

One Moment of Reflection:

A Creative Seeking for Creativity

Amr Almgawish

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## *Introduction: Pause the Movie. Eat Popcorn. Rewind.*

When I dropped AP Literature, I had to join one of two classes: English 12 honors, or Creative writing. Guess what? I ended up choosing the Creative writing class because we have a connection. I am a creative guy. It is a creative class. Boom! I am attending it. I thought that it was my chance to fill in the puzzle of my "creative" personality with the missing piece. And here is how I am filling it:

I was so happy, but it started to be a struggle. Well, honestly, I did not even know what "Creative writing" meant. Since my sophomore year, I learned how to write formally, argumentatively, and seriously. Being the Secretary General of JMP, practicing the SAT essay, and convincing people to do what I want to do all day all time, I became professional at arguing. However, I forgot how to dream, to reflect, and to breathe so I decided actually to pause and reflect on my life so far especially my experience at King's. Who I am? What did I learn? How would I share it with others? Let me tell you a secret; I read 12 creatively written books after the moment Ms. Emily said that "this is NOT a formal English Class." Three weeks later, after reading and writing and asking and trying to progress...

This portfolio is here to show you my level of "creativity" before and after a month.

The first piece sums it all up; you can call it, the secret to my success at King's. The secret to doing all of these activities and courses. To be called by a teacher: "the most active student on campus." I wanted to be a reflection of the right side of my story at King's and the creative writing class. Believe me, the effort I have put to make it happen and to impress myself and teacher is great. It is the real definition of progress regarding my progress at King's and my favorite class at King's.

The second piece, "Mama Ya Mama," in Arabic means "Mom oh Mom" in English. It is a very different piece that I wanted to write to my mom to show her how special she is and how unique the education that she gave me. In it, I tried to tell a story about my childhood especially in the "do you remember" part of it. I decided to complete it when Ms. Emily said that "this could be a very powerful piece." Here I am showing her how powerful its message and writing style became after three months in her class.

My third piece was the hardest to write; I have never written something that strange. I did not know that I can write something like that; I felt it was another JMP speech or Capstone essay that I should submit for a Creative writing class. I tried my best then, but at the end, I

had "to loosen up," Ms. Emily said. Still, although it was one of the hardest, I made it magnificent as it tells a beautiful story. The way three special teachers made me learn a unique language. Despite its ups and downs, I was able to play it, the French horn, and I was able to write this essay, "New beginnings." "New Beginnings" does not only mark my beginning in learning how to play the French horn, but how to write and write creatively.

Finally, "if you really really really know," was the really really really hard piece as it was very personal and I had to get very courageous to share it. I can't lie and say that I was happy when I had to share it first. I freaked out. I did not know what to do. I just expected my teacher to be as racist to me as everybody else who has known me. But the lovely Ms. Emily was not. "Thank you, Ms. Emily!" She even made me write about it. Now, I can enjoy eating popcorn.

Now, I can press rewind. One moment of reflection is a big moment, to be honest. It had so much impact on my life whether while reading it over and over again. Or feeling free to share it with some people. Ms. Emily, I even chose one of these pieces to be my college essay, simply because these pieces are the finest of my writings. The best I ever wrote. I am much more than a writer before. I am much more creative now. Flip the page and enjoy!

## Mama Ya Mama!

I grabbed the stylus, my hands shivered, the stylus dropped, so I held it with strength and determination.

I wanted to write to you mother, yes Mama, but I was unable to write, so I complained to my mother.

Alone, you need elongated analysis,

Mom, a word of three letters, bearing all the meanings of love, beauty, and tenderness.

Mom, do you remember me when I was a petite child clutching your skirt on the first day of preschool?

I felt like a plant being taken apart from the soil but its roots striving not to leave the Earth.

Do you remember me crying when I lost my toy, and when you went and got me a new one from the money you had left instead of getting yourself the makeup kit you wanted?

I felt like I was stealing something from you, but remembered that I took your freedom a long time ago.

Do you remember that my naughtiness around the house, but you hugging me and giving me a Nutella sandwich instead?

Believe me; it was savored differently because it was made with love.

Do you remember the jealousy that I felt when Yamama was sleeping at your warm hand instead of me?

You still made me sleep on your lap, as I couldn't close my eyes without being attached to you!

Do you? Do you? Do you?

words bunching in my mind, tongue stammering with what to say,

Does it say that you are the first teacher?

or does it say that you are the first companion?

or it says that you are the first love and affection?

or it says that you are a piece of me?

Mama, you taught me that life is pleasing if taken patiently,

I've learned from you that the most beautiful of this world is you, listening to your voice chanting Fairouz, sniffing the morning coffee you brew each morning, watching a late movie each Thursday evening with you, biting your luscious pancakes on a Friday morning, advising me of what to pick whenever we are shopping, facetimeing me each morning and night to motivate me and say, "this is your day! It's your year! You can do it!", giving me all your embraces and love when I arrive each weekend from King's, and gazing into my eyes through our bridge of connection to tell me you were proud!

Oh, Mom!

A hug from you makes me ignore my concerns, washes my grief and stops my misery.

Mommy, here I am standing haughtily today, saying here's my mom!

Here's who has the great merit of my success:

-Birds are twittering. Earth is flourishing. Peace is pouring. -

Mama!

## The King of King's

It's 7:00 pm, should I run to the French club meeting? or shut the butterflies in my stomach? would I have enough time to see my creative writing teacher tonight? "You are on duty this evening! Don't be late!" oh yeah, and my college essay final draft is due on tonight.. wow, I wish I lived in a world with 27 hours a day, maybe that way I can satisfy myself and everyone. But ouch, it doesn't function like this, let's get back to reality.

Choosing six challenging courses for my senior year at King's, leading six key activities, conferences, and clubs, and participating in another six has given me "the best opportunity to demonstrate my love of learning." Yet, it has driven me crazy sometimes as I had to find or actually make time for all of that I want to do and have to do like submitting homework, calling friends and family and perfecting every single detail in all I do. well, let me tell you something: I am capable of doing all of that, in the best way I can and better than anyone. "How?" Great question, read on as I am going to give you the top 3 Tips for a successful-perfected-organized-manageable-worthy lifetime at high school!

### Do you have to use a planner?

If 20 courses, activities, and responsibilities can fit in a single week, where else can they fit? In a planner. Do you know that little white book, with some golden illustrations, and "King's Academy," written in a big bold red font on top of it, that we usually get with our uniforms? It is the major key to success! Just divide it into three main sections; a short term goals section, a midterm goals section, and a long-term goals section (actually page).

Listen up! The most critical part is... the short-term section! "Why?" Because it is where you list all of the tasks you have to do for the next day or week, to reach and to stay alive. I like to call it the "kaziye," (An Arabic word that means gas station and at King's it is the canteen) because it is very similar to a station where you fill your car with oil or your stomach with food to keep on moving on. It usually includes the daily homework, assignments, and tasks that you have to finish. The list can start with an essay that is due on the next day, to shopping that you want to do this weekend. Most importantly, always write everything -unless you have a photogenic memory,- and cross everything you finish (it is as if you are paying yourself for what you have done). During my first year at King's, I had trouble myself. My first midterm report was pretty bad, and I did not know what to do. I did not have any goals in mind, and I was not prepared.

What comes next? "Mid-term-goals?" Correct! But they actually come first in the planner; look for that section that comes after expectations and the Tawjihi (The Jordanian national exam, equivalent to APs in the USA) parts, you will find a yearly planner. There, write what you

want to achieve in a period that ranges from next month to next year. This section could include an end-of-the-term grade you want to get in a subject, a college you want to get into -if you are a senior like me,- or just a trip to a place you want to visit.

And you end your planner up, with what you want to do last. The goal you want to achieve that made you "work, work, work, work, work," the desire you need for yourself that made you read this and write and follow up with that annoying planner, and the time and place you imagine yourself in 10-years or 30-years from now. It is one goal. one life. one dream. And it will only take you one page; the last page or the cover of your planner to write it on. By the end of the term, I was able to raise my grades through hard work, less sleep, and budgeting my time more wisely. It takes a lot of work to master time management but eventually it will become like second nature.

### what's more important: An essay or a test?

okay, now that you have stored all of these lists and goals and tasks and responsibilities. Can you do them all at the same time? Maybe. I can't. Therefore, it is so easy to arrange them in the order of what is more important and of what comes next.

For example, let's say today is Sunday, I have a Creative writing essay due on Thursday, a Math test due on Tuesday, a school meeting announcement, a JAVA homework due on the third period of the next day, and a presentation due on the first class. what do we start with? why?

Step one is to arrange the list sequentially: presentation, JAVA homework, school meeting announcement, math test, and Creative writing essay. It seems like now the list is over and I shall start with the presentation and end with the essay. This can work sometimes, but it is not always right. So what's next?

"Step two?" Yeah! It is the most important step as we rearrange the list by importance. Many factors play a significant part in our order such as what weighs more on our grades, the number of opportunities we have, and the deadlines. Thus, here is how my new list would look: presentation, math test, JAVA Homework, Creative writing essay, then school meeting announcement. "How??"

The presentation comes first because it is the closest as it is due on next day's morning. Secondly, Math because I need two days to study to get a good test grade that weighs a lot. Thirdly, JAVA as I can do it in the break the next day before the next period, and I know it would take me 15 minutes. Fourthly, Creative writing essay, as I have another 3 days to write several drafts, revise it and submit it supremely. And lastly, comes the school meeting



announcement as we have another meeting on Thursday and the event doesn't happen before then.

woah! Doesn't this feel like magic? Now I have organized all that was seeming unmanageable to be done, and not that only. I have done it all. Perfectly. "Perfect!" Thank you! Oh, and to do that on your planner use highlighters or underlining.

**Avoid distractions. Set a time limit. Allow distractions.**

"Distractions?" Come on! You all know what I mean. "Umm, phones?" Correct. Excellent. Good job. Yeah, we live in the 21st century, and our magical device that connects us to everyone else can also disjoin us from living the moment and from uniting our eyes, ideas, ears, and thoughts to that one thing we are doing at the moment. "Superman can multitask!" Normal human beings can focus on one task at a time only.

So your study time should be your phones rest time. You need food. It requires electricity. You have organs that work 24/7, but you sleep. It has processors, hardware, and software that are always ready for you to use, but they also need to cool and rest. And you need to focus on your current task and save at least "30 minutes per 2 hours?" -Per my experience- leave it away charging. And here you go, you saved yourself time, cooled your device down, and got some free time before you sleep. Again. woah!

Talking about time, you can also save yourself time by setting some time limits. Firstly, estimate how much time you need to do each task. Next, follow that period. "Two steps?" Yeah! But actually follow them and go back to what you haven't done at the end.

I said, "allow distractions." "what? You also just said avoid distractions!" I know, but I cannot ignore the fact that I depend on these distractions all day long. Sometimes, I am in the school meeting, and I don't have my planner carried around. "what do you do?" I open the Reminders <sup>(1)</sup> application and create the list of tasks I need to do. This app is fantastic as you can arrange your tasks by time or topic, and even ask it to remind you. Hey, Siri <sup>(2)</sup>! Can I use you all the time, though? "Yes, the entire day, until the moment you start studying. Move all that I have saved for you to your physical planner, and let me go rest." Okay! Thank you! "My pleasure. As always."

Finally, I can write "finally." You saw that? It is so easy to manage your time, even in the hardest and busiest environments you choose to live in. Just, figure out what you have to do, the time you need to do it and utilize your resources intelligently. Now I can officially announce that you are the King of King's.

(1), (2): "Reminders" and "Hey Siri" are trademarks of Apple Inc.

## New Beginnings

The harmony. The emotions. The highs and lows. I was charmed by what they were doing. It was my first time seeing a full orchestra, and I was absolutely enamored, so I went to the conductor and asked if I could join. Nervous, I went up to her, unsure what I was thinking. I did not know how to play an instrument. I built up the courage and asked her anyway: "You came in at the nick of time! Go to Ms. Nadine, and you can start classes with her this week."

It was another Wednesday evening, I was new, and I did not know anyone at Kings except a few. My newest friend was called Hani. She was so sweet, and we were having dinner when she said: "Shit! It is 6:15, I have to run to the orchestra!" I did not want to stay alone, so I went with her. I sat in the auditorium and started observing what was going on.

I only had one free period a week, but I wanted to learn the French horn too. I was torn. It was an instrument I have only seen on TV and never expected to play, seemingly simple yet time-consuming, I felt up to this challenge.

On the day of the first class, I met Ms. Nadine, whom I did not recognize at first because I did not know her and she did not look Arab, despite her seemingly Arabic name. "Are you Ms. Nadine?" I inquired, nervously. "Yeah, I am. Welcome to the French Horn class!" I did not know what to expect, but I thought it would be an easy instrument to learn because I thought I only had to blow and press one of three valves. Boy was I wrong.

Apparently, I thought I had heard the full musical scale that consists of 8 notes when she played. So I was shocked when I saw her moving her fingers, but only a few notes coming out. I asked her, "Are you playing for real?". She said, "Yeah just watch and listen again!" Then she gave it to me, and said, "It is your time to start!"

She was right; it was my day to start that new adventure that would take so much time and effort. An experience that turned into a burning passion that needs to be achieved to work on and to obtain self-satisfaction. I always tried to watch her lips moving but could only see them expanding and contracting. I wanted to see the way she was setting her tongue but never could and was always dependent on her explanation and my imagination. When playing, I had to think of how to move my lips, which valve to control, the sound of the note, the tempo of it, and what I should play next, all at the same time.

It was getting harder, and I was still not capable of playing. One weekend, I stayed at school just to practice playing the horn all day long. It was like a race from the dining hall back to the classroom trying my best to get some notes right and to make myself and Ms. Nadine

proud. I wanted her to feel like she is investing her time because she was teaching me in her free class as well.

The end of the second term approached, and I still did not know how to play the f-major scale - a basic musical scale -, I felt very pessimistic and thought of leaving because I was not learning anything (or at least I thought that!). I spoke to a teacher in whom I confided and whose opinion I respected a lot (Ms. Janan). She told me to give it another shot. Moreover, that was when the sign of the equation changed.

I kept taking classes with her and eventually decided not to give up. Attending the orchestra in the afternoon added a much sweeter taste to my school life. Besides it being hectic, it represented the 2 hours where I get to leave campus and go to a world of my own. However, as the clock strikes 7:15, Cinderella would lose everything and go back to reality.

Having twice the time for practice has helped a lot and allowed me to experience performing. I tried to play as precisely as I could we were approaching to the spring festival and I even invited my parents because I wanted them to come and to introduce them to the people that changed my life, and show them the changes that they made.

It was another Wednesday evening but today was the day of the performance. I was very excited that I went an hour before, and was waiting in my jet black suit that I had carefully picked. I was holding my horn with extreme care, doing some breath exercises and reviewing the complicated process of playing all together.

The piece started, and my part was nearing and I was very nervous that I thought my heart beats where the sound of the drums. It was finally my part, and I closed my eyes and started. I felt like I have memorized the piece because of the endless times I practiced, but I still had that fear inside of me. I opened my eyes to see my parents and friends all clapping while standing, it felt like a moment of glory. Not only to me but to those superwomen who made what I did possible.

Ms. Janan who saved me. Ms. Nadine who taught me how to speak a new language. The experience that brought me to life. Being a senior now I feel very proud to see that happen and very thankful for that dinner I had with Hani. Sometimes those unexpected moments are the ones that make the huge change. French Horn is my passion and an instrument that I inhale and exhale through to stay alive!

## If you really really really knew me!

Coming from a Syrian, Druze family, I have learned to adapt. The adaptation was essential as an Arab in an international school, as a Syrian living in Jordan, and finally, as a Druze residing in a Muslim country, where we are a minority not religiously recognized, meaning that we are forced to learn about Islam in school, have the word "Muslim" on our IDs, are surrounded by ISIS and other terrorist militias in Syria who want to kill us, and have no place to settle or live a safe life.

I remember my mom saying on my 12th birthday, "we are not Muslims Amr, we are Druze, and nobody should know." It was an unusual present that transformed me into my adult self immediately, making me ask, "what is Druze? Is it different from the Islamic theology class I have been taking all these years?" She paused then said, "we are a small religious minority, characterized by extreme secrecy!" why shouldn't people know about us? How are we different? And the list of questions in my head kept growing. My parents always gave me short answers while I had to hide a secret I did not understand.

Eventually, I started to understand what my parents were saying. In my Islamic theology class, I sat at the end of the classroom hiding from my curious teacher who simply asked, "where are you from?" I said hesitantly, "I am from As-Suwayda in Syria." Then he asked instantly, "are you Druze?" At that moment, there was silence in the class, and everybody was staring at my mouth, "No!" I said. I could not tell the truth; I was afraid of him criticizing me in class. I feared to have a troubled year because other students think of Druze as Kuffaar (people who do not believe in Allah, the God of Muslims) because we were once part of Islam and left it in the middle ages. Later that year, I attempted to deliver a presentation about various religions, trying to explain my religion as much as I could, "undercover." why undercover? Because if not, the rest of my high school career would be full of embarrassment and ridicule and racism.

It has been a serious dilemma when following my beliefs because when I think of a right path to follow, I am not allowed to make up my mind. I cannot compare my religion to any other when my knowledge is pretty limited or without being allowed to discuss religion freely.

I wanted to adapt and to do so; I had to live try and live with traditions other than my own. I remember my friend who used to come to me each night to study. Study. Pray. One day, it was prayer time, and he had to pray, so he thought we would do it together. I said, "yes" but my heart was pumping very fast cause I did not know how to pray. what to do. what to say. I only hid behind him and tried to mimic him in that two by 2 meters room. It was hard. It will be hard. I think did the right thing.