

Sample Common App Essay: “Something Funny”

“Alright,” said the Boss, leaning back into his chair. His mouth hardened into a line of disapproval, all a part of the act. “Do something funny.”

Something funny? Twenty sets of eyes focused on me, waiting for me to make them laugh. In that moment, my body froze. My pulse raced. My cheeks flushed, rivaling the redness of the plastic sphere tied to my nose.

“I can’t,” I sputtered. The words felt foreign in my dry mouth. My typical enthusiasm and confidence was lost somewhere between the folds of the curtain backstage, and I was stuck. I was on the verge of tears. Who knew that being an absolute fool was so difficult?

Let me clarify: When I learned I was selected for the Georgia Governor’s Honors Program for theatre, I had no idea I would be attending clown school. I love Shakespeare, Tennessee Williams, and the occasional David Ives comedy; I knew nothing about the art of clowning, which revolves around physical freeness and spontaneity. Around my peers and family, I am a master of “goofballery,” a millennial style Lucille Ball. I usually have no qualms about making a fool of myself. When it comes to something as important to me as my art, however, I found I was having a hard time tapping into this levity.

All my life I have been a perfectionist. I want to set my pins *and* knock them down. I am a goal setter, the wilder the better: I want to hike the entirety of the Appalachian Trail; I want to perform on Broadway, and mitigate climate change. I am not afraid of risk, or at least I thought I wasn’t. I wasn’t afraid to pack up and leave the comforts of home last year for an outdoor boarding school in the mountains. I wasn’t afraid of performing a ballad to a packed house for the Spring musical. I embraced my fears when I rappelled 300 feet down “The Monkey Face” Spire. I relish taking on difficult tasks, organizing large groups, and working under pressure. But reality hit me hard last July, when I faced a difficult task and had nowhere to go. There was only the current moment, and that was terrifying.

I’ve spent so much of my life over-thinking, scratching my skin and worrying in circles. The future pulls my mind forward, occupying precious space with preoccupations of an unseen tomorrow, while my body is tugged back, reminded of past mistakes and regrets. It’s taken me years to understand that life is a collection of “nows,” every one limitless. While nothing excites me more than the prospect of new experiences, taking risk isn’t running off to the next adventure, or jumping on every opportunity that blows by. It’s staying put and leaning into those tasks and feelings that truly challenge me.

Though I didn’t succeed that week, I had a revelation. I began to connect with the clown. Its open, loving, and sometimes idiotic nature helped me uncover a side of myself that I had suppressed for too long in my attempts to get everything “right.” The summer I tried clowning, I learned the beauty of letting go. I learned to enjoy the view from the top of the tightrope of chance, rather than dread the fall downward.

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