

English

Paul McCormack

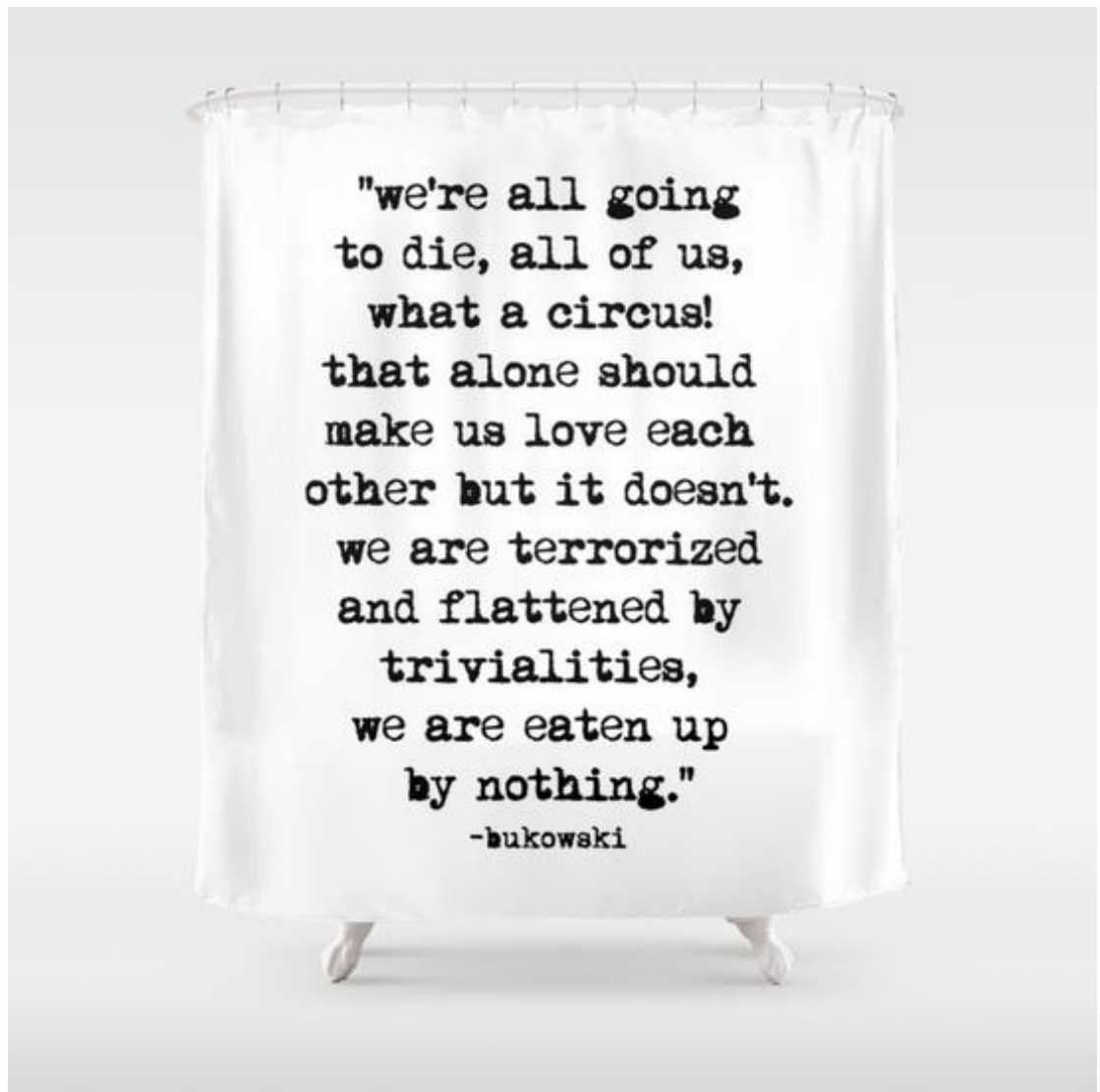
Higher Level

2020-21

Personal Essay



Personal Essay



2017 Exam

In TEXT 3, Paul Auster describes a moment of revelation he experienced one Saturday morning when he was six years old.

Write a personal essay in which you reflect on moments of insight and revelation you have experienced.

Marking Scheme Guidelines for this Composition Title

- ✓ Allow for a variety of approaches to the task.
- ✓ What do you think this means?

- ✓ Mark ex 100 by reference to the criteria for assessment.
- ✓ P: Focus – a personal essay in which the candidate **reflects** on moments of insight and revelation he/she has experienced
- ✓ understanding of genre – the effective use of some elements of personal writing e.g.

a. reflective insights

What do you think this means?

b. confessional tone

What do you think this means?

c. individual observation

What do you think this means?

d. use of personal pronoun

What do you think this means?

e. anecdotes, etc.

What do you think this means?

f. originality and freshness, etc.

What do you think this means?

- ✓ C: The extent to which the personal approach is successfully **sustained and developed**

What do you think this means?

- ✓ Effective shaping of the essay **sequencing** and **management of ideas**, etc.

What do you think this means?

- ✓ L: Quality and control of language

What do you think this means?

OP

What are the requirements of an effective OP?

1.

2.

3.

4.

Killer Opening Lines

“It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.”

— Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*

“It was a pleasure to burn.”

— Ray Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451*

“There are only two kinds of people in our town. *The stupid and the stuck.*”

— Kami Garcia, *Beautiful Creature*

OP Example

Life is about learning, right? I've read enough of Aesop's fables to understand that. The boy who cried wolf, the tortoise and the hare, the fox and the crow – I have a heightened awareness of the lessons and moments of revelation that are a part of the life experience. The teenage years have been difficult, and I feel I have become a little more aware of the world around me. I have experienced moments of insight and revelation that have played an important role in shaping the person I am, and the relationships I have. This is particularly the case with my father, a man I love profoundly, and the source of probably the most startling moment of insight I have yet experienced.

Comments

Opening Paragraph to 'Ham on Rye', by Charles Bukowski

The first thing I remember is being under something. It was a table, I saw a table leg, I saw the legs of the people, and a portion of the tablecloth hanging down. It was dark under there, I liked being under there. It must have been in Germany. I must have been between one and two years old. It was 1922. I felt good under the table. Nobody seemed to know that I was there. There was sunlight upon the rug and on the legs of the people. I liked the sunlight. The legs of the people were not interesting, not like the tablecloth which hung down, not like the table leg, not like the sunlight.

BP#1 – a&b

I suppose I must have been seventeen, maybe sixteen – old enough that I was sure he wouldn't raise his hand to me. I know I was hungover. We went to the GAA club every Friday night no matter what, so, at that stage of my life, you could bet I'd be raw and wrecked on a Saturday morning. He didn't drink, never had, and was disgusted to see me fall into the kitchen, mutter hellos and dig for food. He took a knife up and started waving it at me, raving and ranting and talking about waste and wasters. I probably muttered something offensive – I don't remember, but that was my default, so, probably. Anyway, the knife was up under my chin and the spit was flying from his mouth and I was certain I was going to get hurt.

Of course, nothing happened. He was a good man, I was his son. And that day lives with me. What must I have been like? How disappointing. How frustrating for a man who wanted to work, but who was unable to, debilitated as he was by sickness, to watch his boy waste his life drinking and dossing. I thank him for that every day. He taught me he was as vulnerable as I was. Later that day I went into where he was sitting watching Match of the Day. 'Good game' I said, after a while. 'Yeah' he said. And then. 'Sorry'. 'Yeah, me too.' Golden.

246 words

Comments

Extract from 'The Bell Jar' – Sylvia Plath

"I saw my life branching out before me like the green fig tree in the story. From the tip of every branch, like a fat purple fig, a wonderful future beckoned and winked. One fig was a husband and a happy home and children, and another fig was a famous poet and another fig was a brilliant professor, and another fig was Ee Gee, the amazing editor, and another fig was Europe and Africa and South America, and another fig was Constantin and Socrates and Attila and a pack of other lovers with queer names and offbeat professions, and another fig was an Olympic lady crew champion, and beyond and above these figs were many more figs I couldn't quite make out. I saw myself sitting in the crotch of this fig tree, starving to death, just because I couldn't make up my mind which of the figs I would choose. I wanted each and every one of them, but choosing one meant losing all the rest, and, as I sat there, unable to decide, the figs began to wrinkle and go black, and, one by one, they plopped to the ground at my feet."

BP#2 a&b

My dad was a soldier, and I grew up surrounded by books about the second world war, and in particular the amazing story of Britain's '*against all-odds*' survival in the first two vital years. As a fifteen year old, I first read about Bletchley Park and Alan Turing and the BOMB and I got totally caught up in the romance of these people, specialist mathematicians, far from the bloody battlefield, saving countless lives through their ingenuity and intelligence. I probably built up a romanticized vision of the story, and that I why I was so shocked and saddened when I read about Turing's lonely death by suicide in the early 1950s.

How could a man who had played such a part in defeating fascism, a man whose work is recognized as playing a powerful role in the development of modern information technology, have been brought to such a low point? Because of his sexuality? Because of the shame he was forced to feel for being who he was? The story of Turing's life and death stays with me. I realized something about the cold cruelty of the world. I understand how we are all capable of achieving remarkable things, and I also understood how the petty prejudices and bias of others can have a powerful and destructive impact on even the greatest of minds. The story of Alan Turing, I feel, is a story that should be known to all kids growing up in schools, and not just because of the greatness he achieved, but because of the insight his tragic death gives into the cruelty and loneliness that can be and is a part of our lives.

Comments

My earliest memory is of imagining I was someone else—imagining that I was, in fact, the Ringling Brothers Circus Strongboy. This was at my Aunt Ethelyn and Uncle Oren’s house in Durham, Maine. My aunt remembers this quite clearly, and says I was two and a half or maybe three years old. I had found a cement cinderblock in a corner of the garage and had managed to pick it up. I carried it slowly across the garage’s smooth cement floor, except in my mind I was dressed in an animal skin singlet (probably a leopard skin) and carrying the cinderblock across the center ring. The vast crowd was silent. A brilliant blue-white spotlight marked my remarkable progress. Their wondering faces told the story: never had they seen such an incredibly strong kid. “And he’s only two!” someone muttered in disbelief.

Extract
from ‘On
Writing’, a
Memoir by
Stephen
King

BP#3

I probably had my first, painful insight into that cruelty when Christopher Maguire died. He was quiet, kept to himself, never really mixed. I don’t remember paying much attention to him, busy as I was getting on with whatever it was I though was important between the ages of 6 and 12. When we in 3rd year in secondary school he died. We were never told exactly how but the rumour was that he committed suicide. I was so upset and couldn’t explain to my da why. He is a real talker, my da. Thinks it is important to vent those feelings, but this one, when Christopher died, a kid I hardly knew, really got to me. I have no idea why, but he has played a bigger part in my life since his death than he did when he was alive. I guess I probably remember the incident and the time so vividly because it was the first time I came into contact with how cruel life can be. I probably grew up a little. I wish I hadn’t.

Comments

BP#4

Christopher's death means I have a heightened awareness of the fragility of life, and that was powerfully brought home to me during the cold snap last January. I cycle to school, and one Wednesday morning, I was moving through traffic, ready to shoot up the Luas track, when I hit ice. I made the mistake of pulling the brake and the back end of my bike, which had extra weight because my schoolbag was there, slid away from under me. I ended up on the road looking up at the tyre of a bus heading for my head. I remember thinking what an odd place it was to die, crossing the Luas track outside Heuston Station. The bus driver, beautiful woman that she was, was able to stop in time and my brush with death was probably not as dramatic as I remember it, but it stayed with me nevertheless. It made me think about how much I love my ma, who I fight with all the time, because, well, because she's my ma. It made me think about how fragile things really are, and it certainly made me think about being more careful when cycling in the ice.

Comments

BP#5

As a kid I read a lot. I think it is either in you to read or not, and as I was afflicted by the kind of asthma attacks that make you feel like you are breathing through the head of a pin, the outside world, running around and doing all of the things my sisters and brothers did was often off-limits for me. So, I read. A lot. I read the Chronicles of Narnia, and the Enid Blyton novels, I read adventure and spy stories my dad left lying around the house, I read newspapers and I read my sisters' fashion magazines. However, I don't think a book really made an impact on me until I was 14 and Mary Buggle, the teacher who saved me, handed me S.E Hinton's novel '*The Outsiders*'. Have you read it? If not, you should. The story, of Ponyboy and the Greasers and teenage angst and avoidable tragedy, is so well told.

However, it wasn't the story that struck me, that offered me my moment of insight. It was the fact that Hinton was 15 years old when she wrote the novel. I didn't believe it at first. I went and checked and, sure enough, it was true. This remarkable, timeless book was written by a kid. I had always believed I was too young to achieve, too limited in my experiences to do anything worthwhile – I'd have to get a good leaving cert, and a degree, forge a career, and follow the well-worn path. Reading Hinton's novel gave me an understanding that this was nonsense. It offered me a valuable insight – I need not be held back by who I was, what age I was, where I come from or how I spoke. A bit of talent and a lot of energy, and achievement is possible.

Comments

What are the requirements of an effective CP?

1.

2.

CP

Improvised CP

I am 18 years old, and here I am sitting this hall, reflecting on the past and looking forward to the future. Life is about learning, and all of the moments of insight and revelation I have experienced have contributed to the person I am today. I look forward to the many similar moments that I will no doubt experience in the adult world, as I leave school behind.

Past Examination Questions

2019 Exam

Write a personal essay in which you reflect on what feeds your imagination.

Write a personal essay in which you reflect on some of the places that have helped to shape and define you, and the significance of those places in your life.

2018 Exam

Write a personal essay reflecting on what you perceive to be the pleasures particular to youth.

Write a personal essay in which you reflect on the value of personal space and quietness in the modern world.

2016 Exam

Write a personal essay in which you reflect on the “useless clutter” that is a feature of many aspects of our lives.

2015 Exam

Write a personal essay about your response to an ending, or endings, in your life that you consider significant.

2014 Exam

Write a personal essay about one or more moments of uncertainty you have experienced.

2013 Exam

Write a personal essay in which you explore the storytelling evident in music and song and its impact on you as a listener.

2012 Exam

Write a personal essay on what you consider to be the marvels of today’s world.

2011 Exam

Write a personal essay about your clothes, what they mean to you and what they say about you.

2010 Exam

Write a personal essay about your understanding of freedom and why you think it is important.