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Introduction

As student editor, it is my honor to present this year’s edition of Hoi Polloi, Gainesville College’s anthology of student essays. I am proud to have been a part of this special project that displays the best of the Gainesville College student body’s creativity, talent, and knowledge of the world around them. And, just as everyone involved in producing the magazine has experienced, it is my hope that this issue will inspire everyone who reads it to write, create, and dream.

Thanks to everyone for their contributions to all aspects of this year’s issue of Hoi Polloi. First, thanks to the student writers and to the faculty members who encouraged their students to participate and share their work and talents so that they could be appreciated by others. Second, thanks to the student and faculty editorial boards who helped put together and polish the magazine. Special thanks go to Kristin Bruchey for her imaginative cover design. Finally, thanks and farewell to Dr. Bob Croft, who, after ten years’ service to the publication, will be turning over the reins to a new faculty advisor next year.

All Gainesville College students interested in submitting essays to next year’s Hoi Polloi and to the Gainesville College Writing Contest please ask your English instructor for further information and due dates.

Thanks again to all, and enjoy this year’s edition of Hoi Polloi.

Brittany Castro
Editor
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Explication of Sylvia Plath’s “Mirror”
Tim Gibson

Since the creation of mirrors, humans have formed a love/hate relationship with these truth-tellers. Mirrors are gods to some and bitter enemies to others. One glance in a mirror can determine a person’s mood for a day. Reflections in the mirror can make one person feel happy, while another person may feel depressed. People may avoid mirrors because they do not want to see the truth about their lives. In Sylvia Plath’s “Mirror,” the speaker of the poem is none other than a trustworthy mirror. This looking glass is like many others—except for one thing: it tells of the trials related to a truth-teller. Although originally intended for good, mirrors sometimes reflect the grotesque side of people rather than the appealing or alluring. As long as mirrors exist, however, they will tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, no matter how harsh that truth might be.

In the first stanza of “Mirror,” Sylvia Plath personifies a mirror with great detail. In lines one and two its attributes are described: “I am silver and exact. I have no preconceptions. Whatever I see I swallow immediately.” What you see in the mirror is what you get. In lines six and seven the mirror says, “Most of my time I meditate on the opposite wall. It is pink with speckles.” The mirror may be talking about the mundane details of life, the pure consistency of its existence. In lines seven and eight the mirror gives proof of perseverance. With a sense of longing it says of the wall: “I have looked at it so long I think it has become a part of my heart.”

Mirrors are neither moved by emotion nor persuaded by human will. Mirrors are the same today as they were yesterday. The speaker emphasizes this point in lines three and four by saying, “Just as it is, unmisted by love or dislike. I am not cruel, only truthful.” At first glance, a mirror may seem like an insignificant piece of furniture. However, the speaker of “Mirror” begs to differ. In line five the mirror tries to influence the reader by describing itself as “the eye of a little god, four cornered.” It seems a bit arrogant for a piece of furniture to call itself “the eye of a little god.” Unfortunately, mirrors are more like little gods than some people would like to admit.

In the second stanza of “Mirror,” a key transition occurs as the mirror becomes a lake. The lake serves as a reflective place for the woman in the poem. When people lose their identity, they sometimes search for who they really are in their reflections. Lines ten and eleven confirm this concept when the water reveals, “Now a woman bends over me, searching for who she really is.” When searching for the truth, people may sometimes overlook the glaring holes in their character. Some people may even attempt to compensate for their personality defects by focusing on physical appearances. The speaker illustrates this point with great accuracy in line twelve by asserting, “Then she turns to those liars, the candles or the moon.” Other people, success, achievements, or possessions may be just a few of the distractions one looks to for self-significance. False reflections are easy to gaze upon when a person is not ready to see an accurate representation of his or her self.

As one can see, reflections, whether from mirrors or lakes, are accurate images of the onlookers. But these reflected images are not always what people want to see. In order to improve inner and outer flaws, one must reflect upon his or her true image from time to time. Plath said it best in lines seventeen and eighteen: “In me she drowned a young girl, and in me
an old woman rises toward her day after day, like a terrible fish.” Through reflection one can learn much about his or her inner self. And, although it is sometimes difficult to behold such an accurate view of one’s true self, this type of self-reflection is the key to personal growth.
Play Review: Anything Goes
Amanda Disharoon

The Gainesville Theater Alliance’s production of Anything Goes contains a number of compelling factors. With confident and talented lead actors, an upbeat musical selection, and creative stage design, this play exquisitely personifies the script written by Guy Bolton, et al. The enthusiasm radiating from the stage captured my attention, and the overall experience left me humming to the catchy tunes as I exited the Hosch Theater with a spring in my step. However, the performance was not without flaw. The love story portrayed throughout the plot was ridiculously predictable.

The plot begins in a smoky little bar in New York, with singer Reno Sweeney (Christina Owens) serenading her love interest, Billy Crocker (Corey Greenan). Billy, however, is madly in love with Hope Harcourt (Stephanie Ferguson), an aristocratic young lady he’s known for only a day. Unfortunately for Billy, Hope is engaged to Lord Evelyn Oakleigh (Michael McCracken), a quirky Englishman obsessed with American culture. The knowledge of this union reaches Billy as he goes to bid his boss, Elisha Whitney (Ricki Lee Hagen), farewell. Elisha is on a voyage to London; and it just so happens that Hope, accompanied by Lord Evelyn and her overbearing mother, Evangeline Harcourt (Gay H. Hammond), is also conveniently destined to sail on this cruise ship. Risking his career to follow his heart, Billy sneaks on board the ocean liner with desire fogging his sense of logic. Thus, the play is set to full throttle, and the web continues to tangle with some obvious twists. Throw in a couple of “angels,” along with public enemy number thirteen, a screwy priest, and redeemed Chinese gamblers, and the title becomes quite appropriate: Anything Goes.

The actors that aptly portray the wacky characters presented in Anything Goes bring life to the performance. For example, the role of Reno Sweeney is played brilliantly by Christina Owens. From her incredible singing voice to the iridescent costumes she adorns, Christina perfectly embodies her character. She dominates the stage with brilliance and class, leaving the audience enraptured by her every move and anticipating her next appearance. Such talented acting truly contributes to the overall success of the production, and Corey Greenan adds his touch to Owens’s spell beautifully. Portraying the love-blinded and determined character of Billy Crocker, Greenan brings almost as much zeal to the stage as Owens. His movements are vivacious while his voice is strong and clear. Greenan’s versatility is exceptional as all the comical disasters wend their way into Billy’s life. This flexibility allows him to work perfectly beside Owens, and with the combination of their talents, the stage is absolutely bursting with life.

The musical endeavors of Cole Porter, composer of the music and lyrics for Anything Goes, are marvelously expressed in the Gainesville Theater Alliance’s production. The duet Owens and Greenan perform of “You’re the Top” would make Porter proud, just as it manages to get the audience jumping. The band doesn’t miss a beat either, driving the smoothly flowing melody in accompaniment to the actors’ singing. “Blow, Gabriel, Blow” is amazingly performed by both cast and band, filling the theater with the jiving gospel-like sound of trumpets, horns, and angelic voices imbued with such vigor that everyone will be inspired to get up and dance.
Such energy was enhanced by the colorful backdrops and props employed on stage. The set design actually sparkled, despite the less than professional lighting techniques. It looked as though an enormous glitter bomb had exploded in the midst of all the action, covering the entire stage in gold dust. The cruise ship was equipped with what appeared to be genuine articles of furniture, and the scene changes were so nimble that the depressing cellar was transformed into a vibrant front deck within seconds. While the actors and music provided the majority of the production’s success, the background certainly contributed as well.

From stage design, to the musical score, to the talented actors, the Gainesville Theater Alliance’s production of *Anything Goes* is truly a worthwhile experience. I would recommend this spectacular performance to any teenager or adult. Such an invigorating act is sure to get people of every age jumping and jiving with a sailor’s smile set upon their faces. Audiences will definitely “get a kick” out of *Anything Goes*. 
Alienation in *The Sun Also Rises*
*Aba Degrant-Hanson*

Alienation. This is not a word frequently used in most people's daily discourse. Since humans the world over experience alienation (otherwise known as loneliness) in one form or another, this word can bring to mind many painful images. For example, kindergarteners become upset if no one else wants to play with them. Teenagers and young adults feel the pain of being excluded from the “popular crowd.” Perhaps adults marry each other not just because they are in love, but also because they cannot bear the thought of living life alone. Considering these examples, one can see that alienation is by no means a pleasant experience. One may ask the question: If alienation is such a terrible thing, what causes people to experience it?

Ernest Hemingway addresses the subject of alienation in his novel *The Sun Also Rises*. Through Robert Cohn, one of the main characters, Hemingway describes how and why a person may become alienated from a group or even a society. The author leaves room for readers to speculate about the significance of alienation, specifically from Robert Cohn’s point of view. After reading the book, a reader may ask the following questions: How does alienation start? Should the isolated person be pitied? And, what lessons can a 21st century human learn from the alienation of a fictitious character? A thorough study of Robert Cohn’s alienation may help answer these questions.

Originally, Robert Cohn is an accepted member of the circle of expatriates the novel focuses on. Jake Barnes, narrator and protagonist, describes Cohn as his “tennis buddy.” Cohn is somewhat set apart from the rest because of his Jewish heritage, but no one holds this detail against him until his alienation becomes evident. Other seemingly insignificant differences include the following: unlike his friends, Cohn does not drink heavily; he goes to bed early; he reads a great deal and entertains fantastic ideas; and he takes offense much too easily. At first, however, these acts simply make Cohn the target of playful jokes among the group.

Cohn’s alienation begins to accelerate when he meets Brett Ashley, the woman whom Jake Barnes is in love with. Immediately smitten with Brett’s attractive figure and vivacious personality, Cohn eventually persuades her to have an affair with him in San Sebastian, Spain. Afterwards, Brett carelessly puts the event out of mind. Cohn, however, cannot. He insists on bragging about the affair, consequently evoking Jake’s envy. For Jake, once jealousy enters the equation, it is as if those “insignificant” differences mentioned earlier are significant enough to render Cohn unworthy of Brett Ashley. And, since Jake is the leader of the group, his growing envy serves to estrange Cohn even more.

During the bullfight in Pamplona, Spain, Cohn’s alienation continues, in part because of his own behavior, and in part because of a growing animosity towards him from the rest of the group. Cohn brags about the affair in San Sebastian, and he tags Brett’s heels. He stares at her and even spies on her, even though she makes it perfectly clear that she does not want him around. This conduct creates a heavy tension among the group. Brett comes to despise Cohn’s obsessive, adolescent behavior; Bill and Mike (the other two men in the group) begin drinking harder than ever and grow increasingly rude towards Cohn. Jake Barnes starts to loathe his friend and admits such feelings early in the novel.
Inevitably, this tension and alienation reach a climax, which comes in chapter seventeen. After Jake leaves Brett with Pedro Romero, a handsome young matador, Cohn can no longer control himself. In an insane rage, he demands to know her whereabouts. Then, he knocks both Jake and Mike (Brett’s fiancé) senseless. Without thinking, Cohn rushes off blindly in search of Brett. Once he finds her (with Romero), Cohn rushes at the young Spaniard, knocking him down. This scene provides the climax of the story because unlike Jake or Mike, Romero gets back up onto his feet every time Cohn knocks him down, thus ultimately proving himself the superior man and the winner of the fight. After this final self-inflicted alienation, Robert Cohn leaves Pamplona and all of his former hopes and friends presumably forever, because the reader hears no more about him.

There is more to Cohn’s story than just the fact of his alienation. The story also teaches a sort of lesson about societal codes and friendships within that society. Robert Cohn is alienated because his actions do not conform to the norms of the group he attempts to become an integral part of. From the beginning, his mannerisms and habits differ too much from the group’s for him to have sustained any closer relationships. Cohn insists on doing things his own way, and he appears to enjoy provoking the others. Consequently, it becomes much easier for Cohn’s peers to isolate him. The “moral” of this story can be summarized in the old adage, “When in Rome, do as the Romans do (otherwise stay at home).” Since Robert Cohn chooses not to abide by the code of conduct his fellow expatriates follow, he should not have associated with them. If he had done so, he might have salvaged his dignity and saved himself a good deal of pain, loneliness, and grief. I am certain that the others would have had a much more enjoyable summer without him anyway.

In summary, Hemingway’s famous first novel The Sun Also Rises is an excellent example of character alienation. This motif is illustrated through Robert Cohn, the antagonistic force in the story. Readers learn how Cohn is gradually alienated from his friends and about the nature of friendship in general as well. One may even come to pity Cohn, not from any affection for his character, but because of the significance and magnitude of his alienation. Through Cohn’s piteous story, Hemingway teaches invaluable lessons about society. Readers are subtly encouraged to receive these lessons, lest Cohn’s fate befall them.
In most colleges around the country, students take introductory classes in English, math, science and social studies. While educating the mind, however, many schools fail to provide character education that is increasingly needed in a world filled with greedy corporate executives who plunder our savings accounts and sports heroes who can’t make the grade. Adding an ethics course to curriculum requirements would give professors a much-needed opportunity to convey to students the importance of good character, not only in the individual students’ lives, but in the larger society.

When thinking of the past, older adults often refer to the years of their childhood and education as “the good ol’ days.” They tell stories of walking safely to school, leaving the front door unlocked, playing baseball all summer long, savoring Mom’s apple pie, and going to football games and sock hops. The leaders of those times were great individuals who challenged and inspired their nation. Many adults grew up in a time of honesty, patriotism, and hard work. In this time, ethics were taught by parents and other adults in the home, by many social icons and leaders, and through sportsmanlike competition. The generation to follow, my generation, has grown up in a very different world, with different needs.

The world today is filled with dishonesty, crime and irresponsibility that is reflected in how my generation is growing and evolving. Instead of role models like Martin Luther King, Jr. and Neil Armstrong, my generation has celebrated sex icons like Madonna, half-naked pop singers like Britney Spears, and MTV’s Johnny Knoxville and his clan of skateboarders, who attempt to set themselves on fire, feed themselves to an alligator or drop a bowling ball on their genitals. My memories of watching the nation’s President address the country are not of John F. Kennedy asking what I can do for my country, but of Bill Clinton attempting to use semantics to clear his record of sexual immorality. My generation is lacking a presence of leaders and role models to teach us strong ethics and morals.

Instead of playing baseball outside or exercising, many children spend all afternoon in front of a television, playing violent video games or watching ignorant, yet outspoken guests on “The Jerry Springer Show.” When we turn to sports for heroes, we hear of controversies involving players on illegal steroids or college teams that cannot compete because their players are not passing academic classes. We witness strikes where players demand that their salaries be increased from a few million dollars to ten or twenty million, and we hear about the terrible crimes some of our favorite athletes are accused of off the field. Sportsmanlike conduct is taking a back seat to a higher paycheck, self-indulgence and scandal. This generation is having a harder time finding examples of good ethics on the playing field.

My generation also doesn’t come home to Mom and her apple pie with a tall glass of milk in the afternoon. We go to McDonald’s for the pie and let ourselves in the house to wait until Mom and Dad get off work. More often than not, children do not wait for both parents to come home, but live with one parent and see the other either only on certain weekends or not at all. Broken homes make up half of the families around the country. Where will children learn how to compromise, cooperate, or even co-exist with other members of society if this lesson is not taught in their homes?
Besides lessons on sportsmanship, leadership and community, my generation is often lacking the examples of good business leaders. Honesty is no longer as valuable as an extra dollar in profit for many companies. Enron, an energy company that was once one of the country’s largest energy corporations, lied to its stockholders and employees by falsely boosting the value of its stock and purposefully misleading the entire market. The company filed for bankruptcy in 2001 after its corrupt business ethics were uncovered. When the most prestigious and lucrative companies engage in cheating and dishonest business tactics, those who are learning how to become successful in schools will use similar strategies. Cheating is commonplace in all educational institutions, from elementary schools to colleges. Students become apathetic to the concept of lying and stealing from others. They see the profit of the “me-first” attitude without the cost to their character. Colleges must tout the importance of good business ethics and honor so that the next generation of business owners and the future of the nation’s economy will be strengthened by honesty and hard work.

The world in which this generation is growing up is sending a message of compromised morals and ethics to its people. If good role models who live exemplary lifestyles and hold high ethical standards cannot be found in the outside world, then ethics must be conveyed through another venue, such as the classroom. An ethics course is greatly needed in this nation’s universities. My generation needs to understand that character traits such as honesty, kindness and patience are essential to our collective peace and prosperity. Too often, society fails to promote this message. Without these vital lessons, the next generation will experience an even darker world in which to grow and evolve. Colleges produce the nation’s upcoming leaders and role models. Educating young adults both in scholarship and ethics is not only their responsibility, but a necessity. As Margaret Fuller wrote, “If you have knowledge, let others light their candles at it.”
Violence Incites Change
Laura Daniel

Sometimes change comes from the least likely source at the least likely time in the least likely place. In “Good Country People,” “Revelation,” and “A Good Man Is Hard to Find,” stories by Flannery O’Connor, the main character in each story undergoes a major change. A vicious incident forces Joy Hopewell to change her outlook on her fellow man drastically in “Good Country People.” In “Revelation,” Mrs. Turpin rethinks her worldview after a chance encounter with violence. The grandmother in “A Good Man Is Hard to Find” experiences a final evolution after intense turmoil. In these three stories, violence precipitates a dramatic change in the attitude and views of each main character.

Joy undergoes a transformation when she encounters violence in “Good Country People.” Joy, a rather large, well-educated woman with a heart condition and an artificial leg, is a bitter woman who never dates and lives with her mother. She claims to be an atheist and views Christianity with disdain. Oddly, she even appears to pride herself on being contrary. Her mother constantly speaks of country people as “the salt of the earth” (401). Joy, however, thinks little of good country people and believes most people in general are stupid. When Manley Pointer, a country bible salesman, visits their house, Joy rudely tells her mother to “get rid of the salt of the earth and let’s eat” (401). Manley brings unexpected violence to Joy’s life by putting her in a compromising and helpless situation in the barn’s loft, where he removes her artificial leg and then refuses to put it back on her. When the realization of his deception dawns on her, she asks him, “Aren’t you just good country people?” (408). He responds, “Yeah . . . I’m as good as you any day of the week” (408). Joy’s change consists of the realization that her views about people may not be true. She believes that people are stupid and simple. This act of violence causes Joy to acknowledge that she cannot pigeonhole people into neat little groups. In this one instance of turmoil, Joy changes her views about people and life in general.

As with Joy in “Good Country People,” Mrs. Ruby Turpin re-evaluates herself after a violent encounter from an unlikely source. Mrs. Turpin enjoys judging people based on their race or socio-economic class. She considers herself a fine, upstanding citizen. Her personality really starts to shine through while she is sitting in a waiting room at a doctor’s office. At one point she tells everyone in the doctor’s office, “I think who all I could have been besides myself and what all I got . . . I just feel like shouting ‘Thank you, Jesus’ . . . . It could have been different” (“Revelation” 417). Looking at people’s shoes, Mrs. Turpin places everyone in classes by the quality and type of their shoes. She also reveals her racist attitude by saying, “There’s a heap of things worse than a nigger” (414). While Mrs. Turpin reflects on her good disposition and blessed life, Mary Grace, a mentally ill girl, suddenly throws a book at Mrs. Turpin, hits her in the head, and then proceeds to choke her. After the excitement dies down and the situation is under control, Mary Grace tells Mrs. Turpin, “Go back to hell where you came from, you old wart hog” (418). For the rest of the day, Mrs. Turpin thinks about the occurrence. While doing chores, she sees an image in the sky of people walking up to heaven according to class. However, they line up in an unexpected order with people of a lower socio-economic class first and people like Mrs. Turpin last. At this point, Mrs. Turpin realizes that her beliefs about race and social standing are prejudiced.
Like Mrs. Turpin in “Revelation,” the grandmother in “A Good Man Is Hard to Find” changes after a tragic turn of events. The grandmother, a materialistic and manipulative liar, wants to vacation in East Tennessee instead of Florida, where her family wants to go. She attempts to manipulate them by saying that an escaped murderer named The Misfit is heading for Florida. Once she accepts that the family still plans on taking the trip to Florida, she secretly stows her cat in the car. As the story progresses, the reader learns more about the grandmother’s character by her comments and actions. Along the way, she relates a story about a former beau, making a point of informing them that he died “a very wealthy man” (386). This comment emphasizes her materialism. Later in the day, the family encounters The Misfit and his two henchmen, Bobby Lee and Hiram. While the murders of her son, Bailey, and grandson, John Wesley, are taking place, the grandmother desperately tries to convince The Misfit that he is a good man. She tells him, “I just know you’re a good man” (392). When they collect the children’s mother, the baby, and the daughter, June Star, and take them into the woods, the grandmother desperately speaks of Jesus and offers The Misfit money. Her pleas do not convince The Misfit, however. After the grandmother hears three gunshots, her dishonesty and materialism disappear. Devastated, the grandmother experiences a moment of clarity and forgiveness. Then she tells him, “Why, you’re one of my babies. You’re one of my own children!” (394) and touches him on the shoulder. Even though The Misfit then shoots her, these horrific acts of violence incite a phenomenal change in the grandmother immediately before her death.

Paradoxically then, violent acts toward the main characters in these three stories cause changes in their beliefs and attitudes about themselves and other people. Joy in “Good Country People” and Mrs. Turpin in “Revelation” release some of their ignorant stereotypes and achieve a better understanding of human nature. Before dying, the grandmother in “A Good Man Is Hard to Find” sees the humanity in a hideous murderer. Each character’s experience with violence varies in degree, but they all evolve greatly from their encounters.
Technological Breakthroughs
Stephanie Satterfield

With the turn of the twenty-first century, technology surrounds us. It is in our homes, cars, and workplaces, and for many it is the basis of everyday life. Although some may warn that technology can become an intrusion, technology has greatly improved in the last twenty years, helping the human race to adapt to its ever-changing surroundings.

Perhaps the most utilized advancement has come with the development of computers, which serve as the backbone of many industries throughout the world. In business, for example, salespeople use computers to check stock and current industry updates and also to sell supplies. Laptop computers come in handy for people in many fields, including students and everyday travelers. A business may give its workers laptops for in-home use or for travel. Laptops allow them to work in the comfort and safety of their home rather than in a crowded business environment. Students use computers for many purposes. They use the Internet for research papers by logging on to a search engine, such as Google, and accessing information on just about any subject, from the latest trends in clothing to the most recent developments in cancer research. Furthermore, they can use the power of the Internet and computers through Encarta, Webster’s online dictionary, and online libraries. Email and chat rooms are helpful for students who live away from home. Parents can talk to their children anytime they want just by dropping them an e-mail. Having e-mail saves parents money on long distance phone calls. In addition to the Internet being a good medium for communication, it is also a good place to shop. Stores such as the Gap and Abercrombie and Fitch make it easy for students to go online and buy clothes without leaving their apartments. The on-line auction site eBay is an easy way for college students to go online and buy and sell goods. Nontraditional college students have found the computer useful when it comes to going back to school. When the demands of a full-time job make it difficult to commute to school every day, they can take classes online at schools like the Devry Institute or the University of Phoenix for more convenience. Teachers find computers useful for posting grades and online notes; conducting classes this way saves them both time and the hassle of paperwork. Many schools, including Gainesville College, have programs like WebCT, which allows students to interact with teachers and other students. If computers had never been invented and developed, the world would be very different from what it is today.

But computers do not just help businesses and schools; in the medical field technology helps prolong and save lives every day. A major technological breakthrough that has dramatically improved the medical field is nuclear medicine. Nuclear medicine involves the use of isotopes and radiation detectors in diagnosis and therapy. For example, doctors can inject very small amounts of radioactive fluid into the bodies of cancer patients to help diagnose the size and type of cancer or disease. The different types of therapy available because of technology are now prolonging many patients’ lives. Cancer begins with the large growth of abnormal cells. Once these cells are found by doctors, patients begin treatment. One type of treatment used is radiation therapy. Radiation therapy is a high-energy X-ray. Doctors are able to pinpoint radiation to the spot needed, instead of radiating a larger area. Another type of therapy, chemotherapy, is used to kill all the cells associated with a cancerous tumor. In the near future, scientists predict that chemotherapy will be able to target only the bad cells and not the good cells. With all the new medical technology, cancer patients may one day be able to recover fully from this often fatal disease.
Across the world, from day to day and night to night, cell phones are another key technology. Besides the elemental needs of food and shelter, people today have two basic needs: communication and safety. With technology's help we meet both of these needs with cell phones. Cell phones are good for businesses and everyday people, especially new drivers. Businesses can easily keep in contact with their salespeople, communicate changes in plans, or have meetings over the phone. Many families, including parents of young drivers, think cell phones are useful. Cell phones are convenient if drivers are stuck on the side of the road, down a dark alley, or with a flat tire and no gas. These personal phones, which are also referred to as wireless phones, are relatively new and have become increasingly popular. Carriers such as Verizon and Cingular have come a long way since bulky "cell phones in a bag." Newer, lightweight cell phones now allow people to send and receive e-mails and keep in touch with friends around the world. Digital phones are popular with people who get bored easily because they can send pictures and play games, such as Snake or Memory, to occupy their time. Passing time, feeling safe, and communicating are three ways cell phones have helped society.

Computers, medical technology, and cell phones are examples of advancements within the last twenty years. Yet, even with all the advancements in technology, society as we know it now will not hold a candle to what technology will offer during the next twenty years.
"Unrelated" Relatives
Carly Tilden

On rainy days my family loves to flip through the pages of our photo albums. We laugh about the good times that we have had and reminisce about lessons learned. A few pages, however, we skip over without a word. They hold the pictures of the dearly loved, but unacknowledged, members of our family. I like to think that I have a "normal" family; nevertheless, I have to admit that the most eccentric people I have ever known are on those ignored pages of my family photo album.

Although I love him dearly, my grandfather, Dabs, is a few eggs short of a dozen. His hobby is collecting old cars, a common hobby among older men, but he owns over one hundred. Many would think I would be glad to have a guaranteed set of wheels when my car gives out; however, only three of the cars run at any given time. The rest he packs into barns, where they serve as homes for raccoons and mice. He not only collects cars, but everything else as well. In his garage are stacks of newspapers from the 1950s, as well as every hanky on which he has ever blown his nose. His pack rat nature has become such a problem that his wife had to hire a professional organizer to help him sort through the clutter. When I was younger, I wondered where he got all of the money for his hobby, but in recent years it has become clear. While everyone else is rushing about at Christmas searching for the perfect gift, he is sitting at home cutting pictures out of magazines. He wraps up the pictures in newspaper to avoid buying cards or wrapping paper. On Christmas Day, he presents the pictures and promises that the gifts are on their way. Do we ever see these luxurious gifts? I never have. If lucky enough to receive a gift from Dabs, one should not expect to keep it for long. More than likely, he has other plans for it. Five years ago he gave my dad an old work truck to use in his landscape business. Then three days later, my dad looked out the window to see Dabs and a man in overalls admiring the truck. The next thing my dad knew, they were driving off in the truck. My dad never saw it again because Dabs had sold the truck to the man. Dabs' neighbors also think he is a little strange. Every morning he walks out to get the paper in only a little terry cloth wrap. One neighbor told him that she doesn't bother to plant flowers because he would scare them back into the ground. Yet, he continues to wear the revealing wrap.

Then there is Betsy, my sixty-year-old great aunt from up north. Because of her age and her northern roots, we expect a few quirks; however, she far exceeds the limit. She can best be described as a hippie who is forty years too late. In years past, she was the cook at a small pizzeria in the middle of town. She could bake a pizza with the best of cooks. There was never a dull moment when working with her. She would sneak around and untie your apron or hide blown-up rubber gloves with faces drawn on them in the vegetable bins. All of her jokes made working a little more exciting for her fellow employees. Then one day, a new employee jokingly said "bite me" when Betsy told her to wash the dishes. To the employee's surprise, Betsy bit her right on the arm. So we always joke with Aunt Betsy about how she could get a job taming dogs. In her spare time, she enjoys working on craft projects. One of her most recent, and most exotic, was a collage of cartoon characters. "You just have to see it," she said, so I went to visit. When she emerged from her work room, she was carrying a big framed work of art and wearing a pair of underwear on her head. The collage was made out of pictures of children's underwear!
The least pictured of all of my relatives is Betty because she is usually passed out drunk on the couch by the time we pull out the camera. Always living up to her nickname, "Wild Thing," she has a crooked smile that always sports a cigarette and hair like Cruella DeVil’s. She could be Cruella’s look-alike except for the small bald spot from when she tried to commit suicide by shooting herself in the head. Luckily, she is not my blood relative. My dad’s family is Catholic, and my grandmother insisted that I have a godmother just like she did when she was a little girl. At the time, my dad happened to be working for Betty (who is rather wealthy). To ensure that she would remain his client, he asked her to take the honorable role as godmother. Unfortunately, she is not the same as my grandmother’s godmother. The time we spend with Betty is short and limited to Christmas. However, I will never forget the one weekend we spent at her house in the marshes of South Carolina. She insisted on riding with us and then demanded to sit in the front seat. We were forced to ride for eight hours listening to opera music turned up so loud that no one could talk because Betty said it calmed her nerves. When we arrived, it was about seven o’clock, and we were all starving. Nevertheless, she did not serve dinner until two a.m. Exhausted, we went to our beds only to be awakened a few hours later by the sound of her beating on the walls and yelling. My dad went to check on her and ended up having to rub her throbbing legs. Every Christmas since that weekend my sister and I kindly thank her for the liqueur-filled bonbons and then slide them back into her bag. Surely she needs them more than we do.

Most of our “normal” family members attend church with us on Sundays, but so does my odd uncle. Uncle Lee sticks out like a sore thumb. His pants are always pulled up to his chin, and the smirk he wears under his huge schnoz makes his eyes look like two slits below the caterpillar he calls his eyebrows. Uncle Lee is known at church as the “prayer-list Nazi.” When he thinks the prayer list is getting too long, which is almost every Sunday, he gets up in front of the entire church and asks for a report on every name on the list. This process can take more than thirty minutes, but he considers it absolutely necessary. Apart from his attempt to save the church from a monstrous prayer list, he is not a friendly character. He has gone through more neighbors than I can count on both hands. The main reason he runs them off is because his big nose is always finding its way into everyone else’s business. Once, he dug up his neighbor’s dead chicken, which had been killed by his other neighbor’s dog, just to start trouble. On another occasion, he was reported to the police for looking in the windows of the house next door. One day when he was feeling very neighborly, he stuck a pole in the middle of the neighbor’s driveway. He claimed that the driveway was on his property, so yet another neighbor moved away. Going out to eat with Uncle Lee makes me laugh for weeks. He will eat more than anyone and then volunteer to divide up the bill. He counts everyone except himself. Because everyone is giving him the money, no one notices that money never comes out of his wallet. By pulling off tricks like these, he has earned the reputation of being a sly guy.

A pizza-cooking aunt who wears underwear instead of a chef’s hat, an aunt in love with opera and liqueur-filled bonbons, a grandfather that the fashion police should arrest, and a nosey uncle are not exactly the family members that I want to introduce to my friends. Admitting Betsy, Betty, Dabs, and Lee are related to me puts a big knot in my throat, but they are in my photo album nonetheless. With their eccentric lifestyles and quirky habits, they make looking through our album very interesting. They are truly some of the most colorful people I have ever known.
Tasty Essay
Recipe by Jocelyn Negron from Athens, Georgia

Let me begin by giving you a background on this recipe. I was given an assignment in English 1101 to write an essay on the process of my writing style. To me, writing an essay is much like baking a cake. What better way to write an essay than to relate it to something that I can really sink my teeth into?

Before you start, I advise you to keep all of your ingredients organized to better your writing experience. Remember: If Jocelyn can write, so can you!

Preparation Time: 5 hrs. +
Inactive Preparation Time: 0 hrs.
Cooking Time: 1 day
Yield: 1 great essay

Preheat oven to 98 degrees

Ingredients:

1 pencil or word processing program
1 tsp. teacher’s instructions
2 c. creative ideas
1 introductory paragraph
¾ c. thesis statement
3 or 4 topic sentences

Directions:

On a regular piece of notebook paper, found in most grocery stores, combine teacher’s instructions and your creative ideas. Mix together until an idea forms. The timing of this process varies depending upon procrastination.

Cover the idea with your brain and simmer until a thesis statement forms. If you’ve never written a paper before, a thesis statement binds the rest of the ingredients together. It summarizes the purpose of the entire paper. Like an egg binds cookies, so a thesis statement holds the entire essay together. Refrigerate the thesis statement until completion of the outline.

You may want to prepare an outline if you are unfamiliar with the recipe. (Hint: I find that if you begin with an outline you are able to better visualize the process of the paper. Fewer errors are made with tense and detail. The outline may seem useless, but it makes the task of writing easier, and when writing is easy, writing is fun!)
Begin the outline with a topic sentence. A topic sentence explains what the rest of the paragraph will convey. Continue forming the topic sentence on an ungreased cookie sheet in list formation, leaving approximately two to three inches between each line. Always remember that each topic sentence must support the thesis statement.

Under each topic sentence make four bullets to put in details that support the topic sentences. Under the first three bullets put at least two sentences to back up your topic sentence. Reserve the fourth bullet to establish the connection between the topic sentence and the thesis statement.

Place the completed outline close by as you are about to put your essay together.

As you formed your outline, you may have drawn some key points together and created a summary of the information. This process, when written out, is called an introduction. Begin to write by thinking of ways to introduce your essay in order to draw the reader in and make him or her interested. No one wants to taste a bland soufflé, so why not jazz it up a little? Would you rather have a chocolate cake or triple cocoa truffle torte?

Take the thesis statement out of the refrigerator and reread it. You may want to smooth the statement out as lumps may have formed. You might find out later that you have to rephrase the sentence totally because it does not match the rest of the introductory paragraph.

Take your prepared outline and read it as if it were the essay itself. You can automatically think of transitional phrases or think of other supporting evidence. When you take the time to let your mind work and let your thoughts go freely, you will find that your mind has a mind of its own! Begin to record your thoughts in sentence form in conjunction with the outlined information. You'll probably end up making a mess, but know that you'll have time to clean it up later.

Now it's time to write a conclusion, but not so fast. You might think of writing the conclusion as the last step in writing an essay; you thought wrong! Writing the conclusion signals the halfway mark.

Before you write the conclusion, read your paper from the beginning, overlooking errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Recall the key information and bring in another general way to make your point. You can start the conclusion by recalling details used earlier, relating the essay’s subject to a humorous situation, or simply restating your thesis in an entirely different way. Think of the conclusion as a commentary for your readers. By thinking in this manner, you will better relate the essay to the readers and they will be left thinking, “My thoughts exactly!”

By drawing obvious conclusions, you will make the essay more digestible and not leave the reader hungry for something else. You want the readers satisfied with what they’ve taken in. They could possibly tell their loved ones about the “delectable piece of writing” they had at dinner last night.
Leave the paper in a cool, dry place for at least fifteen minutes, but no longer than two days. You need this waiting period, not only as a break from thinking so hard, but as a time to allow yourself to become the audience. Since you've had time away from the piece of writing, you will have a better understanding of someone who has never tasted it before. Once you've had time to rest, reread everything that you've written. Do you think you've been clear, or do you need to rearrange some things? Keep reading and rearranging until you are satisfied with the final product. When you are satisfied with the general flow of the essay, you are ready to start editing.

For some writers, editing comes naturally. Others may need a professional aid in the editing process. Editors, regardless of their experience, can be your next door neighbor, your best friend, or your professor (if you are lucky). Sometimes letting others get a taste of your essay offers helpful advice about the content. Editors will probably find errors you've overlooked and they might even suggest omitting certain ingredients that overpower the essay.

Don't get discouraged with the criticism. Just think of it as being one step closer to getting that blue ribbon you've always wanted. Take the corrections one by one and apply them to your essay. You may find that you can write better than you thought when you take time to look at the mistakes and learn from them. The more you write, the better the final product will become.

Create a neat final draft in a word processing document. Most college English courses require MLA (Modern Language Association) heading. The MLA heading starts in the upper left-hand corner of the page. Take a look at this example to help you:

Wolfgang Puck (first name)
Ronder Young (professor's name)
English 1101 (name of course)
2 September 2003 (date: day month year)

Papers longer than one page need page numbers. Insert your last name followed by the page number in the header section of the word processing page and align it to the right side of the page.

Once you've completed and printed your edited essay, turn it in to your professor on the due date. Turning your paper in on time prevents your essay from spoiling. Remember that the professor has many essays to sample, so allow sufficient time for digestion and cleansing of the pallet.

I hope you've found this recipe as enjoyable as I have; however, don't limit yourself when given a recipe for an essay. Spice it up with a little humor next time. You might even want to relate the topic to something familiar by using analogies. Writing takes time and practice. Readers will know when an essay has been rushed and when an essay was written with time and patience. Remember, when writing at the college level, stick with the exact recipe and follow all the rules, because professors have an acquired taste for well-written essays.

Yield: 1 great essay
Common Conflict Between Two Corners of the World
Nic Aubuchon

I still remember the morning of April 9, 2003. I was flipping through the channels when I came upon amazing footage on CNN of American troops seizing Baghdad. I became captivated after I witnessed the toppling of Saddam Hussein’s twenty-foot statue. Americans and Iraqis alike smiled and cheered the overthrowing of Hussein. Everything looked optimistic. Unfortunately, everything did not turn out to be as optimistic as we had hoped. The event brought some positive results; nevertheless, it has brought negative consequences as well. These consequences still benefit and plague Iraq and the U.S. today.

The first people to be affected by the consequences of Saddam’s defeat are ultimately the Iraqis. The Iraqis have lived under the dictator’s rule for years. They have both supported him out of fear and protested him for his terror. With the fall of Hussein’s regime, all Iraqis, both pro-Hussein and anti-Hussein, are now living in a period of crucial and dramatic change to their political structure. The new administration that the U.S. is forging for Iraq will govern the entire nation and its citizens. Every Iraqi citizen bases his or her support or opposition to this emerging establishment on what benefits are offered to the masses as well as fundamental reasons. Many citizens oppose the new government due to its unstable foundation and lack of law enforcement, which is proving to have few benefits for the masses. Because Saddam instilled such strong anti-American sentiment, some Iraqis have been reluctant to trust the new government supervised by the U.S. Some Iraqi citizens believe that they are now oppressed by a nemesis that has no right to be there. They also perceive that their very way of life is being challenged. This common instinct of patriotism is prevalent among anti-American Iraqis. Even though Saddam has been ousted, he has not been captured or confirmed as dead. The fallen dictator is still believed to be active and is determined to strengthen his support among the Iraqi people in hopes of reacquiring his former control. Hussein’s influence appeals to the anti-American sentiment and personal patriotism of certain Iraqi groups, an appeal that supplements his current goal of rallying support. Those who detest Saddam and fear his wrath are left worrying about his return. Those who detest the American occupation are left seething with hatred towards oppressive foreigners. For the majority of the masses, neither Saddam’s nor America’s presence is desired, leaving the masses in a grey zone of confusion. Though the current situation in Iraq is chaotic, order may eventually be achieved and will affect Iraq both positively and negatively.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the globe, the American victory in Iraq has brought relief and worry to U.S. citizens. Saddam Hussein, a well-known despot, has been defeated and his oppressive power structure left in ruins. Yet the current existence and location of Saddam’s destructive weapons are still unknown. The lack of destructive weapons raises questions such as, “Did America have the right to attack on unproven grounds?” or “Has the U.S. just ruined its international relations?” The opinions of the American people are split concerning the answers to these questions. Some believe that the U.S. is wrong and that the international stance of America has been changed from a passive position to a violent one, tarnishing relations with other nations. Others have concluded that the U.S. had every right to invade Iraq and defeat Hussein.
Due to these contrasting opinions, questions of patriotism have risen among the American public. Supporters for the war now allege that protest of the war is unpatriotic. Protestors have argued that the United States allows protest and that through protest one can also be patriotic. Since the U.S. victory in Baghdad, new situations arise everyday. The U.S. now has an obligation to recreate Iraq, yet this obligation takes several tolls on the American people. The new Iraqi government will struggle to survive, and as a result, the American government is going to give massive amounts of money and troop support to Iraq to enable the formation of a stable foundation. Even though U.S. troops “vanquished” Saddam in April of 2003, American soldiers are still dying at the hands of terrorist cells and resistance militias. The loss of family members in the military continues to create concern throughout the nation. Though American opinion is still sharply divided, both sides agree that the support and safety of American soldiers are imperative and that Iraq needs to be reconstructed into a self-reliant nation.

After analyzing the consequences of the American victory in the Iraq war, one can definitely notice that this event has affected both nations in many ways. Though the two countries have their differences, they have both undergone strife and internal conflict since Saddam’s fall. Any future involvement between the United States of America and Iraq will be affected by their current confrontations.
I work security in a mid-sized city hospital. Mostly we spend our days fighting drunks, talking to would-be suicides, and intervening in family disputes. In a given day we unlock countless doors, jumpstart cars, write reports, and escort patients. All of these mundane activities contain varying degrees of tedium and nastiness, but one of our more unpleasant obligations is morgue duty. We have a code that we use over the radio when referring to the morgue, so that anyone within earshot won’t be made to feel uncomfortable. We call it “Conference Room M.” This small obfuscation has always amused me slightly; it’s as if the dead were simply gathering to discuss a coming merger, which in a way, I suppose, they are. We tend to refer to death from an oblique angle, as if to look directly at it would blind us. We say that people “pass away,” or “expire,” or simply that they are “resting in peace.” But these are just comfort words that hide the truth.

The conference room is in the basement, away from the public, tucked in-between the paint shop and a dirty laundry room. The deceased are brought down from the floors by transporters on a gurney covered in a gray canvas shroud. As the deceased progress through the brightly lit corridors, employees make a hasty about-face and find an alternate route to wherever they were headed; others just stop in their tracks and watch silently as the gurney passes. A security officer will meet the transporters and their charge at the conference room door to check them in. The bodies have been placed, naked, in large plastic bags that have a zipper running from end to end. Once the bodies are inside the conference room, the officer unzips the bags. The smell is a toxic combination of petrochemicals and human effluvia that hits one square in the face and never lets go. It’s a smell that penetrates the senses and tends to linger for the rest of the day. The officer makes certain that the body is facing up so that blood doesn’t pool in the face – this could spoil any chances for an open casket funeral. Next the officer looks the patient over from head to toe for any personal artifacts that may still be adorning their former owners. If a ring or a necklace or dentures are found, the officer is supposed to remove the objects and place them in an envelope to await the funeral home. Many of the other officers find these duties repugnant and refuse to perform them. Myself, I find a sort of peace and comfort in the rituals. I’m glad to have been a part of these people’s lives, however briefly, before they move on to wherever they’re going. As a result, many of the other officers are more than happy to leave this particular duty to me.

The room itself is rather small, maybe fifteen by fifteen, coated in stainless steel like an industrial refrigerator, with a metal rack in one corner. The rack holds infants and stillborn children. The room is kept at a constant thirty-six degrees, and a single forty-watt bulb glows in the corner. Winter is the time of year when the conference room sees the most activity. Generally, there are only one or two residents at any given time, but on one particular Saturday in February, we ended up with five individuals placed side by side in that cold room with the dim light.

The first visitor of the day was an elderly woman named Myrtis. She’d died the previous night in her sleep. Myrtis was in her late eighties and quite frail. Her arms, crossed over her breast, looked like sparrow wings. Her hands were covered with black blotches and age spots, her fingers thin and skeletal. Her skin was translucent and pearly, spidered with
blue veins. It seemed so painfully thin, like rice paper. Her eyes were closed, but her mouth was open. It looked as if she were about to lift her voice in song.

About mid-morning, a forty-three year old man named Stan was brought in to the Emergency Room having massive heart failure. They worked on him for a bit, but Stan didn’t make it. Stan weighed about 260 pounds, but when I looked at him, I could still see the thin person he used to be. He had a boyish look to his features, and his full head of blond hair added to this impression. He wore an expensive suit that had been scissored away by the E.M.T.’s, and it hung in tattered strips from his bloated torso. His cologne was strong, masking the various odors of his ordeal. I think it was Polo.

Then came the accident. Shortly after lunch, a sixty-two-year-old man named Harold crossed the yellow line and hit a car being driven by a twenty-three-year-old woman named Tameka. She was on her way home from the grocery store. In the back seat of her car, was her two-year-old son. He was playing with a Hot Wheels fire truck his mother had bought him at the store. Harold had spent the morning drinking vodka, and most likely the night before as well. They brought Harold down first, since they were still working on Tameka and her son. By the looks of him, Harold had had a hard life. His face was a relief map of sorrow and meanness. He hadn’t shaved in a while, and his stubble was the mottled blue-gray of a blue tick hound. He had been badly damaged in the accident, and his limbs were askew in disconcertingly unnatural positions. An overpowering smell of blood and vodka heightened the stench of uselessness and regret. I removed his wallet and watch as quickly as possible and zipped up the bag.

Tameka arrived at the conference a couple of hours later. It felt wrong to put her in the same room with the man who had taken her life, but there was nowhere else to put her. I settled on rearranging the bodies so that Harold could have the dark corner. Despite the tubes protruding from her mouth, Tameka seemed undamaged. Her hair was long and crimped and I could still make out the scent of her lavender shampoo, or was it juniper? Her eyes were open, and she looked at me, looked through me, to something else, something just over my shoulder and to the right. I had to fight the urge to turn and look. Her skin was a deep dusky cocoa, and the gold crucifix that hung at her neck stood out in sharp contrast. I whispered goodnight to her as I zipped the bag.

I wasn’t really ready for Tameka’s son when he was wheeled in. I wasn’t prepared, mentally, for the sight of him. The accident had hurt him fairly severely on one side and his blood was pooled in the bag. He had his mother’s coloring and his diaper shone white against his dark skin. His eyes were closed, and in spite of what he’d gone through, in spite of the lacerations and broken arm, his face had a serene, sleepy countenance. Heather, the social worker from the E.R., had accompanied him to the conference room, and I could tell she’d been put through the ringer on this one. Her face was thin and tired, and her eyes were red with emotion. She had brought a stuffed bear with her, something she’d gotten from the lost and found, and she placed it under his good arm. My hands were shaking as I zipped up his bag. We placed him on the gurney next to his mother and left without speaking. I never found out his name.

That evening I went home and held my wife for a long time. At the time she was pregnant with our son, and all I could think of was the face of that boy, of how he was leaning up against his mother in that cold room. We speak of death in hushed tones and
sanitized terminology, but its closeness to all of us is inescapable. It's as apparent as the sun in the sky or the ground beneath our feet, as necessary as breathing or eating. We should be comforted by its certainty, by its reliability, but we're not. We hide from it. We tuck it away in the warm blanket of euphemism till its meaning is blunted and distant. We refuse to see it, and this turning away is dangerous. If we don't look death in the face, then we will never know if it is something that should be feared or something that should be welcomed with open arms, like an old friend or a lost child.
The Effects of Adoption

Tom Curran

I don’t remember when it happened. How one event can so impact an individual’s life without even the slightest memory of its occurrence simply boggles the mind. My parents, that is, those who raised me, have told me that I was very young when we had this momentous conversation. I have memories from as early as five years of age, and even then, I knew. The event I am referring to is the day my parents told me that I was adopted. This knowledge grew within me like a cancer since my maturity level and comprehension of what being adopted truly meant were both abysmally low. If it is true that we are all the sum of our experiences, then the knowledge that I was adopted was a very prominent variable in the equation that created the man who now places pen to paper and examines the effects that being adopted have had on him.

The knowledge of my adoption has given me what many would call a self-esteem problem. Though it may seem a childish misconception, I came to believe that my biological parents did not want me. I concluded that there must be something inherently wrong with me. This thought always made me feel inferior, or not worthy of what others simply took for granted. Simple actions such as participating in class by answering questions aloud or by solving problems on the chalkboard were terrifying for me. I was never afraid to be in front of people; I was afraid those same people would consider me foolish or see the wrongness that I felt was somewhere within me. I always felt that I would just fail at whatever I attempted, because I came to believe that I always did. I often “parallel played,” meaning that I would rather amuse myself than be with others my own age, because I felt I was not good enough to play with them. Although my self-imposed exile granted me a rather vivid imagination, I often wonder how my life would have evolved had I made more of an effort to be integrated with my peers. I would often look out the window at my classmates as they were choosing teams for a game of football, but I would never join them, always fearing I would be the last one chosen. Generally, I could be found sitting alone reading a book in the darkened schoolhouse while the other kids were running and playing in the sun. I would look in the mirror every morning and feel saddened, wondering if what stood before me was all there was.

In addition to low self-esteem, the knowledge of my adoption caused me to exhibit a massive fear of rejection. As a child, I always felt my biological parents had rejected me. I had an agonizing time comprehending the concept that adoption occurs because of love, not the lack of it. I seldom initiated friendships because of this fear, and simply speaking to a girl was nearly impossible. I found that my fear of rejection was an obstacle that I could only occasionally circumvent. Although I feared being rejected, I was terrified by my reaction to the rejection far more. Every instance became a bludgeon that I would use to pummel myself, continually hammering in the idea that I was not good enough. In hindsight, I realize that my teen years were very lonely. Sadly, this solitude was my own doing.

Last, the knowledge that I was adopted made it difficult to connect with members of my own family. Because of my upbringing in an Italian-American household, I was indoctrinated into the belief that the institution of family was of primary importance. Family was the one place where you were loved unconditionally and where you would always be accepted. Because I was adopted, I began to feel that I was not truly a part of my family. If
family was the most important vestige of human society, then my sorrow was compounded by the belief that I was not a part of one. This feeling of otherness, in and of itself, acted as a cause, effectively worsening my self-esteem and fear of rejection issues. Although I love my family, all 48 aunts and uncles, 200 plus cousins, and various distant relations, I never felt like one of them. It took many years to feel comfortable simply expressing my feelings for them. I was not their own biologically, but they treated me as if I were. In my youth, I could not understand, but as an adult, I find it a revelation of the highest order.

The knowledge of my adoption was an albatross I wore about my neck for two decades, constantly weighing me down with self-doubt and despair. These effects were a long, black night that I felt I would never awaken from, but as it is with all nights, there is a dawn. That awakening moment came for me when the sunrise cast out all self-doubt, insecurities and childhood fears, which had kept me in my shell for so long. That sunrise came in the form of my daughter’s eyes. When she first looked up at me, and I saw what I considered the only blood relative I had ever known, all of my blurry misconceptions came into focus. My love for her was unconditional and enormous. I looked into her blue eyes and saw the rarest commodity of all reflected back at me: the truth. The truth that if I were so bad, so unworthy, then how could I have been a part of making someone as wonderful and glorious as this? My daughter was not the only person born that day, for I myself was reborn as well. I looked upon the world with new eyes, her eyes, and realized that we are all important, all worthy. Each and every one of us means something to someone, and that symphony of human emotions makes our world worth living in. I concede that yes, the knowledge of my adoption had many bad effects on me in my youth, but that experience helped me to become the person I am today. Now, I look in the mirror and realize that I gaze upon only the foundation, only the beginning of the story, and that the end of that story is far greater than I ever imagined. That magnificent revelation is the greatest effect of all.
Broken Toys
C. Miles Fowler

There is a surprising source of symbolism in Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*. It is the toys. These toys act as symbols for the characters’ condition. The state of the small toys in the novel mirrors the emotional state of the characters that they belong to. The toys also connect pieces of the story and affect the tone of the novel. The children’s toys are referenced in important places in the novel to connect events from the past and present and to create a melancholy tone. The toys become invaluable tools for evaluating and interpreting Roy’s work.

Like people, the toys change with time, and they have their own stories to tell. Chacko’s broken planes tell an interesting story. Chacko used to order model planes that could fly. He would take the children out to test the planes, but the planes never seemed to fly the way that Chacko wanted them to. He continues to purchase and build the same planes even though none of them ever fly for more than a minute. The planes always break apart when they land. He keeps pieces of the broken planes in the cupboards of his room. The planes represent Chacko’s dreams and wishes, but they never turn out the way that he hopes they will. His marriage to Margaret fails, his Sophie Mol dies, and the Paradise Pickles and Preserves factory is left in ruins after a worker’s revolution. Everything that Chacko has worked so hard to build falls apart before it really gets going. Nevertheless, he holds on to his broken dreams, keeping them continually in his heart. However, holding on to the past ultimately destroys him. Chacko gains weight and becomes a sad man, who compares himself to Jay Gatsby. His real failure is that he continues to buy the same bad planes. Chacko doesn’t move on after Margaret; he doesn’t find a new dream. Instead, he lets her remain the only woman he would ever love, the only plane he would ever fly.

Another important toy is Rahel’s watch with the time painted on it. The time on the toy watch (ten minutes until two o’clock) holds great significance throughout the novel. The entire flashback chapter called “Abhilash Talkies” takes place in twelve hours, beginning and ending at ten minutes until two o’clock. In this short span of time, both twins are traumatized so severely that neither ever fully recovers. Estha gets a bottomless feeling that she can never shake, and Rahel begins to feel Pappachi’s cold moth on her heart whenever she feels unloved. In many instances in the novel, the time ten minutes until two o’clock is referenced. The repetition of the static time connects events from the past and present to one another, and gives time a fluid quality like the river that flows between their home and the history house. The river changes direction with the tides, and the river takes Sophie Mol’s life. Time in the novel traverses the plot forward and backward just as the river reverses its direction with the change of tide. The small painted watch that stands still is the only constant in the children’s world. Rahel believes if she can change the time on the watch, she can be like the river and flow through time instead of being pulled by time. When the police beat Velutha and destroy or steal the twins’ toys, they leave the watch, which keeps a “faulty record of time.” The watch gives a false witness of time just as the police give a false story to the paper.

The twins have an inflatable goose. When they cross the river to get to the history house, they bring it with them, and it witnesses the murder of Velutha. When the police discover the goose, they suddenly realize that Baby has lied to them about the kidnapping,
so the cops pop the duck with a cigarette. Years later, Estha keeps the duck atop his ceiling fan with his other old toys. When Estha identifies Velutha as a kidnapper to save Ammu with the word “yes,” his childhood “slipped out the door.” All his childhood toys are ruined or gone. The stuffed koala has lost its button eyes, the socks have been stolen, and the popped bird is just a “yooseless goose.” Estha’s innocence has been lost and broken, and so have his toys. The toys mirror Estha’s emotional and mental state.

Toys mean so much to children. They are treated like living creatures and best friends. Toys can be sources of great joy. The toys in The God of Small Things are just as alive as the children who own them, and they too bear witness to the tragic events in the novel. Some toys reflect the condition of the character they represent, like Estha’s goose. Some toys are symbolic of universal experiences, like the planes that represent Chacko’s dashed dreams. Still other toys Roy uses to connect events in the novel and to represent complex ideas, such as Rahel’s painted watch. Like Roy’s other literary devices, the toys serve to engender sad tones in the novel and bring the book to life.
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Karoline Kuss, a joint-enrollment student and 2004 graduate of West Hall HS, is currently studying theater at Meadows School of the Arts at SMU. She wants to thank her parents, Brad and Kathy Kuss, and her siblings for their love, character, and optimism.

Jocelyn Negron, a sophomore from Snellville, would like to thank her English teacher, Ronder Young, for saying, “Have you always been a good writer?” Jocelyn plans a career in an interesting creative field.

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