

Teacher's Example *Writing in the Works* Homework Twelve

Homework Twelve

Use this memoir writing to prepare for the optional exit essay, which is an application essay. Tell the story that makes you want to be what you want to be in life.

Adjust tone and level of honesty to purpose. Always use common sense.

Note: This is not an essay I would use for an application essay, not for most jobs. Thankfully, I'm already employed. ☺

Do As I Would Do If I Had Talent and Integrity

I dimly remember my Brownie scout leader and my brief time in her home. The Aqua Net buffont, paneled basement and assembly line are all a little fuzzy, but the lesson taught has lasted, much longer than my innocence. Five or six years old, wearing stiff brown cotton dresses, our troop knew the drill. We all lived in the same house, essentially, designed without variation, for Livonia was a Michigan Levittown. Single-file line, please. March downstairs. Take one cookie, drink one Dixie cup of bright colored Kool Aid, paste together pre-cut felt in predetermined patterns. *Look! A Mother* for Mother's Day, Victorian style, the ultimate era of heavenly motherly devotion. Every child expected to reach the same result arranged on recycled ground beef Styrofoam bases. From Hamburger Helper to art-substitute in less than thirty minutes. Catalogued for decades along with too many other instances, somewhere inside I have always criticized crappy lesson plans that insult my intelligence. Scenes like this made me think "Maybe," like in the musical *Annie*, I was adopted and had been born to professional parents, who lived in a more educated place like Connecticut, who did not bowl in a weekly league, who sent their offspring to Harvard.

Sr. Lorenzo's propensity for beating fourth grader Todd Morbach over the head with the window opener couldn't be good, despite the rosary around her neck. If Sr. Bernice thought our parents would allow her to berate us, she was right. Catholic kids learned not to complain. The nuns and the priest were considered infallible. Education wasn't so much the aim as discipline. Turn 'em into unquestioning contributors who won't upset their parent's relatively low expectations. I don't recall any young boy being groomed as the next JFK in our parish. Thank God for Elton John and Bernie Taupin telling me how things really are. "Sweet Painted Lady, guess it's always been the same. Getting paid, for being late," or so I heard at a tender age, the year I started my period. It took me a few years to sort of the contradicting messages: Mary, virgin, whore,

profession. When I finally heard the lyric correctly as "laid," so much of life snapped into focus. I was never a prime candidate for the club. As grade school progressed, I resisted the gobbleygook but couldn't yet pinpoint the problem because I wanted to watch *Little House on the Prairie*, not figure out what makes the world turn. While I waited for time to pass, I made due. When I got my driver's license, I faked going to church and worshipped at the altar of McDonalds, reading the Sunday *Detroit Free Press* instead of consuming the body of Christ.

By the time I reached my second and final all-girl Catholic high school, the seventies were drawing to a close, Watergate fading as disco played and burned. A sense that a big world awaited out there was dawning on me, along with the terrifying realization that I wasn't ready for it. The Felician nuns were eccentric, seeing imaginary mice and talking trash about our female bodies, our limited futures. Sr. Alexis was easy to bait and manipulate with the word "pope." Employers and college teachers and potential investors might not be so easy, it occurred to me. And I was right. When it was clear the education being pedaled was deeply flawed, a rip off, I marched into the principal's office. Sr. Desales was the worst because she knew about the damage and did nothing. With evidence in hand, I demanded she do something to improve the quality of French classes. Getting a teacher who actually spoke the language would be a good start. For a second, I had her, then so quickly my righteous victory crumbled. Sr. DeSales smiled the devil's smile. No one would believe me. No one would care. And she was right.

All professions, all people, fall prey to corruption. My past teachers have influenced my own teaching. Like a student told me once: Keep it real.