

Inspiration from *The House on Mango Street*

Vignettes Linked By Theme

In the same manner as Cisneros (but on a much smaller scale), you will compose (at least) three vignettes that are linked thematically. Our objective is to make a point about what we notice in the world and about ourselves, but without forcing the lesson on our reader; vignette pieces are an argument in and of themselves: our lives consist of little moments that sometimes tell us the same thing in new ways.

Use small scenes to link a common theme/argument about the human condition.

*

To get started, you might think about places or people that matter to you, *small* moments that have had an impact or have defined you in some way, or an emotion that recurs in your life.

The journals you have been writing for the last few weeks are perfect “starters” for this essay. You have already completed the brainstorming.

Expected techniques (also see rubric):

- use **concrete images** that have significant detail to reveal the tone and conflict in the essay;
- create **consistency within images** to establish a dominant impression in the essay;
- make clear the **impact without overtly saying so**;
- use **voice** to keep your reader engaged;
 - that is, use **concise**, sometimes lyrical, language; avoid wordiness, adverbs, etc;
- be consistent with the **universal theme** within your piece.
- use **multiple small scenes to develop your theme**;
 - that is, use a **narrative arc** to ensure a beginning, middle, and end within each vignette AND in the essay as a whole (it might not tell the whole story, but still offers a sense of completion).

Even though your essay is very much about *you*, because you are so specific, crafty, and profound, the essay offers themes that matter to everyone. The more you re-create the experience, the more you engage the reader. (In mature writing, this occurs without the writer telling us it has occurred.)

My first reaction to this assignment is that I'm _____ because:

Other expectations:

- You must break a “conventional” grammatical rule on purpose and be able to justify why you did so.
- You must have a **recurring** symbol or motif in your essay and justify why you chose it. (For example, in *Mango*, she uses windows or clouds or hair, etc.)
- You must be able to explain and defend your theme and how it is universal.
- You must go through all steps of the process before submitting your final essay:
 - Complete journals.
 - Read all supplemental handouts/examples on imagery and conflict.
 - Peer review rough draft of your first vignette.
 - Conference your first vignette with me.
 - Peer review your complete rough draft.
 - Apply revision techniques to your complete rough draft.
 - Complete reflection/author’s statement.

Stuck?

- Look at your journals. I’ve secretly tricked you into starting a thousand things. Or write more journals.
- Within your journals, look at two different entries that might *seem* unrelated because they were written at different times. Is there secretly something in common?
- Think of objects, people, or moments that matter to you and how they might relate.
 - I once wrote an essay about a wedding I attended but through different scenes of people smoking. Do something that like that—one event, multiple scenes, like little snapshots taken throughout the night. Or maybe your vignettes take place over a number of years. There are basically no rules for topic, other than it’s different from anything that’s been done. 😊

“Banned” topics:

- How much you love [insert cliché holiday here]
- Anything involving waking up to an alarm clock
- News of a death
- Most sports-related topics unless you can absolutely move them beyond the cliché (no “I won/lost the big game” or “life is like a race” or “I tried hard to get over my injury,” etc. I’ve heard that story already.)

100 points.

Vignette Essay Rubric

A

The essay offers a creative, personal experience that uses voice, imagery, figurative language, and other purposeful literary devices to establish a universal theme. Imagery abounds: there is very little abstract language. **The essay as a whole, and each vignette, has conflict.** A complex (that is, not “obvious”) symbol or motif is developed in *each* vignette, and it evolves rather than is merely repeated. Imagery drives the conflict, voice makes the reader invest. The purpose or theme is implied, not overtly stated. These essays make the topic personal, yet universal.

The author has exceptional control of language, thus avoids wordiness. Absolutely no cliché regarding topic or language. The essay is not “over-written”; strong essays play with language poetically. It is clear the essay has been revised (not just edited) multiple times with consideration of overall purpose in mind: the author has heeded the advice of the supplemental reading, the peer review, and the teacher conference. The author cares for their ideas and about the language that carries them. The difference between an A and an A- is likely **freshness, originality, amount of risk**, and control of language and imagery. The sure mark of an A is that the reader will find themselves telling someone else about it.

B

The essay offers a creative, personal experience that uses purposeful literary devices to establish a universal theme. While there is vivid imagery, at times abstract language takes the reader out of the experience. **The essay has conflict.** A symbol or motif appears in *each* vignette, but it may not develop fully as the essay progresses. The purpose or theme is implied, not overtly stated, and the topic is universal.

The author mostly avoids wordiness. Absolutely no cliché regarding topic, but there may be one or two language clichés. The essay plays with language for effect. It is clear the essay has been revised (not just edited) multiple times with consideration of overall purpose in mind: the author has heeded the advice of the supplemental reading, the peer review, and the teacher conference. The author cares for their ideas and about the language that carries them. The ideas are original, but could be fine-tuned with stronger, more purposeful imagery, and the author could’ve taken more risks.

C

The essay offers a personal experience that uses voice and imagery to establish a universal theme, although that theme may be cloudy or inconsistent. While there moments of strong imagery, abstract language, wordiness, or redundancy makes it difficult for the reader to invest. The essay has conflict, but the conflict may be superficial; however, the topic is universal. Language is typical or predictable, and the writer is more concerned with “rule following” or formula than his or her personal ideas. There are moments where the author neglected the curriculum, peer review, or conference—the final draft may be a facsimile of the rough draft or simply has minor changes.

D

The essay is driven by cliché ideas or language, and it appears that the author has not fully invested or considered the impact of the theme or conflict. Abstract language abounds, wordiness is distracting, and conflict may be superficial or nonexistent. There are clear moments where the author neglected the curriculum, peer review, or conference—the final draft may be a facsimile of the rough draft or simply has minor changes.

F

The essay does not exist, is living at the bottom of your backpack, is on fire, or all components of the essay and/or process have not yet been completed.

Name:

Timeline/Check-in Tracking

- I've read all of the handouts in class and posted on Google Classroom.
- I've read at least five essays from the *Brevity* archive, and I've listed them in my journal and written a two sentence reaction to each.
- I've written my first rough draft: one of my three vignettes (three copies printed).
- I've completed a peer review with my abovementioned first vignette.
- I've prepared three **very specific questions** for my conference with Ms. Prokott.
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
- I've conferenced with Ms. Prokott _____ and have taken notes from our conference and set a specific goal/know my steps moving forward.
- I've completed a rough draft of my vignettes (at least three vignettes).
- I've completed a formal peer review of my completed rough draft with at least three other students. They have written on my draft, but also, their signatures:
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
- I've applied the "big, fat revision" to my essay and determined which techniques were helpful for my final draft. (The essay with these edits will be submitted alongside my final.)
- I've typed and proofread my reflection (MLA), which answers the following in **specific detail**; **I've quoted my own writing** (1+ pages):
 1. What is my theme? How did I achieve that theme? (i.e., How is my essay universal?)
 2. What symbol, motif, and/or metaphor recurred in my essay, and why? What does it represent, or how does it tie to my theme?
 3. Which grammatical convention(s) did I break on purpose, and why?
 4. How/where did I take risks in my essay?
 5. What is the tone of my essay? How would I describe my voice?
 6. Which editing technique was most effective for me, and why? What was my method for revision? (E.g., did I start with a blank screen, did I edit on my printed copy, etc.)
What did I learn about the writing process? **What are two goals moving forward?**
- I've submitted the following (in this order, starting on top): the rubric/this sheet, my reflection, my complete rough draft with edits, my final draft.