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First draft

Why I Write

I really don't enjoy writing about myself at all. I'm a lot better at taking my experiences and weaving them into fiction pieces than writing something solely about me. All the pieces of my personality take different roles in different stories, so there is always a little something from my life but it isn't my life story attributed to the name of an "imaginary" character. I had also never considered why I write until this prompt came up. My initial thought was because I was told all through middle and high school that I was good at it, and everyone likes doing something they're good at. But I knew that wasn't enough to keep me writing for as long as I have and for taking on a project as daunting and challenging as writing a children's novel. There had to be some deeper reason for my relationship with writing.

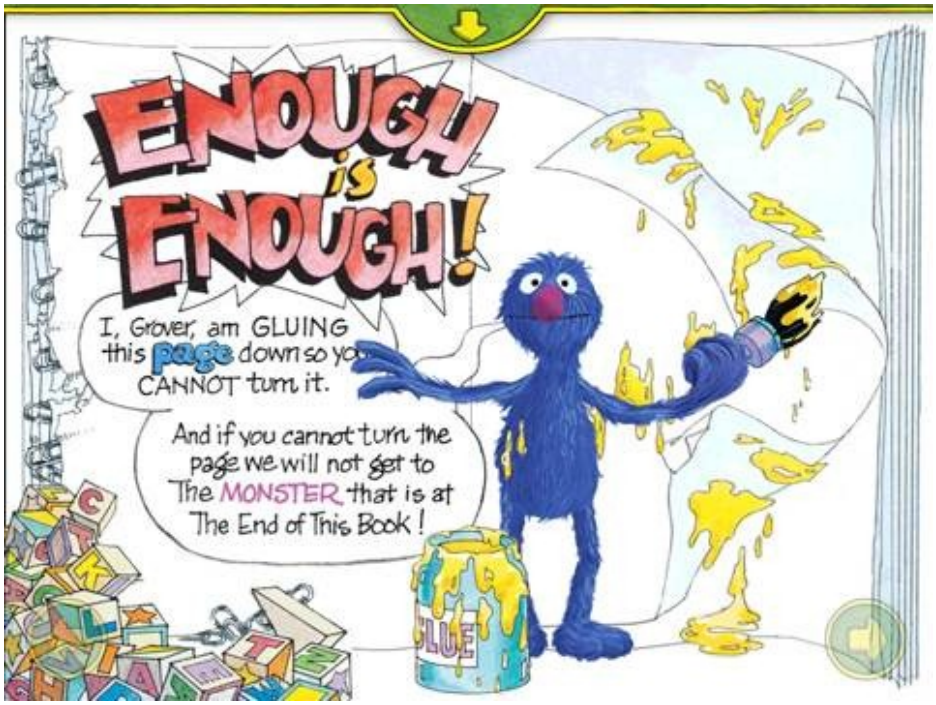
A lot of times I begin writing because I think I have an idea in my head that I can't work out without getting it down on paper. Writing it down is a process of discovery for me; I usually end up with a completely different purpose or thought by the time I draft and edit my initial thoughts. Even this piece changed a lot from the original draft. My thinking likes to fight with itself when it is in my mind; there is a lot of scratching and clawing to see which idea will win out, and sometimes it turns into a vicious cycle that leaves me drained and upset. When I funnel my thoughts onto a page, I can feel them calming down and waiting patiently for their turn. The thought that I play with first does not always become the one that I take home and raise; sometimes the one that prefers to play with its toy alone in the corner of the kennel is the one that I connect best with and the one that gets to take its place on

my page. I need my writing process to find out which thought is best though. I write to find clarity.

I write because I feel a tugging at my heart when I feel inspiration. It moves through my body, into my fingers, and I know I must write to stop the tugging. I want others to see the beauty and feel the pain that I do. Not in some demented way, like I want them to suffer, but I want to be able to share what I have with others. Maybe I could just talk about what I'm feeling, but I struggle with articulating my thoughts through speech. I sputter and talk myself in circles until no one, even me, is quite sure what I was trying to say. It happens to me every time I open my mouth in class. It's why I have the reputation of the shy girl in any class I've taken since second grade. I don't remember, but maybe I turned to writing because I needed some way to communicate with the outside world and my voice didn't give that to me. I write to share my ideas with fewer struggles.

My parents like to tell people that I was born with a book in hand and that I haven't stopped reading since. I don't think my mom would like me as much as she does if I came out with a sharped-edged book, but who really knows. Anyways, every night growing up I would bring my parents at least five books to read before I went to bed. They would finish them and sometimes it still wouldn't be enough to satisfy my craving. I'd bring a few more, and, no matter how tired they were, they would read until I was happy, ready to fall asleep and dream up my own stories. My favorite was, and still is, "There's a Monster at the End of This Book" by Jon Stone. I was obsessed with all the images of Sesame Street's Grover trying his hardest to

keep the reader from turning the page and finding the monster at the end of the book.



They had such lifelike qualities, and I felt like Grover was actually coming out of the book to keep me from finding the monster. The way the pages were drawn into the actual image made the experience a lot more interactive. I loved the pictures, but the words made me keep coming back. I could hear Grover's silly pleading voice in my head, trying to stop me from turning another page. I loved feeling like he was my friend and that we were having a conversation. The characters in books were some of my best friends, starting with Grover. Whenever I think back on that book and remember how happy it made me, I know I want to give other children books that can do the same for them. I write to give back.

The first time I can remember enjoying writing was sixth grade. I could have enjoyed it before that — I was always the best in the class at spelling and went to

the spelling bee twice, so needless to say I already loved words — but this year was the first memory I have of real enjoyment. My reading and language teacher was Ms. Hecht and she played a huge role in my love of the English language. There were three specific assignments we had that I clearly remember, though I don't remember the order we did them in. The first was an assignment to write a short play using the colloquial language of the 1960s (though it was obviously explained in simpler terms for 12-year-olds) and perform it with your other group members. I loved writing out the stage directions and using words like "po-po" that we never otherwise would. We got to see how much slang can affect the meaning of something and how it changes over time. I haven't written any type of play since then, but I have had multiple people tell me that my writing seems to fit screen plays better than any other genre, so I'm thinking of dabbling in that for my next big project.

Our next project was to work with a group to develop a mystery story to get in the spirit of Halloween. My friends and I wrote about the stereotypical haunted house, but it turned gory by the end — a lot more explicit than anyone would have expected from four girls. I've never been a huge fan of gore, but I love going back to that story to see all the details we came up with and entwined together. We described the blood-filled bath and the severed legs in such detail that friends I show it to now cringe and don't believe I wrote that. If I hadn't been there, I wouldn't believe it either. A lot may have needed work on that story — like indenting for new dialogue…or indenting at all — but we had the details down. That was the most fun I had with writing; I realize now that I liked that a tone was set for

us beforehand. I write and copy edit for the Michiganensian Yearbook now and we have a set tone of positivity for our pieces there; I feel most successful when I work on these pieces. I have grown to realize that I work well when I pick my tone beforehand; sometimes this tone has to change, but I feel most confident when I set a tone with which to begin.

The last project set me on the path that I'm still currently following. We had to work on our own to imagine, write, and illustrate a children's book that we would read to kindergarten classes on a field trip to neighboring elementary schools. I came up with a story that involved a class turtle that escapes and explores his school for the night, meeting all kinds of animals and creatures that he had never seen before from the inside of his tank. The drawings were simple and the plotline was straightforward, but working from conception to completion of a full project left me feeling like I could actually write my own book. That's what I'm doing now; last winter, I wrote a children's book about a koala on a journey, similar to that of the turtle but more developed. Now I am writing a middle grade novel about two kids discovering a mystery connected to the famous Chicago gangster, Al Capone. I want that feeling of satisfaction I got from completing a novel that I did in sixth grade, but I'm hoping to take it farther and publish something for children. I loved seeing the kindergartener's face light up over the mischievous turtle and I want to do that again. I write for the readers.

I love creating something using all the feelings that bottle up inside of me. I've played piano since 3rd grade and I have always loved playing around with different melodies and making new songs, even if they were simple and no one

would ever hear them. Creating a song that exuded what I was feeling — especially all that teen angst in high school — made me feel better without having to talk to anyone. As high school went on, I found myself with less time for piano but I could write anywhere I was. I didn't need anything except for something to write with and something to write on. I've gotten busier as life has gone on, but I always have time to jot an idea down and work on it in my free moments of the day. If I leave my emotions pent up for too long, they start to take a toll on my daily life and I feel like I'm going to burst. I write to ease my emotions.