

What really makes Slavina's essay extraordinary, though, is her fluid prose. Slavina does not use hackneyed words or make grandiose statements; she keeps it simple, and the result is a clear, moving piece that seems natural, not forced. An essay that grapples with the weighty subject of a death in the family could tend toward the maudlin, but Slavina demonstrates her maturity and confidence in an understated style. Her choice not to mention cancer until the second paragraph lends the subject added force, and we realize that the essay will not be about cancer, but about her mother's bravery and love. Slavina's essay is an excellent example of the "show, don't tell" strategy; she lets her vivid descriptions and imagery express their own power without being heavy-handed.

One thing Slavina leaves out—perhaps intentionally—is any information about the circumstances of her mother's death or any time frame. We are told that she lived three years after the diagnosis, and that she persevered through treatments while being an attentive mother, but little else. While the absence of such details serves to highlight her mother's unflinching devotion, Slavina might have fleshed out more about her personal relationship with her mother and the direct effect Lyubov's illness had on her at the time. Since her essay is so tightly wrought, Slavina could have afforded more words for this kind of detail. At the same time, she could have tightened up, or eliminated, discussion of her injury in sports, which seems insignificant in comparison to her mother's illness. Slavina also takes a great risk in focusing so heavily on her mother in so short an essay. Nonetheless, Slavina succeeds in conveying her message, loud and clear, by means of the essay's tight structure and simple language.

—Rebecca D. O'Brien

"A Great Influence"

By Michelangelo V. D'Agostino, who attended a small Catholic school in Chicago, Illinois.

Albert Einstein must have been a truly quirky individual. Though a patent officer by day, he worked into the wee hours of the morning on his revolutionary theories. I can just see him with his mass of white hair splayed out on his desk catching up on some long-overdue sleep. Of all the science teachers that I have ever had, only one has been comparable to Albert Einstein; only one has been able to truly appreciate physics like Einstein and been able to instill this deep appreciation in others.

Mr. Michael Peterson walked into the classroom for the first day of AP Physics flouting the standard notions of a teacher at St. Ignatius. He wore khaki shorts, an open-necked golf shirt, and deck shoes with no socks. The most striking features of his appearance were the two dark blue semi-circles underneath his eyes. He appeared to be somewhere between a raccoon and a test subject for a psychological experiment on sleep deprivation. He was always to be found holding a mug of caffeinated beverage, whether it be Pepsi, Jolt, or Mountain Dew. He went on to inform us that he did not sleep much (as if we couldn't already tell), between teaching and working on his own theories. Like Einstein, he loved what he was doing, and he spent as much time as possible pursuing his goals.

His method of teaching was also unlike any I had previously experienced. He emphasized pragmatism and creativity through hands-on projects and creative writing assignments. One of the major projects that we pursued was the building of a go-cart. For three weeks we hammered and greased our way into a better understanding of what we were studying. One of the major problems we encountered was with the brake system: we just couldn't figure out how to make it work. With a

wry smile on his face, Mr. Peterson said, "I would advise that you figure it out. Brakes are a pretty important part of a car." He taught us that the answer will not always be in a book. There will not always be a teacher to swoop down like a guardian angel with all the answers. We successfully worked out the problem ourselves, and our brakes were able to stop on a dime. Okay, maybe a quarter. Einstein once said that knowledge is nothing without imagination. Mr. Peterson truly comprehended this ideal and stood behind it.

Obviously his methods worked. People were interested in science, and grades reflected it. We all looked forward to coming to class every day. The administration did not appreciate his efforts though. He was told that he must either teach from the text in a more orthodox manner, or he must leave. He said that it would be unfair to sell his students down the river. Consequently, he lost his job.

Towards the end of the year, Mr. Peterson faced his uncertain future with composure. He said that for all he knew he might be flipping greasy hamburgers this time next year, but he didn't mind. If Albert Einstein was a patent officer, why couldn't a fast-food worker revolutionize science? Someday Mr. Michael Peterson could be receiving the Nobel Prize for physics. And you know what? I wouldn't be the least bit surprised. He taught me to love science, to value creativity, and to be true to my ideals. In this way he has forever influenced my life.

ANALYSIS

The essay highlights aspects of the author's personality via an examination of how that personality has been affected by another individual, in this case, an unorthodox schoolteacher. The essay proceeds by describing this teacher, and his interaction with the author, concluding with a description of how that interaction has imparted upon the author a series of important lessons in both science and in life.

What makes the essay work is its strong sense of organization. The reader is taken smoothly from the enticing introduction, through the description of the author's teacher, to the eventual conclusion of the teacher being fired and the author's reflection on the teacher's influence. The essay's use of analogies and similarities is also effective. The description of the teacher's independent work in physics strengthens the reader's appreciation for the lessons of independent thought and problem-solving that seem to be imparted upon the author through his classroom experiences. The analogy between the author's teacher and famous theoretical physicist Albert Einstein also showcases the author's appreciation for another one of life's ironic lessons—that sometimes the most brilliant minds and teachers are also the most unorthodox and misunderstood ones.

The essay could be improved, however, by giving us a better background on the author's views and ideals prior to his interaction with the physics teacher. Although the reader is given a clear view of what lessons the author has learned via this interaction, it is not clear as to how much of a transformation has truly occurred in the author's character. By describing the author's character prior to his experiences with the teacher, the essay could serve to better position these experiences within the course of the author's development.

—Elliot Shmukler