

Bowdoin Supplementary Essay, Kesha Ram

Upon entering high school, I found myself disappointed with what I thought would be a wide array of expansive discussions and debates. I was hoping to have at least a few of the sporadic dance numbers and dramatic interludes offered by the likes of *Fame* and other such depictions of high school life. I was under the impression that everyone would be ready to tackle their own unique identity, not scramble to fit within the confines of a restrictive social structure. Call me a rebel, call me disillusioned, call me the average struggling teen, but as I dragged my feet through the first few weeks of freshman year, I could only conjure up one sentiment about my surrounding environment: high school sucks.

It was at the height of this state when my class schedule changed, and Mr. Sanders entered my life. I was transferred from an English teacher who had us use yarn to express our feelings into the hands of a curly-haired wild man whose room resonated with Miles Davis and laughter. Here, I thought, was a class that might be just outside the box, even if only slightly. On my first day in his ninth grade Honors English class, Mr. Sanders stood complacently at his podium with an Australian tea tree oil chew stick set loosely between his lips, looking up long enough to inform me that my attire struck him as smurf-like in nature and break into a grin. It was the beginning of a new outlook for me, one that allowed for the supposition that high school might not be so bad.

After that first encounter, the days seemed to go a little faster, thanks to that single ever-changing class. On one occasion, Mr. Sanders strode casually around the room, handing us each a copy of *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by Paulo Freire. The

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piece showed us the downfall of "banking education," where students are taught merely to regurgitate information and are not given the resources to challenge authority. In a similar instance, he came in with excerpts from Matt Groening's *School is Hell*, a satirical work on the (oftentimes ridiculous) school system, presenting it to us as an outlet to vent our frustration with, which a majority of high school students naturally wish to express.

Some teachers emphasize a "challenging workload" too quickly, holding the belief that students should quickly be broken in to the rigor of "complex literary analysis," or something equally as rigid. Let them be reminded that young, malleable minds need creative cultivation and healthy independence before being subjected to the arduous work of translating Shakespeare or finding deeper meaning in the work of Hemingway. It takes a special kind of teacher, who is comfortable enough with his students and himself, to reveal to them the path of rebellion as an art form, and as a viable academic endeavor.

Now in my senior year, I have come full circle. I left Mr. Sanders' class after ninth grade, carrying the wisdom he gave me to my successive English classes and into my high school career, in general. He taught me that a good student asks questions and challenges answers, and that I should never be afraid to take risks in the pursuit of my own truths. I began this year under his guidance once again, in his Beat Literature class. However, he recently made the decision to stay home to take care of his newly adopted son. At first, I felt as though I was dealt a mighty blow, but I've since realized that a child lucky enough to have Mr. Sanders as a father deserves his fullest attention,

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and I have gained more from him in a little over a year than I will gain from some in a lifetime.

I have always worked hard to make a difference, to right the wrongs I perceive, and Mr. Sanders taught me something valuable for my crusade. He taught me to fight within the system, to inspire change in others, rather than force it upon them. He taught me this by example, because few people suspect a ninth grade English teacher to be the one to make the world a better place, but he did precisely that for me.