

Share, Learn and Connect

March 11, 2010

Evocation and Revelation: Helping Students Find their Voice in the College Essay Part I: Knowing Oneself

- **Theory behind the format of the essay: Dr. Pat Wolfe**, a specialist in the human mind, states that our brains remember information when it is presented in the form of a story. Think about stories you were told as a child, such as Little Red Riding Hood, Bible stories, and family stories, and you will see that you remember information/morals/advice when it is told to you in the form of a story. The college essay is the same way.
- Writing the college essay causes most students to “freeze” or “become paralyzed.” **What can you do to help students loosen up and embrace the college essay?**
- **First Step: Find ways to help a student get to “know oneself.”** According to Alan Gelb, help the student answer “Who am I?” “What is important to me?” “How do I function in the world?”

Five Examples:

- 1). Poster board activity:
 - During a mentoring session, class, as an example in office.
- 2). Window into your world:
 - I was trained an an Alumnae Admission Rep at Wellesley by Janet Lavin Rapelye, who was the dean of admission at Wellesley College at the time. She is now the dean of admission at Princeton. She described the essay as a “window into your world.” Show can and Easter egg.
- 3). Chapter 6 in Steve Antonoff’s College Match contains 2 good brainstorming activities for students. He includes a list of adjectives for students to consider and circle. If you don’t have College Match, you can also ask students to write 3 adjectives that Best describe themselves. These adjectives would then be shown in their_story or essay.
- 4). Chapter 6 also includes Questions for the student to ask herself, such as People describe me as... ; During my high school days, I have succeeded at?; During my high school days, I failed at?; An important decision I made was...

College Match can be used as a textbook for a college counseling class at your school.

- 5). Jani’s activity: List 20-25 phrases that describe themselves, in 10 minutes. Then circle the 3 that best describe them.
- **Take Away from my section: Five activities to help students open up.**
 - **Here are some questions you can have handy to ask students:**
 - **What happens when the essay is not written in your voice?**
 - **How can you determine that?**
 - **What if you read the essay out loud?**
 - **How can you bring it back to your voice?**
 - **How can you get started?**