

Students should choose an important person, activity, place, or event that has significantly influenced their personal development. Considerable thought should be given regarding the chosen topic because students will, at length, relate how that particular person, event, etc. altered their opinions, shaped their characters, and impacted their life goals. Obviously, immediate family members and religion have a tremendous influence on the lives of young people; however, I do not allow these as topics. Instead, I encourage them to recognize other influences. An exception might be a life-threatening disease of a family member or something else out of the ordinary. Topics will vary considerably and include typical choices like a favorite sport, a family vacation spot, a childhood friend, an admired coach, a hobby OR less likely subjects such as a gnawing fear, a tough decision (like deciding between public or Catholic high school), a long-time rivalry, etc.

While considering the topic, students should be aware that, in addition to writing a five page paper, they will be expected to include a minimum of six pages of pictures, complete with captions. Also, students prepare and present a four minute speech.

In the five page paper, students are expected to develop their content so that half of the paper relates the relationship of the student to his/her chosen topic and half of the paper explains how that relationship has shaped him/her. Obviously, these two components should be cohesively combined. This exercise provides an excellent opportunity to focus on style and voice in writing.

A great model for this assignment, particularly in reference to excellent style and voice, is the essay, "Beauty: When the Other Dancer is the Self," by Alice Walker. Another good model is the essay, "The Inheritance of Tools," by Scott Russell Sanders. We read and discuss both of these essays in class in preparation for the assignment.