the board fluttered like handkerchiefs waving goodbye, and the letters disappeared to make us “Mth Intrest Grop.” I suddenly understood why everybody had this *Is it some kind of secret society?* look on their faces whenever I mentioned MIG.

To prepare for a new round of recruitment, my advocacy for a “less modest” publication was endorsed by the club advisor and soon implemented. Beginning with a notice board that I designed, more students started to contribute manpower, ideas, and resources. Members like me that had previously felt insignificant started to become more involved. I was glad to see the transformation from “handkerchief collection” into a well-organized and informative notice board.

Throughout this process, I’ve become close with many MIG members, some of whom possess extraordinarily diverse talents. During our regular “notice board meetings,” I ended up learning

to fold Kawasaki's Rose, fill in 35\*35 Magic Square, and play Dragons & Dungeons. This was a totally new level of spicity for me: simultaneously stimulating yet amusing.

### **Present Day**

Now, sitting in front of the computer, mouse hovering on the "Submit" button, a similar fear creeps in. I'm that girl hesitating in the Indian restaurant again, both intimidated and fascinated by the uncertainty inherent in "spiciness." Well, that girl hasn't changed. I will take a bite of whatever spice life throws my way, confident that with a playful attitude and open mind, I'll be able to handle it.

## **Personal Statement 22**

*Accepted into: (Cambridge, Oxford), Yale, Cornell, Columbia, UPenn, Brown*

I was haunted for weeks after first hearing the song "Memory" in the Japanese film *Okubirito* (2008). The cello melody was so pained yet powerful that I could not let it go. I already had many years of experience playing the *guzheng*, or Chinese zither, but I begged my parents to let me take cello lessons. In the years since, I have grown proficient enough to perform the song flawlessly, and it is one of my favorites. Every time I play it, I cannot help but think about the film, which follows the life of a failed Japanese cellist who becomes a *nōkanshi*, a Japanese ritual mortician. His difficulties as someone working in this highly taboo field revealed to me the deep discomfort that people face regarding death.

I recently got to confront this discomfort myself. This past summer, I attended Georgetown University for a summer course in Medicine. I vividly remember the day we performed a human dissection.

The heavy smell of Formalin filled the room, reminding me of the taste of salted fish. The other students were white with silence. I could hear my pounding heart and the ticking of the clock on the wall. Cold and stiff, a female corpse lay in a half-opened bag on the table. Swirling feelings of respect and distance mingled when my gloved hand touched the corpse. The skin was unexpectedly hard, the arms and thighs scattered with brown speckles. The right knee was injured with a deep wound. Her painted pink nails presented a stark contrast with a burn mark on her left hand.

I found myself shaking as I stepped closer to the table. I breathed deeply in an effort to calm myself down, and at the instruction of the professor began exploring the internal organs. I gently opened the corpse's breast skin and took out her ribs. Her lungs were spotted black and abnormally tiny. Reaching deeply down to her abdominal cavity, I pulled out a long strand of solid fat to observe her dislocated stomach. The organs did not bother me, yet I was still uncomfortable. I paused and drew myself into meditation. The taboo from the movie suddenly made sense; there was something far too intimate about this experience. I was invading her privacy somehow, learning information never intended for me. Her lungs and fat, her burn and

leg wound, were evidence about her private life. I could see that she had an unhealthy diet due to the accumulated fat; I knew she was a smoker due to the cigarette burn on her hand; and I knew she had trouble breathing due to her small thoracic cavity. Yet as I resumed the dissection, I realized her life must have had more meaning than these health conditions.

What do we know about a person after death? We can see from the body if she was healthy or sick, injured or not. But the important things in a person's life are rarely visible. As I mused with her organs, my mind meditated on the melody of "Memory," like a mantra. Every time I play that piece, I discover something new in the music. After I die, the music will be gone. Yet that does not bother me, because it obviously stops even sooner than that—I withdraw my bow from the strings and the room goes silent.

Nevertheless, what I do in my life can never be taken away, no matter what happens to my body posthumously. The significance I give to my life is my own, just as the existentialists claimed. I cultivate my life's meaning today and every day. I can make it beautiful or hideous depending on the actions I take and decisions I make at various stages in my life. Silence is inevitable, but I do not feel helpless to play. What matters is simply that the music was ever made at all.

## Personal Statement 23

*Accepted into: (Cambridge), Princeton, Yale, Columbia, UPenn*

A long, shrill whistle jolts me awake. As the other raucous sounds—the harsh bellows of strict officers and the heavy thuds of boots stomping in unison—precede my alarm clock, I jump to my feet and mechanically start making my bed. After I tuck in the sheets and compulsively smoothen the blanket, I sit by the windowsill and observe the scene below.

Hundreds of uniformed soldiers stand in perfect lines. Backs straight, eyes forward, expressions stoic, their legs march up and down like disconnected limbs. After the morning processions, these soldiers run eight miles, train combat and weaponry skills, and perform a variety of menial tasks, such as scrubbing the barracks, before they are allowed a monochromatic lunch of rice and noodles.

Observing these soldiers on a daily basis instilled in me a disdain for rules and routine. I pitied them for having to eat the same, insipid meals. Perhaps they were lucky to only have four-minute eating windows—their brains wouldn't have time to process the grimness of their reality. I didn't understand why these men had to live under such austere conditions. What if they never made it back home from a hypothetical war? Didn't they deserve at least some luxuries now? The commanders' rules seemed arbitrary and inhumane.

Living in such an environment was stifling, but inescapable, as my father is an army officer. Since I was little, he has disciplined me like a soldier. I called him "Sir" instead of "Daddy," and the only three acceptable answers for a slip-up were: "Yes, Sir; No, Sir; No Excuse, Sir." I was strictly reprimanded for slovenly bed-making or slouching. I vowed that as soon as I was old

enough, I would break free from the shackles of tedious rules and instead, write my own.

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As soon as I reached Dallas airport, I gulped my first taste of freedom. I instantly felt lighter, like a drifting balloon. Intoxicated with this newfound liberty, I began my journey in America.

I had kept true to my word - as soon as I was seventeen, I left to study abroad. My history teacher, Mr. Lorenzo, passionately taught us through stories. This new teaching method intrigued me, but I was not prepared for it. Mr. Lorenzo didn't provide students with packets of study material like Chinese teachers do; rather, he only put a few bullet points on each slide and said that it was our responsibility to do the assigned readings. Since he never "ordered" us to take notes, I didn't- feeling triumphant leaning back while my classmates scribbled away.

Unexpectedly, I failed my first exam. I lay in bed that night, thinking: *Do I only need to do what my teacher assigns, or do I need self-discipline?* I recalled the soldiers marching in the scorching sun. They needed discipline so they could be ready to fight for their country. As an individual blessed with newfound freedom, I had to impose my own restrictions in order to fight for future opportunities.

Subsequently, I adjusted my attitude. Dismissing the idea that "rules are made to be broken," I realized that perhaps they exist for legitimate reasons. In class, I became my strictest officer. I started recording each lesson, which I would transcribe afterwards. I did all of the assigned readings, even when there was no correlating assignment. I jotted notes furiously, no longer the nonchalant. Unsurprisingly, my grades skyrocketed.

This experience taught me that my younger notions of rules were naïve. Though I still have not come to terms with every social rule, I nevertheless respect them. I have also created my own set of rules - of conduct and morality – which I live by. By following my own rules, as well as society's, I can grow into the young lady I aspire to be.

## Personal Statement 24

*Accepted into: Yale, Dartmouth, Cornell, UPenn, Brown*

The sacred ceremony commenced again. The leader of our choir inserted the tuning fork—an acoustic resonator used to determine intonation—into her bun. The fork was the crown of impeccable technique and skill, only allowed to be held by the most skillful performer. Consumed with a desire to hold that fork, I painstakingly practiced my scales and melodies. Under our teacher's instruction, I colored my tunes with the imaginations of sensory details after carefully researching the songs' lyrics and historical background. My hard work paid off. While singing a ballad of the Yi ethnicity, *The Spring Is Coming*, I could understand how there was supposed to be a young lady dressed in lime green approaching, dancing in front of me. During our performance in Cincinnati's competition, I still did not get the honor of holding the tuning

fork despite my satisfaction with the music I created with impeccable technique and artificial imageries.

After the competition, we started our tour in America by watching *The Phantom of the Opera*. Sitting in the back row without glasses and with a limited understanding of the dialogue and content, I was lost with the plot progression. Yet, I magically understood what they sang: I knew what their mood was, and I knew what they were trying to express. In show-within-the-show scene in which Christine suddenly pulled down Phantom's robe, revealing the silver mask on his face, there was a sudden silence. That deafening silence was a prelude to a storm of emotional outbreak. A second later, Phantom slowly began to sing, plaintively but beautifully, with a voice so gripping and sorrowful. Something resonated within me, as my heart ached and my eyes involuntarily started to tear. Walking out of the theater, I couldn't get my mind straight. A question emerged from the confusion—*why was I about to burst into tears even though I could not follow what Phantom said?*

Two years later, I found my answer when our choir went to Latvia for the 8th World Choir Game. Becoming the second in command under my minister, I could finally put the tuning fork in my hair. Singing again, the feeling differed substantially. In the competition, we sang *The White Crane*, whose lyrics are derived from a classic Chinese poem. Sensing the responsibility brought by the tuning fork, I carefully gathered up all the imageries and historical background from my repertoire and memorized the most "emotional" version. Yet, maybe because of over-preparation or the weight of the tuning fork, my mind blanked and my delicately engineered imageries slipped away as I performed.

My confusion continued until the solo's high-note and crisp voice floated lightly aloft the stadium, and when approaching the climax, four departments neatly extolled "the white crane, please lend me your wings, I would not tour to remote places, but stay in Litang for a while and I would come back." At this moment, a scene spontaneously emerged. I felt like standing under a cloudy and foggy sky, riding the enormous saint bird, and soaring to the dazzling light. The crane steadily flapped its huge wings as if every fluttering created potent wind. My eyes watered, and I was again shocked by this unprecedented experience. *Why was I moved?*

Upon reflection, I found the answer to both this question and the one raised when watching *The Phantom of the Opera*. Emotion, the source of music, is not created; rather, it creates itself. It overflows from the music spontaneously. It transcends the boundaries of language, reason, logic, and intended human efforts. All I need to do is grant it ample freedom, and it will carry me into the heart of each audience, connecting mankind through spiritual commonality. This musical journey also reminded me that despite our growing emphasis on numbers and rationality, emotions are what enable us to better understand ourselves and this world.

## Personal Statement 25

*Accepted into: Dartmouth, UPenn, Columbia, Brown*

“Join the school choir – it will boost your team spirit;  
Learn how to folk dance – it cultivates your femininity;  
Study abroad – you will have better chances of finding a profitable job...”

Growing up, I have been bombarded by incessant preaching about what I should become, forced into paths carved by my parents’ expectations. Oftentimes, I felt frustrated and disoriented – it seemed that my destiny had been predetermined, and I was hell-bent on escaping from it. The two-dimensional animated world had long been my safe haven: Miku Hatsune sings and dances perfectly for her millions of fans with adorable emotions; Homura Akime fights crime with her magic power in order to save the world she loves; Victorica buries her head in books by day and moonlights as an assistant crime fighter. Impressed by their outfits, abilities, and adventures, I fell in love with cosplay – the act of forging new, exciting identities for myself.

Hunting for gorgeous costumes online, designing accessories, and sporting colorful wigs, I began to fulfill my wildest imaginations: Miku always wears short skirts and fancy tops; Homura carries a sharp sword and magic diamond while fighting; Victoria dresses like an old-fashioned doll with fancy dresses and hats, always carrying heavy books. Soon I discovered these cute, vivacious teenage-girl characters enjoyed a tremendous popularity, as all the posts of my cosplay photos received countless “likes” on social media. Drunk off compliments, I clung to the belief that cosplayer had become my newfound identity.

My self-appreciation in cosplaying was, however, soon challenged when a senior cosplayer asked me a simple question. “Who is the favorite character you’ve cosplayed as?”

Though a self-proclaimed cosplay zealot, I was startled that my mind went blank. I had cosplayed most of the characters solely because they were attractive and popular, and for the number of “likes” popping up on my personal page. Even in my safe haven, I was doing nothing different than in the three-dimensional reality: fulfilling other’s expectations and becoming who they wanted me to be.

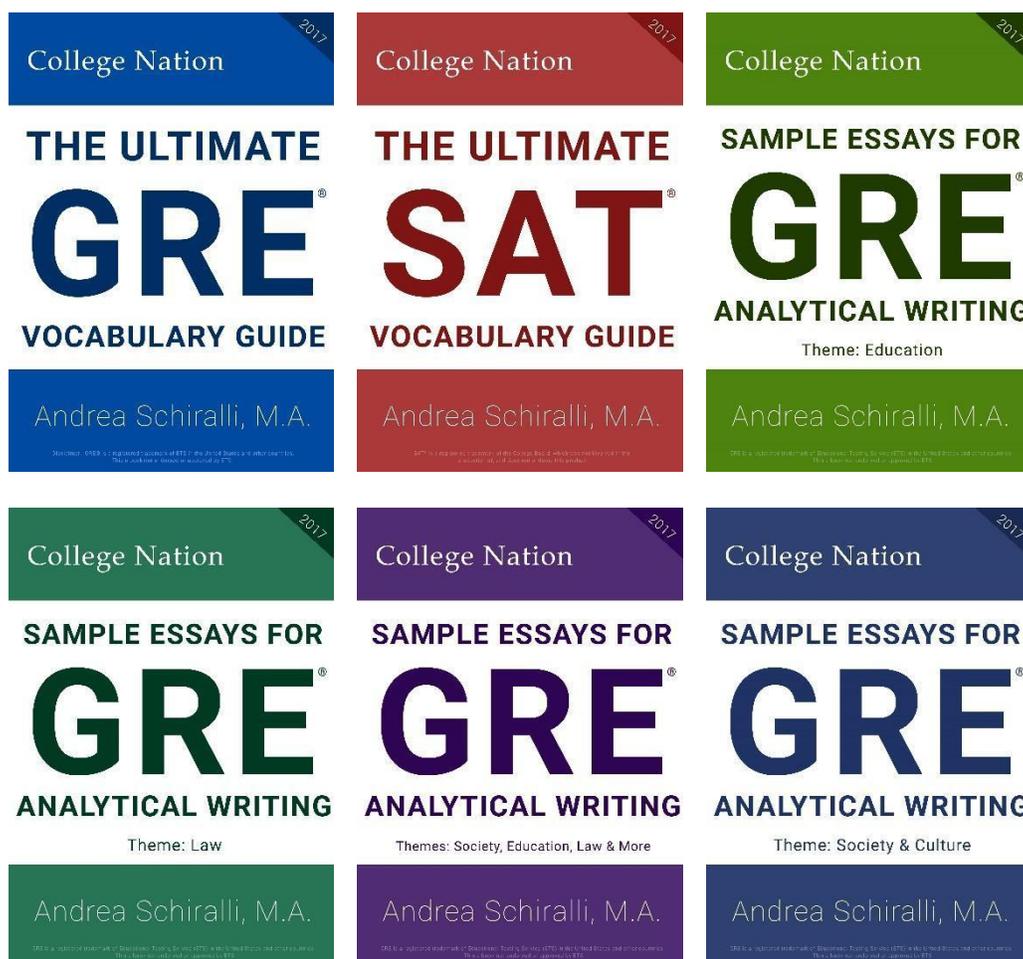
Yet, this time I resolved not to escape. I began to search for a character I truly adored, and finally came across Reborn. Cosplaying this character was an unprecedented challenge: for starters, Reborn was a male character, which meant I needed to cross-dress; and like his pet chameleon, he was constantly shifting his image – sometimes a cold mafia leader, the next moment shrunken into a cute, innocent kid with a high-pitched voice. As I strutted in man’s attire, with the cruelest grin one moment and the sweetest laughter the next, I felt not at all awkward but instead empowered. The magic within cosplay lies not in pleasing people’s eyes, but in the incessant exploration into identities that sometimes cannot be accurately defined. And maybe, being undefinable is the best definition of an identity, which grants it boundless possibilities in exploring, imagining, and transforming. And now, even all those teenage-girl characters of my previous endeavor made sense too – they were part of my journey in the exploration of a true self.

In retrospect, I see all endeavors in locating one's identity – whether in reality or in the animated world – as acts of cosplaying. We don garments sometimes of our own choice, and sometimes out of others' expectation. Yet in both situations, we are down the path of exploring ourselves: I indulge myself in the resonances I create with my group members when I sing in the choir; I am surprised by the artistic expression through body language as I folk dance. In the acts of fulfilling others' expectation, I also create boundless possibilities for my own identity. And as I look beyond, I aspire to see what further characters I am about to “cosplay” as when I set foot in the States.

## Additional Resources

We hope you enjoyed reading our ebook, and more importantly, that you learnt from it!

For more information on how we can help you tell *your* story to college admissions officers, check out our [essay coaching process](#). Our services include detailed coaching for the perfect personal statement and supplementary essays as well as simple proofreading/editing.



[Website](#)