

In this document is the Personal Response to Texts Assignment completed, under time pressure, by students on November 8, 2011.

It is followed by a set of sample responses (unedited except for some obvious typos). Each response is excellent in matters of form and mainly of content. These are the kinds of responses that people may be inspired by and take tips from.

Included in the mix are also a couple of "problem papers." Take special note of these, as they are texts that, while being generally strong, are also somewhat deficient in that they scant a key assignment requirement (see notes in red appended to them).

**English 30-1**  
**Following *King Lear***  
**In-class writing: Personal Response to Texts**

Base your response on any one, or any combination, of the following texts:

- a quotation from Mother Theresa
- Marge Piercy's poem "Gracious Goodness"
- Robert Coffin's poem "Forgive My Guilt"
- James Stephens' poem "Strict Joy"
- an African image
- Phillip Larkin's poem "Ambulances"
- an excerpt from George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*

**What idea(s) do the texts suggest to you about reacting to the suffering of others?**

### **A quotation from Mother Theresa**

People are unreasonable, illogical, and self-centered. Love them anyway.

If you do good, people may accuse you of selfish motives. Do good anyway.

If you are successful, you may win false friends and true enemies. Succeed anyway.

The good you do today may be forgotten tomorrow. Do good anyway.

Honesty and transparency make you vulnerable. Be honest and transparent anyway.

What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight. Build anyway.

People who really want help may attack you if you help them. Help them anyway.

Give the world the best you have, and you may get hurt. Give the world your best anyway.

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### **"Gracious Goodness"**

#### **Marge Piercy**

On the beach where we had been idly  
telling<sup>1</sup> the shell coins  
cat's paw, cross-barred Venus, china cockle,<sup>2</sup>  
we both saw at once  
the sea bird fall to the sand  
and flap grotesquely.  
He had taken a great barbed hook  
out through the cheek and fixed  
in the big wing.  
He was pinned to himself to die,  
a royal tern with a black crest blown back  
as if he flew in his own private wind.  
He felt good in my hands, not fragile  
but muscular and glossy and strong,  
the beak that could have split my hand  
opening only to cry  
as we yanked on the barbs.  
We borrowed a clippers, cut and drew out the hook.  
Then the royal tern took off, wavering,  
lurched twice,  
then acrobat returned to his element, dipped,  
zoomed, and sailed out to dive for a fish.  
Virtue: what a sunrise in the belly.  
Why is there nothing  
I have ever done with anybody  
that seems to me so obviously right?

<sup>1</sup> telling = naming or counting

<sup>2</sup> cat's paw, cross-barred Venus, china cockle = names of various seashells

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**"Forgive My Guilt"**  
**Robert Tristram Coffin**

Not sure always what things called sins may be,  
I am sure of one sin I have done.  
It was years ago, and I was a boy,  
I lay in the frostflowers with a gun,  
The air ran blue as the flowers, I held my breath,  
Two birds on golden legs slim as dream things  
Ran like quicksilver on the golden sand,  
My gun went off, they ran with broken wings  
Into the sea, I ran to fetch them in,  
But they swam with their heads high out to sea,  
They cried like two sorrowful high flutes,  
With jagged ivory bones where wings should be.

For days I heard them when I walked that headland  
Crying out to their kind in the blue,  
The other plovers<sup>1</sup> were going over south  
On silver wings leaving these broken two.  
The cries went out one day; but I still hear them  
Over all the sounds of sorrow in war or peace  
I ever have heard, time cannot drown them,  
These slender flutes of sorrow never cease.  
Two airy things forever denied the air!  
I never knew how their lives at last were spilt,  
But I have hoped for years all that is wild,  
Airy, and beautiful will forgive my guilt.

<sup>1</sup> **plovers** = shorebirds that live near lakes and sloughs

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**"Strict Joy"**  
**James Stephens**

Today I felt as poor O'Brien did  
When, turning from all else that was not his,  
He took himself to that which was his own  
—He took him to his verse—for other all he had not,  
And (though man will crave and seek)  
Another all than this he did not need.

So, pen in hand, he tried to tell the whole tale of his woe  
In rhyming—lodge the full weight of his grief in versing—and so he did.  
Then—when his poem had been conned<sup>1</sup> and cared,  
And all put in that should not be left out—did he not find, and with astonishment,

That grief had been translated or was come  
Other and better than it first looked to be  
And that this happened because all things transfer  
From what they seem to what they truly are  
When they are innocently brooded on  
—And so the poet makes grief beauti-ful.

"Behold me now, with my back to the wall,  
"Playing music to empty pockets!"  
So, Raferty, tuning a blind man's plight,  
Could sing the cark<sup>2</sup> of misery away  
And know, in blindness and poverty,  
That woe was not of him nor kind to him.

And Egan Rahilly begins a verse—  
"My heart is broken, and my mind is sad ..."  
'Twas surely true when he began his song  
And was less true when he had finished it.  
—Be sure, his heart was buoyant, and his grief  
Drummed and trumpeted as grief was sung!

For, as he meditated misery  
And cared it into song—Strict Care, Strict Joy!—  
Caring for grief he cared his grief away.  
And those sad songs, though woe be all the theme,  
Do not make us grieve who read them now  
Because the poet makes grief beautiful.

And I myself, conning a lonely heart—  
Full lonely 'twas and 'tis as lonely now—  
Turned me, by proper, to my natural,  
And, now too long her vagrant, wooed my muse.  
Then to her—let us look more close to these,  
And, seeing, know, and, knowing, be at ease.

Seeing the sky o'er-cast and that the rain had  
Plashed the window and would splash<sup>3</sup> again,  
Seeing the summer lost and the winter nigh<sup>4</sup>,  
Seeing inapt<sup>5</sup> and sad and fallen from good,

Seeing how will was weak and wish o'erbearing,  
Seeing inconstant, seeing timidity,  
Seeing too small, too poor in this and yon<sup>6</sup>,  
Seeing life daily grow more difficult,  
Seeing all that moves away moving away  
... And that all seeing is a blind man's treat  
And that all getting is a beggar's dole<sup>7</sup>,  
And that all having is bankruptcy ...

All these, sad all! I told my good friend,  
Told Raferty, O'Brien, Rahilly,  
Told rain and frosted blossom and the summer gone,  
Told poets dead and captains dead and kings—  
And we cared naught<sup>8</sup> that these were mournful things,  
For caring them, we made them beautiful.

<sup>1</sup> **conned** = learned; known; understood

<sup>2</sup> **cark** = anxiety

<sup>3</sup> **plash** = splash

<sup>4</sup> **nigh** = near

<sup>5</sup> **inapt** = inappropriate; ill-suited; not fitting

<sup>6</sup> **yon** = yonder (at a distance; "over there")

<sup>7</sup> **dole** = donation; alms; gift of money or other goods (especially to one in great need)

<sup>8</sup> **naught** = nothing



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### ***Ambulances***

Phillip Larkin (1922 – 1986)

Closed like confessionals,<sup>1</sup> they thread  
Loud noons of cities, giving back  
None of the glances they absorb.  
Light glossy grey, arms on a plaque,<sup>2</sup>  
They come to rest at any kerb.<sup>3</sup>  
All streets in time are visited.

Then children strewn on steps or road,  
Or women coming from the shops  
Past smells of different dinners, see  
A wild white face that overtops  
Red stretcher-blankets momentarily<sup>4</sup>  
As it is carried in and stowed,

And sense the solving emptiness  
That lies just under all we do,  
And for a second get it whole,  
So permanent and blank and true.  
The fastened doors recede. *Poor soul*,  
They whisper at their own distress;

For borne away in deadened air  
May go the sudden shut of loss  
Round something nearly at an end,  
And what cohered in it across  
The years, the unique random blend  
Of families and fashions, there

At last begin to loosen. Far  
From the exchange of love to lie  
Unreachable inside a room  
The traffic parts to let go by  
Brings closer what is left to come,  
And dulls to distance all we are.

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<sup>1</sup> **confessionals** = A confessional is a small enclosure used for the Sacrament of Reconciliation (in the Catholic Church). The confessor (the penitent) and the confessor (the priest) are in separate compartments of the structure and speak to each other through a small grid.

<sup>2</sup> **arms on a plaque** = This reference is to the standard image on the side of a British ambulance. Picture something like the traditional symbol of the Red Cross.

<sup>3</sup> **kerb** = British spelling of *curb*

<sup>4</sup> **momently** = for a moment; briefly



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An excerpt from *Homage to Catalonia*  
George Orwell (1903 – 1950)

At nights we patrolled as usual—more dangerous than it used to be, because the Fascist trenches were better manned and they had grown more alert. They had scattered tin cans just outside their wire and used to open up with the machineguns when they heard a clank. In the daytime we sniped from no-man's land. By crawling a hundred yards you could get to a ditch, hidden by tall grasses, which commanded a gap in the Fascist parapet. We had set up a rifle-rest in the ditch. If you waited long enough you generally saw a khaki-clad figure slip hurriedly across the gap. I had several shots. I don't know whether I hit anyone. It is most unlikely. I am a very poor shot with a rifle. But it was rather fun, the Fascists did not know where the shots were coming from, and I made sure I would get one of them sooner or later. However, the dog it was that died.<sup>5</sup> A Fascist sniper got me instead. I had been about ten days at the front when it happened. The whole experience of being hit by a bullet is very interesting, and I think it is worth describing in detail.

It was at the corner of the parapet, at five o'clock in the morning. This was always a dangerous time, because we had the dawn at our backs, and if you stuck your head above the parapet it was clearly outlined against the sky. I was talking to the sentries preparatory to changing the guard. Suddenly, in the very middle of saying something, I felt . . . it is hard to describe what I felt, though I remember it with the utmost vividness.

Roughly speaking it was the sensation of being at the center of an explosion. There seemed to be a loud bang and a blinding flash of light all round me, and I felt a tremendous shock—no pain, only a violent shock, such as you get from an electric terminal: with it a sense of utter weakness, a feeling of being stricken and shriveled up to nothing. The sandbags in front of me receded into immense distance. I fancy you would feel much the same if you were struck by lightning. I knew immediately that I was hit, but because of the seeming bang and flash, I thought it was a rifle nearby that had gone off accidentally and shot me. All this happened in a space of time much less than a second. The next moment my knees crumpled up and I was falling, my head hitting the ground with a violent bang, which, to my relief, did not hurt. I had a numb, dazed feeling, a consciousness of being badly hurt but no pain in the ordinary sense.

The American sentry I had been talking to had started forward. "Gosh! Are you hit?" People gathered round. There was the usual fuss—"Lift him up!" "Where's he hit?" "Get his shirt open!" The American called for a knife to cut my shirt open. I knew that there was one in my pocket and tried to get it out but discovered that my right arm was paralyzed. Not being in pain, I felt a vague satisfaction. This ought to please my wife, I thought. She had always wanted me to be wounded. This would save me from being killed when the great battle came. It was only now that it occurred to me to wonder where I was hit and how badly. I could feel nothing, but I was conscious that the bullet had struck me somewhere in the front of my body. When I tried to speak I found that I had no voice, only a faint squeak, but at the second attempt I managed to ask where I was hit. In the throat, they said. Harry Webb, our stretcher-bearer, had brought a bandage and one the little bottles of alcohol they gave us for field dressings. As they lifted me up a lot of blood poured out of my mouth, and I heard a Spaniard behind me say that the bullet had gone clean through my neck. I felt the alcohol, which at ordinary times would sting like the devil, splash on to the wound as a pleasant coolness.

They laid me down again while somebody fetched a stretcher. As soon as I knew that the bullet had gone clean through my neck I took it that I was done for. I had never heard of a man or an animal getting a bullet through the middle of the neck and surviving it. The blood was dribbling out of the corner of my mouth. "The artery's gone," I thought. I wondered how long you last when your carotid artery is cut. Not many minutes, presumably. Everything was blurry. There must have been about two minutes during which I assumed that I was killed. And that too was interesting. I mean, it is interesting to know what your thoughts would be at such a time. My first thought, conventionally enough, was for my wife. My second

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<sup>5</sup> **the dog it was that died** = Here Orwell alludes to "An Elegy on the Death of a Mad Dog" by Oliver Goldsmith. The dog went mad to kill the man, but "the dog it was that died."

was a violent resentment at having to leave this world which, when all is said and done, suits me so well. I had time to feel this vividly. The stupid mischance infuriated me. The meaninglessness of it! To be bumped off, not even in battle, but in this stale corner of the trenches, thanks to a moment of carelessness. I thought, too, of the man who had shot me—wondered what he was like, whether he was a Spaniard or a foreigner, whether he knew he had got me, and so forth. I could not feel any resentment against him. I reflected that as he was a Fascist I would have killed him if I could, but that if he had been taken prisoner and brought before me at this moment I would merely have congratulated him on his good shooting. It may be, though, that if you were really dying your thoughts would be quite different.

They had just got me on to the stretcher when my paralyzed right arm came to life and began hurting damnably. At the time I imagined that I must have broken it in falling, but the pain reassured me, for I knew that your sensations do not become more acute when you are dying. I began to feel more normal and to be sorry for the four poor devils who were sweating and slithering with the stretcher on their shoulders. It was a mile and a half to the ambulance, and vile going, over lumpy, slippery tracks. I knew what a sweat it was, having helped to carry a wounded man down a day or two earlier. The leaves of the silver poplars, which, in places, fringed our trenches, brushed against my face. I thought what a good thing it was to be alive in a world where silver poplars grow. But all the while the pain in my arm was diabolical, making me swear and then try not to swear, because every time I breathed too hard the blood bubbled out of my mouth.

The doctor re-bandaged the wound, gave me a shot of morphine, and sent me off to Sietamo.

## Sample responses from November, 2011

### #1

Ideas & Impressions 5/5

Presentation 4/5

**TOTAL** **9/10**

[Peer-assessment average 9.2/10]

Throughout the long journey of life, the experiences humans have are so vast and unique that making sense of it all could take an entire lifetime by itself. The complexity is so in-depth that it may be difficult to understand the ideas about reactions to suffering. How it affects us compared to the others, why we think the way we do. It is an interesting concept to delve into, and by doing this we investigate the basis of our being. What makes us tick on the inside.

"Why is there nothing/I have ever done with anybody/that seems to me so obviously right?" This excerpt from the poem "Gracious Goodness" by Marge Piercy brings forth a valuable idea. Reacting to the suffering of others involves a complex thought about a sort of primal motherly instinct. As a mother bear cares for her cubs, we care for our children. This physical child to caretaker relationship that exists in our lives and most strongly in nature is echoed in our reaction to suffering. Just as the mother will fight for her cubs safety, we feel a natural obligation to react to the suffering of others. In the poem, the narrator rescues an injured bird from a hook in its wing and in reflection wonders why nothing else had seemed so obviously right. Society has told us we are the top of the natural hierarchy, that we are better and more capable than any other being on this earth. Looking around this can be easy to accept considering all the things that are now possible. Deep down, however, we are just animals. We have natural instincts and ideas just like any other common beast. Our drive to survive is simply more developed. We have many shortcomings as humans, we cannot run very fast, we do not fly, we cannot keep warm in cold weather, all of these things have pushed the human race to adapt and thrive. When we see other beings we automatically accept that they are inferior and are naturally sympathetic. Just as one feels pity for the scrawny kid who is always picked last in gym class, we pity and feel sorry for others who in our own opinion are not so blessed. When the bird falls to the sand we feel a twinge of sympathy and sorrow. The quality of lowliness that we exhibit makes us feel better about ourselves because we helped another who was incapable of helping themselves. When someone that is our equal however, natural instinct takes over. Only the strongest will survive. Competition limits us to feel sorrow or compassion for the less fortunate. Our own success is a roadblock to empathy. If I made it, why can't they? Darwinistically this is correct, survival of the fittest, but humanely it is not. Our minds must make the choice between which it believes is more valuable. It is in this way that our reactions to suffering of others has a strong basis in natural instincts.

Our own suffering can open the door to empathy. In victory we feel no sorrow or pity for the loser, knowing that we are the rightful victor. But in defeat, perspectives change. A startling revelation can be discovered in moments of loss. Self-love can be one of the hardest emotions to overcome. It is easy to disregard others opinions of you, but what happens when you realize you are not as great as it seems? The roles are switched, the right becomes wrong, the truth becomes blurred. When a person is bested by another, it seems that they become lowlier. Taking pride out of the equation can be a very effective way of realizing why and how you react to the suffering of others. In the excerpt from *Homage to Catalonia* by George Orwell many important ideas can be gleaned from the story. After overcoming the initial shock of being shot, the soldier admits that he feels no anger or resentment, only acceptance of the other. He admits that he would done the same thing in the situation. We wonder what the other soldier is thinking only because he knows he would think the same way if the tables were turned. Knowing the suffering of the other in the situation has a massive impact how we react. Being in the same boat gives the insight that makes us react positively. The truth that he was not the only one in the situation does not make the soldier depressed or downcast, instead it strengthens his resolve and allows him to accept the loss. When things are the worst, they can only get better.

The ideas the texts have suggested are strong in determining the way we react to the suffering of others. Instincts and experiences cause us to react in different ways that we normally believe we would. When we let someone down, got beat, or just simply failed, those are the moments that define us and force us to make decisions and become stronger than ever before.

## #2

Ideas & Impressions 4/5  
Presentation 5/5

**TOTAL** **9/10**

[Peer-assessment average 9.2/10]

Nostalgia is a feeling that is so complex and diverse that it is almost impossible to describe. To be nostalgic, essentially, is to reminisce on times in the past and have a longing for the emotions during that time. Nostalgia is most often related to past events that brought happiness and wholeness to a person. When I look back on the summer of 2009, specifically August 23 of that year, my memories send me into a whirlwind of dark, painful emotions, and regrets. Emotions that I, for a very long time, internalized until the cracks in my seemingly convincing wall began to emerge. I used my internalization as a defence mechanism. It was my shell, and it was my barricade from any comments that were sparked from a lack of knowledge, and any sympathy that my family and I would receive. I did not want sympathy. I was not the one who needed it. For lack of a better word, I was constantly frustrated. I woke up angry, and I fell asleep angry. Anger seemed to be the only emotion that I could harness and understand because I did not want to admit what I was truly feeling. My shell encased me in a thick blanket of anger and I would often lash out at anyone who would mention anything about the cracks in my wall by the kind gesture of asking me if I was okay. Could they not see that I wasn't? My mechanism was paradoxical. I so badly desired to conceal my emotions seamlessly, yet at the same time I wanted to find someone who would break down my wall without permission, only to find me cowering behind my confusion, anger, and sadness and without judgements, pick me up and bring me back to life. That desire for someone to find me again seems quite selfish, considering the situation I will soon explain, but I was always one for harbouring my emotions in the fear that I would affect the people around me. But in doing so, my suffering became immense enough that it did become evident and it did affect others. It was the summer of 2009, when my family and I almost lost my brother.

I often resented long, family vacations in the fears that I would miss out on events happening back home. Although I loved travelling and exploring different parts of the world, I felt like being included in my friends' activities was often more important than spending time with my family. During the month of August, my Dad unexpectedly brought forth the idea of a road trip. Most people would be enthused at this idea, and this is not to say that I was unappreciative of the opportunities that I was blessed with, but I would've preferred to stay at home that month. I was soon approaching tenth grade and I wanted nothing more than to be with my friends, ensuring that we would hold true to our friendships that we had in previous years. I am unsure as to why I thought the tenth grade would be different than the ninth, in the fear that some of my friendships would fade, but I felt an overwhelming sense of insecurity and uncertainty that summer. After a series of selfish arguments, on my part, I grudgingly got into the car and we began our trip. After the first day, I realized that my acts of selfishness were immature, and I gave a very deserving apology to my Dad and the rest of the family. I began to enjoy myself, and enjoy the time that I spent with my family. Due to a rocky history, I was never very close to my Mom. Nor was I close to my younger brother, purely due to the constant bickering we would do over the simplest of things. During this particular trip, I found myself very irritated with my younger brother. Not only would he sleep in for hours upon end, often wasting an entire day (which was strange for him because he was an early riser), but he would complain about going out for dinners with the family and partaking in any activities, his constant excuse being that he wasn't feeling well. Ironically enough, I would be the one to lash out at him, calling him selfish and claiming that he was making this vacation unenjoyable for the entire family. Little did I, or my family, know that his excuses were quite valid and he was going through something we had never understood before. After a few more days of the complaining and sleeping, we started to notice patterns that became alarming. During one particular car ride to the beach about forty five minutes away, my brother had drunk eight bottles of water. Then, after the entire flat of water was finished he still complained of thirst. A few days after this incident, we began to notice that underneath his eyes were deep, purple rings as if he hadn't slept in days. Yet, he was sleeping more than he ever had in his life. Our family vacation was cut short due to his dwindling health, and even then I, foolishly, found myself thinking that he was fine and that he was probably just suffering from the common cold or flu. On the gruellingly long, car ride home I

noticed that my brother's cheeks began to hollow more so than they ever did, and he seemed so much smaller in his seat compared to before. After arriving at home, my parents took my brother downstairs and weighed him. He was twenty pounds lighter than he was before the trip. For a growing, young boy and for such a short trip, we were shocked with the blinking red number the scale read to us. Shouldn't a boy his age be gaining weight instead of losing it so rapidly? The next morning was the day before school. I remember this day so vividly. I woke up to a very quiet house. I could hear the faint murmurs of the television in my Dad's office, but that was it. It was the strangest and most indescribable feeling in the world. It was as if every clock had stopped, and every outside and daily noise had been on mute. I walked up the stairs, confused as to if I was home alone or not. I found my parents and my brother sitting in the kitchen, holding one another. They told me that they were waiting until I woke up to take my brother to the hospital so I could give him a hug before he went. Confused, disoriented, and shocked I hugged my brother without knowledge of what was going to happen to him or what was wrong. My parents looked me in the eyes and said that they would call me as soon as they knew anything. A pit formed in my stomach, fearing the worst. What if he has cancer? What if I never saw my brother again? The things I would take back, the comments I would take back from that trip. How could I be so foolish? How could I assume that he was making up excuses all along. I would have to be stupid to think that everything was alright. I led my parents and my brother out the front door, knowing nothing of his future or fate.

It was dark by the time I contacted my parents. I tried endlessly but the calls went straight to voice-mail. I was left with a constant empty feeling, and that monotonous robot voice on the other line, telling me that my parents were unavailable at the moment. As if I didn't already know. That next morning, I woke up to an empty house. It felt like all of the life and all of the memories had been erased from my home, all the sounds were muted again and I was overwhelmed with the feeling of confusion and loss. It was my first day of tenth grade, and I had no idea what was happening to my brother and when I would hear from my parents. I floated through the first day like a ghost. I said hi to my friends but I spoke nothing of what was going on at home for the fear of a breakdown. A breakdown caused by what? I knew nothing at this point. My mind was filled with nothingness, but my heart was heavy with sadness, regret, anger, and confusion. I was consumed in my thoughts and regrets so deeply that I could not focus on a single thing.

I finally received a phone call from my parents. They informed me that my brother was diagnosed with type one diabetes. I had only heard of type two before, and I was aware that type two was able to be treated by a change in diet. Little did I know that type one was a permanent disease that would change my family and my brother's life irrevocably. The doctors informed my parents that we got very lucky in the sense that if we had come a day or two later, my brother would either be in a coma or would be dead. The average person's blood sugar level ranges from a three to a four, whereas my brother's blood sugar level was at a 35. An alarming number that should have sent him into a coma or, worse, death. Yet, he held on. My parents had to stay at the hospital because they were being instructed on how to monitor his blood sugar, administer his needles filled with insulin, and create meal plans in order to give him the adequate amount of carbohydrates in order for his body to function. Although it was absolutely heartbreaking to know that his life would be different from other kids his age irrevocably, a wave of relief washed over my family. Crippled by the fear of cancer, type one diabetes seemed like some sort of a blessing. It took a very long time for us to understand his condition, and we are constantly learning new things daily. It was because of this hardship that I was able to realize that I should appreciate and love the ones I am with every day because you never know when they will leave this earth. Since then, I developed a strong relationship with my brother that still continues to flourish. I now look up to my younger brother as a person to be inspired by. His strength and independence exceeds his age by many years, and it was through the suffering that my family, but especially my brother, endured that I was able to resolve everything into a sense of realization. It is through suffering that we are all able to develop a realization of ourselves, of mortality, and of the sheer fragility of life itself.

### #3

Ideas & Impressions 3/5  
Presentation 4.5/5

**TOTAL** **7.5/10**

[Peer-assessment average 8.2/10]

I see no faces beyond the burning glare of the stage lights; no people to account for what I say and how I feel. But I know they are there; just barely out of sight, hiding under a blanket of darkness, waiting patiently for me to begin. My fingers shake, and my gut twists in anticipation. It's not just a song that I'm about to share with them; it's a secret, whispered through the solid strings of the piano and the fragile tune of my voice. A secret that only my tears ever speak of, and only my songs ever put into words. I begin to play, sinking the keys into their beds, lifting them back up, and repeating. Melodies begin to build and harmonies swing back and forth in the dusty stage air. And then I breathe, the first line of lyric starting with the release of my exhale. There's no going back now, I think to myself, the secret of your suffering is out and spreading from ear to ear in the darkened audience beyond.

My songs always seem to have a varied effect on the shadowed people of the audience. Many will listen, applaud, and continue on with their evening, drinking and laughing with acquaintances, and worrying about what time they should get home to their family and their cats. For some however, the emotion may hit them dead in the chest, and through some miracle connection in the twisted wires of the human brain, they will understand. They will be hit with a wave of emotion that even they can't really explain. Their palms may begin to sweat, tears may collect in their eyes, chills may spread through their skin. For many, it won't hit them until they've put on their coats and gloves, walked out the door, and inhaled the icy winter air. Some even come up to speak with me after the song is over, cooing about how they loved the song and about how it brought tears to their eyes. I am flattered, yes, however I know that their own experiences are what bring out the sadness within the song, not mine. It would be strange to be grateful for their own suffering wouldn't it?

You see, the details of the meaning behind the song do not matter; my own experiences beyond the lyrics have lost all significance once they are shared with new ears. It is the memories that are triggered in the listener's head that matter most, and they will likely share no resemblance mine. They may be stories of ancestors, or memories of lost loves, or even fictitious ideas and possibilities that were thought up during a day dream. Whatever they may be, they have re-surfaced as a result of a few words or notes in my song. It is not my intent to make people walk out after hearing a song of mine crying or in distress. I only wish to make people feel something; to change the course of their normal day and make them see differently, and only when they choose to listen will they begin to feel something extraordinary.

\*\*\*, while this is strong writing—dressed in neatly chosen details, invested with lyricism and insight—it suffers a tad from not obviously addressing all of the elements of the Personal Response to Texts Assignment, which requires that you build in reference to one or more of the source texts. This is one of the requirements of the PR that markers are most looking to see fulfilled. If your response *does* make reference to any of the source texts, the references are rather too subtle (I've chosen to believe that you are alluding to the poem "Strict Joy" and its idea that out of his own suffering the artist "cares" beauty into being). When it comes (as in the case of the diploma exam) to writing for anonymous markers, being too subtle can be a danger, for you run the risk of being evaluated by those who will suppose simply that you've missed the point of the assignment.

#### #4

Ideas & Impressions 5/5  
Presentation 5/5

**TOTAL** **10/10**

[Peer-assessment average 9.7/10]

When we look around today, all we hear of is the suffering of those around us. We hear of murder and famine and natural disasters and hear nothing of the possibility of optimism and hope that still briefly occurs in this seemingly negative world. These tragedies pull at our heart strings; their victims call out to us for help, and we are left deciding how we can even begin to respond to all of the tormented screams that scratch at our ears. Without hearing of the positives in this bleak world, we struggle to try to stay optimistic. We are left looking back through our memories to a time where our struggles and the challenges of those around us were not so oppressive. However, it saddens us to see that we will never find a time without suffering, without tragedy, there was always something that was trying to pull us down when we were up, and drag us even farther down when we believed there was nowhere farther to fall.

Looking back far enough, we will remember a time when we were not concerned with the challenges of the world; we did not feel obligated to respond, to reach out to the begging hands of the world's citizens. So in our sheltered, childish worlds, we looked around and saw our mom and our dad, our dog, our friends from down the block, and our school reachable by schoolbus, and these spherical worlds did not extend farther than that. But still, in these small domes of life, tragedy still exists. The dog died of old age. Our best friend moved away. Mom and Dad decided that they would be better off apart, and we are left transferring our burden back and forth in a backpack every weekend. Despite all of these saddening occurrences, we survived. We survived long enough to see our worlds expand past the mailbox, past the confines of our country, to a time when we were old enough to understand that there are others out there, suffering more than ourselves; across the ocean or down past the United States or in a country that we still (admittedly) could not find on a map.

When we hear of the news of famine in Africa, of natural disasters in Japan, of debt and financial crisis in Greece, we feel ashamed when we even consider our own golden lives as burdened. We see children starving, being prayed on by vultures before they even have the chance to escape into death, and we know that nothing we could ever experience will ever hold a candle to the suffering of that poor child. This is true. We do not have to scavenge for food everyday, we do not have to walk for miles to collect the only water, although disgusting and diseased, that we can find, and we do not have to try to dig for our loved ones in the rubble of our crumbled homes. But, we do have our own challenges. Our loved ones pass away, we feel oppressed by the curriculums in school, we do not have enough time to possibly do what everyone expects of us. So no, these challenges are not horrific, in most cases; they are not life and death, but we survive them, our skin is thickened, and we become ourselves. In the wake of all the bad news and gory images that seep out of our televisions during the 6 o'clock news, we do not have to be left feeling ashamed for feeling bad for ourselves, we can be proud. Proud because we have survived. Proud because we are still here. Proud because we now have the ability to help others who aren't as fortunate as us, and hopefully, after everything is done, leaving them with the same pride in their ability to persevere.

Our ability to continue on even after the smallest of hurdles changes our personal makeup. We grow stronger, we learn, we evolve. We must all experience such blows or we would all become the same; ignorant of any ability to survive. Being aware of our personal ability to stand strong, to absorb the blows delivered to our gut, time and time again, effects how we approach the rest of the world. We will "spend years building [what] may be destroyed overnight," but we "build anyway." We will grow to be able to help the world around us, even if all we can do to help is to donate a few dollars here and there. We do our best to help the remainder of the human race survive the blows that they may receive. We have survived the scraped knees, the hardships of high school, and the heartbreaks of our youth to stand here strong, ready to "give the world the best [we] have, and [we] may get hurt, [but we will] give the world [our] best anyway."



## #5

Ideas & Impressions 5/5  
Presentation 5/5

**TOTAL** **10/10**

[Peer-assessment average 9/10]

Suffering is a curious condition. Relative to your perspective, it can elicit different reactions, thoughts, and feelings. To the one experiencing the suffering, it varies with degree of severity. When one is in pain, one instinctively seeks relief or escape or is incapacitated all together. When one is in shock, one might take a more objective view to one's own condition or to the condition of others. When one is in abject misery, or desperation, one can be driven to thoughts and actions that would in other circumstances be inconceivable. To an outsider, suffering can elicit varying responses in emotion, action, or thought, often a combination of these. But how does one react to suffering when it is conveyed in a form other than direct or observable experience?

The written word provides a unique perspective to suffering. By removing the viewer from direct or observable experience of suffering, it can, when done correctly, magnify a response by engaging the reader's own imagination, the ethereal realm of possibilities which is not bound by any natural law. Phillip Larkin wrote a poem about the outsider's reaction to suffering, which he chose to name after a common indicator of such suffering. "Ambulances" tells of such a vessel's transit, and the thoughts and emotions perceived by those who watch its passing. How often does one see an ambulance pass by? It is not a common event, thankfully, but does happen enough that we are reminded of its significance. An ambulance means that someone, possibly recently, was in distress. One often feels pity for whoever is concealed inside, be it the one who experiences the distress, or those who care for them. One also feels relief, though we might be slow to admit it, that such distress has happened to someone else, and not to ourselves. Hope, fear, and dread also make themselves known in our minds, that the unfortunate passenger is not someone that we know, that they might survive it, and the lurking possibility that they will not. And lastly, sorrow, for whoever is known to that unfortunate soul, for the hope, fear, dread, and possible pain that they must endure.

The written word does not only present suffering with which we are familiar, but can also resurrect suffering that had lain long dead, and gives it a sort of immortality. Such stories are best written by those who have experienced such suffering, as George Orwell had. His story, *Homage to Catalonia*, a tale of his experiences in the first world war, is so vivid, that it is easy for us to place ourselves in it. Take for example, an excerpt in which Orwell is shot by one of the enemy. He describes in detail his thoughts and emotions of that time, his relief at the lack of pain, which we later find is the result of shock, his confusion at the loss of ability, his reflection at the possibility of his own demise, his irritation at the lost opportunities that life could have brought him, and his curiosity at his unseen assailant. The detail is so precise, that it invites the reader to ponder what their thoughts and emotions would be if such an event were to befall them, if they would reflect on their life and find it lacking or fulfilled, if they would think of those closest to them and their reactions. Orwell draws the attention of the reader away from his own experience, and redirects it at the reader himself.

The written word can also, when applied correctly, bring the reader closest to true empathy, to be able to physically perceive the emotions of others. Poems often achieve the greatest success at this, as explained by James Stephens in "Strict Joy". His poem explains the efforts of a man named O'Brien to display his own emotions; grief, pain, loss. He explains that O'Brien, by putting emotion to paper, took his grief and pain and transformed it into something else, something that did not look sad or pitiful, but something that could be called beautiful. Stephens explains that by revealing his pain to the word, he actually removes it from himself, and allows it to become its own thing. He also demonstrates this with other poets, Raftery and Rahilly, that they experienced this strange catharsis. And finally, he reveals that by partaking in these poems, these barings of souls, we too bring about this transformation. By immersing ourselves in this cesspool of grief, sorrow, and pain, we take it, and invert it, and enrich ourselves in doing so.

The reactions to suffering are as varied as those that can experience it. In the contemplation of suffering, we must ask ourselves how we would react if given the same circumstance. Do we act differently, or find our thoughts travelling on similar lines? In truth, we may only find out if chance visits such circumstances upon us, and if we are lucky, contemplation will be the closest we will ever come.

## #6

Ideas & Impressions 5/5  
Presentation 5/5

**TOTAL** **10/10**

[Peer-assessment average 9.5/10]

Individuals are constantly preoccupied by their own suffering and by the suffering of others, particularly when the individual has caused the other's suffering. This phenomenon forms an essential part of the human experience and is the basis for such important determinants of our actions as sympathy and empathy. Each of us is "stretched out on the rack of this tough world" (*King Lear*) and many would say that life is composed mainly of suffering; that is, we all must partake of a share of suffering as we move through life, wading through of its vagaries and injustices. When we cause harm to another living thing, we ache because we are exposed to an echo of the cruelty that we ourselves have been forced to endure, and this bond of shared experience allows us to sympathize or even empathize with the tormented creature before us. The aforementioned bond has another consequence: guilt. This may take the form of self-admonishment for failing, or being unable, to relieve the suffering of another or, as in the case of Robert Tristram Coffin's poem "Forgive My Guilt," regret that one has *been* the cause of another's suffering.

In the poem "Forgive My Guilt," Coffin describes an experience that he had while hunting as a boy, an experience that, despite the fact that he is "[un]sure always what things called sins may be," he knows to be "one sin I have done." During this hunting trip, Coffin spots two birds running along a stretch of sand and fires his gun at them, disabling their wings. However, he is unable to kill and capture them because, despite the fact that they are now crippled, they manage to run into the sea and escape. Over the next few days, Coffin repeatedly hears them "[crying] like two sorrowful flutes...to their kind in the blue." He sees the others of their kind, the other plovers, beginning their long flight south while these two birds can only make piteous noises at their departing brethren. They are isolated and abandoned, much like Lear is abandoned by his daughters in the play *King Lear*, forsaken not so much out of genuine hatred as cold-hearted calculation. Lear is an obstacle to Goneril and Regan's goal of having unimpeded control of the kingdom, just as the two injured birds are obstacles to the goal of the rest of the flock to travel as quickly and efficiently as possible. In fact, the undamaged birds could hardly be expected to tend to their wounded kindred. Coffin's boyhood self realizes this and, as he is forced to listen to the birds' expressions of sadness and pain over and over again over the course of the next few days, he is filled with an all-consuming guilt and regret for bring such pain to the birds. "Over all the sounds of sorrow in war or peace [he has] ever heard...these slender flutes of sorrow never cease." This is most likely because he, in his own journey through life, has been subjected to similar experiences and recognizes the pain of the birds as the pain of all living things, including himself, just as, in the end, we pity Lear because his suffering stands as a symbol of the suffering of all ourselves and all mankind. Indeed, the "two airy things forever denied the air" likely resonate with Coffin because he himself has undoubtedly been denied his own "air" in the past by things out of his control. When confronted by the suffering of another creature, especially considering that it is a suffering that he has caused, Coffin, like us, is forced to piteous guilt that, in this case, haunts him for the rest of his life, though he has "hoped for years all that is wild, airy, and beautiful will forgive [his] guilt."

I, too, have had experiences similar to Coffin's, though one stands out from amongst the rest. When I was 11 years old, I joined a large group of my schoolmates in tormenting a small boy who had revealed that he liked a certain television show that the rest of us considered "girly." This boy was mocked for such a long time, tormented so badly, that he eventually began crying and was sent home. He spent the next several days away from school, and unmistakable feelings of guilt began to develop inside of me. The knowledge of this deed settled like a fine gold dust behind my eyes, gleaming from and distorting every aspect of my sight and mind. I began to consider the suffering of this poor child from the perspective of all the suffering I had ever experienced in my own life, no small sum, that. The isolation of this boy and the cruel beating he was given at the hands of the large group of boys, pounding relentlessly against him like ocean waves, was the suffering of each one of us, unfairly persecuted by the forces of existence. This guilt and regret continued to build up inside of me the more I empathized with the boy. I, like Coffin, wished for forgiveness, a way to erase the guilt that had consumed me and in redressing another's suffering to redress

my own. Indeed, this is one of the principal aspects of our reactions to the suffering of others, the idea that the soothing of the suffering of the tormented and the tormentor are inextricably linked, because of that ingrained force we are unable to repress, empathy. In the end, I had more luck than Coffin, in that the boy was still accessible to me and I was able to offer an apology, assuaging my guilt and suffering, which will not follow me and be felt for the rest of my life “over all the sounds of war and peace.”

#7

Ideas & Impressions 5/5  
Presentation 5/5

**TOTAL** **10/10**

[Peer-assessment average 9.5/10]

A soft mechanical clicking fills the otherwise quiet room. He shifts his eyes to the right, where the clock hung on the off-white wall claims it is 12:01. He sighs and looks back down at his desk. A sheet of printer paper sits on the middle of the desk, blank side up. He turns the paper over and is greeted by a picture. He gazes at the image before him with a hint of disinterest. It is just another snapshot of the depravity of mankind, another glimpse at the depths that humanity can sink to. The picture is that of a boy, obviously suffering from severe malnutrition, bent over on the ground as a vulture stands quietly in the distance, waiting his next meal to quietly slip out of the realm of the living. He sighs again, picking the page up to get a better look. He cares not for the child, for he knows that the child is likely already dead. He struggled through his miserable meaningless life deprived of the most basic necessities to survive, facing tragedy after tragedy day after day until the moment he could no longer muster the minimum amount of energy required to maintain his bodily functions. Did this child's parents die when he was young? Had they abandoned him? Sold him? It matters not. He puts the picture down now, a sad cynical smile playing at the corner of his lips. He knows about suffering. He knows that there is not a single organism in existence that is not aware of the experience. Sure, he can identify with the boy, look at his situation, and understand the tragic nature of his life, but it is hard to care, it is dangerous to care. If he is to care about this child as an individual, feel his pain, understand his anguish, live his life, must he not do the same for the next individual? If he does not, then does this not suggest a degree of uniqueness to this case? This is impossible, as he knows that in this world pain and anguish reign supreme, that as he ponders the significance of this child, another just like him may be in the exact situation that this boy was in. He has heard the statistics all his life, knows that "every second X amount of children die due to Y," that suffering is not unique. He picks up the picture again, giving it another quick glance before crushing the fragile paper between his fingers. Standing apart from the matter is safe, it is secure, it helps to clear his mind and see the bigger picture, the truth of this world: there is no meaning to life, there is only hardship and misery and death. People he loves will wither and die while rapists and murders and child abusers live to draw another breath. He knows that there is no justice, that there is no right and wrong, that the only true act of mercy is a quick and painless death before the horrors of living drive one completely mad. He clasps his hand around the rough paper, his knuckles grow white as he pours all of his hate, all of his anger, all of his sadness into his fist. He feels the blood seep through the cuts in his palm, the small tears where the sheet has bested his skin. He knows that he can do nothing, that all of his actions are meaningless in the end, that he is unable to save this child, unable to stop this situation for happening over and over again. He knows this and he hates it. He hates that he is unable to act, he hates that reality is random and uncaring, and, most of all, he hates himself. He hates himself for his awareness of the cruelties in life, he hates that he can not go back in time to his years of childhood innocence, when the horrors of the world were unknown and far off. He hates himself for trying to ignore the fact that he is an utterly insignificant part of an infinite universe, that every emotion he has felt and will ever feel has been known by countless others before him and that they will be known by the countless number who follow. He hates himself for being a part of such a horrid reality, and for knowing that the only way out is his demise. He hates that he knows suffering, and that this knowledge is not unique to him. He looks back at the clock. 1:42. He pushes his chair back and stands. He walks over to the garbage can, letting the paper fall into its gaping maw. He straightens himself, adjusts his shirt, and holds back a sneeze. He rests his fingers lightly on the handle of the door and closes his eyes. He knows that, most of all, he hates himself for being human. He takes a deep breath and steps outside.

## #8

Ideas & Impressions 2.5/5  
Presentation 4.5/5

**TOTAL** **7/10**

[Peer-assessment average 7.6/10]

"Men must endure!" the commander would always shout. "Suffering is our price to pay!" Occasionally, he'd remind us of the morning sandstorms that could be expected, after we shipped out, saying they "formed crystals in your eyes, turning your skin into the very desert that caused it - masks and goggles barely providing help." He wasn't lying, my eyes begged for comfort, my skin for a cold shower, but in Afghanistan, there was barely the time. Patrols in the morning, patrols at night, patrols while eating, and patrols when sleeping. Today's wasn't so different, we set out for east Kandahar, the worst of the running, for another cruel day of suffering. Our route took us from the old, destroyed, parliament building, to the nearly abandoned Bazaar, found east of the city center. We passed row upon row of mud huts, crisp and dry in the sun's vigilance, kids, probably orphans, wandering aimlessly down the streets, and old men glaring, as if we, their saviors, were Taliban demons. They would appear to terrorize a group of innocents, and leave as quickly as they came; as of a child's nightmare turned reality. Occasionally, we would park our humvee adjacent to a "hot-spot", arm its 50. cal mounted gun, and fire warning shots if one decided to pop his turban up from their hidden hovels. Depressingly, I am a very poor shot with a mounted machine gun, but I found amusement in playing whack-a-mole on a daily basis, hoping I could win one day. However, it was the hammer that got nailed. A Taliban mole got me instead, retreating with his success. Only ten days in the desert, and I got hit.

It was the eastern Bazaar, on a warm afternoon, when market fever began. Very dangerous to whack moles, for the entire city, or what was left, crowded the streets, and if you took a shot, collateral damage was guaranteed. I was observing a group of men attempt to haggle a man into selling a carpet for half its price, forgetting my duties for a brief instant. In a flash, my shoulder took the impact of what seemed to be a tidal wave, launching me back against the humvee. I'd clash against its metal, as my hands themselves tensed with pain - firing shots from my "unmanned" gun. Numbness then took over, as if my body played the role of doctor and injected morphine. Soon thereafter, my knees buckled and I fell back, roughly, in the humvee's back seat. Elapsing only a few seconds, I had realized I was shot, and my squad too. The sergeant I landed next to jumped in fright, "My god! Are you alright?" he shouted. He dragged me out of the vehicle, and the team gathered around. There was the usual fuss - "Lift him up!" "where's he hit?" "Get his vest open!" The sergeant scuffled for his knife, I tried giving him mine from its sheath, but I soon felt limited in my abilities. My arm wouldn't move, nor could I speak. I attempted to question where I was hit, with no success. On my second attempt, I managed to utter the words, short of a few breaths, correctly, to which the sergeant replied calmly, "In the left chest cavity."

Was he trying to calm me? I was already calm, thinking of my children at home, my wife who'd hope that I'd bring back good news, and not bad. I then realized death was waiting for me, inevitably, as my chest took on the weight of a thousand elephants, and my air drastically escaping. It must have been my lung, and I've not met a soul who brushed off such a brutal attack. Soon, the alcohol was applied, but instead of pain, I felt a sort of relief, as if cooling the numbing sensation. They lifted me back in the humvee, and drove 20 miles, over arduous, unkept dirt roads back to base, potholes being common, and the chance of a mine more than possible. It was until I found myself back in the infirmary, that pain rushed to my chest. My eyes blurred, and the blunt of the pain was so great, I barely managed to stay conscious. But happy I was to feel pain, as life began creeping back into my body, returning only from lunch break.

The doctor informed me I would recover, and it was only a minor collapse of the right lung. He gave me a pat on the head, and sent me back to Ottawa.

\*\*\*, this is strong writing. Your online practice as a role-play writer must be serving you well, for here you speak credibly and forcefully about the experience of a soldier in the

Afghanistan conflict, your diction, syntax, and detail choices carrying the reader rhythmically and climactically along. As well, the text is quite sound in terms of mechanics, and what minor errors there are can generally be excused by the fact that you were composing in a time-pressure situation.

There is a problem, however, in the matter of fulfilling the requirements of the Personal Response to Texts Assignment—namely, that it does not fully answer, from *your* point of view, the question "What ideas does the text suggest about reacting to the suffering of others?" While it does speak of some individuals' reactions to the suffering of the narrator (not least of all, the reactions of the narrator himself), they are largely a restatement of the actions and reactions described by George Orwell in the excerpt from *Homage to Catalonia*. Recall that I mentioned, the other day, that the marker must sometimes make a distinction between what appears as homage to, and extension of, a source text and what appears as derivative—that is, what seems mainly to trot behind and mimic the content of a source text.

Doubtless, you have your own statements to make about how we humans react to each other's sufferings, and that (speaking as a marker) is what I'm most keen to read. What would happen, I wonder—and what original insights could you generate regarding the assignment question—if you were to tell the story from the point of view of, say, the sniper who hits Orwell in Spain or the sniper who hits your narrator in Afghanistan?

#9

Ideas & Impressions 5/5  
Presentation 5/5

**TOTAL** **10/10**

[Peer-assessment average 9.7/10]

In the world today, we are surrounded by suffering. There are starving children in Africa, we hear of burn victims in the news, and we see homeless people on our streets, flipping up their collars in order to fend off what is sure to be another cold Calgary winter. The quality and state of suffering, of being a sufferer, is something in which I personally -- having grown up in a wealthy society with a roof over my head, nourishing food in my stomach, and a family -- have very little experience. Never have I been forced into physically or emotionally trying situations and never have I been led to question whether or not I would still be alive tomorrow. However, despite never having suffered anything that can match the desperation of poverty, the fear of death, the pain of torture and abuse, or the anguish of losing close family or friends, I am still bombarded with images and news and videos and gossip of suffering that other people and animals are facing. In fact, in this day and age, with the surplus of media and the efficiency of our satellites, I would go as far as saying that I am as familiar with the idea of suffering, if not suffering itself, as any other "average" inhabitant on this planet.

Suffering is an emotion, a situation, a state of being that I find unites our race. When a person sees a picture or watches a video of another human or animal be put through an agonizing circumstance, a portion of our hearts suffers with them. It is sad, sometimes painful, to see someone reduced to their most naked, vulnerable, desperate form, to see them stripped of their dignity and hope. The poem "Gracious Goodness" by Marge Piercy parallels this idea. When the two children see "the sea bird fall to the sand / and flap grotesquely," they immediately feel obliged to help it. Maybe all human beings are born with that "saving" instinct, that when you see something hurting, you are compelled to provide some measure of aid. And perhaps the reason that we experience this obligation is due to the fact that we desire to end our own suffering as well. With each agonized cry of the pinned gull, I feel as though internally a piece of the child was crying along with it. It is just as emotionally and psychologically painful to see the creature in such pain and fear as it is to be the creature experiencing the pain and fear. So in order to end their own misery, the children were automatically compelled to end that of the gull's. And this idea can be broadened to encompass many other real-world situations.

Along with suffering with the sufferers, "Forgive My Guilt" by Robert Tristram Coffin suggests that in order to cope with the suffering of others, we laden ourselves with guilt. Specifically, the poem elaborates on a situation in which a boy actually causes the suffering of the plovers, a situation in which he personally made "[them cry] like two sorrowful high flutes, / With jagged ivory bones where wings should be." And he regrets his actions, for in seeing them "crying out to their kind in the blue," he began to sympathize with their suffering and in response became guilt-ridden and haunted by their mournful cries on the beach, even long after they ended. In this circumstance, I believe that the boy was incapable of truly suffering or empathizing with the plover's gloom, possibly because he was still too young and naive. However, deep down I think he felt the gravity of what these creatures were going through, and so to cope, he developed a guilty conscience that he hopes will eventually be forgiven. Similarities can be drawn between the actions in this poem and our actions in real life. We, the privileged folk in North America, often find it difficult to empathize with the suffering of those less fortunate, those that are separated from us by oceans and continents, and so we adopt a guilty mind-set, whether we acknowledge it or not, that may motivate us to donate to the charities that support those people.

All in all, these texts suggest to me that in reaction to the suffering of others, we suffer (to an extent) with them, and so are therefore compelled to end their suffering in order to stifle our own. Also, I believe that the texts suggest that in response to suffering, and when incapable of empathizing with the sufferer, we adopt a sense of guilt to cope with the agony and pain and desperation in those unfortunate individuals.



## #10

Ideas & Impressions 4/5  
Presentation 5/5

**TOTAL** **9/10**

[Peer-assessment average 8.5/10]

Kellan Racksaw was not a popular man, and that's just the way he'd like it. He was old, in his late 70's, although no one really remembered the exact number. His family had lost contact with him around twenty years ago; in fact most people had not heard from him in about that time. He lived by a beach. It was not the sort of beach that families brought picnic baskets to, nor was it the kind to find models carefully monitoring their tans. It was usually overcast, the ocean cold and calm, and this suited Mr. Racksaw quite nicely. There was occasionally a gull who'd gotten lost and flew around for a while, never long enough to make a friend for fear of never being able to leave the mesmerizing dullness. Grass sprouted from the dunes, making it suitable for walking with neither sandals nor sneakers. It was quiet all year. Mr. Racksaw wasn't the type to have people over to visit, and his tiny dilapidated beach house served as an eyesore for phantom neighbors who'd abandoned their cottages when the nearest town was boarded up years ago. His doorbell hadn't rung in who knows how long, and Mr. Racksaw wasn't entirely sure he remembered what it sounded like. He had books which he read and reread, a small garden which kept him just busy enough and gave him the odd potato or dwarfed carrot, and a fireplace that served as his television while he dozed on his ratty recliner, which was likely older than he was. He walked two hours with a wagon every other Sunday to get enough food from a sparsely stocked truck-stop-slash-gas-station-slash-diner, and Mr. Racksaw wasn't sure how they were able to stay open since he never saw anyone there except the one woman who ran it, a burly lady with a rough voice and a sweet heart. Her name was Mary Wilson, although no matter how she tried to convince Mr. Racksaw to call her Mary he consistently called her, with only the politest of intentions, Mrs. Wilson. She liked to slip extra cans of beans in Mr. Racksaw's wagon when he wasn't looking and always gave him a coffee and a muffin from the kitchen, since they weren't busy anyway. She was the one person left who Mr. Racksaw still enjoyed talking to, and he sometimes brought her interesting rocks he'd found or an especially picturesque potato he'd grown. They would chat about the weather or the increasing price of corn, and after half an hour Mr. Racksaw would begin the two hour walk home, which Mrs. Wilson always offered in vain to accompany him on.

Mr. Racksaw would get home and have a nap, tired from his journey, and fix a hot can of beans on his fireplace, chuckling at the cans of beans on his shelf he hadn't put in his basket himself. The beans always seemed a little less bland every second Sunday, but by Monday he'd fallen back to routine. If he had nothing to do, he'd sleep. If he was cold, he'd make a fire. If he was hungry, he'd have beans, or beans and hot dogs if he was especially peckish. He lived an easy life, without great joy but also without great despair, and the mediocrity was a welcome change in Mr. Racksaw's life. Before he moved to the already-abandoned beach house community he lived in now, he'd lived in the city, and hated every minute. People talking at him, ten-year-old kids yelling cuss words across parks, salespeople and flyers and pigeons and skies punctuated with airplanes. He craved simpler times and so he moved to the simplest place he could find, a place where he could just survive, without any cares except keeping himself fed. He had money enough, certainly. He was always a hard worker, and had enjoyed being at work in his large office much more than he ever enjoyed being home. He was a successful businessman, and vast sums of money passed through his trusted hands every day. He was paid well but he didn't care to spend it. What would he spend it on? When he moved he filled a shopping cart full of books to read, and brought those, a couple changes of clothes and some small gardening tools, and drove to his new home, his ancient car putt-putt-putting the last few kilometers to his house. He sold it for a song to a junkyard and was pleased to never have to see it again. For Mr. Racksaw, the car was another needless, stinking symbol of an overcomplicated life, a symbol he certainly wanted nothing to do with.

One Christmas Sunday, which was, surprisingly, a holiday he still enjoyed, Mr. Racksaw bundled himself up very warmly and set off towards Mrs. Wilson's place. He brought one of his favorite books, which, today, had a loving inscription inside addressed to Mrs. Wilson. He loved giving gifts to "those who deserved it", as he bitterly put it, and who could have been more deserving than Mrs. Wilson? He was very

excited to give the book to her, and the already long walk seemed to take twice as long as usual. When he finally arrived he was surprised to see another car in front of the diner, he saw it from far away but couldn't make out the distinctive red and white stripes on the big van until he got closer. He began running (which was more of an off-center hobble) when he could read "ST. THOMAS HOSPITAL" on the side of the ambulance and burst into the front doors.

"What's going on?" he demanded, noticing the waver in his voice which he'd tried so hard to keep firm. After a couple seconds a uniform stepped out from the kitchen and looked at Mr. Racksaw with great surprise.

"Who are you?" he asked cavalierly.

"I'm Kellan Racksaw, what's happening? Is everyone okay?" Mr. Racksaw pressed.

The uniform replied grimly, "I'm afraid not. The woman who ran this place had a heart attack. We couldn't get here fast enough. We're almost two counties over. I'm afraid she didn't survive. Did you know the deceased?"

Mr. Racksaw didn't reply. He shook his head, covering his mouth, and tried to move past the uniform to the kitchen, blinking furiously. The man caught him with an outstretched arm.

"I'm afraid I can't let you in there," the uniformed man said coldly. Mr. Racksaw pushed him aside with more force than he knew he had and stormed into the kitchen, freezing in the door. He saw Mrs. Wilson's white face only momentarily before another uniformed man pulled red stretcher-blankets over her. She looked serene. Mr. Racksaw could have sworn she was still wearing the half-smile she had when he gave her his rocks or potatoes. The uniformed men carried Mrs. Wilson out of the kitchen on a stretcher, barely missing Mr. Racksaw when they went through the door. He traced her arm as she floated by him.

"If you are related to this woman please call the morgue at St. Tom's. We can't let you stay in here, though. You'll have to leave. Hospital policy," said the second uniform. Mr. Racksaw glided out of the diner in a trance, allowing his tears to flow freely now.

"I'm sorry for your loss," said one of the uniforms clinically.

Mr. Racksaw stood in the cold outside the diner and watched the ambulance pull away. He was frozen in place, not sure why he would go home, or why he would stay in place. It didn't occur to him that he wouldn't have enough food, or that he didn't have any way to get anywhere. He was consumed with the thought of not having Mrs. Wilson, a woman he scarcely talked to, only around twenty times a year, around. He was amazed at how lost he felt, how scared he was to be alone. He had been alone for twenty years. He had loved it, but now it was too much. He remembered what loneliness felt like once again, and instead of reveling in it, he felt abused by it. He wanted someone to talk to him, to tell him it was okay, that Mrs. Wilson would be okay, that he would be okay, but he had no one. He was alone in the world, with no one to see his suffering, and somehow, not having anyone to see it made it much, much worse.

## #11

Ideas & Impressions 4.5/5  
Presentation 4.5/5

**TOTAL** **9/10**

[Peer-assessment average 8/10]

42 years young I was when I first placed my foot on the solid, dry earth of the magnificent continent of Africa. I don't know why it took me this long or where my sudden drive came from to venture to the other side of the world. Being raised in Grand Rapids, Michigan I didn't have much to complain about, I guess. Average house, average career, average car and the average husband. When I hit 40 I knew there had to be more to life than waking up at precisely seven o'clock, dropping the kids off at school, going to work, picking the kids up and making dinner before I retired each night. I had always been fond of writing; hell, writing was a favorite pastime of mine until I lost touch with it when Heather's second birthday rolled around. As a result I found myself in that average life routine leaving nothing to the imagination anymore. At the age of 39 I became diagnosed with clinical depression and my husband couldn't understand why. I found myself suffering to get out of bed and paint on an optimistic smile before the kids would see me. After a year of five different medications and numerous spiritual treatments I began planning my trek to Africa. I suppose at first it was just a silly idea that gave me a distraction from the regular routine and as a result, I spent every spare waking second researching. Without the husband's knowledge I maxed out two credit cards within two months, but I tapped into my life savings to cover the shame of my frivolous spending. On the fifth day of June I left Grand Rapids in hopes of finding that something else that should be a part of life.

Within thirty-six hours of travelling, three flight connections and four half-eaten meals I breathed in the hot, dry air of Ghana. Finding the 1995 Jeep Wrangler equipped torn seats and a broken seat belt really jump-started my Ghana adventure. I drove an additional five hours into the barren landscape stretched out before me, feeling every dip and bump in the ground courtesy of the Jeep's soft suspension. Air whipped into the car, spewing dust in my face with every chance possible while my back became drenched in a layer of sweat, my most ignorant moment rooted in the fact that I thought this was suffering at its finest. Five hours of what I believed was suffering later I arrived in a small village greeted by my tour leader and a stampede of smiling children. Cutting the engine, I stepped out of the vehicle and greeted Jane the tour leader. As per usual I was the last one there and we were all keen to see our sleeping accommodation. I put one foot in front of the other and within that short amount of time I felt dry, brittle skin grab onto my hand but when I looked down I was looking into the deepest, softest brown eyes I had ever seen staring back at me. Malakai I would soon know to be her name and she lead me to the tent I would be calling home. As she walked a couple inches in front of me, I began to notice that when you can't see those soft eyes staring back, you see lines rippled throughout her body, these lines being the proof that she hasn't eaten a proper meal in days. She glanced back at me to make sure I was still in time with her and her smile captured me.

Upon arriving at the tent, I noticed the tears in the insect shield and the springs about to burst through my mattress, but Malakai couldn't have been more proud to present me with my accommodations. Out of respect, all the locals left rapidly to allow us some rest. That night I thought I had found what suffering was. Springs digging into your bad, itchy blankets rubbing across your body and a pillow made out of what you could only describe as lumps. I woke up the next day laced in mosquito bites and some other insect I wasn't sure about. Nonetheless I swallowed my words of complaint and got ready to work a full day. For the next five days I didn't see Malakai. Maybe she had better things to do than come watch us work. Working in sync with the eight other volunteers we had built up half a house already. Of course it wasn't complete with granite counter tops or hardwood flooring, but I could only imagine that the roof and water pump would be a step in the right direction. By the seventh day the mattress had taken a toll on my aging back and I had no choice but to take the day off.

By noon I was walking the dirt path leading to where I was told the children spend their days. No school, just a piece of land garnished with two dead trees and broken sticks lining the earth. The joyful squeals of children playing tag accompanied with the soundtrack of traditional African songs filled my

ears. Searching for Malakai, I couldn't seem to find those deep brown eyes I was desperately searching for. To the far right, about thirty steps away, I couldn't help but notice what seemed to be a child digging in the dirt. My curiosity got the better of me and forced me to explore the happenings of that child. Upon twelve steps closer, I began to see protruding bones and a lack of body fat staining this child. Walking up, I didn't know how to go about the situation. Do I say hello? Do I walk away? Do I tap her on the shoulder? Being used to my routine at home I didn't have to come into situations like this. As a stick snapped under my foot the child looked up and I was staring back Malakai's eyes, this time lined with tears. I sat down next to her and didn't question anything. After six minutes of sheer silence she stood up and this time it was my turn to grab her hand and lead her someplace I was proud of.

I unzipped my tent proceeded to dig into my emergency stash of granola bars I had been saving for the drive back. I handed over my favorite fruit and nut bar, but Malakai just stared at it. With hand gestures I showed her it was meant for her to eat. Still she stood still. I took the granola bar back, opened a corner and ate part of it myself. After she had seen me eat a piece I handed it back to her, this time unwrapped, and she devoured the bar without hesitation. Seeing her eyes light up like I had seen them the first day prompted me to go back into the tent and receive the bag that was full of granola bars. I handed them over to her and gestured that they were now hers. Her smile could have lit up the entire village if everyone else had seen, but I was glad to share that moment with her alone.

For the rest of my trip I finished two more houses and proceeded to visit Malakai each day. When my time came to leave I became overwhelmed with a combination of grief and joy. Saying goodbye to everyone tore at my heart, but seeing Malakai helped to lift my spirits again. It was not a goodbye to her, it was a "I'll see you again." I left the village with one extremely sore back but a feeling of completeness. Looking in the rear view mirror, Malakai's smile slowly faded into the dust cloud that followed the jeep.

Upon my arrival at home, I did the traditional thing of greeting my family and telling them my stories. However I kept Malakai's story to myself. As a result I picked up my journal and a blue ink pen and wrote down every fond memory of her. She was the reason I now understood what suffering really was and how I beat depression. While writing I had realized how ignorant I was thinking that I was the one suffering on that lumpy pillow and mattress. Malakai taught me the greatest lesson I have learnt in life so far, and that is suffering only comes from attachment. We all attach ourselves to a customary level of comfort and as soon as we are taken out of that zone we feel as if we are suffering. Malakai had no comfort zone and as a result she taught me when we believe we are suffering, we need to find what is attaching us to that remorseful feeling. To suffer isn't an easy idea to comprehend as we all have to find our own form of it regardless of leaving our comfort zone.

## #12

Ideas & Impressions 5/5  
Presentation 5/5

**TOTAL** **10/10**

[Peer-assessment average 8.5/10]

"The weight of this sad time we must obey, speak what we feel, not what we ought to say." Sympathy for a stranger is short lived. It waves from an ambulance as it sails past. It interrogates our emotions, but to no avail. No matter how much people tell themselves that they are modest and caring individuals, we are always looking out for the most important person in our lives. Ourselves. Strangers are no more than unopened books, and when their flame is extinguished how will we ever cope? We will continue with our daily routines. Routines that are only so until they are interrupted by another unfortunate event, sent to test our humanity and input that sense of sympathy into our lives. Although this idea of vanity seems rather extreme, I will speak what I feel, and not what I ought to say.

Suffering and sympathy go hand in hand. One cannot succeed without the other. Nearly everyday of the spring and summer, I see wounded gophers shuffling across roads, fresh from the battle. Their suffering is blatantly clear, but we don't see articles and CBC National headlines about the suffering of gophers. This is because the majority of humans, including me, could honestly not care less about this issue. Without our sympathy, each one is just another martyr of the road. In the excerpt from *Homage to Catalonia* by George Orwell, we get to see the idea of suffering from the victim's perspective rather than our usual objective view. The narrator is a rather passive individual who seems to be intrigued by his own crisis. As described throughout this excerpt he is more interested in seemingly less important issues than his own, such as his wife's yearning for him to be wounded, and the persona of the shooter. He describes the panic around him as "the usual fuss," which is the input of the sympathy to his suffering. If this excerpt were about a soldier who was shot while patrolling all on his own with no one around, there would be no story. He would be another meaningless pawn, removed from the table. Since that is not the case, he is the root of all suffering in this excerpt. He is the king, with pawns surrounding him to tend to his every need. A king does not ask to become king. He is appointed to his royal status. To me his arrogance of his situation is not really arrogance but his inability to assess his situation. I feel that he "cannot heave [his] heart into [his] mouth."

As a reader of this excerpt I automatically feel sympathetic towards the narrator. He is in a war, he has a wife, and he is not ready to leave this world. As soon as the story starts, you feel like you know this character. Therefore he is no longer a stranger to me, and the dimming of his flame puts a sense of panic into my heart. Although I have only grazed on what would be but a chapter in his life, he is somebody to me. Earlier this year one of my friend's brothers passed away. I had never imagined something so awful happening to anyone so close to me. I did not know the brother that he lost, but he was not a stranger to me. I went to the memorial and I was surprised by how many people there were there. The building was packed. I realized that these people were not just here for the loss of his brother, but they were here for the support of their family. The suffering was happening within his family, and by the end of that memorial it had spread to everyone in that room. I wanted to support my friend, but it's hard to be sympathetic when you are suffering as well. In the end I found a sense of empathy that I linked to this incident and it is something I will never forget. The routine of my life and the hundreds of others that know this family was interrupted by this incident. We all did more than create a short-lived sense of sympathy; we got on board and accepted the weight of their suffering. The boy who passed away became the king of the chessboard, and at the moment I heard of his loss, I would have sacrificed a hundred pawns to have him back.

A stranger is just a friend that you have not met yet. Although that is a broad statement, it is always nice to imagine that each stranger is a potential friend, a person you would care for and sympathize with in their suffering. Without this knowledge of their identity and personality, our sympathy for their suffering appears to be pity. But on the inside, we would all be thinking, "I'm just glad that was not me." Ambulances will continue to carry our half-hearted emotions, a speed bump in our daily routines. Our vanity is undeniable but simple to understand. Strangers are unopened books, which contain thousands of stories. "Unhappy that I am" I will continue to look out for the most important person in my life. Me.

### #13

Ideas & Impressions 4.5/5  
Presentation 5/5

**TOTAL** **9.5/10**

[Peer-assessment average 8.8/10]

Last March I travelled with a group from my school to Botswana, Africa to build houses with the organization Habitat for Humanity. While I was tremendously excited, I knew that I probably would see things that were not always pleasant or good. When I was there I noticed the usual things that I had expected to see, like incredibly small houses, skinny underfed dogs, and people trying desperately to sell things so that they could afford simple things like food or materials to build a better home. Everywhere I looked I saw a beautiful country with not enough food or shelter for everyone. Something like this is difficult because you just want to help everyone and let them have the lifestyle that you do in North America.

The house that my group was assigned to build was probably the size of my bedroom in my house at home in Canada. It was made of large brick-like materials and its shape looked almost like a rice crispy square. What surprised me was the fact that living in this house were supposed to be six people. I could not understand how they lived that way. In fact, there were so many people trying to live in the house—a grandmother, grandfather, mother, father, and two children—that the two children often had to go live with another relative so that there was enough space and enough food for them. Upon hearing this I tried to imagine what that must be like for their parents; having to give their children to another home and probably were not being able to see as much of them as if they could all live together as a family. I wondered if the children might be confused as to who their real parents were and if they would feel a real connection to them or not. I thought about how hard it must be on the children as they were not able to see their mother and father on a day-to-day basis. However, when I met the family, I saw them together and not only did I see a happy family, I saw a caring, loving, close family that I had not anticipated or expected to see. They were playing together and the mother held her little baby girl like she was made of glass and everyone had smiles on their faces. I suppose they appreciated their time together much more than another family would. They did not look like they had suffered or that the family had been broken up by physical boundaries, as they were still so emotionally connected. I was glad that the whole family would be there when we were working on the site. To get to know the family made it more important to do a good job on the house. We worked together with the family on the house, so it did not feel like we were just building it for them, we were building it with them.

Often we would see the little boy walking with his grandfather and helping him in the garden and with other tasks around the yard. It was clear that he had a special connection to his grandfather. The grandfather was 91 years old and acted about 21 years old. He was always dancing and was never caught without a grin on his aging face. When I heard him wheezing or coughing, it broke my heart because it seemed that he might be getting sick and at age 91 that is something to worry about. However, he did not seem concerned about it and went on doing things that no 91-year-old should be doing. He operated the wheelbarrow and tried to help build the house with us. He did as much work as he could possibly do, against our persuasions that he should relax and that we could do the work. He was the most remarkable man I have ever met in my life. He was incredibly skinny and it was evident that he had not lived a sheltered, peaceful life, but he was the happiest man that I ever saw. He talked all the time but no one had any idea what he was saying. When he laughed you could hear the sound of pure joy and it made everyone else smile and laugh with him. It sounded like the laugh of the character "Rafiki" from the Lion King, which suggested his great wisdom. I looked up to him just as his grandson looked up to him. He was the best role model that anyone could have. He showed us that you can be happy with so little when you are surrounded by those you love and have a positive attitude about the world. It is something that you often hear, but it is hard to internalize until you actually see it from a person like him. He inspired me every day with his ability to see past his suffering and his belief that he was the luckiest man in the world.

When I saw the picture of the tremendously underfed African child laying in the fetal position near to a bird, who is probably in a similar situation, I thought of my own experiences in Africa and of how amazing the people were, even though they had so little. This photo is one of true sadness and hopelessness. I know that this child is loved but also that he certainly needs help. A child suffering is one of the greatest tragedies in today's world and I would so much like to help this child. Things like this make one appreciate their own life so much more. However, even when something looks or seems hopeless, it may not be. That is what I learnt in Botswana. Through that amazing family I worked with, I saw that happiness is everywhere and in fact is more abundant when it is more appreciated and taken for granted less. This picture that seems to be a picture of almost death; relating a small child to that of a scavenging bird, both of which cannot find sufficient food, is not completely hopeless. There is happiness through suffering where you least expect it and after a tragedy one learns to appreciate and have a more positive outlook on life.

## #14

Ideas & Impressions 5/5  
Presentation 4.5/5

**TOTAL** **9.5/10**

[Peer-assessment average 8.8/10]

Suffering is in the eye of the beholder. Where one might find a certain situation to be amusing and another, in the same situation, may be filled with nothing but dread; dread being only one word amongst many that associate with the state of suffering. Such words may include: pain, depression, anger, fear etc.. Although, no matter which emotion one chooses to feel while suffering, it is never really one that invokes a sense of happiness. For this reason, it would seem that people have a tendency to avoid sufferance; the word itself being interpreted as something that is an inhuman thing to experience. So it is best to remain ignorant, in that way people may continue to live in a form of their own utopia created in their heads. It is safer this way, safer because suffering is contagious, and it can spring from anywhere. A child may be starving on the other side of the world, yet when this knowledge reaches our ears, we cannot help but feel as though we are responsible. The suffering of said child causes us to suffer because of the awareness we have over the fact that we are so fortunate, yet others are not; that we should be doing something to help, yet nothing happens; or just the plain fact that we now see the world as an awful place, and we suffer just by knowing we are a part of it. And so, ignorance is bliss. Then there are those that are able to enter harsh reality, and to accept suffering, and to see the positive value in it. Mother Theresa for example encourages others to suffer, not because she enjoys the suffering of others, but rather because she can see the benefits that come from it. She is aware of the reality of things, that people are "unreasonable, illogical, and self-centered", yet they should be loved anyway. Why? What in them merits being loved if they are so blinded by themselves to even acknowledge that someone cares? Or why bother succeeding, or doing good, or helping or being honest, if all it ever brings is suffering? Perhaps the answer is that, if all of those factors are avoided, then there really would be no good left in the world. It is about determining the priority of suffering in order to obtain happiness, versus avoiding suffering and never gaining anything. One must react to sufferance with an open mind, otherwise suffering is just suffering. Still, even those that are brave enough to dive into places where suffering is common, do not necessarily have the ability to correct. A picture may be worth a thousand words, but from that may rise one hundred questions, and again from that, fifty tears. A picture is seen of a child, a small, sick, starving child. Behind him, a vulture, not a dove, not a canary or a bluebird, but a bird of prey. Knowing that the only thing that could be done in that situation was to take a photograph, unable to physically intervene. Only able to stand by and watch as something so innocent becomes a symbol for destruction and suffering, and it makes us think that maybe we are the vulture. Powerful, strong, dangerous; just watching something die, waiting, waiting for what? For the problem to solve itself maybe, so that we can fly away and forget that it ever happened. It is easier that way. People are not perfect, and mistakes are often made. No one wants to endure suffering, but finding the courage to accept what comes our way allows us to experience, and hopefully come out being stronger and knowing more.

Suffering comes in many degrees, it does not necessarily mean that you must be shot to suffer. Suffering may show itself in something as simple as having to write a school exam. The tic-toc of the clock ringing in your ear, reminding you that you have so many minutes to attempt to get the answers correct. Those endless nights of studying, reading note after note, suddenly seem to be useless. "Should have studied harder". "Did we even learn this"? Then you come across one minute where you can calm yourself down. "It is just a test, and really does not determine whether or not I am smart, it is just a test". But with that thought starts the fall of the dominos. You come back to the realization that this test is worth half your grade, and all the work you put in during the semester can be destroyed by the failing of this one test. From that low final average, you wonder how you will ever end up in the university you wish to attend. And if you should find yourself at said university, how on earth are you going to be able to pay tuition. And if you obtain sufficient money, how are the exams in university going to be? Surely worse than this. Focus. Look back down at the multiple choice question. And you read the question; once, twice, a third time, maybe hoping that it will change wording. Do not know answer. Oh no, here it comes, the beginning of the end. Take a deep breath. The answer is always C, and then move on to the next question. And it repeats, over



and over; sometimes the answer being clear in your head and other times seeming like a lost cause. As you progress through the exam, there are times where your focus slips, and you exit that frantic space in your head and take notice of the awful silence that surrounds you, despite the fact that there are a hundred other students in the room with you. You associate the experience with being in a prison, a comforting thought to have at such a time. Again, you take notice of the clock, and you swear that it is laughing at you, enjoying you suffer. Focus. The exam is only two hours, and soon there will be freedom from this place. You are not rolling around on the floor as if you have gone mad like one of Shakespeare's tragic heroes, but all this suffering is going on in your head. The supervisor walks by, and all he sees is a silent, expressionless student, calmly filling in circles on a scantron card.