

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *THE RULES OF MAGIC*

ALICE HOFFMAN

THE WORLD THAT WE KNEW

"Glorious."

—ELIZABETH
STROUT,
winner of the
Pulitzer Prize



Fort Collins
Reads Essay
Contest

Winners

2020

A NOVEL

ESSAY TOPIC: IN ALICE HOFFMAN'S NOVEL, *THE WORLD THAT WE KNEW*, A MAGICAL GOLEM SUPPORTS AND PROTECTS THE 12 YEAR OLD MAJOR CHARACTER. WRITE A STORY ABOUT SOMEONE (RELATIVE, FRIEND, TEACHER, COACH, NEIGHBOR) WHO HAS SUPPORTED YOU WITH THE GIFT OF THEIR TIME AND KNOWLEDGE.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FORT COLLINS READS ESSAY CONTEST WINNERS:

Brittany Gutierrez Cuevas, sixth grade, "Learning Things That Could Change Your Life," Leshler Middle School, Teacher: Andrew Reyes

Sophia DelMuro, sixth grade, "Learning to Play Guitar," Leshler Middle School, Teacher: Andrew Reyes

Mazzy Dynowski, sixth grade, Poudre Global Academy, Teacher: Stacy Denham

Justice Emery, sixth grade, "Sunday Snow Day," Leshler Middle School, Teacher: Josh Swann

Lavinia Franco, sixth grade, Leshler Middle School, Teacher: Andrew Reyes

Gracyn Redmon, sixth grade, Leshler Middle School, Teacher: Josh Swann

Brittany Gutierrez Cuevas

“Learning things that could change your life”

Someday you are going to do something that will change your life. It started about the first week of school. “Education is key to success!” My teacher always screamed. But I didn’t understand what that was back then. I was in third grade. I was so excited! But at the same time I was nervous of not being able to do something right. Or not understanding something right. Everything was going great! I was with all my friends and teachers. “Estoy muy emocionada que es el primer día de escuela,” My friend yelled “Yo también!” I screamed with excitement. Everything was going great. A normal first day of school.

Until, the teacher separated us in groups. I was in a group of people who only speak Spanish. The teachers started to talk English. At that time I didn’t speak English or understand it. I was so confused. Would I have to stay in a class where I didn’t know anything? Would I have to stay there like a baby learning how to talk. But then I finally noticed that I was assigned in a English class. To learn English.

I was super worried and confused. I was as nervous as a cat when he heard a mouse in the wall. I talked to the teacher, but they said that we were all here to learn English. “¡No puedo hacer esto!”. I cried “Brittany se que tu puedes hacer esto, yo confío en ti!”. My teacher said with excitement. She talked about how she would help me throughout anything. I was so relieved and happy that I had her support and that I would be learning something new. But at the same time more nervous than happy.

I studied, learned, listened, and after a few months I understood English clearly. I still had trouble spelling some words but I could understand English better. And even better, I could talk English. I was as happy as sunshine. I was also so impressed with the opportunity that I took and changed my whole life. I was so excited that I learned something new without even knowing anything about it.

The teachers were also so glad with their work they did. They had teached more than 10 people how to speak a totally different language. My third grade teachers help me with all this hard process. I was a 3 grade girl learning something I thought was impossible. Sometimes learning a different thing can be so difficult, and you can be so nervous, but things can get better. It takes time, but if you work hard you can do it.

Sophia DelMuro

“Learning To Play Guitar”

Music makes people happy by getting them out of the real world when life is demanding or uneventful. It was fall of 2015 when I walked in on my father while he was playing his guitar. I thought to myself, “How is he making that noise?”

“ Let me teach you something that helps me clear my thoughts.” he said..

My Dad handed me the guitar and told me to hold it close to my body. I did as he said. I held it tight, like he said. He told me to put my index, middle, and ring finger on the strings D, G, and B. He helped me hold my fingers on the strings decently hard. It was hard he asked me to loosen my fingers and I did so. The problem was my fingers didn't quite reach the strings. He pushed my fingers tremendously hard over and over again and still no sound came out. To be completely honest my fingers felt like they were on fire.

When I was done playing I put my hands under cold water to make them feel better. As time went on the pain would start going away. I guess my hands just got used to it. Before I knew it I was able to put the chords together to produce a melody. The music made me feel relaxed and happy. I realized that whenever I was frustrated or upset I could just go to my room and play my guitar.

What a great feeling to know that instrument is always in my room when I need it. I really appreciate how I walked into that room while my Dad was playing because if I didn't I wouldn't be able to do what I love most. Unfortunately, Dad has been playing more advanced music while I am still doing semi beginner leveled music. Thankfully however my Dad taught me how to tune and my playing then sounds better when I tune it. Having a guitar that's fully in tune has helped me improve how my chords sound.

Playing my guitar makes me happy by making my mind focus on the chords not the reality that's happening around me. We all have feelings and we cannot change what's going on around us. However when life is challenging around us, and we can't always change it, listening and playing music always makes one feel better. I don't know what your passion is but I know for sure that my passion is music, no matter what.

Mazzy Dynowski

I love art. I love it a lot, it is one of my favorite hobbies. It is nice and calming to take some time and paint. Sometimes it's nice just to look around to see something small and paint it, or draw. Even a glass of water, a vase, or maybe even a burning candle. All art is beautiful even if there is no meaning behind it.

About 1 year ago, I went to a small art store in downtown Loveland. All the people there kept to their self and didn't judge anyone's art. Their art was unique and beautiful.

My art teacher's name was Joe. He was very kind. He was tall, skinny, and had long, curly, dark hair. He usually wore black long-sleeve shirts with tan jeans. He had big black shoes that would always make a clicking sound when he would walk.

When you first join, you learn the basics. You learn some stuff about your teacher, and about the art place. Joe taught me how to properly hold the pencil, and how to sit. Joe also told me what kind of pencils to use too.

The chairs you sit in change sometimes but it is usually in the same spot. They were just plain black with slight cushioning. It was a nice place but it kind of smelled like rusty pencils. They have a small table with different compartments for different plastic objects to draw. They had fruits for beginner. They also had skulls, animals, and more for the advanced artists. !THEY WERE ALL PLASTIC!

I was usually drawing apples, oranges, mangos, and wine bottles. Every time I looked around people were drawing skulls and landscapes.

About 2 weeks in nothing changed. My hand was still uncomfortable, and I couldn't draw any better. I always complained I wasn't changing anything but he would always tell me "Slowly but surely." And I would get so annoyed. I did not like doing things out of my comfort zone especially when it hurt.

I thought I did a pretty good job sketching an apple, but he said "It's a little crooked, maybe try erasing some lines and restart." I took a deep breath and said "Okay." Joe was very nice but also very strict. My apple looked perfectly fine to me.

I was in that art class for about 7 months, and I can tell Joe was right. Art does take time, it's not something you can master right away. Even though he always said "Slowly but surely" and he probably knew how much I hated it, he was right!

Justice Emery

“Sunday Snow Day”

I want to tell you about somebody. His name is Gramps. And let’s just say this. If you are lucky enough to have a Gramps in your life, then that is a very special life you have. For those of you that do not have a Gramps, let me paint a picture.

Imagine it is the last snow of Spring, one of the most special snows of the year. The snow that is mushy from the sun but still holds its shape; with temperatures outside that you only have to wear a fleece in, to be content, but you don't get too hot when you wear snow pants. The snow when the birds are chirping, and it feels like you are in a fairy tale and... you get the picture. It was a special day, and you were ready to go outside to build a proper snow fort, one with giant snow bricks, and space big enough that you can turn it into anything. You eagerly pull on all of your snow gear, ready to tackle the cold, only to come to the cognizance that it will take far too long to do alone, and won't be nearly as much enjoyable compared to doing it with two people.

Conveniently, your brother comes into the room at that exact moment. He looks you up and down, puts the puzzle pieces together, then exclaims:

“I wanna go too!” Well, now you have someone to help! But you still could use some adult guidance (Along with someone who can throw hard enough to make a snowball fight actually fun). You scramble around the house, looking for somebody to come with you. Mom and Dad are in the kitchen sitting area, relaxing and too slackened already to go outside and play. Nana is not in the mood, and is too busy doing laundry and cleaning and other dumb grown-up stuff.

You defeatedly flop down into an armchair, your spirits low. Your face is pink and hot from all of the running around your house. Your legs feel sticky with sweat underneath your snow pants, and your neck is damp. You look down piningly at your clean snow boots. They too long to be outside, with those glorious glistening white snow drops shining on them in the sun.

Then, instantaneously, you perceive the sound of a : Clump, clump, clump, a sound that you recognize, and brings a buoyant uplift to your spirits. You slowly look up. (Cue angels singing) Standing before you is a savior, a kind hearted saint. A true treasure in the universe’ hand. Standing before you, is a Gramps.

“Hey J-Bird!” he exclaims joyfully, “I heard you were thinking about building a snow fort?”

“Yes can you come?” you ask, popping up faster than a bag of 100 degree pop-corn. But there was really no point in asking. Because of course, he says yes. It didn’t matter to him that he had a bad knee, or that he had work to do. What mattered was that he would be making you happy! What mattered, was that he would be spending time with you. Because this is what Gramps’ are all about! They put you before themselves in any situation. They support you in any and every pursuit you take on, loving you with all of their heart, and doing whatever it takes to make you laugh. Your happiness is always their first priority. They are the ones who take the time to talk with you. Like, real talk, where you can pour out your heart and be completely honest, in exchange for his sagacious advice, vast knowledge of the world and in-depth life experiences. They are the ones who drive you anywhere, anytime, to do whatever you want; whatever you feel like doing. They are the

ones who pray with you at night when you're scared, snuggle with you when you are sad, and joke (as in go completely nuts) with you when you are gleeful. They protect you with their life, and love you till' the end of time. They make you feel like you belong. Like nothing in the world is wrong and never will be. Like it's just you, and Gramps. Why? Because that is what Gramps' are for.

Lavinia Franco

At some point in your life, no matter who you are, you will face challenges that may scare you, but there will always be somebody there to help you. I have always loved Judo, and I had never been afraid to fight at the dojo, but that all changed the day of my first Judo competition.

It was April 2019, and Spring was just around the corner. It had not been that long since I had started doing Judo, but there was a competition coming up in Denver, and my Sensei (Sensei Marcos) thought that it would be a great opportunity for me to have my first competition there. Every year to kick off the Spring, there is a Judo competition in Denver called the Denver Classic.

My Sensei asked me if I would be interested in participating in the competing that year, and I said yes. I was very excited, but there was a lot of preparation to do. I had to attend every Judo practice to prepare myself, I had to think of different strategies for fighting different people, and I had to learn how to fight both on the right and on the left. The competition was just around the corner, and all of my Judo peers were going to compete as well. Every practice we trained hard, and every practice we got more and more excited. I was very happy to be able to compete, and I was content that all my Judo friends would be there, but I couldn't help feeling nervous. What if I got badly hurt? What if I forget all of my techniques? All of these thoughts lingered in the back of my mind.

It was the day before the competition. We went to the dojo for one last practice before the competition. Since Denver was only an hour away, we could leave the house at 6:30 a.m., get there at 7:30 a.m., and still have time to get ready before it started at 8:30 a.m. That night in bed, I couldn't fall asleep. All I could think about was the competition. I decided that it would be best if I got a good night sleep and to worry about it in the morning. I cleared my mind, and I was finally able to fall asleep.

At 5:30, my mom woke me up. I leaped out of bed and put on some comfy clothes. I had breakfast and then I got my stuff ready. My mom made two tight braids in my hair so it wouldn't come loose while I was fighting. On the way out, I made sure to grab a jacket because it was chilly outside. We got in the car and entered the road to get to Denver. My parents and sister talked and laughed, but I stayed silent. I was only able to think about how everybody would be disappointed in me if I lost my matches. I tried to think of something else, but as we came closer to Denver, I only got more and more nervous. A couple days ago, I was so excited to compete, but now I was dreading it.

We finally made it to the location. It was a big building with a high ceiling, and a massive domed room where the competition would be taking place. I slowly got out of the car. I gripped my duffle bag so tightly that my knuckles turned white. We entered the building, and I was glad to see my friends. We checked in together, and we found ourselves a sitting space big enough for the whole dojo. We hung out for a bit, and we cracked jokes and laughed a lot. I was already a bit calmed down until my Sensei came to us and said it was time to warm up. We jogged and did some low intensity exercises. We stretched and reviewed our throws. At 8:00 a.m., we stopped stretching and went to the locker rooms to change into our kimonos.

After I got ready, me and one of my friends (Mariana) met up with the rest of the group. We had about ten minutes until the matches started, so we just hung out for a bit. The competition ranked from the youngest

competitors to the oldest. It was also categorized by belt ranks. Since my sister was only seven years old, she was one of the first ones to fight. We cheered her on and after a hard match she won!

We spent the next few hours hanging out and watching the other matches. Every time somebody from our dojo went to fight we would all go to the edge of the ring and cheer them on. After about an hour and a half, the announcer called my name to go to the waiting line to wait for my turn to fight. I slowly got up and made my way to the line. My hands were sweaty and my heart was beating at a hundred miles an hour, but there was nothing I could do, so I just got in line to wait for my turn. My Sensei noticed how nervous I was, and he came up to me. "Lavinia, don't be afraid. Just remember what I taught you, and don't forget that everyone will be here to cheer you on. You will do great! Even if you don't win the match, we will all be proud of you for competing." He said in a reassuring tone. "Thank you Sensei Marcos." I said feeling calmer. I was next in line, and I was talking to this girl from another dojo named Sunny. She was in the line next to mine, so that meant that we would be fighting each other. When the people in front of us finished, it was our turn. We got to our ends of the mat and bowed to one another, then we went to the middle and got in position.

As we waited for the referee to give us the signal to start the match, so many thoughts raced through my mind that it was impossible to think. When the referee gave us the signal, we started the fight. She tried to throw me but I got out of her grip, then I threw her, but she landed on her side, which didn't count as a complete throw, so we had to keep fighting. We started pinning each other on the ground, but we could never hold each other long enough for it to count as a full point.

It eventually went overtime and we were still fighting. Our points were matched and we were both getting tired. I was trying to think of a strategy to win, but my mind was blank. I was paying too much attention to when she would try to throw me, that I forgot to try some throws myself. At first I was so nervous, but as the fight went on, I got the hang of it. I noticed that every time Sunny tried to go for a grip to throw me, she would practically run at me. So the next time she went for a throw, I used her own strength against her and was able to throw her straight on her back. A burst of cheering erupted from the crowd. I was so caught up in the moment that it took me a second to realize that I had won the match and they were cheering for me. I felt a wave of happiness wash over me.

I couldn't stop smiling as I bowed to her and walked out of the ring. As soon as I got off the mat, all of my Judo peers attacked me with hugs. Sensei Marcos and all of the assistant coaches congratulated me. "I knew you could do it!" Mariana exclaimed. "I'm proud of you Lavinia." Sensei Marcos approved.

We spent the next hour watching the rest of our peers fight their matches. Once everyone in the competition had finished their matches, it was time for them to announce first, second, and third place of each division. I was proud of my sister when she got a gold medal. Then, we heard an announcement. "Yellow and yellow-orange belt division 75-100 pounds, please report to the lobby." Announced a referee through the intercom. That was my division. My friends and I got to the lobby and waited in the midst of the crowd. A referee announced the third place winner for my division. It wasn't me, so I thought I hadn't made it on the top three. "For second place, we have Sunny from the Gracie Judo club!" The referee announces. I congratulated Sunny as she made her way up onto the podium.

Silence fell over the crowd as we waited for the referee to announce the first place winner. "And in first place, congratulations to Lavinia Franco from the Fort Collins Judo club!" The referee exclaimed. I couldn't believe

my ears. It was my first competition and I got first place! Everyone from my dojo crowded around me, cheering and yelling. They helped me onto the podium. As the referee hung the shiny gold medal around my neck, I was so excited all I could manage was to mutter a thank you.

Almost everyone from my dojo won a medal, but only a few people got a gold medal. After all of the winners of the divisions were nominated, the referees and coaches congratulated us. When the adult part of the competition began, we started getting hungry. My parents took Mariana, Luca, and I out to eat. We went into downtown Denver and found a chinese restaurant. We ate, talked, and laughed a lot. I was so happy, I had completely forgotten about my anxiety from my match.

As we walked back, my medal hung proudly around my neck, and all I felt was happiness. Before we drove back home, I made sure to thank Sensei Marcos for his heartfelt words. During the ride home, we cracked jokes and ate snacks. I was so proud of myself for competing, even if I got very scared at one point. As I look back, I wouldn't have wanted it any other way.

Gracyn Redmon

I had a swarm of butterflies in my stomach. They weren't going anywhere, so I just choked them down like excessive peanut butter on a dry sandwich. I was going to run the Bolder Boulder 10k. It was 6.2 miles. I was 8 years old. My heart was pounding that night getting ready for bed.

“Wake up-wake up, it's almost time to go.” “Get some breakfast, something light, so you don't throw up, and go to the bathroom.”

My dad woke me up almost every morning and trained me for this, pushing me on each and every step. On this morning, it wasn't training, it was reality.

It was a crisp morning. The perfect running weather. There were white fluffy clouds lining the sky to give us shade, an ideal day. I stepped off the bus. The streets were lined with cars on each side. Ahead of me, another endless line, this time with porta potties. They were ready, and so was I.

“We are going to run the whole way, don't stop, even once.” My dad stated, My hair was up and my shoes were tied.

Boom! About 10 waves ahead of us the gunshot went off and the race had started. My heart thumped in my ears, almost as loud as the gunshot. We stepped forward. Getting closer and closer with each wave and each passing gunshot. Soon we were at the front, the starting line was one wave ahead of us. I looked down at my shoes trying to calm my ferocious heart.

“You ready?” My dad asked.

“As ready as I'll ever be” I replied, but then the doubts kicked in...

What if i don't do well? What if I stop? What will happen if I don't finish?

Questions, and worries raced through my head like the runners ahead of me. CRACK the gun shot, it was my wave. I raced off sprinting. Bands playing on every side of me, people watching from every angle. It was magnificent. I was so thrilled to be there and to be able to run. The first mile flew by like it was nothing. The second mile flew by almost as fast, I went through a slip n slide. Soon I felt my heart racing again, but for a different reason. I was getting really tired. My dad noticed when I slowed down.

“Come on don't stop.” He said, “Keep moving forward, never give up.” I grabbed his hand and he pulled me forward giving me a little burst of speed. I ran faster. I stepped over mile 3 knowing I was that much closer to finishing. I pushed harder ignoring the pain in my legs and my feet. I started getting a cramp in my side. Oh no I am never going to make it now, I thought.

“We are going to make it, just keep pushing forward.” My dad said as if he read my mind. Those words motivated me and told me to persevere through it. I grabbed my dad's hand again to give me the strength. Mile 5. Finally. One more, One more, One more. I kept thinking to myself.

Mile six passed by. My cramp was burning and it felt like fire pressed into my side. I ignored it. I turned a corner and saw a gigantic hill ahead of me. The final stretch.

I started up the steep hill, using every single ounce of force I had left to drag my legs up. I could barely breathe. The top was only a few feet away. I pushed one more step and made it! My legs relaxed as I rounded the corner, the stadium full of people all cheering and smiling. I stepped onto the bouncy white floor and saw the finish line on the other side of the stadium. I sprinted, whipping past runners left and right. The crowd cheered. My legs were bouncing and it felt like I was flying. I knew this was it. I sped up. The finish line rapidly closing in on me. Soon there were less than fifty feet left. I pushed myself hard and stepped over the line! My heart burst with pride and excitement. The seeds of perseverance had been planted.