

College Application Essays That Worked

By Jane E. Dabel, PhD

College Application Essays That Worked

The application essay might just be the hardest part of your child's college application. Mostly this is because it has the least guidance and is the most open-ended.

One way to understand what colleges are looking for when they ask your child to write an essay is to **check out the essays of students that already got in - college essays that worked**. After all, they must be among the most successful of this weird literary genre.

Many parents think that these essays are supposed to be formal in their tone. In reality, admissions committees are actually looking for interesting stories about your child. In particular, admissions essays should:

- **Tell a story**
- **Use a lively, individual voice**
- **Be technically correct**

In this booklet, I've also compiled 10 sample college essays that worked, helping students get accepted to some of the top schools in the country.

Example #1: "Breaking Into Cars," Johns Hopkins, (Common App Essay, 636 words long)

I had never broken into a car before.

We were in Laredo, having just finished our first day at a Habitat for Humanity work site. The Hotchkiss volunteers had already left, off to enjoy some Texas BBQ, leaving me behind with the college kids to clean up. Not until we were stranded did we realize we were locked out of the van.

Someone picked a coat hanger out of the dumpster, handed it to me, and took a few steps back.

“Can you do that thing with a coat hanger to unlock it?”

“Why me?” I thought.

More out of amusement than optimism, I gave it a try. I slid the hanger into the window’s seal like I’d seen on crime shows, and spent a few minutes jiggling the apparatus around the inside of the frame. Suddenly, two things simultaneously clicked. One was the lock on the door. (I actually succeeded in springing it.) The other was the realization that I’d been in this type of situation before. In fact, I’d been born into this type of situation.

My upbringing has numbed me to unpredictability and chaos. With a family of seven, my home was loud, messy, and spottily supervised. My siblings arguing, the dog barking, the phone ringing—all meant my house was functioning normally. My Dad, a retired Navy pilot, was away half the time. When he was home, he had a parenting style something like a drill sergeant. At the age of nine, I learned how to clear burning oil from the surface of water. My Dad considered this a critical life skill—you know, in case my aircraft carrier should ever get torpedoed. “The water’s on fire! Clear a hole!” he shouted, tossing me in the lake without warning. While I’m still unconvinced about that particular lesson’s practicality, my Dad’s overarching message is unequivocally true: much of life is unexpected, and you have to deal with the twists and turns.

Living in my family, days rarely unfolded as planned. A bit overlooked, a little pushed around, I learned to roll with reality, negotiate a quick deal, and give the improbable a try. I don’t sweat the small stuff, and I definitely don’t expect perfect fairness. So what if our dining room table only has six chairs for seven people? Someone learns the importance of punctuality every night.

But more than punctuality and a special affinity for musical chairs, my family life has taught me to thrive in situations over which I have no power. Growing up, I never controlled my older siblings, but I learned how to thwart their attempts to control me. I forged alliances, and realigned them as necessary. Sometimes, I was

the poor, defenseless little brother; sometimes I was the omniscient elder. Different things to different people, as the situation demanded. I learned to adapt.

Back then, these techniques were merely reactions undertaken to ensure my survival. But one day this fall, Dr. Hicks, our Head of School, asked me a question that he hoped all seniors would reflect on throughout the year: “How can I participate in a thing I do not govern, in the company of people I did not choose?”

The question caught me off guard, much like the question posed to me in Laredo. Then, I realized I knew the answer. I knew why the coat hanger had been handed to me.

Growing up as the middle child in my family, I was a vital participant in a thing I did not govern, in the company of people I did not choose. It’s family. It’s society. And often, it’s chaos. You participate by letting go of the small stuff, not expecting order and perfection, and facing the unexpected with confidence, optimism, and preparedness. My family experience taught me to face a serendipitous world with confidence.

Example #2: " Just Keep Folding," Johns Hopkins, (Common App Essay, 650 words long)

Having explored the myths from ancient Greece, Rome, and Egypt, my curiosity was piqued in eighth grade by a simple legend from Japanese lore. If you fold one thousand paper cranes, the gods will grant you one wish. I took it as a challenge. My previous forays into origami had ended poorly, but I was so excited to begin my quest that this detail seemed inconsequential. My art teacher loaned me a piece of origami paper and, armed with an online tutorial, my quest began. Like an early prototype of the airplane, I ascended towards my dreams for a glorious moment before nose-diving into the ground. The first crane was a disastrous failure of wrinkly lines and torn paper. Too embarrassed to ask for another, I turned to my stack of Post-it notes. By the third attempt, I ended up with a sticky pink paper crane. Holding that delicate bird, I was flooded with triumph and elation.

The first two hundred cranes were all crafted from Post-it notes. Armed with a pack of highlighters, I decorated each piece of paper individually. I folded cranes at home, between classes, and in the car. My fingers were permanently sticky from the glue I scraped off every square. Slowly, my collection grew: first ten, then fifty, then one hundred. Before the task could become monotonous, I started experimenting. How small was it possible for a crane to be? Smaller than a golf ball? Smaller than a dime? Small enough to sit on the end of a pencil? Any size was attainable. I could make a crane smaller than almost any arbitrary form of measurement. Soon I could finish a crane in fifty seconds or with my eyes closed. Anything square and foldable became my medium. Paper towels, candy wrappers, and aluminum foil joined my vibrant menagerie of carefully folded paper. I was

unstoppable; that wish was as good as mine.

By six hundred cranes, the increasing demands of high school academics caused my pace to slow. I despaired. I wouldn't let this be another ambitious project that I couldn't finish.

My cranes mattered to me. As an outlet for expression, they served as a way to defuse frustration and sadness, and a source of pride and joy. Their creation allows me to bring beauty to the world and to find a sense of order in the bustle and chaos of life. There is a lot of beauty to be found in tiny things. I'm reminded that little gestures have a lot of meaning. I have given away cranes to my friends as a pick-me-up on bad days, and I have made cranes to commemorate people, such as the dark green crane I made the day my grandmother died. They are a symbol of hope to remind me what I have accomplished.

So, I pushed myself to keep working and to keep folding one crane at a time. My determination paid off, and in the summer after sophomore year, my passion was reinvigorated. One month before the end of junior year, I folded my thousandth paper crane. As I leaned over the open drawer brimming with origami pieces in a multitude of sizes and colors, I felt a rush of satisfaction and triumph. Not only was 1,000 cranes an achievement in its own right, but I proved to myself that I can finish what I start.

The world is filled with big numbers. College tuition, monthly rent, and car prices deal in the many thousands. Those figures are incomprehensible to someone who has never interacted with anything so large, and I wanted to understand them. A thousand will never simply be a number to me: it is hundreds upon hundreds of hand-folded cranes combined with years of effort.

So what did I wish for? It turns out, I didn't need the wish. I learned I have the power to make things happen for myself.

Example #3: "The Palette of My Mind," Johns Hopkins, (Common App Essay, 487 words long)

A question that every high school senior is familiar with is: "What kind of college is the right fit for you?" My criterion doesn't appear in the deluge of admissions pamphlets; that's because I want my school to resemble my favorite dish: the hummus-tabouli wrap.

...and Johns Hopkins University is the creamiest, tangiest, most flavorful hummus-tabouli wrap in existence.

The secret to any savory wrap lies in how its flavor is contained. Regardless of what outside influences are imposed upon it, the pita bread expertly holds all of its

ingredients without allowing them to spill. Hopkins opposes outside pressures, unapologetically supporting individuals who are unafraid to break tradition. The OUTlist, an online database for Hopkins affiliates who openly identify themselves as members of the LGBT community, revolutionized the visibility of LGBT individuals in higher education and created a support network at the university. For students who are struggling with their identity (due to the fear of coming out to their families or friends), I want to help them express themselves and understand that they are not alone. I want to serve as an advocate as well as a source of comfort, like a homemade pita that is warm and soft, yet tenacious.

Next on our wrap is the core layer of hummus, lathered on the pita and heavy with expectation. Being the most renowned staple of the Mediterranean diet comes with its pressures, but hummus handles it well, always stepping up to the plate, ready for any intimidating food critic. Similarly, Hopkins's academic diversity lives up to its reputation and more. The Classics Department offers 83 different undergraduate courses, with varied paths that students can take in the pursuit of cultural and literary knowledge. I hope to study the interrelationship of modern literature and culture and its classical roots in Latin by examining international texts in courses such as Latin Literature Beyond Hermeneutics taught by Professor Butler. I intend to further facilitate international communication—a modern necessity—by researching how English is adapted by different cultures. I can imagine narrowing my research from World Englishes to the fundamentals of the English language that bring about its malleability under Professors Celenza or Roller of the Classics Department.

After the hummus follows the influx of diced tomatoes, onions, and parsley, all varied in taste, combining to form the tabouli sauce. Tabouli is accepting of its ingredients, which when combined, bring to it a taste that is unparalleled by any other ingredient of wrap. I hope to spend my next four years in the Hopkins community learning alongside students from backgrounds starkly different from my own, who, like each component of tabouli sauce, bring their varied perspectives to discussions, an invaluable trait when studying how English has been adapted by different cultures.

In this world of flavorful foods and people, the delectable allure of Johns Hopkins University entices the palate of my mind. And I hope to eat my fill.

Example #4: "Riding in Cars," Tufts, (Common App Essay, 608 words long)

I have always loved riding in cars. After a long day in first grade, I used to fall asleep to the engine purring in my mother's Honda Odyssey, even though it was only a 5-minute drive home. As I grew, and graduated into the shotgun seat, it became natural and enjoyable to look out the window. Seeing my world passing by through that smudged glass, I would daydream what I could do with it.

In elementary school, I already knew my career path: I was going to be Emperor of the World. While I sat in the car and watched the miles pass by, I developed the plan for my empire. I reasoned that, for the world to run smoothly, it would have to look presentable. I would assign people, aptly named Fixer-Uppers, to fix everything that needed fixing. That old man down the street with chipping paint on his house would have a fresh coat in no time. The boy who accidentally tossed his Frisbee onto the roof of the school would get it back. The big pothole on Elm Street that my mother managed to hit every single day on the way to school would be filled-in. It made perfect sense! All the people that didn't have a job could be Fixer-Uppers. I was like a ten-year-old FDR.

Seven years down the road, I still take a second glance at the sidewalk cracks and think of my Fixer-Uppers, but now I'm doing so from the driver's seat. As much as I would enjoy it, I now accept that I won't become Emperor of the World, and that the Fixer-Uppers will have to remain in my car ride imaginings. Or do they? I always pictured a Fixer-Upper as a smiling man in an orange T-Shirt. Maybe instead, a Fixer-Upper could be a tall girl with a deep love for Yankee Candles. Maybe it could be me.

Bridget the Fixer-Upper will be slightly different than the imaginary one who paints houses and fetches Frisbees. I was lucky enough to discover what I am passionate about when I was a freshman in high school. A self-admitted Phys. Ed. addict, I volunteered to help out with the Adapted PE class. On my first day, I learned that it was for developmentally-disabled students. To be honest, I was really nervous. I hadn't had too much interaction with special needs students before, and wasn't sure how to handle myself around them. Long story short, I got hooked. Three years have passed helping out in APE and eventually becoming a teacher in the Applied Behavior Analysis summer program. I love working with the students and watching them progress.

When senior year arrived, college meetings began, and my counselor asked me what I wanted to do for a career, I didn't say Emperor of the World. Instead, I told him I wanted to become a board-certified behavior analyst. A BCBA helps develop learning plans for students with autism and other disabilities. Basically, I would get to do what I love for the rest of my life. He laughed and told me that it was a nice change that a seventeen-year-old knew so specifically what she wanted to do. I smiled, thanked him, and left. But it occurred to me that, while my desired occupation was decided, my true goal in life was still to become a Fixer-Upper. So, maybe I'll be like Sue Storm and her alter-ego, the Invisible Woman. I'll do one thing during the day, then spend my off-hours helping people where I can. Instead of flying like Sue, though, I'll opt for a nice performance automobile. My childhood self would appreciate that.

Example #5: "Julia Child – My Hero," Tufts, (Common App Essay, 648 words long)

A portrait of Julia Child leans precariously on my bedside table competing for space with sticky notes, pennies, and a plastic alarm clock. Julia has been my role model ever since I spent an hour at the Smithsonian American History Museum watching cooking show after cooking show. As she dropped eggs, burnt soufflés, and prepared a whole pig, she never took herself too seriously and with her goofy smile and accompanying laugh. And yet, she was as successful in her field as anyone could ever be. Her passion completely guided her career. She taught me that it does not matter what I choose to do, it only matters that I do it with my whole self; zealously and humorously.

Unlike Julia, I do not aspire to be a chef. Brownies out of a box may just be the highlight of my baking career. Something I have been passionate about for my whole life, however, is teaching. The first traces of my excitement came from a summer camp that I founded when I was seven years old. Motivated by too many imperfect summer camp experiences, I established my ideal summer camp, one in which campers could choose their activities, from banana split tutorials to wacky hat-making. So that year it began, with seven five-year-old campers in my backyard. For six consecutive years, I ran my summer camp, each year tweaking and improving from the years before.

Chebeague Island, Maine, established a preschool in the spring of 2012, run out of a trailer by a recent college graduate. I volunteered as an intern. For three months, I helped organize for the summer and the following year. I took out the trash, cleaned, and sorted toys, all while studying how to incorporate educational material into preschool activities. I wrote curriculum and researched preschool regulations to ensure that we were in compliance. We created a safe classroom, an academic plan for the upcoming year, and a balance between learning and playing in the classroom. By the end of the summer the intern became the co-director of the summer preschool program.

This past June, I returned to the trailer to find the space and program in complete disarray. Since the previous summer, the preschool had seen two new directors and the latest was spread thin, juggling maintenance, finances and curriculum planning. My progress had not endured. After sulking for a week, I decided I was better suited to envelop Julia's mentality. What did she do when she flipped a burger onto the ground? She smiled, laughed at the camera, picked it up, reshaped it a little, and kept right on going. So that's what I did. I brought in a group of friends to clean and organize the trailer. I initiated a "lobster-roll" fundraiser, and Island lobstermen donated lobsters while their wives came together to pick meat from the shells. It was wildly successful and thrived on the community's spirit. Then I worked to reinstate some sort of educational value into the summer program. We danced to Spanish and Ghanaian music, crafted wacky hats, and read books about the lobstering industry, an aspect of their community that is so significant.

My past two summers have been exhausting and all too frequently frustrating but ultimately the Chebeague Island Preschool, along with many other teaching experiences, has exposed me to the ground level of education policy in the United States. After this past summer my goal is to become a future U.S. Secretary of Education.

So my portrait of Julia is by my bedside to remind me. Remind me that throughout the tedium of my extremely busy life there is something that I am passionate about. To remind me that personality and humor are essential to success. And remind me that the sort of passion I need to succeed is not the type that will let me give in to small setbacks along the way.

Example #6: "My Shoe Fetish," Washington University at St. Louis, (Common App Essay, 618 words long)

Psst! I have a confession to make. I have a shoe fetish. Everyone around me seems to underestimate the statement a simple pair of shoes can make. To me, though, the shoes I wear are not merely covering for the two feet on which I tread, but a reflection of who I am.

So, who am I? Why don't you look down at my feet? I could be wearing my high-platform sandals—my confidence, my leadership, my I-want-to-be-tall-even-though-I'm-not shoes. My toes are free in these sandals and wiggle at will. Much like my feet in my sandals, I don't like being restricted. I have boundless energy that must not go to waste! Or maybe I'm wearing my furry pink pig slippers. I wear these on crisp winter nights when I'm home spending time with my family. My slippers are my comforting side. I can wear them and listen to a friend cry for hours on end. My favorite pair of shoes, however, are my bright red Dr. Martens. They're my individuality, my enthusiasm, my laughter, my love of risk-taking. No one else I know has them. When I don't feel like drawing attention to my feet or, for that matter, to myself, I wear my gym shoes. These sneakers render me indistinguishable from others and thereby allow me to be independent. I wear them running, riding my bicycle alone through the trails surrounded by signs of autumn, and even when I go to a museum and stand, transfixed by a single photograph. My hiking boots typify my love of adventure and being outdoors. Broken in and molded to the shape of my foot, when wearing them I feel in touch with my surroundings.

During college I intend to add to my collection yet another closet full of colorful clodhoppers. For each aspect of my personality I discover or enhance through my college experiences, I will find a pair of shoes to reflect it. Perhaps a pair of Naot sandals for my Jewish Studies class or one black shoe and one white when learning about the Chinese culture and its belief in yin and yang. As I get to know myself and my goals grow nearer, my collection will expand.

By the time I'm through with college, I will be ready to take a big step. Ready for a change, I believe I'll need only one pair after this point. The shoes will be both fun and comfortable; I'll be able to wear them when I am at work and when I return home. A combination of every shoe in my collection, these shoes will embody each aspect of my personality in a single footstep. No longer will I have a separate pair for each quirk and quality. This one pair will say it all. It will be evidence of my self-awareness and maturity. Sure, I'll keep a few favorites for old times' sake. I'll lace up the old red shoes when I'm feeling rambunctious, when I feel that familiar, teenage surge of energy and remember the girl who wore them: a young girl with the potential to grow.

I am entering college a naïve, teenage bundle of energy, independence, and motivation. My closet full of shoes mirrors my array of interests, and at the same time my difficulty in choosing a single interest that will satisfy me for the rest of my life. I want to leave college with direction, having pinpointed a single interest to pursue that will add texture and meaning to my life.

So there you have it. I've told you about who I am, what I enjoy, and what I want from college. Want to know more? Come walk a day in my shoes.

Example #7: "Elephant," Smith College, (Supplemental Essay, 148 words long)

When I was a month old, my aunt gave me a little elephant plushie. It's about 9 inches long, feels like an umbrella and wears plastic orange glasses, which are prone to breaking. I know because I've kept it with me for nearly 17 years and have had to superglue the bridge of those glasses thrice (I've since given up, they just stay broken now). It's the oldest, most threadbare stuffed toy I've ever seen, and I have no idea why I love it so much. All I know is without Slonik (for such is his name; using *it* makes me uncomfortable), I have trouble falling asleep. At some point over my childhood I started treating Slonik like a tiny creature with feelings, though I never thought of him as human. I think loving Slonik has taught me that love doesn't always make sense, but it remains real.

Example #8: "My Love Affair with the Piano," Carelton College, (Common App Essay, 662 words long)

I can't even write this essay because I keep thinking about the piano. Now, I wouldn't know a pentatonic from a hole in the wall. I don't play piano. But for about four minutes I bet I could fool you.

I did take lessons when I was a kid, but I was always exceedingly terrible. My own mother admitted later that she was shocked a child as bright as I was could be so backwards. One hour a week for unending months I would sit in the living room on the bench of glowing dark wood, looking at the shining keys, and consistently massacre whatever stripped-down, simplistic piece was in front of me.

I forget quite how it happened, but somehow my mother, my teacher and I can together to put the piano lessons to a merciful end. And yet years and years later, I find myself not writing this essay, because I can't stop thinking about the piano.

I did volunteer for piano, way back when. And I remember exactly why. Such a great deal of *sound* could come from that giant instrument. It was fascinating, irresistible. And it was so rich, both in sound and image. There was something luxurious about the deep wood and contrasting white and black keys that lured me. Opulent words like mahogany, ebony, and ivory belonged to that instrument, whether it was made from such materials or not. And even when the piano stood silent, I could feel the music waiting inside, if you just knew how to bring it out. It was complex, magnificent, larger than life – and that was quite appealing to a very small person.

After the lessons slipped away I forgot about the whole thing for years on end. I think I was the one third-grader who could not play at least half of “Heart and Soul.” But in the summer before my senior year piano notes were echoing in my mind, and I couldn't make them stop. I was being called, and since I had no mast to which I could tie myself, the only choice was to jump. I dived in to the piano bench – another of the piano's magical features is that its bench opens up to store sheet music. I toyed with a few folk songs and pop songs, and even had a delicious dig through choral music from the second grade, but eventually I stumbled upon it. The One, my love-at-first-sight. And that's how I fell head over heels for Johann Pachelbel.

I could never practice when I took lessons, but I'm constantly at it now. My rendition of the Canon in D is getting more complex, and more polished, by the day. In the beginning it took me half an age to painstakingly decipher the black circles and lines, laboriously converting them into notes into fingering into sound. Now I'm getting much faster at interpreting, and just today I got the last line on page three. Pachelbel and I have been together for four months now. I hope my parents don't mind him.

I'm not quite sure what this love affair is all about. (I'm finding it hard to type because my hands are thinking about how to get from that awkward F-sharp-and-B bit to the part where my fourth finger needs to be on C.) But if I can focus for just a little bit longer, I'll try to articulate. It's independence, patience, self-control, learning. It's something to be engaged in, something to strive for, something to love. I'm fine with my snail's pace and my complete lack of knowledge – it just doesn't matter, because I love what I am doing. I love that I can now play the first

page seamlessly, even well enough to improvise – change up the fingering, try a new rhythm. I love turning my mind off and making music, and also turning my mind on to search out the meaning of the notes on the page. I love both the journey and the result.

But it's really eating into my ability to sit down and write an essay.

Example #9: "Life from Seven Feet Up," Hamilton College, (Common App Essay, 514 words long)

Walking down a busy street, I see the quick glances and turned heads. The murmurs and giggles trickle toward me. I try to ignore the buzz, interspersed with, "Oh my God!" and the occasional, "Damn!" Then, a complete stranger asks for a picture, so I stand with people foreign to me and politely smile and laugh. After the click of the camera, they go on their way. Sometimes I wish I weren't so tall. Maybe then I could take a friend to a movie and just blend into the crowd.

Attention from strangers is nothing new to me. Questions about my height dominate almost every public interaction. My friends say my height is just a physical quality and not a personality trait. However, when I reflect on my life, I realize that my height has shaped my character in many ways and has helped to define the person I am.

I learned how to be comfortable in my own skin. If I had the introverted personality my older brother had in high school, I'd probably be overwhelmed by the constant public attention. Even as a young child, parents at the sidelines of my baseball games, as well as the umpire, would, in front of all my teammates, demand by birth certificate to prove my age. I grew acquainted early on with the fact that I am abnormally tall and stick out about the crowd. It's just the way it is. Being self-conscious about it would be paralyzing.

I learned how to be kind. When I was younger, some parents in my neighborhood deemed me a bully because I was so much larger than children my age. I had to be extra welcoming and gentle simply to play with other children. Of course, now my coaches wish I weren't quite so kind on the basketball court.

I learned humility. At 7 feet tall, everyone expects me to be an amazing basketball player. They come expecting to see Dirk Nowitzki, and instead they might see a performance more like Will Ferrell in *Semi-Pro*. I have learned to be humble and to work even harder than my peers to meet their (and my) expectations.

I developed a sense of lightheartedness. When people playfully make fun of my height, I laugh at myself too. On my first day of high school, a girl dropped her books in a busy hallway. I crouched down to her level and gathered some of her notebooks. As we both stood up, her eyes widened as I kept rising over her.

Dumbfounded, she dropped her books again. Embarrassed, we both laughed and picked up the books a second time.

All of these lessons have defined me. People unfamiliar to me have always wanted to engage me in lengthy conversations, so I have had to become comfortable interacting with all kinds of people. Looking back, I realize that through years of such encounters, I have become a confident, articulate person. Being a 7-footer is both a blessing and a curse, but in the end, accepting who you are is the first step to happiness.

Example #10: "My Life at Strawberry Banke," Connecticut College, (Common App Essay, 647 words long)

I spent my entire childhood engulfed in the world of my imagination. I spent countless hours draped in taffeta gowns of bubblegum pink, ocean blue and sunshiny yellow as a medieval princess: Lady Michelle. My castle was a nearby church and my moat was the concrete road. The jester? My brother Tom. I slipped a patch over my eye and sailed onto my bed, now Blackbeard's pirate ship my treasure map drawn onto my wall in magic marker until Admiral Tom came in and revealed my map to the king and queen. Other days my lush backyard became dotted with tumbleweeds as I put on a hat to become a cowboy in the Wild West chasing the Indian Sitting Tom. My saloon sheltered in my tree house. As I've grown into adolescence, my days of endless time travel have almost ended, my plaid skirt replacing the whimsical dresses and to-do lists replacing the hours of play. But not quite, my imagination and my world have one final fortress: Strawberry Banke.

At Strawberry Banke, a history museum comprised of restored houses, I exchange my skinny jeans for an empire waist dress complete with a bonnet and my world of imagination reopens. I am Mary Chase and my world is 1814, a time of James Madison and the war of 1812. Maybe, if you're lucky, I'll let you, the museum visitor, in on my secret: I flirt with the boys through the language of my fan. If I'm waving my fan quickly, I'm interested, but if I fan myself slowly? Run! My world morphs, and my empire waist dress turns into saddle shoes and a blouse and skirt cut from the same cloth. Before you know it, 1945 is in full swing and now I am Helen Jalicki, my life filled with radios, WWII and lines drawn up the backs of my legs with eyeliner pencils since nylons are rationed. But don't tell my mother! I look at the sailors over the fence of the navy shipyard too...my mother probably shouldn't find out about that either! I trade in my saddle shoes for an A-line skirt with crinoline itching my thighs, now Betty Quackenbush's. Enter my world of 1955 and watch my nifty TV as the Cold War shivers on outside. I'll show you my Elvis record, slightly warped since I sleep with it under my pillow so my mom won't find it.

The worlds of my imagination are released, at Strawberry Banke, from the confines of Hardy-Weinberg equations and conjugating the subjunctive case. Here I can recreate those worlds, but instead of just inviting my older brother in, I invite hundreds of strangers, not just into the museum, but into my world, my imagination, my spin on history. There are 300 years of American history and old guys with PhDs have already written the history books. But now I get to write the history from the viewpoints of 17-year-old girls. I get my chance to say yes, Eisenhower matters but so does Betty. Mary, Helen and Betty matter just as much as Hamilton, FDR and MacArthur. When I open up my little world of history to the visitors, I realize the power of the individual. Individuals matter because all of them can open up their worlds to others and share history. Every individual who has ever lived, has influenced history and left a mark. They've mattered. They mattered when they were alive; they still matter today. Maybe I'll end up a homemaker like Helen with four kids and a doting husband or maybe I'll follow my dreams and end up in Zambia living and breathing my passion: public health. But either way my little world and my story are so much bigger than I am because they are something shared, something communal. My world and my story are pieces of the pointillist painting of the human condition: history.