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Personal Essay/Memoir

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Grade 12

Loving Little Alliterations in Literature

My life revolves around English, literally. It's the language I was born into and speak (although not always correctly); it's the language that fills every billboard I see and every test I try to pass. It's the language I am taught in and told to analyze in school, but also it is the language I find so fun to play with.

Yeah, I just put fun, English and play all in the same sentence, and by now I'm sure millions of high school students around the country are screaming to whatever lord they worship for the safe reclamation of my soul. Except, I don't think I'd want to be saved from the lovely iron metaphors and rock solid syntax that surrounds me. Even though most students balk at the idea of examining a poem by E.E. Cummings, I relish the idea of picking a poem apart line by line and shaking the little details from its pages. The words and phrases that personify a love affair with literature, and life itself; is in Cummings own words:

“we are for each other: then
laugh, leaning in my arms
for life's not a paragraph
and death I think is no parenthesis” (untitled, E.E. Cummings).

A quote beautiful in its illusion of love and writing alone, but it's even more profound when paired with the rest of the verse.

It is this depth of love for poetry, for words, that pulled me further into the welcome grasp of language play. At first I struggled to find meanings, as all beginners do. Over time I developed my own style, a flavor not unlike Cumming's – by now you must realize he is my favorite poet—but with a certain stream of conscious flair, one that tends to tie pieces of lines together and separate them at the same time.

“what will happen when i die?

will i—
see a flash of white light at the end—
of a dark tunnel
arrive at golden, pearly gates
with a white feather—
pen; to write down my name
spend eternity—“

This short excerpt from one of my own poems shows the way in which lines flow together to form meanings entirely new but mesh with the overall idea of the poem, and it illustrates how I cut off my written thoughts to punctuate, to emphasize the importance of themes and images. This patient puppeteer play drew me into writing; it gave me a wide new appreciation for the effort and cunning slid into a poem by its author. Noticing and utilizing this skill opened my eyes into a wider world of wonder as well.

Now I find myself doing this in my sleep. Yes, in my sleep. I'm not lying, the flow of language is so engraved into my soul that my unconscious thoughts are plagued with it. The internal word play is so strong I find myself stopping in the midst of yard work and pondering out loud to my poor mother, the outlet to many of my day dreaming musings, why it is that we turn words like "terrific," "wicked," and "awesome" from their original meanings (terror filled, evil, and something of awe) to exclamations of excitement and happiness. While it may have nothing to do with the leaves I am supposed to rake up, it still crosses my mind and stays there for many days.

This epiphany has sent me in a search for more amusing changes of meaning and complex words with precise meanings. Like prevaricate. That fun little word, a word not in the average teen vocabulary, but a skill we all know how to use. To prevaricate, a verb, is easily defined as just a lie but, more accurately, to speak or act in an evasive manner, to tell only a partial truth and not the whole. This fun little word has tickled my delight with the new sound to roll off my tongue and with its precise meaning. Although I may not have found it a home in a poem, I still hang on to it, stealing it away in the well-kept portions of my brains, those areas where I can silently ponder over definitions and letter sounds, wondering why it is I'm drawn to

these specific words and when can I use them to their best benefit. Adumbrate, juxtapose, prevaricate, parsimonious, and cardiomyopathy, to name a few.

I don't just sit around and think about the language. I mean I will, but let's face it, even I can bore myself with the word adumbrate after a good 32 hours. I write. I am a writer, and I am proud to say that. I focus most of my attention on an incredibly long, in-depth chunk of prose that I've been working at strand by strand since 2008. However, whenever the mood strikes me, or rather flares up because I'm always in the mood to write, I toss out a piece of poetry. Or maybe just a poetic thought that in two weeks time could be a full blown 75 line piece. A few of my ideas floating around now are simple lines:

“College;

Four white walls eating away your soul”

and

“I've been staring at pale yellow walls for what seems like hours,

And it's times like these that I realize

That the fast track, crash collision course I'm on;

Has violently blown up”

These two pieces are supposed to go together, but I have yet to tie a knot or build a web interlocking them, so for now they lie humbly in a word document staring at me, waiting to become something grand and intricate.

My inspiration comes from every little thing in my life. I've written a poem about a cold Pop-Tart® I happened to be shoving down my gullet, and I've written little ditties on the disillusioned exhaustion that perforates many a relationship. I find that I don't have to go anywhere to get my inspiration, yet I love traveling on family vacations and being able to take in more of the world to paint an accurate picture of my thoughts. As an example, once my mom sold one of our old couches on eBay or Craig's list, and the man who bought it was such a character he quickly prompted a quirky little snapshot of his life:

“He drove up in a big white van;

The one he used to ship nuclear products around.

A child of the 60's,

His hair was grey,
His teeth weren't all there,
But he smiled.
And on that cold and bitter day,
he gladly took our couch away."

I tried to single out the last rhyme to give it the most meaning, but I also urged to tie it in further to the poem. Thus the line grey was to keep the rhythm, to make the poem whole. As if I wasn't done yet, I added a preferred slant rhyme to the first two lines to incompletely mirror the last two. I had fun trying to synchronize the poem in a way it could accurately catch what I wanted, for this man truly was something special.