

College Essay Prompts Examples

Some students have a background or story that is so central to their identity that they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.

Admission Essay to New York University

By Nora Becker

When I first met Ethan at Score!, I was fifteen. He was ten. I remember him mightily pushing open the heavy doors and announcing in a loud voice that he had arrived. His appearance took me off guard; he had a gawky uncoordinated body, a crooked smile filled with different colored braces, and bulky brown glasses. Rarely did anyone enter Score!, the learning center for children where I had recently begun working, with such enthusiasm. I wondered why none of my co-workers seemed to notice. After all, Ethan wasn't the typical embarrassed child, forced to come by his parents. As a sophomore in high school, I did not have any experience teaching kids with special needs. Ethan was my first exposure to it, and initially, it was hard not to get frustrated with him; he was loud, clumsy, and disruptive. Occasionally he would get so out of hand that his parents would need to be contacted. Once when he got a good mark on his spelling unit, he leapt out of his seat and began loudly celebrating, only to be met with looks of disapproval from the other employees. But when his parents came, also shaking their heads at him, he refused to leave before he had completed his lessons.

One day Ethan confided in me that he got picked on a lot. "It's because I have a little stutter," he explained in a meek voice. Immediately I knew that this was one of those sensitive moments where it is incumbent on the adult to say just the right thing to make the child feel better. It's the type of thing that's not so hard if you're a psychologist in practice twenty years. But since I lacked the degree and the years, I just said the first thing that came to mind. "Everyone stutters." He looked up at me. "Not really. That's not what I meant to say. I mean that everyone has something about them that seems weird to other people." Uy. Was I making him feel worse? "You're smarter than them anyway," I added, trying to look at him encouragingly. In response, he only muttered "okay" and continued to fidget with the computer keyboard.

There were many similar moments in the eight months I worked with Ethan, times when I could only guess at the proper way to handle the situation. These are the instances that stand out in my mind, more than the obvious successes and failures. These "lessons for the teacher" as my supervisor used to jokingly call them, all had two things in common: first, none of them involved math, and second, they left me feeling very confused. My most valuable lessons actually occurred in the pizza parlor next door to Score! where Ethan and I sometimes met before his appointment. There I got to know him for who he truly was: a tuba player, a coin collector, a lover of pizza-not a list of psychological ailments on a piece of paper.

To most people, Ethan's last appearance at Score! resembled his first almost exactly. A little figure could be seen pushing open the large glass doors, excitement in his voice as he called out my name. But I no longer saw an awkward, clumsy child; instead, I saw a friend, a unique person whose life had touched mine for a brief, but important moment.

(581 words)

Describe a place or environment where you are perfectly content. What do you do or experience there, and why is it meaningful to you?

College Admission Essay

By Rachel Tornheim

I tighten my fists and narrow my eyes at the invisible enemy in front of me. The sweat drips from my face and soaks through my crisp white *gi*. I struggle to breathe as I have been taught - in through the nose and out through the mouth - and bounce to the music, anticipating the instructor's shout.

"Move!"

My body springs into action. Backfist, reverse punch, front ball kick, hook, uppercut, double palm heel to the ribs. On the last strike I *kiai* with the rest of the students. Our yells fill the room, louder than the traffic outside and louder than the din from the stereo. The sound pounds inside my head. Drawing back, I assume the on-guard position. I am ready.

Karate has been a part of my life since 1994. My mom had been encouraging me to take up martial arts ever since she realized that my tiny size would make me an easy target, but it wasn't until seventh grade that I felt physically threatened and decided to sign up for karate classes. Although I no longer feel in danger at this school, karate has not gone the way of figure skating, horseback riding, and piano. It has stayed with me and become a part of my identity. I have paid for my brown belt with sweat and occasionally blood, with anxiety before tests, and with hours of exertion and exhaustion. My training has given me the ability to defend myself, a necessity for a four-foot-ten, slightly built woman entering the twenty-first century.

But karate has left me with more than aerobic and defensive abilities. Because of my physical limitations, defending against an attacker does not come easily to me. I cannot count the number of times I have been unable to evade the plastic knife wielded by my opponent or the number of bruises I have received from fists, feet, and knees. My aversion to failure and reluctance to trying unfamiliar things are obstacles I face in other aspects of my life, obstacles that my experience with karate has helped me to overcome. It has taught me that when you get knocked down, you get up again and keep fighting... Karate has boosted my confidence too. I have sparred with a professional body-builder, and there's nothing like the rush I get from bringing a 200-pound man to the floor!

As we kneel and meditate before each class, the teacher instructs us to clear our minds and leave our problems of work, school, and family outside the *dojo*. At first I don't think it's possible to avoid worrying about the freshman that I need to tutor, the science project that isn't finished, or the 6:45 AM flight I need to catch for this weekend's debate tournament. But somehow, every time, I forget these concerns. For one hour, I am only a *karateka*, a warrior.

(490 words)

Discuss an accomplishment or event, formal or informal, that marked your transition from childhood to adulthood within your culture, community, or family.

College Admission Essay

By Sanju Poudel

In summer 2003, my aunt suggested I deliver babies. That was what volunteering at her small town hospital in Bharatpur, Nepal meant to me anyway. The more she insisted, the more frustrated I became, fearing what I felt would be another one of my parents' ways for me to build character. My aunt, on the other hand, was determined to show me otherwise and literally dragged me to her work on a rickshaw. Throughout the ride, I did not hold back my aggravation. After all, what did I know about small time hospitals?

Nevertheless, I had certain expectations of the well-known hospital before entering. I pictured succeeding red-bricked buildings with tidy carpeted rooms and people arriving in cars for minor checkups. I imagined how in each room a doctor with a white lab coat and a stethoscope around his/neck would be consulting individual patients.

The very moment the rickshaw slid through the gate, however, my naïve conceptions dissolved into disease, disorder, and destitution, the truth of what was in front of me. Hesitating to get out of the rickshaw and step into a foreign world that was threatening to suppress my innocence, I closed my eyes. I closed my eyes to the make-shift wooden stretchers carrying frail men and women contemplating their inevitable deaths; I closed my eyes to a young girl with a tattered school uniform and undone ribbons leading a blind woman by the hand; I closed my eyes to the sorry, languishing environment that I did not want to be a part of.

My astonishment peaked when entering the maternity ward. In what I considered a room fit for two patients, there were *fifteen* women sprawled on rusting metal-framed beds and sheets on the floor. In the little gaps about the room were green plastic pans where the women would uncomfortably station themselves to urinate and vomit. I immediately imagined all of these women in nice comfortable beds in their own separate rooms which was the way *my* mom had given birth to my younger brother in New York.

The longer I stayed in the hospital, the more I wanted to reach out to these people. Although the hospital had initially been a place I was reluctant to approach, I ended up visiting everyday that week even if merely to speak to the patients. It was because of this day that I finally understood why my aunt refuses better paying jobs abroad. Her strong conviction of returning to her native land and using her education to help her *own* people has filtered into me. Before this event, I had always planned on living in New York, indulging in its luxuries and finding a career with a lucrative salary. Now, however, the prospect of going back to my country and living among a community I can lend a hand to is much more appealing. At the end of the week, I was very thankful that my aunt had pushed me into an experience I now consider a crossroad in my life.

(508 words)