



MOON PREP'S
Favorite Essays

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Seven Essays that landed students a
spot at Johns Hopkins

One.

Entropy is the property that provides the basis for the second law of thermodynamics, which states that the universe naturally gravitates toward disorder. Its explanation comes from the idea that the universe prefers to conserve energy; because energy must be put into organization, everything around us is constantly descending into an increasingly complex state of chaos. Cheerful, I know. While it may seem like a concept worth forgetting – especially with its conviction about an imminent “universal heat death” – entropy has taught me far more outside of the classroom than in it.

I, unlike the universe, have never been a very big fan of disorder. Admittedly, I worship the planner in my backpack, hate it when I have more than three unread emails, and am the designated pantry organizer of my household. I arrive dependably at school every morning half an hour early and have mastered the art of Marie Kondo’s file folding for each of my closet drawers. I have fallen in love with the idea of becoming a surgeon to dedicate my career to putting back together what has been broken – ordering the disorderly – and every organizational habit I have developed has been a microcosm of that passion.

However, life is often more unpredictable than might allow a color-coded spreadsheet to double as a crystal ball. When I am faced with a group discussion in which conflicting ideas create more questions than answers, or when I am rushing from track practice to a robotics meeting, worried about when to fit my homework in, I remind myself of the importance of entropy.

For a system to be considered at equilibrium, entropy must actually be at its maximum. In order to be stable, everything must be marginally out of control. This applies just as much to life as it does to chemistry. The best stories I’ve written didn’t start with an outline, but with random phrases I’d jotted down in a notebook in a moment of epiphany. My favorite chemistry labs were exponentially disastrous as they progressed, teaching me more about error analysis than acids and bases. My most memorable class periods were the ones that started with a lesson plan but followed the curiosity of the class, taking us anywhere from the taxonomy of mermaids to hiking horror stories.

Entropy is also a measure of the changes in the status quo of a system. The more unpredictable the outcome of a reaction, the higher its entropy value. Although I love my orderly desktop and preprepared Spotify playlists for any mood, I embrace copious entropy and all that it represents, because I, too, want to be the unexpected in a world that expects the status quo. I want to defy predictions and make world-changing discoveries, increasing my entropy as my impact tends limitlessly towards infinity. Though I don’t expect it to be easy and may occasionally enlist the help of my planner and about a million colored pens, I take comfort in knowing that my intention to excel as a woman in STEM and a young adult dystopian novelist pleases the universe.

A high entropy value increases the chance for both failure and success; it is both the natural way of the world and the primary supplier of chaos. I welcome both with open arms, though chaos and failure still scare me. Now, when I am the only one in my class with a particular opinion on our book or am stressed about the caveats of a busy schedule, I take a deep breath and recognize the potential to thrive in it. I am supposed to exist in chaos. I can venture into uncharted territory and comfortably embrace the positive that lies in the unknown, sure that when that entropic feeling inexorably takes over and life gets messy, I’ll be ready. To feel out of control is not the end of the world, but the natural state of it.



One - Review.

Ellie's essay skillfully uses the topic of entropy as an extended metaphor. Through it, we see reflections about who they are and who they aspire to be. Many students write about a future they hope to achieve, such as a major, career, impact, or lifestyle. While that may tell us something about who they are, these types of essays often use that desired outcome as the thesis and not as a means for us to understand who the applicant truly is. Ellie's essay tells us some of those desired outcomes without sacrificing self-reflection in the process. We learn a lot about who they are throughout this metaphor: their willingness to learn from mistakes, accept the unpredictable, and push the status quo. These are traits that drive Ellie and ultimately allow us to know them on a deeper level and see how strong of a match they are for the Hopkins community.



Two.

Friday night, September the 16th 2022 and I am packing for my pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in Galicia, Spain. It is a tradition at my school that all seniors begin their final year of school by embarking on the “Camino de Santiago” (the Way of St. James). Four days of walking a total of 135 kilometers to reach our destination. We have been told to pack light, a bulky and heavy backpack will hold you back, but to be prepared for: changing weather (lightweight clothes, a jacket, rain poncho) blisters and sore feet (plenty of socks, extra shoes, bandages, antiseptics) and physical exhaustion (dried fruits and nuts, cereal bars, extra water bottles). I look at my compact backpack and I think...it is going to be a long night.

As I settle into the task at hand, carefully packing, unpacking, and readjusting items, trying to make them fit, it occurs to me that we do the very same thing in life. The backpack that we carry on our journey must also be packed light so that it is easy to carry, and it too must be equipped with everything we will need to successfully face the unexpected; to be prepared for anything that comes our way, and this got me thinking, “What do I have in my backpack?”

The first time I consciously chose an item to pack was in first grade. I remember as I listened to my teacher stressing the importance of “good behavior”, my interest was riveted on the transparent yo-yo with flashing lights which would be given to the student who received the most merits at the end of the month. I had a goal and I planned to work diligently towards achieving it, and I did. That feeling of success was so fulfilling, so gratifying that it marked a path that I would follow from there on out.

I was twelve when I made a deliberate switch of items in my backpack. I had been playing soccer forever, we all did, it is the sport of choice here in Spain, so many were surprised when I decided to take up rugby instead. My decision was based on finding a sport that not only matches my physical abilities and potential but more importantly it reflects who I am. In rugby, there are no superstars, both victory and defeat are owned by the team with an intense spirit of camaraderie. I have been playing on a federated level for the past five years and all the values that are embodied in this sport – integrity, passion, solidarity, discipline, commitment, and respect – have found a permanent home in my backpack.

There came a time when I realized that something was missing. I was unable to put a name to it, but I would reach for it in certain situations, and it was not there. My decision to do ninth grade of high school abroad, in New Jersey, led me to discover what it was. I had to learn how to put myself out there for people, outside of my circle, to get to know me. I had to open myself up to making new connections and brace myself for possible rejection by stepping out of my comfort zone. This experience marked a before and after in my life for which I will be eternally grateful.

It is 1.00 a.m. and I have finally finished packing; a tight fit, but I have everything I will need. As for my other backpack, I do a quick mental check: a goal-oriented drive, actions coherent with my character, the ability to open myself up to and learn from new and enriching experiences and other items, carefully tucked in there. Am I prepared for what lies ahead? I believe so, and the best part is, I left room for so much more.



Two - Review.

In Pablo's essay, the act of packing for a pilgrimage becomes a metaphor for the way humans accumulate experiences in their life's journey and what we can learn from them. As we join Pablo through the diverse phases of their life, we gain insights into their character and values. We learn Pablo is determined in the face of challenges and is committed to their own personal growth. Their willingness to embrace change and excitement for the path ahead illuminates their optimism and eagerness for the future. Hopkins students are always up for a challenge and love to embrace new and different things. Through their essay, Pablo paints a vivid portrait of someone who is eager to step out of their comfort zone, making them at home in our community of forward-thinkers.



Three.

Tikkun Olam, a desire to help repair the world, is the most important value that my family transmitted. Although it was presented to me all my life, I internalized its meaning when I realized I needed to do something for my city.

I grew up in La Plata, which sits on the widest river in the world, the Río de La Plata. I've been sailing on this river since I was a child. As I got older, I started to notice some changes in the river: dead fish, floating waste, and a murky color. This filled my heart with concern and sadness. After brainstorming about how I could help restore the river to its original glory, I had my eureka moment: filter the trash out of the water using a waterproof barrier. I gathered people in my neighborhood who shared my concern, and after several attempts, the floating waste barrier we had engineered was up and running. It was empowering to take an idea from my head and with hard work turn it into something physical and useful. However, cleaning up the river is just the beginning, I'm inspired to create more mechanisms like this one.

At Hopkins, I aim to spread the concept of Tikkun Olam and carry my initiative to fight against pollution, as I intend to develop new systems with my peers and professors to build a greener campus, just as I did in my city. Hopkins is the ideal place for this thanks to the variety of courses it offers to complement my ideas and ambitions: working alongside Professor Michael Tsapatsis would help me enrich my knowledge in green energy, in order to reduce waste and pollution. Moreover, being part of Professor Marc Donohue's research group would allow me to work in collaborative projects, and thrive on catalytic systems to reduce emissions from industrial processes that will benefit Hopkins' community. I would love to connect these projects with my Latin roots, and the OLÉ Latine student group is the perfect environment for it. From this, I will gain knowledge to build myself as a professional, and then bring those transformative ideas back to my hometown.

That's why I strongly believe that the opportunities in Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering at JHU are absolutely perfect for me to apply what I've learned from my experience and engage in this new community to make the best out of it.



Three – Review.

Julieta illustrates how the concept of Tikkun Olam, “a desire to help repair the world,” has shaped their passions and drives them to pursue experiences at Hopkins. First, Julieta shows us how this value encouraged them to create a lasting impact in their community by designing a water-cleaning mechanism in their city’s river. They illustrate several aspects of their identity: leadership within their community, stewardship of the environment, and emerging skills as an engineer. Julieta clearly connects all of these qualities to the education they plan to pursue at Hopkins. They further pinpoint their interests in green energy and fighting pollution, and detail avenues to pursue these interests at Hopkins and beyond. Julieta has woven connections between their culture, experiences, and passions that helped us understand them more completely. This essay gives us a sense of how Julieta will contribute academically and socially to a greener campus at Hopkins and to a cleaner environment in their future.



Four.

Nothing about true love comes easy. Loving comes with hard work, responsibility and compromise. In my case, it came with four legs, PTSD, separation anxiety and in need of constant attention.

Rock came to us when he was 10 years old, retired from the Bangalore police force and in need of a loving home for his last few years. I'd been asking my parents if we could adopt a dog for years. I still wonder what made them say 'yes' to Rock. Suffering from amebiasis and severely malnourished, he had been at the dog shelter for a while, and was on the verge of giving up.

I wasn't ready to parent a senior dog. As the youngest in the family, I was the one who was always looked after. Once Rock came along, I was suddenly completely responsible for someone else's life. Roles like being a school student council member taught me responsibility, but not to care for someone else. I realized the stark difference between acknowledging responsibility and actually taking it on. It was the small things like recognizing the difference between barks for food or barks to be taken out. It was the bigger things like feeding him 10 pills a day, bladder issues that meant he needed four walks a day and acute PTSD and separation anxiety. Rock was a whole lot of work and needed a whole lot of love.

I thought I knew how to multitask with my varied extracurriculars, but here I was learning a whole new meaning to the word. I thought I had effective communication skills from my time volunteering at a dog shelter, and here I was trying to create a whole new lexicon for what each of Rock's barks meant. And yet, nothing has come easier to me than my love for Rock. Awkward, unsure of how to express love, and constantly hungry, he and I mirror each other in more ways than one. As a child, I would make my older sister follow me around the house, just to make sure I had her attention. Ten years later, my dog does the same to me.

Anxious and traumatized, he needs me as his therapy human as much as I need him for moral support and inspiration. And, an inspiration he is. Arthritic, limping, and uprooted from his life of ten years, Rock remains the biggest source of joy in our lives. As tough as it was for us to adjust to having him, it was a million times harder for him. But, somehow, he's managed to find his joy with us, too. Whether I leave the room for ten minutes or 3 days, he's always ecstatic when I return. All he needs is for me to show up. There are even times when he wags his tail in his sleep. Our relationship helps us both – he teaches me to be happy and I make sure I always show up for him.

I recently visited the Exploratorium in San Francisco and observed what is known as a mutualistic relationship between Randall's pistol shrimp and prawn goby. The shrimp always has at least one antenna touching the fish at all times – their symbiosis depends on it. Rock and I are always in the same room, always within a foot of each other.

In his essay collection, 'The Anthropocene Reviewed', John Green says, "the Canada goose is hard to love. But then again, so are most of us."

Rocky has taught me that I'm, surprisingly, pretty good at the tough parts of love. That I can be responsible, caring and overflowing with good feelings all at once. Maybe it's just that the love that seems the hardest, that teaches us the most, is the one we treasure most. And for this, and for Rock, I am forever grateful.



Four – Review.

Kashvi's essay encapsulates a heartfelt journey of self-discovery and the invaluable teachings of Rock, their 10-year-old dog. Through the lens of their companionship, Kashvi walked us through valuable lessons on responsibility, friendship, patience, and unconditional love. Their bond epitomizes genuine friendship, built on trust and a mutualistic relationship where they learned from each other. Through Kashvi's reflections on Rock's impact, we get a profound understanding of their values and personal growth. This essay provides insight into their genuine emotions, allowing us to truly connect with Kashvi as an individual.



Five.

My eyes scan the Latin, searching for a word in the nominative to ground the beginning of my translation. Each line of Latin is like a pile of jumbled puzzle pieces. It's my job to sort each part of speech into the right order until the knobs and holes of the sentence click together. The completion of a translation is always fulfilling.

Studying Latin and Ancient Greek allowed me to read the epic stories I loved in their original languages, and find nuances through their allusions and word pictures, adding a depth unknown to the English texts. Eventually, I began to seek out lesser-known writings by female and nonbinary writers who differed from the men often taught in the Latin classroom. In her poem, Renaissance writer, Olympia Morata, defines herself apart from the historical expectations placed upon women, and instead by her own unique interests. Despite the passage of time between us, I connect with her words as another young woman acquiring self knowledge and transitioning into womanhood. Her writing left me wondering how many other writings of marginalized authors were waiting to be appreciated. The role of gender and whose story gets to be heard in the Classics intrigued me, and led me to examine how gender was complicated during the Roman Civil War in Tacitus' Histories.

In college, I hope to explore more writings by women throughout history to better understand gender dynamics, and ultimately help raise their profile. The stories of many female authors remain unheard in Latin classrooms where their male counterparts, such as Caesar and Vergil, dominate. By broadening my range of readings, I intend to continue helping to bridge the gender gap within the Classics.

The opportunity to research at Johns Hopkins' Classical Research Lab would allow me to continue exploring my questions surrounding gender in the Classics while discovering the writings of forgotten authors at my own pace. Unique courses at Hopkins which observe the connection between Greek Myth and Anime, and the ancient interpretations of the cosmos, all interest me and will open my eyes to new avenues within the Classics. Additionally, Archaeology and Ancient Civilizations Club and Quiz Bowl Club seem like fun ways to test my knowledge while meeting new people with similar interests. As shown, the Classics community at Johns Hopkins provides many amazing opportunities which I intend to utilize fully.



Five – Review.

Maddie’s essay details their intellectual journey using their love of Greek classics. They incorporate details that reveal the roots of their academic interests: storytelling, literary devices, and translation. As their essay progresses, so do Maddie’s intellectual curiosities. We learn about their interest in gender studies and how they actively pursued connections between this and their love of classics by seeking texts by female and nonbinary authors. Maddie’s connection to research opportunities in the classics at Hopkins helps us understand how they visualize their academic journey here. It also helps us envision the contributions they will make in how academic communities may understand gender dynamics in the classics. This essay highlights the intersectionality of Maddie’s interests and the unique academic perspective they will bring to our community.



Six.

Special memories from the past seventeen years of my life can be captured by my 38 thoughtfully curated Spotify playlists. Each has a unique name, from “studying with ghosts” to “liminal spaces”. I hold three in particular closest to my heart, each representing a time when I used music to connect and bring people together. I see music as a powerful influencer — it uplifts, heals, and unites.

“Court’s in session,” an invigorating playlist that marked my first year on the varsity tennis team. The road to CIF Finals was hard-fought that year. I remember the despair I felt when the team lost two consecutive matches, and our coach pointed out our disconnect from each other on the court. Listening to my Spotify on the way home, I knew I had to come up with a way to unify my teammates. Thus, I pitched an idea for a collaborative, high-energy playlist to be blasted whenever morale was low. The playlist took form quickly and evolved into Tiktok dances on my lead with the participation of the whole team. Being in sync outside of the court made our team more cohesive, which became especially apparent during double’s play. This newfound sense of unity and energy would carry us as we went on to compete. Slowly, we took back the games one by one.

“Hollaback Girl” by Gwen Stefani became the anthem and lifeblood of our team, spurring us to the CIF Championship title that year.

“Westridge 2023 bops,” a diverse playlist I created to keep my classmates connected during the pandemic. By the time I was elected as sophomore vice president, I had not seen my classmates in person for months and realized with a sinking feeling it was unknown when we could reunite. Wanting to lessen this sense of isolation they often mentioned, I started a new Spotify playlist: “Westridge 2023 bops.” Everyone contributed to it with songs ranging from “Fergalicious” by Fergie to “More Than a Woman” by the Bee Gees. Loneliness dissipated as we exchanged music recommendations, fangirled over different artists, and listened to the playlist during class meetings. Realizing I was able to unpause the silence and reunite my class, I dug deeper for ideas; next came a grade-specific Instagram, which included pictures of our classmates’ Halloween costumes, virtual art contests, and notes of gratitude for our teachers. I felt my own sense of belonging return as our community strengthened once more.

The spirited melody of “Everybody Talks” by Neon Trees, our established class song, brought my classmates back together and revived our camaraderie.

“Stemology jams,” a kid-friendly playlist enhancing our STEM classes. When I co-founded Stemology, an elementary-aged educational nonprofit, I never thought the most difficult component of the process would be earning the trust of the kids. As their concentration waned and chatter increased during our first class, I realized I had to pivot from the original lesson plan. In a desperate attempt to keep their attention, I quickly blasted Disney’s “Under the Sea” to match our presentation on marine biology. It worked! Their attention snapped back, and a meaningful conversation about sea anemones ensued. The next class, they shouted with excitement as we played “Fireflies” by Owl City for our lesson on bioluminescence and interjected with their own song suggestions. Before long, the students greeted me with hugs and enthusiasm when I walked into the classroom, eager to guess the day’s lesson plan from the song I presented.

The inspirational lyrics of “Counting Stars” by OneRepublic during an astronomy lesson bridged the age gap, as my students and I swapped stories inspired by the constellations we created.

These existing Spotify playlists were my tools to bring together communities, and the memories made with people I have shared my playlists with have shaped who I am. I’m looking forward to new adventures and starting my 39th Spotify playlist with “Don’t Stop Me Now” by Queen.



Six – Review.

Alyssa’s essay reflects on special memories through the creative lens of Spotify playlists. They use three examples to highlight their experiences with their tennis team, finding a virtual community during the pandemic, and co-founding a nonprofit to help younger students learn about STEM. Crafting each unique playlist gave Alyssa the opportunity to build meaningful connections with three very different groups. This ability to understand and uplift others shows us how Alyssa will take advantage of the varying organizations and communities on our campus. Alyssa’s genuine interest and care for those around them will be an asset to their peers and the larger Hopkins community.

