Stories Matter

In Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's TEDTalk, "The Danger of a Single Story," she tells us that "stories matter." She uses her own stories and experiences to illustrate her *point* and convince her audience of its importance. In this project, you will share one of your stories about learning and analyze its significance in order to *convince* your readers of the importance of the lesson you learned.

Think about an experience you've had that was significant to you. This can be a positive or negative experience, as long as it helped you learn a lesson you feel your readers should also learn. The experience can come from school, family, work, or any other part of your life. To get thinking about what story to tell and what lesson you learned from it, consider the following questions. What story first popped into your mind? Was it important to you? Did your habits or point of view change afterwards? Why did you choose this particular story to tell? What effect did it have on your life or on the education you are now pursuing? What do you want your reader to understand now that they didn't before?

In order to help your audience understand the importance of the lesson you learned, you will need to draw conclusions about what this learning experience means to you.

Telling us your story is just one part of this piece. What about the thesis? This lesson, what we want our reader to learn, can serve as the foundation for the piece's thesis. What is the overall theme of the conclusions you've made about this time in your life? Can you restate your conclusions in one sentence? Do you feel that statement accurately portrays what you want your readers to learn? Is this a lesson your reader might not already know or might disagree with you on? Developing and strengthening theses are difficult but valuable skills that we will work on all semester, so we will spend time in class discussing what makes a thesis strong, both for this project specifically and for effective writing in general.

How do we back up our thesis? Your piece should include specific and vivid details that will both make your story more interesting for your readers as well as support your thesis. In order to connect those details to your thesis, you will analyze how those details support the conclusions you draw about yourself and your story. In other words, you will explain why you included specific details and how they will help your reader learn the lesson. Analyzing your details will help ensure that your details are relevant and connected to your thesis: if you can't explain how the detail you've chosen to include supports your thesis, then you might consider cutting it and replacing it with a detail that better helps you make your point.

Who is our audience? Your audience for this piece is your classmates. Remember that not everyone in our class has the same experiences, so think about what you will need to explain and what you can safely assume your audience will understand. For instance, if your piece is about learning to cook a family recipe and includes references to a food or ingredient that someone outside your family or culture may not be familiar with, you might consider explaining what type of food that is. Think about how much you know about your classmates, and vice versa; provide whatever information is instrumental to their understanding of your lesson.

What is our tone? As it is a personal narrative, you are encouraged to use "I" and other first-person pronouns ("we", "us", "my") as well as emotions and humor where they might be useful to your story. Try to avoid addressing the reader directly in the second person ("you") as you can't make assumptions about who your reader is. We will use formal language in general, avoiding abbreviations, coarse language, or text-speak unless they are instrumental to telling your story.

Length: This piece can be anywhere between **1000-1500 words**. This length requirement is not arbitrary: in order to tell a story with specific details and analyze and draw conclusions about it, you will need at least 1000 words. However, if you go too far over 1500, it's likely that your story is too broad or includes too many details.

The learning goals for this piece are to:
> Gain experience writing in a formal style
> Practice our storytelling, including the importance of details
> Gain experience developing a thesis
> Learn to use details to support our analyses
> Begin to develop our analytical skills
> Reflect critically on a story from our own lives and learn something new about ourselves

Due dates:

> 9/9: Thesis proposal (10 points)
> 9/16: Rough draft (20 points) and peer review (15 points)
> 9/28: Final draft (100 points)