

### My Life On My Shoulders

My backpack is in the shape of a tombstone. It represents the death of the old me, and the rebirth of the new me. It is grey and black, like the ominous sky in the spring during a really bad thunderstorm. My backpack is durable like the steel structure of a car, and rugged like my childhood sneakers. My backpack has many zippers that hold the responsibility of keeping everything together, just like I have to hold my life together. There are many compartments in my backpack, which can be compared to the many places I lived. My backpack represents my life within the last year: a new beginning, becoming independent, and gaining the motivation to succeed.

My life within the last year has been very difficult, and unfortunate occurrences forced me to start a new life with nothing but my backpack and its contents. On June 8, 2009, my mother got fed up with my irresponsibility and lack of ambition. She made the ultimate decision to kick me out the house. Only eighteen and having no idea about the difficulties of life, I grabbed my backpack, which had little space, and tried to make decisions about the essential personal items I had to bring with me to make the best of my situation. In this backpack I packed the most important items first. I packed my clothes, items of personal hygiene, my laptop, and

important documents like my birth certificate, passport, and bank account information. My backpack was very important to me because of the circumstances I was in. It held all my personal belongings and made me realize the magnitude of making important decisions about what vital things I needed to bring with me for survival, and what things I needed to do to turn my life around.

I was on my own and suddenly reality hit me like a deer jumping in front of a car. It was time for me to mature and become independent. I began to realize that I had nowhere to go and that I had to take care of myself. I no longer had my mother by my side to support me. It was crucial for me to get a job so that I could pay for my cell phone, my food, and a place for me to live. As of June 8<sup>th</sup> 2009 I lived at my friends Gage's, my girlfriends, and the most recent place my friend Trevor's family farm. Without having a stable place to live until two months ago, I was no longer able to take things for granted. For example having a place to call "home", having your own room with all the amenities like a bed, closet, and a television are things I now have a strong appreciation for. Having nothing but my backpack and being kicked out my house helped me become more independent. I got a job to pay my cell phone bill, to pay my rent, and to save money so I could go back to school and further my education.

After graduating high school I did nothing with my life for over a year and a half. I had been kicked out my house, didn't have a stable place to live, and worked at a yogurt shop. I didn't want to live my life moving from house to house not knowing if I would ever have a stable place to live. I always convinced myself that school is not for me, and that if I were to go to college I would fail miserably and

never succeed in life. One day I found a piece of paper crumbled up in a ball, and stuffed in the bottom of my backpack. The paper was a biology test from high school that I received a 90 percent on. When I saw this I realized that school wasn't so bad and I became motivated to succeed in college. Within the next few weeks of discovering this test, I went to Montgomery College and took my Accuplacer test. I placed in college level English, but didn't do as well on the math, and placed in a non-credited level class. After seeing that I placed in a college level class, it changed my attitude forever. I no longer think of myself as being worthless and now I see more opportunities in my future. I am currently a student at Montgomery College and quit my job at the yogurt shop. I found a better paying job working for my friend's parents carpet-cleaning company, *Carpet Concepts*. If it wasn't for my backpack, I never would have found this test and I still would have thought of myself as worthless and I would still be unmotivated to further my education.

My backpack has much more meaning than just a bag that holds my personal items. Getting kicked out of my house, and having nothing but my backpack, forced me to make many changes in my life. I started a new life for myself working and going to school. I am proud to say that I worked for everything I own, and that gives me a sense of achievement. I buy my own food, I pay for my own cell phone bill, I pay my own rent, and I paid for my own education. My backpack has opened my eyes and now I can finally say "it has literally changed my life". I will never look at a backpack the same way due to the past year of my life and everything it has done for me.

# ENGLISH 101: TECHNIQUES OF READING AND WRITING

Instructor: Jill Kronstadt

## TAKE-HOME ESSAY 1: OBJECT AND IDENTITY

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- Due:** THREE copies of your rough draft due Thursday, 2/18  
Revised draft and cover letter due Tuesday, 2/23
- Pages:** 3 minimum, 5 maximum
- Format:** MLA document format (see *Rules for Writers* for a refresher)
- Weight:**
- **15% of your total course grade for the revised draft and cover letter** (final drafts not accepted without cover letter)
- Purposes:** This assignment achieves these course outcomes from the syllabus (some are combined to save space):
- Use brainstorming and refining processes to select an appropriate topic
  - Use a thesis as an organizing principle for an essay and for body paragraphs
  - Implement a rhetorical strategy appropriate for audience and purpose
  - Revise to incorporate feedback from fellow students and your instructor
  - Provide effective peer feedback
  - Write essays that demonstrate an awareness of proper grammar and have few errors in mechanics
  - Write an essay of 3 pages or more
- Assignment:** Choose a possession you have that reflects a meaningful aspect of your individual identity - something about you that may not be obvious to others. For the essay, you will begin with a physical description of the object; write a thesis statement that expresses what the object shows about you; develop the idea in your thesis with detailed, specific body paragraphs; and conclude with a paragraph that gets across why these insights about you matter.
- Tips:**
- Carefully select an object that gives you something meaningful to write about.
  - Make sure you can say something about your object that goes beyond the obvious. "My car shows that I like cars" or "My red lipstick expresses my fun personality" are not especially interesting. On the other hand, if you write about a series of memories about your car or the different layers or facets of yourself expressed by lipstick, your approach will be much more compelling for readers.
  - Show the skills (i.e., introduction & conclusion strategies) we've covered in class.
  - Make sure you understand exactly what I'm looking for – if you're not sure, ask for more help or feedback.
  - See me or visit the Writing Center for grammar help *before* you submit a revision.

**Cover letter:** When you revise and submit your draft for a grade, you need to attach a cover letter to the front, or your revision will not be accepted. Your letter should be addressed directly to me (see *RFW* for business letter format) and needs to answer these questions:

1. What's the thesis of your essay?
2. What is your favorite part of this essay, and why?
3. What is your favorite sentence of this essay, and why?
4. What feedback that you've received on this essay did you decide to use? What didn't you use, and why?
5. To what parts of your revision do you especially want a response? What questions do you have about your essay that you would like me to answer in my feedback?

**Evaluation:** Here is what I want to see you accomplish successfully in your revised essay:

**Topic and thesis:**

- You have selected a topic that is appropriate for purpose and audience and that gives you an opportunity to express your individuality.
- You have written an introduction that uses strategies we have worked on in class (these may be different than what you were taught in previous classes).
- You have a clear, compelling thesis at the end of your introduction paragraph. Your thesis makes a point that goes beyond the obvious.

**Content:**

- You demonstrate the ability to describe your object using sensory detail.
- You use specific, concrete examples in all your body paragraphs.
- You make substantial global revisions to your original rough draft.

**Structure and organization:**

- All your paragraphs have topic sentences that show a meaningful connection to the thesis statement.
- You connect the details in your paragraphs with the topic sentences and the thesis statement.
- You have a conclusion paragraph that shows in some way why your essay matters – again, this may be different for some of you who have been taught just to summarize what you've already said.

**Language and audience:**

- Your tone and word choice are the appropriate register for a college audience.
- You show control of sentence structure, grammar, punctuation, spelling, mechanics, and format.