

# CHAPTER One

## *Where We're Coming From*

### LEAVING OTHER LIVES

The selections here examine how different people, places, times, and cultures affect who and what any individual becomes. This chapter explores reasons for going (or not going) to college, how formal education may or may not prepare students for adult life, the values of learning on one's own, and personal experiences of overcoming stereotypes and prejudices.

#### READING SELECTIONS

from *Up from Slavery*

Incurring My Mother's  
Displeasure

from *One Writer's Beginnings*

Saved

Miss Rinehart's Paddle

50% Chance of Lightning

Somewhere in Minnesota

LD

School's Out: One Young Man  
Puzzles Over His Future Without  
College

8th Grade Final Exam: Salina,  
Kansas, 1895

# Up from Slavery

AN EXCERPT

Booker T. Washington

Booker T. Washington (1856–1915) was an American educator who urged blacks to attempt to uplift themselves through education and economic advancement. He was born in Franklin County, Virginia, the son of a slave. From 1872 to 1875, Washington attended a newly founded school for blacks, Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute (now Hampton University). In 1879 he became an instructor at Hampton. The school was so successful that in 1881 Washington was appointed principal of a black school in Tuskegee, Alabama (now Tuskegee University).

---

*The sight of it seemed to give me a new life. I felt that a new kind of existence had now begun—that life would now have a new meaning.*

---

**CRITICAL THINKING POINTS:** *As you read*

1. What are some clues to the time and place?
2. The author had no idea where Hampton was or how much tuition cost. What circumstances might have led the author to have such a desire to go to college?
3. Recall a time when you felt proud of yourself for learning, simply for the sake of acquiring knowledge. What led to this?

**N**otwithstanding my success at Mrs. Ruffner's I did not give up the idea of going to the Hampton Institute. In the fall of 1872 I determined to make an effort to get there, although, as I have stated, I had no definite idea of the direction in which Hampton was, or of what it would cost to go there. I do not think that any one thoroughly sympathized with me in my ambition to go to Hampton unless it was my mother, and she was troubled with a grave fear that I was starting out on a 'wild-goose chase.' At any rate, I got only a half-hearted consent from her that I might start. The small amount of money that I had earned had been consumed by my stepfather and the remainder of the family, with the exception of a very few dollars, and so I had very little with which to buy clothes and pay my traveling expenses. My brother John helped me all that he could, but of course that was not a great deal, for his work was in the coal-mine, where he did not earn much, and most of what he did earn went in the direction of paying the household expenses.

Perhaps the thing that touched and pleased me most in connection with my starting for Hampton was the interest that many of the older coloured people took in

the matter. They had spent the best days of their lives in slavery, and hardly expected to live to see the time when they would see a member of their race leave home to attend a boarding school. Some of these older people would give me a nickel, others a quarter, or a handkerchief.

Finally the great day came, and I started for Hampton. I had only a small, cheap satchel that contained what few articles of clothing I could get. My mother at the time was rather weak and broken in health. I hardly expected to see her again, and thus our parting was all the more sad. She, however, was very brave through it all. At that time there were no through trains connecting that part of West Virginia with eastern Virginia. Trains ran only a portion of the way, and the remainder of the distance was traveled by stage-coaches.

The distance from Malden to Hampton is about five hundred miles. I had not been away from home many hours before it began to grow painfully evident that I did not have enough money to pay my fare to Hampton. One experience I shall long remember. I had been traveling over the mountains most of the afternoon in an old-fashioned stage-coach, when, late in the evening, the coach stopped for the night at a common, unpainted house called a hotel. All the other passengers except myself were whites. In my ignorance I supposed that the little hotel existed for the purpose of accommodating the passengers who traveled on the stage-coach. The difference that the colour of one's skin would make I had not thought anything about. After all the other passengers had been shown rooms and were getting ready for supper, I shyly presented myself before the man at the desk. It is true I had practically no money in my pocket with which to pay for bed or food, but I had hoped in some way to beg my way into the good graces of the landlord, for at that season in the mountains of Virginia the weather was cold, and I wanted to get indoors for the night. Without asking as to whether I had any money, the man at the desk firmly refused to even consider the matter of providing me with food or lodging. This was my first experience in finding out what the colour of my skin meant. In some way I managed to keep warm by walking about, and so got through the night. My whole soul was so bent upon reaching Hampton that I did not have time to cherish any bitterness toward the hotelkeeper.

By walking, begging rides both in wagons and in the cars, in some way, after a number of days, I reached the city of Richmond, Virginia, about eighty-two miles from Hampton. When I reached there, tired, hungry, and dirty, it was late in the night. I had never been in a large city, and this rather added to my misery. When I reached Richmond, I was completely out of money. I had not a single acquaintance in the place, and, being unused to city ways, I did not know where to go. I applied at several places for lodging, but they all wanted money, and that was what I did not have. Knowing nothing else better to do, I walked the streets. In doing this I passed by many food-stands where fried chicken and half-moon apple pies were piled high and made to present a most tempting appearance. At that time it seemed to me that I would have promised all that I expected to possess in the future to have gotten hold of one of those chicken legs or one of those pies. But I could not get either of these, nor anything else to eat.

I must have walked the streets till after midnight. At last I became so exhausted that I could walk no longer. I was tired, I was hungry, I was everything but discouraged. Just about the time when I reached extreme physical exhaustion, I came upon a portion of a street where the board sidewalk was considerably elevated. I waited for a few minutes, till I was sure that no passers-by could see me, and then crept under the sidewalk and lay for the night upon the ground, with my satchel of clothing for a pillow. Nearly all night I could hear the tramp of feet over my head. The next morning I found myself somewhat refreshed, but I was extremely hungry, because it had been a long time since I had had sufficient food.

As soon as it became light enough for me to see my surroundings I noticed that I was near a large ship, and that this ship seemed to be unloading a cargo of pig iron. I went at once to the vessel and asked the captain to permit me to help unload the vessel in order to get money for food. The captain, a white man, who seemed to be kindhearted, consented. I worked long enough to earn money for my breakfast, and it seems to me, as I remember it now, to have been about the best breakfast that I have ever eaten. My work pleased the captain so well that he told me if I desired I could continue working for a small amount per day. This I was very glad to do. I continued working on this vessel for a number of days. After buying food with the small wages I received there was not much left to add to the amount I must get to pay my way to Hampton. In order to economize in every way possible, so as to be sure to reach Hampton in a reasonable time, I continued to sleep under the same sidewalk that gave me shelter the first night I was in Richmond. Many years after that the coloured citizens of Richmond very kindly tendered me a reception at which there must have been two thousand people present. This reception was held not far from the spot where I slept the first night I spent in that city, and I must confess that my mind was more upon the sidewalk that first gave me shelter than upon the reception, agreeable and cordial as it was.

When I had saved what I considered enough money with which to reach Hampton, I thanked the captain of the vessel for his kindness, and started again.

Without any unusual occurrence I reached Hampton, with a surplus of exactly fifty cents with which to begin my education. To me it had been a long, eventful journey; but the first sight of the large, three-story, brick school building seemed to have rewarded me for all that I had undergone in order to reach the place. If the people who gave the money to provide that building could appreciate the influence the sight of it had upon me, as well as upon thousands of other youths, they would feel all the more encouraged to make such gifts. It seemed to me to be the largest and most beautiful building I had ever seen. The sight of it seemed to give me a new life. I felt that a new kind of existence had now begun—that life would now have a new meaning. I felt that I had reached the promised land, and I resolved to let no obstacle prevent me from putting forth the highest effort to fit myself to accomplish the most good in the world.

As soon as possible after reaching the grounds of the Hampton Institute, I presented myself before the head teacher for assignment to a class. Having been so long without proper food, a bath and change of clothing, I did not, of course, make a very

favourable impression upon her, and I could see at once that there were doubts in her mind about the wisdom of admitting me as a student. I felt that I could hardly blame her if she got the idea that I was a worthless loafer or tramp. For some time she did not refuse to admit me, neither did she decide in my favour, and I continued to linger about her, and to impress her in all the ways I could with my worthiness. In the meantime I saw her admitting other students, and that added greatly to my discomfort, for I felt, deep down in my heart, that I could do as well as they, if I could only get a chance to show what was in me.

After some hours had passed, the head teacher said to me: "The adjoining recitation-room needs sweeping. Take the broom and sweep it." It occurred to me at once that here was my chance. Never did I receive an order with more delight. I knew that I could sweep, for Mrs. Ruffner had thoroughly taught me how to do that when I lived with her.

I swept the recitation-room three times. Then I got a dusting-cloth and I dusted it four times. All the woodwork around the walls, every bench, table, and desk, I went over four times with my dusting-cloth. Besides, every piece of furniture had been moved and every closet and corner in the room had been thoroughly cleaned. I had the feeling that in a large measure my future depended upon the impression I made upon the teacher in the cleaning of that room. When I was through, I reported to the head teacher.

She was a 'Yankee' woman who knew just where to look for dirt. She went into the room and inspected the floor and closets; then she took her handkerchief and rubbed it on the woodwork about the walls, and over the table and benches. When she was unable to find one bit of dirt on the floor, or a particle of dust on any of the furniture, she quietly remarked, "I guess you will do to enter this institution." I was one of the happiest souls on earth. The sweeping of that room was my college examination, and never did any youth pass an examination for entrance into Harvard or Yale that gave him more genuine satisfaction. I have passed several examinations since then, but I have always felt that this was the best one I ever passed.

I have spoken of my own experience in entering the Hampton Institute. Perhaps few, if any, had anything like the same experience that I had, but about that same period there were hundreds who found their way to Hampton and other institutions after experiencing something of the same difficulties that I went through. The young men and women were determined to secure an education at any cost.

1901

**CRITICAL THINKING POINTS:** *After you've read*

1. Washington learns several important lessons on his journey to Hampton. What are some of them?
2. Washington says about a reception for him in Richmond, "This reception was held not far from the spot where I slept the first night I spent in that city, and I must confess that my mind was more upon the sidewalk that first gave me

**6** CHAPTER ONE Where We're Coming From

---

shelter than upon the reception, agreeable and cordial as it was." What might such a statement say about Washington?

3. Washington says of his first assignment from the head teacher, "The sweeping of that room was my college examination, and never did any youth pass an examination for entrance into Harvard or Yale that gave him more genuine satisfaction. I have passed several examinations since then, but I have always felt that this was the best one I ever passed." What were some of the reasons this was so important to him?

**SOME POSSIBILITIES FOR WRITING**

1. Write a scene in which Washington, who is sleeping under the boardwalk on his way to Hampton, meets a man who attends college. Or, write a scene between Washington and another African-American man who has no aspirations for college.
2. Washington says of first seeing Hampton, "I felt that I had reached the promised land." Why was education so important to him? Do you feel it is as important for you?
3. Find *Up from Slavery* and read Chapter 8, "Teaching School in a Stable and a Hen-House." After reading the piece, compare/contrast Washington as a student and a teacher. What insights about education arise from your writing?

# Incurring My Mother's Displeasure

FROM THE SCHOOL DAYS OF AN INDIAN GIRL

Zitkala-Sa

Zitkala-Sa (1876–1938) was a Sioux Indian. “Incurring My Mother's Displeasure” appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1900. It is a part of her larger work, *The School Days of an Indian Girl*.

---

*Thus, homeless and heavy-hearted, I began anew my life among strangers.*

---

**CRITICAL THINKING POINTS:** *As you read*

1. What are some clues to the era?
2. The language and tone of this essay are very formal. Why might that be so?
3. Speculate on what causes prejudice among ethnic groups. What are some stereotypes, past or present, of Native Americans?

**I**n the second journey to the East I had not come without some precautions. I had a secret interview with one of our best medicine men, and when I left his wigwam I carried securely in my sleeve a tiny bunch of magic roots. This possession assured me of friends wherever I should go. So absolutely did I believe in its charms that I wore it through all the school routine for more than a year. Then, before I lost my faith in the dead roots, I lost the little buckskin bag containing all my good luck.

At the close of this second term of three years I was the proud owner of my first diploma. The following autumn I ventured upon a college career against my mother's will. I had written for her approval, but in her reply I found no encouragement. She called my notice to her neighbors' children, who had completed their education in three years. They had returned to their homes, and were then talking English with the frontier settlers. Her few words hinted that I had better give up my slow attempt to learn the white man's ways, and be content to roam over the prairies and find my living upon wild roots. I silenced her by deliberate disobedience.

Thus, homeless and heavy-hearted, I began anew my life among strangers.

As I hid myself in my little room in the college dormitory, away from the scornful and yet curious eyes of the students, I pined for sympathy. Often I wept in secret, wishing I had gone West, to be nourished by my mother's love, instead of remaining among a cold race whose hearts were frozen hard with prejudice.

During the fall and winter seasons I scarcely had a real friend, though by that time several of my classmates were courteous to me at a safe distance. My mother had not yet forgiven my rudeness to her, and I had no moment for letter-writing.

By daylight and lamplight, I spun with reeds and thistles, until my hands were tired from their weaving, the magic design which promised me the white man's respect.

At length, in the spring term, I entered an oratorical contest among the various classes. As the day of competition approached, it did not seem possible that the event was so near at hand, but it came. In the chapel the classes assembled together, with their invited guests. The high platform was carpeted, and gaily festooned with college colors. A bright white light illumined the room and outlined clearly the great polished beams that arched the domed ceiling. The assembled crowds filled the air with pulsating murmurs. When the hour for speaking arrived all were hushed. But on the wall the old clock which pointed out the trying moment ticked calmly on.

One after another I saw and heard the orators. Still, I could not realize that they longed for the favorable decision of the judges as much as I did. Each contestant received a loud burst of applause, and some were cheered heartily. Too soon my turn came, and I paused a moment behind the curtains for a deep breath. After my concluding words, I heard the same applause that the others had called out.

Upon my retreating steps, I was astounded to receive from my fellow students a large bouquet of roses tied with flowing ribbons. With the lovely flowers I fled from the stage. This friendly token was a rebuke to me for the hard feelings I had borne them.

Later, the decision of the judges awarded me the first place. Then there was a mad uproar in the hall, where my classmates sang and shouted my name at the top of their lungs; and the disappointed students howled and brayed in fearfully dissonant tin trumpets. In this excitement, happy students rushed forward to offer their congratulations. And I could not conceal a smile when they wished to escort me in a procession to the students' parlor, where all were going to calm themselves. Thanking them for the kind spirit which prompted them to make such a proposition, I walked alone with the night to my own little room.

A few weeks afterward, I appeared as the college representative in another contest. This time the competition was among orators from different colleges in our state. It was held at the state capital, in one of the largest opera houses.

Here again was a strong prejudice against my people. In the evening, as the great audience filled the house, the student bodies began warring among themselves. Fortunately, I was spared witnessing any of the noisy wrangling before the contest began. The slurs against the Indian that stained the lips of our opponents were already burning like a dry fever within my breast.

But after the orations were delivered a deeper burn awaited me. There, before that vast ocean of eyes, some college rowdies threw out a large white flag, with a drawing of a most forlorn Indian girl on it. Under this they had printed in bold black letters words that ridiculed the college which was represented by a "squaw." Such worse than barbarian rudeness embittered me. While we waited for the verdict of the judges, I gleamed fiercely upon the throngs of palefaces. My teeth were hard set, as I saw the white flag still floating insolently in the air. Then anxiously we watched the man carry toward the stage the envelope containing the final decision.

There were two prizes given, that night, and one of them was mine!

The evil spirit laughed within me when the white flag dropped out of sight, and the hands which furled it hung limp in defeat.

Leaving the crowd as quickly as possible, I was soon in my room. The rest of the night I sat in an armchair and gazed into the crackling fire. I laughed no more in triumph when thus alone. The little taste of victory did not satisfy a hunger in my heart. In my mind I saw my mother far away on the Western plains, and she was holding a charge against me.

1900

**CRITICAL THINKING POINTS:** *After you've read*

1. In what ways is Zitkala-Sa "homeless"?
2. Why would the narrator physically and spiritually separate herself from her people in order to go to college? What are some details from the story that support your opinion?
3. Read or reread the selection from Booker T. Washington's *Up from Slavery*. How is Zitkala-Sa's experience at college similar to Washington's? How is it different?

**SOME POSSIBILITIES FOR WRITING**

1. Imagine what happens when the narrator finally returns to her tribe. Write a reunion scene between Zitkala-Sa and her mother.
2. Recall a time when you purposely disobeyed your parents. What circumstances led to this? Write about the moment when you knew you would go against their wishes. What was the outcome?
3. The narrator feels isolated from her classmates because of their prejudice. Have you ever felt isolated from classmates, friends, or family? Write a scene describing your isolation or someone else's.

# One Writer's Beginnings

AN EXCERPT

Eudora Welty

Eudora Welty (1909–2001) received her bachelor of arts degree from the University of Wisconsin–Madison in 1929. She won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction with *Optimist's Daughter* in 1969. *One Writer's Beginnings* was nominated for the 1983 National Book Critics Circle Award.

---

*I learned from the age of two or three that any room in our house, at any time of day, was there to read in, or to be read to.*

---

**CRITICAL THINKING POINTS:** *As you read*

1. Pay attention to the things that are detailed in this essay. Why do you think the author chose the objects she did?
2. Pay attention to all the action in this essay. Why do you think she chose the actions she did?
3. Pay attention to the different ways in which the boys and girls are educated. How is this a sign of the times?

**I**n our house on North Congress Street in Jackson, Mississippi, where I was born, the oldest of three children, in 1909, we grew up to the striking of clocks. There was a mission-style oak grandfather clock standing in the hall, which sent its gong-like strokes through the living room, dining room, kitchen, and pantry, and up the sounding board of the stairwell. Through the night, it could find its way into our ears; sometimes, even on the sleeping porch, midnight could wake us up. My parents' bedroom had a smaller striking clock that answered it. Though the kitchen clock did nothing but show the time, the dining room clock was a cuckoo clock with weights on long chains, on one of which my baby brother, after climbing on a chair to the top of the china closet, once succeeded in suspending the cat for a moment. I don't know whether or not my father's Ohio family, in having been Swiss back in the 1700s before the first three Welty brothers came to America, had anything to do with this; but we all of us have been time-minded all our lives. This was good at least for a future fiction writer, being able to learn so penetratingly, and almost first of all, about chronology. It was one of a good many things I learned almost without knowing it; it would be there when I needed it.

My father loved all instruments that would instruct and fascinate. His place to keep things was the drawer in the "library table" where lying on top of his folded

maps was a telescope with brass extensions, to find the moon and the Big Dipper after supper in our front yard, and to keep appointments with eclipses. There was a folding Kodak that was brought out for Christmas, birthdays, and trips. In the back of the drawer you could find a magnifying glass, a kaleidoscope, and a gyroscope kept in a black buckram box, which he would set dancing for us on a string pulled tight. He had also supplied himself with an assortment of puzzles composed of metal rings and intersecting links and keys chained together, impossible for the rest of us, however patiently shown, to take apart; he had an almost childlike love of the ingenious.

In time, a barometer was added to our dining room wall; but we didn't really need it. My father had the country boy's accurate knowledge of the weather and its skies. He went out and stood on our front steps first thing in the morning and took a look at it and a sniff. He was a pretty good weather prophet.

"Well, I'm not," my mother would say with enormous self-satisfaction.

He told us children what to do if we were lost in a strange country. "Look for where the sky is brightest along the horizon," he said. "That reflects the nearest river. Strike out for a river and you will find habitation." Eventualities were much on his mind. In his care for us children he cautioned us to take measures against such things as being struck by lightning. He drew us all away from the windows during the severe electrical storms that are common where we live. My mother stood apart, scoffing at caution as a character failing. "Why, I always loved a storm! High winds never bothered me in West Virginia! Just listen at that! I wasn't a bit afraid of a little lightning and thunder! I'd go out on the mountain and spread my arms wide and run in a good big storm!"

So I developed a strong meteorological sensibility. In the years ahead when I wrote stories, atmosphere took its influential role from the start. Commotion in the weather and the inner feelings aroused by such a hovering disturbance emerged connected in dramatic form. (I tried a tornado first, in a story called "The Winds.")

From our earliest Christmas times, Santa Claus brought us toys that instruct boys and girls (separately) how to build things—stone blocks cut to the castle-building style, Tinker Toys, and Erector sets. Daddy made for us himself elaborate kites that needed to be taken miles out of town to a pasture long enough (and my father was not afraid of horses and cows watching) for him to run with and get up on a long cord to which my mother held the spindle, and then we children were given it to hold, tugging like something alive at our hands. They were beautiful, sound, shapely box kites, smelling delicately of office glue for their entire short lives. And of course, as soon as the boys attained anywhere near the right age, there was an electric train, the engine with its pea-sized working headlight, its line of cars, tracks equipped with switches, semaphores, its station, its bridges, and its tunnel, which blocked off all other traffic in the upstairs hall. Even from downstairs, and through the cries of excited children, the elegant rush and click of the train could be heard through the ceiling, running around and around its figure eight.

All of this, but especially the train, represents my father's fondest beliefs—in progress, in the future. With these gifts, he was preparing his children.

And so was my mother with her different gifts.

I learned from the age of two or three that any room in our house, at any time of day, was there to read in, or to be read to. My mother read to me. She'd read to me in the big bedroom in the mornings, when we were in her rocker together, which ticked in rhythm as we rocked, as though we had a cricket accompanying the story. She'd read to me in the dining room on winter afternoons in front of the coal fire, with our cuckoo clock ending the story with "Cuckoo," and at night when I'd got in my own bed. I must have given her no peace. Sometimes she read to me in the kitchen while she sat churning, and the churning sobbed along with any story. It was my ambition to have her read to me while I churned; once she granted my wish, but she read off my story before I brought her butter. She was an expressive reader. When she was reading "Puss in Boots," for instance, it was impossible not to know that she distrusted all cats.

It had been startling and disappointing to me to find out that story books had been written by people, that books were not natural wonders, coming up of themselves like grass. Yet regardless of where they came from, I cannot remember a time when I was not in love with them—with the books themselves, cover and binding and the paper they were printed on, with their smell and their weight and with their possession in my arms, captured and carried off to myself. Still illiterate, I was ready for them, committed to all the reading I could give them.

Neither of my parents had come from homes that could afford to buy many books, but though it must have been something of a strain on his salary, as the youngest officer in a young insurance company, my father was all the while carefully selecting and ordering away for what he and mother thought we children should grow up with. They bought first for the future.

Besides the bookcase in the living room, which was always called "the library," there were the encyclopedia tables and dictionary stand under windows in our dining room. Here to help us grow up arguing around the dining room table were the *Unabridged Webster*, the *Columbia Encyclopedia*, *Compton's Pictured Encyclopedia*, the *Lincoln Library of Information*, and later the *Book of Knowledge*. And the year we moved into our new house, there was room to celebrate it with the new 1925 edition of the *Britannica*, which my father, his face always deliberately turned toward the future, was of course disposed to think better than any previous edition.

In "the library," inside the mission-style bookcase with its three diamond-latticed glass doors, with my father's Morris chair and the glass-shaded lamp on its table beside it, were books I could soon begin on—and I did, reading them all alike and as they came, straight down their rows, top shelf to bottom. There was the set of Stoddard's Lectures, in all its late nineteenth-century vocabulary and vignettes of peasant life and quaint beliefs and customs, with matching halftone illustrations: Vesuvius erupting, Venice by moonlight, gypsies glimpsed by their campfires. I didn't know then the clue they were to my father's longing to see the rest of the world. I read straight through his other love-from-afar: the *Victrola Book of the Opera*, with opera after opera in synopsis, with portraits in costume of Melba, Caruso, Galli-Curci, and Geraldine Farrar, some of whose voices we could listen to on our Read Seal records.

My mother read secondarily for information; she sank as a hedonist into novels. She read Dickens in the spirit in which she would have eloped with him.

The novels of her girlhood that had stayed on in her imagination, besides those of Dickens and Scott and Robert Louis Stevenson, were *Jane Eyre*, *Trilby*, *The Woman in White*, *Green Mansions*, *King Solomon's Mines*. Marie Corelli's name would crop up but I understood she had gone out of favor with my mother, who had only kept Ardash out of loyalty. In time she absorbed herself in Galsworthy, Edith Wharton, above all in Thomas Mann of the Joseph volumes.

*St. Elmo* was not in our house; I saw it often in other houses. This wildly popular Southern novel is where all the Edna Earles in our population started coming from. They're all named for the heroine, who succeeded in bringing a dissolute, sinning roué and atheist of a lover (St. Elmo) to his knees. My mother was able to forgo it. But she remembered the classic advice given to rose growers on how to water their bushes long enough: "Take a chair and St. Elmo."

To both my parents I owe my early acquaintance with a beloved Mark Twain. There was a full set of Mark Twain and a short set of Ring Lardner in our bookcase, and they were the volumes that in time united us all, parents and children.

Reading everything that stood before me was how I became upon a worn old book without a back that had belonged to my father as a child. It was called *Sanford and Merton*. Is there anyone left who recognizes it, I wonder? It is the famous moral tale written by Thomas Day in the 1780s, but of him no mention is made on the title page of this book; here it is *Sanford and Merton in Words of One Syllable* by Mary Godolphin. Here are the rich boy and the poor boy and Mr. Barlow, their teacher and interlocutor, in long discourses alternating with dramatic scenes—danger and rescue allotted to the rich and the poor respectively. It may have only words of one syllable, but one of them is "quoth." It ends with not one but two morals, both engraved on rings: "Do what you ought, come what may," and "If we would be great, we must first learn to be good."

This book was lacking its front cover, the back held on by strips of pasted paper, now turned golden, in several layers, and the pages stained, flecked, and tattered around the edges; its garish illustrations had come unattached but were preserved, laid in. I had the feeling even in my heedless childhood that this was the only book my father as a little boy had had of his own. He had held onto it, and might have gone to sleep on its coverless face: he had lost his mother when he was seven. My father had never made any mention to his own children of the book, but he had brought it along with him from Ohio to our house and shelved it in our bookcase.

My mother had brought from West Virginia that set of Dickens; those books looked sad, too—they had been through fire and water before I was born, she told me, and there they were, lined up—as I later realized, waiting for me.

I was presented, from as early as I can remember, with books of my own, which appeared on my birthday and Christmas morning. Indeed, my parents could not give me books enough. They must have sacrificed to give me on my sixth or seventh birthday—it was after I became a reader for myself—the ten-volume set of *Our Wonder World*. These were beautifully made, heavy books I would lie down with on the floor in front of the dining room hearth, and more often than the rest volume 5, *Every Child's Story Book*, was under my eyes. There were the fairy tales—Grimm, Andersen, the

English, the French, “Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves”; and there was Aesop and Reynard the Fox; there were the myths and legends, Robin Hood, King Arthur, and St. George and the Dragon, even the history of Joan of Arc; a whack of *Pilgrim's Progress* and a long piece of Gulliver. They all carried their classic illustrations. I located myself in these pages and could go straight to the stories and pictures I loved; very often “The Yellow Dwarf” was the first choice, with Walter Crane’s Yellow Dwarf in full color making his terrifying appearance flanked by turkeys. Now that volume is as worn and backless and hanging apart as my father’s poor *Sanford and Merton*. The precious page with Edward Lear’s “Jumblies” on it has been in danger of slipping out for all these years. One measure of my love for *Our Wonder World* was that for a long time I wondered if I would go through fire and water for it as my mother had done for Charles Dickens; and the only comfort was to think I could ask my mother to do it for me.

I believe I’m the only child I know of who grew up with this treasure in the house. I used to ask others, “Did you have *Our Wonder World*?” I’d have to tell them *The Book of Knowledge* could not hold a candle to it.

I live in gratitude to my parents for initiating me—and as early as I begged for it, without keeping me waiting—into knowledge of the word, into reading and spelling, by way of the alphabet. They taught it to me at home in time for me to begin to read before starting to school. I believe the alphabet is no longer considered an essential piece of equipment for traveling through life. In my day it was the keystone to knowledge. You learned the alphabet as you learned to count to ten, as you learned “Now I lay me” and the Lord’s Prayer and your father’s and mother’s name and address and telephone number, all in case you were lost.

1983

**CRITICAL THINKING POINTS:** *After you’ve read*

1. What kinds of people are the narrator’s father and mother? How do you know that?
2. Compare and contrast what the father and the mother feel is important in an education.
3. What kinds of skills does Welty believe were important for her to learn as a writer?

**SOME POSSIBILITIES FOR WRITING**

1. Fill in the blank and write your own essay: “One \_\_\_\_\_’s Beginnings.”
2. Use Welty’s essay as a model to write your own description of the house in which you grew up.
3. Welty says, “It had been startling and disappointing to me to find out that story books had been written by people.” What in your life has held that kind of power over you? Why?

# Saved

FROM THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MALCOLM X

Malcolm X

While serving seven years in prison on a burglary charge, Malcolm X (born Malcolm Little; 1925–1965) experienced a life-changing conversion to Islam, honed his reading and writing skills, and emerged as a dynamic political leader of Black Muslims. He was assassinated in 1965.

---

*. . . months passed without my even thinking about being imprisoned. In fact, up to then, I never had been so truly free in my life.*

---

**CRITICAL THINKING POINTS:** *As you read*

1. What do you know about Malcolm X? How does that “back story” influence your reading of this excerpt?
2. List some of the various motivations Malcolm X has for learning.
3. Malcolm X says, “Anyone who has read a great deal can imagine the new world that opened.” What are some of the elements of that world?

**I** became increasingly frustrated at not being able to express what I wanted to convey in letters that I wrote, especially those to Mr. Elijah Muhammad. In the street, I had been the most articulate hustler out there—I had commanded attention when I said something. But now, trying to write simple English, I not only wasn’t articulate, I wasn’t even functional. How would I sound writing in slang, the way I would say it, something such as “Look, daddy, let me pull your coat about a cat, Elijah Muhammad.”

Many who today hear me somewhere in person, or on television, or those who read something I’ve said, will think I went to school far beyond the eighth grade. This impression is due entirely to my prison studies.

It had really begun back in the Charlestown Prison, when Bimbi first made me feel envy of his stock of knowledge. Bimbi had always taken charge of any conversation he was in, and I tried to emulate him. But every book I picked up had few sentences which didn’t contain anywhere from one to nearly all of the words that might as well have been Chinese. When I just skipped those words, of course, I really ended up with little idea of what the book said. So I had come to the Norfolk Prison Colony still going through only book-reading motions. Pretty soon, I would have quit even these motions, unless I had received the motivation that I did.

I saw that the best thing I could do was get hold of a dictionary—to study, to learn some words. I was lucky enough to reason also that I should try to improve my penmanship. It was sad. I couldn't even write in a straight line. It was both ideas together that moved me to request a dictionary along with some tablets and pencils from the Norfolk Prison Colony school.

I spent two days just riffling uncertainly through the dictionary's pages. I'd never realized so many words existed! I didn't know *which* words I needed to learn. Finally, just to start some kind of action, I began copying.

In my slow, painstaking, ragged handwriting, I copied into my tablet everything printed on that first page, down to the punctuation marks.

I believe it took me a day. Then, aloud, I read back, to myself, everything I'd written on the tablet. Over and over, aloud, to myself, I read my own handwriting.

I woke up the next morning, thinking about those words—immensely proud to realize that not only had I written so much at one time, but I'd written words that I never knew were in the world. Moreover, with a little effort, I also could remember what many of these words meant. I reviewed the words whose meanings I didn't remember. Funny thing, from the dictionary's first page right now, that "aardvark" springs into my head. The dictionary had a picture of it, a long-tailed, long-eared, burrowing African mammal, which lives off termites caught by sticking out its tongue as an anteater does for ants.

I was so fascinated that I went on—I copied the dictionary's next page. And the same experience came when I studied that. With every succeeding page, I also learned of people and places and events from history. Actually the dictionary is like a miniature encyclopedia. Finally the dictionary's A section had filled a whole tablet—and I went on into the B's. That was the way I started copying what eventually became the entire dictionary. It went a lot faster after so much practice helped me to pick up handwriting speed. Between what I wrote in my tablet, and writing letters, during the rest of my time in prison I would guess I wrote a million words.

I suppose it was inevitable that as my word-base broadened, I could for the first time pick a book and read and now begin to understand what the book was saying. Let me tell you something: from then until I left that prison, in every free moment I had, if I was not reading in the library, I was reading on my bunk. You couldn't have gotten me out of books with a wedge. Between Mr. Muhammad's teachings, my correspondence, my visitors—usually Ella and Reginald—and my reading of books, months passed without my even thinking about being imprisoned. In fact, up to then, I never had been so truly free in my life.

The Norfolk Prison Colony's library was in the school building. A variety of classes was taught there by instructors who came from such places as Harvard and Boston universities. The weekly debates between inmate teams were also held in the school building. You would be astonished to know how worked up convict debaters and audiences would get over subjects like "Should Babies Be Fed Milk?"

Available on the prison library's shelves were books on just about every general subject. Much of the big private collection that Parkhurst had willed to the prison was still in crates and boxes in the back of the library—thousands of old books. Some of them looked ancient: covers faded, old-time parchment-looking binding. Parkhurst, I've mentioned, seemed to have been principally interested in history and religion. He had the money and the special interest to have a lot of books that you wouldn't have in general circulation. Any college library would have been lucky to get that collection.

As you can imagine, especially in a prison where there was heavy emphasis on rehabilitation, an inmate was smiled upon if he demonstrated an unusually intense interest in books. There was a sizable number of well-read inmates, especially the popular debaters. Some were said by many to be practically walking encyclopedias. They were almost celebrities. No university would ask any student to devour literature as I did when this new world opened to me, of being able to read and *understand*.

I read more in my room than the library itself. An inmate who was known to read a lot could check out more than the permitted maximum number of books. I preferred reading in the total isolation of my own room.

When I had progressed to really serious reading, every night at about ten P.M. I would be outraged with the "lights out." It always seemed to catch me right in the middle of something engrossing.

Fortunately, right outside my door was a corridor light that cast a glow into my room. The glow was enough to read by, once my eyes adjusted to it. So when "lights out" came, I would sit on the floor where I could continue reading in that glow.

At one-hour intervals the night guards paced past every room. Each time I heard the approaching footsteps, I jumped into bed and feigned sleep. And as soon as the guard passed, I got back out of bed onto the floor area of that light-glow, where I would read for another fifty-eight minutes—until the guard approached again. That went on until three or four every morning. Three or four hours of sleep a night was enough for me. Often in the years in the streets I had slept less than that.

1965

**CRITICAL THINKING POINTS:** *After you've read*

1. What kind of a teacher do you think Malcolm X would have been in the classroom? What in this piece leads you to believe the way you do?
2. Malcolm X refers to skipping words he didn't know while he was reading as one of his "book-reading motions." What are some others and are they as easily remedied?
3. What might have Malcolm X learned in the streets that served him well in this experience?

**SOME POSSIBILITIES FOR WRITING**

1. Malcolm X says, "I didn't know *which* words I needed to learn." Pick a page at random from a dictionary and write about any words you "need" to learn.
2. Compare and contrast this piece with the selection from *Up from Slavery* presented in this book. What do you think accounts for the similarities and differences in these pieces?
3. Compare and contrast this piece with the selection from *LummoX: Evolution of a Man* later in this book. How does Magnuson's "conversion" in jail compare to that of Malcolm X? How important are some of the differences? Why?

# Miss Rinehart's Paddle

Jeri McCormick

Jeri McCormick (b. 1934) teaches creative writing at senior centers and elderhostels. Her poems have appeared most recently in *Poetry Ireland Review*, *Cumberland Poetry Review*, and *Rosebud*. Her book of poems, *When It Came Time*, was published in 1998 by Salmon Publishing Ltd. in Ireland.

## *the other side of power*

### **CRITICAL THINKING POINTS:** *As you read*

1. Were you the kind of student who got into trouble or the kind who did everything right?
2. The poem is saturated with violent images. What are some of them?
3. Name some of the kinds of power that teachers have over students.



The long hard rumor  
had hit us years before  
but there was nothing we could do  
to fend sixth grade off.  
One September morning  
we filed into Miss Rinehart's room  
to face the thick glasses,  
heavy oxfords, spit curls.

The weapon occupied  
her middle drawer  
and was rarely used on girls,  
though Betty Jo got five whacks  
for her haphazard map of Brazil —  
the Amazon all smeared and off-course,  
Rio de Janeiro inland by inches.

I sat through six months  
of imagined failures,  
ended up a jittery stooge  
with all A's, the best parts in plays  
and only now wonder  
about the other side of power.

1991

19

**CRITICAL THINKING POINTS:** *After you've read*

1. What might the author mean when she calls herself “a jittery stooge / with all A’s, the best parts in plays”?
2. What did you feel as you read this poem? Was it painful, funny, or sad to read? What made it so?
3. Recall elementary or middle school teachers who were especially “mean.” What made them mean? What did you fear about them?

**SOME POSSIBILITIES FOR WRITING**

1. Many of us can recall memorable episodes from elementary, middle, or high school classrooms that changed the way we feel about teaching and/or learning. Think of such an episode. What makes it a memorable moment? What changes did the event lead to?
2. Talk to your parents and grandparents about their experiences in school. Write an essay comparing your experiences in school to those of your parents or grandparents.
3. Physical discipline is rarely practiced much anymore in this country. What other kinds of discipline do teachers and/or school systems employ? Which methods do you think are the most effective?

# 50% Chance of Lightning

Cristina Salat

Cristina Salat is founder of Kulana, a racially diverse artist's sanctuary in the rainforests of Hawaii. An author and filmmaker, her work has been published by Bantam Books, Children's Television Workshop, and *Popular Photography*.

*Well, what's the point of being gay if I'm never going to be with anybody?*

**CRITICAL THINKING POINTS:** *As you read*

1. Watch for the different responses Robin and Malia have toward college. What are they? Were you eager to apply to college and leave home, like Malia, or not quite ready, like Robin? Why?
2. Speculate about how Robin's mother died. What details in the story led you to that theory?
3. Are the people you know more like Malia (concrete goals, even down to the type of car she hopes to drive) or more like Robin (abstract wishes, such as simply "be happy")? Are you more like Malia or Robin? In what ways?

**I**wonder if I'll ever have a girlfriend." Robin stamps her sneakers against the wet pavement, tired of waiting.

Malia laughs. "Is that all you think about?"

"Well, what's the point of being gay if I'm never going to be with anybody?" Robin shifts the big umbrella they are sharing to her other hand. Fat silver drops of rain splatter above the plastic dome. She wishes the bus would run on time for once.

"Independent women. We vowed, remember? No guy chasing," Malia says.

Robin shoots Malia a look.

"Or girl chasing," Malia adds quickly.

"You can't talk," Robin says, trying not to feel each strand of her hair as it frizzes. "You have someone."

"That's true." Malia smiles.

Robin looks at the gray, wet world through her clear umbrella. It's hat weather. Black baseball hat and hair gel. She uses both, but nothing really helps on damp days like this. "It's silly to worry how you look. Rain can make you alive if you let it!" Robin's mother used to say. She loved stormy weather almost as much as Robin didn't.

"It's Friday! How come you're so quiet?" Malia asks. "You're not obsessing about your hair, are you? It looks fine. I'd trade you in a second . . . so don't start in about my perfect Filipino hair!" She grins, reading Robin's mind.

Robin can't help smiling. They've known each other a long time.

"Guess what!" Malia changes the subject. "Tomorrow is me and Andrew's six-month anniversary. That's the longest I've ever gone out with anybody."

Robin sighs. "You guys will probably get old together." And I'll be the oldest single person on the face of the planet, she thinks gloomily.

Malia's forehead wrinkles into a slight frown. "No. I'm leaving. I can't wait to get out of here." A large electric bus lumbers to the curb and stops with a hiss. "I sent my applications out yesterday. NYU, Bryn Mawr, Hampshire, and RIT, in that order," Malia says as she boards.

They squeeze onto the heated bus between packed bodies in steaming overcoats. The bus lurches forward.

"Where did you decide?" Malia asks, grabbing onto a pole near the back.

Robin shrugs.

Malia raises one eyebrow. "It's almost Thanksgiving. You are still going to try for NYU and Hampshire with me, aren't you?"

"I guess," Robin says. "I haven't had time to decide anything yet." It's not like she hasn't been thinking about it.

College catalogs are spread across the floor of her bedroom. All she has to do is figure out where she wants to spend the next four years of her life. New York? Massachusetts? Zimbabwe? There's an endless stream of choices.

"You better make time," Malia says. "You shouldn't wait until the deadlines."

"Give me a break, okay?" Robin stares past the seated heads in front of her.

"Cranky, cranky." Malia elbows Robin's arm.

A woman wipes one hand across a steamed window for an outside view and pulls the bus cord. She vacates her seat and Malia and Robin squeeze past someone's knees to claim it. With Malia balanced on her lap, Robin turns her head toward the window and watches the city swish by. She tries to picture herself next fall, suitcases packed, excited to be going. She's almost eighteen; she should want to leave home. A new room. New city. New friends.

I can't leave, not yet! The air in the bus is thick and warm; it's hard to breathe enough in. Outside the window, sharp edged buildings and signs fly past. Robin's head feels light and disconnected. She presses her face against the cold glass. She doesn't have to leave. She can apply to San Francisco State or USF right here in the city. Or she won't go at all. Malia's mom didn't go to college. Robin's dad didn't go either, but he wants her to. "You're smart, like your mother," he's always saying. But what if she doesn't want to go?

It's okay, Robin repeats to herself. No one can make me.

Outside the window she watches a small, mixed terrier approach the curb, sniffing the ground. Its fur is wet and matted, standing up in points. The dog steps into the stilled, waiting traffic. Robin scans the sidewalk for the dog's person. Don't they know it's dangerous to let their puppy wander into the street?

Robin stares through the window, her mind racing. Maybe it's lost. She could help. She could get off the bus and . . . A car honks loudly. Something inside her shrinks up. Malia's weight is heavy on her lap. The dog looks up and scampers back to the curb as traffic surges and the bus rumbles forward. Robin cranes her neck. She should get off, before it's too late. But she can't.

"What is it?" Malia asks, feeling Robin's shift.

Robin forces herself to lean back in the seat and breathe slowly. She's being stupid. The dog won't get run over. Its owner is probably just down the block.

They hang their jackets over the chair in Malia's small, neat room and Robin drops her baseball cap onto the desk.

"You want to see my list of goals?" Malia asks. "I read in *New Woman* if you know exactly what you want, you're more likely to get it." She hands Robin an open, spiral-bound note-book and drops next to her on the bed.

#### MALIA MANANSALA

##### *Goals for Now*

*Get into a good college, far away*  
*Major in computer science or business*  
*Get another part-time job for clothes, makeup, etc.*  
*Have fun!*

##### *Eventually*

*Dressy job where I make a lot of money and get respect*  
*Nice apartment with classy things*  
*Old BMW or Jeep Cherokee (depending where I live)*  
*Great friends*  
*Marry someone loyal, sexy, and successful*

"Money." Robin shakes her head. "Even if we get scholarships, we're going to be paying off college loans forever."

Malia nods. "That's why I need a big career. I'm not going to suck up to some man for money. You should make a goal list," she suggests, handing over a pen. "I need a snack."

Robin flops onto her side. Why not? At the top of a clean page, in slow, careful letters, she writes:

##### *Goals*

*Figure Out Who I Am*  
*Be Proud of Myself*  
*Fall in Love*  
*Do Something Good*

Robin frowns at her list. How does Malia know exactly what she wants? "Hand it over." Malia comes back into the room with a tray of hot cocoa and microwaved pork buns.

"Okay, but it's not like yours."

"Do something good?" Malia makes a face. "Can you be more specific?"

"Hey, I didn't pick on your list!"

"I don't get it. When you want to do something, you just do it. This year you start telling everyone, 'I'm a lesbian, deal with it.' Why can't you be like that about college?"

"It's different," Robin says, thinking, I didn't tell everyone. My mother never got to know. Her mom drove a red Ho CRX with African pendants dangling from the rearview mirror. She took the highway a lot, to avoid city traffic. Route I South. Robin yanks her mind away.

"You are going to do more with your life than just be a lesbian, aren't you?" Malia prods.

Robin gets to her feet, shaking the damp bottoms of her baggy jeans away from her ankles. "Can I borrow something dry?"

"Come on. Seriously. What kind of job do you want?" Malia sounds like Robin's mom and dad used to—always excited about plans.

"I don't know. Something to help people," Robin says, looking through the closet.

"Peace Corps? Lawyer? Social worker?" Malia suggests.

"No," Robin says, a faded memory seeping into her mind. She used to play medicine woman when she was little, healing stuffed toy rabbits and her plastic Ujima dolls with bowls of grass-flower soup. "I always pictured myself in a fun office," she tells Malia, "where people or animals would come when they didn't feel well."

"You want to be some kind of doctor!" Malia enthuses.

Robin shakes her head. Playing medicine woman was a kid thing. "You know I can't stand blood and guts." Robin focuses her attention in the closet, taking out a black lace top and black leggings.

"How about a therapist? You could help people's minds."

"And listen to people complain all day?" Robin asks as she changes.

Malia sighs, shutting the notebook. "Well, what do you want to do tonight? I told Andrew I'd call him by four. Oh, I forgot! My mother and the jerk are going out after work. They won't be home till late. Do you want to have a party?"

"Yes!" Robin says. "Go rent some movies. I'll call for a pizza and invite everybody."

Andrew arrives first with a soggy Safeway bag tucked into his aviator jacket.

"Hey, Robbie!" he says, unpacking jumbo bottles of root beer and 7UP on the living-room table.

The doorbell rings again. Robin runs to let in Malia's friend Dan, who has brought his sister, Cybelle—a junior—and another girl. Malia has plenty of friends. Most of them are at least part Filipino.

Being a mix (African and Polish), Robin doesn't care who her friends are. She only has a few anyway, though she knows lots of people. When her mother died at the end of sophomore year, nobody knew what to say, so they acted like nothing happened. Robin still hangs out with the same people, but just because it's something to do; not because she cares.

When Malia returns from the video store, fifteen people are sprawled on the couch and floor with paper plates of mushroom and garlic pizza.

"Party woman," Andrew teases Malia, leaning down for a kiss. "You're soaked."

"It was only drizzling when I left. Sorry I took so long. I couldn't decide!" Malia takes two video cassettes out of a plastic bag. "I got a vampire movie and *The Best of Crack-Up Comedy*."

"I love vampires!" Cybelle adjusts one of the five rhinestone studs on her left ear. "Let's get scared first."

"Go change," Andrew tells Malia. "I'll set up the movie." He nudges her toward the bedroom.

Robin watches, wondering if anyone will ever care like that about her. For some reason the wet dog she saw from the bus pops into her mind. Nobody cared enough to keep it safe.

"Hi. You're Robin Cizek, right?" A white girl in ripped jeans and a "Save the Planet" sweatshirt sits down next to Robin on the couch. "I read your article in the school paper! I'm April, Cybelle's friend. I never thought what it feels like to be gay until I read your essay. Do you know a lot of gay people, or was the story mostly about you?" April's slate colored eyes are wide and curious.

Robin takes a big bite of pizza. It's still hard to believe she wrote an article about being gay and submitted it to the school paper. She must have been crazy.

"I hope you don't mind me asking," April says quickly. "I'm just interested."

"The story's mostly about me," she tells April. "I don't know a lot of other gay people."

"I guess you will next year," April says. "My sister goes to UC Berkeley, and she says there's like three different gay groups on campus."

Robin feels her shoulders clench up. Is college the only thing anyone can talk about? Of course, it'll be worth it to be out of high school just to get away from the stupid notes guys are taping on her locker door: ALL YOU NEED IS A REAL MAN and ROBIN C. AND MALIA M. EAT FISH.

"Personally, I'm glad I don't have to think about college for another year," April continues.

"Really? Why?" Robin asks, surprised.

April looks away, embarrassed. "It's dumb. I have this cat. I don't want to leave her."

"Guess what I brought!" Cybelle calls out as Andrew dims the living-room light. She takes a half-full bottle of brandy from her tote bag.

"I'll have a little of that," Malia says, coming back into the room in overalls and a fluffy white sweater. "To warm me up."

"Quiet—it's starting," Gary yells from the easy chair as a bold, red title flashes across the television screen.

"I want to sit on the couch," Tara giggles. "Move over, Danny."

April moves toward Robin to make room for another person. Her hip rests against Robin's. The couch armrest presses into Robin's other side.

"Oh, hold me, Andrew!" Cybelle teases Malia as eerie music fills the darkened room. Malia laughs.

April's leg relaxes against Robin's. Out of the corner of one eye, Robin looks at the girl sitting next to her. April is watching the screen. Robin's thigh sizzles.

Robin nonchalantly eases sideways until their arms and legs are touching. A faint scent of perfume tinges the air. April doesn't move away. Robin's whole left side buzzes. She sinks into the couch, holding her breath. It would be so amazing if—

If what? Just because this girl liked the article doesn't mean she's interested. Robin moves her leg away, mad at herself. On screen, a shadowy figure suddenly whirls around and grins evilly. April leans softly against Robin.

Warm drops of sweat trickle down Robin's side. The room feels dark and red. Robin could reach out, take April's hand, trace one finger over the knuckle bumps and pale, freckled skin. . . .

Halfway through the vampire movie, Robin has to go to the bathroom, bad. She is tempted, but restrains herself from squeezing April's leg as she gets up.

Away from everyone, she splashes cold water on her face, smiling. Could April really be interested? I could go back and sit away from her to see if she follows me.

Feeling hot and wild, Robin unlocks the door. It doesn't budge. She pulls harder, leaning backward, and opens it a foot.

"Hi, Robin." Cybelle grins, peeking around the corner.

"What's with you? Get away from the door," Robin says.

"Okay." Cybelle runs one hand through her porcupine patch of short, black hair. "C'mere. I want to ask you something." Cybelle pulls Robin into Malia's room. She shuts the door without flicking on the light.

"Smell my breath," she says, leaning close.

A warm rush of brandy air tickles Robin's face.

"I can't go home wasted. Do I smell like pizza or alcohol?" Cybelle asks. Her lips touch the side of Robin's mouth.

"What are you doing?" Robin asks.

Cybelle nuzzles Robin's face, tracing her lips along Robin's. "Don't you like me? Kiss me back."

Robin's heart stutters. Is this for real? Cybelle slides one hand under Robin's hair and grips the back of her neck, kissing harder.

I've wanted this for so long, Robin thinks, awkwardly moving her arms around Cybelle. It's weird not being able to see. Robin touches sharp shoulder blades through the thin cotton of Cybelle's turtleneck.

I should have helped that dog. The thought scuttles into Robin's head. Why is she thinking about that now!

Cybelle sucks on Robin's lower lip. I should have gotten off the bus and helped. I could have taken it to the pound, or home. Why didn't I do something?

Cybelle's small tongue slides into Robin's mouth. Why am I doing this? I've seen Cybelle around school and never wanted to. She's got a boyfriend. She'll probably tell everyone, "I made out with the lesbian at Malia's house," for a laugh.

Robin shifts sideways. "I have to go."

"What?"

"I'm going back to the living room." Robin feels for the wall switch and flicks on the light.

Cybelle blinks. "How come? It's okay. Nobody misses us." She smiles and tugs on Robin's arm, moving closer.

"I want to see the rest of the movie," Robin says, pulling away. It's a lame excuse, but what else can she say? "I want to kiss somebody I'm really into, and you're not it?"

Cybelle stops smiling and drops Robin's arm. "Oh sure," she laughs. "You're scared! Writing that story and you don't even know what to do! What a joke." She yanks open the door and walks out before Robin can respond.

Robin follows Cybelle to the living room and watches her take the small, open spot on the couch next to April. She glares at the back of Cybelle's spiked head. Who does she think she is? I don't have to make out if I don't want to!

Whirling around, Robin heads back to the bedroom and jams her feet into her sneakers.

"You okay?" Malia asks, coming in.

"Sure." Robin doesn't look up.

"Are you leaving? What's going on?"

"Nothing I want to talk about right now." Robin zips up her jacket. They walk to the front door. Robin flings it open. She can't wait to be outside.

"Call me tomorrow, okay? Hey." Malia grabs Robin's jacket.

Robin looks back over her shoulder. "What?"

"We're best buddies forever, right?"

If Malia moves to New York and Robin stays here . . . Nothing's forever.

"Sure," Robin says, looking away.

Malia smiles and reaches out for a hug. "I'm sorry you didn't have a good time. Let's go shopping tomorrow morning, just you and me. Okay?"

As soon as Robin steps away from Malia's house, she realizes she's forgotten her baseball cap. Angrily, she pops open her umbrella. It doesn't matter. There's a bus stop at the corner and she's just going home.

Water drops drum against the plastic shield above her head as cars zip by, their rubber tires splashing against wet asphalt. Robin glares at each car that passes. She will never own one. What if that dog got run over? She should have helped. A bolt of light illuminates the night. Robin looks helplessly down the empty street for a bus. She hates being out alone after dark, even when it's not very late.

Whenever someone worried, her dad used to say: "There's a fifty-fifty chance of something good happening." Robin's mother loved that saying. Her father hasn't said it much lately. It's hard to believe in good stuff when you're dealing with the

other fifty percent. At least she ended the thing with Cybelle. That's something. Robin might want experience, but she's not desperate.

Thunder swells, filling the night. Robin cranes her neck, looking down the street. No bus. So it's fifty-fifty. Should she wait here, hoping no weirdos show up and bother her before the bus comes, or should she start walking in this lousy weather? Her parents used to take walks in the rain. They were nuts . . . but happy.

Robin starts to walk. A sharp wind whips by, threatening to turn her umbrella inside out. Okay, why not? She has nothing to lose. Robin clicks the umbrella shut. Rain falls cold against her face and settles onto her thick hair, expanding it. She walks fast, with the wooden umbrella handle held forward, staying near the street-lamps. Water trickles down her face and soaks into her clothing. She licks her lips. The rain tastes strangely good.

When she reaches the place where she saw the dog, Robin stops and studies the black road. A few torn paper bags. No blood or fur. It could be dead somewhere else. Or it could be off foraging in a garbage can or sleeping under a bush.

I'm sorry I didn't get off the bus to see if you needed help, she thinks. Next time I will. I hope you're safe. But maybe the dog didn't need help. Maybe it wasn't even scared. Maybe it was totally pleased to be out exploring and taking care of itself. Robin decides to picture the terrier that way.

From down the block a bus approaches, grumbling to a stop a few feet ahead. Robin hurries over. As the doors squeal open, she looks behind at the dark, empty street. She is afraid, but she doesn't want to be. Slowly, Robin turns away.

It is a long walk home under the wide, electric sky.

At the warm apartment on Guerrero Street, Robin finds her father asleep on their living-room couch. A paperback novel is spread open across his chest and his glasses are pushed up onto his forehead. Standing over him, dripping onto the brown shag rug, Robin feels tender and old. She removes his glasses and places the book on the glass coffee table, careful not to lose his page.

In her room, Robin drops her wet clothing to the floor and changes into an old set of flannel pajamas. Then she sits down at her drafting-table desk. Nothing's forever, and that's just the way it is. Moving college applications aside, she lifts two thick San Francisco phone books from the floor.

Robin thumbs through the thin A-L yellow pages slowly. There is something she can do. Something right.

Attorneys, Automobile . . . Bakers, Beauty . . . Carpets, Collectibles . . . Dentists, Divers . . . Environment . . . Florists . . . Health. Health clubs, health and diet, health maintenance, health service. A boxed ad catches Robin's eye.

Holistic Health Center

Dedicated to the well-being of body and mind

Licensed: nutritionists, massage therapists, acupuncturists

Courses in herbal healing, yoga, natural vision, Tai Chi

Medicine without blood and guts. Smiling to herself, Robin reaches for some loose-leaf paper and a pen. There's a new life out there, waiting for her. She just has

to find it. She moves A–L aside and flips open M–Z. By ten P.M. three loose-leaf pages are filled with numbers and addresses. At the top of the first page, she writes: Call for info.

Robin stretches and climbs into bed with her new list. She rubs the soles of her bare feet against the chilled sheets. Maybe life is like rain. Alive if you let it be; lousy and depressing if you don't. She rolls onto her stomach. Under the information for the Shiatsu Institute, the College of Oriental Medicine, and the School for Therapeutic Massage, she writes: Tell Malia to get April's number from Dan. Call her?!?!?!?

1994

**CRITICAL THINKING POINTS:** *After you've read*

1. Malia thinks that if people know exactly what they want, they're more likely to get it. Do you believe this is true? Why or why not?
2. Compare Robin's and Malia's lists of goals. Who do you think is more likely to be satisfied? Can you judge this simply from someone's goals? Why or why not?
3. Why do you think Robin doesn't get on the bus when it stops for her? What does the dog seem to represent to her? What details in the story led you to that conclusion?

**SOME POSSIBILITIES FOR WRITING**

1. Make two lists of your own goals: one abstract like Robin's and one concrete like Malia's. For instance, an abstract goal would be "work with people," whereas a concrete goal that is an extension of that would be "get a degree in elementary education."
2. There are advantages and disadvantages to having a life's plan like Malia does. Make a list of advantages concerning having your goals and life mapped out. Now make a list of disadvantages concerning having your goals and life mapped out.
3. Robin is harassed with notes on her locker after her article appeared in the school newspaper. Recall a time when you were teased for your ethnic background, sexual preference, or simply the way you talked or walked or something you did. Write about your experience.

# Somewhere in Minnesota

Peter Klein

Peter Klein (b.1955) wrote this poem as an undergraduate student. After graduate school he stopped writing for nearly fifteen years and recently returned to writing and publishing. His work has appeared in *The Cortland Review*, *The North American Review*, *Blackbird*, and elsewhere. He lives in Nashville, Tennessee, where he works for a market research company.

---

*your dark eyes focused / on a brilliant future.*

---

**CRITICAL THINKING POINTS:** *As you read*

1. Who do you think is the “you” in this poem?
2. Because of poetry’s condensed nature, every word is important. Choose some words that you feel are “important” to this poem. Why do you think so?
3. Why might the lines end where they do? How would the poem be different if the lines were longer or shorter?



somewhere in Minnesota  
 there is a photograph  
 mailed from denver  
 to an uncle in duluth  
 who left it in a diner  
 on a table by the salt  
 it marked a woman’s place  
 in a drugstore fiction  
 where it lay for years  
 until her freshman son  
 found it told his friends  
 the subject was his steady  
 then threw it in a lake  
 this picture was of you  
 your mortar board smile  
 gleaming softly beneath  
 the photographer’s light  
 your dark eyes focused  
 on a brilliant future.

1979

**CRITICAL THINKING POINTS:** *After you've read*

1. What might the author mean by such phrases as “your mortar board smile” or “your dark eyes focused / on a brilliant future”?
2. How do the places in which the photo ends up contribute to your reading of the poem? What do these places have in common?
3. Why do you think the history of the photograph is important to the narrator?

**SOME POSSIBILITIES FOR WRITING**

1. Page through your own high school yearbook. Write a brief impression of the memories the pictures call to mind. Be as specific as you can in communicating these impressions.
2. Look at your parents' or grandparents' high school graduation photos and write about the people as they appeared then compared to the people as you know them now.
3. Find yearbooks in your college library from ten or twenty years ago or older. What seems to be different about the people and the university then? What seems to be still the same?

# LD

Jeff Richards

Jeff Richards was born and raised in Washington, D.C. He has an M.A. in creative writing from Hollins College.

---

*His twisted brain was no disability. It was a gift.*

---

**CRITICAL THINKING POINTS:** *As you read*

1. What do you associate with the term “LD”?
2. How can labels, such as “LD” or “gifted,” help or hinder students in school?
3. Students with “invisible” disabilities often go unnoticed by other students.  
What would be the benefits and disadvantages of that kind of disability?

**O**ur minds are twisted but they are perfectly good minds. We are artistic, sensitive, impulsive, socially and emotionally immature. Spaced. We are angry, passive, withdrawn or overly extroverted. We tell stories in random order without references, and our academic skills are very slow in developing. At least that’s the way we are when we are young, according to Neela Seldin, a specialist in LD who compiled the above list of our characteristics. When we grow older, we either adapt or don’t adapt. Some of us drop out of high school and clerk at Kmart. Some of us graduate with Ph.D.s in nuclear physics and work for NASA. Some of us are well known: Harry Belafonte, Cher, Vince Vaughn; or leaders in their fields: Dr. Donald Coffey, a cancer researcher at Johns Hopkins; Dr. Florence Haseltine, a pioneer in women’s health issues; Gaston Caperton, the educator and former governor of West Virginia; and Roger W. Wilkins, the civil rights activist. According to the company of Winston Churchill, Thomas Edison, Albert Einstein, Leonardo da Vinci, all of them either LD or afflicted by one of LD’s numerous cousins, like dyslexia. Da Vinci often wrote from right to left. He had difficulty completing projects, leaving scores of complex plans and designs for posterity to try to assemble. Ms. Seldin describes the young disabled student as one who “can’t make choices” and “can’t stay with an activity.” “Distractible, impulsive.” The type to sketch out and set aside. . . .

Was I really that stupid? Was I unable to calculate fractions or percentages? Or understand what I read? I enjoyed comic books. *Fantastic Four. Archie. Spiderman.* Even the high-brow Classic Comics. One of my fondest memories was going to the drugstore to buy those comics with my dad, who seemed to enjoy them as much as I did even though he wasn’t LD. I hated *Dick and Jane*. Who didn’t? But comics aside,

I have to admit now, I could not read worth a damn. I was no whiz at fractions. And besides the baseball statistics I computed and recorded in a spiral notebook, I knew little of percentages. Though the terminology didn't exist at the time, I was LD.

My parents were upset at my failure to move to the next level but were undaunted, as concerned parents tend to be. They arranged for me to be tested at a diagnostic center. They enrolled me in summer school and endless tutoring sessions, and transported me to Longfellow School for Boys where I repeated sixth grade. I remember I was very depressed. I wanted to run away, join the circus or the merchant marine. I didn't want to leave my neighborhood buddies to go to this bizarre school in Bethesda full of boys who dressed up in blue blazers and ties everyday.

The summer before I went to school, they gave us a reading list—*Penrod* and *Tom Sawyer*, the usual collection of coming-of-age classics. I remember sitting in the bedroom of our rented beach house feeling the sticky, salt air, looking up occasionally from where I was bent over a book to see the yellow curtains blowing in the window. I'd hear the far-off waves against the shore, the wind in the pines, and I'd feel like I'd just woken up from a long sleep. I could read. I could *really* read. And later on, after I had finished another book, I would sit down at my desk and write exhaustive synopses and commentaries.

I hated my parents when they enrolled me at Longfellow but, when I went there and my new teacher read an excerpt from one of my book reports and said I had some good ideas, I accepted the possibility that they might be onto something. My teacher could understand my writing; I could understand him and follow his instructions; I did my tests and did my homework without copying from the encyclopedia. For the first time in my life, I didn't feel like a fraud.

However, I wasn't instantly cured of LD. It is a disability and not a disease. My mind is still twisted and always will be. What is different is that I learned how to deal with it. I'm easily distracted, so when I was in a college class I concentrated by taking elaborate notes. Many students borrowed my notes since I missed almost nothing of what the professor said. I think they benefited more than I did given my problems with memory. So I tested poorly. I made up for this in out-of-class assignments where I had time enough to think about what I was going to say. On these papers, teachers would act surprised and wonder if I was the same person who wrote the exams. My professors did not understand that I had a twisted mind, that I was as smart as anyone else, that I came to the same logical conclusions as everyone but it took me longer to get there because I was distracted by the interesting terrain I traveled on the way.

Today my daughter's teachers know what mine did not. This is both good and bad. It is good that they've found the terminology. The Internet has hundreds of Web sites that relate to Learning Disability, some of which define LD with as many as forty-eight different characteristics. Hannah has only a handful of these, many of them similar to mine: "academic skills very slow in developing, strong discrepancies in skills and knowledge, artistic, sensitive, excellent vocabulary but poor production, wants to tell but cannot retrieve words, mishears or doesn't hear, and

problems with various motor development–related skills.” I am amazed, on the one hand, by what a good job the nebulous “they” have done in codifying my disorder, but, on the other, I am frightened by what they plan to do with all this ammunition. They are, after all, tinkering with the human mind, my daughter’s mind, in particular, and I don’t find this reassuring.

I believe they are at the very beginning of understanding LD, but don’t yet know how to treat it. Or if it is treatable. Or if it is a disability. Or a difference, which is closer to my view. When Hannah was in first grade she received a report card much like my own from Miss Probey. Only Miss Probey was a nice lady, even nicer when she turned into Mrs. Bernard in the middle of the year. Hannah’s teacher was a prison guard. She looked like Miss Honey in *Matilda*, but acted more like Miss Trunchbull so let’s call her Ms. Honeybull. Ms. Honeybull’s range of normal was ludicrous. Only about three students could fit into it, two of whom were on Ritalin, the third naturally passive. She was always berating the students for one thing or another and keeping them in from recess for minor slipups such as talking out of turn in class or not keeping in line when the students walked from one classroom to another. Once, she even beat one of the students with a ruler for not identifying the location of the Nile River on a map. One of Ms. Honeybull’s favorite victims was Hannah.

Hannah with her pretty, round Irish face like her mother’s, thin lips, and long hair to her shoulders, flyaway hair like mine. She’s been a vegetarian since she was five. She hates that we own a leather couch though she does grudgingly sit on it. When her skin touches the leather, sometimes she’d say, “This is disgusting,” and eyeball us half in jest as if we are murderers.

When we received Ms. Honeybull’s report card, we were upset that Hannah flunked absolutely everything. We knew she was having difficulty in her academic subjects but we had received no prior warning that it was this bad, even in art which she loves. How could she flunk art or, even more inexplicable, deportment? We were aghast with the accusation that she didn’t show consideration and respect for others, that she didn’t play or listen to her peers, or cooperate or share, or control herself, and on and on. This was antithetical to every experience we had ever had with our daughter. Only a kid who burned down the school deserved grades like this, said my wife. We arranged a conference with Ms. Honeybull. She defended her views. We defended ours. Nothing much was accomplished. As we left the conference room, Ms. Honeybull blurted out, “Your daughter is unteachable.”

“Now I understand,” I might have said but didn’t. It wasn’t that Hannah was unteachable. It was that Ms. Honeybull was incapable of reaching Hannah. Connie, my wife, thought it went beyond that. “They’re trying to push her out of school.” Which seems obvious to me now as I look back on it. We did what my parents did when we were growing up. We tested Hannah. We hired a tutor. We looked for other schools.

By the fall of the next year Hannah was enrolled in the Lab School of Washington, one of the premier schools in the world for children and adults with learning disabilities. Unlike Ms. Honeybull, the teachers are trained to deal with a wide range of students, using art, theater, dance, woodworking, you must know math.

Sally Smith, the founder and director of LSW, is the recognized leader in the field of learning disabilities. In addition, she is the head of the graduate program in LD at American University, author of five books on the subject and countless articles. As tough a character as you're likely to find, she could squeeze blood out of a turnip. So the school is well endowed. But not exclusive. Most of the students are funded and come from the public schools. The waiting list to get in is endless, as is the waiting list for teachers who want to teach there. But the real judge of LSW's success is that 90 percent of the students go on to college.

Hannah is thriving in this environment. She is much further along in her reading, writing, and arithmetic than I was at her age. She is happy. The teachers never punish her. They never single her out, except for praise. They have given her the award for good behavior practically every week she has been there. If she accumulates enough of these awards over a certain period of time, she is allowed to have lunch with the handsome gym instructor that all the girls swoon over.

In the fall the Lab School gives a gala at which they honor successful people with LD. I think it was the year they invited the Fonz that a paleontologist from Johns Hopkins, Dr. Steven M. Stanley, said in his speech to the overflow audience at the Omni-Shoreham Hotel that he thought he wasn't disabled. I don't remember his words exactly but they confirmed my belief. His brain, like my own, was twisted. It took him through that same illogical Alice in Wonderland world that I go through daily, and when he came out on the other side, usually he came out with a scatter-brained idea. But sometimes when he came out, his ideas were great, the very same ideas, he thought, that made it possible for him to rise to the top of his field. His twisted brain was no disability. It was a gift. What Hannah has, what I have, what my mom had, and what our ancestors had were gifts. And yet, I'm still apprehensive for Hannah. Will she be at the Lab School forever? Or will they recommend a transfer to a more traditional school once she catches up developmentally with her peers? Either way, I wonder how well she will do in college and beyond. Will she be able to compete in the real world? My concerns are no doubt little different from other parents'. Yet other parents do not have to go to the expense, the extra time, and the heartache that Connie and I do. Somehow I feel cheated that we are forced to send Hannah to a special school with kids who are basically the same as she. I wonder why this is so, why she must be isolated from the average student population, the  $1 + 1 = 2$  Crowd.

2000

**CRITICAL THINKING POINTS:** *After you've read*

1. Richards writes, "My professors did not understand that I had a twisted mind, that I was as smart as anyone else, that I came to the same logical conclusions as everyone but it took me longer to get there because I was distracted by the interesting terrain I traveled on the way." How does he "prove" himself in college?

**36** CHAPTER ONE Where We're Coming From

---

2. Richards makes the point that being LD might be a disability or simply a difference. What might be the impact of each alternative point of view? What is associated with each word?
3. How is Richards better able to parent Hannah because he has a similar disability?

**SOME POSSIBILITIES FOR WRITING**

1. Research the effects on a generation of people—most often boys and young men—heavily medicated by drugs such as Ritalin.
2. How might public schools incorporate some of the ideologies of the Lab School?
3. Research what kinds of services are available for students with disabilities on your campus.

# School's Out: One Young Man Puzzles Over His Future Without College

Laura Sessions Stepp

Laura Sessions Stepp is a *Washington Post* staff writer.

---

*"You see these clothes I'm wearing?" he asks. "I bought them. These shoes I'm wearing? I bought them. That car out there? I'm paying for it."*

---

**CRITICAL THINKING POINTS:** *As you read*

1. What are some stereotypes about high school students who choose not to go to college? Where do those stereotypes come from?
2. What kind of town does Ben Farmer live in? How does that influence him and his choices?
3. Keep a list of reasons you feel Ben did not go to college.

**B**en Farmer at 19, steering his silver Camaro Z28 down Main Street on a Friday night, glances at the Dairy Freeze and thinks about the buddies he graduated from high school with last year. They're off at college, probably partying tonight, the beer, the girls, at Virginia Tech, Radford, wherever.

He passes a karate studio, beauty supply store and boarded-up movie theater with a marquee begging passersby to "Shop Altavista First."

He could be at college. He had the grades, he's got the brains, but here he is, listening to the cough in his 330-horsepower engine and worrying about his spark plugs.

"There was a lot of unknowns about college," he says after he thinks about it. "It was going to be this big, tough, hard, hard time in which all you'd do is write papers, which I don't like to do." So for now he assembles air conditioning ducts in a factory, for \$7 an hour, which is as much as his mother makes in her new job at the bank, her first sit-down job in all the years she's been raising him.

Nobody in his family ever went to any kind of college. His mom wanted him to go. She helped him with the application and the financial aid forms. But he didn't go, he took a \$7 job in a town with a lot of \$7 jobs, a little river town in central Virginia, where the Southern railroad met the Norfolk and Western, spawning a furniture factory, textile mill and other small manufacturers.

Ten to 12 hours a day, he hammers sheet metal, then goes home to shower off the dirt and fibers. Some nights he heads out to the driving range to hit golf balls. Weekends, he drives over to South Boston to watch guys do what he would like most to do, race stock cars. He has thought about signing on with a NASCAR pit crew, a great job except you're never home.

Altavista is home. He knows everybody, he's already got a job, and now he's met a girl, named Apryl East. He's having visions of a little house one day with a two-car garage, "going to work and going on vacation, not worrying where your next meal is coming from."

So now he's thinking of asking his boss at Moore's, an electrical and mechanical construction firm, if the company will pay him to take night classes at the local community college and then move him indoors to a better-paying job, a sit-down job. Apryl, who goes to Virginia Tech, encourages this line of thinking.

The fall after Ben and 70 others graduated from the local high school, 2.5 million American seniors enrolled in either a two-year or a four-year college.

Almost a million did not. They were overwhelmingly poor, male and white. Much to the surprise of social scientists who traditionally have looked for educational problems among minorities, low-income black and Hispanic men are more likely to go to college right out of high school than white guys like Ben. So are young women of any background. If Ben had a twin sister, she'd likely be enrolled.

There are Ben Farmers all over: in the coal towns of Pennsylvania, the suburban sprawl west of Sacramento and especially in the rural South. They've always been there, hidden in the pockets of America where they pump gas, assemble machine parts and put their pay on the family's kitchen table. They do work that needs to be done—building houses, running backhoes, riveting airplanes, surveying land and fixing the BMWs of upscale college types who occasionally might call them rednecks. America might well lose all its advanced-degree business school graduates with less pain than it would lose these young men.

They're proud of the work they do. At the same time, they've found it harder and harder to acquire full-time jobs with decent pay increases and good health insurance. Their earnings, adjusted for inflation, have fallen or stalled. Altavista, population 3,400, has several thousand people commuting there to work, so there are jobs. But fewer and fewer: Altavista has lost 1,300 jobs in a little over a year.

Other young Altavista men in Ben's position fear they're headed nowhere in a society that prefers paper-pushers to pipe fitters. They don't want to manage accounts payable for a living, or scan X-rays for cancerous tumors. They're proud of doing hard, physical work. But people around them say that white-collar jobs, available only with a college diploma, are the only way to win at life. This attitude, says Patricia Gandara, a professor of education at the University of California, Davis, can make these young white men feel invisible.

"Latinos and African Americans have horrendous problems, too, but at least they have a group identity," says Gandara, who studies low-income, primarily

minority youths. "These poor white males don't know where in the culture they fit. Some are really alienated and angry."

Ken Gray, a professor of workforce education at Pennsylvania State University, worries about them, too. "No one's interested in the Bubbas," he says.

Ben is no Bubba, more an easygoing, smart kid with a goatee and a vague future. Off work, he wears American Eagle polo shirts, khakis and Nike sandals.

"You see these clothes I'm wearing?" he asks. "I bought them. These shoes I'm wearing? I bought them. That car out there? I'm paying for it." It's a matter of pride and obligation that richer people can't understand.

He has friends whose parents pay their school expenses, their apartment rent. One of his pals lives off campus in a nice two-bedroom apartment with a big leather couch and an air hockey table.

"On some days I wish I were him," Ben says. On other days? All he'll say about his buddy is this: "If you asked him how much his cell phone bill is, he wouldn't know."

Ben's a guy whose mother taught him to "always keep good credit and pay your bills on time." You get his drift.

His father, Walter, a truck driver who left Ben and Ben's mom when Ben was 3, hasn't played much of a role in his life. But Walter's parents, Marvin and Frances, sure have. Until his early teens, he'd spend the school months in Altavista with his mom, Patsy Moore, and all summer with Marvin and Frances, big NASCAR fans who followed the circuit.

"I think I disappointed Granny the most not going to college, and Mom second," he says.

His mom, eating dinner with Ben in his favorite restaurant, El Cazador, says she's still wondering why he didn't go to college. Hasn't he learned from her example?

Researchers would say that some kids never want to venture much farther along life's path than did the people they know and love best. Moore, a sweet woman of 42, doesn't understand this, as she explains to Ben over a taco salad that he helped her choose.

"You've seen me struggle from week to week," she says. "You can't want that."

No, he doesn't want that. But what does he want? More pressing still, what can he realistically expect to attain?

Ben has loved hot rods since he was a baby. He ran Matchbox cars over his grandmother's rug for hours at a time before he could walk, and as he got older he took up dirt bikes with a bunch of boys his age who lived in the country near his granny.

"We stayed outside all the time," he recalls.

As they got older, their little group carved a dirt track in woods of scrub pine and began racing cars and trucks. Ben's two best friends eventually acquired race cars and the gang started spending time at Big Daddy's South Boston Speedway, a NASCAR-sanctioned short track. Ben began to dream of becoming another Tony Stewart or a pit crew chief.

His teachers couldn't understand this fascination. He's such a good student, they'd sigh, as if you couldn't be interested in both math and Chevys, which happen

to have a serious relationship through mechanical engineering. He pulled down A's and B's in high school, taking calculus and Latin. But his teachers didn't foresee a career in engineering, they just seemed to see a car-crazy kid.

One problem they didn't count on: His friends' families all had more money than his, and to dress the way they did and do the things they did, Ben had to get a job.

So at age fifteen he found one at the Amoco Food Shop south of town. He stopped playing high school basketball and started stocking shelves. Making money became something of an obsession. Not big money, though. That would have required college.

When Ben's friends started talking about four-year colleges, Ben would go silent. When they took the SAT in their junior year, Ben didn't. "I thought to myself, where would I find the money?"

His mom encouraged him to try a two-year school, and so he got an application to Danville Community College. But his heart wasn't in it. The message of his guidance counselor and some of his teachers, he says, was that four-year colleges or universities were the only goal worth aiming for.

Those who hold bachelor's degrees have a hard time understanding why anyone wouldn't want one. At Ben's high school, administrators took pride in the fact that they send proportionately more graduates to four-year colleges than other schools in the area. They talked about former students who chose Columbia, Duke or the University of Virginia. For Ben, even \$8,000 to \$10,000 a year for in-state tuition, room and board didn't seem in the cards.

Other young men in Ben's position report similar experiences.

"They were good at giving out papers to kids going to college, but didn't pay no attention to students going to community college," says Jason Spence, who makes bulletproof vests on the night shift at BGF Industries. Jason and Ben both remember sitting through school assemblies where the same students won award after award, scholarship after scholarship—to four-year schools.

Ben's mother recognized she needed someone to help jump-start her son, but when she sought out school authorities, she says, she received only an offhand kind of attention. "I'd never done this before. They told me I could take Ben to Danville and Lynchburg. It wasn't very helpful."

Ben says he asked at school if, on career day, organizers could bring in someone who worked in the racing industry. With several local drivers around, it would have been easy to find someone, but nothing happened.

"You feel like kind of an outsider," he says.

He might not have felt that way a decade ago, because young men and young women here could still come right out of high school and go to work for family-run industries offering decent starting wages and chances for promotion. They didn't need higher education to enjoy job security at places like Lane Furniture, famous for its cedar chests. But once the Lane family lost direct control of the company in the late 1980s, things started to change. Gradually the manufacturing of cedar chests and dining sets moved to the cheap labor market of China, and fewer and

fewer workers filled the million-square-foot brick and wood complex that had dominated, indeed was, Altavista's skyline.

Last year, on Aug. 31, the last hope chest rolled off the assembly line. Other industries in the area started folding or cutting back, and by this past spring, the unemployment rate in central Virginia had hit a 10-year high. When a health supplements lab in town advertised for 40 new jobs, the cars lined up for interviews the first morning snaked for blocks through town.

Ben worried about his mother—she'd get a job, then be laid off under a last-hired, first-fired policy. "She's had a string of bad luck," he says.

Rather than head for college in the hope of improving their chances for a good job, Ben and other young men like him sought out jobs right away that offered health insurance, pension plans and savings programs.

Max Everhart, who lives around the corner from Ben, was one of them. Also a bright young man, he went to work at a machine bearings plant for \$10 an hour plus benefits. "It's a good job," Max says. "I'm lucky to have it."

Ben felt the same way when he got hired four months ago at Moore's. With 300 employees, it's one of the few companies in town that is growing. In its vast, open garage he bends, shapes and glues ducts with men like Smoky Hudson and Melvin Mann, who have been doing this kind of work for 30 years. He has learned to respect them.

These guys "really work for their money," he says. "They get their hands dirty."

T.O. Rowland, a 33-year-old welder at Moore's, tells Ben he earns as much money as his wife, a schoolteacher with a master's degree. This makes Ben wonder again: Why do people make such a big deal over college?

This is a question that resonates only in some quarters of the educational establishment. Ken Gray, the Penn State professor, says: "The real opportunities for youth are grossly distorted by colleges. Seventy-one percent of jobs don't require anything beyond a high school education."

But that doesn't mean people can't or shouldn't keep learning, acquiring new skills. In Altavista, Central Virginia Community College runs a satellite center in the former Lane executive building here. The idea is to reach people in high-layoff areas. Center director Linda Rodriguez says the response from older workers, especially older female workers, has been terrific.

But young men like Ben aren't coming in.

When she approached high school authorities about coming to visit classes, she was met with some of the same lack of enthusiasm for community college that Ben's mom did. School authorities said there was no time in the calendar for her visits—the students were too busy taking tests—and offered a one-time assembly instead.

One evening last winter, as Ben arrived at the Amoco store to start his shift, the store manager pushed a paper napkin over to him across the counter. "Someone left this for you," he said.

On the napkin next to the beef jerky, the name Apryl East was scribbled along with a phone number. Ben smiled, remembering the blonde with the cornflower-blue eyes and infectious laugh who had stopped by a couple of weeks earlier. She was after him. Sweet.

Eight months later, the blonde is riding with him in his Camaro as they return from a football game between his old high school and hers in nearby Gretna, where she led cheers and played piccolo in the marching band. Now she's a senior at Virginia Tech, planning on teaching elementary school.

Apryl swears that her best friend left the napkin without her knowledge. Ben doesn't know whether to believe her but he also doesn't care.

He eventually did call her, they went out to a movie. Now a wallet photo of the two of them is propped next to the odometer in his beloved car.

Increasingly, their conversation involves the years to come, and tonight is no exception. Ben ran into a guy at the game whose girlfriend is taking courses in motorcar management at a community college.

"That kinda makes me want to try it," he tells Apryl.

He could choose to stay on at Moore's and go to school at the same time, "maybe get a job on computers" at Moore's. He also has had a couple of conversations with NASCAR driver Stacy Compton. Perhaps, while he's still young, he should just chuck everything—except Apryl—and enlist Compton's help signing on with a racing crew. The sponsors and money for his own car might follow.

"I am so not sure," he says.

Apryl has accepted his confusion, for now.

"I'd like you to go to college," she tells Ben, "but it's okay with me if you don't." Her three best friends are all at different universities. But neither her dad, a supervisor at Moore's, nor her mom, a secretary in a printing shop, attended college, and they've been happy together. From what she has observed at home, college isn't crucial to the married life she dreams of.

What is important, she has told Ben gently, is that he get his behind in gear. He can always try one avenue and move to another if he doesn't like it. He's not yet 20, she reminds him.

Where will he find the motivation?

"From me," she says. She laughs but she's serious. "I'm going to get out of college, come back home and tell him to do it. I can be his little mentor."

A few hours before Ben picks her up for the game, over lunch at a downtown diner, she admits that when she learned that Ben wasn't in college, "I was shocked. I told my mom he didn't get the right kind of guidance."

So why does she stick with him? "He's got a great personality. He's funny." Unlike her previous boyfriend, "he treats me well. Oh, and another thing I like about him? My dad and he have bonded. He says when we have kids, he wants to be the kind of dad he never had."

She takes a breath, then adds, "Ben's everything I ever wanted." She laughs again, then cups her hand over her mouth as if she has revealed just a little too much.

**CRITICAL THINKING POINTS:** *After you've read*

1. Do you have any friends who are not in college? Is it difficult to explain to them what it is like? Why or why not?
2. If you could predict a future for Apryl and Ben, what might it be? Why?
3. If you were going to give Ben some advice, what would it be?

**SOME POSSIBILITIES FOR WRITING**

1. Compare and contrast your life now to the life you might have had if you had not gone to college.
2. In so many ways, Ben is a product of the environment and people around him. Imitating the "feature reporter" tone of this essay, write a similar one with you as the subject.
3. "No one's interested in the Bubbas," this essay asserts. Is that true? Why do you think the way you do?

# 8th Grade Final Exam

## Salina Kansas, 1895

---

Various tests from the days of yore occasionally make the rounds of Internet information loops. This exam was taken from the original document on file at the Smoky Valley Genealogical Society and Library in Salina, Kansas.

---

*What is the cost of a square farm at \$15 per acre, the distance around which is 640 rods?*

---

**CRITICAL THINKING POINTS:** *As you read*

1. How well do you think you would do on this test? Why?
2. Do you think your teachers could pass it? Why or why not?
3. Are there any questions where your answer might be correct for today but not for 1895? Why?



### **Grammar**

**(Time, one hour)**

1. Give nine rules for the use of Capital Letters.
2. Name the Parts of Speech and define those that have no modifications.
3. Define Verse, Stanza and Paragraph.
4. What are the Principal Parts of a verb? Give Principal Parts of do, lie, lay and run.
5. Define Case, Illustrate each Case.
6. What is Punctuation? Give rules for principal marks of Punctuation.
- 7–10. Write a composition of about 150 words and show therein that you understand the practical use of the rules of grammar.

### **Arithmetic**

**(Time, 1.25 hours)**

1. Name and define the Fundamental Rules of Arithmetic.
2. A wagon box is 2 ft. deep, 10 feet long, and 3 ft. wide. How many bushels of wheat will it hold?

3. If a load of wheat weighs 3942 lbs., what is it worth at 50 cts.per bu, deducting 1050 lbs. for tare?
4. District No.33 has a valuation of \$35,000. What is the necessary levy to carry on a school seven months at \$50 per month, and have \$104 for incidentals?
5. Find cost of 6720 lbs. coal at \$6.00 per ton.
6. Find the interest of \$512.60 for 8 months and 18 days at 7 percent.
7. What is the cost of 40 boards 12 inches wide and 16 ft. long at \$20 per inch?
8. Find bank discount on \$300 for 90 days (no grace) at 10 percent.
9. What is the cost of a square farm at \$15 per acre, the distance around which is 640 rods?
10. Write a Bank Check, a Promissory Note, and a Receipt.

### **U.S. History**

**(Time, 45 minutes)**

1. Give the epochs into which U.S. History is divided.
2. Give an account of the discovery of America by Columbus.
3. Relate the causes and results of the Revolutionary War.
4. Show the territorial growth of the United States.
5. Tell what you can of the history of Kansas.
6. Describe three of the most prominent battles of the Rebellion.
7. Who were the following: Morse, Whitney, Fulton, Bell, Lincoln, Penn, and Howe?
8. Name events connected with the following dates: 1607, 1620, 1800, 1849, and 1865.

### **Orthography**

**(Time, one hour)**

1. What is meant by the following: Alphabet, phonetic orthography, etymology, syllabication?
2. What are elementary sounds? How classified?
3. What are the following, and give examples of each: Trigraph, sub-vocals, diphthong, cognate letters, linguals?
4. Give four substitutes for caret 'u'.
5. Give two rules for spelling words with final 'e'. Name two exceptions under each rule.

## 46 CHAPTER ONE Where We're Coming From

6. Give two uses of silent letters in spelling. Illustrate each.
7. Define the following prefixes and use in connection with a word: Bi, dis, mis, pre, semi, post, non, inter, mono, super.
8. Mark diacritically and divide into syllables the following, and name the sign that indicates the sound: Card, ball, mercy, sir, odd, cell, rise, blood, fare, last.
9. Use the following correctly in sentences, Cite, site, sight, fane, fain, feign, vane, vain, vein, raze, raise, rays.
10. Write 10 words frequently mispronounced and indicate pronunciation by use of diacritical marks and by syllabication.

**Geography****(Time, one hour)**

1. What is climate? Upon what does climate depend?
2. How do you account for the extremes of climate in Kansas?
3. Of what use are rivers? Of what use is the ocean?
4. Describe the mountains of N.A.
5. Name and describe the following: Monrovia, Odessa, Denver, Manitoba, Hecla, Yukon, St. Helena, Juan Fernandez, Aspinwall and Orinoco.
6. Name and locate the principal trade centers of the U.S.
7. Name all the republics of Europe and give capital of each.
8. Why is the Atlantic Coast colder than the Pacific in the same latitude?
9. Describe the process by which the water of the ocean returns to the sources of rivers.
10. Describe the movements of the earth. Give inclination of the earth.

1895

**CRITICAL THINKING POINTS:** *After you've read*

1. Perhaps too easy an answer as to why much of this material is so foreign to you is that you were never "taught it." What are some of the reasons that is so?
2. Which sections of the test do you think you would do the best at? The worst? Why?
3. Which individual questions would be the hardest and the easiest for your class to answer? Why?

**SOME POSSIBILITIES FOR WRITING**

1. Design your own test (or section of a test) to give to students in 1895. Try not to “trick” anyone or to concentrate on objects or areas that would be unfamiliar to them simply because those subjects didn’t exist at the time.
2. What are some of the most difficult tests you have taken in school? What made them difficult? Were they fair or unfair tests? What made them fair or unfair?
3. If you were to design a fair but difficult test for a course you are taking this semester, what kinds of questions might you ask? Why?

## Further Suggestions for Writing— “Where We’re Coming From”

1. What do you expect to miss the most and least about high school and/or home? Why?
2. What kind of high school student were you? What traits would you like to keep as a college student? What would you like to change and why? What could you do to facilitate this?
3. Recall a time when you were thrust into a situation where you did not quite fit in. Describe your experience. How does it compare to starting college?
4. Recall some recent experience that was new, different, foreign, and perhaps even frightening. Reflect on what you learned or how your preconceptions changed. What idea(s) gradually dawned on you?
5. Think of some significant accomplishment in your life. Write about how curiosity, discipline, risk taking, initiative, and/or enthusiasm contributed to that accomplishment. Did other qualities contribute as well?
6. Think of a time when you lacked the verbal skills you needed to communicate effectively. It may have been conducting a college interview, writing a letter to a friend, or expressing your ideas in class. Write about how it made you feel and how you coped with the problem.
7. If you participated in any organized programs in high school, describe what that activity did or did not teach you.
8. Identify a talent you have or information you possess that is unique, such as tap dancing, scuba diving, or how to make maple syrup. Write at least a page about why this is important to you and why others should know about it.
9. Aesop says, “Never trust the advice of a man in difficulties.” No doubt you’ve received advice before coming to college. What makes for good advice? For bad? What kind of advice were you given? Which will be the easiest or the hardest for you to follow? Why?
10. Choose one of the pieces of advice in this chapter and try to convince someone that it is particularly good or bad advice.
11. Think of a problem with your high school, perhaps within a team, student organization, or group of friends. Propose some specific solutions for this problem.
12. Working in a group, examine how our society guides students to college. Did you feel that you received “the right kind of guidance”? Why or why not?
13. Some students seem eager to answer questions in class, to join the discussion, while others do not. How do you usually react in these situations? Why?
14. Interview two or three experienced students about their first year. What kinds of pressure and problems did they have? How did they handle them? Seek their advice on things you are concerned about.

15. Most people want to succeed at what they do, and college is no exception. Why and how much do you want to succeed at college? What does success at college mean for and to you?
16. What cocurricular activities do you plan to pursue in college? How do these activities relate to your academic or career plans?
17. Choose a campus organization you are thinking about joining and investigate it. Prepare a report on this organization to deliver to the class.
18. If you are new to the town where your school is located, or even if you are not, find something interesting, odd, or unique about it and present your findings to the class.
19. Go to an on-campus event of any kind that you have never experienced before, such as a symphony, a ballet, a poetry reading, or a debate. The possibilities are endless. With an open mind, summarize, describe, and/or evaluate it. Do you think you would ever attend another event of this kind? Why or why not?
20. Prepare for a crucial situation that is likely to happen to you as a college student this semester. Imagine exactly what might happen and write a description of it. Explain why this situation is likely to be so crucial. Include all the possible outcomes from the best to the worst, and figure out what you might do to prepare for the situation before it occurs.
21. Contrast “Saved” with “One Writer’s Beginnings.” What are some of the reasons these pieces display the differences they do? What support do you have for your position?
22. Find and watch Spike Lee’s 1992 film *Malcolm X*. How does seeing this film affect your reading of the selection “Saved”?
23. Research and write a brief report about the Dawes Act (or General Allotment Act) of 1887. How do the philosophical and political implications of this act further your understanding of Zitkala-Sa’s “Incurring My Mother’s Displeasure”?
24. Read *Be True to Your School* by Bob Greene (1988) and/or *Please Don’t Kill the Freshman: A Memoir* by Zoe Trope (2003) or similar high school memoirs. How does either of these high school experiences compare to yours or to each other? Why do you think that is so?
25. Read *Bullseye: Stories and Poems by Outstanding High School Writers* edited by Pawlak, Lourie, and Padgett (1995) and/or *Coming of Age in America: A Multicultural Anthology* edited by Frosch and Sotto (1995) and/or *Early Harvest: Student Writing from the Rural Readers Project* edited by Rachele Syme (2000) or similar collections. Which pieces seem to be the most honest to you? Why?
26. Read *Aquamarine Blue 5: Personal Stories of College Students with Autism* by Dawn Prince-Hughes (2002) and/or *Learning Outside the Lines: Two Ivy League Students with Learning Disabilities and ADHD Give You the Tools*

- to *Succeed* edited by Mooney and Cole (2002) and/or *Learning Disabilities and Life Stories* edited by Rodis, Garrod, and Boscardin (2002), or some similar collection. After reading these experiences from these points of view, what insights and/or new awareness do you have?
27. Read *Don't Tell Me What to Do, Just Send Money: The Essential Parenting Guide to the College Years* by Johnson and Schelhas-Miller (2000) and/or *Empty Nest . . . Full Heart: The Journey from Home to College* by Andrea Van Steenhouse (2002) and/or *Letting Go: A Parents' Guide to Understanding the College Years* by Coburn and Treeger (2003), or a similar guide for parents of college students. After reading these experiences from these points of view, what insights and/or new awareness do you have?
28. Choose at least three films from the list at the end of this chapter. What do they seem to say about high school? What support do you have for your position?
29. Choose one of your responses to "Some Possibilities for Writing" in this chapter and do further research on some aspect of the topic. Write about how and why this new information would have improved your previous effort.
30. Find the original text from which one of the selections in this chapter was taken. What led you to choose the text you did? How does reading more from the text affect your original reading? Is there more you would like to know about the text, its subject, or its author? Where might you find this further information?

## Selected Films—"Where We're Coming From"

- Almost Famous* (2000, USA). Cameron Crowe's semi-autobiographical tale of a high-school boy who is given the chance to write a story about an up-and-coming rock band as he accompanies it on their concert tour. Comedy/Drama. 122 min. R.
- American Graffiti* (1973, USA). The action takes place over one typical night for a group of high school graduates. Cowritten and directed by George Lucas (the auteur behind the *Star Wars* trilogy). Comedy. 110 min. PG.
- The Boy Who Could Fly* (1986, USA). After the death of her father, teenage Milly moves into a new neighborhood with her mother and brother. Amid the struggles to fit in at a new school in a new town, Milly befriends an autistic neighbor boy who believes he can fly and who changes the lives of everyone around him. Family/Fantasy. 114 min. PG.
- Boyz n the Hood* (1991, USA). The film follows the stories of childhood friends who grow up in a Los Angeles ghetto. Drama. 107 min. R.
- The Breakfast Club* (1985, USA). Forced to spend a Saturday detention in school, five disparate high school kids find that they have more in common than they ever realized. John Hughes directed. Comedy/Drama. 97 min. R.

- Breaking Away* (1979, USA). Oscar winner (for best original screenplay) about a teen just out of high school searching for his identity through bicycle racing. Filmed on location at Indiana University. Comedy/Drama. 100 min. PG.
- Can't Hardly Wait* (1998, USA). It's graduation night for a group of high school seniors, and each of them must face the future while learning to let go of the past. Comedy. 100 min. PG-13.
- Class* (1983, USA). Two prep school roommates come up against class differences and a salacious secret neither one is fully aware of. Comedy/Drama. 98 min. R.
- Crooklyn* (1994, USA). The life of a 1970s Brooklyn family told through the viewpoint of a nine-year old girl. Spike Lee's semi-autobiographical tale of his childhood, coauthored with his sister, Joie. Comedy/Drama. 115 min. PG-13.
- Do the Right Thing* (1989, USA). Spike Lee's film of racial tensions that finally boil over in the Bed-Stuy district of Brooklyn during the hottest day of the summer. Comedy/Drama/Crime. 120 min. R.
- Election* (1999, USA). An obnoxious overachiever running for student body president is opposed by an unlikely candidate egged on by a vindictive teacher. Comedy. 103 min. R.
- Elephant* (2003, USA). A violent incident rocks the students and faculty at a high school in Portland, Oregon. Drama. 81 min. R.
- Fame* (1980, USA). Follows four students through their years in the New York City High School for the Performing Arts. The kids fall into four clearly defined stereotypes: brazen, gay and hypersensitive, prickly, and shy. Drama. 134 min. R.
- Fast Times at Ridgmont High* (1982, USA). Based on the factual book by Cameron Crowe, who returned to high school as an adult masquerading as a student for a year. Featured the film debuts of Forest Whitaker, Eric Stoltz, Anthony Edwards, and Nicolas Cage. Comedy. 90 min. R.
- Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (1986, USA). Days away from graduation, Ferris and his best friends, Cameron and Sloane, explore Chicago on a day of hooky. John Hughes directed. Comedy. 102 min. PG-13.
- Finding Forrester*. (2000, USA). Jamal is a basketball player and gifted student whose writing talent is nurtured by a famously reclusive author, William Forrester (Sean Connery). 136 min. Drama. PG-13.
- Grease* (1978, USA). John Travolta stars in this musical where Greasers and Goody-Goodies sing and dance their way through broken hearts, drag races, and phantom pregnancies at 1950s Rydell High School. Comedy/Musical. 110 min. PG.
- Heathers* (1989, USA). In a half-hearted attempt at popularity, Veronica mixes with popular girls Heather I, II, and III until she meets the darkly rebellious Jason Dean, who shows her that the flip side to popularity can be murder. Dark Comedy. 102 min. R.
- Hoop Dreams* (1994, USA). Recruited to attend an elite high school by professional basketball player Isaiah Thomas, Arthur Agee and William Gates are filmed for nearly five years as they struggle through successes and failures on their way to college. Documentary. 170 min. PG-13.

- Hoosiers* (1986, USA). A coach with a dark past and the town drunk pair up to train a small-town high-school basketball team in Indiana for the state championships. Drama. 115 min. PG.
- Kids* (1995, USA). A young skater sets out to deflower as many virgins as possible, but things go badly when one gets tested for HIV. Drama. 91 min. R.
- Malcolm X* (1992, USA). A biopic of the controversial and influential Black Nationalist leader. Directed by Spike Lee. Drama. 209 min. R.
- Mystic Pizza* (1988, USA). Three young women of blue-collar Portuguese descent work in a pizzeria in the coastal town of Mystic, Connecticut, and one dreams of going to Yale. Romantic comedy. 104 min. R.
- Not Another Teen Movie* (2001, USA). A send-up of teen movies from the past two decades. The film plays with stereotypes of stereotypes and mixes stock plots into one incomprehensible storyline—and it all takes place at John Hughes High School. Comedy. 89 min. R.
- O* (2001, USA). An update of *Othello* with a teen cast, taking place in a white prep boarding school in the South. The only black student, Odin, is the star basketball player. Drama. 95 min. R.
- October Sky* (1999, USA). Based on the memoir *Rocket Boys* by Homer H. Hickam Jr., this true story begins in 1957 with the Soviet Union's historic launch of the Sputnik satellite. Homer sees Sputnik as his cue to pursue a fascination with rocketry, but winning the science fair is his only ticket to college and out of life in a West Virginia coal-mining town. Drama. 108 min. PG.
- Orange County* (2002, USA). An Orange County teen and aspiring writer yearns for admission to Stanford. Comedy. 82 min. PG-13.
- The Outsiders* (1983, USA). Based upon S.E. Hinton's popular novel, *The Outsiders* follows the lives of a group of high-school-aged boys who sit on the margins of society. Drama. 91 min. PG.
- Perfect Score* (2004, USA). Six high school seniors decide to break into the Princeton Testing Center so they can steal the answers to their upcoming SAT tests and all get perfect scores. 92 min. PG-13.
- A Raisin in the Sun* (1961, USA). On the brink of the Civil Rights movement, an impoverished African-American family unexpectedly receives a small windfall, enough money to make someone's dreams come true. Beneatha dreams of going to medical school, while her father dreams of opening his own business, and her grandmother dreams of owning her own home in an integrated neighborhood. Based on the groundbreaking play by Lorraine Hansberry. Drama. 128 min. N/R.
- Rebel Without a Cause* (1955, USA). A James Dean classic. Dean stars as a troubled teen who comes to a new town hoping to start over and finds both friends and enemies. Drama. 111 min. N/R.
- Risky Business* (1983, USA). With his parents out of town, entrepreneurial Tom Cruise decides to spend the time waiting to hear from colleges dancing in his underwear and organizing a prostitution ring. By the time he gets to college, he's a wiser man. Comedy. 99 min. R.

- Rushmore* (1999, USA). The king of Rushmore prep school is put on academic probation. Comedy. 133 min. R.
- Say Anything . . .* (1989, USA). A young kickboxer falls for the smart girl. She's college bound; he's maybe not. Comedy/Drama. 89 min. PG-13.
- Sixteen Candles* (1984, USA). Samantha Baker's angst-ridden love-life, as well as her sixteenth birthday, is lost in the uproar caused by her older sister's wedding. Comedy/Drama. 93 min. PG.
- Thirteen* (2003, USA). A thirteen-year-old girl's relationship with her mother is put to the test as she discovers drugs, sex, and petty crime in the company of her cool but troubled best friend. Drama. 100 min. R.
- Valley Girl* (1983, USA). A Valley Girl falls for a Hollywood punk (played by Nicholas Cage) and struggles to do the right thing despite what her trendy, snobby friends think. Comedy. 95 min. R.
- Weird Science* (1985, USA). Two high-school science nerds "create" the perfect woman, who proceeds to turn their lives upside down. Sci-Fi/Fantasy/Comedy. 94 min. PG-13.

For critical thinking points on these films, see Appendix (p.281).

