

Personal Growth College Essay Example

My science class's first field trip took place on a bitter cold February day in Maine. Tom, our science teacher, led the group of relatively puzzled, well-bundled students into the forest. I was right behind Tom, and the sound of his red boots breaking through the thin layer of ice that covered the crusty snow seemed to bounce off the trees and scare away the few singing birds that had not migrated south for the winter. We stopped fourteen times during that four-hour field trip to hear Tom ramble on about the bark of "this" deciduous tree and the habitat that "this" coniferous tree needs to grow. We examined animal droppings and tracks in the snow and traced a bird's song back to its singer. This was all meaningless to me. I was cold and bored and wanted the field trip to end.

I would later write several essays in my journal about the fact that writing a detailed seven-page analysis of the field trip took all the beauty out of the event. I would complain to Tom about how boring and mundane his class was and how impossible it was to be so "anally" observant. I argued that no field trip could ever be enjoyable if we had to write down and later analyze the percentage of deciduous and coniferous trees, the air temperature, the amount of snow on the ground, the slope of the course taken, the change in temperature over the day, and a plethora of other minutia. Basically, I was lazy. No, no. I was not lazy. I was just not ready; I was not yet ready to become an observer.

"Sam, just trust me on this one. You'll thank me later," Tom said at the conclusion of our meeting. I had gone to see Tom privately in order to discuss how I could survive his class. The minutia was killing me, and my slow death was reflected in my dismal grade. Upon leaving that meeting, I made a personal and academic decision to develop my observational skills, both to please my teacher and to avoid the disappointment of another "D+."

On my next field trip, I set out into the forest with two pencils cocked between my two ears like guns ready to fire. My teeth were clenched with the determination to stay focused throughout the entire field trip and write down every word that man uttered. However, I constantly felt myself drifting, and while my mind wandered, the group advanced significantly ahead of me, and I missed the sighting of another bird. I ran up to the group just in time to hear Tom start his lecture about a nearby rock formation. Instead of listening, I was asking my friend to see his Picasso-like rendition of the bird. I, therefore, fell behind on the lecture, and so went the endless cycle: fall behind, try to catch up, fall more behind. When it came time to rewrite my field notes in legible form, I stared at a piece of paper that consisted of smudged squiggly lines and eventually tears. Frustrated and disappointed, I retreated back to my cabin to seek refuge.

I quickly got undressed and slipped under my blanket for warmth, comfort, and most importantly protection. After I gave myself a few minutes to calm down, I took out the wet crumbled piece of paper from my pocket and tried to redraw a stick figure of a bird. The twelve stick figures, representing the twelve different birds we saw, looked exactly the same, and trying to redraw each body part of each bird to scale was so difficult that I felt like each pen stroke was met with a ton of resistance. Giving up, I pushed the piece of paper back into my pocket and lay down on my back. I saw Simon sitting in his characteristically feminine position on Ethan's bed. Simon was sitting, facing Ethan, with his legs crossed and his right hand casually nestled on his right kneecap, his foot twitching like the tail of a happy dog. Ethan was lying on his side with his big black headphones cupped around his ears, reading Faulkner. As my head swiveled, I noticed Conrad, sleeping, as usual, with his blanket clenched tightly under his chin, with both fists. I heard Fred and Rob discussing the pitfalls of modern education and could see Donald's head rhythmically moving back and forth, in sync with Jimi Hendrix. I then realized that I too was part of my environment. I realized that I was a silent participant, and more importantly, I realized that I was an observer.

On my next field trip, I had one pencil nonchalantly nestled on top of my right ear. I set out with no mission in mind and had no vengeance in my heart. I intentionally lagged behind my fellow classmates in order to get a wider, broader perspective of the environment. Applying what I learned in my cabin, I was able to engage all of my senses and could attempt to take in the vastness of it all. When we returned from our field trip, the task of doing a “rewrite” did not seem so odious, and my pencil flew across the page like a writer who just experienced an epiphany and wants to get his idea down before he forgets it. I drew every bird, tree, and rock as best I could, and although they were not perfect, they were exactly what I saw.