

Student Model 1

Reflective Essay Read the essay. Evaluate it for focus and unity.

Talent Comes in Different Packages

I have to confess that I've always been a klutz. If there was a piece of paper on the floor, I could trip over it and probably fracture a bone in the process. If there was an inch of milk in the bottom of the glass, I could spill it and probably break the glass in the process. I've long since learned to deal with my flaw, and so have my friends—or so I thought until recently.

In the past year, I've grown four inches taller, which has made me even more klutzy and has left me not knowing where to put my arms and legs; they hardly seem to belong to me. I've noticed that I tower over most of my friends, which feels weird.

So why is it that everyone thinks I should miraculously turn into an athlete all of a sudden? Lately, various people have been pushing me to try out for the basketball team. Just today Luke, a kid I've known since seventh grade, came up to me in the cafeteria and said, "Hey, Stretch. We could really use a guy like you at center this year." Then he balled up his napkin and tossed it casually at a garbage can twenty feet away for a perfect two-pointer.

I know my weaknesses, and I know my strengths, so I said, "My name is Raul, remember? Here's why you don't want me on the team." I lined up the shot carefully and tossed my napkin at the same garbage can, only to watch it fall three feet short (as I knew it would).

Luke rolled his eyes, muttered something that sounded a lot like "No-talent loser," and stormed away in a huff.

I started thinking about how I would paint a basketball player going up for a jump shot. What colors would I use and where? How would I give viewers the feeling of motion? How would I show his muscles at work?

You see, I do have a talent, but instead of being for sports, it's for art. I've always been good at painting and drawing, at capturing the world in pictures. I may be a klutz when I use my big muscle groups, but nobody has more control than I do when it comes to using a paintbrush or a pencil.

I enjoy shooting baskets with my friends on a nice spring day, but then nobody's counting on me to score. If all eyes were on me, I'd become even clumsier, and I'm afraid I'd let everyone down. I'd much rather have all eyes on my work—after I finish it. Maybe it's because I've always known what I'm good at that I don't mind what I'm not good at. I like who I am, so I don't need to try to be somebody I'm not.

Student Model 2

Reflective Essay Read the essay. Evaluate it for focus and unity.

How Trees Are Better Than Boys

I was staring at Joseph, my boyfriend. He looked the same as usual—curly dark hair, oval face, pug nose—but somebody else’s voice was coming out of his mouth, a voice whose words made no sense to me. “I think we need to see other people,” he said while staring intently at his feet and avoiding eye contact with me. “I’ve come to realize that we’re too young to get so serious.”

“When did you turn into my mother?” I yelled. “You sure sound like her.”

Then I turned on my heel and walked away as fast as I could, not even noticing where I was going. I was so busy replaying his words and my own and the words I should have said instead that I must have walked a mile before I even looked up. My subconscious mind must have guided me to one of my favorite places, the forest preserve that’s just a few blocks from my house. In fact, these oak trees are tall enough that I can see them from our kitchen window. Our kitchen is too small even for my family, let alone for having people over for dinner, which my mother likes to do on Friday nights.

I took a deep breath and felt myself calming down. I made a choice to relax—conscious relaxation as they say in yoga class. I take a yoga class with my friend Natalie every Wednesday evening. Her mom teaches the class at the community center.

I saw a tree that must have fallen down in a storm several years ago because even when I was a kid I used to walk along the trunk where it crosses a stream.

I sat on that tree trunk and began to pay attention to my surroundings. My eyes were filled with forty shades of green, my ears with the sound of water running over stones, my nose with the fresh, clean scent of pine needles.

I thought about how nature is always the same and yet constantly changing. These trees and stones and streams have been there for as long as I can remember, yet the woods look a little different every time I walk in them. Somehow it felt reassuring to know that these woods will be here for me the next time I have something to cry over or something to celebrate.

I even started to think calmly about the things that Joseph said. It’s not that he’s right, exactly; it’s just that I can do better. Next time I’ll date a guy who likes movies that have more to them than car chases, who has a classically shaped nose, who even talks about his feelings sometimes.

I pulled out my book and started reading. “When we love the earth, we are able to love ourselves more fully,” bell hooks wrote. I wonder if she came to that realization after a painful breakup.