Why Write
لماذا نكتب؟

Best Writing
Why Write?
Best Writing

Edited By
Mysti Rudd
Elizabeth Schmidt
Dear Readers,

The Best Writing Committee—made up of students, staff, and faculty—is thrilled to present you with the third edition of Best Writing, an anthology of undergraduate student writing from the engineering majors at Texas A&M University at Qatar. Our International branch campus offers Bachelor of Science degrees to undergraduate students majoring in mechanical engineering, chemical engineering, petroleum engineering, or electrical and computer engineering, and a Master of Science in chemical engineering. Although our campus is small (with a total enrollment each year between 500 and 600 students), it is wonderfully diverse. Half of our student population is made up of Qatari nationals, and the other half is composed of 40 distinct nationalities. The diversity of educational backgrounds and identification with homelands, as well as the disparate career goals and outside interests of our students, has led to the wide spectrum of pieces you are holding in your hands.

The subtitle for Best Writing 2016: Why Write? was adapted from the 2015 National Day of Writing in the United States, which we “internationalized” in Doha by celebrating all writers at Texas A&M-Qatar on 20 October with fun (read: balloons), food, and word games. Many students, staff, and faculty submitted responses to the prompt “Why I Write” via social media, which were then displayed on digital signage throughout the Engineering Building in November. Reading these insightful reflections has repeatedly confirmed our suspicion that Texas A&M at Qatar—although an engineering school—has effectively created a community of writers.

The support for Best Writing from the Aggie Community has been overwhelming this year. From faculty members who nominate student work for Best Writing, to the tireless work of those in the Academic Success Center helping students polish submissions, we are doing our best to encourage these engineers to also identify as writers. In both interviews and introductions of past editions, the editors of Best Writing have been referring to our student contributors as “poet-engineers” for years now, loosely defining poets as critical thinkers and potent philosophers whose
medium is the written word. This year’s collection, however, makes the
designation “poet-engineer” even more literal as 16 poems by a dozen
different “poet-engineers” were chosen for publication, more than the first
two editions combined! In fact, there is such a growing interest in poetry
on our campus that a few newly matriculated students are in the midst of
forming an Aggie poetry club to encourage even more engineering
students to write in this genre.

But support for our Aggie writers does not come from our faculty and
staff alone. In addition, we were also fortunate this year to receive financial
support from the Texas A&M University Association of Former Students,
an organization founded to support the Aggie Network all over the
world. Their belief in student achievement helped in developing what we
consider to be our best issue yet.

To write is to think, to contemplate, and to express both your struggles
and your hard-won wisdom; to write is to address and re-dress the
situations you find yourself in; to write is to make sense of the world
around you along with the feelings inside of you. The chapter titles in
this collection form a mantra of sorts to motivate many “poet-engineers”:
“Write to be heard”... “Collect your thoughts”... “Restore the earth”...
“Construct the world around you”... “Hold on to tradition”... “Find the
key” and “Seize the day.” To keep writing, you might need to rearrange
these steps or even revise, replace, or eliminate that-which-gets-in–the-
way, whatever it is that inserts itself between you and your writing. The
steps don’t matter as long as they culminate in the activity of “writing to be
heard”—which is writing that is shared—like the pieces in this collection.
And every single one of these pieces took courage on the part of the
writers who brought their “babies” out into the world, risking judgment as
they dared to share the products of their creativity.

The photographs that accompany the chapter titles also demonstrate
the talent and creative efforts of our engineering undergraduates. These
seven photos were chosen from nearly 40 submitted for the cover photo
contest. Each photograph chosen to introduce a chapter shows talent
and creativity, and it is not surprising that the winning photo on the
cover of Best Writing 2016 was taken by a student who recently founded
the first student photography club at Texas A&M at Qatar. Indeed, it is not a difficult endeavor at Texas A&M at Qatar to transform the STEM curriculum to STEAM (integrating the liberal “A”rts into science, technology, engineering, and math education) as we are fortunate to be blessed not only with a significant number of “poet-engineers,” but also gifted photographers, illustrators, designers, orators, comedians, and negotiators. Many of our students display an impressive array of the “sharp soft skills” necessary to equip an engineer to tackle the grand challenges of the 21st century, according to Dave Goldberg and Mark Somerville in A Whole New Engineer (2014).

Best Writing 2016 is significantly different from the previous two editions of this series as this year the committee asked for input from the entire Texas A&M at Qatar community. At the most recent International Day of Writing event held on 20 October, 2015, we asked students, staff, and faculty to respond to the prompt “What would you like to see in Best Writing 2016?” Their answers varied, but many voices coalesced to suggest that we include more creative pieces, more pieces “from the heart,” and fewer ethics papers. The committee considered these community preferences in choosing this year’s pieces for publication. There was even a suggestion to try to find a way to include staff writing, and so we invited all students, staff, and faculty to contribute—however briefly—to the prologue of this book, “Why Write?” Whether the contributors to this section are designated as “student” or “staff” or “faculty,” together they make up our Aggie community of writers. As a community, we all joined together in finding the courage to share our explanations of the need and desire, the struggle and pleasure of writing. We hope to continue this tradition and invite the entire campus to respond to a single prompt again next year.

We hope that you enjoy reading the many pieces written about writing and other literacies in this year’s collection. We also invite you to take a look at the heartfelt pieces that show new students questioning their place in the universe as they attempt to successfully transition into the academy. In addition, this collection includes a few research papers where the writer really went beyond the classroom requirements and immersed him or herself in the topic as he or she chose to share with us what was learned
about, for example, the health benefits of olive leaf extract, or the redeeming qualities of Lyndon B. Johnson, or the role of solar panels in combatting climate change.

But most of all, we suggest you find a comfortable place to settle, open this book randomly, and read whatever piece jumps out at you. May the courage of our student writers be contagious, so that you, too, experience the need—and the gratification—of writing.

Sincerely,

Mysti Rudd and Elizabeth Schmidt, co-editors
Acknowledgments

The editors wish to acknowledge all of the students who submitted their writing for review—even those whose pieces were not selected for this particular volume. Without all of your contributions, the third volume of *Best Writing* by Texas A&M University at Qatar students would not exist, and we honor the courage required to share your writing with the world.

We also want to acknowledge the *Best Writing* Committee, made up of faculty, staff, and students, for demonstrating commitment to this project by volunteering many hours.

Rida Ahmad, Class of 2016
Ghada Al-Haroon, Class of 2018
Hassan al-Mazrooei, Class of 2016
Ahmad al-Rchid, Class of 2016
Dr. Sara Hillman
Dania Jalees
Lesley Kriewald
Dr. Olga Kulikova
Lida Larson
Hanaa Loutfy, Class of 2016
Sahar Mari
Adel Mohsin, Class of 2018
Deanna Rasmussen
Chereen Shurafa
Sherry Ward
Kelly Wilson

Special thanks to Dr. Troy Bickham and Dr. Eyad Masad for funding this year’s volume through the STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) Initiative. We would also like to thank the Texas A&M University Association of Former Students for providing funding to support this volume of *Best Writing*.

Design and layout by Fatima Al-Salat
Dedication

Dedicated to all Aggie writers—
whether you are student, staff or faculty,
may you always find time to write
and the courage to share your voice,
both in and beyond our community.
About the Cover Photo

Latifa Al-Subaey’s photo was selected by a panel of Texas A&M at Qatar representatives. The editors would like to thank Dr. Ann Kenimer, Damian Medina, Dania Jalees, Jowaher Al-Marri, Sahar Mari, Justin Harbor, and Ghadeer Al-Haddad for choosing such a great photo for our cover. Some of the runner-up photos appear in this volume as chapter dividers. Thanks to all of our student participants in the photo contest!

Latifa Al-Subaey

Unique Piece

A few months ago, I was heading to Souq Waqif with family to have lunch in one of the restaurants over there. As I was walking, I passed by a small store that sells souvenirs, art crafts, and old antiques. I stopped by to look at the merchandise as the pieces looked unique to me. I had never seen something similar before. I purchased a keychain and took some pictures. On my way out, as I was about to leave the store, I noticed something that caught my eye. It looked like a bowl at first, but then I asked the person working there what it was, and he said, “These are a 100-year-old lights that were used in the past!” He added, “This piece is very rare and ancient, and it is not even for sale!”

Because the piece was not for sale, I asked for permission to take a picture of it, and I got it. Since then, I can never go to Souq Waqif without passing by that store to look at that unique piece that I like and appreciate. The lights remind me of how my great grandparents used to live back then. The picture has become one of my favorites. I had posted the picture on my accounts on social media, and so I thought sharing it with Best Writing would be a great idea.
We would also like to thank the talented student photographers who provided photos for the following pages:

Najla Hassen Badar (27)
Latifa Al-Subaey (49 and 209)
Aya Safan (77)
Hussam Al-Biltaji (115)
Fatema Rashid Al-Mansoori (169 and 231)

The Best Writing Committee is proud to publish your artistic expressions.
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To Reach
As much as I wanted to write, I tried to not write. I tried to escape writing, to believe that I’m not a writer, that writing is not for me, but I couldn’t.

Something deep in me made me want to write; I don’t know what it is and despite that, I still want to write. Despite my unsureness, my mistakes, and how hard it is to write.

I thought of writing more than I wrote. It was in my dreams while in reality I was trying to be an engineer with a will to write.

I wrote to search for answers around me, but I ended up finding the answers within me.

I wrote to find people that I want to meet, that I have lost on the way, but searching in my words, I just found myself. I think most of the time I write for myself and sometimes for others. Everything I write is incomplete and I never feel satisfied.

I write to try to believe that the world is a fair place and to realize that no one but we people made life look unjust, bloody and scary. It is a one way journey, but we live like we are staying forever and we forget that we are in a battle. A battle between right and wrong, truth-tellers and liars, ourselves and others, and ourselves and ourselves.

I write to search for people who feel the world’s pain and sadness and who are searching for the truth. Who choose the right path even when few people chose it, even when it looks dark and scary because at the end there is light and in this life you are searching for that light.

I think I’m still learning about writing, and I still believe that it is hard. Maybe writing has helped me a little from feeling lost, from feeling that I don’t have a voice that everyone can hear, that I can’t share my thoughts with people, but that I can think in a little crazy way and live in an imaginary world.

—Ghadeer Al-Haddad (student)
Writing is...

Writing is thinking.
The process of making sense and maybe even sometimes making something new.

Writing is commitment.
Sometimes I hate it. It’s painful, the words won’t appear.
But when I persevere, I feel happy, maybe brave, and every once in a while, proud.

Writing is a test.
It’s terrifying to lay your thoughts out on the page, to make them available to a reader.
I never feel more nervous than when I watch someone else read what I’ve written.
Sometimes my writing fails. But the cool thing about writing is that it can be revised.

Writing is gratitude.
It’s the way that I try to give back to people that have given so much to me.
Words can build relationships, weaving a “me” into the “us” of a community.

Writing has power, to lift up and to tear down.
I write in hopes of positive transformation.

—Nancy Small (faculty)
Sometimes I write just for myself—to clarify and refine my own thinking. When I read what I have written, I can look at each word and ask myself if it clearly articulates what I am thinking. I often find a better word. I might even find a word that helps me more fully understand my own thoughts. When I leave my written words for a time, I believe I continue to ponder them on a subconscious level. When I come back to my writing, words and ideas frequently come instantly to mind, as though they had been formulated in the interim and were eager to leap onto the page. Occasionally, on fresh re-reading, I realize I had only scratched the surface of my thoughts. The subject I really wanted to bring into focus was at a deeper level. I am then able to start again and try to get more to the core of my thoughts. After I have gone through this process of examining my thoughts, by way of my own written words, I think I understand myself better.

—Beverly Farmer (staff)

It is a resource that is simple, accessible to understand yourself better in order to be understood.

—Nakia Mustafa (staff)

Writing is not my hobby, writing is my passion. I write for the very enjoyment of it. You could say that physics is my wife, but writing is my mistress.

—Mohamed S. Lamine (student)
**I write to set my heart at flight**

I write to set my heart at flight  
to release my fears and share my dreams  
to awaken every soul to its call

Those stirred with a silver or wooden spoon  
to release the string on everyone’s kite  
to watch them all fly by

as they will unite in the sky  
To sing and dance  
to see only one spring

A well so strong and deep  
To hold creation’s heart beat  
To withstand desert’s itch

All will come back down  
To share their awakening  
To write a story of aspiration

—Nancy Abraham (staff)

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We are all full of stories and have to decide which one to share and which one to hide. At times, we hide them from even ourselves and create a reality that does not fit our truth. All the while the real story is hidden inside. The story that reflects your humanity, is sitting inside. It must be written, so that it is embraced by loving arms of humanity throughout time. The written words of truth pierce through the thickest of walls and plants a seed in hearts for ages to come. The seed will flourish and be foraged. Write to watch the walls crumble and you will see it first in your eyes.

—Nancy Abraham (staff)
Ride the Tide
Although writing is words, you can make writing anything you want it to be:

Inspiration, passion, a vessel to store yourself in; or maybe an escape, an expression, a conveyance

And if it can be anything then why not become its mold? Why not write and allow your body to be the direct medium from your inner to the outer, an effortless act because your mind already is art, as you are the canvas and your writing: a beautiful brush stroke

The secret lies in holding continuous faith and confidence within and allowing its purity to make your work sacred, all the while letting it transform you.

So why not ride the tide? And savor the splashes of all that’s inside of you

—Midhat J. Zaidi (student)

Why do I write? Because I have stories to tell. Sometimes they’re mine, but a lot of times they are stories long dormant. Research helps me find them, but writing? Writing helps me share these stories with the world. Writing gives a voice to people, groups, organizations, communities, nations that have stayed silent for too long.

—Elizabeth Schmidt (staff)
All of my books begin with a central question. The answer is the story. I write to know what I’m thinking. I write to know what I’m feeling. I share so that others will feel less alone in their journeys.

—Mohana Rajakumar (staff)

A writer has two favorite lines: one he wrote, and one that made him write.

—J. C. Crisme (student)

Writing is a gift.

—Samar Elkhalifa (student)
Why I Write

I write to feel, I write to grieve,
I write to measure the distance between
who I am and who I claim to be.

I write because I have forgotten how to cry.
I write to prove I am alive, to re-define nature and re-create family.
To disrupt the monotony of like-mindedness
with the staccato demands of exclamation,
I write to be heard!

I write in order to breathe; I breathe in order to write.
I write to keep from drowning
because I no longer possess
the buoyancy of a wish
or the certitude of a dolphin.

I write to give up, give over, give in,
to transcend my body and align my mind
with something bigger, brighter, both
more alive and more benign.
I write to prevent my thoughts from disappearing.
I write to resist smashing atoms of oxygen
against the cliffs of self-discipline.
I write to preserve in vinegar
the record of my existence.

I write as a form of kneeling;
I write in order to hear with holy ears.
Writing is a form of waiting
for the wave of words flowing from a sacred source
to wash me-with-you and you-with-me
back on to the coughed-up shores of the world
to continue our holy work.

—Mysti Rudd (faculty)
Write…

May the words heal your wounds,
May they help you find your soul,
May they alleviate the pain
of your broken heart

—Aalaa E. Abdalla (student)
Photographed by Najla Hassen Badar
Write to be Heard
This piece is a short poem I wrote not for a particular prompt but when I just thought about why I liked writing and words. I often end up writing on arms and seeing words on my skin makes me feel grounded. I’ve always loved words and have always found some strange comfort in them. While I do love debating and have no qualms speaking to large audiences, I would definitely say that I’d take a pen over a podium any day. This poem sort of runs over all the thoughts that I have about writing.

Ink Willed

As silence cuts through comfort like lesions
and I struggle to answer unasked questions,
to keep the conversation breathing just a little longer,
I don’t want my traitorous tongue carrying rebellious thoughts forward,
so I’d rather let ink talk and remain just a little bit stronger.

Inked words carry more heart than I ever could.
Ink knows no fear and I don’t think it ever would.
It knows not what the world sees as right or wrong.
Ink isn’t human and therefore sings a more honest song.
Is it really a surprise that I’ve trusted ink to be my messenger for so long?

With strained vocal chords, betraying muscles and emotions reaching the brink,
I’d rather bleed ink.
Bleed enough to stain skin with charmed coherent thoughts,
Bleed to hide from the world my deepest fears and reach the peace I’ve always sought.
So go ahead and call me a robot
for feelings are awful and I hate that human link.
I’d rather etch words onto my skin with ink,

Etch words that mean the world onto the barren expanse
that I need to look at everyday.
I’d rather see words than the mirror because
they have nicer things to say
and words keep the darkness of doubts at bay.

With my words I can forget the world.
Conversations with and through ink can be however bold.
The numerous thoughts swimming around my mind,
Each screaming for attention, not being too kind.
If I let ink take control
from mind through fingers and ink, the thoughts will flow
and for a short moment in my universe
there is harmony between mind and words.

Through scratches, doodles and writing
that holds emotion in lines,
I find peace and I think
it’s because my will is bound by ink.
Biography

Pavithra Manghaipathy considers herself a typical college senior who loves to read, dance, and watch a lot of television. Her unhealthy obsession with science fiction and tendency to be most comfortable alone lead her to start writing. While she writes a lot, she is often not very keen on sharing a lot. She worries that most of her poetry seems too personal and raw while most of the short stories she writes are often too outrageous and maybe the world isn’t ready for them yet. But the works she has been able to publish are still quite dear to her heart and she truly hopes that someday in the future, her words can help someone else start writing.
This piece describes the thoughts that run through an Olympic champion’s mind during the victory ceremony. She remembers the times she spent within the crowd cheering for her favorite swimmers, her role model, and her first swimming coach. She talks about all the dialogs that go through her mind during the 100m freestyle final. When the national anthem stops playing, she has a sudden realization.

One, Two, Three Reach

It was time for the 100-meter freestyle Olympic champion to take her place on the podium. As soon as her name was called, cheers, applause, and whistles filled the aquatic center. Not only did she come in first, but she also managed to smash the seven-year-old world record. Her right foot went onto the podium first, then the left followed. Two seconds later she raised her hands high in the air as a sign of victory. She acknowledged the crowd and noticed the support signs that read, “You are the best,” “Those who wish to sing always find a song,” and “We Love you.” She waved at the children who filled the second and third rows of the fan section and remembered how not long ago she was in their places.

The first time she saw a swimming meet was with her dad during the Arab games during which her favorite swimmer and role model dominated most of the events, winning 15 gold medals. She has always admired the way he swam: she learned from every turn, every stroke, and every kick. She would dream of the day she would become an Olympian like him. She would close her eyes and visualize the last few meters of the race, the winning touch, and the medal around her neck. Indeed it was time for

Doaa Awad
her to lower her head so the medal could be placed around her neck; not only was it an Olympic medal, but it was the gold medal. What was even better was that her favorite swimmer, now president of the International Swimming Federation, was giving out the medals. She felt like she owed him the medal; after all, he was the one who saved her career.

Four years back, she had faced obstacles that made her decide to quit the sport. Only to her great disbelief, the very next day she met the president at an event and asked for his autograph. As much as he was an amazing swimmer, he had a great personality, and his spontaneous reaction was to sign her cap and say, “Good luck in your career.” Who could ever guess that those five words would make her fall in love with the sport again?

One of her favorite traditions of the Olympics’ victory ceremony is the uniquely designed mascot that matches the theme of every game. Although in her mid-20s now, mascots and stuffed animals still meant a lot to her. They never failed to look cute and adorable. The bright yellow, green and blue stuffed monkey never failed to draw a smile on someone’s face. Back home she had a shelf full of mascots of previous Olympic games, Arab games, and swimming championships. One special mascot was a seahorse that she got from her sister on her nineteenth birthday. Another was the mascot for the 2011 Arab games, the white horse that represents the rich culture of the Arabs. Although she had always visualized this moment, she would have never expected it to be full of memory revival.

Everything just happened one after the other: the medal, the mascot, and now the national anthem. There was a sudden silence in the crowd and then the national anthem started playing. This was a huge moment that gave her goose bumps, made her shed tears of joy, and most importantly, announced her presence not only in front of the crowd in the stadium but also in front of millions of swimming fans all around the world. The screens in front of her displayed replays of the race that she had just won.

She had the fastest reaction time; she couldn’t help but think that those taekwondo practices didn’t go to waste. The coach would make them lie on the ground with their eyes closed, then whistle to signal to everyone to
get up as fast as they could and run to the other side of the room. In her opinion, the most important figure was actually the coach who taught her how to swim back time in time when she was five. Oh, she remembered how she fell in love with the water from the very first splash.

The first 49 meters went really well, and then it was time for the flip turn. It is known that the turn can either make or break your race. She couldn’t help but remember her swimming coach who had so much patience to spend a month of her time teaching her the flip turn. It definitely paid off: the perfect tuck, the push, the flip back on the stomach, and the glide gave her a strong start on the second and final leg of the race. Now, this race is very tricky for it is not too short yet long enough to exhaust you if you give the maximum potential all the way. She would say that the last 20 meters were the hardest as the oxygen level started decreasing rapidly, the strokes started to get sloppy, and the brain began shutting down. Then she remembered her coach’s famous magical words:” One, Two, Three, Reach.” Basically, that was her wakeup call; it got her back to the rhythm of a clean, long, effective stroke.

Her tears were now sliding down her cheeks, the national anthem was about to finish, and on the screen showed the last five meters of the race. This was the no-breath, ultimate concentration, and positive thoughts zone. At this stage all a swimmer does is kick, swim as fast as possible and really focus all mental effort on creating a positive atmosphere in her head, hoping that she touches the wall first. Here it comes . . . one meter to go, the last stroke, the final touch, and it was over. She took her goggles off, looked at the OMEGA sponsored screen, and read 52.06. She had broken the seven-year-old world record by one hundredth of a second!

She then congratulated the second and third place medal receivers, and threw the mascot to the crowd for that lucky child to keep as memory. She felt this heaviness in her chest: was it happiness or was it the weight of the medal? She ran her fingertips across the piece of alloy; her fingers formed the rings that she has always been obsessed about, and they read
RIO 2016 XXXI Olympiad. It then occurred to her that the fate of this medal will be in a frame on the wall somewhere in her room. Only then did she realize the true meaning of the saying, “It is about the journey not the destination.”

**Biography**

Doaa Awad is a mechanical engineering student graduating in 2017. She is deeply passionate about sports and its power to change the world. Doaa believes that through sports one can develop his/her personality by learning important qualities like discipline, attitude, determination, and perseverance. Upon graduation, Doaa would like to pursue her love for sports and maybe mingle it with the field of engineering.
Maryam Rashid Al-Buainain

“The Voice” was written during my English 104 class after reading a piece about our internal voice, the voice that speaks in our heads. This piece was my favorite during this course because it was so spontaneous and unexpected from me. While I was writing “The Voice” I was going through an intensive thinking of the philosophy about what is this thing that is in our head that speaks to us all the time, and this piece was the result.

The Voice

Understanding my voice is complicated because even I can’t understand it.
My voice is always in my head speaking to me and guiding me.
When I write I just want my voice to speak without any limits.
I want to express myself/ my voice/ my thoughts.
I want to change the idea that I write to be graded because I enjoy writing but I don’t enjoy it at school.

University was a new world to me, one where I decided to open my heart and be me in everything even in writing.
That’s why I write freely.
That’s why I wanted my voice to speak.
When my own voice speaks,
I know that I will get a better grade ‘cause it’s simple, I am not lying.

I think that you can hear my pure voice speaking. My voice is a proud, sad, comfortable voice that might have some hesitation. It might be my Arabic voice translated into English or my English voice translated into Arabic, I don’t know; my voice is just a voice that is in my head. As you read and discover it, I know that in your head my voice will speak to your voice.

Biography

Maryam Al-Buainain is a mechanical engineering freshman at Texas A&M University at Qatar. She is an engineer, and loves science and all of its applications, but still enjoys her tool to survive in this life, which is writing.
Off to the front gate dashed Gorman right after the sound of the doorbell had echoed all over the house. Sir Charles Leachman was in the sitting room reading a sociological journal, and drinking his tea. It was 1856, a warm day in Bristol, 21° Celsius, but this condition was very temporary. Sir Leachman was there only to execute his affairs. Otherwise, his time would normally be occupied by his geographical expeditions.

Gorman came back, “Sir, this is from the Royal Geographical Society.”

“Do read it for me,” said Leachman.

“Odd, sir. This letter has only one word written,” said Gorman.

Leachman smiled in assurance, and responded, “This is what it is ought to be, but most notably, what does it say?”

“Approved, Sir. Approved.”
“This is very pleasant to hear. It consumed a long time for me, anticipating it would never arrive. I must be packing and getting all set. Very soon, I shall be in a sea route to Arabia.”

Three days later, Leachman and other members of the Society were all in Portsmouth Harbor waiting to embark. Sir Roderick Murchison, the Society president, emerged unexpectedly from the crowd, but it was an occasion for Leachman to express gratitude for the journey approval. For Murchison, there was a purpose for his appearance, just before sailing, as he announced to Leachman, “With only one human being photographed, regardless of how many more you would append, this journey is officially completed.”

A voyage of 13,000 miles commenced with Dubai as its destination. Leachman knew that it was more than a fishing settlement; a tribal conflict almost identical to what was occurring there signified a lot. The ship was anchored after 52 days; the Society members were not to go off board, only three were to accompany Leachman: Wilfred, an English anthropologist; Rajeh, a Syrian Arabic translator; and Nejad, an Indian servant.

The Her Majesty Ship remained in the port while the four men rode camels prepared and brought by an ally waiting for them. They crossed nine miles through Bur Dubai until they reached Al-Shindagha, the mud hut village where the main tribal federation, Al-Bu Falasah, was residing. They were introduced to the sheikh and the people there who welcomed them with the very noble traditions of offering food and constructing a place of residence.

Leachman had a new friend, Butti, a local man, who was credited with being the fountainhead of the very detailed information Leachman recorded, as he was also their geographical guide. One week had gone by, and every trial to photograph the natives failed. News flies as rapid as a blink, and as much as the people heard about the many Portuguese massacres against their neighbors along the southeastern coast of the peninsula, they became horrified and very cautious. Now, here came this English gentleman with a collodion camera of which the natives knew
nothing and tried to photograph them. Was this device a new phase of a firearm? People sensed an absolute fear of this camera, but they were very certain that as those scholars were respected guests, this device shall never be used on them.

It was Leachman’s 30th morning in Bur Dubai. He opened his breakfast bag, pulled out a silver spoon, and started eating. Butti had witnessed this action every day since Leachman’s arrival. However, he never expressed his will to practice the same. Does it taste different with this strange finger? Is it tastier? Butti whispered to himself. Leachman left with his water bottle, and began washing his hands. The bag was left behind, open with the spoon above. Leachman was away, and Butti was looking. The perfect moment came; quickly Butti jumped over the bag and began emulating Leachman. With no notice, Leachman caught him on the hop: “Stop, our most precious goals tend to have the prolonged time of all, but it is only our motivational vitality that makes them possible and immediate. I circumnavigated the peninsula for this; now that you have used my spoon without my permission, I must photograph you and the spoon without yours.”

When Rajeh translated that, Butti perceived what an enormous transgression he had committed. Nevertheless, chivalrous he was to accept the judgment: to hold the spoon and to sit and wait for his death.

Wearing rubber gloves, Leachman washed glass plates, poured a collodion solution over the plate, and sensitized the plate in a silver bath while Butti visualized his life as the most dramatic of all time. Leachman placed the sensitized plate in the plate holder; wiped out the silver excess; closed the plate holder; focused the camera; and attached the plate holder to the camera. Butti’s body was frozen and surprised by this short extension of his life. Leachman allowed the plate to expose, removed the plate holder from the camera, took out the plate, and poured a developing solution on the plate. The image started to appear; the plate was rinsed with distilled water; put in a developing bath, and finally the image was printed on a special paper.
The objective of this journey was met thanks to Butti’s curiosity. Based on an initial agreement, the ship was waiting for the men, and so they sailed. The photograph found its way by Cape of Good Hope to Great Britain where it ended up in the British Museum in a showroom devoted only to it. A public invitation circulated, and people were jammed into the showroom the next morning.

This was not an ordinary photograph; it was a great hope for the kingdom—a hope of further geographical expansion. A protectorate almost in the heart of the world could facilitate trade and transportation to India, Persia, Africa, and Europe.

The clock bell rang, it was afternoon, and the museum closed. The photograph was left alone, preserved, with the imperial ambition to be achieved and a small golden title bar underneath it that had the engravings said: “The Bedouin with the Spoon.”

Biography

Saeed Binnoora is an electrical engineering sophomore. “I AM, two of the most powerful words for what you put after them shapes your reality.”
I am not deaf, nor blind
but mute without my pen.
Even when I shout no one hears me
Until,
I write it down, and get my message delivered.
My voice is heard without a microphone,
Because it is not said, it is written down by my magical tool.
My pen.

Biography
Aalaa Abdalla, a 19-year-old sophomore mechanical engineering student, was born and raised in the beautiful Mediterranean city of Alexandria in Egypt. She loves writing because it is a way to express herself. Her favorite writer is Paulo Coelho, who inspires her to read more, and even start writing. Her other loves include drawing, classical music, and coffee. Outside the classroom, Aalaa can be found conducting robotics workshops and making YouTube videos.
To Pens And Swords And Souls Unheard

For every time I got shot down,  
or shushed to silence with a frown.  
For every day I went unheard,  
until my self-perception blurred.

To myself I swore, I took a vow,  
I’d make my voice be heard somehow.  
So I yelled, I sang, I whispered soft,  
yet all their noises soared aloft.

But when the pen and paper met,  
I wrote some words they’d not forget—  
Words that, mirrored from my soul,  
spoke of all that made me whole.

I wrote until my soul was sate,  
and all my restless throes abate.  
My heart unto the paper poured,  
for the pen has more might than the sword.
So the next time someone calls me out, know that all I care about, is ink on paper, flowing free, reminding me who I can be.

Biography

Samozai Farheen Mansoor is a mechanical engineering junior who enjoys writing both prose and poetry. Her favorite poems include “Ode on a Grecian Urn” and “Ode to a Nightingale” by John Keats, and “Dazzle of Day” by Pablo Neruda. She likes nature and animals very much, and dreams of having a pretty little house in a quiet countryside someday.
Photographed by Latifa Al-Subaey
Collect Your Thoughts
The Tempest is a play written by William Shakespeare. It is believed that it is the last play that Shakespeare wrote alone. As high school students, we were required to read and analyze multiple forms of writing. The majority of students complained about having to read and analyze Shakespeare’s plays. However, I am still amazed at how interesting and poetic his plays are. Multiple assignments were given throughout the course of reading The Tempest, and one of the tasks was to write a poem inspired by the play. Thus, it was the first poem I have written. I was forced to write it yet I never thought that I would be capable of writing anything poetic. My deep understanding of the play helped me write it easily. Words flew automatically without any boundaries. My audience included my teacher and classmates. However, my audience now is unlimited. Even though it has been five years since I wrote “Who I Am,” I am still proud of writing it.

Who I Am

In this isolated island here I am
Trapped into a cloven pine by a damned witch
Freed by a magical master from Milan
Flaming amazement all around
Playing with fire from time to time
Invisible to every article in this island I am
Like a nymph playing tricks of desperation
Corresponding to commands by a potent master I am
Come and go do and so
but does he love me?
Aiding Prospero to defeat the puppy-headed monster from day to night
Like a harpy I am to frighten the three disingenuous ministers from Milan
Like a magical singer I am to drag Trinculo, Stephano and Caliban

Liberty, Liberty, Liberty is my only demand.

Biography
Tabarak Abdulhussein Al-Lami was born in Baghdad, but moved out of her homeland at the age of five. She grew up in multicultural environments and diversity has shaped a significant angle of her personality. Reading narratives, poems and plays in different languages is one of her interests. Her favorite writer is Khalil Gibran, and her role model is Dame Zaha Hadid. She aspires to become a petroleum engineer who makes a significant contribution to the world.
“Writing Helped Me To Be Me” was a piece written during my College Composition course. I was going through my memories without stopping. Before I started writing it, I spent an entire day thinking of how reading and writing started with me and how I started learning them. I enjoyed going through my memories and writing this piece, and I hope that the readers of this book will enjoy it as well.

**Writing Helped Me To Be Me**

When I was five years old, I remember singing the song, “A B C D...” That was my beginning with literacy. I remember facing difficulties regarding reading and memorizing the alphabets, yet the song helped me to get over it for a while. In the second grade, I was the kind of kid who desired to be the best of the best, and I was somehow, until that day the Arabic teacher gave my classmate Ahmad a pencil for being a good reader. I felt a fire in my chest, and since that day our competition for who is the best reader began.

I admit that I was neither a good reader nor a good writer. I couldn’t see myself reading a book or enjoying it because that was hard to me. When I entered preparatory school, my judgment started to change. My friend Haneen was addicted to books. She was my incentive to start reading. Fortunately, my first novel was an Arabic philosophical horror story called, *When the Ghost Rebelled*. It was amazing, more than 300 pages and the first novel that I chose to read. The novel matched my interests perfectly and is still my favorite. It was hard for me to start reading it and I tried to push myself to finish it. When I was reading, I felt that the words were
bigger than my age and they invaded my mind in a magical way. After this novel, my level of thinking rose to an entire new level. From that day, I became a book devotee for four years. I read most of Paulo Coelho’s novels. I read *Picasso and Starbucks*, *The Universe* and so many other different kinds of books.

During the summer before starting high school, I immersed myself in the astronomy world. I began to be a good reader of articles regarding this subject, starting from what is an atom all the way to dark matter, nuclear energy, the life of stars, black holes, what is space, what is time, how theories can explain our world, the relation between philosophy and physics, etc. Not only that, but I also started to study astronomy by my own self, and this is where I chose reading to learn again.

Yet my story with writing is totally different. I have always seen myself as a writer with good philosophies, but bad grammar, vocabulary and ability to convey ideas. Before and during high school, the category of writing that I choose to do was odd. I had this big notebook full of empty pages, and I filled these pages with hate, anger and tears. In this period of my life, I lost a person—not physically, but I lost the presence of this person in my circle. This loss made me a very different person, one full of hidden hate and anger. The only way for me to release the pressure was to transfer my bad, evil ideas onto the pages.

During my high school days, I had a love-hate relationship with writing. I hated writing because I was forced to learn the basics in order to get into a good university and to pass my exams, of course. Far away from all that, I think writing helped me to survive from my saddest moments. During this period, I learnt how to express my feelings and ideas freely. I was a moody, sensitive person full of hate and love and lots of ideas to share.

Writing helps me to be me. I write when I am happy, I write when I am sad, I write when I am in love, I write when I feel cheated, I write when I listen to a good song that is related to my life, I write when I feel lonely, I write when I feel hated, I write when I feel satisfied, and I write to express me. Writing was and still is my tool to survive.
In the past month, another important person has faded away from my life. Here again writing began to help me. I appreciate sadness on pages. I think that sometimes my sadness has developed me as a free writer.

Now I love writing more than any time before, because writing supports me and explains me. To me, I don’t care if I have a bad grammar or a weak vocabulary, I don’t care if I keep on repeating the same words again and again, I don’t care about anything when I write from myself to myself.

Biography

Maryam Al-Buainain is a mechanical engineering freshman at Texas A&M University at Qatar. She is an engineer, and loves science and all of its applications, but still enjoys her tool to survive in this life, which is writing.
Monya Al-Muhannadi

This piece is my favorite writing assignment I’ve ever done in my life so far. It does not have to do with how good my writing was as much as it has to do with how much it means to me. I have never been so honest and so “me” in a writing assignment for school before. I found out that the key to writing a personal essay like this one is to forget that you have an audience. By doing so, you are writing what you have to say, not what people would like to hear. I wrote so many drafts, and I think that I won’t stop here. It feels like I’m writing the script of my own biopic and as a viewer, I’m eager to know what happens next.

What Am I Doing Here?

Often at night, I feel the heavy burden of my being when I’m left alone with myself. With time and experience, I discovered that putting myself to sleep while listening to music frees me from the unyielding chains of thoughts and questions that grip so tightly around my head. My sleep playlist, which I call the “Auditory Sleeping Pill”, consists mainly of my favorite chill out albums like Chelsea Girl by Nico and Kid A by Radiohead. The way I see it, my favorite artists are having one-sided conversations with me. So in a way, music keeps me company.

It is only common sense to completely avoid anything and everything that might trigger your anxiety. Having said that, I could not avoid the first week of classes and jump straight into the part where I have my college life figured out. Instead, I was assigned to write an essay about the reason I am “here.”
I’m not a creative person. I’m not a critical thinker. I don’t know how to “think outside the box” or “approach problems from a different angle.” I’m not even smart; in fact, the only reason I managed to get good grades in high school is because I enjoyed studying; therefore, I put the time and effort into that.

When I started high school I realized how cool engineers were, and I knew that I wanted to be one of them. I didn’t only imagine myself as a well-established, successful female engineer, wearing my hardhat and going on with my daily engineering business. I also fantasized about the amount of knowledge that I will learn in college, the laws of physics and chemistry, and the tough math courses that I will master. At home, I secretly enjoyed the innocent jokes that my cousins made about me when they knew that I wanted to be an engineer. I had no problem whatsoever fixing a broken AC at home, or even my own car, once I learn how to drive. On the contrary, I was excited to learn how to fix stuff. To me, becoming an engineer meant self-fulfillment.

At that point I thought that the only barrier separating high school student Monya and engineer Monya was engineering school. I had the grades to get into a good engineering school. I thought that was all that it took to actually be an engineer. I am passionate enough about my major to study hard and ace all of my exams to graduate and become the engineer I have long daydreamed of becoming.

I have never been so wrong in my life. Come to think of it, I have never been so traumatized in my life either. I was struck by the first week of classes. Everything from losing my way to the lecture hall, to the course topics, to the workload. None of that was how I imagined the start of my journey at college would be.

Physically, I did attend my first two math classes. But mentally, I was in outer space. Traveling through a wormhole. Shaking slowly, with bright lights flashing at my eyes. The turbulence intensifies.

After class, I went to my math professor’s office with a notebook and a couple of questions that I did not fully understand from class. I can’t
remember ever going to my teacher’s office in high school. Even in class, I don’t recall ever having as many “light bulb moments” as I had that day in my professor’s office. Math has never made so much sense to me. Who would have thought that an application as simple a graphing calculator, when used correctly, could make teaching so much more fun and easier?

I don’t know what went through my head that day, but for some reason, I let out all of my feelings. I told my math professor, “Most of the time, I am completely lost in class. I walk out of class feeling overwhelmed, worried about how my actual situation would affect my college career.”

This math course carries so much weight. It is a prerequisite for a number of different classes. That fact made my anxiety worse. The first thing that she told me was that I was not the only person in class who is feeling the same way. Not only that, but she said that I’m doing the right thing by realizing that I’m not doing well and that I have to make some changes in order to perform well in class. I have to say that that was quite reassuring. I did not stop there. I told her what was really going through my head the day I burst into tears on my bed.

“I’m starting to doubt myself. I don’t think I have what it takes to be an engineer,” I blurted out to my math professor.

She replied, “Do you really want to be an engineer?”

“Yes, I am sure,” I responded.

My instructor then said, “The way you have been doing math in high school seems to be different from what you’re doing now, and that is normal. Here, you’re studying to become an engineer, and to become an engineer you have to think like one, solve problems like one, accept the challenges that come with being an engineer.”

I replayed that conversation in my head several times on my way back home in my brother’s car. I’m not here to just be an engineer, I’m here to rediscover myself, learn to accept failure, explore my limits, challenge myself, and most importantly, I’m here to change.
A month after the first day of classes. I started doubting myself even more. I didn’t know whether I had chosen the right major or even the right university. Nothing felt worse than realizing that I was not good enough to be what I have always dreamed of being. I had gotten to the point where every time I hear my friends saying things like “four years from now we will be doing this or that,” I cringed a little. I could not even imagine myself saying “I survived my freshman year of college!” Actually, in a low-key kind of way, I imagined myself in my second or third year of college remembering the tough times I went through as a freshman, even laughing at my eighteen-year-old self with my friends.

My family and friends think that I am being overdramatic. I don’t agree with them. I prefer to see things as they are. This is why I’m still not sure I can do it here. Or anywhere.

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**Biography**

Monya Al-Muhannadi was born and raised in Doha, Qatar, but is always ready to hop on a plane and fly somewhere new. She is currently a mechanical engineering freshman. She decided to pursue a degree in mechanical engineering because she knew that she wanted to be an engineer ever since she was a little girl. She is passionate about food, music and film and can’t wait to be the first Aggie engineer in her family!
Who has not dreamt of a magical place where they want to be rather than where they are now? Because life is not always fair, we may end up somewhere without knowing why we are in that place. This what happened to me, but I discovered “why” by writing this piece.

Aalaa E. Abdalla

Why Am I Not There?

The weather is great, sunny with a cold breeze, I just came out of the sea. The sun is shining on my face while I drink a cold pineapple juice. I have nothing to do other than relax the whole day and enjoy my time. I wish life was that simple, but, unfortunately, this is not the reality. The reality is I have loads of homework and endless to-do lists in front of me on my desk, my slow HP laptop open with a new word document on the screen just waiting for me to fill it.

I jumped the big step when I moved from high school to university, so now I can loudly and proudly call myself a freshman. I thought choosing engineering would save me from writing long essays, but oh well! This is not the case. During the first week of study, we were assigned an essay in my English class. Yes, I said English. Not because I became an engineering student—I will spend my time happily solving physics and math—instead I have to WRITE ESSAYS!

The topic I was assigned for English is “Why am I here?” or “Why I am here,” the form I prefer. Because I don’t know the reason behind why I am here, I will go with the first option “Why am I here?” Before writing an essay about why am I here? I should know the answer, or try to figure out a reason.
This is a hard question. Maybe I can seek help. Every time I have a question and can’t figure out an answer, I ask Google for help. I minimize the word document and open the browser looking for an answer, but this particular question Google couldn’t answer for me. I am the only one who should have an answer.

Wait a second, I am trying to figure out Why before I know what Here the question is asking about. It seems that my thinking strategy as an engineer can help me with English assignments. I should know which “here” to use. Is “here” the university, the English class, Qatar, the whole universe, or where exactly? I began to think about all the “heres” that came to my mind.

If we started with the universe, I think we are here because we should find a way to live and improve our planet. This reasoning seems like a cliché. Anyone familiar with philosophy can come up with that answer, so I need to find a personal reason. Now let me move to a smaller scale and consider Qatar. I am here because my family left our home in Egypt looking for a higher standard of living, and I had no choice as a child but to come with them. On an even smaller scale, why am I at TAMUQ? Because one out of the two majors I want is Engineering. TAMUQ is one of the eight universities that I applied to. Why am I in this English class? Because I was too lazy to do the AP English exam, although I did four other AP exams. But why all of this, why do I care about the English class, and APs and endless exams? Because each of these classes and exams is part of my degree plan.

But do I really want a degree? Or has it become a default in our days that you should at least obtain a bachelor’s degree? Or maybe I am the one who just went with the flow to meet everyone’s expectations. And I forgot about my own preferences. If I listened to my heart, I would be on that beautiful island right now. Even if not on the island at least I would not be here in front of my dead laptop, trying to begin writing.

Let me change the question then. “Why am I not there?” There where I always wanted to be, there I will be breathing, free, there I will be living.
I don’t know where there is on the map, but I can tell you that it is clearly located in my heart. I know it is not where I am now.

So “Why am I here?” AGAIN because this is what was written for me; the choice that I did not have. Maybe I am here to freely write what comes to my mind as I am doing now, to find a professor who is willing to read my thoughts, the thoughts that I have always kept in a diary locked inside my secret drawer. Maybe I am here to liberate myself from following the rules that don’t make sense to me. Not to keep track of the word count anymore, just to write, and more importantly, to keep writing...

Biography

Aalaa Abdalla, a 19-year-old sophomore mechanical engineering student, was born and raised in the beautiful Mediterranean city of Alexandria in Egypt. She loves writing because it is a way to express herself. Her favorite writer is Paulo Coelho, who inspires her to read more, and even start writing. Her other loves include drawing, classical music, and coffee. Outside the classroom, Aalaa can be found conducting robotics workshops and making YouTube videos.
This piece was a class assignment, nothing I had thought I would be writing about, especially in engineering school. I have been reading and writing for as long as I can remember, and when this assignment was given, I was taken aback by how much I have grown throughout my academic life. I had forgotten just how many reading and writing skills that I had picked up were important today. One day you’re learning the alphabet and the next you are writing an eloquent research paper. It was quite a humbling paper to write, and the reason I chose this piece to submit was to hopefully pass on this feeling of gratitude to other readers and allow them to ponder how much they have grown. I believe we are so engrossed in bigger things that we forget the little things that are the reason we are who we are today. It seems like just yesterday we were learning to count on our fingers, and now we not only have numbers in mathematics but the alphabet and punctuation!

A Love for Reading and Writing

I am my mother’s daughter, and one way this comes across is through our mutual love for reading and writing. For as long as I can remember, she has always been stressing to my siblings and me about the importance of reading. She would buy us books, read to us and help us with English homework. It wasn’t the best thing because I was young and all I wanted was to watch cartoons all day. But as I grew, I was able to appreciate books more.

I would not say I am an extrovert, but I can pull it off just as well as any one. However, growing up this was not easy. I did not know how to talk to people and hold a solid conversation longer than ten minutes. I
would always have a book in hand, and I felt freer when I was alone with something to read. I still do to this day, except as you grow up you learn to do in Rome what the Romans do. I was able to learn so much from books and see things from different perspectives. Books became a very important part of me; it was me talking to “people.”

In the sixth grade, I was obsessed with *Goosebumps*, a teen thriller book, which at that time was very famous at my school. I would read them more than I read my school assignments. The librarian even let me read the boxed ones before he shelved them. And because they were small books, I would read two to three a day. They had great influence on my writing, thus all through my primary years everything I wrote for composition class had themes and thrills similar to those I read in *Goosebumps*! I was so in love with the books I tried writing a book of my own. Unfortunately, after writing 20 pages, I crumpled up the papers and tossed them into the trash. I just was not that good.

High school came and my reading preferences matured. I was not excited by *Goosebumps* anymore. I started reading Sidney Sheldon, Paulo Coelho, J.R.R Tolkien, and Dan Brown among others. My most memorable book was *Gifted Hands* by famous Neurosurgeon Ben Carson. One of the scenes in the book is when Ben and his brother were watching a trivia gameshow and were amazed by how much the contestants knew. With a push from their single mother, the boys discover the library, books, and paintings and learnt about things they did not learn in school. They found a new peace and developed a great interest in reading. This motivated me to not only read for leisure but to read for knowledge.

One experience that tried to put off reading for me was assigned class readings. I strongly disliked those! They were boring and restricted. Some would be about politics—a topic I do not have much interest in, and others were just too “academic.” They sucked the fun out of wanting to read. Sadly, I had little time for personal reading because the assignments were bulky. But sometimes we just have to suck it up and read to get the work done.
The only good this bulky reading yielded was writing skills, not content writing but the visual aspects. Looking back, I cannot believe how horrible my handwriting was! It was so bad; I could not read back what I myself wrote, and teachers struggled marking my exams. I would look at my mother’s handwriting and get so jealous! She has such beautiful writing and when she writes, the pen effortlessly glides across the page, making smooth stops to mark periods and dots over the “i.” In the 11th grade, to prepare for my final exam, my class teacher would assign class readings. But for me, I had the honor of writing the whole assignment in a children’s handwriting book. As much as I complained every time, I am very grateful that I get compliments today for my handwriting.

To me, books are a journey into someone’s mind. When I read about a woman who struggles, I feel the emotions the writer had; when I read of a story of success, I feel the joy one would have crossing the finish line; and when I read the story of a journey, I reflect on my own.

Biography

Saly Mohamed is a chemical engineering student with a great interest in medicine, especially neuroscience. She is Yemeni, but was born and has lived in Kenya her whole life until she moved to Qatar for university. Fun Facts: Her name actually has two “L’s” but one “L” on all legal documents. She also speaks fluent Swahili.
This essay was written for my college composition course. I was asked the question: “Why are you here?” The question seemed very general to me, so I asked my professor if she could be more specific about the topic. Then I realized that there were many reasons for why I was at that place, at that time. The main reason is because it was a matter of discipline to pursue my dream of becoming an engineer, and other reasons fell under that.

Qatar is Where I Belong

When I was in the tenth grade, my high school math teacher arranged a trip for my class to visit Texas A&M University at Qatar. The purpose of the trip was to introduce us to the university and to the engineering field. During this visit, I was neither interested nor paying attention to the boring lecture. Instead, I was fooling around/goofing off with my friends during the lecture and on the bus. I did not even know that we had arrived at the building of Texas A&M University. In fact, the only reason I went on that trip is because my classes got cancelled since everyone in my class decided to go. Ironically, I ended up being the only person who got admitted to Texas A&M.

When we arrived, the teacher asked me to be quiet. I sat down quietly, and I started listening to the boring lecture with an empty mind. In fact, I was thinking about what I was going to have for lunch. As the room got quieter, the lecturer started to grab my attention when I heard about the bright future of engineering not only in Qatar but worldwide. I whispered to myself, “I want this.” I wanted a future where I achieve a higher level of education and make my parents proud. Therefore I thought about becoming an engineer.
Everything started when I had that thought which led me to the moment where I decided to join A&M to become an engineer. Engineers are high in demand in Qatar, especially petroleum engineers since Qatar’s economy is based on gas and oil. In addition to that, I tend to like engineering-related subjects, such as mathematics, physics, and chemistry more than other subjects. I chose Texas A&M University at Qatar as the university where I am going to study engineering for two major reasons: 1. It is the best engineering school in Qatar and classified among the top universities in the world, and 2. I cannot study abroad because I do not want to live far away from my family. Texas A&M is the full package for everything I ever wanted. Therefore, I started taking action as soon as I finished high school in June 2013. I went to Texas A&M and applied for freshman application. I still remember that day on 13 April when I received a phone call from an unknown number, and as soon as I answered I heard: “Congratulations on your admission to Texas A&M University at Qatar.”

When I enrolled in A&M and became a student, I had to register for classes to follow my degree plan to graduate. One of the courses offered in spring 2015 was English 104. Attending this course is a part of passing it, which will help me graduate and eventually make me an engineer.

I am sitting here today in this classroom to be a better writer. I want to improve the way I think in writing. It bothers me when I write poorly and get a bad grade while everyone else is acing it. I feel left out, and I need to learn more. I know that I can do it if I develop and enhance my writing skills. I want to prove to everyone who thought that I do not have what it takes to become an engineer that I am completely capable of achieving my goals through my self-discipline to attend and pass my courses. In general, I want to pass this course, but also I want to become a better writer than who I am today because this will allow me to write better essays and get better grades in my composition class. I want to learn to express what I am writing in a more evolved way. Furthermore, I am here to get my participation and attendance points, which might help me if I get a low grade on a test.

I am present in this room precisely because this is where my English 104 class meets every Sunday, Tuesday, and Thursday at 8 a.m. I am sitting in
the front seat because I have poor eyesight, and I will not be able to see clearly if I sit in the back of the classroom. I am sitting next to Hamda because she is my friend, and she is the only person in this class whom I have had a previous encounter with.

I am in a country. This country is Qatar. It is a small country in the Middle East in the Asia. Qatar is my home country, where I was born and raised. I am a Qatari citizen, and I am living at my home country where I belong. My family lives in Qatar. My parents were born in Qatar. Qatar is where I belong.

Planet Earth, Middle East, State of Qatar, Education City, Texas A&M University, Room 211, English 104 class, front seat, next to Hamda. This is exactly where I am right now. In other words, I think I am present here today as a matter of discipline to pursue my dream of

Biography

becoming an engineer. Latifa is a sophomore student majoring in electrical and computer engineering. She is from Qatar. She is the founder and president of the photography club at Texas A&M University at Qatar. She enjoys writing essays and submitting them to Best Writing, and this is her second time participating in the Best Writing series.
This piece talks about why I am here, and was a part of my college composition course. This piece has gone through a long editing process, eight drafts, during its creation. At the beginning the ideas were scattered, but within the time it got to its final shape. “Our Soul Needs” made me go through a deep process of thinking for why I am here. While I was sharing this piece with my friends, I noticed that a lot of them share the same concepts as me, and I hope that it will help people to actually start thinking about why they are here.

Our Soul Needs

I was born on the 11th of October, 1997, because God wanted me to have my first breath on this day. I started my life learning and gaining experiences from others. Since that day, I started to build my own kingdom, my own life and my own future. Since that day I started to store bad and good memories, and I started to have my own theory about life, which is still under construction, but explains why I am here.

I believe as a human being that I was created for a purpose; I was created to learn and build. We as humans build a ceaseless complex net that is still under creation. We share feelings, experiences, and we share wisdom. Let me put this into other words: we share life.

But then again, how do we share life? Albert Einstein came up with many theories that were helpful for humanity. Agatha Christie shared her stunning fantasies with the world. Leonardo DiCaprio shared his gorgeous performances in movies with us. And we share our thoughts, tastes, and accomplishments with our surroundings.
Every day that passes, we gain knowledge and we share it with each other. We build schools and colleges for this purpose. We try every possible way to gain knowledge and to advance this knowledge. That’s why we are here.

As an individual in this society that we created, I want to prove myself; I want to feel that I exist. Sometimes I feel that my ego kills me by my desire for faultlessness. Maybe that’s another reason why we are here. Maybe we are here to compete and that is how we prove our humanity. By competing, I mean that humans are always in a race for perfection; we race for money, success, fame, and many more things. All of us have this sense that make us want to be the best in our reality. To me, I see that this is our source of motivation for developing. I can see myself always in a difficult race, a race where I picture myself rivals with everything in my surroundings. This is part of my/our humanity.

I want to accomplish something during my life to satisfy my ego. I want this thing to be helpful for humanity, so that eventually I will be a part of developing and building this society. To me this is my own way to share and help.

I can picture myself ten years from now. A hyper engineer or physicist working in a university, sitting in my office behind my ancient wooden table, with students asking me questions, then, moving from one lab to another, giving commands to those who seek knowledge, and working on my own big project involving nuclear energy or dark matter.

I see my life as a big box full of many other small boxes. These boxes contain memories. The value of the memory depends on many factors like the people we love, the places we appreciate, the emotions we feel. The value of these factors depends on our needs. That’s why we have “our soul needs.” Those needs explain the reasons why we are here. I accept as true that our needs have a connection to our fate. God is the only one who knows this weird link. Thus, those needs are part of our personality; they are part of us, and they are what defines us as individuals. In the end, they are what motivates us to walk on our path, they are what motivates us to discover our fate and to truly know why we are here.
Biography

Maryam Al-Buainain is a mechanical engineering freshman at Texas A&M University at Qatar. She is an engineer, and loves science and all of its applications, but still enjoys her tool to survive in this life, which is writing.
Restore the Earth
This poetic expression reflects moments in my life. The highs and the lows, the calm and the violent: all part of the moving, stirring ocean inside. I write when I feel the need to pen down, when energy surges through my body and needs grounding. With the page as the ground, I store everything within for all the dark times that need energy to light up and also so that one day these words could be of service to all of the others in search of that energy, in need of the light. This poem was brought to you by moments of self-reflection merged with an ever-growing passion for writing.

Oceanum

My mind is an embodiment of the ocean: wild and ever-changing. The tides portray my feelings and emotions while the waves exemplify my fluctuating moods. Day to day, the tides crash against the rocks as I struggle with my own self, crashing against my self-made barriers, But the world is my moon and I am its earth; its gravity disrupting the calm of my ocean, controlling the tides in my mind.

Oh, how I let it manipulate me and make me question my own self, my own waves. And so, I am always the calm bringing on the storm, disguised as the calm before the storm, a storm that is in my control, yet I am unable to swerve it away.
Peek inside my head and let the strong winds pull you in, deep down the agitated ocean and let them guide you to the heart and soul of who I really am.

*My mind is an ocean,*
At night I let the stars above guide me, the constellations my sanity, the twinkles, a beckoning light, their reflection on the ocean of my mind, a confirmation of my reality.

*My mind is an ocean;* one day I wish to become Poseidon, in control of my own seas; able to welcome the toughest seasons, like winter, with open arms. Allowing the cold to freeze my mind and letting it pause every thought and emotion running within me so that I can cherish how beautiful the silence of a clear mind and a calm ocean can be.
And I will wait...

For a day will come when I will swim the ocean, yet remain dry, when I will conquer the biggest tides and overcome all of my barriers, and at last, the violent winds will seize and I will stand there, atop the breathing tide beneath me, in reverence of my ocean, of myself...

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**Biography**

Midhat “Mids” J. Zaidi is a Canadian-Indian and Saudi-raised Aggie from Australia; these four sides of the world fill the four chambers of her heart. Midhat is a sophomore majoring in chemical engineering at Texas A&M University at Qatar, and her love for chemical engineering is such that she will carry that passion till death do they part. A poetic engineer in the making and a huge spoken word poetry fan, her love extends deeply to astronomy, meteorology and literature. They keep her grounded and alive. Oceans, skies, Pagani Huayra, photography, poutine, churros, Islamic geometric art, *Suits* and The *Flash* are just a short and quick peek into the infinite world of Mids.
Maryam Abdulla

While writing this academic paper, I learnt how to address both technical and non-technical audiences. Since the beginning of my study at Texas A&M University at Qatar, I have dedicated my writings to technical audiences, mainly other engineers. “Solar Panels as a Solution to Climate Change” was a challenge at first, as I was aiming to writing for non-engineers as well. However, that challenge was achieved by reading science papers that are meant for a variety of audiences.

Solar Panels as a Solution to Climate Change

Abstract

Solar panels promote eco-friendly power solutions to reduce the effects of climate change. Although there are few industrial pressures about using solar panels due to the usage of cadmium, this new alternative technology to the energy generation is highly attractive because it has low gas emissions, the photovoltaic (PV) modules can be recycled, and the lifetime of the panels is long [1]. Hence, the solar panel technology is used in several applications including water heating, heat pumping and multi-purpose electricity generation systems [2]. Therefore, for a PV panel to work with its optimum efficiency, the choice of the solar panel material type should be made according to the weather conditions. Nevertheless, solar panels are a promising clean energy resource for a sustainable future due to their lower environmental impact compared to conventional sources such as natural gas, oil and coal [3].
That is true because the PV customers are never directly exposed
to cadmium due to the fact that the panels are encased in plastic
encapsulates [1].

**Introduction**
The significant driver in increasing the use of solar panels during the
last decade is because solar panels mitigate the impacts of fossil fuel
combustions. That is true because the cumulative energy demand of
solar panels is decreasing. Also, solar panels’ technology is an attractive
technology for saving the environment, because PV cells avoid the
emissions of greenhouse gases to the atmosphere [4] by using the sun's
energy instead of burning fossil fuels. Therefore, the electricity generated
from the PV panels contributes about 96% to 98% less greenhouse gases
than the electricity generated from burning coal. Moreover, there are
concerns about the various health effects of climate change [5], as different
human activities lead to climate change by altering the Earth's atmosphere.
The climate warming or cooling arises from changes in the Earth’s
energy balance, which leads to an increase in the atmospheric carbon
dioxide concentration and an increase in the short-lived greenhouse
gases concentration such as ozone. These changes are deleterious as they
affect the ecosystem through different ways including, rising sea levels
from melting glaciers, poleward and upward shifts in animals and plants,
changes in oxygen and salinity level of seas and oceans [6]. Therefore,
the main goal from using solar panels is to promote eco-friendly power
to reduce the effects of climate change, and hence their efficiency plays a
critical role for their optimum solar energy to power conversion. That is
true because PV panels are affected by the weather conditions [3]. For
example, some solar panel material types are the best choice in hot, humid
conditions, while other are better used when the average temperature is
between 5 °C to 18 °C.

This report sheds light on how solar panels are used as a solution to
climate change. First, the paper will demonstrate how solar panels were
discovered by accident, and how such a technology was developed
to reach high efficiencies. The report will then illustrate how solar
panels’ efficiencies are affected by weather conditions such as wind
speed, airborne dust, temperature and humidity [3]. Hence, some
recommendations will be made about the better choice of solar panel
material while taking into account the four previous external factors. Moreover, due to some industrial pressure on such a new technology, this report will prove that solar panels are better than conventional sources for power generation. For example, some of the PV modules are recyclable, as will be shown towards the end of the report. The report will conclude with the most important benefits of solar panels and hence recommend that they be used as a solution to climate change.

**Overview**

Solar panels are electrical devices, also known as photovoltaics, which are made from semi-conducting materials that are able to convert photon energy into power. They capture the sun’s energy when sun lights hit the photovoltaic cells and converts them into electricity or heat. As light waves hit the PV cells, the electrons get excited and flow through the material to produce direct current (DC) [3]. The cells absorb the sunlight in the visible (400-700 nm) regions, where the largest amount of light is transmitted. Remarkably, solar cells, which are the basic unit of the solar panels, do not require direct sunlight to work, as they still generate electricity on a cloudy day from the sun energy they have absorbed previously [1].

![Figure 1: A solar panel](image)

**Development of Solar Panels as a Solution**

In 1839, Edmond Becquerel found out that when two different brass plates were immersed in a liquid, a continuous current was produced when the plates were exposed to sunlight. At that time, he did not realize that the two brass plates were the copper-cuprous oxide thin-film solar cell. In the 1870s, a number of scientists such as Willoughby Smith, W. G. Adams and R. E. Day discovered the photovoltaic effect in selenium. Just a few years
later, C. E. Fritts covered the selenium with gold leaf film and observed that the selenium array produced a continuous current with considerable force. Due to Fritts’s inability to verify his observations, he sent a sample of the selenium to Werner Siemens who was an expert in electricity. Siemens was able to verify that the thin-film cuprous oxide and the amorphous selenium were actually solar cells with efficiencies less than 1% [8].

Five years later, importance of single-crystal semiconductors was recognized especially during the quantum mechanics era. Therefore, in 1954, a number of scientists at Bell Labs discovered and demonstrated the silicon single-crystal solar cell with efficiencies up to 6%. Fortunately, this level of efficiency of the solar cells to convert sunlight into electricity has increased over the years. For example, by studying the silicon single-crystal solar cell, the efficiencies were reached up to 15%. In 1973 and with the Arab oil embargo, the solar cell industry produced cells and arrays with consistent performance. For example, the flat-plate silicon module has modified to increase its weather resistivity, and hence the efficiency of flat-plate silicon solar cells increased to about 25%. In the present day, the single-crystal silicon solar cells dominated the market due to their high efficiencies [8]. They are used in residential applications, as shown in Figure 2 [8].

![Figure 2: Single-crystal silicon solar panels in residential applications](image)

**Efficiency of Solar Panels**
The efficiency of the solar panels and their relative stability are tested according to the weather because generating electricity in solar panels depends on the season of the year. The efficiency of solar panels measures
the percentage of the sunlight that hits the cells, which is then converted into electricity that people can use [3]. Therefore, solar panels are developed based on several effects, including:

1. Weather conditions such as wind speed, airborne dust properties, temperature and humidity [3].

2. Land constraints such as land accessibility to the transportation infrastructure [3].

The increase in the temperature causes a decrease in the electric power output from the solar panels by affecting the open circuit voltages of the PV cells. For example, when the temperature is increased from 38˚C to 48˚C, the PV panel’s efficiency declines by about 11%, as the efficiency is measured by the power output. Moreover, the Aeolian dust deposition drops the performance of the PV panels by changing the dependency on the incidence angle of the solar radiation that strikes the PV cells. Hence, the efficiency of the solar panels can drop to about 30% after eight months from using them due to the dust accumulation. In fact, the dust particle size is inversely proportional to the efficiency of the solar panels, as the finer the dust particle, the less solar irradiation reaches the solar panels [3].

**Types of Solar Panels**

Since solar panels efficiencies depend on the weather and the season of the year, certain solar panel type are preferred depending on the weather condition or the season of the year. Therefore, it is important to know the materials of the PV panels to understand how they efficiently work in different weather conditions. There are several types of solar cells materials ranging from single crystals to amorphous silicon. The types of material that the PV panels are made of should be understood to analyze the optimal PV panel to be used according to the weather. Solar Panels are of many types according to the material used to manufacture it [1]. These materials include:

1. Silicon Solar Panel

2. Thin film Solar Panel

Restore the Earth 85
Silicon Solar Cells

The silicon solar cells are widely used in the market due to the abundance of silicon. The purity of silicon cells means that the more perfectly aligned the silicon molecules are, the higher efficiency of the panel as the solar cell will better convert the solar energy into electricity. The crystalline silicon PV cells are produced from p-type doping of mono-crystal or poly-crystal semiconductor wafers of 150 µm to 300 µm thickness. The front side of the PV cells is doped with either phosphorous or boron. For instance, the PV cells is doped with phosphorous to create n-doped of 0.1 µm to 2 µm thickness, or doped with boron for the same result. The doping process implies that the semiconductor transfer a charge by any of two types of doping, which are: p-type and n-type. Doping also implies the insertion of a counter ion to achieve an overall charge neutrality [8]. The two types of silicon solar cells are:

1. Polycrystalline silicon solar cells
2. Monocrystalline silicon solar cells

Poly-crystalline Silicon Solar Cells

Polycrystalline silicon solar cells are crystals of multi elements. They are also called p-Si. P-Si can be recognized by their perfectly rectangular with no round edges as shown in Figure 3 [8].

![Figure 3: From p-Si cell (left) to p-Si panel (right) [8].](image)

Elemental silicon does not occur in nature, but it can be extracted from naturally occurring minerals. For example, quartz is the most abundant mineral in the Earth's crust, composed of silica and different silicates. Following the carbothermic process, oxygen is removed from quartz to form silicon. This process demands high temperatures and pure sources of carbon. From an environmental standpoint, the one significant deficiency with the carbothermic process is the high reaction temperature [1]. The molten silicon is poured into a square mold, which is then
cooled and cut unto perfectly squire wafers. Moreover, the process of manufacturing this type of silicon solar panels costs less than that of the monocrystalline silicon solar panels [9]. However, p-Si are not as efficient as monocrystalline silicon solar panels because p-Si is not a pure element as it has metal impurities [1].

**Monocrystalline Silicon Solar Cells**

Monocrystalline silicon solar cells are single crystalline of a pure element. They are also called mono-Si. Mono-Si are easily recognizable by an external uniform appearance, as shown in Figure 4 [8]. Mono-Si are made of silicon ingots which are cylindrical in shape. To optimize performance and lower the cost of a single mono-Si cell, four sides are cut out of the cylinder ingots to make silicon wafers, which is what gives the mono-Si panels their characteristic look as presented in Figure 4 [8].

![Figure 4: From mono-Si cell (left) to mono-Si panel (right) [8].](image)

It is important to understand how solar panels are manufactured to correlate different materials of solar panels with the environmental considerations presented in a later section of this report. Monocrystalline silicon solar ingots are made by the Czochralski (CZ) method, in which a seed crystal of silicon is placed in molten silicon. The direction of rotation and pull rate of that seed crystal influence the size and the purity of the ingot. This method creates high-purity crystalline silicon. After forming the silicon ingot, the recrystallized silicon ingots are transferred into wafers, cut into cells or chips, and then proceed with the chemical processes. The cutting process is usually performed with a wire saw that reduces the friction to ensure a cleaner interface [1]. Monocrystalline silicon solar panels have the highest efficiency since they are made of the highest-grade silicon. For example, their efficiencies are typically between
15% and 22%. Moreover, mono-Si panels are space-efficient, because they yield the highest power outputs while requiring the least amount of space compared to the other types of solar panels that will be discussed later in this report [8].

**Thin-Film Solar Cells**

Thin-film refers to a small amount of semiconductor material required to create the PV cells. The product itself is also flexible in nature. The initial layer is a conductive window layer, followed by a buffer and the absorber layer sandwiched with another conductive contact. The window layer or the top contact is usually a transparent conductive oxide (TCO), which allows light to reach the entire surface of the underlying semiconductor layer. Moreover, when the glass is used as the superstrate, TCO will be deposited on the inner surface of the glass, followed by the absorber layer and the back contact. After deposition, a laser scribe is used to create the scribe lines that cingulate the layers into individual cells. Several chemical compositions make up different thin-film solar panels [1]. These chemicals are:

1. Amorphous silicon (a-Si), which is the most popular type of thin-film solar panels
2. Ribbon silicon (r-Si)
3. Cadmium telluride (CdTe)
4. Copper-indium diselenide (CIS)

Each chemical composition corresponds to different efficiency[8]. Processing thin-film panels is done by cell fabrication. The contacts, buffer layer and semiconductor are all used for the insulating substrate that is commonly glass [1].

**Choice of Solar Panel According to the Weather**

The efficiency of the PV panels is affected by the weather conditions [3]. This should be analyzed for the case of State of Qatar, where the weather is hot and humid during the summer and damp during the winter. Researchers are still trying to find a solution to the dust accumulation problem. However, based on the weather conditions, the following type of solar panel can be suggested.
The poly-crystalline panels are the most efficient type of material to generate electricity during the winter because this type has the highest temperature coefficient. Similarly, mono-crystalline panels are also efficient in the winter, when the average temperature is between 5˚C to 18˚C, for the same reason. On the contrary, the thin film panels are efficient in the summer when the temperature is 35˚C or above [10]. That is true because the hybrid and bifacial cells consist of thin coating of amorphous silicon which has a lower temperature coefficient, making it a good choice for high efficiency solar panels in hot areas. Therefore, the effect of ambient temperature on thin film panels are less than that of the mono-crystalline, and hence thin film panels are recommended for Qatar where the temperature is hot almost all year. However, mono-crystalline and poly-crystalline panels are highly available in the market by almost 85%, due to their efficiency. They are widely used in California where the average temperature in the winter is about 18 ˚C while 28˚C in the summer. For instance, monocrystalline silicon solar panels produce up to four times the amount of the electricity as thin-film solar panels. Moreover, mono-Si has longer life time as it can be used up to 25 years [11].

**Environmental Considerations to Solar Panels Manufacturing**

Solar panels are promising clean energy resource for sustainable future due to their lower environmental impact compared to conventional sources such as natural gas, oil and coal [3]. However, there is a significant industrial pressure on the solar panel manufacturing industry. For example, there are a few chemical hazards that are associated with the chemical processes used to manufacture silicon PV cells. Chlorosilanes are used in the synthetic steps for both mono-crystalline and poly-crystalline silicon solar panels. They are flammable and toxic when handled improperly and highly reactive in the presence of water and oxygen. Therefore, when silicon solar panels are manufactured, a regulation is implemented to create a chlorine-free process. Chlorine-free processes are environmental as they promote health and safety improvement. In the solar panel industry, a chlorine-free process is referred to as the purification method that is used to convert silicon PV cell to another silicon cells type. The chlorine-free process or the purification method demand lower thermal budget than traditional chlorosilane processes.
Therefore, this method is adopted by industries because it both reduces environmental impacts and lowers the production costs by decreasing the energy expenses [1]. New technologies nowadays could further reduce the energy demand during cell manufacturing process [12].

Furthermore, the thin-film technology has received the largest amount of research. Precisely, the exposure risk of cadmium released from CdTe module has received high attention from the public. It is true that there are some challenges, but the cadmium emission risks from thin-film manufacturer do not compare to that of the traditional sources. For example, the amount of cadmium used in 1 GW of CdTe modules is approximately 1/25th that used for paint stabilizers. Moreover, the PV customers are never directly exposed to cadmium due to the fact that the panels are encased in plastic encapsulates, and glass is used in the laminate[1].

**Recycling of Photovoltaic Modules**

The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) conducted a study that showed that photovoltaic waste is of small volume. For instance, in 2010, the photovoltaic waste was only around 2534 metric tons. Despite that small waste volume, photovoltaic modules can be recycled, which even makes the solar panel’s technology more attractive. Some examples of the modules than can be recycled are glass, aluminum and polymers. The method of recycling starts with separation, in which the module is separated into the junction box, aluminum frame and laminate [1]. The plastic and wire used in the junction box can be sold and recycled into other products. Also, the aluminum frame can be removed and sold as a scrap metal [1].

As mentioned previously, the CdTe modules are controversial unlike the other modules. Therefore, its recycling is attracted by researches. A hydromet process has been developed for CdTe cells. First, chemical stripping is required to recover the glass substrate. Sulfuric acid (H₂SO₄) and hydrogen peroxide (H₂O₂) slurries wash over the crushed glass to strip off the metals. The glass is recycled as mentioned earlier, but the metal slurry is sent on for further purification. The slurry is then combined with the filtered metal fragments to retrieve the cadmium and tellurium in the semiconductor layer. The cadmium extraction process involves redox reactions, leaching, selective precipitation, filtration, and ion exchange.
After the removal of cadmium, the last step in tellurium extraction by separation using ion chromatography. Finally, the recovered material is reduced and precipitated with either iron or zinc metals. These processes create filter cakes of cadmium and tellurium than can be reused or sold for further applications [1].

**Benefits of Solar Panels**

Due to the increase in energy demand and the fact that fossil fuels will come to an extent in some time in the future, a lot of attention is towards using solar panels. Precisely, solar panels are well known now due to the harmful effects of different human activities on the environment, as there are concerns about various health effects of climate change. The main significant factor that lead to such a phenomena is burning of fossils fuels that increased the amount of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄), nitrous oxide (N₂O) and halocarbons (F, Cl, Br) in the atmosphere [13, 14]. Some structures of the molecules of the greenhouse gases are shown in Figure 5 [5]. Greenhouse gases affect the climate by altering with the Earth’s energy balance, which is the incoming solar radiations and outgoing thermal radiations. The four greenhouse gases are produced from the following activities:

- CO₂ is mainly produced by burning of fossil fuels and heating or cooling of cement [13].
- CH₄ is produced from agricultural activities such as rice cultivation and field burning of agricultural residue [15].
- N₂O is produced from burning fossil fuels as well as field burning of agricultural residue [15].
- Halocarbons such as chlorofluorocarbon (CFC) is used as refrigeration, which causes ozone (O₃) depletion in the atmosphere [16].

![Figure 5: Molecular structure for the greenhouse gases [5].](image-url)
The greenhouse gases increased with the industrial era because more fossil fuels are burned and more forest trees are cut, increasing the carbon dioxide concentration, increasing the long-lived greenhouse gases (including CH₄, N₂O and halocarbons) concentrations, increasing in the short-lived greenhouse gases (such as O₃) concentration, and increasing in aerosols which are small particles in the atmosphere [17]. These changes are deleterious as they affect the ecosystem through different ways including:

- Rising sea levels from melting glaciers and ices caps.
- Increased runoff and earlier spring discharge in glaciers.
- Poleward and upward shifts in animals and plants.
- Changes in plankton and algal abundance.
- Changes in oxygen and salinity level of seas and oceans.
- Quality of river water is affected [17].

Therefore, this new alternative to energy generation, which is the solar panels, is highly attractive, due to the following benefits:

- Solar panel's technology is a greener and more environment-friendly due to its low gas emissions and waste volumes [1].
- Solar panels are widely used in several applications including water heating, heat pumping and multi-purpose electricity generation systems [2].
- As mentioned previously, the amount of cadmium used in CdTe module is less than that used for paint stabilizers [1]. For example, solar panels have been increasingly used in residential applications, like the many houses in California, as shown from Figure 6 below [11].
- The previous benefit is true because the surplus electricity created by the system can be sold back to the grid-based to the owners’ benefits [11].
- The lifetime of the panels is long, around 25-30 years [1].
- The photovoltaic modules can be recycled [1].
Solar Panels as a Solution

The aim from using solar panels is to promote eco-friendly power and propulsion solution to reduce the effects of climate change. The significant driver in increasing the use of solar panels is because solar panels mitigate the impacts of fossil fuel combustions for power generation and other pollutants as mentioned earlier. That is true because if the mitigation efforts are made, low longer-term emission will be achieved. The PV cells emit low concentration of greenhouse gases relative to human activities mentioned earlier. However, its advantages surpass its disadvantages. They can remarkably progress in reducing the greenhouse gases emissions [18]. Solar panels technology become more cost effective and more practical as it is widely used due to the following benefits [19]:

- Avoid natural sources depletion such as fossil fuels as the PV panel uses Sun energy to generate power such as electricity [20].
- Avoid emissions of greenhouse gases to the atmosphere [4].
- Decrease air pollution by using sun energy instead of burning fossil fuels.
- The electricity generated from the PV panels contribute about 96% to 98% less greenhouse gases than the electricity generated from burning coal.
- The electricity produced from the PV panels does not endanger animal and human health, due to its low or non-release of pollutants [22].
Conclusion
This report proved that solar panels are used as a solution to climate change. To generate power at their highest efficiency, poly-crystalline panels are the most efficient type of material to generate electricity during the winter, while mono-crystalline panels are efficient when the average temperature is between 5°C to 18°C. On the contrary, the thin film panels are efficient in the summer when the temperature is 35°C or above [10]. Therefore, it is important to relate the weather conditions to the choice of solar panel material type to reach high efficiency. Solar panel technology is an attractive technology for saving the environment, because PV cells avoid the emissions of greenhouse gases to the atmosphere [4] by using sun energy instead of burning fossil fuels. Over the past few decades, solar panels have become more cost effective and more practical. Lastly, they are highly recommended as they mitigate the impacts of fossil fuel combustions [4].

References


Biography

Maryam Abdulla is a senior chemical engineering student, Class of 2016. One of Maryam’s interests is volunteering, as she feels it has enhanced her leadership skills and allowed her to engage with different people with an optimistic attitude and respect their cultures and beliefs. Having new experiences has reinforced Maryam’s commitment to learning, her ability to work as a part of a team, and her punctuality.
This is a poem inspired by waves. It talks about how a wave forms, washes up the shoreline, and returns to the sea. The aim of this poem is to capture the moment and to romanticize this particular natural phenomenon. This piece was not submitted as coursework.

Backwash

Dashing; rising amidst the tide,  
as it proclaims itself with great pride.  
Frail souls and shattered hearts abide.  
The gargantuan mist of cerulean and white  
devours beings as they bow down and die.

Ripples.

as majestic as the sky,  
    yet,  
as captivating as an infant’s eyes.  
Rigorously roaring with rage  
as it rushes to the shoreline  
    where the earth meets the heavens,

never to be trifled with.

A moment cometh,  
marine sanctuary bursting forth  
with violence and thunderclaps from the depths.  
The divine spoke as the sea humbles itself.
The folds on the surface are autumn leaves fluttering, with the wind.

Silent and peaceful, morphing into a lesser creature than it was before as it consumes the vastness of the abyss and fades into the distance where the earth meets the heavens.

**Biography**

John Crisme describes himself as a frustrated poet, essayist, novelist, musician, athlete, astronaut—a frustrated person. John is a mechanical engineering freshman who has a penchant for drifting mentally throughout the day. He fell in love with poetry ever since he watched “Dead Poets Society” during the winter of ’14. John believes that a poet has two favorite lines: one he wrote, and one that made him write, which was “O Captain, My Captain” in his case. He fancies the works of Walt Whitman, Robert Frost, and Lord Alfred Tennyson, to name a few.
Ahmed El-Agnaf

This piece, written for my Foundations of English course, includes my imagination of Utopia, a world where everything seems to be perfect. Technology is what transformed the old world to the new. This is where imagination and creativity led me to in my English class.

Earth Reborn

The difference between the 22nd century and the 21st is that we live in the perfect world. People in the 21st century had no hope; there was no solution to their problems, and yet we have shaped the Earth into a dream. The ideal place to live in where equality is no longer an idealistic dream, and the world is not in fear from mass destruction because peace is the solution. A place where science and technology answers all our ideologies so we live happy and normal lives. There is no denying that because of science and technology the generation we are in is at its peak, with ideas flowing from every continent and city; solutions will be, if not already are, available. Imagine a world where global warming disappeared, food and energy are clean, equality is the basis of a community, and fear is just history.

The reason why global warming was destroying the 21st century world was because the atmospheric pressure was increasing due to the increasing CO₂. Instead of forming a solid solution, the lost generation continued with their killing habits, simply hoping that global warming would disappear. Their major problem was how to get rid of CO₂ gas; it was immensely increasing by the day, and they were in danger. They believed that solar power would be their main energy source. They were wrong. But that was the past.
Technology has advanced rapidly—to the point that their past worries are our current advantages. Carbon emission is the solution to our current energy; it might have been a negative outcome in the past, but now it is our savior. We managed to reconstruct CO₂ into the ideal clean energy source. It is ironic how such a terrible chemical became the answer to the dying oil and gas. The chemistry behind this was simple: the CO₂ molecule was flipped multiple times using a carbon emission machine, and the result was that CO₂ became clean and efficient enough to be used as a replacement for oil and gas. We also captured CO₂ and extracted the Carbon, C, and oxygen, O₂, from each other. With the carbon we created graphite, also another problem they had. The discovery of graphite in the 21st century was crucial. During that time graphite was destined to be the main component in producing planes, cars, batteries, computers, clothes, computerized cells, and so much more. It is the perfect atom; however, they failed to produce mass production of graphite. With the carbon we extracted from CO₂ we managed to combine them all and form immense amounts of graphite. The G-Mac (graphite-machine) was the apparatus used for the formation of graphite. The G-Mac ran on the same coding of the archaic game Candy Crush. The Candy Crush code was so simple, but at the same time the results were complex. The code was used to find boundless binding formations for the carbon atoms to form graphite. As the population increases by the day, the number of CO₂ molecules kept on increasing as well. Even though we ran out of oil and gas, the main source of CO₂, the amount of humans on Earth successfully managed to become the source of CO₂. Surprisingly it became cleaner than any other energy source ever created, even solar panels were not as clean as CO₂.

Global warming left a great scar on the Earth. An astounding 90% of the world’s wildlife had been destroyed, and the food was all chemically manufactured since they could not grow any crops. With the source of energy solved for our world, it opened doors to a new distinct Earth. Global warming began to fade away with time, and soon ended its deep era. The moment global warming ended, the earth surprisingly started to grow back more than half of the dead Amazon in just a couple of months. After a few years, the whole world was green. The environment was no longer poisoned from all the CO₂, therefore plants began to grow naturally without the need of fertilizer. Trees and flowers grew everywhere; cities transformed more than anyone could ever have imagined. As a result,
people took advantage of this prodigious growth of plants and decided
to grow millions of farms all over the globe by using Farm Implant. Farm
Implant was the solution to having the perfect farms. This machine used
old information that was stored before the death of plants in the 21st
century and was able to create flawless farms. The only thing Farm Implant
needed to create farms was 100% clean plants, which was already available.
The average growth time of a farm in the old days was fifteen to twenty
years, but now because of Farm Implant, it takes two months. Societies
were tired of the unnatural fruits and vegetables that were being produced
in factories. Health was at its lowest point due to the insufficient amount
of vitamins that were in the food, resulting in one big headache. However,
since farms were planted, the chemical food gradually died out. Fruits
and vegetables became more beautiful and tastier than ever before. With
the demand for healthy food rapidly increased, fast food products such
as burgers and pizzas lost their popularity in the world. Everyone became
so in love with the current food that more than five billion people are
now vegetarians.

With the vital successes of the carbon emission machine and Farm
Implant, the world’s future deviated completely. The growth of plants and
healthy food both had an effect on people. Science has shown that with
a green environment and healthy food, the brain will function faster and
happier. Happier is the perfect word to describe the world we live in. Stress
levels for the average human dropped from 80% to just 2%, which made
everyone more peaceful. The act of wrongdoing would not bother anyone
anymore, since they were always calm. Violence dropped completely, not
just in one country specifically but on a world scale. Wars ended due to
presidents coming to peaceful terms with one another. Everyone began to
understand the meaning of peace. This massive shock suddenly united the
world. The meaning of that resulted in this: every country united into just
one country. With the amount of graphite that was made from the G-Mac,
the society decided to connect all the continents using graphite for unity.
No more borders and passports; this unity slowly shaped equality into
becoming real. No one was better than someone else, and there were no
excuses to argue with one another since all the basic needs were forged.
The definition of equality is this: “the state of being equal, especially in
status, rights, and opportunities.” Now this was true; everyone was equal
with the same food, country, rights, and level of importance. In order for
the world to survive, the Earth needs enormous quantities of CO₂, and humans are our only source of CO₂. With one fewer person, there will be less CO₂, which is extremely vital. Everyone has an important role in the society, where they are the reason why the Earth continues to thrive.

The world has formed into a beautiful and peaceful environment, people are finally equal, and the basic needs are the only needs. The beautiful nature and clean food affected humans into becoming peaceful themselves. The success of mutating CO₂ into a reliable clean energy source was the pivoting point of the world’s transformation. It reconstructed Earth into becoming the key to uniting all countries into one. The ideas of surviving and trying to be safe all faded away. Peace is more than just a word; it is what people live by now. We no longer worry for the future of our kids because we all know that we are destined to live happy lives.

**Biography**

“Part of the secret of a success in life is to eat what you like and let the food fight it out inside.” Mark Twain said these words that Ahmed El-Agnaf lives by. Ahmed joined Texas A&M at Qatar, Class of 2019, to change not only his life but the lives of others. Along with the goal of being a chemical engineer, Ahmed wants to change the world of food.
I write in my free time to highlight the ongoing challenges and struggles in the Middle East. There have been too many problems between families of different religions or Taefa. It is a very sad reality because all religions had one purpose: love and good. Love for the people, love for anyone. On the contrary, people are separated because of religion, which is the source of love. The problem is not religion; it is people and their understanding of religion.

To My Future Children

To my lovely children of Earth,  
Take time to grow up  
while enjoying the innocence  
of color, religion, nationality.  
Don’t let people get  
to you, I am saying,  
stay together and celebrate Christmas  
here, in Bet lahim,  
and Eid Adha Mekka,  
sitting next to the glory of Kaaba.

To my future son,  
Treat your mother with love,  
all the love she gave you;  
keep your eyes on your sister  
and take care of her.  
If I got ill or sick  
or when I die,
Marry the woman you love
With no need to try 100 women.
Remember, that once this woman
was a sister to someone
or a daughter of him or her.
Remember your sister.

To my future daughter,
Remember, just remember
what I told you about love.
Don’t leave your dad,
Don’t leave me,
Don’t leave your brother,
Don’t be afraid to choose your husband
who is somewhere waiting for you.
We can’t stop you if your heart chooses for
who would want a heart to bleed?

To you both,
Promise me not to be racist,
promise me to be fair with everyone,
promise me that you will never
ever consider religion as
a barrier or a moving ghost of someone.
Don’t ever believe the media;
believe your eyes,
believe your senses.

Don’t believe what is said about Christians;
read the Bible, God is there for you.
Don’t believe what is said about Muslims;
read the Quran, God is there for you.
Don’t believe what is said about Jews;
read Tawrat, God is there for you.
Don’t ever believe in the differences
because similarities make you stronger
Believe in God...
Sit down with your legs down and pray;
cover yourself and respect God before anyone else.
Sit down and sleep, with love
But who had the greatest love in the end?
God, the father of all

Sincerely,
Your Future Mother

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**Biography**

Salwan Abou Salem is a Palestinian who was born and raised in Lebanon to a Lebanese mother and Palestinian father. She is currently majoring in mechanical engineering and minoring in mathematics.
Pavithra Manghaipathy

This is a poem I wrote as I waited for graduate programs to reply to my applications. After one particularly harsh rejection, I started worrying about my future and wondered specifically if I was hoping for too much. I felt that hope had taken me to places I would never be able to reach, and I lost faith in myself and my abilities. The ending of the poem takes a different turn because I stopped hoping. I realized that if I stop worrying about not being good enough to reach my own goals and dreams, life becomes a lot easier. It becomes easier to come up with contingency plans and live in the moment.

Hope’s Lullaby

Hope is quite funny but not trustworthy.
Sure, it will keep you sane and happy
but at the cost of lies and a betraying mind.

Hope will lie and cheat you into thinking that all is well.
Your mind will succumb to its dark influence and sure, ecstasy will swell.
Believe me though when I say, ‘Hope is not kind.’

You may ride into your dreams with Hope at the forefront of your stability,
but as you crash into the rocky shores of reality,
Hope turns into a siren and its claws will leave you in a bind.

Never believe in Hope for its song isn’t a happy tune.
The Siren song it sings lures you into a dark sea of flitting dunes.
Do not listen to Hope for it is a lullaby guiding you to nightmares of the future, with no ally.
Hope orchestrates a reality that exists in your own thoughts
and there is no evil crueler that yourself compared to the while lot.
So do not listen to the lullaby Hope sings;
forget about the future and the past and be your own king.

Leave Hope’s nightly embrace behind.
Go and grab some peace of mind.
Dream instead about the now and let the universe align.

For nothing is truly in your control
except the decision to believe what has just been told.

**Biography**

Pavithra Manghaipathy considers herself a typical college senior who
loves to read, dance, and watch television. Her unhealthy obsession with
science fiction and tendency to be most comfortable alone lead her to
start writing. While she writes a lot, she is often not very keen on sharing a
lot. She worries that most of her poetry seems too personal and raw while
most of the short stories she writes might be too outrageous and maybe
the world isn’t ready for them yet! But the works she has been able to
publish are still quite dear to her heart, and she truly hopes that someday
in the future, her words can help someone else start writing.
Photographed by Hussam Al-Biltaji
Construct the World Around You
By writing poems, I learn more about myself. Looking back at the poems I have written allows me to remember a certain state of mind I was in. By that, I am able to witness the changes I have passed through. I write poems very often, and I have initiated my own poetry blog. When I asked my peers about my poems, each of them had a different interpretation. This assured me that I have achieved my goal, which is leaving space for distinct opinions, personalities, and people to fit in. Most of my poetry can be considered abstract. I am captivated by the notion of art inspiring other forms of art. I get inspired by music, painting, and even movies.

Bare Mirage

Looking ahead,  
I can see a picturesque pond.  
Joyfulness filled my body, finally!

It exists.  
I use all my energy,  
I will use all of it,  
I insist  
it exists.  
I am blinded by optimism;  
I come closer,  
leaning over to touch the water.  
It does not exist;  
it is a bare mirage.
Biography

Tala Anabtawi is originally Palestinian. She was born in Houston, Texas, but she has lived most of her life in Qatar.
This paper was written for my History of Children’s Literature course, in which I was asked to investigate a social issue and observe how it is portrayed in children’s literature. The task was to use some of the texts we’ve read in the semester (and others) that relate to, involve, or speak to that idea. My paper tackles the social issue of feminine beauty and explores how European classic fairytales from the 19th century and their corresponding Disney animated films from the late 20th and early 21st centuries set a very narrow standard of beauty. Writing this paper, I learned a lot about the effects of language on our ways of thinking and observing.

The Construction of Feminine Beauty in Fairy Tales

It is no secret that there are beauty standards in cultures and societies around the world. All throughout history, appearance has been a central factor in determining self-worth. Appearance, particularly for women, affects appeal for marriage, success in one’s career, and happiness. Certainly for women, a happily-ever-after involves being beautiful. Children, teenagers, young adults, and even elders are constantly bombarded with visual representations of beauty standards in the media, books, television, social networking sites, and more. Even children’s literature has devised and promoted the feminine beauty ideal. This essay will explore how European classic fairytales from the 19th century and their corresponding Disney animated films from the late 20th and early 21st centuries are very much conformist when it comes to beauty standards. So what is the feminine beauty ideal devised by fairytales?
What problems does it cause? And how has this feminine beauty ideal shifted in time?

A fairytale story or a Disney movie is always accompanied by a moral. Naturally, these are lessons that reflect cultural and social norms. Bruno Bettelheim, a child psychologist and writer, mentions that fairytales are a major tool by which children assimilate to culture (Baker-Sperry & Graurelholz, 2003, p. 4). Children make role models out of the hero/heroine in the story. For example, Pinocchio’s nose grows when he lies, thereby teaching children not to lie. Children fall into a trap thinking that in order to be like them, they must look like them. The story can lead children to associate big noses with liars and “bad people” and thus the image becomes a deceiving perception (“Pinocchio (summary)”). This is one example of a fairytale that distorts matters related to appearance in conformity with beauty standards. Many other popular fairytales nurture the social construction of beauty, and this is very problematic.

_Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, and Cinderella_ are examples of popular classics that set a common standard of beauty and value it. They take the infinite quality of beauty and make it finite. Snow White was “a child as white as snow” (Hallet & Karasek, 2002, p. 116). Sleeping Beauty had “the disposition of an angel” (Hallet & Karasek, 2002, p. 54), and Cinderella, “couldn’t help but be a hundred times more beautiful than her sisters” (Hallet & Karasek, 2002, p. 74). The type of diction used to describe their beauty is almost always correlated with light skin, “fair,” “pale,” “snow,” and “angel.” As opposed to the common diction such as “dark,” “yellow,” “dark and sinister” that were used to describe villains (Disney, “Aladdin”; Hallet & Karasek, 2002, p.56). Furthermore, illustrations and movies emphasized their fair skin, their soft features, and their blue eyes. These fairytales promote a very narrow and Eurocentric view of beauty. This is problematic as children are impressionable and vulnerable in the face of such stories presented to them at such a young age. They are only fed with one criterion for “beauty,” and this has negative consequences on their self-esteem, as well as their perception of other people. Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi, comments on this impact by stating, “Because all I have read were books in which the characters were foreign, I had become convinced that books had to be about foreigners and had to have things that I cannot personally identify with. The unintended consequence is that
I didn’t know that people like me can exist in literature” (Adichie, 2009). The limited descriptions of beauty inadvertently dismissed the girls who looked different from the ultimate princess standard of beauty. Girls with chocolate skin, Afro-textured hair, and dark eyes, for example, would not relate to this predefined image of feminine beauty.

Another issue with the beauty ideal is that children equate interior goodness of heart with the constructed image of beauty. Children’s literature repeatedly makes connections of good character and morals with beauty, and evil and bad characters with ugliness. The protagonists— like Cinderella who was a “sweet-natured girl” (Hallet & Karasek, 2002, p. 74), and Snow White who was so kind to animals and creatures that when she “died,” they “wept for her”—have kind and good qualities tied with their description of beauty (Hallet & Karasek, 2002, p. 120). A study in the Journal of Applied Social Psychology concludes, “As ratings of beauty increased, so did ratings of friendliness, goodness, intelligence, favorability of the character’s outcome, and romantic involvement” (as cited in Leach, 2010). By contrast, villains of evil character are usually portrayed as “ugly”—fatter, darker, distorted facial figures. Ursula in The Little Mermaid had a darker skin tone, and darker hair. Jafar in Aladdin had a large nose, yellow teeth, and a thin face. The stepsisters in Cinderella had darker eyes and rougher facial features. Beauty was always tied with good character, and ugliness was tied to bad character, and so it becomes difficult for children to understand that the two have no natural connection.

Even in stories like Disney’s The Hunchback of Notre Dame and The Ugly Duckling don’t really resist the constructed beauty standard. At face value, the themes and morals are against the beauty ideal. In The Ugly Duckling, the duck flees every time he is shunned for his appearance. Similarly the hunchback of Notre Dame, Quasimodo, struggles with his physical limitations throughout his journey. Even though both stories try to highlight the interior beauty over the exterior, none of them go all the way as to treat these “ugly” characters as they would any other protagonist. The ugly duckling does not stay ugly and turns into a beautiful swan. This highlights that a happy ending is associated with beauty and not self-acceptance or even acceptance by society. The hunchback also does not end up marrying Esmeralda, which also implies that “ugliness,” or not fitting the standard of beauty, is in conflict with the ideal happy ending.
(Hanafy, 2004). More strongly, the stories failed to resist the feminine beauty ideal, as both main characters were male, and not female. This suggests that males can be ugly and be “heroes” but females cannot.

These female beauty standards can lead to detrimental mental and social effects among children, particularly young girls. To have a constructed notion of beauty that plays a large role in defining your identity, your actions, and your success is very dangerous. It gives rise to low self-esteem for girls who do not fit this criterion of beauty. It can also plant seeds of power and superiority in children who do have this exterior (Danish). This can lead to jealousy, hatred and bullying. Beauty standards are racist in their euro-centrism, and ableist in their negative characterization of people with abnormal features. Fairytales proliferate that by complying with these beauty standards.

Although the female beauty standard was very apparent in the late 20th century, that changed with the rise of recent egalitarian movements. Graurelholz, an associate professor of sociology at Purdue, predicted that as women increase in status, there would be less static beauty standards (Baker-Sperry & Graurelholz, 2003). The theory seems to hold true with recent Disney productions. For example, after eighty years without one, Disney made a movie about a black princess, The Princess and the Frog. Also, the more recent Disney princesses are less about their beauty and more about their skills and qualities. Brave’s Merida, for example, is an archer who doesn’t care about her perceived physical appearance. These two fairytales are very progressive children’s stories in their treatment of the female protagonists as independent, skillful women, women who are beautiful without adhering to hackneyed standards of beauty.

There is only one certain thing about beauty: it is something of value. Attaching specific criterion to this object of value has negative impacts on self-esteem and systematically oppresses those who happen to fit these arbitrary standards. Fairytales and Disney animated films have unfortunately played into this problematic system. It is important to realize this because adolescent girls start becoming familiar with these stories at an age where they absorb these ideas without critical evaluation. Girls grow up conditioned into thinking that to be beautiful, you have to be skinny, white and delicate. This is fortunately changing now, and our stories have become more accepting of different forms of beauty.
Bibliography


Biography

Byanne Malluhi is a junior chemical engineering student. Her ultimate goal is to leave her fingerprint on the world. How, when, or where, she doesn’t know yet. Her life is governed by the following rules: Rule #1: No hard work goes undone; Rule #2: You live for others and not for yourself; and Rule #3: The little things in life are what matter most.
This paper was written for my college composition course in spring 2015. The assignment was to write a literacy narrative about sponsors of literacy. A sponsor of literacy, according to Deborah Brandt, is “any agent, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way.” I am proud of this piece because it shows my favorite hobby.

Capturing Moments

I am neither a beginner nor professional photographer. I am somewhere in between. I see myself as an intermediate photographer. I started as a beginner and here I am, a few steps away from becoming the head of the photography club at Texas A&M University at Qatar. I usually take pictures for fun, not because I am asked to do so. In fact, photography is one of my favorite hobbies. My passion for photography started when I was 15 years old. When I pick up our family album, I am never able to go through it without smiling at least once. I feel like I relive these moments every time I see those pictures. I want to show my future children their mother’s life before having them. I want to capture moments to keep them forever.

Photography is “the practice of creating images in a proficient way.” (This is the definition of photography according to Wikipedia). However, I define photography as not only creating images or taking photos, but capturing the beautiful moments in our lives. My purpose in this essay is to discuss my developing literacy of photography.
I have a professional photographer cousin, Aisha, who influenced and supported me to become a photographer. I love the way she takes pictures in our family gatherings in a magnificent way, using the zoom-in property to show the funny face expressions. Aisha helped me participate in photography by getting me into a workshop until I became good at it, and it became one of my favorite hobbies. I can say that Aisha is a “sponsor of my literacy” of photography. “A literacy sponsor is a person or system that influences your literacy or ability to read and write” (Deborah Brandt, “Sponsors of Literacy”). Aisha influenced and helped me to pursue photography.

In the beginning, I used to take pictures using my cell phone. I did not own a digital camera until my parents got a Canon D500 professional camera for my 16th birthday. I posted the photos that I took on my blog just for fun, but many people liked them and asked me to post more photos. That encouraged me. I love taking pictures of everything, especially the sky between afternoon and evening when it looks pink and peaceful. As a matter of fact, the reason behind my obsession with photography is because it freezes the time at that moment allowing me to relive these moments every time I look at them. Sometimes I wish I can go back in time to relive the beautiful moments of my lives and these images are the answer because they stay for generations. We can learn and grow from them. Whenever I grab our family album, I look at my parents’ pictures, especially those of their wedding. When these pictures were taken, I was not born. I stare at them, I think about life, and I ask myself: “How was it like when I never existed?” It makes me wonder about life, especially when I see pictures of my grandparents when they were young. I have my grandmother’s picture when she was 19 years old. Every time I look at it, I think of how time passes by so fast and how things can change in a blink of an eye. This is the beauty of taking pictures: it makes me think and wonder about the past. Besides, taking pictures improves me as a photographer. The more I practice something, the better I get at it. In other words, when we practice something very often, we become experts. I used to take terrible pictures, but with practice, I have learned to take very beautiful ones.

I like to take pictures at different times and places, especially when I travel. I might not come back to these places again. Therefore, taking pictures is a
brilliant thing to do when traveling. I took a picture of the Eiffel Tower in Paris and the Big Ben clock tower in London. It does not matter whether the picture looks good or not since capturing moments is my target. I think everyone should do the same thing as I do. My best friend Amna always complains that she cannot find enough photos of her when she was a baby. It is because her parents did not take many photos of her when she was younger. Amna always tells me how badly she wants to see her baby photos and maybe recall her memories. This is why I think people should take photos—because it allows them to re-live their pasts.

I feel like I became a better photographer and as a proof of my progress, two of my photos were chosen as finalist in the Best Writing cover contest in college last year, and this year, one of my photos actually won! I was so proud of myself. I never thought I would make it this far. I started taking photos just for fun, but my engagement with this literacy helped me become a better version of the photographer I used to be.

Examples

I am including these pictures that I have taken to show the overall shape of my progress in photography. The first picture was recently taken and the other one is old.

I took this picture in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. I love birds and do not see many birds in Qatar like I did there, so I thought about capturing that moment.
This is the picture of the Oyster and Pearl Fountain. It is one of the famous landmarks in Qatar. I took this picture for my album of famous landmarks in my country. I also took pictures of the Museum of Islamic Art and Aspire tower. I chose this one because I really love the lighting here. Aisha also thinks that this photo is the best one in my album.

**Biography**

Latifa is a sophomore student majoring in electrical and computer engineering. She is from Qatar. She is the founder and president of the photography club at Texas A&M University at Qatar. She enjoys writing essays and submitting them to the *Best Writing*, and this is her second time participating in the *Best Writing* series.
I wrote this paper for my Literature and Other Arts course. The assignment required me to write about how my cultural identity can affect the way I interpret one piece of art from what we studied in class. I chose my identity to be Tunisian, and I chose the picture book *Persepolis* as my piece of art. I made sure to briefly introduce the book and explain what I was about to do in the introduction so that readers from outside my class would be able to understand everything.

**Identity and Art**

My identity as a Tunisian can have a great influence on the way I read and interpret art. So in this essay, I will first define what it means to be Tunisian; then, I will apply this lens to the way I see *Persepolis*. Lastly, I will evaluate what I have discovered and see if this lens made me foreground or miss some aspects of the big picture that others would see differently.

Being a Tunisian has far too many implications. Concerning the interpretation of art, I will talk about one influential characteristic in particular. In 1957, Tunisians faced a political situation similar to that of Iran. In fact, after getting rid of the French colonization, France put a new dictator under the fake pretext of him winning 99.9% of a free presidential election. But unlike in Iran, he promised the Left (or the secular movement) to run the country the way they wanted and give them all the privileges if they could help him keep the country on a tight leash. In other words, to be Tunisian means that either you or one of your family have gone through an oppressing regime.
Persepolis: The Story of Childhood is the first in a series of picture books created by Marjane Satrapi. In this book, she talks about the political situations happening in Iran from 1978 to 1989. At the same time, she also talks about her childhood experience from age 7 to age 16 in that turbulent period in Iran’s history. As I read “Chapter 8: Moscow,” it immediately caught my attention. The chapter talks about how the main character, Marji meets her uncle, Anoosh, whom she regards as a hero for opposing the tyrant regime. This admiration is highlighted in picture 3 from page 54 by the visual emphasis on Anoosh with the circle of light behind him as if he were a holy figure. This backdrop makes Anoosh’s face look more dramatic. Reading this chapter through my Tunisian lens made me remember the time my father told me about my uncle who spent more than 15 years in prison for the same reason. I also had the same feeling of admiration as Marj so I was able to relate and understand her feelings unlike someone who has not gone through similar circumstances.

The second interesting part is from “Chapter 10: The Trip.” On page 73, Marji and her family are seen watching the news when a fundamentalist on TV is shown talking about how school books are leading children away from the true path of Islam in his perspective. The size of the speaker’s face was gradually increasing in the first three pictures. This is a design made to emphasize the extreme nature of his speech. Similarly, reading this part through my Tunisian lens made me remember the time when I was watching the news during the oppressive regime. I remember that they were systematically posing anything that is religious as vicious which was another face of extremism. Reading two outrageous statements from two extreme perspectives made me think twice before blaming the speaker’s affiliation as a whole. So my interpretation was opposing the author’s intentions and his personal view rather than Islam.

So my interpretation of Chapter 8 was that I understood Marji’s admiration to her uncle. Fortunately, my lens helped me better understand Marji’s feelings. If not for this lens, I would have found it more difficult to relate to her. As for the second part, my interpretation was different from the author’s intentions. Nevertheless, instead of sharing Marji’s feeling of hatred towards the fundamentalists, I was able to overcome that hate and harbor a different feeling. This feeling made me look at the situation as a whole and avoid all the negative stereotypical assumptions that I
would have harbored instead. My hate is now directed to whoever does the hateful actions instead, no matter who he is. So ultimately, I felt that understanding the lens in which I interpret a piece of art resulted in a positive outcome.

**Biography**

Ghaith Glaied, is Tunisian and came to Qatar when he was nine years old. He is now 21, having lived most of his life in Qatar but constantly visiting Tunisia during the summer breaks. He received his elementary and secondary education in the Tunisian school in Doha, then spent a year studying in Florida, USA, while living on his own. He returned to Qatar because of medical reasons and has recently completed his first semester as a mechanical engineering student at Texas A&M University at Qatar.
The Sixties through Andy Warhol

In the future everyone will be world-famous for 15 minutes.

-Andy Warhol, 1968

Andy Warhol is one of the most prolific and popular artists of the twentieth century. He has even been described as the “bellwether of the art market.” Furthermore he has consistently been one of the three most traded artists since 2002 (The Economist, 2009, para. 3). What makes his art so popular and special is not his masterful technique or his color scheme but how his art captures the essence of America in the 1960s.
The 1960s were a period of great change in America. This decade saw the rise and fall of public figures, and marked a peak in American consumerism and mass production. At the same time the ’60s also witnessed a resurgence of religious devotion (Becker, 2007, p. 144). It is these changes that Warhol successfully captures through his art. From his paintings of Marilyn Monroe to the “Campbell Soup Cans” painting to the “Last Supper Series,” he not only documents these changes but he also provides a social commentary on them. His art both criticizes and celebrates the people's love for celebrities, the American consumerist culture and the religious changes in society. In doing so, Warhol provides a deep insight into the motivations and workings of the 1960s like no other artist.

**Celebrity Obsession**

Warhol’s celebrity paintings, despite being simple and similar, are undeniably some of his best works. Hidden in these paintings is a complex message about the people’s obsession with celebrities. The 1960s saw the death of popular figures such as Marilyn Monroe, the decline of public stars such as Elvis Presley and rise of leaders such as Mao Zedong (Hertel & Heff, 1962, para. 3; Kirchberg & Hendrickx, 1999, p. 67). These changes affected the public deeply so much so that some of these figures were elevated to the status of legends. For example, Monroe’s death caused the suicide rate in Los Angeles area to nearly double (Banner, 2012, p. 427). Warhol uses his paintings to depict and criticize this exact fixation of the public with celebrities.

A prime example of this are the numerous “Marilyn” paintings he painted after her death. All his “Marilyn” paintings start off bright but gradually fade from left to right. Through this Warhol shows that people were deeply affected by her death in the beginning and how she faded from their hearts with the passage of time. However, in all his paintings, the image of Marilyn never completely fades away showing that while people moved on from her death, they never truly forgot her. Additionally in many of these paintings, Warhol starts the painting in bright colors but ends the painting in black and white. The bright and brilliant colors symbolize how Monroe appealed to the deepest emotions of man: fame, lust and sense of mortality (Keitner, 2013, p. 66). In contrast the black and white section expresses Warhol’s disdain for how people continuously idolized Monroe long after
her death. A great example of Warhol’s depiction of Marilyn Monroe and her status in society is the painting “Marilyn’s Lips.” The repeated depiction of her sensuous lips in the painting clearly establishes Monroe’s position as the sex symbol of the 1960s (Keitner, 2013, p. 66). Thus the “Marilyn” paintings masterfully portray the public perception of Marilyn Monroe in the 1960s.

His painting of Elvis Presley also follows the same technique of starting off colorful and fading to black and white towards the end. However, in Presley’s case, Warhol uses this technique to show Presley’s fall from fame. Another observable difference is how the paintings are not as bright as Marilyn’s painting. This can be attributed to the fact that Elvis was still alive when his popularity declined, unlike Monroe whose decline happened after her death. The 1960s is unique in how common people were obsessed with public figures they hated. A glorious example of this is Mao Zedong who was the founding father of communist China which earned him the ire of most Americans. Warhol also captured this widespread dislike for Zedong perfectly in his paintings of Mao Zedong. One element common to all the paintings of Mao Zedong is the use of feminine colors to paint Zedong. In doing so, Warhol is trying to subtly say that Mao Zedong is not the great leader many people believe he is; rather he is a coward who hides behind the idea of communism to oppress the Chinese people. For this same effect Warhol paints the lips of Mao Zedong with rosy colors. The rosy lips resemble that of a woman and reemphasize Warhol’s message that Zedong was a coward and unfit to be a leader. What makes these series of paintings special is how these paintings echo the sentiments of people around the world and not only the American people.

Likewise the rest of Andy Warhol’s celebrity portraits follow a similar painting style; however, each portrait portrays a different message about the celebrity in question and society in general. It is this unique style of painting that makes Warhol’s paintings one of the best depictions of celebrity obsession of the sixties.
**American Consumerism**

Warhol and the consumerist culture have had a long relationship. Warhol placed such a great emphasis on the consumerist culture that he always said, “An artist is somebody who produces things that people don’t need to have but that he, for some reason, thinks it would be a good idea to give them” (Warhol, 1975, p. 144). As a result, a lot of Warhol’s artwork revolves around the idea of consumerism. If one were to look closely at all his artwork about consumerism, one would find that the 1960s provided some of the best and most magnificent artworks on consumerism.

The reason behind this was simple: the 1960s were the peak of American consumerist culture. The 1960s saw a booming post war economy and rapid advances in the art of mass production. These coupled with what many called the “creative revolution” in advertising (*AdAge*, 2005, para. 5), led to an astonishing boom in American consumerism. People lined up to buy the same mass produced items in an attempt to be unique. Warhol expresses this irony in many of his artworks where he printed the same image again and again but with minor changes.

His greatest painting on consumerism and perhaps his career was the “Campbell’s Soup Cans.” For this he painted each of the varieties of Campbell’s soup. The soup cans were painted with dull colors. The dull colors mocked how materialistic people had become and how this had made society a boring and dull place. The repetitive pairing of the soup cans provided the viewer with a sense of stagnant stability. Moreover it criticized how modern city life had become monotonous and numb where everything looked the same (Bastien & Varnedoe, 2001, p. 42). Warhol expresses this same fact as a satire in his book *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol—from A to B and Back Again* where he says, “The most beautiful thing in Tokyo is McDonald’s. The most beautiful thing in Stockholm is McDonald’s. The most beautiful thing in Florence is McDonald’s. Peking and Moscow don’t have anything beautiful yet” (Warhol, 1975, p. 71). These paintings are amazing in how Warhol manages to give a complete satirical social commentary in one painting of a can. It is this talent that sets Warhol above all artists who describe the consumerist nature of American society in the 1960s.
Religion and Society
What most people don’t know about Warhol is that he was a practicing Catholic and went to mass in private (Keitner, 2013, p. 106). As such, his artwork on religion during and after the 1960s has the special distinction of being directly inspired by his life and beliefs.

The sixties represented a huge change in the role of religion in society. The Vietnam War caused many people to return to their spiritual roots to find comfort. This in turn caused a spike in the sale of religious iconography such as religious books, New Age music and healing crystals (Beckman, n.d., para. 9). At the same time, the ’60s also saw the emergence of many eastern religions in America. Furthermore the number of people following any particular denomination in Christianity fluctuated greatly during the ’60s (Gallup, n.d.). Warhol explores these changes in one of his biggest collection of paintings, “The Last Supper Series.”

While “The Last Supper Series” celebrates the return of people to Christianity, it also hides several deeper messages. “The Last Supper Series” is essentially a rethinking of Leonardo Da Vinci’s painting on the same topic (Kattenberg, 2001, p. 5). By copying and modifying Da Vinci’s work, Warhol expresses the great ideological changes taking place in churches and religious circles. These changes were mainly inspired by the successes of the Black rights movement, the “sexual revolution” and the feminist movement in the ’60s (Beckman, n.d., para. 3). The first observable difference between Da Vinci’s work and Warhol’s work is the presence of logos and price tags in Warhol’s work. Warhol placed logos of companies such as GE and Dove, price tags and other imagery on top of the original painting. While it may seem blasphemous, Warhol uses this overlap to criticize the act of using religion to deceive and profit off others. The second difference is the presence of two Christs in the same painting which is considered a transgression in the Catholic dogma (Kattenberg, 2001, p. 53). Through this Warhol expresses his reverence and irreverence for religion simultaneously (Keitner, 2013, p. 136). This paradoxical action describes society’s never ending cycle of love and hate for religion.

However, many critics claim that “The Last Supper Series” describes the 1980s because it was completed in the 1980s. What many of these critics fail to see is that these paintings were based on Warhol’s key artistic
procedures from the ’60s rather than the ’80s (Kattenberg, 2013, p. 52). This, combined with the pop art look of the series, clearly establishes it as a portrayal of the 1960s. At the same time, many critics claim that “The Last Supper Series” was an attempt to make Leonardo’s work relevant again. The problem with this theory is the fact that Leonardo’s work was still very popular in the ’60s. Still others claim that the paintings depict Christ’s omnipotence. Again, the problem with this idea is that most of these paintings focus more on the logos and the surroundings than on Christ himself. Nonetheless Warhol’s ability to evoke unique interpretations from the same artwork sets him apart from others in the field of religious paintings.

**Business Art**

Despite Warhol’s great success, there are many people who believe that he was merely a “business artist” (Lando, 2008, para. 2). They claim that Warhol’s art was simply an attempt to grab people’s attention so as to increase his painting sales. They also add that he painted celebrities like Monroe because of the shock value and to profit from their deaths. Many critics point out that he launched *Interview* magazine in 1969 to profit from the public’s appetite for glamour, fashion and movies (Keitner, 2013, p. 79). Meanwhile, others say that the numerous films he directed and the organizations he ran such as the Factory were all attempts to diversify and earn more money.

While it may be true that Warhol painted Monroe because of the shock value, it was only because her death allowed him to portray the people’s obsession with celebrities more clearly. As for the films he directed, they were never mainstream and never released on a wide commercial scale. Rather, his films were used in underground circuits and generated little to no profit for him (Keitner, 2013, p. 70). As for the Factory, it was merely a gathering place for people from different walks of life to socialize, and it never turned into a commercial venture as many people claim. *Interview* magazine was a subtle parody of both celebrity obsession and American consumerism in the sixties. Finally, Warhol himself has often voiced his dislike for “commercial things” and once said, “As soon as anything becomes commercial for a mass market, it really stinks” (Shorr, 2015, p. 57). Thus it is clear that Andy Warhol was anything but a “business artist.”
Concluding Thoughts
Warhol was undeniably one of the best artists of the 1960s. The brilliance of Warhol's art lay in how he represented the vibrant nature of the 1960s using two dimensional and flat pop art. He took the “mundane artifacts of daily life and used them to create a mirror of society” (Finkelstein, 1999, p. 9). His social commentary on celebrity obsession, consumerism, and religion in the 1960s elevates him above the artists of his time. If one wants to truly understand the working and motivation of the ’60s, one must only look to Warhol's paintings.

References


**Biography**

Arshad Mohamed Ali is a first-year undergraduate student pursuing a degree in chemical engineering. He is originally from India but feels that Qatar is his home. He has always found writing to be interesting because he perceives it to be a powerful tool to connect with people of all walks of life.
Aside from being a course requirement, the intention behind this essay is to show people the brighter side of President Johnson’s character. To quote my professor, “Johnson was utterly underrated. He could have been up there with the greats: Lincoln, Jefferson, Eisenhower. Sadly, that wasn’t the case…” Even an individual who has no knowledge about the history of American politics can see and understand how quintessential LBJ was, especially when dealing with national issues such as segregation and discrepancies in the country’s foreign policies. He wasn’t the most diplomatic person, but he got the job done. I enjoyed writing this paper because it presented facts contrary to popular belief. I like that, going against the tide...

Lyndon B. Johnson: An Intimidating Presence in the Late 1960s

Picture this: You are a world-renowned American nuclear physicist and you were able to synthesise two heavy metals to form one “super element” that can blow North Korea to the moon and back. You were then invited to the White House so that the president can congratulate you in person and bestow national honours upon you. He offers you a seat, maybe a good cup o’ Joe, a fresh cookie, and says, “I commend you for your contribution, Dr. Scientist! You have worked towards making America greater.” Most likely, the salutations will lift your spirits on high. Then he continues, “Now, are you willing to work for a top-secret government agency that will ensure the safety of the United States of America? Are you able to work with full confidentiality under the secretary of defense to keep any hostile advances at bay? Are you ready
to do what’s necessary to keep America the greatest nation in the world? Are you, son?” Now, that makes you think for a minute: should I take up this guy’s offer and be off the grid, or refuse and risk being branded as a defector. Even the most mentally resilient men crack under the pressure. The late President Lyndon B. Johnson used to do this at his own leisure: he eats self-esteem for breakfast.

This tough, gritty, terrorizing façade can be traced back to his southern roots. Born on the 27th of August, 1908, in Stonewall, Texas, LBJ was the son of a rancher and a semi-politician. He has had his fair share of living in poverty, considering the fact that he lived in the rural countryside and had to work his way through college. Nevertheless, this shaped him to be one of the most intimidating American men in the course of history. What contributed to his personality? Taking into account that President Johnson towers above most people at 6’3” tall and has had a no-nonsense upbringing, it may be wise not to get on his cranky side. This is perhaps one of the things that made him stand out. Normally you would have politicians that are well-versed, diplomatic, mild-tempered, and whatnot; Johnson was not one of those. He was straightforward, with a knack for making people wet themselves 15 seconds after shaking his hand. LBJ was also known for his “toilet conversations” which involved dragging people into the loo with him to finish their conversation while doing his business.

There’s always a yin for every yang. As for President Johnson, people found no happy medium; it’s either they loved him to bits or loathed him to hell.

The Good
When the Kamikaze attacks on Pearl Harbor made the entire nation come to a grinding halt, Lyndon Johnson won a commission to be a lieutenant commander in the U.S. Naval Reserve with the help of President Roosevelt. He worked on speeding up the ship manufacturing process and participated in a number of bomber missions in the South Pacific during his service. Apparently, he made so much of an impact in the reserves that General Douglas MacArthur had to present him with a Silver Star Medal as commendation for his services.

He always had his way with things. When Johnson was elected a senator for Texas, he used his unshakable temperament to know where his fellow legislators stood on certain issues and, more often than not, made them
cater to his political whims. This would justify his quick elevation up the bureaucratic ladder; he was able to play the system with a stern face and a few swear words. Johnson then set his eyes on the White House itself. Unfortunately, he ended up losing the democratic nomination to a young senator from New England named John F. Kennedy. However, due to Johnson’s charisma and his southern influence, Kennedy offered him the vice presidential seat, which Johnson then accepted, albeit reluctantly. The JFK-LBJ tandem brought the Democratic convention and the traditional southern democrats together; and that’s all she wrote. Kennedy won the presidency and brought Johnson with him.

After the assassination of the President John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson was sworn into office while on board Air Force One. He shared the same sentiments as his predecessor. To be more specific, it was during Lyndon B. Johnson’s term in which the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was enacted. This was initially proposed by Kennedy. Johnson conveyed his full and utter support by stating that “No memorial oration or eulogy could more eloquently honor President Kennedy’s memory than the earliest possible passage of the civil rights bill for which he fought so long.”

The Bad

“With great power comes great responsibility.” It has been said that the president of the United States of America is the most powerful man of the “free world.” However, with that authority, he must put the welfare of his constituents and the nation he serves above all else. The president can only do so much in so little time; this became a major issue during Johnson’s time in office.

When Johnson gave his “Great Society” speech at the University of Michigan, thousands were in awe of the ideals this man has spoken. The minute he proclaimed that this society “demands an end to poverty and racial injustice,” everyone embraced the abstract goals he set forth. However, Johnson did not have concrete steps to work towards this seemingly unrealistic goal. This is what made Johnson’s administration look meaningless: he was adamant to build a just and humane society right away, even back when he had racial segregation and the Vietnam War to deal with.
In theory, one can argue that Johnson’s overconfidence of being able to get the work done with his boorish tactics became his hamartia.

The Ugly
In 1964, there was an incident of brief naval warfare against American and Vietnamese ships. The Gulf of Tonkin incident, as it is commonly referred to, escalated events leading to the Second Indochina War. When things took a turn for the worse in Vietnam, President Johnson was insistent on invading the southeast Asian country with the hopes of liberating it from the clutches of Communism. What he doesn’t realise is that this course of action would have grave repercussions.

Things started out well: he mustered 500,000 American troops from 16,000 when he took office. When Uncle Sam had boots on the ground, the Viet Cong still overpowered the American G.I.s. This took a toll on several things, including manpower, logistics, resources, and LBJ’s reputation within the Democratic Party. Johnson’s rapport with colleagues nosedived, prompting him to reconsider his presidential re-election bid. “I shall not seek, nor will I accept, the nomination of my party for another term as your president,” were Johnson’s words as he struggled to resolve the ongoing conflict in Vietnam, stressing out that a political campaign would throw him off.

The Badass
President Johnson once said: “Being president is like being a jackass in a hailstorm. There’s nothing to do but to stand there and take it.” Despite all the hate and criticism thrown his way, he still worked towards solving a problem that he did not start. LBJ might not have had a very diplomatic approach, but he was a guy who gets the job done. He had a no-nonsense attitude when dealing with other individuals and was quite a frank fellow. Although his lack of tact and his charismatic persona got him to the top of the pyramid, it also brought him down. But that’s not saying he wasn’t a good president; he was just highly ineffective in some areas of governance. With all that said, President Lyndon B. Johnson will always be one of the most intimidating Americans in history: a legit badass in jurisprudence.
References


6. Ibid.


Biography

John Crisme describes himself as a frustrated poet, essayist, novelist, musician, athlete, and astronaut—a frustrated person. John is a mechanical engineering freshman who has a penchant for drifting mentally throughout the day. He fell in love with poetry ever since he watched *Dead Poets Society* during the winter of ’14. John believes that a poet has two favorite lines: one he wrote, and one that made him write, which was “O Captain, My Captain” in his case. He fancies the works of Walt Whitman, Robert Frost, and Lord Alfred Tennyson, to name a few.
While it is common to incorporate an ethics course into engineering education, the inclusion of a single course is far from comprehensive and does not adequately train engineering students to deal with the moral dilemmas they are likely to encounter as professional engineers. This article explores the existing problems with such courses in the light of the recent Volkswagen scandal and offers opinions on how these could be resolved.

Engineering Ethically: Revisiting Engineering Ethics Curriculum and Pedagogy in the U.S.

The recent Volkswagen scandal is a significant example of how ethical dilemmas are inseparable from the engineering profession, arising from most decisions concerning competing interests in a real-life situation. The implications are equally significant and include the role of engineers as moral agents from a societal viewpoint: due to the nature of their profession, engineers’ moral decisions transcend personal consequences and have an impact on many different stakeholders within the public sphere. This is because all engineering projects are by definition experiments which involve technology development and humans. Engineers are thus in the position to contribute greater harm to society should they act unprofessionally or unethically, and must therefore exercise greater care to avoid doing so. This makes instruction in professional engineering ethics an absolute necessity if we wish to train engineers who are to benefit society.
Some pertinent questions, however, regarding the nature of such instruction require our attention. What are the current methods of imparting knowledge and information regarding engineering ethics to engineers-in-training in U.S. institutions? Is a single course in ethics sufficient to train future engineers to evaluate any unprecedented and extraordinary personal ethical dilemma falling within the professional realm, as well as to deal with the societal consequences of their reaction to the same? This article tackles these questions by examining the Volkswagen scandal—in conjunction with similar cases—from the engineers’ perspective, considers contemporary pedagogical approaches to engineering ethics, and offers insights on how improvements to the same may be achieved.

**Beating the System: Volkswagen’s “Diesel Dupe”**
The scandal surrounding Volkswagen, the German automobile manufacturer, has yet to make its way to ethics textbooks, with legal proceedings in the case currently ongoing [1]. Dubbed the “diesel dupe,” the case involved Volkswagen employing a “defeat device” in several models of its diesel vehicles, enabling the manufacturer to bypass emissions standards set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) [2]. A complex piece of code allowed the vehicle’s central computer to sense when the car was undergoing emissions testing under laboratory conditions, and then reduce the emissions below EPA-specified thresholds, albeit at the expense of fuel efficiency [2]. When actually driven on the road, the vehicle would be reconfigured by the computer to maximize fuel efficiency and engine performance by switching off emissions controls, causing the vehicle to emit nitrogen oxide pollutants up to forty times above the EPA limit [2].

Interestingly, the scandal was unearthed by two engineers affiliated with the Berlin-based nonprofit International Council on Clean Transportation (ICCT). They were assisted by engineering researchers from West Virginia University, who conducted in-lab and on-road tests in 2014 on two Volkswagen car models and found discrepancies between the two results [1, 2]. The researchers subsequently alerted the California Air Resources Board (CARB) and the EPA whose tests confirmed their findings [2].
Volkswagen finally admitted in September 2015 to installing the defeat device in eleven million vehicles [3] manufactured between 2009 and 2015, of which half a million were sold in the U.S. [2].

It has been posited that Volkswagen’s actions resulted from attempting to outperform its main competitor in the U.S.—Toyota—by investing in diesel vehicles rather than in hybrids, and trying to simultaneously meet strict mileage and emissions requirements. Whatever the reason, the sophisticated nature of the “device” leaves no doubt that the development and installation of such technology required direct assistance from, as well as tacit approval of, (at least some) Volkswagen engineers, making the company’s actions not just illegal but blatantly unethical as well—unethical because the engineers risked public health and trust for corporate goals. In October 2015, as a result of the fallout from the scandal, Volkswagen recorded “its first quarterly loss in fifteen years” amounting to $1.84 billion, and stock prices fell by as much as twenty percent. The company’s actions were in violation of the US Clean Air Act [2], and Volkswagen risks facing several billion dollars in fines from the EPA. It is currently being sued by the U.S. Department of Justice, facing investigations in several countries and all fifty states, and dealing with “lawsuits from owners seeking compensation for the decreased resale value of their cars [1].”

Such illegal—but more crucially, unethical—behavior from Volkswagen has resulted, and will result, in repercussions for all associated stakeholders. The environment and public health have been put at risk: nitrogen oxide pollution can lead to health effects such as asthma attacks and respiratory illnesses, particularly in children and the elderly [2]. Moreover, the automobile industry’s goodwill and automotive engineers’ integrity have also been put into question. Fines may be payed, apologies issued, management overhauled, and market share recovered, but the aforementioned repercussions cannot easily be negotiated. That it required external involvement to uncover this unsavory business instead of a potential whistleblower intervening on behalf of the stakeholders encompassed by the public sphere, sheds light on how unethical behavior within the profession of engineering is still existent and institutionally protected.
A Systemic Problem: Professionally Unethical Engineers

Volkswagen’s actions are a classic example of using engineering knowledge and sophistication in the disservice of humanity. However, this case is not the first time that unethical behavior has been unearthed in the automobile industry. In 1998, the EPA and the U.S. Department of Justice were involved in a billion-dollar settlement with diesel truck engine manufacturers¹ whose engines were fitted with “defeat devices” similar to the ones in Volkswagen vehicles, allowing the trucks to pass emissions tests while continuing to emit nitrogen oxide pollutants three times above the EPA limit [4]. The affected trucks—roughly 1.3 million—emitted “1.3 million tons of excess nitrogen oxide in 1998 alone [4].” The remarkable similarity of this case to the recent scandal suggests that the Volkswagen engineers responsible were fully aware of the possible legal, financial, environmental, and social ramifications of their actions. Despite this knowledge, their unethical decisions deceived not just the regulatory authorities but the public as well: the vehicles were marketed as “clean diesel” cars.

This inability to apply moral reasoning when confronted with an ethical dilemma is not restricted to engineers in the automobile industry. The recent invention of an “epidermal electronic medical device” by a materials engineer at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, John Rogers, which was subsequently reported in the prestigious journal, Science, drew further attention when Rogers, claiming to be “just an engineer,” dismissed ethical concerns related to his device as merely something “people should think about.”⁵ This exhibition of apathy regarding moral and ethical questions from some of the most brilliant scientific minds is a matter of grave concern, as pointed out by El-Zein [5].

The strong disconnect between the social sciences and engineering (along with the natural sciences) when it comes to the discussion of the ethical and social ramifications of technologies is partly to blame. Professional ethics is overwhelmingly and erroneously considered to be the domain of the social sciences, as posited by Singer [6]. He argues that this disconnect is increasing, since “our understanding of law and ethics moves at a glacial...

¹Manufacturers included Caterpillar Inc., Cummins Engine Company, Detroit Diesel Corporation, Mack Trucks, Inc., Navistar International Transportation Corporation, Renault Vehicules Industriels, S.A. and Volvo Truck Corporation
pace, [while] technology moves at an exponential pace [6].” Not all engineers may act unethically—as at least some of those at Volkswagen did—but most will face hitherto unprecedented ethical dilemmas in their respective professions. Research into genetics, autonomous (unmanned) weapons of war, artificial intelligence, cloning, and myriad other developing technologies will inarguably raise moral questions which today’s engineers appear to be ill-equipped to answer.

**Engineering Ethically: Preventing another Diesel Disgrace**

These examples illustrate an extremely crucial point about engineering education: technically proficient engineers are not “good” engineers if they fail to make morally sound decisions related to their profession. How, then, should engineers be trained to fulfill this essential requirement?

Harris argues that since engineering ethics—as embodied by professional engineering codes of conduct—comprise a set of inherently “preventative” rules, they fail to capture the essence of virtues that should be innate to any individual as a human being [7]. According to Harris, instruction in engineering ethics should, therefore, be supplemented by an appeal to the humanistic elements of an engineer-in-training through a liberal arts education [7]. Harris is absolutely correct in pointing out the limitations of codes of ethics: “no ethical canons can enshrine the myriad ethical dilemmas faced by professional engineers in just a few thousand words. It is unreasonable, however, to expect and assume that through individual (and standard) courses in political science, history and literature, students of engineering will be able to develop crucial insights (over the short period of time while attending university) into the vagaries of the ethical dilemmas they will inevitably face in their careers spanning several years. This is because the information and knowledge imparted in these standalone liberal arts courses is not contextualized with respect to the requirements of ethical behavior in the engineering profession.

Traditional U.S. engineering curricula that have neglected instruction in ethics are now more likely to include a course in engineering ethics [8], such as the one at Texas A&M. It might be argued that such a course serves the very purpose of contextualizing the knowledge gleaned from

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2 An example is the National Society of Professional Engineers’ (NSPE) Code of Ethics
the humanities. The question, however, that needs to be addressed deals
not so much with the inherent role of an engineering ethics course as
much as with its scope: this is essentially the concern raised by Davis who
assesses criticism of current engineering ethics courses [9] by tackling
some of the issues discussed by Lynch and Kline [10].

Lynch and Kline bemoan that engineering ethics is taught by ethicists
“[focusing] on the actions of an individual engineer facing a moral
dilemma, without providing” adequate background knowledge, with
“prepackaged ethical dilemmas [being] standard fare for courses in
engineering ethics [10].” It is evident from their argument that there is
a lack of depth in instruction in such ethics courses. They argue that it is
necessary to hone engineering students’ skill in analyzing ethical issues in
the absence of such clear-cut dilemmas (which is often the case in real-
life) [10]. But in order to hone this ability, greater emphasis needs to be
placed on “practical” ethics instruction instead of merely a theoretical
and philosophical reasoning-based approach (which is necessary but
inadequate in and of itself). An implication of employing this additional—
though not exclusive—practical approach to teaching engineering ethics is
that it would require additional time.

The limited availability of time for instructors of engineering ethics is
exactly what is cited as the key concern by Davis in his response to Lynch
and Kline’s suggestion that a sociological and not individual approach be
taken to the teaching of engineering ethics in order to expand the scope
of instruction in the course [9]. It is pertinent to realize that Davis claims
that sufficient attention is already being paid to the issues addressed by
Lynch and Kline “given the length of the semester and other topics [ethics
instructors] should cover [9].” It can be logically argued, therefore, that
the current level of instruction in engineering ethics is inadequate simply
because it has been relegated to the confines of a single course over a single
semester.

This relegation defeats the very pedagogical purpose of teaching
engineering ethics: to train engineering students to be as proficient in
tackling moral and ethical dilemmas as they are taught to be technically
skilled. Engineering ethics at most U.S. institutions is currently a mere
single-course degree requirement that must be met as part of a degree
plan. Why can it not be a parallel, simultaneous training which students
undergo over the course of their university education? Engineering, mathematics and science courses follow a logical progression, introducing new concepts sequentially and developing students’ analytical skills over the course of several semesters. Similarly, students’ ability to reason morally should be honed throughout the course of their studies. Such training involves the development of their professional character and this can hardly be expected to be successfully tackled in one semester.

Students should ideally be introduced to engineering ethics and its significance in their introductory courses rather than in the standalone ethics course, which is often offered in the last two years of an undergraduate degree in the U.S. This can be supplemented with Davis’ idea of “micro-insertion,” the addition of ethics “into technical courses in small enough units not to push out technical material,” so that students are keenly aware of the pertinence of ethical concerns throughout their engineering education. Moreover, rather than teaching standard liberal arts courses, engineering schools should concentrate on those that are contextualized and have greater utility to students of engineering. Courses dealing with anthropology, sociology, organizational management, and public policy are more relevant in preparing students for a profession with such a significant societal role. These courses can also be expected to introduce students to esoteric issues associated with ethics, such as whistleblowing.

The aforementioned suggestions are in no way exhaustive. Nevertheless, their implementation can directly tackle two crucial concerns. Firstly, it would dispel the notion held by most engineers-in-training that professional ethics is relevant only to the social sciences, by creating a perpetual ethics discourse through the curriculum. Secondly, it would enable engineering students to become cognizant of professional ethics and develop their moral reasoning skills; rather than learning about ethical dilemmas on the job and not knowing what to do, they would then be able to apply these skills to grapple with unique ethical dilemmas not encountered in the classroom.
Conclusion
The study of engineering ethics is not merely about finding specific answers to ethical problems but about raising questions which may not have definite answers, such that the significance of those ethical questions is emphasized. Engineering students have to be trained in a manner that not only makes them aspire to achieve technical excellence but inculcates in them a constant moral consciousness that arises from the very nature of the engineering profession—a profession that aims to benefit humanity through investigation into and application of scientific technologies. Ultimately, the onus is on the current system to revamp its methods of instruction in engineering ethics, as has been pointed out in this article, in order to ensure that creative scientific minds graduating from the bastions of technological development do so with the requisite skills to cope with the unprecedented challenges of engineering ethically in a morally complex technological world.

References


Biography

Muhammad Ghufran Rafique truly appreciates coffee, this being the third time he has reverently referenced the caffeinated beverage in his Best Writing biography.
Monya Al-Muhannadi

This piece was my attempt at writing a summary and response to an article by Margaret Kantz called “Helping Students Use Textual Sources Persuasively” as part of my English Composition and Rhetoric class. This article wasn’t an easy read, but thankfully, we did not have any “guidelines” or restrictions in my class, so we got to be as creative as we could be. I think that the article did make me a better reader and even a better writer not only because of the content, but due to the writing process as a whole. While writing this piece, I had a feeling that I wouldn’t get a good grade on it, because I had to do lots of citing, something that I never learned and had to do in my English high school classes. Surprisingly, my professor really liked it and even suggested that I submit it to Best Writing.

I Am Shirley

In her article “Helping Students Use Textual Sources Persuasively,” Margaret Kantz explores the reason why the average college student fails to use textual sources effectively to write good research papers (430).

Kantz begins her article with a composite example of a college student, Shirley, who was assigned to write a research paper, documenting the set of challenges that Shirley faced, and that many first year college students face, too. Kantz believes that the solution is teaching students how to read rhetorically.

According to Kantz, one of the first factors that affect how “rhetorically” a student reads an assignment is her or his understanding of what is a fact vs an opinion. Students blindly believe that everything in a textbook is considered a fact. However, Kantz quotes Toulmin in her article: “any
aspect of an argument may be questioned by the audience and must be then supported with further argument” (437). And that includes “facts.” The reader can question a fact as long as he has the right arguments to back him or herself up. It’s not about the fact; it’s about how the audience perceives it. In fact, the reason these so called facts tend to change in different sources says a lot about what the encoder (the writer) is trying to make the audience believe. Which brings us to Margret Kantz’s definition of rhetorical reading: “teaching students to read a text as a message sent by someone to somebody for a reason” (435).

Kantz insists that students must be taught a certain set of skills in order to be able to “read” sources correctly, one of which has to do with opposing the writer’s argument. Kantz claims that in doing so, students open their eyes wider, reading not just for content, but for what is written inbetween the lines, which makes analyzing easier and more efficient.

Kantz also believes that teaching students to use heuristics to find the rhetorical “gap” aids in the process. To write better papers, students need to read rhetorically. To read rhetorically, they need to find a better way of approaching a paper. Instead of simply seeing research writing as a sophisticated, longer rephrase of a secondary source, students should approach their research papers as a helpful tool to somebody else. And they have to know who that “somebody” else is in order to really help them.

Moreover, Kantz suggests that not having rhetorical skills makes students fall victims of unintentional plagiarism. Because they don’t know how to read their sources, they often end up just rephrasing, merely changing somebody else’s choice of words into their own. There is no originality here.

Rhetorical writing is not just fully understanding the main points of the paragraph and writing it in different words, something that Kantz acknowledges that many high school students are trained to do; instead it’s knowing what is more important, “what’s worth writing about” (441) and including it into your paper. This is definitely not an easy task at all for generations of students whose idea of summarizing is to shorten the length of a paragraph. It can be scary, and even risky. But doing so shows
that the student is critically thinking about the words that lay in front of him or her.

According to Kantz, students’ limited ability of writing good research papers is not entirely their fault. The way instructors assign writing assignment greatly affects the the quality of the pieces that students write.

Kantz concludes the article with one final insight: “Creativity is an inherently rhetorical quality” (442). Rhetorical writing is an art, and to help students read and write rhetorically enables them to be creative, original artists, which in turn results in much more interesting papers.

As a student, I can relate to Margret Kantz because there is a Shirley in me. In fact, I am Shirley. The only difference between Shirley and me is that I have not been assigned to write a research paper in college yet. Nevertheless, before having read this article, I would have done what I have been taught to do in high school, just like Kantz mentions in the essay, which is merely summarizing the main points and putting it all together in my own words. The part that especially caught my attention is how we can question even the facts in the sources we are given. In fact, it even measures our understanding of the topic.

Work Cited

Biography
Monya Al-Muhannadi was born and raised in Doha, Qatar, but is always ready to hop on a plane and fly somewhere new. She is currently a mechanical engineering freshman. She decided to pursue a degree in mechanical engineering because she knew that she wanted to be an engineer ever since she was a little girl. She is passionate about food, music, and film, and can’t wait to be the first Aggie engineer in her family!
This piece was an ethics paper focusing mainly on engineering ethics in the community. It shows the different aspects an engineer addresses on many levels such as quality, safety, international business ethics, and professionalism in management engaging the ethics values in the final decisions. Engineers play a central role in innovation and development of products in the global market.

Engineers in the Business Environment

In the current global setup, engineering draws close semblance with business. Engineers are gradually showing their interest in initiating start-up companies that enable them not only to make engineering decisions but also business decisions. In this era of globalization, many companies are struggling to improve their operational size and depend on engineers to help in formulating highly integrated cycles of product development. In this paper, I will prove that engineers must rethink their ethical issues to include their ability to act as business managers. Through well thought-out arguments, the paper will illustrate how the rapid developments in e-commerce and biotechnology have contributed to the current ethical standards that define the engineering scope of operation. The main aim is to examine issues that illustrate the essence of ethics in the life and duty of an engineer through quality and safety, international business ethics, and professionalism in management.

In the practice of engineering, the act of balancing safety and quality presents massive challenges to engineers, especially in the context of cost. While it is the desire for every engineer to design high quality products, the concept of business requires low cost production that guarantees
the maximization of profits. This issue raises ethical, legal, and business concerns related to engineering as a profitable profession.

The business environment continues to provide constant competition to market players. The onset of globalization creates even stiffer competition to firms within any given industry. The concept of lean manufacturing has been the phenomenal standard for survival of many industries that want to cope with the stiff competition accruing from the deregulation of competitive global markets. The ability of a firm to remain competitive depends solely on the firm’s ability to generate new products in a quick and responsive framework. The corporate culture plays a role in understanding ethics in engineering (Davis, 1991).

However, the professionalism code for engineering has the ability to undermine the mechanisms adopted by any market. The defects of any manufacturing process may not be visible until after the purchase of the final product. The engineers, therefore, have the sole obligation of ensuring that the safety of the consumer is guaranteed in accordance with the engineer’s code of professionalism. Due to this, a set of professional standards have been constituted in many countries, perhaps to regulate the safety standards of large projects. In the context of business, firms that fail to adhere to these set of regulation standards exhibit regular loss of revenues.

Engineers have a critical role to play in creating an environment that dictates the manner in which business managers operate. Engineers, therefore, have the ability to petition their professional associations in case they feel discontented about the conduct of business managers. In the legal viewpoint, engineers should understand the organizational legal obligation to the customer base. In the basic law, all products must be fit for the purpose that guarantees its use by people. The engineer, as such, plays an important role in fulfilling the legal obligation pertaining to the safety of products.

In the global market, engineering projects are international. Different cultures have developed legitimate solutions to their life problems. In the paper “Engineering Practice and Engineering Ethics,” Lynch and Kline highlight the need for engineering courses to initiate classes about sociological and cultural concepts of engineering (Lynch & Kline, 2000).
The basic key of working in any multicultural setting is to recognize the possibility of different and better approaches to life. This indicates the need for engineering courses to include teachings and lessons about ethical responsibilities in understanding the need for diversity within the workplace. The attention in this case, therefore, is focused on the behavioral patterns that may be considered unprofessional and unethical across different cultures. Engineers working on international projects have experienced bribery, nepotism, and kickbacks, amongst other unethical practices. However, these practices may not be viewed as unethical in the context of the cultural set-up, but amount to unfairness and discrimination along unjustified grounds.

For instance, kickbacks are unethical in the West as they amount to corruption and subsequent conflict of interest. In this culture, the basic rules of transparency and minimal interference form the basis of tendering of government tenders. In other systems, however, the business relationships are deemed personal. In such setups, individuals overlook the company and decide to do businesses through people. Such relationships are founded on mutual trust, and any fault in the process leaves participants with no chance of seeking legal redress. In the ethical standards that define engineering as a business profession, written contracts should be part of any contract that is backed by legal legitimacy.

The definition of bribe varies across the world, mainly due to the cultural differences. While others call it commission, others refer to it as a show of gratitude. Bribes, nonetheless, may be illegal or legal depending on the cultural background. In teaching about the ethical considerations pertaining to cultural differences, engineers should understand the consequences of bribery in different cultures. In engineering ethics, Davis highlights that it is modest to devote extra time and resources in engineering ethics to explain the legal constraints that affect the structure of large organizations across various cultural backgrounds (Davis, 2006).

For instance, bribery varies along the Asian countries such as China, Singapore, and Korea. In Singapore and China, bribery receives harsh punishment, while in Korea, it is a tradition that does not amount to corruption. However, it is important for engineers to understand that universally, bribes do not contribute to making successful and transparent
working relationships. While it offers an opportunity for an individual to fulfill personal gains, bribery undermines the loyalty of the engineering.

Nepotism is a custom that has many advantages to some cultures. Some people may show interest in hiring incompetent relatives. Other quarters argue that nepotism allows a manager to assign duties to a person according to the individual’s strengths and weaknesses. Competency, therefore, in line with the requirements of the engineering profession to maintain quality and safety, should be a consideration over the family ties.

However, the dilemmas of an engineer do not only end through legal redress. Engineers have three basic courses of action to apply when they feel that a practice is unethical. The main concern for the engineer may be whistle blowing, amidst other actions such as maintaining silence or resigning (Lynch & Kline, 2000). Whistleblowing touches on the fundamental issue of employment in the business world. More often, whistleblowers pay the price of unemployment for highlighting the faults within the organization and its policies.

The topic of professionalism in the practice of engineering is defined by the characteristics that outline professionals in other career courses including expertise and responsible use of the expertise. Professionals are experts at what they do, and engineers are equal to this description. Professional status develops around occupations that are difficult to identify such as an individual's incompetence. Engineering calls for professionalism, as it is evident that serious defects in the engineering works may only be unraveled several years after the completion of the work.

Consequently, the professional duties of engineers are envisioned in the professional code of ethics. The main task of this code of ethics stretches beyond derivation of obligations of engineers to disclose and outline the public expectations concerning this profession. In business, there is no stipulated code of ethics. According to Harris, engineering ethics in relation to providing safety for the public includes adopting production processes that illustrate the dedication and commitment of the engineers to protect and conserve the environment (Harris, 2008).
Ethics in engineering comes into practice when striking a balance between these two differences. While the current global set up allows engineers to practice their profession on a business framework, the duty of engineers often clashes with that of business managers. Business managers aim at maximizing the wealth of shareholders and the proprietors. On the other hand, engineers aim to attain a similar feat while ensuring the safety of products and maximum customer satisfaction through superior quality of products and services. It is useful, however, for engineers to maintain a distinct differentiation between the professional obligations and other obligations such as fulfilling the requirements of the stakeholders to the disadvantage of all other professional obligations. The public expects engineers to provide them with products that attain specific standards and specifications. However, the demands of the public often are unclear or utterly demanding. Engineers must fall back to the theories of normative ethics.

In engineering ethics, corporate social responsibility contributes equally to the similarity between engineering and business (Downey, Lucena & Mitcham, 2007). Corporate social responsibility is a tool employed by many businesses that want to gain a competitive advantage in the competitive global market. Engineers can apply corporate social responsibility as an ethical measure aimed at improving the relations between them and the community. Corporate social responsibility requires engineers to undertake certain activities such as educating the community on conserving the environment in line with the current concerns on the impact of global warming on the livelihoods of people.

In conclusion, engineers are designers who contribute largely to the competition experienced in the global markets. Besides, the rapid development of information and biological technology has obligated the rethinking of ethics and intellectual property laws. Therefore, software intellectual property has revolutionized the topic of ethics in engineering now that many businesses encounter threats of hacking, cybercrime, and organized crime. Engineers play a central role in innovation and development of products in the global market.
References


Biography
Salwan Abou Salem is a Palestinian who was born and raised in Lebanon by a Lebanese mother and Palestinian father. She is currently majoring in mechanical engineering and minoring in mathematics, Class of 2016.
Photographed by Fatema Al-Mansoori
Hold On to Tradition
Hold on to Tradition

This paper was written for my History of Children’s Literature course, where I was asked to write a persuasive piece arguing that the professor should add a specific work of children’s literature to the course. My goal was to argue literary merit and persuade the professor that she should add the Middle Eastern collection of classical stories, The Arabian Nights or better known as A Thousand and One Nights. While writing this essay, I realized that there is a lack of international recognition of art works outside of the West. Even though I’m not western in origin, I still happen to know more about western children’s stories such as "Little Red Riding Hood", rather than children’s stories that originated here. I wrote this essay in hopes of convincing the professor to learn more about Eastern culture. My professor loved my paper, and I think I did my job in convincing her.

The Universal Allure of Shahrazad

There is a universal aspect to children’s literature, a universality that is inherent in the simplicity of it. Children, no matter what languages they speak, what regions they are from or even what time period they belong to, find similar stories appealing. We can see this in the universal and timeless recognition certain stories receive. We all know Charles Perrault’s "Little Red Riding Hood", or Aesop’s The "Tortoise and the Hare." However, due to intellectual colonialism, children’s stories from other parts of the world are unfortunately largely overlooked by the rest of the world, despite their potential appeal to children.

Alf Layla W Layla (A Thousand and One Nights), most often translated as The Arabian Nights, is a collection of fairy tales and historical anecdotes of different ethnic groups, including the Arabs, the Persians, and the South
Asians (Burton). It should not be possible for us to go through a course on children’s literature and not read parts of *The Arabian Nights*, a true historical artifact of children’s literature. This work should be added to literature courses because of its unique narrative structure, the mark it left on Western literature, and its universal theme of perseverance.

One of the most unique aspects of *The Arabian Nights* is the framework in which the stories are presented. The collection is framed by the story of Shahrazad. In this story, King Shahryar is made a cuckold, and so he kills the wife who betrayed him. In a fit of rage, he vows to wed and kill a woman every night. Shahrazad, a very wise and intelligent woman, wants to end these atrocious acts, and so she bids herself to him. Every night she would tell the King a story that outlasts the night, and so he postpones her execution. Although it is a collection of “tales,” the narrative structure makes it feel like a series of “nights” instead (Mahdi, 2010). Every reader is caught between two storylines: the story of Shahrazad and the intriguing story that she tells the King. The narrative structure is described by Daniel Heller-Roazen, a professor of comparative literature at Princeton University, as “the poetry of narrative” because of the enjambments between the storylines. The story is always momentarily interrupted at daybreak, day after day, before the conclusion of its events. Heller-Roazen describes the effect of these enjambments: “we are no longer in the terrain of mundane storytelling. We are in the wondrous world of Shahrazad” (Mahdi, 2010). This narrative structure keeps a reader hooked, as every story is read knowing that the life of a princess is at stake depending on the stories she tells.

Given the riveting distinctiveness of *The Arabian Nights*, it is no surprise that it has inspired world literature. The collection of fairytales was most notably introduced in Europe by Antoine Galland’s translations in 1704 (Thompson, 1998). It had appealed to the West because it offered insight into Arabian culture: its oriental rituals, themes, characters, and stories. It ignited a new sense of creativity and imagination beyond the customary stories of the West. As a result, this collection strongly influenced English literature across centuries. For example, a play in the early 18th century called *Almyna*, or *The Arabian Vow* by Mary de Larivier Manely had a character who was inspired by Shahrazad (Al-Olaqi, 2012). Shahrazad represents a voice of freedom attempting to liberate herself and other
women from the King’s oppression; similarly Almyna from the play challenges the Sultan for violating her rights.

Another forefront figure in English literature of the 20th century, W.B Yeats, was also inspired to incorporate many Arabian elements in his work. For example, in his novel *A Vision*, he incorporates beasts of the desert (camels), the lunar calendar (28 phases of the moon), and Arabic clothing (Jawadlis) (Mann, n.d.). He ranked *The Arabian Nights* next to Shakespeare when he was asked for his favorite six books (Al-Olaqi, 2012). There are several more influences of *The Arabian Nights* on Western literature, and some of these are listed in Appendix A.

Because of the massive influence of *The Arabian Nights*, Martha P. Conant (1908) claims that the tales are the “fairy godmother of the English novel” (as cited in Al-Olaqi, 2012) and gave rise to a wild and liberating unleashing of imaginations in the Western world. It opened new doors of creativity beyond the standard clichés being used in West literature. Given just how influential this fairytale has been, it seems only logical that one would study it.

Although this piece of literature is foreign to many, it is far from inaccessible. It employs universal themes in the stories that anyone would understand. One of the most recognized themes in *The Arabian Nights* is perseverance (Warner, 2010). For example, Sindbad from the *The Seven Voyages of Sindbad*, who “fled from one form of death only to meet with another just as hideous,” constantly faces obstacles (Dawood, 1973, 136). Whether he goes through the “raging sea” or the “black monstrous giant” or a “Karakadan beast (rhinoceros),” he perseveres until he comes across good fortune and is rewarded with “gold” and “mansions” (Dawood, 1973, 133-144). Similarly, Ali Baba from *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*, and Aladdin from the *Aladdin and the Enchanted Lamp*, are both examples of men who were able to rise in status after facing numerous obstacles.

The notion of a common man rising in status was not only a popular idea during the Islamic Golden Age, but it remains universally popular until today and probably will remain so for a long time (“The Arabian Nights”, n.d.). The universal themes the fairytale employs allows for an emotional investment into the work, even from a foreigner. An anonymous reviewer wrote, “What is remarkable about *The Arabian Nights* is that the stories comment so poignantly on universal human nature even in the midst of
such extraordinary adventures,” allowing [readers] to relate and connect with characters who don’t feel so foreign (“The Arabian Nights”, n.d.).

It is important that English literature courses offer a variety of different works that range in geographical origin. Not only would it allow for more variety in the kinds of stories we look at, but it would also facilitate cross-cultural awareness. It’s important to have that diversity in such studies as to not normalize the West’s disregard of other cultures. *The Arabian Nights* is truly a gem in children’s literature. The collection of fairytales takes you to a wondrous world in the Mediterranean, a world filled with fantastical creatures and magical kingdoms. The narrative structure of the story captures a reader between two narratives, making it so that the reader keeps reading, effectively becoming the King, too absorbed with the stories to have them end. Its power of appeal is made apparent by the way it has impacted Western literature, so much so that it has been referenced as “the fairy godmother of the English Novel.” And featuring a universal theme such as perseverance makes the foreign stories and characters appear not so far away and not entirely different.

**Appendix A**

Influences of *The Arabian Nights* on Western literature:

- The story of the Caliph Haroun al Rashid appears in some form in William Shakespeare’s “Awakened Sleeper” in *The Taming of the Shrew*. (Al-Olaqi, 2012)

- The structure of the story of Daniel Defoe’s, *Robinson Crusoe* emulates the style of some the Arabian adventure tales like the tale of Sindbad and the Seven Voyages. (Al-Olaqi, 2012)

- Sindbad’s experience with the “Roc,” a giant bird that could lift elephants in its claws, is best shown in *Gulliver’s Travels*. (Al-Olaqi, 2012)

- In *The Turkish Embassy Letters* by Mary Wortlry Montagu, the heroine Fatima describes a scene which might easily be equated with an event in the Harem residences of *The Arabian Nights*. (Al-Olaqi, 2012)

- There are similarities between Sir William Jones’ poem “The Seien

- “The inspiration of the Arabian Nights is remarkable in works such as Swift’s Gulliver’s Travels (1726), Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe, Goldsmith’s Citizen of the World (1760), Johnson’s Rasselas (1759), and most particularly Beckford’s Vathek (1786).” (Al-Olaqi, 2012)

**References**


Biography

Byanne Malluhi is a junior chemical engineering student. Her ultimate goal is to leave her fingerprint on the world. How, when, or where, she doesn’t know yet. Her life is governed by the following rules: Rule #1: No hard work goes undone; Rule #2: You live for others and not for yourself; and Rule #3: The little things in life are what matter most.
Fatema Rashid Al-Mansoori

This paper was written for my final Foundations of English class assignment in fall 2015. My teacher gave us the option to choose one piece of writing previously done for class and revise it for submission to Best Writing. It was just a pretense, but I chose to make it real. Surprisingly, I chose the first essay that I wrote as an Aggie, which I thought was the worst! However, I chose it because it was very close to my heart. I enjoyed writing it as well as revising it. I never thought that one day I would reach 1,000 words in an essay without feeling it! This essay represents my traditions, my country, and me.

The Reminder of Our Remarkable Past

Qatar National Day is the day that Qataris wait for annually. It is a day that all the streets are colored with maroon and white—the national colors. “Maroon represents the blood shed in Qatari wars, white stands for peace” (“Qatar Flag”). The celebration runs for a week starting from 8 December, 10 days before National Day. Another name for National Day is the Founder’s Day. It is significant because it celebrates the rise of Sheikh Jassim bin Mohamed Bin Thani as the father and founder of the State of Qatar in 1878.

On this holiday, Qatar remembers how Sheikh Jassim succeeded in achieving national unity, and how Qatar became a unified state instead of a community of rival tribes. As a result, we Qataris truly pride ourselves on helping to build a strong community to complete what Sheikh Jassem started. National Day confirms our identity and the history of our country, as it captures the great foundation, humanity and development that the
country was built upon. Besides, it honors the men and women who participated in establishing Qatar, especially the Al Thani family.

As a Qatari, there are a lot of activities I join and enjoy on Qatar National Day. For example, last year I started celebrating National Day by visiting Darb Al Saai. Time travel is something most of us wish to try, but it is no longer a distant dream; that is why Darb Al Saai, which means “the route of the messenger,” was created. It is a complete city, built on an area of about one square kilometer in the heart of Doha. This place has a rich history behind it, and you can discover it by going there. It contains many different things to do. It opens its doors starting from 8 December spreading the traditional breezes, because when you pass by the gate, you will actually feel that you are brought back to the past, as if the old neighborhood was restored with every detail, like an artwork painted by a professional artist. When I went there, I noticed that every year the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Heritage improves the organization in a remarkable way. First thing I looked for was the traditional food, like harees and madrouba. These dishes are made up of boiled and cracked ground wheat mixed with meat and Qatari spices. It is usually served on plates or bowls. I walked by the Arabic horses listening to Qatari old-fashioned music, played on tar drums and oud, and I felt as if I were brought back to the past.

I could see how the houses were close together and facing each other, as if all the Qataris were one family. They shared all the moments of joy and pain. All of a sudden, my thoughts were disturbed when the policemen, on their horses, asked us to move, and make a place for the classic cars show. Even the policemen were wearing what Qataris policemen used to wear in the past. I am not really interested in cars, but when the cars were passing, I imagined my grandfather driving these cars. My imagination was filled with the past.

At 8 p.m. fireworks started, past fragments were mixed with present, and all the visitors had a moment of silence watching the magnificent view. Furthermore, there were tents that presented the history of Qatar and the royal family. When I entered the first tent, it was a photo gallery created by a big wall with many photos hanging on it. There were many kinds of categories, such as photos of sailors, old businessmen and also the royal family. Under each picture there was a short description about it. In the other tents, you could find Qatari animals and plant, as well as heritage
activities such as poetry reading. Darb Al Saai’s activities are uncountable, and all of them enhance the importance of the National Day, making a significant difference that touches the visitor’s heart. It is not only about having fun, but it is a great way to present the culture by letting Qatari and residents live the old moments. It gives us the opportunity to learn about the work of the founders of the State of Qatar, who have endured difficulties and paid a heavy price to achieve the unity of our nation.

It is the morning of 18 December, Qatar National Day. Before the sunrise, the public reserves their seats, dresses in maroon and white, and attends the annual parade, which is located on Doha’s Corniche. The parade starts at 7 a.m., starting with the national military march, followed by the parade, and the sky is also decorated with planes in a choreographed fly-past. What makes the parade more special is that the royal family, including the Emir of Qatar, attends the show. The royal family’s humility and modesty is one of the main reasons we always show our love and respect to them. After the parade, people can attend other events. There are some traditions particular for men, such as Ardaa, the traditional dance for men using swords. That is why men make sure to get a unique sword for that day. Moreover, Qatari channels televise the festival for those who could not go out to celebrate for any reason. They cover all the events, as well as conduct interviews of the residents. In addition, young Qatari celebrate in their style, by activating social media with posts that support the national spirit. For example, they made a competition for the best tweet about Qatar on Twitter.

Qatar National Day is not just something we do; it is significant because it is a reminder of our remarkable past. It is a precious memory for all of us; this day is embodiment of the present derived from the past. Our country lives today officially and popularly on the anniversary of National Day, this glorious national occasion on which the people of Qatar recalls all pride, cherished sacrifices, and glories of the founder Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammed Al Thani, “God rest his soul,” who planted the seed of the foundation to underscore across Qatar’s modern history. The 18th of December will remain immortal and dear to the hearts of all Qatari, generation after generation, because it is a reminder for the national work, achievement, sacrifice, and acceptance of the challenge.
Biography

Fatema never had a dream to be an Aggie, but all of a sudden, she became obsessed with Texas A&M University at Qatar. She used to buy their products, wear the Aggies hoodie in high school, and meditate every night on the Aggie keychain hung on her room’s door, a replica of the engineer’s yellow hat that she got after she participated in STEM Future Aggie Engineers program. Fatema is a social person who enjoys photographing, filmmaking, gatherings, and cooking.

Work Cited:
“Qatar Flag.” Qatar Flag. Web, qatar ag.facts.co. 28 November 2015.
The breakfast at Clarke’s, the diner on Clark Street, just a block south of Northwestern in downtown Evanston, was absolutely scrumptious. I ordered a vegetable omelette (served with fresh fruits) and pancakes, and when I saw that the coffee was on the house, Faique had to stop me from ordering a whole pot.

“Don’t embarrass us, man!” he laughed.

“Yeah! Leave some for the other customers,” Saad joked. I grinned. Eid breakfast had always meant gathering around the table at home, sharing food and jokes with family, even after I had gone to college. This was my first Eid away from home, and I had never imagined I would be having breakfast with new friends in a Chicago suburb. But the food was great, the company better, and the coffee, free. I could not have asked for more.

After breakfast, some of the guys left for work. Faique, Saad and I decided to head to the mosque for Friday prayers.
“Let’s catch the train at Davis. We can take it up to Noyes, and then walk from there to the mosque. That’ll be the quickest way.”

We set off for the Davis Street station, chatting about our graduate school plans. Walking down Benson Street, we looked like a homogeneous group of desis, but truth be told, our stories could not have been more different. Faique, a Pakistani-American, was a senior at Northwestern, and one of the first friends I had made during my time there. He had an apartment two blocks from the university, with a fantastic view of downtown Evanston, and I would often hang out at his place after finishing with lab work during the day. He was studying business and economics, and was currently working on a startup at the university. He was short and athletic, and often spoke in a hurried yet deliberate manner.

Saad, an Indian-American, was a graduate student at the university, studying biomedical engineering. Unlike Faique, whose family lived in Chicago, he was from San Diego. He wore a short beard which complemented his calm demeanor, and made him appear the most mature individual in any company. He was good friends with Faique who had introduced us to each other.

And then, there was me, a Pakistani undergraduate from Texas A&M at Qatar, doing research in chemistry at Northwestern for the summer. I was in Chicago for two months, participating in an undergraduate summer research program. Faique had asked me if I was free for breakfast, and I had almost sprinted out of the research lab on receiving the invitation.

All three of us were dressed differently too. I was wearing blue jeans and a gray t-shirt. Faique, ever the casual entrepreneur, was sporting track pants and a sweatshirt, and Saad was dressed in a pure white shalwar kameez, a traditional South Asian dress, and Peshawari shoes. I joked that he looked more desi than I did. He smiled good-naturedly.

We reached Davis Street station, a derelict and decrepit structure that was a clear indication of the CTA’s (Chicago Transportation Authority) poor financial health, and took the stairs up to the platform. ‘Thank God the trains are much better,’ I thought to myself as I saw the silver snake-like locomotive slither into my line of sight. It glided to a stop, and with a pneumatic hiss, the compartment doors slid open, and the
passengers rushed out onto the platform. As the three of us started for the compartment, Saad was stopped by an elderly Caucasian woman. What happened next took only a few seconds, and yet I shall never forget it.

“Happy…” she began, but then faltered. “I’m sorry, I don’t remember what the festival you celebrate is called,” she said sheepishly, holding her hands up apologetically, and we could sense that she felt a bit embarrassed at not being able to recall the word “Eid.” “But I hope you have a great day,” she beamed, with half a wave of her hand. She had a benign, bespectacled face, pale white and wizened, though not excessively, and she could not have been more than fifty. She was wearing a blue floral dress and an old, off-white cardigan, giving her the air of the kindly lady most likely to invite you in for tea were you to go trick-or-treating in her neighborhood.

I have never felt more appreciation for the words of a complete stranger than I did in that moment. Our faces lit up with smiles, and yet, the wish was so unexpected that we could only mumble a hurried “thank you” as we rushed towards the closing train doors.

**Reflection**

There is ample to reflect upon here in an intercultural context. Let us start with the Eid breakfast.

Like any other religious or cultural festival, Eid is also marked by family gatherings as part of the festivities. Food is an important cultural aspect of Eid. Cultural because even though Muslims all over the world celebrate the same religious festival, the food they eat is reflective of their respective culture. It was an interesting group that had gathered around that breakfast table at Clarke’s. Everyone, excluding myself, was a first-generation American of either Pakistani or Indian origin. Partaking in an Eid feast without the extended family was something new to me since it was a tradition that we had followed every year back home. I realized that this was not something unusual for my American friends, given especially...
that immigrant families tend to be small and nuclear in nature. This highlights how the same festival, depending on where and with whom it is celebrated, can feel different because of the individual or collectivist nature of the society. We were, however, culturally similar in that we collectively rued the absence of kheer from the table, and agreed that omelette and pancakes were delicious yet culturally unsatisfying culinary substitutes.

It also felt strange to celebrate a festival that I had always celebrated as a holiday. Even in Doha, Eid is marked by time off from school or work, surrounded by people celebrating the same occasion. In Chicago, it felt like any other Friday, people going about their business as usual. Back home, or in Doha, the streets would have worn a deserted look. Some of my friends left for work immediately after breakfast, and I myself went back to lab later that day. While I almost never wear shalwar kameez now, I have always had the habit of dressing up in traditional attire on Eid. And yet, except for Saad, we were all dressed as we would have on any other day of the week. We all, I believe, felt a subconscious urge not to stand out too much, since we were already part of a minority cultural, religious (and for me, national) group.

I was restricted to an extent in terms of the language I could converse in. While my friends could understand Urdu, they were unable to hold a conversation in the language. And so our verbal communication was restricted to English, interspersed with words from Urdu which were unique in that they had no substitute in English, such as kheer or shalwar kameez. I could have conversed just as easily in either language, but I had to converse in English to accommodate my friends.

The incident at the train station is most interesting in that it highlights the significance of perspective in cultural analyses. In Chicago, my friends and I were cultural outsiders of sorts, I more so than the others. However, given his attire, Saad was the most culturally unique individual at that station. It was, in fact, his attire which caught the attention of the lady, and initiated the conversation. From our perspective, in the context of the conversation, she was the cultural outsider, treading cautiously, as was evident from her choice of words and her actions. She was careful not to offend the strangers she was greeting.
Generalization, I believe, played an important role in the lady’s decision to wish us well. Saad’s dress reflected his religious identity, and by association, mine and Faique’s. That all three of us, by appearance, could be identified as South Asian despite the fact that we were hardly a homogenous group, allowed the lady to surmise that we must share the same religious identity as well, when this might not necessarily have been the case.

The conversation could also have been drastically different. We could have been accosted by a hostile stranger since we were cultural outsiders. And yet, we were greeted by a most lovely old lady who was polite and kind and considerate enough to regard our traditions. I would like to think that this was because of the multicultural and cosmopolitan nature of the city of Chicago itself. Culturally and religiously diverse cities tend to be more accepting of minority groups and cultural outsiders. The process of cultural hybridization often allows the citizens to be more aware of other cultures. Chicago has one of the largest Muslim populations in the US, and although the lady could not recall the name of the festival of Eid, she was still aware that it was being celebrated that Friday.

Chicago’s appeal lies not just in its physical beauty, captured here by my camera’s lens, but also in it being a host to several multicultural communities.
References


Biography

Muhammad Ghufran Rafique truly appreciates coffee, this being the third time he has reverently referenced the caffeinated beverage in his Best Writing biography.
I consider writing to be a very intimate process, and I always rely on personal anecdotes as a source of inspiration. However, I have never written anything as personal as “My Special Person” before and it was a very emotional experience. There was so much I wanted to say because this is a story that has literally defined my life since the day I was born, but I had to be careful not to let this turn into a rant. The purpose of this story was not to have people feel sorry for my brother or me. If that is what you felt after reading it, then I clearly failed. If there is one thing I would want you to take away from reading this story, it’s that if you are ever lucky enough to meet someone like that, please refrain from calling him or her retarded or stupid.

My Special Person

“All the world's a stage,” William Shakespeare famously stated, “and all the men and women merely players: they have their exits and their entrances; and one man in his time plays many parts.”

I know one such man who sits with his legs dangling off a vast stage brimming with the busy lives of its players. I know the many parts he plays; those of a son, a brother, a patient, even a prayer. If Shakespeare was referring to life as a theatre of lives and their words, this man would have disappointed him with his silence. For he is on stage, giving us a mime, watching the day begin and end inside a world all of his own.

This man’s name is Essa. He is my older brother.

Essa, who is now twenty-one years old, was diagnosed with Autism when he was three. It has severely affected his ability to communicate with
people, and due to the lack of proper resources in Pakistan, he is almost entirely dependent upon the help of others to get through his day.

By the time I was born, my parents were already going through a devastating realization; battling with the idea of an illness they could not understand and one which the people around them had never heard of. For years they spent most of their time shuttling Essa to various hospitals around the world, in Europe and the USA, changing direction with every indication of a new drug, a new experiment, a new therapy. Nothing ever seemed to work.

Understandably, they were unable to be around me a great deal, and most of the time I was left home with my sisters. In this time, growing up in a home where one child was always given utmost priority, I found ways to keep myself happy without the attention of my parents. I kept busy, creating a universe of imagination in my small cupboard-sized bedroom, making myself a cape from a few discarded curtains and becoming the fearless vigilante of all Lahore.

I am not at all bitter about what people might think Essa’s condition “took away” from my childhood or my years growing up. In fact, today I stand before the world a better human being because I think he has given me an immense amount of perspective. It is Essa’s continuous presence in my life that has made me more patient and understanding than most of my peers, and I find I am able to enjoy diverse company, making friends with all sorts of people from all walks of life. Perhaps this is because I have gradually discovered that the one thing without which most human ventures become worthless is kindness. It is our humanity that connects us, and ultimately it is the only thing that counts.

Growing up I have seen how my brother is looked at differently; he makes people uncomfortable and most times brings out the worst in them. So few people have ever reached out and taken his hand or spoken to him with consideration because they feel he cannot see it count. Yet I know for a fact that people with special needs feel emotion far more strongly than most of us express in a lifetime. And so it is through Essa that I have myself begun to see the world, and this has helped my interactions with all kinds of individuals, even if all they are is shy and reserved.
My mother was careful to instill in all her children the realizations of privilege and the responsibilities that come with it. We saw Essa and all he could not do for our parents, so we pushed ourselves hard at school and in life to make them proud. I do believe that in this I have thus far succeeded. Yet no matter what I do, there sits inside me a constant, personal sense of duty. It is most acute when I spot my parents having what they call their “senior moments,” a flash of old age, exhaustion or illness. I know Essa’s condition has been terribly hard for them, and the struggle has already spanned eighteen long years. Yet it is also in these moments that I am most motivated to be as successful as I can possibly be, to help them when I grow up. I now realize, a little fearfully, that growing up is almost here.

In my family we love to talk about Essa to other people. I find it makes us all feel he is partaking in the conversation at parties and gatherings where he is not present. He is six feet tall but walks with a small hunch in his back. He has high, chiseled cheekbones, a full mouth and a big heap of silky black hair. His eyes however are the true windows into his soul: they are grey-blue eyes, full of almost legible expression, trying hard to show you his world and all the secrets that sleep in it. Last of all, there is his smile, and any happiness he cannot express with words is communicated most beautifully through a wide, generous grin that lights up his whole face.

Can I imagine a life without Essa? I cannot even begin to. There is so much he has added to my world by his presence, hanging around like a silent, invisible backdrop to my life but always overwhelmingly present in the ways that count. Even in my childhood imaginings of heroism and caped crusaders, I remember I was always trying to rescue my brother from the evil clutches of some terrifying monster. Yet even though I saved him a thousand times in my imagination, frolicking from bed to couch, dodging invisible bullets and turning villains to ice with my gaze, it was he who was the hero of all my stories. And he still is.
Biography

Omar Khan is a chemical engineering graduate student at Texas A&M University at Qatar. He really wanted to become a playwright, but since Pakistani parents do not deem that to be a profession, he chose to pursue engineering instead. Omar is a hopeless romantic, who for some reason continues to wear his heart on his sleeve even after a considerably large number of heartbreaks. He is an avid reader and an incredibly sound procrastinator when it comes to writing. His longtime goal is to be happy.
Ahmed Al-Nowfal Al-Tamimi

I wrote this piece when I just had come here to Qatar. I wanted to summarize the main difficulties I went through and how it changed me on a personal level. Do not let difficulties stop you from success.

My Father is My Inspiration

When I was younger, I would sneak into my father's room while he was out. Browsing through the books in his library, I marveled at the certificates and honors he gained throughout his career. I soon realized that he was not an ordinary man. This made me want to find out more about him, but I did not know then that my time with my father was short. I later learned that my father was a famous civil engineer. In fact, he was the best in his profession. He was more than a father.

I learned that my father was a renowned civil engineer who served as the department head of the Baghdad Metro Project, which built the first metro in the Middle East. He led the department from 1980 to 1989, when the government canceled the project for political reasons. My father then taught civil engineering at Baghdad University. Even when the bombardment of Iraq began in 1991, he continued to work every day. My mother, an engineer responsible for the metro project's mechanical division, explained that he was responding to the bombings with his knowledge and teaching. She said that the more the country was bombed, the more he would teach. He continued to go to the university even when no one else would show up. After the war ended, Iraq's president honored him with a medal of courage and commitment. Then, in the mid-nineties, during the sanctions, my father traveled to Libya to teach civil engineering.
After the 2003 war, he was offered a dean’s position at Baghdad University, but refused because he did not want to be an administrator; instead, he wanted to mentor the next generation of students to succeed even in the worst of circumstances. Inspired by his perseverance, I devoted myself to becoming an engineer and rebuilding communities. I began to study hard until one fateful day when the tragedy, which I feel speechless to talk about, struck, claiming my father’s life. Reeling from shock, I felt like the world had ended; I was thirteen years old.

At that time, I had nothing on my mind but abandoning my studies. My situation obliged me to carry a weapon and defend my family against anything more that could happen to us. Meanwhile, my older brother Mohammed Jawad Al-Nufal was achieving great things, studying medicine at Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar. He was one of the speakers for Qatar’s bid for the 2022 World Cup. Mohammed was living out the very dream that I was about to let go.

My family and I knew we had to leave Iraq, so we went to the nearest country that would accept Iraqis. Searching for a new start forced us to sacrifice all that we knew, to leave our family and our roots, but also our misery behind. We resettled in Syria, but the same conflicts that drove us to leave our country initially started again there. This time our apartment, our new home and last hope were destroyed during the fighting that is still raging in Syria. For a second time, I felt like I lost a part of myself. The feeling that I had no choice but to abandon my studies resurfaced stronger than ever. Again, we knew we had to leave.

There was nowhere left to go until my brother called from Qatar to tell us that Her Highness Sheikha Moza was honoring us with a generous invitation to live in Qatar. Overwhelmed with joy, I regained my hope of studying engineering. I was thankful that my living conditions would become better than those my father faced. Carrying my dream, I left the country with my mother.

Empowered by this opportunity in Qatar and by my father’s ethic of service, I have devoted myself to becoming an engineer. I chose to attend a school where English was the main language to bring me closer to my goal. I didn’t know a word of English when I first started, translating my science notes from Arabic word by word. But by the end of the year, I was getting
A's. I literally studied all my days in Qatar until I got accepted in one of the best universities in the world, Texas A&M.

After all of the challenges I have faced, no matter what else happens, none of them can stop me from becoming an engineer. As was written on the Baghdad Metro Station wall, “You can write the best words from a pen even if it isn't diamond encrusted.” My dad can be proud of me because, despite the horrors I have faced, I am still striving for my dream. Inspired by my parents and moved by the suffering I have seen, I am not going to stop at the door to my future. This was the valuable lesson that I learned from my father.

**Biography**

Ahmed Al-Nowfal Al-Tamimi is a mechanical engineering student who is originally from Iraq. He has lived in many countries, with Syria being the last country he lived in before he came to Qatar. Ahmed is currently a student at Texas A&M University at Qatar, Class of 2019. He is a street fighter, a goalkeeper, and a poet. Ahmed is very passionate about reading both Disney stories and political analytics.
I was inspired to write this piece after I read Martin Luther King’s speech, “I Have a Dream.” That day I wrote down my own dream about my so-called country, “Palestine.” I call it my so-called country since I’ve never even visited my own country. Neither my parents nor I have seen our hometown except on television or the internet. We don’t even carry Palestinian passports—instead we have Lebanese documents, and Lebanon is the country I consider as my second home. But no matter what, my heart still beats for Palestine.

My Dreamland

What’s happening to Palestine? Is it a nightmare or is it actually real? Do you know how many families have been separated? How children were taken away from their mothers? How many children are lost and terrified from their future life? The smile has been erased from their faces, and these children have been denied a childhood.

Once upon a time the sun used to laugh in Palestine, once upon a time the birds used to sing in Palestine, once upon a time the waves used to whisper beautiful music to Palestine, once upon a time the trees were dancing and the perfume of the flowers filled the place. Until one dark, gloomy day the sun disappeared and the birds stopped singing and the waves outraged and the laughter disappeared. Al-Quds, Haifa, Yafa, Acca, Nablus, Gaza, Beit Lahim, Ramallah all the 531 villages and towns in my country started to shed tears of blood.
Today in Gaza, millions of Palestinians struggle for survival. And millions more still live in refugee camps in surrounding countries. Sixty-seven years have passed and our lands are still being occupied by Israel. Sixty-seven years and Palestinians are still looking for freedom. Sixty-seven years, and we Palestinians are still “crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination” (Martin Luther King, I Have a Dream).

Where is justice? Where is humanity? We are human beings just like others and deserve to live our freedom just like others. Each and every day, Palestinians resist occupation in several ways that are never mentioned or reported. Whether it is by rebuilding their once called home that was demolished by the Israeli army, or by finding a way out of the village to avoid a roadblock in order to try to get to school or work safely, and a million other ways. Palestinians live and breathe resistance in order to survive. Parents send their children to schools and never know if this is their last goodbye or not. Children don’t know any more if they are going to school or to their funeral for the reason that at any moment an explosion might occur in their school and fill it with the bodies of the innocent children. As Martin Luther King said, “Now is the time to lift our nation from the quicksand of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood.” I refuse to forget the injustice done to my country. I refuse to forgive what was done to Palestinians. I refuse to sit in silence like the rest of the world and watch what’s happening to my country.

I have a dream to live to the day that I can hear the sound of freedom ring in Palestine with music. I have a dream that when someone asks me about my country, I would describe the smell of it, the sense of it, the beauty of its nature instead of standing there in silence and saying I know nothing about my country except from pictures I have seen or from news I have read. I have a dream to see Palestinians living peacefully in their country.
Biography

Lara El Said is Palestinian, born in Qatar in August 1996. She considers Lebanon her second home as it will always hold a special place in her heart. Her dream is to travel the whole world one day in order to get to know about the other cultures. She enjoys trying new adventures.
This is a research paper that discusses the use of olive leaf extract as a treatment for Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus in terms of experimentation by scientific researchers. This paper requires nothing but a deep understanding of the risk of diabetes, especially in Qatar where it affects more than 25% of the population. A great appreciation of the efforts made by people who care would be a step in the right direction to put an end to this disease and save an entire nation.

Olive Leaf Extract as a Treatment for Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus

When the flood covered the entire vast face of the earth in the story of Noah and the righteous survived in the ark with the help of God, the white dove was sent in search of land. It came back, but it was carrying nothing in its claws but an olive branch. It was a declaration that the war stopped, the flood receded, and the earth was in sight. Therefore, the olive branch was regarded throughout the civilizations of history as a symbol of peace when the branch was the crown of the victorious who pleaded for peace (Rao, 2006). This tradition was preserved until today; however, the olive tree has not been of historical value only. This paper provides a systematic preview of the medicinal function of olive leaf extract for type 2 diabetic people by reviewing the extract’s anti-diabetic activities, insulin sensitizing quality, and healing power against other diseases that may accompany diabetes. Controversial issues about olive leaf extract are also discussed.

Throughout history, herbal therapy has been increasingly employed around the world. However, this therapy has been described as
“unconventional,” but this description has no concord with the effectiveness of herbal therapy at the time when “conventional” medicine failed to cure persistent diseases. Olive leaf extract (OLE) appears as one of the most common examples of herbal therapy around the world, especially in the Mediterranean region where olive trees growth is accounted at 98% of the international production (Ferreira, Barros, Soares, Bastos, & Pereira, 2007). The anatomy of the olive tree has a valuable background of nutritional, medicinal, and also ceremonial use. As the olive cultivation accompanied the Mediterranean cultural expansion, the geographical restriction over olive production disappeared and olive gained worldwide recognition. The plant, therefore, was widely cultivated in the locational range between the Arabian Peninsula and East Asia (El, 2009). The medical recommendations regarding the use of the olive tree were not only made by modern medical specialists, but also by several ancient Quranic and Biblical references.

Diabetes mellitus (DM) is a common incurable disease where olive leaf extract is often efficient in providing treatment. DM is a metabolic disease with a high rate of prevalence and mortality; it is caused by a lack of insulin or a decay in insulin function (Jemai, El Feki, & Abdelfatah, 2009). It has two primary types: type 1 which results from the pancreas’ failure to produce enough insulin for the body, and type 2 which results from body cells’ failure to respond properly to insulin. Gestational diabetes, a third rare type of diabetes, happens when a pregnant woman with no background of diabetes develops a high blood sugar rate. DM is featured by hyperglycemia and enduring health complications impacting the kidneys, brain, nerves, skin, blood vessels, lipids, and eyes (Jemai et al., 2009). Active medicinal function of olive leaf extract results from the existence of Oleuropein, one of the significant phenolic components of the olive tree. Consequently, it is the reason behind olive leaf extract’s anti-diabetic activities, insulin sensitizing quality, and healing power against other diseases that might occur before or after diabetes such as obesity, blood pressure imbalance, and cancer.

**Anti-diabetic Activities**

During the diabetic state throughout the body, the blood sugar altitude forces a considerable oxidative effort. This effort triggers inflammation of cellular tissues, damages them, and hastens aging. Therefore, a diabetes
treatment should lessen blood glucose to normal levels and limit the
damage occurred by the over-consumed blood sugar (Everson, 2013). Olive leaf extract has observably achieved the previous demands through
several mechanisms. The extract with the help of Oleuropein decreases
the digestion of starch and the intestine absorbance of sugar, but increases
the blood tissues uptake of glucose (Wainstein et al., 2012). Since the
blood tissues in this stage are in a serious condition because of the over-
consumed glucose level, Oleuropein protects them until the glucose binds
to protein in glycation process (Everson, 2013). As a result, it will be easier
for the body to get rid of the glucose during the digestive system. A 2009
study by Islamic Azad University in Iran divided diabetic rats into two
groups; one was injected with olive leaf extract, and the other was injected
with glibenclamide, a commonly used glucose-lowering drug. By the end
of the experiment, the extract evidenced an anti-diabetic function that was
superior to that of glibenclamide (A. Eidi, M. Eidi, & Darzi, 2009).

Since diabetes is one of many diseases caused by oxidative stress, much
consideration has been focused on anti-oxidative plants like olive tree
because of their characteristic biological functions and low toxicity. In
a 2009 Tunisian study published in the Journal of Agriculture and Food
Chemistry, alloxan-diabetic rats were injected with olive leaf extract
rich in Oleuropein and other efficient phenolic compounds such as
hydroxytyrosol. The study found these compounds to be of important
antioxidant activities which confirm the antioxidant functions of
Oleuropein and hydroxytyrosol and yet, allow them to be used in the
protection against oxidation stress-related diseases such as diabetes (Jemai
et al., 2009). Consequently, most of the experimental studies that were
performed on behalf of olive leaf extract suggested a supplement with 500
mg of the extract once daily had significant advantages. The supplement
primarily results in lowering hemoglobin A1c rate, a standard compound
of enduring exposure to increased blood sugar in diabetic people
(Everson, 2013).

**Insulin Sensitizing Quality**
The insulin sensitizing ability of olive leaf extract describes the ability
of olive leaf to restore the standard levels of insulin in a diabetic person.
Oleuropein, which accounts for approximately 20% of olive leaf, is known
to improve insulin secretion (Boaz, Leibovitz, Bar Dayan, & Wainstein,
As a traditional medicine to treat hyperglycemia and diabetes, olive leaf extract reinforces the release of glucose-induced insulin and incites glucose uptake. As stated in the study of Islamic Azad University, the oral consumption of olive leaf extract reduced serum glucose and increased serum insulin (A. Eidi, M. Eidi, & Darzi, 2009).

Beta cells of the pancreas are essential for stabilizing the glucose rate, and the insulin-secretion in the blood. As diabetes develops throughout the body, the balance gets disturbed and lost and olive leaf extract has been proven to reinstate the lost balance. A 2011 study by Gazi University in Turkey induced samples of healthy beta cells with H2O2 to imbalance the insulin level and create a diabetic condition. H2O2 decreased insulin secretion to 44.1%. Oleuropein was tested on the cells and insulin secretion was restored to control levels (Cumaoglu et al., 2011). The findings indicated that the considerable polyphenolic components of olive leaf have an important role in the preservation of beta cells against oxidative stress and diabetes. Consequently, the treatment caused the insulin to positively sensitize to the extract which raised insulin production, and decreased the glucose rate.

**Diseases Accompanying Diabetes**

Many diseases might accompany diabetes before its appearance or after, and since type 2 diabetes primary causes considered are unbalanced diet and lack of exercise; obesity is a frequent example of these diseases. Yet, olive leaf extract proved to have anti-lipidemic ability in reducing the exceeding fat amount. A 2013 study by Yonsei University, South Korea divided high-fat diet induced mice into three groups. The groups received a chow diet, high fat diet, and 0.15% olive leaf extract supplemented diet (OLE) for 8 weeks (Shen, Song, Keum, & Park, 2013). The results showed OLE fed mice had significantly reduced body weight, visceral fat weight, and plasma lipids. This results indicated that olive leaf extract medicinal activity can prevent the causes of diabetes.

Moreover, it is known in the medical domains that glucose is cancer’s favorite food and glucose elevation develops by diabetes which similarly makes cancer very possible to develop. OLE and specifically the Oleuropein content, the anti-cancer main component, can reduce the risk of cancer. A 2011 study by University of Cordoba, Spain tested the possible genotoxicity of Olive leaf extract as an overall compound as
well as its different components and examined its antigenotoxic function against H2O2 in DNA (Anter et al., 2011). The results detected that the extract performed a complete protection for the DNA against the toxicity of H2O2. It also confirmed the extract’s antigenotoxic against DNA damage which is the first step in malignant cell development. Once these cells became cancerous, they will count on certain chemical factors of the human body that will promote their organization into tumors (Everson, 2013). Therefore, the mechanism of olive leaf extract underlines its beneficial nutraceutical value in the prevention of human cancer. Accordingly, OLE medicinal job does not stop by diabetes, but it also addresses many causes and conditions of diabetes.

**Controversy Against OLE**

Even though the research studies on behalf of olive leaf extract are numerous, there are some concerns in the medical domain about the side effects of the extract. Some side effects were claimed by studies performed. One of the common side effects studied is Herxheimers reaction, an immune reaction to the emission of toxins from pathogens that have been damaged, in this situation by olive leaf extract. The reaction procedure is as follows: the extract destroys pathogens cells, which die and release toxins. Toxins get absorbed by the surrounding tissues which are already announcing an alert sign. The concentration of toxins increases as the first symptoms deteriorate, and the immune system responds in swelling and pain (Smith, 2014). However, this effect is temporary as after the response of the immune system the body cleanses itself and removes dead organisms from the body. Therefore, Herxheimers reaction is not a valid reason to not use olive leaf extract. On the contrary, it is indeed a positive sign that the treatment of olive leaf extract works.

Other claimed side effects might be stomach irritation, dizziness, or heartburn. These do not occur because of the the extract, but due to the method of treatment. For instance, patients with low blood pressure cannot consume highly concentrated tinctures or capsules of the extract (Smith, 2014). They must follow a small concentration at the beginning which might gradually increase later to ensure treatment. Even patients with low blood pressure or hypertension can use olive leaf extract as a treatment. A 2008 study by Frutarom Foundation in Switzerland tested olive leaf extract as a food supplement for 40 hypertensive twins with
differently concentrated doses. After 8 weeks, an observable positive decay was examined in their blood pressure rate, and this result confirmed the anti-hypertensive activities of the extract (Perrinjaquet-Moccetti et al., 2008). Overall, any side effect depends not on the extract, but on the method of treatment. Side effects can be overcome by reviewing treatment details with a doctor to avoid the negative interaction between drugs and the extract. Moreover, doses should be consumed at a low concentration until the body gets used to them in order to avoid dizziness. Tinctures can also be diluted in water or tea to reduce stomach irritation, and capsules can be taken along with food to reduce irritation.

**Conclusion**
The Mediterranean region appears to own a very healthy diet with the valuable addition of olive leaf extract. The extract in all its forms proves beneficial against diabetes mellitus and other diseases such as cancer, hypertension, and obesity. Among the phenolic components of olive, Oleuropein is the most significant with anti-oxidant, anti-inflammatory, anti-aging, anti-cancer, anti-hyperlipidemic, and anti-hyperglycemic activities. The advantages invalidate all the concerns about side effects which are not frequent and can be eliminated by changing the form of the intake. Further studies are required with regard to the interaction between drugs and herbal medicine such as olive leaf extract. These required studies can prove that OLE does not appear harmful during the interaction with other types of medicines. The medicinal activities olive leaf extract can become a credible part of the mainstream healthcare of the present century.

**References**


Hold on to Tradition 203


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**Biography**

Saeed Binnoora is an electrical engineering sophomore. “I AM, two of the most powerful words for what you put after them shapes your reality.”
Photographed by Latifa Al-Subaey
Find the Key
This is a poem inspired by doors. It talks about self-awareness, evaluation, and transformation. It includes imagery of personal struggle as a "door."

**Hinges**

I stood by the door...

What lies on the other side, I do not know.  
Will I see Utopia where life grows?  
Or shall I behold barrenness, abundant of crows?  
Beyond this postern threshold, I cannot imagine,  
for I have neither apt nor will to draw from within.  
See, I have been here for quite some time,  
in this beaten up, old shack I call a mind of mine.

Minute by second per moment by instant,  
crippled by lethargy as my thoughts grow dormant.  
What are words, my friend, when I do not think?  
But only cryptic discourse all riddled in ink.  
Did you hear what I wrote? Or read what I said?  
I've found no ray of sunshine, nor path left to tread.  
To embark on a journey I constrain myself  
with emptiness that need not be filled with numbers nor paint.

This life is not just; that, we all are aware,  
thus a bubble to live in, alone, not to share.  
For in the darkness from which fear creeps in,
Anxiety and despair get under my skin.
We hold these truths; all our acts for naught,
so I then think of things that haven't been thought.

Happiness: that's something new,
Along with my onesies, I thought I outgrew.
To embrace the joy of every tick-tock living,
And cherish the passing of time's constant fleeting.
To love and to lose, to turn every stone,
for better or worse, to be someone's own.
Existence between the sun's rise 'til twilight,
Seeing nothing of Orbis, but laughter and light.

I bid you adieu, o bitter sweet solitude,
for the ride to self-discovery, you have my gratitude.
As bones break and heal, grow stronger with adversity,
So must a soul crumble; rise up and break free.
I dare not say 'au revoir,' o grief, my friend,
Yet I feel adamant that we'll meet again.
But hear me this, for I profess with great pride:

I will stand by the door, but I,

I shall be on the other side...
Biography

John Crisme describes himself as a frustrated poet, essayist, novelist, musician, athlete, and astronaut—a frustrated person. John is a mechanical engineering freshman who has a penchant for drifting mentally throughout the day. He fell in love with poetry ever since he watched *Dead Poets Society* during the winter of ’14. John believes that a poet has two favorite lines: one he wrote, and one that made him write, which was “O Captain, My Captain” in his case. He fancies the works of Walt Whitman, Robert Frost, and Lord Alfred Tennyson, to name a few.
Omar Suleman Khan

One thing I’ve noticed about universities in general is that they are obsessed with the concept of leadership. As students, we love going for university-funded trips, and I think you would agree with me that nearly every application has an essay about leadership. It was for one of those applications that I wrote “What Leadership Means to Me.” I had initially planned to write something along the lines of how a leader is supposed to be great at time management and task delegation, but I realized that I didn’t really believe in that. Many great leaders committed terrifying acts, so I focused my paper on the importance of being kind and humane. I find it sad how people all want to be good leaders but never stop to think whether they are good people.

What Leadership Means to Me

From my reading and understanding of history, I find it is important to draw a distinction between being a leader and possessing leadership. In my opinion, this difference may be summed up in a single word: humanity.

Leaders do not have to be, and have not been in most cases, humane people. They may well possess the natural charisma, knowledge and ability to direct and manipulate a great many people and their choices, and though this is certainly a rare trait, it is not always an admirable one. After all, even Adolf Hitler rose from a homeless shelter in Germany to president of the Third Reich and his oratory skills as well as magnetism are not unknown. History is littered with examples of charismatic dictators, generals and kings who led their nations to great victories but led lives devoid of love from those they led.
Leadership is the art of knowing people and oneself, and I truly believe it cannot be taught. One may spend a great amount of time poring over self-help books, manuals that claim to "teach" leadership as if humans could acquire such skills as simply as picking a fruit off a tree. However I do believe these innate skills can be honed, nourished and guided in correct directions, so as to inject that vital ingredient of humanity. When leaders are humane people, a powerful force is born. That is when we get people like Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King Jr., Thomas Jefferson, Mother Teresa and Princess Diana. These were leaders whose legacies will forever be remembered in the best of ways.

Due to circumstances, naturally everyone who possesses leadership skills cannot always achieve a position of power, and this brings me to my second point. Leadership has very little to do with power outside of politics. People can be great leaders at home as parents, in schools as teachers and students, in the work place as bankers, doctors, engineers. The quantity of people one leads is less important than setting extraordinary examples for others to follow no matter where one is.

I was privileged enough to grow up in a household led by two people who were great parents. As far back as I can remember, they have asked me to think independently, to speak with confidence and to behave with kindness. Kindness is the only quality that can really change anything, my mother has always said, and though it was harder to grasp the wisdom of these words as a child, with time and through my own experiences, I can attest to its truth. To my parents I owe the greatest lessons of leadership. These have been their support, their open communication, and their unflinching wisdom in all my endeavors.

To laugh generously with people, to take somebody's hand and help them in a difficult situation, to speak up for someone who is unable to do so for themselves, to never be blinded by the passion of envy and hate, to step up to challenges and even embrace them, to believe in the goodness of people, to know one's strengths and understand one's weaknesses, to take new and exciting initiatives and to strive hard to achieve success, to see what others cannot see and listen to what others do not say, to go through life without arrogance and egotism and to never forget that we cannot
make it anywhere entirely on our own without the guidance of wiser men-this is to me, what leadership is really all about.

Biography

Omar Khan is a chemical engineering graduate student at Texas A&M University at Qatar. He really wanted to become a playwright, but since Pakistani parents do not deem that to be a profession, he chose to pursue engineering instead. Omar is a hopeless romantic, who for some reason continues to wear his heart on his sleeve even after a considerably large number of heartbreaks. He is an avid reader and an incredibly sound procrastinator when it comes to writing. His longtime goal is to be happy.
Muhammad Asfandyar Yoosufani

This piece helped me to explore my expressive side. At Texas A&M University at Qatar we mostly write in a formal manner due to the various lab reports, memos and other technical work that need to be conveyed. However, I have personally always enjoyed writing briefly and effectively. I hope in my writing to make sure that it’s like I’m talking to the reader; this is of course an aspect of writing that my engineering professors don’t always encourage.

This piece describes an internship that I took up in high school. It’s a true story. And since I’ve been slightly involved in similar experiences with special needs children here at Texas A&M at Qatar, I decided to hand in a piece of writing regarding them. One of my liberal arts professors found this piece highly effective and touching, and I hope that I can entertain my reader always, rather than boring him or her.

**Barriers**

I froze, spellbound. I was taken into a trance-I have NEVER known why. She clasped my hands tightly, her frail fingers shaking. Turning back to see a drooling mouth, a wide smile and a perturbing squint, I saw the countenance of a 7-year-old, a countenance that spoke to me. A barrier had been crossed like it had never been crossed before. I could not move a muscle. Why they called the children at the special education center SETC “special” stopped making any sense at all.
My achievement from the internship is not the 20 hours I spent there. It is but the priceless instant in which I experienced the power of separating preconceived notions from that which is “earned.”

Young Fatima’s minute interaction gave to me the real importance of communication, where neither I was normal nor she was special. It was just us being human.

**Biography**

Muhammad Asfandyar Yoosufani is a chemical engineering sophomore. One of the most remarkable experiences of his life taught him never to take labels as they have been given and that we should always experience the reality of whatever label we put on someone else. His hobbies include working out, cooking, and going out with friends.
Fail Better

Here I am in university, trying to be an adult and make sane choices. This might sound like a ramble, but I ask you to keep reading. We are more alike than you might think. Due to recent happenings, I have felt inspired to share my insight on the war between learning and cramming.

High school seems like it was just a few days ago; it is all fun and excitement to be in university… until you get punched in the face by your first semester results! Just when you thought it couldn’t get any worse, your eyes gaze into the distance trying to find the words to convince your sponsor, “I am smarter than these grades.” That’s not even the worst part. Worst of all is when your grades push you to the ground and hover above you like a dark cloud convincing you that you are not smart enough.

I am sitting at home at the moment, not sure where I will be ten years from now, or rather even tomorrow. I am sure that like me, most of you have spent your whole academic life worried about what grades you will get. You have spent more hours cramming than understanding material; you have spent sleepless nights because of that A… that abominable A… the beginning of all academic problems and the source of every student’s stress.

When I joined Texas A&M University, I was ready to crush all my exams. I had spent my previous academic years cramming and fighting for the A. I won some, I lost some. Or at least I thought I had lost some. Turns out I had lost more than I thought.
At the beginning of my freshman year, I had a terrible breakdown. I was failing my classes, and there was just too much work. My time management skills were so poor; if time were money, I wouldn’t be able to buy a bottle of water! I began to suffer from anxiety, and my biggest fear was going to class and taking exams. I would rather face a lion than attend calculus. I was internally torn. I wanted to change but my fear of failing was greater than my desire for success. As I write this, I still feel a lump in my throat. I know you know what that feels like.

We have been going through school with such a distorted meaning of education. We think we are learning, but really all we are doing is filling water into a bucket with holes. How many times have you aced a test, but a week later could not recall a single thing on the test? Or if given the same test again as a pop quiz, you know you wouldn’t succeed? Every time I want to cram for a test, I am haunted by a voice in my head that says, “The biggest lies are the lies we tell ourselves.” You may think you are studying, but you are unconsciously cramming. It has taken me quite a while to come to terms with this. No more lies now.

I am not yet over my anxiety, but I am better than when I had started. There truly is healing in acceptance. I still do fear failing, but never have the words fail better meant so much to me. When I failed a class or a test, it killed me inside. Now, however, I fail because I do not understand. I recently got a 55% on a calculus test and I was thrilled! Crazy? No, my friend, I could explain to you the ins and outs of every question I got correct! If given a pop quiz in my sleep, I would get it right. For all those questions I got wrong, I know my mistakes, and for once, I know where to start my studying.

I am not writing this essay to gloat or complain, but every student should be comfortable with a failure once in a while. I know what it feels like to be dropped by a sponsor because of grades or specifically what it’s like to be the D among all the A’s; I know what it’s like to lie awake thinking of that horror of a fee invoice. But trust me: where there is a will, there is a way. Having the zeal to learn and know more will take you places that grades may not.
It is going to take a ton of faith to get through the storm. I know I may fail more of my classes in the future, but for now, I am ready to be a better learner and fail better. There will be some cramming for some things, but my number one priority will be to learn.
Samozai Farheen Mansoor

It is in our nature to subconsciously conform to the belief that our loved ones are always going to be by us. When this belief is shattered, it is a bitter pill to swallow. Yet, human nature is such that we tend to fall back into the same belief system once again. The pain that occurs from parting with someone or something we love never really goes away, but rather, lingers on and burns itself in our memories for a lifetime. However, in due course of time, we can make room for this pain and learn to live with it. Somewhere along this journey, we find acceptance. We find a way to heal the wound and live with the scar. The poem is about coping with loss and finding acceptance amidst the pain.

Walking Away

Rivers of tears flow down my face,
I take a deep breath; I search for solace;
with a resigned smile, I bid him goodbye
as, with majestic splendor, he spreads his wings
and takes off to fly,
free and young, in the cloud-spangled sky.
Goodbye, forever, my love.

Beautiful, aye, were the moments we created
Yet, these, too, like the long-trapped bird,
have soon to take wing.
Beautiful, truly, were the kisses
laden with unharnessed innocence,
yet these, too, like old-written words,
have soon to fade.  
Goodbye now.

That grief-stricken heart,  
you captured and held,  
if only for a moment, your happy prisoner;  
has struck out now,  
for anything ill-kept, my sunshine,  
is seldom retained.  
Goodbye, my heart.

It is not that I disbelieve,  
that this here is my path – nay, my destiny –  
for only when the wrong letters are erased  
can the right ones take their place.  
And I, for one, see now  
that I’m not right for you.  
Those, my heart, be the inevitable tears,  
that envelope any sincere goodbye.  
So, goodbye now again.

Inaccurate it is to claim,  
this is the end to a beautiful something –  
for a spark that ne’er caught,  
can ne’er be put out;  
yet, even as the tears flow,  
I smile to myself consolingly,  
as I walk away  
towards a better promise,  
a better tomorrow.
Biography

Samozai Farheen Mansoor is a mechanical engineering junior who enjoys writing both prose and poetry. Her favorite poems include “Ode on a Grecian Urn” and “Ode to a Nightingale” by John Keats, and “Dazzle of Day” by Pablo Neruda. She likes nature and animals very much, and dreams of having a pretty little house in a quiet countryside someday.
By writing poems, I learn more about myself. Looking back at the poems I have written allows me to remember a certain state of mind I was in. By that, I am able to witness the changes I have passed through. I write poems very often, and I have initiated my own poetry blog. When I asked my peers about my poems, each of them had a different interpretation. This assured me that I have achieved my goal, which is leaving space for distinct opinions, personalities, and people to fit in. Most of my poetry can be considered abstract. I am captivated by the notion of art inspiring other forms of art. I get inspired by music, painting, and even movies.

**The Hidden-One**

Aware of the threat that might come,
Perhaps everything you have will seize,
come to an end,
a force will halt it.
Entropy can sometimes lack wit
But there always is a greater force,
that one outsource:
the Exalter,
the Creater of All Power,
the Hidden One.

**Biography**

Tala Anabtawi is originally Palestinian. She was born in Houston, Texas, but she has lived most of her life in Qatar.
Photographed by Fatema Al-Mansoori
Seize the Day
I wrote this short essay for my English language professor as an assignment for my Foundations of English class in 2015. In this reflective essay, I managed to portray how I conjured a fear towards fish.

Facing the Salmon

Like all third-world countries, human rights are something we neglect to enforce. That is the main reason someone would view my childhood as a bit messed up or even label me as a victim of domestic abuse. In reality it didn’t really matter until that direful day that carved traumatic scars into my mind. Uniquely, my family was the true catalyst in the awakening of my phobia that will forever haunt me.

It all started when I was 13, the age of self-discovery. I can remember it like it was yesterday. It was a hot morning, the tarmac was like rubber, softened by the sun’s unrelenting gaze. If one were not careful, he could easily burn his hand by simply resting it on a car as the metal was literally hot enough to fry an egg on. This was the reason my father suggested we all go for a swim as we just arrived to Cannes. It was six o’clock in morning, and the whole family was in a state of fatigue due to jet lag. However, the empty beaches evidenced an aura that repudiated our longing for sleep. Sadly, my mother and sister did not share the craving the gentlemen had, and so they went to the hotel. As for us young, we men rushed to the beach. I felt out of my element, defenseless to what might happen next. I was a cub without his mama bear’s guidance or protection; ignoring my survival instincts. I was but a sheep in a wolf’s domain.
As I was going into the shallow water, I never imagined the depth of despair. I was about to sink into it. A little bit ahead, I could make out the faces of my two brothers looking rather bored. It was then that my brother Muhammed waved me over, void of any precognition of the scaly terror I was about to be faced with. I blissfully rushed over to my brothers. I could see them both bronzed from the Cannes sun, and their hair wet from playing in the water. Muhammed had a much bigger build than me, almost intimidating. And then there was Abdullah who physically resembles me but is a bit taller than I am; however, he is much stronger. The combination of both of their strength and teamwork was something of a mountain in comparison to my pebble self.

When I reached them, Mohammed said he would acquaint me with the game “drown the boy.” Before I could realize what was happening, he forced my head under the water. My breath escaped from my lungs as if fleeing the fate that was awaiting me in what I thought were my last moments before I returned to Allah. While under the water, I saw a seagull feasting on a salmon on the salty water. For a moment, I thought he was meant to be my guide to Allah, but I was soon to find out that he was a demon in the scheme from the very beginning. For moments later, I was released from my brother’s iron grip and could resurface and retake the treasonous breath that abandoned me so hastily. My ordeal, however, was far from over. My other brother Abdullah, bored of the game preceded to teach me a better one; “slap the boy.” With menace in his eyes, he grabbed the half-eaten salmon away from the seagull that he relinquished with what could only be described as glee and left, never to look back. I then felt Mohammed’s cold bony hands grabbing me from behind as my heart sank ever deeper into the abyss. Having turned my head backwards, I faced again to the front only to see what was to become my greatest nightmare in great detail a split second before it hit me. Yes! Abdullah started striking my face with the salmon. And with every strike the salmon’s anatomy became clearer to me.

I managed to escape from my brother’s grip and finally reached my father with my face covered in salmon blood and entrails. My tears flowed uncontrollably, screaming out my great distress to my father; yet, to my great disillusion I was not met with solace but rather the cold, stern and
disappointed gaze of my father staring down at me. He grabbed on to my shoulders and told me to stop “being a coward and man up.” Looking up at my father, I could hear my small and innocent heart break. The faint noise however seemed inaudible to him as he told me to face my problems as a man. He then turned me around, and to my great horror I saw Abdullah holding in his hand the mangled carcass of my torment. My brother standing well over twenty meters away from me stretched his muscles, unfazed by the vast distance between us, and with enviable precision threw the salmon towards me. As I watched the fish climb high into the sky, for a mere moment it disappeared, swallowed by the sun, and in that split second I thought the sun awoke me from this nightmare. I know it was a ridiculous thought but still, I wanted to believe it. The law of gravity, however, was just as cold and merciless as my family. I then saw the salmon escape the sun. But this time the roles were reversed, and it was the salmon that blacked out the sun. A great darkness came over me, a darkness that would not soon leave me. With my father’s forceful grip holding me still, I could do nothing but what he told me. I faced my problems head on. Something in me died that day. The fish’s guts were spread around my face as if they were peanut butter and jelly.

Being the kindhearted child that I was, I managed to forgive my father and my brothers, although the same cannot be said for the salmon. It carved a deep scar of disgust into my little fragile head. As a result, a recollection of terror haunts me whenever a critter of the sea is within my vicinity.

Biography

Fahad Al Subaie is a student at Texas A&M University at Qatar majoring in electrical engineering. He wishes to face great success in the future and never face something as horrid as a fish again!
This piece of work was a short essay I wrote in my college composition course. In the class we had to write four types of essays which were graded. These included descriptive, narrative, comparison, and argumentative. This essay was the very first essay I wrote for the class and was narrative in nature. In this case, my audience was mainly the professor; however, I tried to structure my essay in such a way that a random person could understand it. This strengthened my narrative and descriptive skills. I relied greatly on the writing skills I had developed during high school. From this assignment I learned how to keep descriptions simple yet interesting for the user to read. I got a positive feedback from my professor, and looking back, I feel this essay was important in showing my weaknesses in writing and helping me overcome them.

The Day Everything Made Sense

Have you ever tried your hardest to understand something but failed? Have you also had those days where you suddenly understood it out of nowhere? I, for one, have had numerous experiences of this kind over the years. These experiences often fade with time and become a distant memory. However, every now and then you have a “eureka” moment that stays with you. The one that has stuck with me to this day is when I finally grasped how to do projection drawings in engineering graphics.

Engineering graphics (EG) deals with drawing technical representations and details of machines, houses, etc. It is often called the easiest subject in high school. Every senior who had studied EG constantly praised it and
those who didn’t constantly regretted not choosing it. As a result, I also chose EG in grade 11. The first few months I found EG to be easy, just as everyone had said. I was overjoyed and slightly proud of my choice. However, every good thing must eventually come to an end, and this was no exception.

When I took the first exam of the semester, I got a 77 out of 100. What made this worse was that most students in my class scored above 95. At first I was shocked, as I had been confident of scoring above 90. However, when I looked closely at my exam paper, I realized I barely understood projection drawings. As a result, I started working hard to improve in it, reading various books, watching videos, and practicing day and night. I worked harder in it than I did for any other subject. This went on for months to no avail.

Then one day it all came to me in an instant. I was sitting in my room, like usual, trying to crack projection drawings. I soon became tired and took a break, opting to watch some TV instead. An hour went by, and I returned to my room to work on the drawings. I decided to go online to find some videos and articles on the subject. I found an old but interesting video on projection drawing and watched it. Sadly, at the end I was no closer to solving the mystery of projection drawings. Tired and fed up, I decided to practice some questions instead. Once I was done, I looked at the solutions, and it was at that exact moment when everything made sense! I am still not sure what exactly happened, but looking at the solutions made something click. It was as if I was walking around in a dense fog trying to find my way home, when suddenly the fog clears and I realize I have been outside my house all along. And just like that I understood what I was doing wrong and how to correct it. This was one of the happiest moments in my life. What made it even more special was that I topped the final exam with a score of 98 out of 100.

I still don’t know how I suddenly figured out how to do projection drawing. It might have been the frustrated months I spent practicing it after my first exam, or it might be that the answer was lying dormant in my brain all along just waiting to be found. Whatever the reason was, I learned...
a very important lesson that day: no matter how hard a task might seem, never give up. You never know when you might just succeed.

Biography

Arshad Mohamed Ali is a first-year undergraduate student pursuing a degree in chemical engineering. He is from India but feels that Qatar is his home. He has always found writing to be interesting because it is a powerful tool to connect with people of all walks of life.
This story began as a five-minute class activity about a historical literary movement assigned in my Literature and Other Arts course in Fall 2015. A version of the story was extended as part of a larger project for that course and received positive comments. The story reflects observations during my time at Texas A&M University at Qatar about how people relate across social classes and the underlying assumptions that influence those interactions.

**Day of Cookies**

My day was going the same as days go. I man the desk. I check IDs. I interrogate strangers. I call home. I see my son on the iPhone screen, I greet the Mudeer, and I do it all over again until I found something that made me stop and think.

I knew what they had intended, and it wasn’t the first time this happened, but I just couldn’t believe that people could still be so ignorant after all this time. How could they still be so blind?

They brought cookies with a sign, “Thank you for all your hard work,” with a hand-drawn smiley face. I can’t be sure who “they” was, but in the past it was idealistic kids with rose-colored glasses who thought that my problems would be solved if I just had free leftovers to eat. They forgot that my problems are of a different sort.

They forgot that I work for a living, and that I’m under contract with my employer for fair wages, or at least I was under contract for fair wages when
I left my country. Now I’m just under contract for wages; they’re not fair anymore under the contract they made me sign when I got here—when they told me they were replacing the old one.

They forgot that when my son is sick, I can’t do anything for him. I can’t hold his hand, I can’t soothe his pain, and I can’t even see him except when my wife puts him on the iPhone screen for me. It breaks a dad’s heart to see his son sick and not be able to see him, but that’s my life, and it has been for years.

They forgot too, or else they never tried to find out, that my house is falling apart. I stretch the truth saying it’s my house—I share it with seventeen other guys. It’s a nice place—three bedrooms and a kitchen—but it gets crowded at about 4 am when we’re all making breakfast at once. Besides the water leaking when it rains and the air conditioner working only sometimes, I’m most upset because three of the four burners on the stove are broken. We’ve asked for them to be fixed, but the manager thinks drinking tea is more exciting than allowing us to cook breakfast. So that’s what he spends his time on—tea, not getting my house fixed.

One day things will be better. One day I will have made enough money to send my son to school and to build my wife the house she deserves back home. One day I won’t have to rely on the iPhone screen to tell my wife how much she means to me and to tell my son I’m proud of him. But that day is not today, and it’s too painful to think about how far away that might be.

So today isn’t a day for thinking. Today is a day for cookies, stale as they may be.
Biography

Brian Tompkins, Class of 2016, grew up in the U.S. state of Delaware before moving to Qatar in 2014 to study at Texas A&M at Qatar. Brian is an engineer because engineering represents the intersection of what he is good at (skills), what he finds fascinating (interests), and what he loves (passion). Brian aspires to be the kind of engineer who does technology well, but also thoughtfully engages with the world around him. His writing grows from that desire.
This piece is about one of the best experiences I have had, and it took place last semester while I was doing my study abroad in College Station. It was specifically written for Best Writing.

Jump

The morning didn’t start out great; in fact, nothing was going according to plan. We pre-booked our rental car and already made most of the payment online, yet the lady at the desk was having issues with our booking. It took me more than an hour to finally get behind the wheel of our red car.

This meant that our entire journey would be delayed by an hour. The journey in itself was estimated to be around two hours, at least that’s what Google Maps claimed. Knowing that we will be late, we decided to call the center and tell them that we will not be able to make it to our scheduled appointment. They told us that they would try to accommodate us when we arrived.

The drive was beautiful. We passed many ranches stretched out around us with occasional horses and cattle grazing around on a lazy Saturday. Halfway into the drive, the road that was meant to take us to our destination was closed. Frustrated, we re-routed and entered the same road through another stretch. All of a sudden I realized that the stretch in front of us was flooded. I knew I could drive through this bit; however, I did not know how strong the current was as I could see the water flowing from one side of the road to the other. We were surrounded by water. Looking
to either side of me, all I could see was a lake of water. I have never before been in such a situation, let alone driven through it. There was no time to ask my friends; two of them were asleep and the other two were in shock!

When I entered the flooded zone, I realized the current was stronger than what I expected as the car was swayed by the water. I stepped on the accelerator and held the steering wheel of the car with a great force in the opposite direction of the current. After a minute or so of battling with the current that felt like forever, we finally made it out of the flooded part. The current was strong, and although none of us made any noise, the two friends who were asleep were wide awake. We all sighed with relief as we realized how tragic this could have otherwise been.

Finally we reached our destination, a domestic airport. It was the chilliest airport that I have ever been to; in fact, all it had was a runway and a portacabin. Since there was no designated parking, we decided to park in the field right in front of the cabin marked “office.” This was a bad idea as the field was muddy due to the recent rains, and it caused the car to get stuck. After a few attempts and making all my friends get out of the car, I managed to pull the car out of the mud.

We finally parked and walked to the office. They told us that the five of us were the last people to be accommodated for the day. We had made it just in time. It’s a good thing that none of us were superstitious or we wouldn’t have proceeded to sign our lives away, literally! After the paperwork was done, it was a matter of nervous waiting. Finally, after three hours, they called us into watch the “safety” video. They told us that if we don’t take our proper landing position we might break our ankles. At this remark everyone in the room gasped. “After signing our lives away, the last thing we needed to worry about is breaking our ankles!” My friend’s remarks made everyone laugh, easing the tension.

It was back to waiting. We were then called to wear our harness, and I finally saw my name on the screen. I was in the last plane ride for the day. My instructor then proceeded to interview me. The reality of what I was about to do still did not hit me. We then walked to our “plane.” It was the tiniest plane I have yet to be on. It literally had two benches and could only
hold a maximum of six people in it. We took off with the door open! It was a beautiful evening. The sun was setting and the rays pierced through the window. I could see stretches of infinite green fields stretched below me. They became tinier as the plane gained height. My instructor told me, “The view gets better without a plane around us!” My friend and I were beyond nervous. I could see this from the look in her eyes, and I am pretty sure my facial expression gave me away. We both held hands as we could barely get a word out of our mouths. My feelings were numb. My instructor then made me sit on her lap as she hooked the back of my harness to the front of hers. I refused to believe that for the next ten minutes or so my life relied on three hooks!

Then it was time. I saw my friend being guided by her instructor as they stood up. And then she was gone. My instructor asked me if I was ready. I believe I nodded in response; however, I am not sure of my exact response as a million thoughts were blasting through my head and I wasn’t paying specific attention to any of them except this one: you are finally doing this! Next we were on our feet walking towards the door. She then guided me to step onto the ledge right out of the door of the plane. The harsh, cold wind smacked me in the face as the infinite sky surrounded me. Looking down, I saw the beautiful landscape of Austin, Texas, stretched out 16,000 feet below.

Biography

Fathima Faizeen is a junior in petroleum engineering, Class of 2017. She is from the beautiful Island of Sri Lanka and comes from a family of four. She likes to read and paint in her free time and is enthusiastic about sports.
This poem was written after a trip I took with the Qatari Students Association. It describes my feelings after I left the grave of the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) in Al-Madina. Listed below the poem are the meanings of some hard words. There is also an additional short poem related to this one called an Abothya: each line ends with the same word which has different meanings in each sentence.

Seize the Day

شوكت ارجع اللک بالعنک اعيش بعيد
والطريق الطويل يقصر بينك وبيني
مشيت بحرحك وواية براسي دارت افكار
بس ماعرف ليش عندك انسى كل عناويني
ختمت صلاتي وسلمت عليك ومشيت
ليش خطواتي ترجعني وعندك توديني
تخجل حروفي وشعري بوصفك يتيه
كل مااعطش لذكرك دموع عيني تنزل وترويني
من بعدت عنك نشف حبري وجرحي على الورق صار مكتوب
حسرة ياقلمن الجرح تأذني وتبجني
بامخزن من الصبر بالشلت دينا علا ظهرك
وماكلت بيوت لحد تعبان من الثقل تجيني
دتعل يارسولنا لخاطر الله بزمانك حعيش اجمل سنيني
مشتاقلك, هواي ياحبي الله مشتاق
واعرف هاي الأرض ماتوسع حنيني
أخذ كل شعري ونشفي ماي العيون
مااكدر عاليبعد, يمك رسول الله استشهد كون ياربي تخليني
يمك رسول الله استشهد كون ياربي تخليني

كلماتي لرسول الله "صلى الله عليه وسلم"
في اثناء زيارتي لروحته الشريفة:

شوك ترجع اللک بالعنک اعيش بعيد
والطريق الطويل يقصر بينك وبيني
مشيت بحرحك وواية براسي دارت افكار
بس ماعرف ليش عندك انسى كل عناويني
ختمت صلاتي وسلمت عليك ومشيت
ليش خطواتي ترجعني وعندك توديني
تخجل حروفي وشعري بوصفك يتيه
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Seize the Day 247
• معنى بعض الكلمات العراقية التي وردت في الشعر: شوكت، متى، هواية، كثير، توديني، تأتي بي، تجيني، أسندني- ساعدني للاتكاء على شيء ما، كون: ياريت.

أبوذية (الكلمة الأخيرة بأكثر من معنى):
يحلمي ذكرتك يارسول الله مرة
طعمة فراقك يانبيي حيل مرة
مشتاقلك وابد وهواية ومرة
وايغى من ربي كون يجمعنا بيك بالجنة سوية.

This is a short poem written to compliment the special people in my life.

تسعى الناس تسمع مني أشعار
واني وشعري كله لقلبك أسعى
سبعة من الأسبوع تصير أيام
بس وياك احس اليوم سبعة
طريقة وبالقلب خليت وأختام
ومن طبع القلب ماينسي طبعه
ربع من القلب للناس محجوز
والك كل القلب ناسه ويه ربعه
Biography

Ahmed Al-Nowfal Al-Tamimi is a mechanical engineering student who is originally from Iraq. He has lived in many countries, Syria being the last country he lived in before he came to Qatar. Ahmed is currently a student at Texas A&M University at Qatar, Class of 2019. He is a street fighter, a goalkeeper, and a poet. Ahmed is very passionate about reading both Disney stories and political analytics.
Why I Write

By: ______________________