

Mr. Slater

Adv. Composition

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Final Draft

Throwing Out the Box

"I wonder what's for lunch," I pondered, as my friend and I walked into Room 51 for our sixth grade literature class.

"A gourmet dinner with roasted turkey and mashed potatoes, I bet," my friend joked. We sat down at our seats in the middle of the classroom and casually waited for the bell to ring out and class to start.

Mrs. Bollinger walked into the room and all talking degraded to a whisper, which eventually muted as she sang, "Good morning, ladies and gentlemen!" There was a collaborative murmur of incoherent phrases in response. "Today, we are starting our next unit which is poetry," she informed us, a little too enthusiastically for my liking. "And the best way to start off the unit is by trying it out ourselves first! So I'm sure you've all heard of the Allen County Public Library annual poetry contest," she pauses, looking around for some sign of recognition. There was only silence and blank faces in return. "Well, this year the theme is 'I Love My Library' so we get the opportunity to write about our love for literature!" The brownnosers and teacher suck-ups in the front of the class nodded their head enthusiastically, while the rest of the class remained in silence and indifferent at the news. "So go ahead, start writing! I'll be walking around to give you some helpful tips. But remember, think outside the box!"

All my peers got right to writing with no hesitation, and I could hear random snippets of their conversations with a neighbor: "I took my book/ to my nook" and "I am so merry/ at my

library.” All around me, I heard rhyme after rhyme, so I decided, perhaps for the sake of being different, to withhold from using any rhyming words at all.

Finally, the class bell rang and I rushed to pack my books and papers to go on to lunch, without a single word written for my poem.

That evening, as I hopped in my mom’s car after practice, she asked the staple questions for mothers around the world:

“So, honey, how was your day?” my mother inquired earnestly.

“Fine,” I shallowly answered.

I hated that question.

“Nothing exciting happened you want to tell me about?”

I went on a tangent about an insignificant event to appease her question. After twenty minutes of mindless conversation, we were pulling up to our house at dusk. Suddenly, I remembered about the poetry assignment.

“Oh, yeah, Mrs. Bollinger is making us submit a poem into Allen County’s contest,” I casually remarked.

“That’s exciting!” my mother exclaimed. “Let’s start brainstorming right now!”

At this point we were sitting in the garage, with the stall still open. It was dark out and I could hear the crickets singing their soft lullaby, telling me I should go to bed.

“Listen to the quiet,” I said to my mom, after a few minutes of stillness. Breaking the silence I was trying to enjoy, my mother announced, “Yes! That’s the perfect first line!” I was caught off guard, until I realized that it did fit into the context of the theme.

“Why don’t you write a phrase for each letter in ‘library’?” my mom asked. Agreeing, I grabbed a piece of paper and pencil from my backpack squished by my feet under the passenger chair.

"I....Intriguing books abound," I suggested, looking questioningly, uncertainly, at my mother. She nodded. I closed my eyes and imagined myself in the familiar library just fifteen minutes from my house. Walking in, there's a fresh breeze of old books and air conditioning. Peering to the left, you can see people with their arms full of books in the checkout line. To the right, the rows of "On Hold" books are stacked up, waiting for people to open their covers and submerge themselves into a completely new world. I opened my eyes.

"Breaking into your thoughts, reaching for new ground," I said, as I simultaneously wrote it down. I closed my eyes again. I thought of how I think and feel when I read a new book. I thought of all the questions that are raised, the thoughts that are provoked, the new ideas that I had never even known existed.

"Attitudes reforming..." I began forming the thought in my head. It was on the tip of my tongue, I just couldn't think of the right words to sa—

"...receiving and transforming!" I opened my eyes just long enough to jot down the phrase, and quickly closed them again, in fear of losing the image I had drawn in my head. Y...Y... I thought of what happens after I finish a book, when I close the back cover and return to the reality of everyday life.

"Yearning for more," I said aloud. I opened my eyes to turn and look at my mother's grinning face.

The next day at school we turned our poems into Mrs. Bollinger so she could submit them to the library. We were told to turn in hard copies of our poems in the front of the room in a black plastic tray. As my class swarmed the tray, I couldn't stop the insecure, incessant buzz in my head. *This poem is so bad. Hopefully we won't have to read this out loud. Oh well, nothing I can do now.* After turning in my poem, I wasn't expecting much, other than an A for completion. Weeks passed. We got our grades back for our poems and, just as I had assumed, the majority of people in the class received an A for completion. We moved on in our literature class to studying the Iditarod.

Finally, several weeks later, I slowly meandered into the house, dragging my overly stuffed backpack and practice bag through our kitchen, and finally ended at our dinner table, where I plopped down with an exhale of exasperation and fatigue from a day's work out.

"You got mail," my dad said from the opposite side of the room, as he filed through the stack of letters and envelopes. "Looks like another bill from the library."

Great, I thought, as I began to slowly walk over to grab the letter. *My mom probably checked something out under my name and didn't return it on time. Again. I told her to never take my card without...* I grabbed the letter from the counter, where my dad had carelessly tossed it, and paused.

"This isn't a bill," I ventured to say, after observing the envelope. Since my mother had, or should I say has, the tendency to borrow my library card and forget to return things, I was all too familiar with the envelope of a late book bill. This envelope was different; it was a cream colored, birthday card sized envelope, instead of the pastel white envelope with harsh black and red lettering like the mail that I am accustomed to receiving from the library. I was anxious yet excited, not wanting to get my hopes up for something that could just turn out to be a new packaging for bills. Regardless, I, not so neatly, ripped open the letter, my mind vacant from any thoughts. Quickly, I skimmed the first couple of sentences.

"Congratulations , we have chosen your poem to receive First Place at the Annual Allen County Public Library Contest."

I grinned, exhaled a sigh of relief that I didn't owe any money to the library, calmly walked over to my dad, and said, "I knew it wasn't a bill."

Just as I was putting the letter on the kitchen table, my mom walks down the stairs.

"Is that mail? What'd you get hun?" my mother inquired.

"Another library bill, mom! I told you not to check out books on my card anymore!" I exclaimed, as I handed her the letter, trying my best to hold back a smile.

“What! I could’ve sworn I returned that...” her voice trailed off, as she read through the letter. “Aw, sweetie, congratulations! I just knew it. I did. Of course, you’ll have to give me part of the credit since I did help you come up with it,” she lightly joked. I smiled, still in shock with the outcome of the poem.

Even six years later, I still remember the process that it took for me to develop my “I Love My Library” poem. After receiving the letter, I realized I had become a published author, even having the honor (to my dismay) of presenting my piece on live television. This achievement sparked an interest that fueled me to strive to be published again. Because of this experience, I enrolled myself in journalism my freshman year in high school, which led to an invitation to become a reporter in our school’s newspaper, *The Charger*. After that, I became a newly published writer every two weeks. More so, after receiving that letter, my whole writing process changed. Although the process to come up with my poem was not easy, after coming up with a theme, the words seemed to come naturally. If I wanted to produce my best work, I had to fully submit myself into the topic I was writing about and use all my senses possible to tear apart the subject to the basics. Finally, and most importantly, I learned that instead of merely thinking ‘outside the box,’ we should strive as writers, students, and human beings to demolish the box completely.