



MOON PREP'S Favorite Essays

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Six Essays that landed students a spot
at Johns Hopkins

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One.

Pop quiz: A bird shoots through the crisp morning air of New York City, dodging skyscrapers at a speed of thirty kilometers per hour. The sun breaks through the horizon, blinding the bird in both eyes. The bird manages to catch its reflection in the shining glass of the Empire State Building—but by that time, it's too late. How do we use velocity, angles, distance, and force to find the point at which the glass shatters?

For me, math is more than just numbers. It's a mode of visualizing movement in action, the synthesis of my imagination and the physical world. When I'm problem-solving, I'm not just generating a string of numbers on paper. I'm picturing the spiral of a rollercoaster, the friction of a waterslide, and the curvature of an asteroid's impending collision with Earth.

In high school, when precalculus was taught as a series of step-by-step instructions, it felt like the vivid and colorful world I had come to love was being broadcast in black and white. I saw this reflected in the growing disinterest of my classmates, who saw math as a monotonous chore rather than a universal language with boundless explanatory and creative power. I had to step in. I had to show people what I saw.

This inspired me to begin writing creative math questions for my peers. My parametric equations are not simple problems with one-step calculations— they are cinematic universes that jolt audiences with excitement. They invite others to embrace mathematics as a practice of external—and even internal—discovery that was missing in my school.

When I present my famous “bird crashing into the window” problem students enthusiastically gather around the whiteboard to uncover its mysteries. I watch their impassioned discussions unfold with a sense of satisfaction as each drawing and scribble brings them closer to the truth. Witnessing their pride as they finally arrive at the answer reminds me of why I teach.

I've since honed question-design into an art, creating math tests and exercises for Teachers Pay Teachers so that teachers around the world can give my imaginative questions to their students. I hope that students not only learn the concepts I'm teaching— but also critical thinking and reasoning that provides new ways to solve challenges in their lives.

I have also used the medium of math beyond problem sets and assessments. As captain of the Math Olympiad, I use it to transform confused faces into laughter and excitement, to test my teammates' courage and strengthen team bonds. When I tutor Mu Alpha Theta or teach in Wall Street Lions, it is a language of empathy and connection to connect with students with interests outside of STEM. And in CivicSpark—the non-profit I co-founded to help students gain agency through civic engagement—I deploy the logic and reasoning of math without the numbers. Through a curriculum of imaginative puzzles, I empowered students in schools across Southern California to reach out to their representatives to ignite real change.

In this way, I have used math as a brush to paint a canvas that extends beyond the visual to what matters most— infusing life with greater meaning and heart. It is this creativity that compels me to pursue Applied Mathematics. There is no greater or more fulfilling challenge than the application of mathematics to real-life problems. However I hope to take this application a step further: If every calculation is a story, what does it mean for us to become storytellers? And how can this intellectual artistry transform the world?

As for the bird that caught its reflection in the office window—perhaps it isn't about the force of the collision, but what happens after. The way the shards of glass multiply a single reflection into thousands of new perspectives. The way a barrier opens to reveal spaces that were previously hidden. And the infinite possibilities of what happens next.



One - Review.

Pursuing knowledge and connecting resulting discoveries to the wider world is one of the foundational pillars of the Hopkins essay, Anthony explores the beginning of his interest in mathematics, diving into the many classrooms and personal experiences that created and strengthened it. He takes this interest, and the essay, a step further by showcasing the ways that he translated this interest into real world impact. By connecting his interest in math to work he's done through teaching, a non-profit, and a school club, Anthony demonstrates an ability to impart his passions and knowledge through a number of different avenues. These skillsets and mindsets will allow him to take advantage of the opportunities at Hopkins and show strong alignment with the University as a whole.



Two.

I stare into my bathroom mirror as I remove the mask. For the first time, I will attend high school showing my full face. I need to look just like the girls on my TikTok feed. I examine each video, searching for the common thread. A hot pink blush gleams on everyone's cheeks. Despite the stark contrast between my pale Irish skin spattered with freckles and that of the sun-kissed influencers, I race to the store for the infamous Revlon Insta-Blush which comes in stick form, making it foolproof. Or, so I thought.

On the first day of school, I optimistically swipe the stick across my face, waiting for instant beautification. But, my embarrassment reddens as they attract a different type of attention. I quickly banish the blush stick to the back of my makeup drawer. In need of a confidence boost, I vow to add color into my life instead of my face.

An opportunity presents itself near the end of freshman year as I sit in World History class with my friends Hannah and Julia. They thrust their iPads in my face. They smirk, informing me that "Glenbard West is looking for its next weather reporter." I join the class and steal a second look at the email. My eyes betray me. Both catch my second glance.

"Oh my gosh, Emily, I dare you!" Hannah screeches. I shrug, click the sign-up link and hastily complete the form. Later, I am asked to record an audition video. I scoff and close the email, certain I'd quickly become a social pariah. Yet, this could be my chance to accept and to take a risk and attempt something new. I grab my umbrella as a prop, hit record and recite the script. A week later, an email with the subject line CONGRATULATIONS WEATHERWOMAN!, arrives. What have I gotten myself into?!

Suddenly, it's time to compose my first report . . . to enter the eye of the storm. Conscious that every word will be broadcasted, I keep it straightforward, simply presenting the forecast. Boring. I know something is missing. So, I create a catchy sign-off, "Welcome to the Castle West" which references our school's castle-like logo.

On recording day, I stare into my bathroom mirror once again. My eyes drift toward a single tube of coral blush I had been told to use prior. Its soft, sunset orange hue in stark contrast to that TikTok trending hot pink. I slowly dab the Glossier Cloud Paint blush. It gives my pale skin a natural glow, one that emulates my happiness. My confidence shines as I record my first segment.

Later, when the broadcast projects into my classroom, my nerves take over. I bury myself into my iPad, trying to disappear. I venture into the hallway, eyes glued to the floor.

"Great job with the weather!" someone yells. Another waves. I shoot upright, scanning from one smiling face to another. As more broadcasts, even people I hadn't known before begin to say "hi" to me across campus. I'd always been one with a small group of good friends, but unexpectedly, my social network broadens as my campus "celebrity" grows. As I forge connections with new people, my confidence builds. I expand my role within the broadcast and my school. I no longer recite the bare minimum but rather, report on school events and dare to write my own jokes. Contributing to our school spirit in this small way makes me proud. By trying new things and breaking the cage of conformity, I've also learned to love myself and my differences from the girls on social media. I wear my coral blush like the freshman girl in Target. She finally learned how to be herself.



Two - Review.

Emily's essay uses a variety of personal experiences to highlight how she takes risks, explores new passions, and learns about what excites and inspires her. From trying a new makeup trend to joining her school's weather station, she shows how the journey of understanding oneself and finding meaningful experiences is often one that requires taking chances. Hopkins values the process of discovery, both in and outside of the classroom, and Emily's essay does an excellent job demonstrating the ways in which she has embarked upon that process. It's clear that, at Hopkins, she would find ways to dive into a vibrant campus community and explore ways both old and new.



Three.

I remember being surprised at how weak my arm felt, as if I was holding a dumbbell instead of a microphone. Standing in front of my high school classmates at our weekly Monday Meeting, I could feel my heartbeat in my ears as I studied the small silver handle of the microphone and momentarily wished I was small enough to fit into one of them and disappear. I looked down at the small History month fact I had prepared and began to read. It wasn't until I felt someone come up next to me and gently push me closer to my face that I realized that no one could hear me. I finished a few seconds later and fought tears as I returned to the smattering of polite applause.

I mostly felt embarrassed; I had failed at such a simple task and allowed my nerves to hijack my voice. For the rest of the year, our Student Body President, a brilliant, charismatic senior, made announcements and cracked jokes with an apparent ease that I could not fathom. I had so much respect and admiration for his public speaking skills— I wished I had the courage to be up there, speaking so composed. As my embarrassment ebbed I felt another feeling boiling up in me; a sudden resolve. I wanted to get up there and try again.

Naturally a reserved person, adjusting to a new school freshman year had been difficult. I found a weird solace in hiding behind my glasses, which were still wearing at the time— covering most of my face made it easier to remain in my own little bubble, quietly observing. Because of my shyness, I was a bit surprised when a teacher encouraged me to run for Student Council. I surprised myself even more when I decided to run. The idea of being one of the student leaders who I so admired, up there leading the meetings, scared me, and yet it drew me in like a magnet for reasons that I couldn't have fully articulated at the time. It was precisely the fear that made me want to prove to myself that I could conquer it.

This inescapable pull towards things that scare me has extended into every aspect of my life, from public speaking to basketball to academics. Aside from the responsibility I feel to myself, I often think about people less fortunate than I am— my cousins in Florida, family members in Jamaica, and girls just like me around the world who will never have access to a quality education. Many of them will never have the chance to take an AP science class, give a TEDx talk, or run for office. I feel that I owe it to them, too, to take advantage of every opportunity, even the daunting ones. Getting out of my comfort zone is not just a personal obligation; it's a privilege and a blessing.

Now, in front of my classmates as Student Body President, holding the microphone doesn't trigger the waves of panic it once did. I no longer study the holes in the microphone; thanks to experience, I have gradually felt empowerment take the place of horror when I have the microphone in my hand. Recently, an underclassman told me that even though she loves being in Student Council, she would never run for Student Body President, because she could never get up there and speak like I do. She said it flippantly, like it was just a fact, but I saw so much of myself in her and immediately pushed back. She can. Because I did. Ultimately, that's the best part of holding the microphone— being an example and encouraging those who I'll eventually pass it on to, like so many others did for me.



Three - Review..

Faith's essay introduces a challenge faced by many—a fear of public speaking. However, she is able to explore how that fear led to a resolve to tackle the challenge head on. Through her subsequent growth, we can see how she cultivates a deeper understanding of her ability to effect change, capitalize on her opportunities, and inspire others. Students may face challenges in college, but Faith shows us how she's able to persevere and use her experiences to develop herself into an impactful member of her community.



Four.

The concept of balance guides me through life. At heart I am a figure skater. Since early childhood I've learned how to balance on ice; to glide through skating routines and busy schedules. While I'm skating, time moves differently. I put my soul into every movement, I morph into the embodiment of my emotion and determination. I practice until it is perfect. I pass into a different state of mind to focus fully. I devote hours, and yet it feels as if no time is passing. I bring this pattern of dedication to all of the commitments I use my sense of balance to handle it all.

I keep moving, on and off the ice, from one thing to the next, because balanced doesn't mean stagnant. In figure skating, a constant movement helps keep me balanced. I've been raised entirely alone by my single mom, no custody time with my father. We have a log cabin with a lawn to mow, and feral rescue cats. We spend every July in a cottage in Canada helping my grandmother, and the AirBnB in our basement before every stay. It is important I keep gliding through everything in a timely manner, since it's always full with lots of responsibilities, and no one else to pick up slack. From my mom I've learned early how to be resourceful, self-reliant, and manage time effectively, including downtime. Sometimes that's a challenge. Sometimes I start to feel off balance. Like when I was in the Eastern regional synchronized skating competition, having to learn lines for my lead in the school play, and studying for exams. My mom is always there if I need help strategizing. So when life accelerates, I take a deep breath. Even if the speed feels overwhelming, skating, immersing myself feels liberating. It is all the more rewarding when my work is completed and I get to reflect on everything accomplished.

When I'm interested in something new to balance I look to my community. I am always the first to offer assistance at my school's volunteer opportunities. I regularly enlist in trips to a Rescue Mission, and have over 3 times the community service hours required to graduate. I also find activities through connections outside school. Like the Endangered Species Theater Project teen led project last spring. On my own initiative, one of my passions is filmmaking. I plan to major in film studies. I enjoy the medium because an audience can get to a story. I thrive in long editing sessions, writing marathons and as my own actor in solo projects. Even creating is another flex of my balancing skills.

Yes I'm a regionally qualifying synchronized figure skater, but I'm also a fourth degree black belt in Taekwondo; I'm three times the school's student government association; I've been lead in the school play two years in a row; I'm an AP Scholar, a guitarist, a leader, a fighter, a vegetarian, an actor, an athlete, a friend, a musician, a cinematographer, and a straight A student. For me to go smoothly I've honed my sense of balance, and dedicated myself: to the arts, knowledge, and community.

I've sculpted myself into a balance beam holding multiple high level skills at once. I love learning, improving, and making a positive section of my life. I feel proud of the work I am completing in such diverse ventures. I am always happy as a fulcrum, the base of a lever system, I am the "Renaissance man." I love to succeed in each pursuit, to accomplish many things in a variety of areas, and searching for more.



Four - Review.

Jade uses their essay to highlight the importance of balance in their approach to life. From figure skating to volunteering to the way they weave together the importance of seemingly divergent interests to highlight how a balanced approach has built skills and passions that have shaped their worldview. At Hopkins, students will be confronted with a wide range of experiences, opportunities, and challenges. This essay creates confidence in our committee that once a student, Jade will have no difficulty continuing to pursue a balanced approach that allows them to explore all that Hopkins has to offer.



Five.

“Nole pongas demasiada sal!” My mom, anticipating a bitter taste from the soup, alarmed me. Yet curious like a five-year-old, I was determined on my mission to discover the secrets behind the little white container in front of me. Standing still, making noise at a shake, I laid the lid to empty half the recipient, my mom and I laughed the second I tasted our alphabet soup.

Composed of primarily sodium chloride, salt is a staple for food and culture. At the same time, the element is an equal symbol for preservation, and connection. Seen time again in history, salt was a compensation for Roman Empire’s soldiers, a source of wealth in ancient China, and an exchange in the Gulf Coast from the Olmec people. Globally, a little of it goes the long way.

Ironically, for the entirety of my early adolescence, I underestimated the value of salt in the human body. How could such a simple element have worth immense value? It appeared like an exaggeration. Despite my assumption, fainting in the presence of heat conversed with my old mindset. Then, I was not surprised to know I battled with low blood pressure. To prevent injuries, I was advised to intake balanced nutrition. Most importantly, moving from one state to another forced me to keep track of possible imbalance in my body at the end of each day.

With an opposing view of the country, I was intrigued at smoky undertones of sea salt in brown rice, at a piece of boiled egg with a pinch of pink salt in a fresh avocado. Unable to eat foods with high sodium, I grew appreciation at the appearance of salt in different places. Mere glimpses at dishes fueled my taste examinations. While exchanging interactions with a diverse school population at lunch time, I met teenagers and teachers with a history of resilience, migration, and adaptation. Fascinated by the mural of a little grain of salt in my vision embodied human connection, presenting roots and traditions with pride. My new communities opened a door to discover distinct salt flavor profiles.

Throughout my personal progress of adaptation with moving, I discovered my love for the range of policies, economies, and cultures bounded in the world. Enamored by the study of international relations, my pursuit for educating on the states of societies, the dearth of rights, and extent of access to resources arrived naturally. In a similar way that I enhance my knowledge of salt’s uses, I am committed for my expatiating my passion towards diplomacy. Exhibiting my devotion for the protection of interests and sustenance, an epiphany of helping not just my home countries in the US and Mexico but vulnerable groups at developing countries became a goal.

At the gaze of a welcoming sun, I practice addressing and collaborating changes particularly towards the rights of children in my community. Implementing the first UNICEF Club at my school and district, I advocate for young children that are underrepresented, mistreated, yet are equally deserving of education and a bright tomorrow. By promoting the organization’s mission, I aspire to break beyond fixed generational chains of knowledge. Similarly, my engagement with my state’s Civic Education Coalition, enlargement of governance, civic education, and establishing a democratic future. Through my continuous experience with domestic relations, I prepare for connections and transformations at a larger global scale.

As a person with a close connection to salt, its presence revolutionized my life purpose. Now, every grain of salt is an insight into our world and human interactions. Appreciating the intricate connection between individuals and nations, salt awakened my curiosity, revealing paths with solutions. In fact, I consider salt’s impact on Earth as an embodiment of motivation for building systems that is truly a symbol of our globe’s shared essence.



Five - Review.

In her essay, Maria uses salt as a driver to examine her growing awareness of communities and perspectives different from her own. Her emerging cognizance serves as a starting point for her jump into areas of impact that focus on service, diplomacy, and collaboration. Collaboration and conversation across diverse perspectives is an important way that students at Hopkins learn and grow. Maria uses her essay to effectively show how she is prepared to participate in that very type of action-oriented college experience that Hopkins provides.



Six.

Just outlining the coastlines took a month. On the solid, 22-inch by 30-inch sheet of white paper I was working on, I couldn't hit an "undo" button if my highlighter happened to slip. I had spent two months creating a rough draft, and an additional month tracing the final copy with a pencil. I then outlined that with a pen, which I was now going over with a highlighter. Messing up at this point would mean four months of hard work. The stakes were high, but I was enjoying the process. I was already thinking about other details I would add upon next. A steampunk society experiencing rapid technological advancements, I'd decided, would be the setting of this fantasy world. I imagined the technologies I could introduce in this setting. I thought about the economic and cultural indications these technologies would have on civilizations in this world. Meanwhile I continued to carefully move my highlighter.

"Worldbuilding" is a process of creating a fictional universe of your own; developing anything from the geography and climate to the annual holidays of a specific culture. The easiest way to visualize the process is to think about works by some fantasy authors like J.R.R. Tolkien, or game developers. Though I am neither, this hobby is an important part of who I am; it reflects my interests, my growth, and my creativity.

One reason I love worldbuilding is because of the sheer amount of questions I can ask. Research is critical to the process. I've recently asked questions involving history (I looked at how historical nomadic empires rose to power), geology (I studied plate tectonics to create a realistic map), primatology (I researched about Great ape language to explore possibilities of interspecies communication), and computer science (I wanted to know whether computers could be invented by civilizations without electricity). The questions that work to ask open my eyes to new subjects I didn't even know existed, and this in turn enables me to work with more sophisticated ideas.

Worldbuilding also allows me to show my own personality within my fantasy world. The amount of detail into the world's history is reflective of my love for the subject. My passion for abstract strategy board games (like chess and checkers) has motivated me to develop a similar board game for my world. The extensive government systems of my republics and empires reflect my strong understanding of the legal system, gained through my participation in the school Mock Trial.

Two months later, standing over my finished map, I immediately noticed some flaws. I'd drawn the continents a bit too small, and there was an awkward blob of blank space on the top left of the map. On the bottom, the map legend's design was noticeably underwhelming. Some things could definitely be better.

And yet, gazing over my creation what I most prominently felt was pride. This moment was perhaps my favorite part about worldbuilding: taking a step back and seeing what I managed to create from scratch. In 6 months, my map came to contain three continents, 50+ countries, and 60+ major cities, along with road networks, major rivers, and mountain ranges. I'd also developed various histories, cultures, and technologies accompanying the individual societies. Worldbuilding shows you what's in your mind: so even yourself.

Even when the map is finished, the worldbuilding journey continues on. I'm still researching. I'm still reflecting my other past creations. My next map may identify earthquake hotspots, and it definitely will have a better organized legend. My next civilization may be by apes, and it will surely have developed mechanical computers. Fusing knowledge, experience and imagination, the possibilities of worldbuilding are truly endless. As long as I continue to grow and learn, my world continues growing with me. I find that very



Six - Review.

Hopkins is a place that encourages and facilitates interdisciplinary learning and exploration. Through his interest in worldbuilding, Shotaro is able to highlight skills and perspectives that will allow him to seamlessly engage in that type of interconnected study. In building his world, Shotaro has explored topics in history, geology, and other subjects all with the goal of creating a cohesive, well-developed, and immersive world. His essay provides ample evidence that allows our committee to imagine the ways he may similarly and effectively combine his interests in study while a student at Hopkins.

