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Tenth Grade

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“If all the books in the world were about to disappear, but you could save one, what would it be? Why?”

The Book that Can Change Lives

In a flash of a brilliant light, the universe becomes blinding white for a split second. When colors and darkness refills its positions, the art of words—literature—is all gone. The one novel that will serve mortality a purpose is Homer’s adventurous epic, *The Odyssey*. Life-changing lessons are embedded in the conflicts the characters resolve, making the epic a useful guide for life.

Loyalty is strength. Loyalty is resistance. Loyalty is a virtue. Penelope remained faithful to Odysseus while surrounded in a crowd of suitors persuading her for love. Her loyalty did not falter; she remained committed throughout all the lonely years. “There she was all day long, working away at the great web, but at night she used to unravel it by torchlight.” (18) Penelope created a lie, promising to marry once she finished her shrine to Odysseus. However, every night she secretly unraveled the work she’d done under a dim torch. Her defiance to being “swooned” by other men illustrates her loyalty. Her loyalty was a strong grip on a ripping rope; she continued to hold onto Odysseus after twenty tedious years without a word from him. Devotion is required to maintain a healthy relationship. Therefore, one must attain loyalty, for it is a necessity, which Homer correlates through his character, Penelope. Loyalty is a life goal. Life goals are difficult to succeed at. To power through the difficulty, one needs perseverance.

Perseverance is the continuous footprints and falls printed on the dirt ground. Perseverance is an imperative to accomplish any task. To accomplish an ambition, there must be devotion into fulfilling it. Odysseus courageously worked with his strength to reach his home, Ithaca. “Your fighting spirit’s

stronger than ours, your stamina never fails. You must be made of iron from head to foot.” (302-305) Eurylochus, a shipmate, admires Odysseus’s persistence and dedication into reaching his home. Life has the tendency to twist paths into a labyrinth, forcing the person to face difficulties before reaching their craved desires. Therefore, only devotion can endeavor the obstacles preventing one from their goal. Through Odysseus’s journey home, Homer was able to clearly portray the importance of having persistence to reach a beloved destination. To attain the moral of having perseverance, one must have a goal to strive to—a goal that has such importance that one is willing to do anything to achieve it. One can only be willing to fulfill an objective if it is their own.

“In the progress of personality, first comes a declaration of independence, then a recognition of interdependence” (Henry Van Dyke). Independence is the foundation for every task, every goal, and every accomplishment. One must discover one’s own identity before taking on the challenge of life. When thrown into a pit of darkness, it is suspected for the object to follow its surroundings. Odysseus finds his crew seduced by the temptations of the Lotus-eaters; however, he does not let his crew influence and corrupt his mindset on returning home. “Any crewmen who ate the lotus, the honey-sweet fruit, lost all desire to send a message back, much less return; their only wish to linger there with the Lotus-eaters, grazing on lotus, all memory of the journey dissolved forever.” (106-110) To enhance Odysseus’s independent mind, Homer juxtaposes the crew’s actions with Odysseus’s heroic deed. “But I brought them back, back to the hollow ships, and streaming tears, I forced them, hauled them under the rowing benches...” (110-112) Odysseus did not let his crew’s decision lure him into their inebriate way; he focused his mentality on returning home. Individuality is an aberration, breaking the normal binds of society with its own cognition. Without independence, people would be following other people’s goals instead of their own. This proves the immense importance of having one’s own mindset, for an individualistic mindset creates passionate goals.

Epics are erupted with life lessons for all, lessons that are desperately required in modern society. If all books were to be burned down in orange

flames, soaked by ruthless waves, or swept away by a gust of wind, I would save *The Odyssey*. Homer's characters display value morals throughout the journey they endure. Underneath the exciting action, the lessons of loyalty, perseverance and independence were cleverly hidden. His morals became a shining light for the odysseys of modern life.

The End

Deeqa Farah
Tenth Grade
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“If all the books in the world were about to disappear, but you could save one, what would it be? Why?”

If I had to choose one book to save, it would be *Night* by Elie Wiesel. Although I have read many more enjoyable books in my lifetime, *Night* has had the biggest impact on me by far. Elie Wiesel is a Holocaust survivor, and his novel tells the story of his fight for survival during one of the most horrific events in history. While I could have chosen a book that I enjoy reading again and again, I chose *Night* because you only need to read it once to feel the impact of Wiesel’s words. By the last page of this small book, the reader has experienced the full range of emotion, from sorrow to horror, and ultimately, to hope. Reading the novel [book] is a completely life-changing experience.

I would choose this book above all others to save because it teaches a lesson to all who read it, a lesson that must never be forgotten. The fact that the Holocaust ever happened is terrible enough, but the idea that such an atrocity could be repeated is absolutely terrifying.

Keeping this book on Earth would, in effect, be preventing another Holocaust from occurring. George Santayana famously said, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” As long as people are aware of the mistakes made in the past, they can avoid making them again. Ignorance, however, only leads to repeated mistakes.

It may be unfathomable to future generations that this incident of inhumanity at its worst could have ever occurred, but this book would keep the story, however horrific, alive. It is also important to remind people of the Holocaust in order to tell the stories of the victims, both living and dead. *Night* is a solid reminder that this terrible event happened in our recent history. When Wiesel wrote the book, he was not writing just to tell his own story to the world,

but to give a voice to the voiceless— the countless victims who suffered unjust and undeserved fates. Eliezer’s spiritual struggle owes to his shaken faith not only in God but also in everything around him. After experiencing such cruelty, Eliezer can no longer make sense of his world. His disillusionment results from his painful experience with Nazi persecution, but also from the cruelty he sees fellow prisoners inflict on each other. Eliezer also becomes aware of the cruelty of which he himself is capable. Everything he experiences in the war shows him how horribly people can treat one another—a revelation that troubles him deeply.

Furthermore, *Night* demonstrates that cruelty breeds cruelty. Instead of comforting each other in times of difficulty, the prisoners respond to their circumstances by turning against one another. Near the end of the work, a Kapo says to Eliezer, “Here, every man has to fight for himself and not think of anyone else. . . here, there are no fathers, no brothers, no friends. Everyone lives and dies for himself alone.” It is significant that a Kapo makes this remark to the narrator, because Kapos were themselves prisoners placed in charge of other prisoners. They enjoyed a relatively better quality of life in the camp, but they aided the Nazi mission and often behaved cruelly toward prisoners in their charge. At the beginning of the fifth section, Eliezer refers to them as “functionaries of death.” The Kapos’ position symbolizes the way the Holocaust’s cruelty bred cruelty in its victims, turning people against each other, as self-preservation became the highest virtue.

Finally, *Night* is a prime example of what can happen when we judge someone for their differences. Regardless of one’s religion, race, age, or sex, everyone is deserving of equal treatment. It is not these factors that make a person inferior, but only how they treat others. It is my hope that future generations will read this book and take from it the importance of following the Golden Rule. If everyone treated their fellow human beings with respect and understanding, the world would be such a peaceful place to live. Until this happens, however, people must be aware of what can happen when indifference and judgment are taken to the extreme.

In a world increasingly plagued with so much pain and violence, it is imperative that a book such as *Night* remains to remind people of the past so that they can change their behavior to create a more peaceful future.

The End

Katie LaCosta

Tenth Grade

Academy of Our Lady of Peace

“If all the books in the world were about to disappear, but you could save one, what would it be? Why?”

My favorite two activities on earth are reading and cooking. If all of the books in the world were about to disappear and I could save one book, I would save the greatest cookbook ever written, “Mastering the Art of French Cooking” by Julia Child. This massive two-volume publication is over 1,200 pages long and is the greatest compendium of recipes ever created. I would be able to read for enjoyment and also create a lifetime supply of stunning meals. In saving this cookbook, I would save a fantastic example of literature, culture and cuisine, and I would be able to share it with all people.

“Mastering the Art of French Cooking” is beautifully written, full of history, descriptive imagery, and interesting anecdotes. Each recipe is introduced with a little history of the recipe and information on how the recipe is to be prepared. Sometimes Julia Child gets entertainingly graphic in her descriptions. For example, in her preparation of lobster, she writes, “A note on dealing with live lobsters: if you object to splitting or steaming a live lobster, it may be killed almost instantly just before cooking, if you plunge the point of a knife into the head, between the eyes, or sever the spinal cord by making a small incision in the back of the shell at the juncture of the chest and tail.” (Child, 220) This type of writing is certainly as exciting, graphic and slightly disturbing as anything written by Stephen King or any other horror writer. The book contains information on just about every type of food people eat. Chicken can be roasted, sautéed, fricasseed, broiled, casseroled, or baked into a cassoulet. In one instance, Julia Child gives you the history of a dessert and explains how it is supposed to look like the caps worn by the officers at a famous French military academy. Her love for food is clear through the passion with which she writes. Even though it is a cookbook,

you can almost read it like a story.

In saving this book, you are basically saving all food that “tastes good, looks good and is a delight to eat” (xiv). I believe what Julia Child is doing in her books is saving the roots of all the culinary arts. She notes, “If you are thoroughly skilled in French techniques, because the repertoire is so vast, you have the background for almost any type of cuisine...you are better as an Italian, Mexican, or even Chinese cook when you have a solid French foundation (xiv). Cooking in every culture includes the following things that Julia Child covers in great detail: measuring, chopping, dicing, icing, mincing, working with meats and vegetables, baking, as well as plating and serving food. These are techniques that translate into every cuisine in every culture. Take the egg, for example. Julia Child spends 22 pages on the basic preparation of eggs. This is an example of a food that every culture has incorporated into its diet, showing the versatility of the French cuisine Julia Child brought to American home cooks. My personal favorite chapter is Chapter 10: Desserts and Cakes. Who would not be intrigued by a recipe that starts by lining a mold with lady finer cookies and filling it with crème patissiere and covering it with a chocolate glaze? Just saying the words, “soufflé a l’orange” is enough to make anyone’s mouth water. There are, admittedly a few recipes that could be skipped, namely, a molded aspic of chicken livers described as “shimmering with jelly.”

Julia Child wrote for people who love to cook. She writes that her recipes are for the servantless American cook who can be unconcerned on occasion with budgets, waistlines, time schedules, children’s meals, the parent-chauffeur/den-mother’s syndrome, or anything else that might interfere with the enjoyment of producing something wonderful to eat” (xxiii). The recipes are easy to follow; the ingredients are listed with step-by-step directions next to them. She is very good about telling you what the food should look like as you’re cooking, a key component of any good recipe. You can almost hear her voice through her writing, making you feel as if Julia Child herself were in your kitchen teaching you how to prepare the food. Because these books were written for Americans, she makes sure to explain how to find or substitute ingredients for the American

cook. Just in case you are a beginning cook, there are plenty of illustrations to guide you through the recipes, so you know what things you should look like as you proceed through the recipe.

It would take years to make and perfect each recipe and techniques, so if it were the only book left, it would provide you with far more substance than any novel. Food is culture. If society is to lose all of the books in the world, including cookbooks, history and literature, “Mastering the Art of French Cooking” contains all things. It will leave everyone satisfied, having been able to dine on the best food writing ever created.

The End

Daniella Schoenfeld

Tenth Grade

Serra High School

Topic: "Monstress" by Lysley Tenorio

Destination Unknown

Everyone has felt it. That uncontrollable desire to be loved, accepted and needed. For some, those feelings can be brought on just by gazing upon what they perceive to be love; for others, it might be something as simple as being called upon to help a friend with a math problem. Regardless of what the trigger may be, we have a tendency to try to push these feelings away and drown them out, especially in a society that views emotions as a weakness. We are constantly told that the only person in control of our emotions is our self. We are taught to be strong and independent, to look only at ourselves to find true happiness because we are the only ones who can supply it. More often than not, it's the events and people outside of us that bring the most joy and conversely, the most pain.

Lysley Tenorio's debut novel, a collection of short stories entitled, *Monstress*, features a cast of characters who are all attempting to make a leap from whom they are and where they came from, to a not quite obtainable improved version of themselves under the false pretenses that this will make their lives better. Each lead character struggles to find their place in the world, attempting to strike a balance between their past, and the new life they are attempting to create. In each case, the greatest desire of the character is the human wish to love and be loved.

The title story, "Monstress," ultimately tells the tale of a woman who suppressed her dream to please the love of her life. Although I have never been in a situation of that extremity, the occasion has arisen where I have swallowed my wants in order to grant someone else theirs. As the story progressed, I understood what motivated me to put the desires of others before my own:

the want to please them and the hope that I would be loved for my sacrifices. Subsequently, this led me to realize that pushing aside my dreams has never led to my happiness. When the main character Reva realized this, she decided to take control by fulfilling her dreams and never looking back.

In "Save the I-Hotel," Fortunado is in love with Vicente, but continually swallows his feelings for fear of rejection and exclusion. The story made me think about all the times that I have kept my thoughts and opinions to myself as a form of protection against ridicule. On occasions like these, Fortunado and I alike let the part of us that crave acceptance and love determine our actions and corrupt our true feelings. I understand now, though, that if you deny yourself in order to be loved, that love cannot be true.

It's common for us to try to hide our flaws. In a world as judgmental as ours, we try to pretend that we are perfect, because any imperfection leaves us vulnerable to be attacked and excluded. Teresa, the narrator of the story, "The View from Culion," is a victim of leprosy. She refuses to acknowledge that her appearance, just like everyone else in the leper colony, has been horribly disfigured. Instead, she hides from the truth, hoping that if she doesn't believe it, it isn't true. I thought about all the times that I have decided to ignore the flaws in my ways. Just like Teresa, I am scared to find out what is wrong with me. The story led me to understand that to some degree, we are all afraid to look at ourselves and see what others see because we are scared to find something undesirable that would cause us to not be accepted.

Being a social species, there is nothing that we want more than to be loved and accepted. It gets to the point where we begin to compromise who we are just so that we can better blend in with our peers. In "The Brother," Eric is born into the wrong body and corrects it by undergoing surgery to become Erica. He embraces himself despite the disapproval of his family. The story reinforced to me the importance of accepting oneself regardless of what others may think. However, even though Erica could love herself, she wasn't truly happy because the approval that she most craved, that of her family, wasn't something she could get. When she died, her brother realized that he had lost her long before,

when he made the choice to not accept “Erica.” “The Brothers” showed me just how important it is to accept our family and friends, even if we don’t approve of everything they do, because in the final moments, the only thing that really matters is the love that we have received throughout our lives and the happiness that we have bestowed upon others, and to deny that necessity is truly cruel and will only lead to regrets.

This desire for love is so real and common that one of my friends confided in me to having felt it, too. She said, “I love myself. But I would be so much happier if someone else would love me, too, and tell me just that and that they need me.” Tenorio implies this same feeling among his character although they never say it so explicitly. Instead, they internalize their feelings and put up the façade that “everything’s ok.” The struggle that exists within them is extremely universal: whether it is more important to become a part of a larger community, to blend in and assimilate in the hopes that one will be more loved for it, or remain true to oneself and one’s past at the risk of being ostracized.

This book has caused me to look at myself and realize that the struggle between acceptance and individuality applies to me, too. Although I would like to think that I’m the exception and don’t need other people in my life to make me happy (who hasn’t wanted to be independent?), after reading this book, I have been forced to accept that I, to, am human and depend on those around me a lot more than I would like to admit. The characters of each story led me to a new personal discovery where I confronted that which I have been too scared to face before.

In the same way that the themes of *Monstress* apply to me, so do they apply to those around me. Now when I look around myself, I see people who are all as vulnerable as I am, susceptible to the ups and downs that are part of growing up. Now I can see through the brave faces that those around me put on and understand that just like me, they crave love and acceptance. And I have the power to give it to them. Everyone holds that power: they have the choice to give love and acceptance, hence making the lives of those around them infinitely better, or to continue on worrying about only their life, ignoring the fact that we

are dependent on each other for the joys of life.

Monstress forces the reader to take a really good look at him or herself. Upon reading the novel, one embarks upon a journey of self-discovery. It's something that people do less and less often because we are becoming more afraid of what we will find when we search our souls. As each generation passes, we are further detaching ourselves from our thoughts because technology is posing more distractions than ever before, leaving us with less time to be alone with ourselves. For many people, the distractions are a relief, because they are scared to be left alone with their thoughts. Scary things lurk in the corners of our conscious. But it's necessary to understand ourselves in order to become better people and to continue to improve ourselves. For this reason, I would highly recommend *Monstress* to people of all ages.

Tenorio's writing is simple and very direct, telling most of his tales from the eyes of the characters. His vivid imagery and first person view allows for the reader to become fully immersed in the world of each of the characters. That is a world that teeters between the past and the present, where cultures clash and internal battles are fought. He keeps things clean, making sure not to overcomplicate his stories, hence allowing his themes to shine through beautifully. The most striking feature of his writing, however, would have to be his endings. As his stories go on, they build more and more momentum, building up our expectation for the resolution. But none of his stories have one. Instead, he leaves the reader to imagine what happens next. In this fashion, he ties together all of his stories. Although none of the characters carry over into other stories, the similarities are apparent. All of the characters, young or old, are caught in the midst of two cultures, not quite fitting into either. Regardless of where they are in the world and in their lives, all of the characters are alone, unloved and afraid. By changing the settings and the characters, but letting the story remain the same, Tenorio is able to reinforce his theme.

In the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Life is a journey, not a destination." As I read *Monstress* and stumbled upon the abrupt endings of Tenorio's stories, I found this to be more and more true. As I probed deeper and deeper into myself,

I realized that the path to self-discovery that is more important than the act itself. There is no actual end to the journey. Life isn't like the board game; there is no winning, only playing. So take the journey. Enjoy the view. You may be surprised by what you find along the way.

The End

Griffin Young

Tenth Grade

La Jolla High School

“If all the books in the world were about to disappear, but you could save one, what would it be? Why?”

There’s no definitive handbook for running a civilization. As much as the people in power would like for you to believe there was, and that they are the author, editor and publisher of this magical manuscript, we’ve been collectively playing it by ear for about 200,000 years. And sure, that was fine at first, the rules were pretty simple: don’t die. And from there, everything seemed to work itself out. Next came reproduce, then create tribes so we can all not die together, and eventually we can establish some standard of living that wasn’t just hunt, eat, poop, sleep, repeat.

Sadly, from there things got a little more complicated. Goals were less clear, and it seemed like the farther we got, the more confused we were about where to go next. As soon as we figured out how to farm, we suddenly had to figure out what we would do with ourselves all day long. And the progress was relentless.

When we first started existing, we never planned for not having to worry about being eaten by wolves, for being too comfortable, or for how to live in a society that doesn’t actually need you to function. With all of our basic needs met, we no longer had those simple common sense goals to strive for. For all the starvation, predators and lack of free Wi-Fi our ancestors had to suffer through, they were playing Human Civilization on easy mode, and now we’re stuck with the inevitable fallout of their progress.

For while progress seems like a positive thing, we’ve now advanced to a point at which automation and industrialization threaten to take over essentially all aspects of production, and we can’t all be doctors and lawyers. The same question that plagued those primitive farmers rears its head again today:

where do we go from here? Our knowledge of the universe and ourselves has reached a point so advanced that we are literally decoding the fundamental fiber of our being, seeing what we're made of on a genetic level. With scientific pursuits having far outpaced that of the humanities, we're breaking new ground that couldn't have been imagined even ten years ago with no moral basis upon which to judge it. Should we alter the genes of our children? If so, who should receive these benefits, and in what proportions? Again, we can't all be lawyers. Someone has to pick up the trash. And so the question stands: if we had but one source of human insight upon which to base the entire future of our species, what would it be?

A weighty question for a library essay contest, indeed.

I believe the only choice is Aldous Huxley's "Brave New World." Huxley anticipated these problems almost 100 years before, and his commentary is as unnervingly relevant today as then, perhaps even more so. What is the purpose of life? A seemingly abstruse question best left to dusty old philosophers becomes frighteningly, terrifyingly, existentially pertinent when we're faced with the trajectory that we are on, and have been on, for the last couple hundred years.

What do you give to the society that has everything? Short of crating a false sense of danger in our lives a la *1984*, the most obvious would be the fulfillment of bodily desires and pleasures of this world, to instill in the populace a sense of happiness, no matter how contrived. What could go wrong with using our technology to create a new and better world in which everyone could be happy? Sounds perfect, but that's the problem. Without a Huxley to guide our endeavors, we're blindly grasping for some purpose, lost and confused.

In Huxley's cautionary dystopia, the character of the Savage, a man brought into this new and advanced world from a reservation, is the most important to our understanding of Huxley's stance on society. Brought up having only read Shakespeare and in a religious, very traditional society, he is shocked and disturbed by the excesses of the brave new world. This civilization's ethics are almost a bizarre inverse of the world the Savage, and the reader, come

from.

Consumerism, vapid hedonism, casual premarital sex, and a rigid class system enforced by genetic stratification at birth are only some of the shocking changes exhibit in the novel, and the Savage is appropriately overwhelmed. In this way, John the Savage serves as our guide more than any other character through this strange society. We are thrust as much as he into the scientifically advanced but seemingly morally bankrupt world, and his reactions serve to color our own views of the society. By having a character as uninitiated as us be introduced to this world, Huxley provides us with a liaison that makes his message that much more resonant.

The most telling part of the book, however, happens not in the plot but in a discussion the Savage has with the head controller of the society. The Savage incites a riot at one point by casting *soma*, a relaxing drug issued to the masses, out of a window, causing him to be arrested and brought to the man's office. From here, Huxley abandons the conventions of a novel in order to more effectively get his point across, and it is this passage alone that sets this typical dystopian novel apart from the others and establishes it as the premier handbook on how to run a modern society.

During their argument, all of the Savage's arguments for religion, nobility, and human dignity are simply dismissed as unnecessary, counterproductive, or nonexistent under the relentless pursuit of happiness and stability that are the terms of their world. Even at the admission of the head controller, life in this framework is dull, vapid, and pointless, but nothing is changed because the alternative would be to choose unhappiness. With vast amounts of technology at their disposal, the best this society can do is stagnancy and a meaningless, oblivious existence that is ultimately, for all its modern implements, no better than societies of hunter-gatherers.

Huxley would later write a follow-up book, *Brave New World Revisited*, announcing that he had found society to be hurtling toward the conditions in his book must faster than he anticipated. If only he knew. With modern science advancing at a breakneck pace, who knows where we'll be in even five

years? However, with the example of Huxley's *Brave New World* as a powerful example of what not to do, we can begin to make the right decisions at these critical crossroads of human progress, and find out for ourselves a purpose in life beyond a hedonistic fulfillment of pleasure in our own Brave New World.

The End