

Scholarly Traditions

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Paradox Interactive 2020, a group of medieval knights on horses heading to a castle.

In my junior year of high school a tradition continued in my AP Language and Composition class. A class I signed up for in an attempt to tempt me with the prospect of college credit, and make myself determined to succeed. Yet when entering the digital classroom I was met with an image of a monarch fully dressed up in a suit and tie sitting in his home office, while I sat at my desk, in my bedroom, in my pajamas at 8am. He introduced himself as Mr. Engelking, an English king surrounded by peasants. He broke the class into breakout rooms and tasked us with introducing ourselves and getting to know each other. I sat staring at the screen at two blank faces in complete silence. Until Mr. Engelking enters and asks if it's going well, which after 30 seconds a chat responds with "yes". The zoom classroom ends and the day continues. The next day, again he sits there in a suit and tie, in a period where the world is chaotic and uncertain, the king stands unphased. Everyday I saw Mr. Engelking and his suit of armor, he stood so rigid,

unemotional, even through a screen he had an intimidating presence. To the point where every morning I had anxiety before entering his domain. Every time I turned in an assignment it felt like it was going before the king for judgment. My performance and grade suffered as a result and by the end of it all; I got a B- in the class and a 2 on my AP test, failing to earn college credit. Continuing a long standing tradition of never getting an A in a rigorous English class. After that I didn't sign up for another rigorous English course, and was ready to just take the required ones for senior year.

Summer waned and in person school returned. During the summer I received an email that my schedule wouldn't be possible and had adjustments made, and that one of the adjustments was that a very rigorous English class, that had a reputation of being incredibly hard, was put on my schedule. Called CIS Introduction to Literature, I knew that I was screwed. Yet on the first day I enter the class I hadn't even signed up for, and see the room has its walls adorned in ancient references spanning the world from Greek mythology and Native American cultures. In the center of the room is a lectern covered in poorly done paint of key moments of Odysseus' Odyssey. I felt there was a historic precedent that this was a class that was meant to be. That fate had rolled its dice and I knew that the combination of my entire life was leading to this moment where I would be standing in this classroom. Then a man walked into the classroom, his appearance made him look like a rugged Bob Ross, wearing jeans and a buttoned up long sleeve shirt, but instead of manipulating a world of paint he contemplated the final truths of a world of ink. He was unique, he didn't call us students, no, instead he called us scholars and he called himself Mr. McGillis. He had three months to turn us into scholars with the ability to surpass college reading classes with utmost ease. He made it apparent that college credit could be earned if one could endure a torment of rigorous assignments. I was put in a similar situation as last year



Odysseus Odyssey Vase 480BC, a vase depicting a man tied to a boat surrounded by bird people.

but this time was different, instead of Mr. Engelking's fear tactics there was Mr. McGillis' aura of light heartedness and a gaze of I know you could do better. He had us write journals while reading books, at first I thought it annoying but doing them made me enjoy writing. Writing for me was always either notes or essays, I always thought about what I was going to write, but the journals made me not think about what I was writing. The journals encouraged me to let loose a barrage of random thoughts, those thoughts were theories of the book's story or gushing over a character.

The assignment I remember the most was a surprise assignment while we were reading a book. The assignment was to just go outside into the wild for 30 minutes and then reflect about it on paper. I remember getting excited when hearing it, already knowing the perfect place to hangout in the wild, my. My backyard is connected directly to a forest which I always wanted to go into but was too scared when I was young and too distracted when I was older. I put on my jacket and walked into the woods while a light bit of snowfall was beginning. I climbed over a hill and stood at the edge of a clearing, peering through the branches and saw a family of deer staring back at me, realizing I would be a worthless hunter. I had a staring contest with the deer and lost.



Saint Petersburg, Russia 2000, a snowy unkempt forest with branches sticking out everywhere.

Then afterwards I went home and wrote. While I was writing I was taken straight back to the forest, every moment was replaying in my mind that then transitioned to my paper; I was able to reflect more with every word I wrote down. Writing opened my eyes and let me see nature as a tapestry of chaos. Mr. McGillis' class made me realize that writing could be fun, that your emotions while writing are shown in your writing without even trying.

Mr. McGillis made me realize that how you feel when writing is what your readers will feel when they read your writing, but at that point it was too late for me. My grade had suffered from writing other essays without passion, into a C-. With only a few weeks remaining, I now knew the secrets to writing and for the final remaining essay, wrote with a passion and clawed my way back to a B-, following tradition. The same grade as Mr. Engelking's class, yet the result feels completely different. It felt like I had learned a life long lesson in Mr. McGillis' class, instead of feeling like I was being judged before a king in Mr. Engelking's class. After reading this look at how you feel, and imagine how I felt when writing this.