

## Sample College Essay I

*TOPIC: Evaluate a significant experience, achievement, risk you have taken, or ethical dilemma you have faced and its impact on you.*

### Finding Truths<sup>5</sup>

By Soraya Palmer

Connecticut High School, Class of 2032

In my life, I have taken many journeys without which I would not have experienced important truths. My father started us off early, taking us on many journeys to help us understand that true knowledge comes only from experience. We took trips every winter break to Madrid, Mexico, Costa Rica, and to Jamaica and Trinidad, my parents' homeland for Christmas. Silly things I remember from those trips include the mango chili sauce on the pork in Maui, the names of the women who gave out the towels by the pools in Selva Verde, Costa Rica, eating dinner at 10 p.m. in Spain. These were all tourist experiences that I, at first, found spellbinding. My truths were the truths of the tourist brochures: beautiful hotels, beaches, and cities. I did not see the blindfolds. I did not appreciate how being held hostage by the beauty of the surface—the beaches and cities—blinded me to the absence of Puerto Rican natives on the streets of San Juan; I did not understand how the prevalence and familiarity of English conspired to veil the beauty of the Spanish language beneath volumes of English translations.

I learned more about these truths in my sophomore year of high school, when I was among a group of students selected to visit Cuba. My grandmother was born in Cuba, yet I had never thought to research my own heritage. I have remained the naïve American who saw Castro as some distant enemy of my country, accepting this as fact because this seemed to be the accepted wisdom. I soon became intrigued, however, with this supposed plague to my freedom, my culture, and everything good and decent. I began to think, just what is communism anyway? What's so bad about Castro and Cuba—and I hear they have good coffee. I believed that what was missing was a lack of understanding between our two cultures, and that acceptance of our differences would come only with knowledge.

My first impression of Cuba was the absence of commercialism. I saw no giant golden arch enticing hungry Cubans with beef-laced fries; I did see billboards of Che Guevara and signposts exhorting unity and love. I realized, however, that much of the uniqueness that I relished here might be gone if the trade blockades in Cuba were ever lifted. The parallels and the irony were not lost on me. I was stepping out of an American political cave that shrouded the beauty of Cuba and stepping into another, one built on patriotic socialism, one where truths were just as ideological as, yet very different from, mine.

History, I recognized, is never objective. The journeys I have taken have been colored by my prior experiences and by what my feelings were in those moments. Everyone holds a piece of the truth. Maybe facts don't matter. Perhaps my experience is my truth and the more truths I hear from everyone else, the closer I will get to harmonization. Maybe there is no harmony, and I must go through life challenging and being challenged, perhaps finding perspectives from which I can extract—but never call—truth. I must simply find ways to understand others, to seek in them what is common to us all and perhaps someday find unity in our common human bond. This is what life has taught me so far, my sum of truths gleaned from experiencing many cultures. I don't know if these truths will hold, but I hope that my college experience will be like my trip to Cuba—challenging some truths, strengthening others, and helping me experience new ones.

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<sup>5</sup> Adapted from: <http://www.sparknotes.com/college/admissions/page21.html>

## Sample College Essays II

*TOPIC: Topic of your choice.*

**By Emily Fiffer<sup>6</sup>**

**Washington High School, Class of 2040**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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<sup>6</sup> Adapted from: <http://www.sparknotes.com/college/admissions/page21.html>