



A mind once stretched by a new idea never regains its original dimensions...

-Oliver Wendell Holmes

MELANIE CAFAZZA

When writing this personal biography the webpage, I spent days thinking about who I am and how to describe myself. Instead I came to the conclusion that I have no idea. I don't think I could ever truly define myself because I am always growing and learning with time. I do know that I love to drive down windy roads with the windows down, I love to listen to every kind of music, I love to drink warm vanilla tea, and I love the bright happiness of the color yellow. But more than anything, I know that I love my brother and sister. They truly are my absolute best friends. "My friends have made the story of my life" –Helen Keller.

I am a daughter, a sister, a friend.

My love for reading started as a young child. While other parents were taking their children to the pool or the playground, we would pile up into our wagon and walk to the library. It was the highlight of my week. I would borrow out the maximum number of books with every visit; always trying to con my sister into getting only one so that she could rent the rest for me. Ever since then, I have had a passion for reading anything I could find. Mark Twain once said that "the man who doesn't read good books has no advantage over the man who can't read them." As a future teacher I hope to inspire this love for reading that burns so brightly within me. More importantly, I hope to provide the encouragement and assistance that my students will require to truly believe in themselves and their abilities. "The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams" -Eleanor Roosevelt.



It is our choices that show who we really are... -Me

**A List of Nothing in Particular
Challenge me, and I'll Prove You Wrong
Melanie Cafazza
February 2009**

“THEY WILL TELL YOU NO, a thousand times no, until all the no’s become meaningless. All your life they will tell you no, quite firmly and very quickly.

AND YOU WILL TEL THEM YES.”

-Nike

Nike once ran a campaign ad that started “All your life you are told the things you cannot do.” When I was a little girl and my parents told me that I couldn’t have a pony, that I couldn’t grow up to be a princess, that I couldn’t eat flowers even though the dog did it, that I couldn’t walk to the playground by myself, I never understood why I was limited from all of those experiences. Looking back now, all those no’s made sense. Then I got a little older and went to school, but the no’s still followed me. No you can’t color like that, no that’s not part of the uniform, no the dog can’t go to school with you, no you can’t go down the slide that way, no you can’t eat ice cream for dinner, no you can’t wear your hair like that. No after no after no. Granted, some of these desires were ridiculous and juvenile, but nonetheless, all those no’s determined who I would become.

And then the no's started becoming more serious. As a 10 year old, the world is still pretty flawless. So for me to understand my father's reasoning as to why I couldn't go to the birthday slumber party that all the other girls in the grade were going to, was beyond my understanding. My father's only response was that I was not old enough, even though my childish mind saw it as a vengeful plot to keep me from being happy. Yet somehow, I survived the rest of grade school and survived the ever present no's that have always remained so close. No you can not go to the movies with a boy, no you can not go to a boy-girl party, no you can not ride in a car with that person, no you can't go there, no you can't eat that, no you can't wear that, no, no, no.

And then high school began and the no's got even louder. My high school English teacher told me that I should consider dropping out of the honors class because my writing was not good enough to earn an A. Despite the fact that she told me no, I knew I could prove her wrong. Eleanor Roosevelt once said that "You must do the thing you think you cannot do," and I did exactly that and learned more in that one class than all of high school combined.

The St. Dominic Dance Team tryouts were no exception to me being told no. There were two parts of the tryout out, the first was to memorize and perform a selection of choreography and the second was a showcasing of skills. When they called my number to perform, I froze. Instantly I forgot the choreography that I had been rehearsing all day, my knees shook unstable underneath my frightened body, my arms turned to Jell-O, and I smiled. I tried to perform the best I could, but I looked more like a confused three-legged ostrich than the next member of a state winning dance team. I completed the skills showcase flawlessly, then went out into the lobby and cried away my dreams. Once again, someone was going to

tell me no. They will tell me that I'm not good enough. I'm not talented enough. I'm not the dancer I thought I was. When I heard them call my number again, I walked back into the gym, confused as to what was going on. I had just figured that they messed up the numbering and accidentally called me twice. But they had brought me back in to try out again. They said that they watched me rehearsing and they liked my abilities, but they were disappointed in my performance. As of now, the coach had me on the 'no' list but the judges wanted to give me another chance. *This is my chance* I thought, *this is my chance to tell them YES I can do it. They are telling me no right now; this is my chance to tell them yes.* And I performed that dance better than I've danced anything my whole life, securing a starting place for me on the dance team.

When looking at colleges, my father told me that the family did not have the money to pay for anything above the community college level. He told me that I couldn't go to a university unless I planned to pay for it, and since I had little money, my options were severely restricted. I refused to take his no for an answer, and I filled out every scholarship application that I could find. I competed in scholarship competitions, filled out form after form for every local scholarship available, I searched online and wrote scholarship essays one after another. I knew that I had the grades and intelligence to go anywhere, I was just lacking in finances. When my high school teacher told me that I wasn't good enough as a writer, I proved her wrong with my winning scholarship essays. When my dad told me that I couldn't go to a university, I earned scholarship after scholarship until I could tell him yes, I can.

Boys will tell you know by breaking up with you and breaking your heart. Your parents will tell you no a million times when you are a child. Bad teachers will tell you no that you are

not good enough for their class. Colleges will tell you that you are not smart enough to go to their school. Coaches will tell you that you are not talented enough to win. You parents will still tell you no about millions of things, even when you are older. No matter who you are, someone will always be there to tell you no, to tell you that you're not good enough. Prove them wrong.

"AND YOU WILL TELL THEM YES." –Nike



Object of My Affection

The road surface, the cold, the wind, the fit of their shoes

Melanie Cafazza

February 2009

The road surface, the cold, the wind, the fit of their shoes

Sharon Olds

Confidently pointing to the top shelf, "I'll take those, size 7 ½ please" I demand after striding into the store, hearing the bell on the door still ringing behind me. "Would you like to try them on to make sure they are the perfect fit for you?" the salesman returns with a curious glance at me. Responding, "No, it's okay, I know" to the salesman, in my head I try to remember exactly how many pairs of that same shoe I already have stacked in my garage.

Although the salesman tries to persuade me with the newest comfort gel innovations and low-

impact resistance soles, the first time I chose a pair of running shoes, we became companions, and I can't desert them now, not after we've gone so far.

After lacing up my shoes, I pause to take a rejuvenating breath of the cool, damp spring air. And I'm off. Treading down the early morning sidewalks of a sleeping subdivision. Sharon Old's words "the single body alone in the universe against its own best time" resonate through my mind as I begin to pick up the pace. By the time I reach my halfway stop sign, I can really feel how new my shoes are. But I do not allow myself to complain, only positive thoughts. And really, I love those shoes. I love every last pair of them that I have literally ran into the ground. This is my favorite type of running; no rough, dizzying track, no beeping stopwatches, the freedom of running outside a lane, no competition besides yourself. I need nothing more than a strong ponytail and my companion shoes.

Those are the times when I love running. I love the freedom, the comfort of my shoes, the cool breeze through my hair. Then "BANG!" the gun goes off and the race begins. Running is no longer for fun. Now it's for sport, for competition, for winning. I lift my head up, and as my feet push off the unforgiving steel blocks, I take off, keeping my elbows slightly out from my body to earn some room against the pack. We are a stampede of athletes pushing, elbowing, crushing- fighting to be the leader of the pack. My adrenaline is pumping from the ringing shot of the gun, but my mind is in slow motion. *Just stay with them Mel. Be the competition. Stay on her tail. She'll push herself too hard, then you can take her.* My right foot pushes off the pavement, then my left.

Our dominance in the pack has been ranked; we're starting to fall into line. But by no means is this is. Runners are animals, and we don't give up without fighting to lead. I am now

five places back; trying to establish my pace and settle in. After a few more strides, I realize the number four girl is falling back from number three. I quickly consider pacing myself with four, comfortable with speed. Coach Haug's voice goes off in my head like a warning alert, "If it doesn't hurt, you're not running fast enough!" He's right. I am the competition, not a running buddy. It's my time.

Viewing my right peripherals, I slow down a step to avoiding running into four. If I take off in a sprint, she will do likewise, and we will both just be wasting energy. So I take off with a hard, steady stride, lengthening my legs and keeping my head held high.

I fall in behind three, adjusting my speed to match her stride with two quick steps. Completing the first lap, Coach Haug's voice rings clear from the rest of the crowd, yelling, *demanding* that I pass her on the back straightaway and then push it hard all the way. My mind is no longer in slow motion. It's running circles as quickly as my feet. I try to calmly remind myself that this is half way. Only one more lap. Just one more. But my thoughts are as fragmented as my breathing. It sounds the same in my head as if I was gasping it out loud between wheezing breaths.

Somewhere, as if out of the untapped depths of my muscles, I found the strength to kick it in that much harder, pulling away from behind three, and running parallel with her for that split second. Breathlessly, she looks at me out of the corners of her eyes. I can sense that we are both past the point of physical exhaustion. At this moment, I realize how much I love running. I love this. I love the competition. I love the burning flames raging from my thighs, the marble slabs that have replaced my mobile feet, the solid block of ice that has formed in my lungs, and the tight claws clamping around my calves, because those pains create pleasure. I

feel proud of my accomplishments, I admire the way my muscles continue on; I am confident and competitive.

Hearing the screaming cheers of the crowd, each one trying to use his/her voice to push the runner faster, I suddenly realize that my muscles have been on autopilot. I had passed three, rounded the corner, and am sprinting with all my strength to the finish line. I no longer feel my legs, everything on my body hurts, each short gasp of cold air burns, yet I am right alongside two. We both push on, pushing each other to run that much harder. The rest seems like a blur; maybe because we are running so fast or maybe because of the lack of oxygen in my brain. My body is moving too quickly to process thoughts of strategy. There's only one word on repeat in my mind, just *go, go, go, go*. But when I keep pushing it past the finish line, she slows down to stop right at the line, which is exactly what I need to win.

Although it's second place, I have never loved running so much. I love the feelings of the confidence and pride. More than anything, I have accomplished something, something I have never done before. Not only have I never placed so well in a race, but I've never tried so hard and really felt successful. I become conscious that I love to run because I have achieved, I have accomplished, I won.



Lesson Idea 2: Geography Assignment
It's all about... Location, Location, Location!
Melanie Cafazza
April 2009

Teacher: Ms. Cafazza
Grade Level: 11th grade
Course: American Literature

Rationale

In this assignment, students will be given the chance to focus not only on a specific geographic area, but also the characteristics of that location given a specific time period. Since this is an American Literature class, their chosen location must be within the United States of America. However, students will be asked to choose a specific time period for that location. The final projects will be on display around the room for the high school open house at the end of the month.

This project will include a writing assignment in which the student will write a three page paper describing the setting of the story, characteristics of that location in that time period, how that location is different now, how the setting and time period affect the characters in the story, and what would happen if the story took place in the same time period but in a different location. The final paper must be typed, size 12, Calibri font.

Students will also be required to include visuals that show the location at that time period (this can be photos or paintings), the type of clothing that the characters would have worn and/or types of houses they would have lived in during that time in that location, a map that identifies the setting, a picture of the modern-day location, and any other visuals they feel appropriate. These visuals may be presented in a Power Point slide show, a poster board, a picture book, or visual of their choice.

Computer skills will be necessary for the completion of this process, so class time will be provided in the computer lab. Word processing skills are needed for the typing of the paper, while internet is needed for research and photo visuals. Besides internet research, students will be given class time to visit the library, and will therefore be required to include research from books and paper sources. A minimum of four sources are required for information research, with only two of them being internet sites. There are no restrictions on web-based or paper-based citations for the visuals. Furthermore, students will be allowed to work with a partner on this assignment to encourage cooperative learning and social skills.

Students are allowed to pick their own partners, but will be encouraged to choose someone that they know is responsible, dependable, and someone that he/she feels they can work well with.

The materials and resources required for this assignment include: class time in the library, class time in the computer lab, poster board/markers/tape/stapler/hole-puncher/glue will be provided. Parts of this project will require work outside of class time, but students who do not have computer/library access will have available class time and resources to complete the project.

Students will be assessed on the completed project as well as using class time responsibly. See rubric for more information.

Teacher Calendar (assuming block scheduling)

Day 1: Introduce project, let students pick a partner, start brainstorming on which story/location/time setting, have group-teacher conference to brainstorm/approve topic

Day 2: Library research day. Continue providing feedback and help students brainstorm.

Day 3: Computer lab day. Continue providing feedback and help students brainstorm.

Day 4: Work day- students will work with their partner to add finishing touches or return to computer lab or library if needed. Continue providing feedback and help students brainstorm.

Day 5: Presentation day- students will give short presentation to class about their location/time period and will show class their visual.

Student Calendar (assuming block scheduling)

Day 1: Students choose a partner. Brainstorm possible topic ideas. Conference with teacher to further brainstorm/have idea approved.

Day 2: Library research day- work with partner in the library to research your topic

Day 3: Computer lab day- work with partner in the library to research your topic

Day 4: Work day- complete finishing touches on project. Proof-read paper. Finish compiling visuals.

Day 5: Quick, 2-minute presentation of topic. Discuss your paper and show your visual to the class.

STUDENT HANDOUT:

Name _____

Ms. Cafazza- High School American Literature

Spring 2009

It's all about... Location, Location, Location!

In this assignment:

1. You & a partner will create a project (**paper & visual**) that will be displayed at the open house at the end of this month
2. The theme for your project is the **location and time period** from one of the stories read in class
3. You & your partner will be given class time to use library and internet sources to research information and visuals

Paper requirements include:

1. Three pages- typed, size 12, Calibri font
2. Paper must be proof-read
3. Paper must describe:
 - a. The setting of the story
 - b. Characteristics of that location in that time period
 - c. How that location is different now
 - d. How the setting and time period affect the characters in the story
 - e. What would happen if the story took place in the same time period but in a different location

*make sure all ideas are well thought-out and developed

Visual requirements include:

1. Visuals can be a power point presentation, poster board, picture book, or creative visual of your choice
2. Visuals may be photos or paintings
3. Visuals must picture:
 - a. The type of clothing that the characters would have worn and/or types of houses they would have lived in during that time in that location
 - b. A map that identifies the setting
 - c. A picture of the modern-day location
 - d. And any other visuals you feel appropriate

*make sure all visuals are relevant to the topic

List of stories read this semester/possible project topics:

- John Smith, 57-66
- William Bradford, 114-126, 133-136
- Pontiac, 439-440
- Red Jacket, 445-447
- Benjamin Franklin, 473-474/526-534
- Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1163-1180

- Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*
- Sojourner Truth, 1695-1696
- Henry David Thoreau, 1872-1882
- Melville's *Bartleby the Scrivener*
- Rebecca Harding Davis' *Life in the Iron-Mills*, 2599-2625
- Melville's *Billy Budd*
- Poe, 1553-1579

Maximum Points			
Minimum Points			
Use of Class Time ____/10	Disruptive to others, wasting time, no work completed	On task half the time, some work is completed	On task, good use of class time, productive
Ideas in Paper (Includes spelling, grammar, punctuation, correct word usage...) ____/40	Evident that very little time or effort went into paper. Not proof-read.	Good ideas but need to be expanded upon. Multiple proof-reading mistakes.	New and original ideas, well thought-out, ideas are fully expanded. Very few mistakes, was proof-read well.
Paper is appropriate length and style ____/5	Too short, wrong format	_____	Three pages in length, proper format
Paper describes story setting ____/5	Idea is missing from paper	Idea there but needs more work	Ideas are there and complete
Paper describes characteristics of location for time period ____/5	Idea is missing from paper	Idea there but needs more work	Ideas are there and complete
Paper describes how location is different now ____/5	Idea is missing from paper	Idea there but needs more work	Ideas are there and complete
Paper describes how the setting and time period affect the characters in the story	Idea is missing from paper	Idea there but needs more work	Ideas are there and complete

____/5			
Paper describes what would happen if the story took place in the same time period but in a different location	Idea is missing from paper	Idea there but needs more work	Ideas are there and complete
____/5			
Visuals	No visuals	Visuals need more work	Visuals are creative and relevant
____/30			
Visual of the type of clothing that the characters would have worn and/or types of houses they would have lived in during that time in that location	No visual	_____	Visual is there and complete
____/5			
Visual of a map that identifies the setting	No visual	_____	Visual is there and complete
____/5			
Visual of the modern-day location	No visual	_____	Visual is there and complete
____/5			
Additional/extra visuals	No visual	_____	Visual is there and complete
____/5			
Bibliography	No bibliography included	Includes a bibliography but is not complete, wrong number of sources	Completed bibliography with appropriate number/form of sources
____/10			
Total Points: _____/140			