



Advanced | Exemplar Essay

Home: The Blueprints of our Lives

Traditions and Mood



Clarity and Focus

Relevant context orients the reader in the introduction as it narrows to a clear, focused, and effective thesis statement (“With his fond memories and descriptive language...Rodriguez creates a grateful and appreciative mood”). The essay maintains focus on developing each point in the thesis, thoroughly addressing the demands of the prompt.



Development

The central idea is developed with precisely chosen details from the text (the kitchen, family, and perseverance examples), and a fair balance of relevant evidence and thorough explanation is maintained throughout the essay.



Organization

An effective organizational structure is employed with a clear introduction and conclusion, and body paragraphs that each address one main point from the thesis statement. Varied transitions show the relationships between and among paragraphs (“As thankful as the author is for...,” “The author also expresses”) and ideas (“because,” “This is best illustrated when,” “While,” “however”).



Language and Style

Precise and domain-specific language is used to enhance ideas (“perseverance,” “imagery,” “instilled,” “discriminated”) and address the complexity of the topic. A formal style and objective tone are maintained throughout, and sentence structure is appropriately varied.



Using Exemplars in Your Lessons

Exemplar essays are tools to take abstract descriptions and make them more concrete for students. One way to use them is to print the clean copies of the essays and allow students to use the rubric to make notes or even find examples of important elements of an essay - thesis statements, introductions, evidence, conclusions, transitions, etc. Teachers can also use exemplars to illustrate what each score point within a trait ‘looks like’ in an authentic student essay. For additional ideas, please see “25 Ways to Use Exemplar Essays” by visiting the Curriculum Resources page in Help.

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"I will never forget how my parents turned this simple house into a home." In this statement from "Home", Narciso Rodriguez embodies the central idea of the memoir: home is where the heart is. The essay describes his experiences growing up as the son of brave Cuban immigrants in New Jersey, USA. He paints the picture of his childhood home, the diverse neighborhood where he grew up, and the welcoming environment his parents shared with the community surrounding them. With his fond memories and descriptive language, Rodriguez creates a grateful and appreciative mood for the Cuban parents who raised him in a foreign land.

In "Home", Rodriguez creates a strong mood of gratitude as he describes the lessons his parents taught him about culture, family, and perseverance. In seeking a better life, the author's parents immigrated to America before their son was born. Though they were far from their home, family, and friends, his parents wanted him to grow up knowing his Cuban heritage. This is best illustrated when Rodriguez first introduces the reader to the vibrant atmosphere of the family's kitchen. Vivid imagery is used to illustrate what he calls the "heart" of their home, and a sense of nostalgia emerges. He remembers that it was always filled with "passionate Cuban music (which I adore to this day)... mixing with the aromas of the kitchen". From the beginning, Rodriguez shows he is grateful that his parents raised him to know and appreciate his Cuban culture. In order to instill in him a pride of Cuban culture, he reminisces how his parents showed him how to cook traditional Cuban food and "unwittingly passed on to me their rich culinary skills and a love of cooking that is still with me today (and for which I am eternally grateful)". Throughout his childhood, Rodriguez

was surrounded by a deep sense of Cuban pride and he clearly learned to love and appreciate his native culture with his stomach, his ears, and his heart. By sharing these memories, Rodriguez shows how grateful he is that his parents immersed him in family traditions and instilled in him a sense of pride for his Cuban culture.

As thankful as the author is for being taught about his heritage, his is equally appreciative for his parents' lessons about family, of which Rodriguez also describes in his memoir. According to him, his parents always invited family and friends over and the kitchen was where everyone would gather. He writes: "Here, the innocence of childhood, the congregation of family and friends, and endless celebrations that encompassed both, formed the backdrop to life in our warm home". Rodriguez expresses his appreciation for his parents taking care of all people, especially those in need. His parents demonstrated that "family" had nothing to do with being a blood relative, but rather a shared commitment to a life lived with value. A variety of individuals were regulars at their dinner table, folks from near and far who were more like family than simply neighbors. He introduces the reader to several people from the neighborhood as his "aunts" or "cousins" or even "grandparents", even though they weren't related by blood. His parents showed him that family is created when you love and care for others, and that compassion is something he has carried with him to this day. Rodriguez appreciates that his parents' generosity was lavished upon this extended family, and also to others in the neighborhood who were in need. For example, they "always kept their arms and their door open to many people we considered family" and "...there was often someone staying with us temporarily until they were able to get back on their feet". Even though he grew up in the 1960s, a time of great change for our country when "racism was the norm and segregation prevailed in the United States", this neighborhood bonded through their genuine compassion and humanity. Rodriguez credits his magnanimous parents for helping to create that sense of family within their community and is

grateful to them for teaching him this lifelong lesson so early in his youth.

The author also expresses a tremendous amount of respect for the struggles his parents overcame in order to provide a good life for their son, as Rodriguez explains how they left everything behind in Cuba so that they could move all the way to New Jersey for him. They came to the United States "without any knowledge of the language or the culture" and they left behind their friends and careers, all to give their son a better life. While in Cuba, his father worked in a laboratory and his mother was an engineer; in America, however, his parents were forced to take "whatever work they could find". He hints that they weren't hired for better jobs because they were discriminated against, but instead of giving up, they persevered, knowing that the struggle was worth providing a better life for their family. He conveys how grateful he is for the sacrifices his parents made for him. His language puts them on a pedestal by describing them as having "courage" and being "selfless". Rodriguez concludes: "There is no way to express my gratitude for the spirit of generosity impressed upon me at such a young age and the demonstration of how important family and friends are". By using the word "impressed", the author emphasizes the lifelong bond between him and the "spirit of generosity", passed onto him by his parents, of which he will never separate.

Narciso Rodriguez clearly regards his mother and father with the utmost admiration and respect, and throughout his memoir, "Home", he maintains a mood of gratitude and appreciation in describing all of the lessons his parents taught him throughout his childhood. His memories are filled with warm images of friends and family, of lessons learned around the kitchen table, and of the strong feelings he developed for his Cuban culture. Rodriguez defines his parents' teachings as "the basis of [his] life", and throughout his writing, it is clear that he is forever thankful that they showed him the importance of generosity, perseverance, family, and love.