

January 2018

## Honorable Mention Essay - ENGL 1000 Literacy Autobiography Contest 2018

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### Recommended Citation

Sanchez, April S., "Honorable Mention Essay - ENGL 1000 Literacy Autobiography Contest 2018" (2018). *ENGL 1000 Writing Studies 1 Autobiography Contest*. 10.  
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April Sanchez

Laura White

### Path to the Literacy Narrative

My literacy narrative was about improving my alphabetical literacy which was one of the most important parts of my life. The essay is called *Hop onto Learning*. If it wasn't for that experience, I wouldn't be here now. I always wanted to share my story because I felt like if other people would see what challenged I went through, it would inspire them to pursue anything that would better themselves. This assignment was a chance to capture some of my childhood memories and put it on paper. Working on my alphabetical literacy was the beginning of my academic career. I can look back and appreciate all the hard work I've done back then and compare it to my successes now. I have always been an Honor student, and if I hadn't worked on my alphabetical literacy when I was a child and grew a passion for learning, I wouldn't be where I am now. An important point here though is that I didn't do this journey alone. I also wanted to show with the right guidance anyone can go far. I'm really proud of this piece of writing yet it took a lot of steps for me to make this perfect. I am unavailable for GSU Research Day on Friday April 6<sup>th</sup> due to a class.

## **Hop onto Learning**

Growing up as an only child had its advantages and its disadvantages. When I was 4 years old, I spent most of my days binge watching cartoons and with my mother. She'd work night shifts and took care of me in the mornings while my dad went to work. My mom and I spent a lot of quality time together. We would binge watch shows such as Mr. Rogers Neighborhood or Zoboomafoo, but sometimes she would sleep. The disadvantages came when we both knew I was supposed to be in school. Even my aunts and uncles would tell my mom I should be going to school already. I remember watching the school bus drop off my neighbors from school and I thought to myself two things. My first thought was, *I should be going to school*. The next thought was, *I'm so lucky to be at home while all those kids had to suffer*. I remember My mom and I would laugh about it too and she'd say, "I'm so glad you skipped preschool, so you can be with me one more year." The thing is though, in the long run it wasn't so great to have made that decision and to have laughed at others too.

I did go straight on to kindergarten and let me just say it was a real struggle going into a place to learn letters, numbers, and basic words. My kindergarten class was a colorful room with a bunch of posters with the letters of the alphabet or representation of all the different kinds of colors. Our carpet area where our teacher would have us all sit was colorful. It was a little area between a bookshelf and cabinets where there were crates of books. The tables were blue, and the chairs were either all red or all blue. Thing is, I felt strange being because I was socially awkward around other kids. When it came to carpet time or sitting at our tables, the other kids either didn't want to sit by me or they most likely got the idea I didn't want to talk to anyone.

Every morning when it came to carpet time, there would sometimes be a little gap between me and other kids or it would just be me trying to be isolated by a cabinet door. I would see the other kids participate a lot and I was just there silent. Seeing them grin when they would get an answer correct would bother me a little. It made me feel lost and empty as if I was missing something. That's where I came to realize that I wasn't doing well in Kindergarten.

The teacher called my mom one day to set up a conference. At the conference my teacher and her assistant asked my mom if I had special needs or something because I wasn't acting normally as I should be my age. While listening to my mom and dad converse about what the teacher said honestly bothered me and of course my parents the most. I remember a specific conversation my parents had once. "I'm going to open April's mind. She's going to have a passion for school. She's going to become very successful. I guarantee you," My dad said to my mom. "Do your thing and I will give her the motivational support she needs," My mom said. So, my dad went on and bought me these set of programs. The program was called The Hooked-on Phonics, Learn to Read Program. It was a set of 5 colorful boxes with pictures of animated characters on each one. They were labeled by levels from level 1 to level 5.

The Hooked-On-Phonics had levels which contained a series of workbooks, books, audio tapes, flash cards, and each level was different. I set a goal for myself to work hard every day, so I can uncover what level 5 had in store for me. The box was such a nice shade of blue that gave me so much curiosity on what it had in store to teach me. Day 1 for me was starting on the very first level. Level one was a yellow box and it had images of couple of animated cartoons of a cat with a yellow shirt and overalls on, a dog wagging his tail, and a mouse wearing a star printed shirt. All these characters were in a straight-line walking as if they were doing the conga. On far-right end corner, is a fox wearing glasses, a red bow tie, a yellow vest, and grey pants. Opening

the box, there was a greeting in it saying, "Welcome to Level 1!" The song, "Eye of the Tiger" by Survivor quickly came to my mind when studying in the afternoons with my dad. We mostly studied in our living room where there was a huge lamp that illuminated the whole room. I had my little desk I made with one of my mom's decorative tables and a dark purple chair my dad made me.

My dad and I started off with flashcards and audio tapes. The flash cards for level 1 introduced the letters of the alphabet, their sound, and an example using the letter. I would listen to all 26 letters and afterwards my dad would test me. After I mastered that, then came the workbook with its own audio tape to follow the reading. I started reading words and phrases such as *Cat*, *Rat sat*, and then reading one of the first books included in the series. The workbook would instruct you to read the books included once you get to the "Let's Read!", parts. The books had a special name, they were called Hop Book.

My first ever book that I read was called *Cat*. The book consisted of basic phrases such as *Rat ran*, *Cat Ran*, and then *Rat sat on Cat*. They were all beautifully illustrated books and I fell in love with reading. There were 30 Hop Books to get through on level 1. They all consisted with simple easy learning phrases that told a story. I read at least 1 different Hop Book a day. Every day was something new to learn after school. I studied with my dad every weekday except for the weekends. My mom always went to work in the afternoons, but the next day before she went to work, my dad would tell her about all the things I've been improving on or the things he and I were currently studying.

The best feeling in the world was to get to the very last page of the workbook that says "I did it! Congratulations on finishing Level 1!" On the next Page it says, "Time for level 2." Level 2 was orange colored box and it was reading and comprehension on the sounds that come with

the beginning of words such as “SL” in Slip and the Hop Books were thicker. After finishing level 2, I went a whole new other journey throughout 3,4, and then my set goal to level 5. Level 5 was a new world to discover and I was so excited to learn. My favorite Hop book was *The Cereal Box*; it incorporated a lot what I learned in the previous levels. I mastered this level easily, but it took me quite a while to get through all the levels. I later realized that my favorite level was actually level 1 because it was where it all began. I had little to no hope when I started to learn. What I’m happy to say though is that both of my parents gave me support and the resources I needed to succeed.

After finishing the program, I saw a lot of growth. I was now graduating kindergarten at the top of my class. After being that “special” lost kid, I became that nerdy little girl that knows how to read. I had positive feedback from my teachers moving up every grade level. My first-grade teacher who tested my reading speed, had difficulty getting me to stop reading because of how passionate I was about it. As time went on my love for books grew and I would discover some whole new world within them.

When I was in second grade my dad bought me some nonfiction books to work on my reading comprehension more. I read about Susan B. Anthony, Sandra Day O’Connor, Harriet Tubman, and so many more historical figures. After reading their story, I would answer a couple of questions to see if I understood what I read. My dad would check them and see if I needed to work on anything. As the years went by, my intelligence grew. The start of my growth was elementary school, but when high school came I was considered an honor and AP student. Senior year I was part of the Early College Initiative program in which I took college level classes while still being in high school.

My experience leads me to believe that anyone can improve their literacy. For my first steps, the support from my parents and their guidance helped me improve my alphabetical literacy. It shows me that with the right guidance and people around to motivate them, anyone can do it. So, don't give up and keep succeeding to go far. I know I did.