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## **GROUP ONE: IFE, LAISHA, SHAUNTAI, EDISON**

***IFE AJAYI***

### **Why Were You Like This?**

I'm sitting alone at the dining table when all of a sudden I hear footsteps approaching my way. Both my parents walk in with familiar disappointed looks on their faces. Looks they would usually have when I would get in trouble with a teacher or come home with unacceptable grades. So I knew exactly why they looked that way and why they came. They wanted to know the specific reasons why I made the choices I did. More specifically, why I kept on making those choices over and over again. My parents have had several talks with me about education and how important it is to have one. They would go on and on about how education is required for a successful future. And how miserable life would be without one. Sometimes in the middle of those discussions I would think about all the people that are successful who didn't go to college. I never brought this up to my parents though because I knew exactly what they would say. They would tell me that I don't have to be like them and I'm better off going to college. It's not that I wanted to be like those people, it's just that they shouldn't be looked down upon just because college wasn't for them. Especially if they aren't on the streets begging but instead doing something productive with their lives.

When the question of why I kept making bad decisions in school came up I completely froze. I had no idea of what to say. All I could see were my parents staring me straight in the face waiting for answers. The longer I took the more impatient they got. My dad then said, "I'm waiting for an answer." I was very nervous and began to shake because of fear of being a disappointment to the family. But when I would make the choices to cut class, talk while the teacher was talking, not do

any homework, not study for any exams I didn't think that. I basically would just go to school and come back home without learning anything. It felt like a never ending cycle. I just wasn't interested in school at that time. I didn't have the guts to tell my parents any of that though because I know how they are. "Can you open your mouth and talk," said my mother. "Hurry up, you're wasting time," then followed my dad. At this point I just decided to tell them what I thought would be a good enough excuse. "My teachers don't know how to do their jobs, they can barely even teach because of how disruptive the students are," I said. "Aren't you one of those disruptive students?" asked my dad. The room went silent after that rhetorical question was asked.

My father began talking about how I shouldn't be giving him any excuses and that I should just own up to my bad behavior. My mother shook her head and walked away in disappointment. I felt really bad because I hated seeing that look on her face. It made me feel like I was letting her down and in all honesty I really was. I wasn't putting in any effort to become a better student. My mother would always tell me that I had the potential to be one of the best students. My father would also tell me the same thing and it's not that I didn't believe them I was just very lazy with my education in high school. After hours of talking and me almost dozing off every once in awhile my father finally asked me if there was anything I had to say for myself. I said no but that wasn't a good enough answer for him, it never was. I told him that I would do better in my academics and not hang with the wrong crowd. "You can and you will," he said. He then got up and walked away. I continued sitting in the same spot just daydreaming and thinking about what to do with myself.

One day I sat down and thought long and hard about my next moves and the steps I needed to take to make them. I needed to make sure that I ended high school strong. I started

off high school strong but then I started to slack and by the time I knew it, it was the end of my eleventh grade year and I was barely on track to graduate. I told myself that it's not too late to get on track so I could graduate on time. I wanted to be a better student. Sometimes I think it was the fear of being embarrassed that made me want to turn everything around but as time went by I realized it was fear of not being able to pursue the career I desire. I realized that what I ended up doing from there on out were steps to determining how my future would turn out. I didn't want to end up on the streets regretting my whole childhood because of the mistakes I made in high school. I was also sick and tired of being pushed from grade to grade. I use to think that I didn't deserve to move on to the next grade but I did every time. I guess you could just say I was lucky. I wanted to know that I deserved moving on to a higher level of education. People would always tell me that it's not good to work from behind meaning that I should've been on top of my game from the beginning and not wait until it's almost too late to try and work my way up.

Twelfth grade ended up being my best year of high school. I was determined and motivated to prove to myself that I have what it takes to excel in my studies. I worked harder than ever in all my classes and I managed to get good grades each marking period. I had a few teachers who supported me and made sure that I was always on task. I'm still til this day very thankful for their help towards my education. With their support and the support of my parents I became on track to graduate before the school year was over. I was very relieved when my guidance counselor told me that I would be graduating with the rest of my peers who were on track. I was happy that I would be walking across the stage with my friends and declared a graduate. The rest of the marking periods went by and I was stress free. I had nothing to worry about academic wise. I eventually graduated and was thrilled to be leaving that school and never going back.

Looking back on my previous years of schooling always makes me wonder what I could've done differently to be a better student. When I think back to all those times I would get into trouble I'm always clueless as to why. My excuse is always that I just wasn't interested in school back then. But was that really the reason why I was so miserable? I don't even know myself. I was such a moody and chaotic student ever since I even started attending school. I remember in elementary school when I use to get in trouble for behavior problems. Teachers use to send me out of their classes and into different classrooms. In middle school it was the same process but even worse. I surrounded myself with the wrong crowd and not having a care in the world. Then high school came by and I wanted to change but ended up getting lazy with the process and almost not graduating. I'm just glad that I was able to make it through and not give up on myself. I hope that in college I can be strong academic wise til the end so I can aspire a bright future.

## **GROUP ONE: IFE, LAISHA, SHAUNTAI, EDISON**

### **LAISHA DE JESUS**

#### **It wasn't always like this**

I'm in my bed everything's dark and a wave of thoughts hits me. All these thoughts are whispering to me saying you will never be anything in this world your ugly and an idiot. They keeping on repeating over and over again to soon bring back terrible memories that I just want to forget. I kept on going back and forth with myself it felt like I was at war. Each bad thought was a bomb that would blow up in head. Silently crying with every blow. Falling asleep a few hours before my alarm to go school. I would hardly get any sleep at night because of all the things my bullies would tell me would flow through my head. Everyday I would wake up, I would putting on a mask to hide to hide myself from the world.

It wasn't always like this. I was usually a happy optimistic person but moving back to New York took a toll on me personally and academically. Being bullied for almost three years straight can really fuck you up mentally. All these doubts made me think I wasn't cut out to do anything. These doubts started when I was in the 4th grade where I started getting bullied. My bully would mock me every time I would get an answer wrong which was very often. He would also critique me about how I looked. He once called me a fat whale because I was chunky. The worst part about this was that the teacher knew this was happen but she would not stop it or she would blame on me for it happening. This did not affect me at the time but it would soon come to haunt me in the future.

It all started coming back to me in the 7th grade when the bullying have started happening again. All the mocking and the criticizing got under my skin but the this time it took a higher toll on me. Slacking became my middle name. I did not do

classwork or homework in English and Math which were the most important just to avoid being mocked. Also I would skip those classes which was detrimental to my education. The only way I would get my work done is if the teacher would work one on one with me or I would stay after school to finish the things I was missing. My read and writing skills never reached its full potential. In math I didn't understand any of the equations. It felt like I was read something in a different language. Not paying attention throughout the school year made taking the State test even more difficult. Which I soon failed and I had to go to summer school for.

After barely passing summer school I made it to the 8th grade. I started the year slacking but that all changed once my English teacher Ms. Sterling did everything in here power to push me to believe I can do anything I put my mind to. She got another teacher in the class just in case I need help when she was busy with another student. She would also stay after school to help me better my writing and to motivate me to do better in my other classes. Not only that she would always put me to read book and read out loud so i can get more practice and bring up my read level. Her pushing me to do better made me want to change my mindset on learning. She would tell me on the daily "It don't matter if you got made fun of for not knowing the answer what matter is that you need to work to understand and get it right the next time". Soon my writing had gotten better and I've gotten better at reading out loud and individually. In math everything was becoming more understandable but I was still struggling. The State test was right around the corner. It has been a very long time since I passed a State Test so hearing that passed I felt relieved and proud of myself for actually passing. Ms. Sterling was proud of me she kept on repeating "I knew you could do it". Graduation came along and I never in a million year I would've thought I would had make to that point or even be able to go to high school. Once I was in High school, I kept



on pushing towards being my best even though there was obstacles in my way.

All in all, my learning experience may have not been the best but it did not only help me grow as a person but as a student too. Yeah bullying can push you over the edge but you can find yourself again and become a better you. Many people you would have not see coming can make your life either a living hell or a carefree paradise. You just have to push through those obstacles and never give up on yourself and your future.

## **GROUP ONE: IFE, LAISHA, SHAUNTAI, EDISON**

### **SHAUNTAI SMITH** **The Education Process**

So, it's going on three years and I've been dedicating my precious time, hard work and patience to the most crappy school known to mankind, New Dawn High. If the beige prison walls weren't enough to drive me insane my teachers definitely passed that test with flying colors. As you can probably guess this was not my favorite place to be. For starters, everyone began at 7AM and left at 4PM which is awfully long compared to the average school day and for some strange reason the fact that this didn't bother anyone else bothered me even more. As I began to rest my legs on a chair that was laid out before me, I couldn't help but think about my future, my life and what I wanted it to be like. My fellow classmates were "grown", either they were in their early 20's, the loudest babymothers you've ever heard, babyfathers trying to get their life together, pregnant girls, dropouts, drop back ins, thugs and so on the list goes. All the kids were either sleeping or sleeping, exactly.

I hated it there. For three years I felt misunderstood like no one including the teachers got what my "problem" was. They had no clue that I simply didn't find the things they taught valuable to my life, I couldn't focus because I didn't want to and because of the mindset I had set in play I had zero intent on doing so. I grew tired of what was expected of me and so I made myself more available to other areas of life, this included getting a job.

That was the beginning. After dropping out and going against what society thought to be true about the education system being "needed" for one to succeed I thought to myself "you gotta make quitting school count for something". Every morning I got my ass up with only one thought in my mind,

money. I had no idea that I was in for a rude awakening but let me get to that part. It's Friday! I could feel my check already in my hands before it actually got to me. Shopping, chipotle, even a bit of weed all circled continuously in my head as I stood in line to grab my envelope with the words "shauntai smith" on it. I've never seen my name on anything regarding to money, just turning 17 I had no idea what to expect but I knew whatever came out of that envelope was mine, all mine. I reach for my envelope and there it was staring at me and sadly to my surprise I stared back in disbelief. It wasn't a very good number at all. A total of \$296.75, more like a total of disappointment.

My nose began to burn, I was fully aware that I was a few seconds from crying and thinking of how much the money did not match the pay nor the amount of energy that was expected at all times. How much could I expect from a job that let a high school dropout like myself come work for them at 17. I was a baby compared to my fellow coworkers. They had children, rent, mortgages and yet they were still were comfortable. They collected their money every week happily without a complaint in the world. At this point I began to question everything. Do I really want to be here, working my ass off for hours and hours to receive a shitty paycheck or do I want to feel good about the work I do along with a higher paygrade? The one thing I knew is that I did not want to be like these women who were stuck under these circumstances because they couldn't or didn't want to commit to school as well as furthering their education. After a hard look on what was laid out in front of me I had to make a decision. I could hear the voice of my parents with the whole "I told you so" face and then it hit me. Trying to grow up too fast wasn't in my best interest and this dreadful draining place was not my calling but instead going back to school, getting into college and finding myself.

I'm aware that pursuing my GED wasn't going to be an easy task shit if anything it would be harder than high school or at

least this is what I told myself for preparation. I sat in the front of every class, breathed in every technique and material my instructors had given us. I knew I could not play around with my opportunities anymore, I couldn't be the old lady at some job getting paid less for more. Day in and day out I studied my life away, attended each tutoring session I could get my foot in. At this point in my education process putting my inner feelings to the side to receive that diploma I was so ready to get was top priority. The day for testing came quicker than the flash! My baggy sweats and furry sweater comforted me in my long hours of sitting down and answering questions. I received the news exactly 2 weeks from the day I took it and to my surprise I passed. I passed everything, all five subjects in one shot. I realized that it was not about me in particular, I didn't have to be the best I just had to want it more than anything else and let fate take it's toll.

## **GROUP ONE: IFE, LAISHA, SHAUNTAI, EDISON**

### **EDISON VERDUGO** **Literature Rewritten**

Growing up in an immigrant family was never easy. From education to real world problems, here I will talk about the one hardship and obstacle I still face to this day.

Both my parents came from Ecuador for a better life. Not only for themselves but for their kids: my siblings and I. If there's one thing I've learned it's that determination and grit can pave the way for anything you want. As long as you have the hunger within you, you will accomplish your goal. So I was taught.

English was a nightmare at school from the very beginning. Every assignment given to student are all very open ended with either various responses being correct or responses that the teacher wanted to hear. It seems that I struggle with articulating my thoughts and ideas onto paper. When we had assignments given to us in school, I struggled with completing them at home. I was surrounded with the Spanish language getting thrown at me left and right. Nobody at home was help, something I needed. I remember always getting 3's on my ELA state test and asking myself "how?" I was NEVER able to get above a 3, whereas math, I would never get below a 4. Boring assignments, boring teachers, boring books, vague questions had all killed the slight passion I had left for the English language, I just gave up.

English at home was never spoken. Coming from immigrants parents, this was the norm. Spanish here, Spanish there, Spanish everywhere. This made the English language even harder to perfect. I've always despised English class with their vague questions. "Think of a time when this happened causing this to happen." I mean like seriously? This requires too much thinking and analyzing for me. It could also be the subjects of books assigned to the class. I still remember the

various books given to read throughout high school like “Hamlet,” “Things Fall Apart,” “A Midsummer Night’s Dream,” “Romeo and Juliet,” “The Crucible,” “To Kill a Mockingbird,” “The Scarlet Letter,” etc. (I mean I could go on and on but I don’t want to bore you). That’s all I could tell you about these books, the title and nothing else. To read most books you have to come to class already with some brief knowledge of history. Let me explain. For “To Kill a Mockingbird,” you had to know the history of racism and America at that time in order to understand some racist undertones in literature. Otherwise, it was hard to care. The same goes with “Things Fall Apart.” I mean you HAD to know some historical context regarding British colonialism and the likes of African empires around that time. No disrespect but sometimes I don’t want to learn these historical events/background because I just do not care and do not wish to care.

Throughout high school, I can say that I’ve read a total of 2 books out of the 30 or 40 books we were assigned to read. Personally, I did most of my readings through the likes of sparknotes and shmoop. I did not want to waste my time reading about things I simply do not care about. I remember entering my English class one day. It was a Friday afternoon and it was my second to last period before I could go home. Keep in mind that I had gym class before this and I was about dead. So I go to sit down and I’m given this book titled “The Giver.” I had noticed the black and white background but what had caught my attention was the single colored apple in the middle. “Great” I thought, “Another boring book with a plain ass black and white cover.” Boy was I wrong. I Usain Bolted that book while on my way home from school. I had a glimpse of hope that maybe there are some books out there that are as exciting as “The Giver.” I was able to read through it all because of the subject matter: Utopian vs Dystopian societies, totalitarianism, etc. Other books I have actually enjoyed are those of similar

subject matter such as Ender's Game and "1984." Most of these books given to students are plain boring and most people can agree with me, I'm sure.

There were plenty of times in high school where we were given essay assignments to complete based on books we have read. Whenever I thought I had written a piece of art, it turns out it was complete shit and I would receive a 65-70 on it. Weirdly enough, whenever I thought I bombed an essay, it did pretty good, receiving an 85+. These series of events baffle me and to this day it still occurs. English is complicated and I will never be able to perfect this craft or art (whatever you want to call it) no matter how much I try. Even if I do try it ends up flunking.

At the end of the day, English is the reason why I got myself into an English-less major. I didn't want to put myself through all this pain again, but here I am writing to you about my experiences. Maybe one day I will pick up another book but for now we can leave it at that as I don't want to deepen my hatred for English.

GROUP TWO: BRANDON, PAVEL, WALEED, JOSHUA

**BRANDON MA**  
**Ethnicity Overwhelming Grip**

Have you been intimidated by someone in your life before, if it may be your family members or even your classmates? Coming from a Asian background, it was really difficult for me to be happy with myself, being identified as a Chinese American. I grew in a community that always compare their grades with each other, it put a lot of stress on myself on wanting to prove myself. For a stereotypical Asian family, they are expected to excel in academics and is known for their dedication to learning. A quote from *Mother's Tongue*, "Well, these are broad sociological questions I can't begin to answer. But I have noticed in surveys — in fact, just last week — that Asian students, as a whole, always do significantly better on math achievement tests than in English"(Tan). Being Asian, I was expected to excel in majority of the subjects in school, especially math. However, I wasn't able to reach that academic standard that is perceived by others such as my family, peers and teachers. I struggled with all subjects—even math, I was even given a letter notifying me that I was in probation and I needed to change. I was never a book worm, nor did I had passion in learning as it dissipated throughout the school years. Being yelled by my family, especially my father, for doing terrible in school had changed me in many ways. One effect that it had on me was my perspective in school, I lost interest in trying in school for the main part. I even was sent to these programs that are suppose to provide extra assistance to English and math called "Kumon" that was located next to my elementary school. I would always remember being put under a lot of stress to the point I had many mental breakdowns. It was hell to the point that I was told this, "you are unable to leave until you get a 100% on this quiz". I was there from 4 pm to 6



pm, constantly re-doing this quiz, it was just me and a few others after their closing hours still doing these last parts. I became so frustrated that my paper was covered in tears. Of course I went against my parents for taking me to this program because I wasn't able to learn anything but constantly failing and not rising through "Kumon" levels. Going to programs like these never helped me in ever learning in a way that I can appreciate affecting my interests in even trying to learn. Struggling through elementary school and middle school, high school is when everything changed. Going into a new environment, with a lot of diverse backgrounds was very intimidating at first. But as time moved along, I adapted and appreciated the people who I met, where I don't compare myself to others too much. I had a very diverse group of friends that consist of 1 Ukrainian, 1 Ghanaian, 1 Hispanic, 1 Ecuadorian, and me- Chinese. I learn the traditions that they follow, and broke some ethnic barriers within me. Though going into high school, my friends had assumed that I was smart only because I was Asian and the only Asian in my grade, instead of actually getting to know me. They even use "your Asian, this math is easy for you", while there are some social norms that can never be broken, not everyone is the same. In my high school, students were encouraged to learn at their own pace because everyone has different needs. Though some negatives were classes had to slow down, thus some units in the year had been removed by the teacher. The sense of community that I shared with my peers in high school was more appreciative because I wasn't worried about my GPA if it was terrible or good because of the acceptance they give. The workload had decreased between middle school and high school. Even though I was told from middle school, "high school is very difficult and you will be doing lots of work". The teachers made it more stressful that it really was because I hardly get homework in high school. From my perspective, I always thought the teachers want more students to appreciate life and not constantly

going home and doing homework all night long for the deadline due the next day. So I had a lot of free time to hang out with my friends and wasn't bound to my school. In conclusion, there is more to life than just packing your brain with information that will show you're intelligent to the social norms. From what I experienced, to be smart is the amount of information one can hold. So people who usually sleep in class like my two my friends, still pass their classes with A-'s or B+'s. I appreciate the friends that I had made in my high school year because they were the ones who helped me mentally, and not think too much about school.

**PAVEL NUNEZ**  
**My Luck**

Sometimes in life I always get lucky and that's just how it is . But it wasn't the luck that helped me , it was the effort that lead me to that luck .A quick example of this would be the time Where I was walking upstairs to my next class which was in the 8th floor, I refuse to take the elevator that day because there was a lot of people in. But as I was going upstairs I saw a 10 dollar bill below the staircase where almost nobody could see it unless u looked a certain angle. I picked it up... I felt like the luckiest person in that staircase, It must have been a coincidence that day because I forgot my money at home.Going to the main story of my luck, the time this happened to was actually recent, When I passed my Computer System Technology class. So it was the beginning of the semester of 2018 and this class was required for my major so I said to myself “ This class should be easy”. I was wrong(like really wrong) ,but that didn't stop me from having doubts. It was an 8 AM class so that wasn't really a good choice but I wanted to get out early so that was the trade off. At first the class wasn't too difficult the following 2 months because we were doing basic stuff. But after that it was complex and there was a lot of rules to cover when coding, and I noticed people around me were far worse where I was. Some people would look over my screen after showing the professor my program that runs correctly. Sometimes they would ask me for help and I helped them but it was still difficult for them( I don't blame them). But overall i knew what I was doing even though it was difficult to comprehend the material being given to me. Sometimes I would leave early because I already did all the classwork which was a good thing. Fast forward to November 6(which was the last day to drop a Class), I was debating whether or not to drop the class

because I didn't really like my major anymore(Computer Science) because I don't think I would like sitting behind a chair just typing 100's of lines of code for a complicated program while also being behind a computer screen all day long, I should've thought of that sooner but it didn't come to mind until it was too late. I decided not to because that would've been a waste of time and money. The next day out of the original 30 students that signed up for the class only 8 people remained. But my friend that was in that class actually dropped it since it was too difficult for him. It was sorta disappointing that my only friend in that class decided to withdraw but it was his decision. Furthermore I had a test coming which I didn't know about because I was too lazy to check the syllabus, I didn't know what was going to be on the test so I just accepted my fate that I was going to fail the test. The day I took the test, I didn't expect it to be almost the same exact things we had to do as classwork, So I dodged a bullet on that one and I passed the test for it. So finally it was near the semester and I had to take my final. Suddenly this person who I thought supposedly dropped the class showed for the final after nearly being absent for 2 months, My professor was actually quite mad at him but he couldn't do anything so he just let him take the test, When the test started he only took a couple of minutes to finish it and left the class, even though there was around 15-30 lines of code that you have to write down for a few problems. One was about making a program that is able to calculate the GPA of your classes by entering the amount of classes, the grade for each class, and the amount of credits each class was worth. Another was typing the Radius and the Height for a given shape and putting the formula for each shape to find the volume of all the shapes, all of this was basically impossible to write under 20 minutes). Some people had to resort to cheating( No names) by looking up the program for the specific problem, the professor was just using his laptop and actually caught someone using their phone, He gave him a warning

instead of giving him a 0 ( which was generous.), I said to myself “Wow, he was lucky”. So after finishing I just went home to sleep and hoped I passed the class. Then I checked my grade and I got a B+ thinking I would get a C or maybe lower. But in the end I passed.

Overall life isn't mostly about luck but how much you effort you put in to get that luck. It something like this:You just don't go in a store and expect to win the lottery ticket after buying a scratch ticket, you have to work and get money, then walk to the store and spend your hard earned money on a ticket which you will likely not win but it's basically a risky gamble.

GROUP TWO: BRANDON, PAVEL, WALEED, JOSHUA

## **WALEED QURESHI** **If I Passed**

August 13, 2015, that was the day I was lost. Lost as I was so deep into the sea of disappointment that I just did not know what to do. Something I was confident at a time that would be so easy to achieve but the results just left me utterly confused.

September 2014, I started my first year as a Cambridge O-Level (gives GED) student in Pakistan. I was always very bad at studies scoring a C or D, at max I got a B in my English or Urdu. I first I thought of this just as a normal year, but then as I started progressing through the semester, I started getting focused on what I had to accomplish. This meant that I had to get good grades in my Urdu, Islamiat and Pakistan Studies since my parents had to pay an expensive fee which was separate from the school fees itself. This basically meant that we had to pay double the amount of an expensive fee already. This was my motivation for the semester.

Our first term ended by the end of December so that meant that this was the time to study for the Cambridge exams (we called them CIEs). My friend at that time talked me into attending a professor's academy who taught us Pakistan Studies and Islamiat. He was a great teacher and always cleared our confusions when we had any. Another thing that he did while teaching was that when he told us to copy the notes, used to tell us life lessons that he had learned in his life and the things that we may encounter at some point in our life. I don't remember most of them but there was one that I haven't forgotten and probably won't forget. He told us that if we say something, stick by it. Overall, I had fun studying with him and I believed that I was ready to get an A or at least B in my finals CIEs.

We had our exams in May to June at exams halls that were

usually very far from all our houses so me and two other friends that we would go to the exam halls together with the friend who had a driver to drop him off and so we did. I wasn't worried about Islamiyat and Pakistan studies, but I was worried about Urdu because during the whole year, I didn't take any extra classes or academies for Urdu.

Our results for these exams came to us in August since they were checked at Cambridge University. Then came the fateful day on which we got our exams back, August 13th. I woke up at ten. Got to school at 11. The school was 5 minutes' walk from my house, so I went there after I got easy. There was a complete rush of students trying to get their results. OfCourse my classmates and friends were there as well. Now most of my class was really happy because they had gotten their results and they had very good grades. This made me confident that I might have passed easily. I went to the room everyone was getting their results at. My turn came, I received a copy of my exam and an original sent from the Cambridge University.

I opened the envelope in which the result was contained. My result had one fail ((u = ungraded in Pakistan), one D and one B. I was totally devastated. Totally confused. Was this what I deserved? Did I not work hard enough? These were just some of the questions that came into my mind. Everyone kept asking me my grade, but I had lost the guts to say anything but obviously I did answer them and told them my grades. After a few minutes, I found my old friend and we told each other our grades and while he had all As, I hardly passed in mine. We later decided to go out to eat something while I gathered the guts to explain my grades to my parents because they had very high hopes from me.

That day, either I was extremely sad or the food at that restaurant we went to tasted bad. I couldn't tell. After sulking for half an hour, I dropped my friend at his house and then went back to my own. I told my mother about the result. My mother

showed her usual face and basically made me feel guilty with her sarcasm. My father and brother lived in New York, so they still didn't know. OfCourse I didn't tell them the results myself. Mother told them the results while I stayed behind the webcam hearing everything. Both were very angry. Now obviously I had to give those exams again. I again paid the school 15000 Rupees and this time the fee was lower because I only had to repeat the failed subject.

The next exams were in October to November. This meant that I had at least 2 months to prepare but this time however things were different. It's not that I studied harder than the last time. No. How could I? Because after one week my self-esteem had faded away and I wasn't fazed by anything. My friend that went to the restaurant with me even started to beg me to study. He even invited me to his house to attempt a past paper, but I just quit after 5 minutes.

Now came the days of them exams. I had to give 2 papers for one subject. This basically meant that exam was divided into 2 parts. My father and brother were also in Pakistan. This made the situation even more intense. I faced constant talks about my grades and how I might fail again but I survived and usually spent my time in my room. I did stop going out to chill though. So, for my first paper, I managed to study one week. Every one of my family members knew this and that was why they were worried. I gave the paper. I had almost twenty days to prepare I believe. And, I did nothing in those twenty days. Instead I just reviewed my old notes one day before the exam. I don't know why but at the time, the only thing I worried about was that I was not worried at all. After that I just gave the last exam and waited for results to come in and I was going to receive them on January 15th, I think.

The day finally came, even though I didn't hope for it to come but it did. I just went to my school for regular classes, I had even forgotten about the results but then literally the whole



class came to me and congratulated me. That was the point I realized that I talk a lot in class. Then my most of my friends came running towards me and congratulated me as well. I had realized by then that everyone was congratulating me for my result, but I still did not know what grade I had. All I knew was that I passed. Upon asking my friends, I was told that I got a C and even though this might not be something one person would be happy about, but this was greater than an A for me because at this point anything would be good if I passed.

This was in a way the funniest thing that ever happened to me. I couldn't even pass a subject after studying for 3 months and now after doing almost nothing related to studies, I passed and even ended passing the next exams without being failed.

**JOSHUA STONE**  
**High School Journey**

The most memorable moment in my life for now would definitely have to be my high school graduation. Not only was it one of the most significant moments of my life, but it was one of the major stepping stones of my life. This was the turning point in my road to being an adult and choosing my career. Despite it being a conjunction of emotions, being either the happiest day of your life or the saddest, it is still a day that is hard to forget. Many students have endured those difficult four years of high school, whether it was getting grades for your classes, passing the regents, or trying to receive honors for academic accomplishments. In my case, it a little bit of everything. My main focus were perfect attendance, above satisfactory grades, and passing the mandatory regents and then some to receive an Advanced Regents Diploma. After enduring those four long years, I was able to accomplish each one of these goals, as well as a few of my classmates. The feeling of accomplishment was definitely on unforgettable and I think everyone who had the same goals in mind would agree. Of course there were some students that simple settled for a regular high school diploma, but I couldn't blame them. If didn't have the encouragement of my parents, teachers, friends, tutors, etc., I would have the same mindset as them. Fortunately, my goals were set on being an overachiever and showing everyone that I'm different.

I remember my high school the journey as if it was yesterday. I hardly believe there's anyone who could forget this so-called "journey". Freshman year was the start of it all. I was your typical student on his first day. I struggled to find classes, had trouble making friends, was dogpiled by assignments and homework. Those days eventually turned for the better. Even

though I technically had a head start due to taking certain courses and regents early in middle school, everything was still so much to take in. After the first week, I finally started getting some stability. I basically become everyone's friends, to my surprise, and the classwork started to seem less of a headache. After the first few months, freshman year was basically smooth-sailing. I kept my grades reasonably high, stayed away from the bad crowd, and was always on time. I eventually got used to this cycle and became fully adjusted to the high school life. Then sophomore year came around the corner.

Sophomore is by far the most headache-inducing, stress-giving, and agonizing year of high school by far. The reason I say this is for one reason only: regents. Most of the classes I took were hellbent on making sure each student passed each regents with a 80 or higher, and that's only an understatement. Even an 80 would be considered disappointing in their eyes and that reflected in our class work. We received assignments and practice exams nonstop and they didn't stop coming until everyone did well. Thinking back to it now, it did work, but only to an extent. To be precise, about 90% of the students benefited from this, and that's me being generous. I'm more than positive there were more students that couldn't take it anymore and gave up halfway or just burned themselves out. I was eligible to take some of my regents early (Geometry and Living Environment), in which I passed with exceptional grades. Some of my friends followed right behind, some surpassed me. And of course, there were some who could care less, would rather take it next year, and just flat out bombed it.

During junior year, everything seemed to be more laxed. We had less classes meaning that we got to go home early, which everyone was excited for. We had the same regimen for regents prep, but was definitely a weight of your shoulders compared to sophomore year. The same people that I've been friends with since day one has matured so much, it was like they were

completely different people. Those who could care less about their education did a full 180 degree turn and started to treat their school with more seriousness. One of those students even ended up on the school council. We continued our year like an other. The classes were more difficult but our teachers managed made our lives more easier. By this time, we also took the time to start looking for colleges and deciding what career we were interested in. Finally, regents week came and had everyone on edge, since the time to make up for their mistakes is winding down. I managed to graze by with just a above average grade on my Trigonometry regents, above satisfactory on U.S. History regents, and passed with flying colors on my Spanish regents. I was just able to survive this storm of regents but I pulled through, and so did a majority of my classmates. For some, time for improvement is dwindling and senior year is their last chance.

And last but no least, senior year, my best year of high school. Not only was our school schedule was even shorter, but our classes were even more lax. On top of all that, most of us have regents out the way so we can all focus on getting our credits now. We were taking college level classes, so we had our fair share of difficulties. We also had a lot of free time on our hands, so a handful of us took that time to relax and unwind, while other took that time to study or start looking at colleges. For those who are behind, they received special attention to ensure their success and eligibility to graduate. After all is said and done, we could finally move on to the fun part of the year: senior activities. First came prom, in which in all honestly would be the third best day. Then a field trip to D.C., which was definitely a highlight of senior year. Third came a visit to a fancy restaurant in New Jersey.

Finally the day has come, June 23. Everything was about to change. This would be the day I become not only be a college student, but a step closer into adulthood. The silly things I used

to do during high school days would be memories now. I used to enjoy the conversations I used to have with our friends, the parties, the classes, teases each other, and much more. Those things are no more in our life. It took place at Adelphi University. The day started as a normal one and ended as a memorable day in my life. It was a mixture of emotions. Happiness of seeing friends after a long time and sadness of realizing the fact that there are no more high school days in our life. Others cried for other reasons, such as being unable to see friends and classmates again. But who could blame them? I'd be heartbroken too if I was unable to see the people I spent the past four years with laughing and learning. I sat there with my friends, probably for the final time, and watched as their names were called and as they received their diploma. Others like me received awards for other accomplishments such as attendance and honor for other subjects like history and science. Finally, my name was called. I heard my parents, sisters, loved ones, and my soon-to-be former classmates cheer for me. All my dedication and accomplishments have led to this moment. I walked on stage, shook my principal's hand as she gave me my Advanced Regents Diploma. This diploma that was given to me is not just a paper, it's the reward for the continuous hard work and dedication. It definitely wouldn't be possible without the support of parents, teachers, and friends. Thanks to my parents, teachers, and friends for being a backbone throughout the phase of my education.

**TISHA CHOWDHURY**  
**Cultural Identity**

Every single person has their own unique identity and culture. An 'identity' is the image that one projects out into the rest of the world and 'culture' is the image which one has of themselves. Culture plays a huge role in shaping our identity. A person's beliefs and morals are made up of culture and remain throughout our entire life. Culture is what made us the person we are today and determines who or what we choose to associate our-self with. Our background and upbringing are what sets us apart from everyone else because no one has been raised the same. My identity would not exist if it wasn't for my own culture and the values I have carried from it along the years.

The morals I have today exist because of the certain culture I grew up in. I grew up hearing and listening to what my parents telling me what it acceptable for me to do and what is not acceptable for me to do. Because of this, I learnt the difference between what is right and what is wrong from my parents. My parents learned from their parents and so on. It's a generation of morals that I carry with me and refers to constantly, sometimes without even realizing it. I was born in Bangladesh and even though I don't live there today, it's definitely a huge part of my life. My parents have taught me to assimilate my culture into my everyday life. Everyone has a different culture and different habits based on how they were raised. It's what sets people apart from others and adds diversity to life.

When I came to New York everything was new for me. I was 14 years old I didn't know how to speak English it was hard for me when I start school. I had a hard time to match with other students because they all know English. I used to take after school to learn English and do my homework. I also face bully

from some students because of I didn't understand English. On the break time, they used to sit like a circle and used to ask my lot of bad questions like "are you virgin?" "do you go to the club?" "Do you take drugs?" let's have a se... etc. I used to get nervous and I didn't know what to answer they made me a joker in the school where ever they see me they used to make fun of me. Some of my classmates help me to face the situation and help me to inform our teachers. This type of situation gave me more strength to work hard on my academics and I graduated in 3 years out of 4 years from school.

Developing a concept of self or personal identity is a result of interaction with people who make up your culture. You associate yourself with the larger group of which you are a member. For instance, I am from Bangladesh so I consider myself as a "Bangladeshi". This is part of my identity. Islam is the religion I believe in – this is again, part of how I identify myself. A person's culture is usually what they are from, what language. Sometimes our cultural identity could influence our perspective. For example, I came from a Muslim family my mother she wear hijab and she had to face a lot of bad comment when she goes outside. Some Americans think that Muslim peoples are terrorist and they judge people based on their outlook. Therefore, sometimes our cultural identity could become a thread for us.

Cultural identity is one of the important things in our life to show us as person front of the world. Cultural identity is the identity or feeling of belonging to a group. It is part of a person's self-conception and self-perception and is related to nationality, ethnicity, religion, social class, generation, any kind of social group that has its own distinct culture. In this way, cultural identity is both characteristic of the individual but also of the culturally identical group of members sharing the same cultural identity or upbringing.

I don't live in Bangladesh but my identity is not going to change because I live in New York. I think New York is the city of diversity where you can practice your culture, religion, language, tradition etc. When I came here I learn more about other countries which I never heard before and I also let people know where I belong. Realizing we have more in common than not when I meet new people, I look at them as individuals. I take into consideration the concrete, the behavioural and the symbolic for they all have their place in a person being who they are.



## ***HEND ELWAHWAH*** **Expectations vs. Reality**

Growing up in a private school my whole life, literally from Pre-K through 12th grade, had a large impact in my life. It has changed my learning experiences in various ways. Good and bad. Throughout that private school life I have experienced lots of joy, happiness, sadness, anxiety, mixed emotions overall. What I could definitely say is that I am very blessed for being in a private school all my life. This was a religious Muslim private school, which lead me to knowing my religion like the back of my hand, memorized more than half of our holy book, read and write my language so fluently and most importantly getting closer to God and having faith in everything. However, at the same time It was a very strict school and their norms were definitely not my norms, but sadly it was something I had to get used to.

Coming into City Tech not having a clue of how it was going to be nor how the classes were going to be was very nerve wrecking for me. I still remember the first day I walked in school itself, thought to myself, is this what a public school looks like? As i got lost about 167 times trying to find my class i finally found it, walking in so nervous, felt so weird being in a class filled with diversity. Not to mention, the private school i had attended was all girl classrooms. It was a gender segregated school. Being around the opposite sex does not differ with me but it is something i need to get used to. When i say i have never attended public school a day in my life i really didn't. First semester was very surprising for me, I didn't know what to expect, felt a bit weird at first but I am a very open person and love to communicate with others so it wasn't hard to get used to. Many people would think I'm shy but im total opposite. My

learning experiences had changed a lot though. You can say in private you are more spoon fed. Rather than in public school you are all on your own. We were walked through everything instead of us learning on our own the steps for many things. Which was a good and bad thing and something me and all my classmates had took for granted. Private school is just different.

Let me take you with me through one day of private school... As Im walking in the building, removing my headphones, putting my phone away. The assistant principle stops everyone to make sure no one has makeup on and if you did they had makeup remover with them so they can give it to you to remove. After that i walk to the backyard if ts a nice day out and if its cold i walk up the stairs to the auditorium and than we do sorta like a pledge you can say. Its 5 to 6 pages from our holy book to start our day. This was my favorite part! However, after that we go to our classes and stay in the same class from 8:30 – 3:10. Tragic, i know. Nope, we don't do such thing named "travel" that most public schoolers do and are used to. Mind you, Im with the same exact girls ive been with since pre-school. Fun and annoying at the same time, were all like practically sisters. Around 12:30, which is our prayer time, we would be called to go to the prayer room to make prayer with everyone, favorite part, part 2. After we're done we would have the longest lecture with the principle and assistant principle talking about new rules and dress code. It was really annoying because it always just dragged with them speaking about the same things all the time, but that was one of the downsides of private school. The strictness.

My learning experience has actually changed drastically. Going from private to public real quick was just so different. I was so used to the same people, same routine everyday, looking the same everyday because we had to wear uniform, eating the same thing almost everyday. I got so sick of it and couldn't wait to start college so I can have a different lifestyle. At the end of

my senior year like the last couple of months, i started counting down the days till graduation. I was so sick of the same exact routine. I would literally go home and cry and complain that time was dragging. But, now that im coming into a public institution, I definitely miss private school. However, college is also a great experience but a learning experience I have to get used to. Put my mind to it. Having 2 different learning experiences has changed me in ways that I am thankful for.

All in all, my learning experiences has shown me paths in life that i am thankful for. It has taught me 2 different ways when i am trying to learn something. Whether it's in school, family, life in general. Therefore, i am very thankful for these learning experiences. It shows me different paths and ways i could think about things. Im looking forward to this journey i am on in a public institution to learn different things with a place filled with diversity. Something different to get used to but definitely looking forward to the change of a learning experiences.

**AMANI NASSAR**  
**The Palestinian Boricua**

Coming from such a diverse background of being Palestinian and Puerto Rican, I have gotten a lot of mixed reactions from people when I tell them about my background. Some would be shocked and ask “how did that happen?” Others would say something like “wow, that’s an amazing combination” and occasionally I get a “you foreign Amani” from my friends. One reaction in particular that I never liked getting was when people would ask if I was a Muslim or a Catholic.

Religion can be a sensitive topic to discuss for some people, and for me this question made me feel rather uncomfortable for the simple fact that I felt as though I had to choose one religion over the other. If I were to say I was a Muslim people would question why I never wore a hijab. If I were to say I was a Catholic, people would ask why I did not attend church regularly or ask me something about the Bible, all of which I would not have an answer to. I had never put much thought into my religious nature or upbringing. In my household, religion was never really a huge topic of discussion, no one was judged for believing in what they believed in or how they chose to believe. My parents never forced religion on me, they had always left it up to me to choose any religion I wanted or even no religion at all.

My mother was brought up as a Catholic from a young age, attending every now and then. My father was a devoted Muslim, born and raised in Israel, later coming to the United States. Typically, most Palestinian men have children with women within their religion, but since my mother is a Catholic my father was actually able to marry my mother and have children

together. Even without knowing much about religion, one could assume that being a Muslim is quite different from being a Catholic. They have different places of worship, different names for their God, different scriptures, different ways of praying, and all around many different practices for fulfilling their religious duty. I felt like I had a conflict of religions that seemed to be more different than alike.

I grew up in my Puerto Rican household with my mom, brother, abuela, and my father once upon a time. All of my life I only knew about my Puerto Rican roots, the food, the music, the Spanish language, and of course the people. All of my family functions consisted of the *boricuas* (another name for Puerto Ricans) on my mother's side. Any birthday I ever had, was attended by only my Puerto Rican family. I celebrated, and still do celebrate holidays like Thanksgiving and Christmas, which Muslims do not celebrate. I do not fast or celebrate Eid and I do not pray 5 times a day, but one thing I do follow as many other Muslims do, is not eating pork. Although I did not follow many of the Islamic practices my brother, who is fully Puerto Rican, actually adopted to the practices of Islam and converted to become a Muslim because of his interest and liking to the religion, he grew fonder of the religion and found a new appreciation for it.

My name often times grabs many people's attention too. Amani is an Arabic inspired name meaning desire or wishes. Nassar is also an Arabic name meaning helper, protector or victory. I've had people who are from a middle eastern descent ask if I was also from a middle eastern descent. There has been instances where my teachers would even ask me where I was from after reading my name off of the attendance sheet and seeing what I looked like. I remember sitting in 9th grade English class one day having a discussion about Hinduism as a collective group. My teacher had made a comment about Indians, then out of nowhere looked at me and said "no offense

to you.” I didn’t know how to take that comment. One part of me felt disrespected for being singled out like that and on top of that being categorized for someone who I was not based on an assumption of what I looked like. On the other hand I thought it may have been just a honest comment that wasn’t intended to offend me, which made me decide to take the comment as an emphasis on my Palestinian side being noticeable from the outside.

Everyday is a new learning experience for me when it comes to my cultures. From my first semester of English class, I have learned new things about the Muslim beliefs from classmates writings and discussions of practices. My brother even talks to me about Islam and the meaning behind certain things in the religion like the people and the names of parts of Israel. Being mixed is something that I have always embraced and will continue to embrace. I love everything my cultures have offered me from my thick curly hair to thick eyebrows and even my effortless Spanish tongue. Although I do not know much about my Palestinian culture or family, it is something I plan to indulge in as time progresses. I want to learn Arabic, I want to know more about my family, and I even want to read the Quran.

**FEIGHBE SOLANO**  
**The New Girl**

Growing up with separated parents was “normal” for me. I have very few memories back from when my parents actually lived together, little moments or visuals that I can see in my mind but never a full story that I could tell. My dad moved back to his native country, Colombia, when I was around four years old so every summer my mom would send my older brother and I to him and for the two months of summer vacation that we had, it would be spent there. By the end of August or the first week of September my brother and I would say our goodbyes, board a plane back to New York and begin the school year at P.S 153. One summer in particular, things wouldn’t go as they usually did.

During the summer of 2005 my mother surprisingly made the trip with us to Colombia, at the time I didn’t think anything of it since I was a child, I even recall sitting in an interview room with my brother, mother, father, and another person who I now assume would be the school director. The kind lady would ask me and my brother various questions about our family and our interests, then would ask me to draw pictures for her. She was interviewing us to see if we would be a good match in her school. I was about the age of 8 during this time, I loved going to Colombia to visit my dad and I also loved living with my mother in New York where I had been raised my entire life and English was my first language, my Spanish on the other hand wasn’t fluent and I had difficulty holding a full on conversation, but for some reason when my mom told me I’d be spending an entire year in Colombia going to school, making new friends, and being without her, I wasn’t scared. I wasn’t sad about not seeing my friends over in NY for a year or that I’d be in a completely

different school atmosphere, my brother on the other hand was furious, since he was older and in his teenage years, spending time with his friends was everything to him so he didn't take things as lightly as I had. From one week to the next my mother boarded a plane back to New York and promised to call us everyday, I think this was the most painful part of this experience. Nonetheless the beginning of the school year approached and my dad drove us on our very first day.

We had been accepted at a private school that specialized in teaching students English. Knowing how to speak two languages in Colombia was something very important whether it was French, English, or Mandarin, so private schools would specifically focus on one distinct language to teach students. I remember stepping out of the car and seeing my new school for the first time, and it looked absolutely nothing like how a school in New York would look. Before I could make into the principal's office I was approached by two girls who looked about my age, they asked if I was the new girl and immediately grabbed my hand to show me around. I was extremely surprised at this. When I compare my experience of studying in Colombia compared to New York one of the biggest distinctions is the students. In Colombia the girls were extremely nice, inviting, and social, meanwhile in NY it was more of a waiting game, the teacher would pair you up and that's who you were friends with. Aside from this within that one year my Spanish improved, I had learned to read and write in Spanish which has benefited me a lot now as an adult because in certain work settings it may be required to be bilingual or a big advantage compared to other candidates in job interviews.

Looking back at this experience, I wish I had studied more than one year in Colombia, because then I would have been able to continue perfecting my Spanish which is easier to do as a child. I'm thankful my parents had made that decision for me and I see it as more of an opportunity of growth that not all



children experience, especially if they are born and raised in the United States. This has encouraged me to possibly even send my future children to study abroad when they are young in order to experience the same opportunities and experiences that I had.

## **GROUP FOUR: GUISEPPE, SANTI, LENESHA, MINHAI**

**GIUSEPPE BIONDI**

### **The Tree of Dreams**

The tree, a tree that I care more than anything else, a tree that helps me getting every difficult task done, and remembers me of the most inspiring person of my life, my grandpa. A tree that reminds me of all trips of every Saturday or Sunday, where me and my grandpa use to go when I was back in Italy. That tree, that every morning remembers me of an adventure, past, and the one I take every morning a step over my house door. A tree that will always have the summer smell of the nature, a nature that brings me back in the hills of Sicily, where my grandfather and I walked step by step, admiring what nature has given us, a gift that many planets in the universe do not have, trees. A tree that my grandfather took from the hills, and then plant it in front of my house, so that it reminds me of all the advice that he shared with me. The tree, which helps me overcome the greatest difficulties of this world.

Day by day, what I remember is a past time, a time, where everything was beautiful and handsome. Trees is what I remember, then, a natural paradise, where the perception of our sense's changes, because of the nature that involves you, as if it was the last match of an important team. Sicily, my island, this is what I remember every day, looking at the tree in front of my house, and while I look at it, it takes me back in there, like a time machine, but only the most beautiful memories will surround you, because at the end a life without good memories is not a happy life. Every morning awakening, what the tree transmits to me, are not only memories of the island where I was born, but also the nature that it transmits to the people that live near me, because it is considered one of the most beautiful trees in Gravesend, my neighborhood in Brooklyn. All seasons of the

year it transmits a different emotion, but a happy one. During the summer it is always full of green leaves that makes me, my neighbors and even the animals happy. And this is what gives me strength when I have to face days when I'm bored and unhappy and it gives me courage, as if it were the person I would always trust, my grandpa. The tree reminds me of my grandfather, as if he is watching me waking up every morning, he's what the tree remembers me of, because it was him who gave life to the tree, and my feelings for it. My grandfather, the person that I would never be afraid to say what I think of him, or something that went wrong that day, or just to express my ideas on something. Just so every afternoon I linger in front of the tree, as if I am talking to my grandfather, and say all the good memories that happened to me that day or other. While talking to the tree, I imagine my grandfather, as if I would be talking to him instead of the tree, and it's this that gives life to the tree, like if it was a person and not a plant. I call it "The Tree of Dreams" because it brings me with him to beautiful memories, like the trips with my grandfather in Mount Etna, where nature envelops you like a burrito. Trips, where the beauty of nature is all you will remember at the end of the day, and where every step counts because nature changes every step taken. From flowers, to majestic plants full of color that gives the nature of the island a beauty, that diversifies it from the others. Every step, where my grandfather explains to me the birth of plants and how they manage to take their fascinating color that not many other plants have. Where step by step, you will have a different memory of the nature that surrounds you, and it is precisely this that makes it unique.

Since the tree has been planted in front of my house, it has helped me so much, overcoming the darkest periods of my new life since I'm here. The most difficult times, were when my family from Sicily are here to stay with us. The moments spent with them are always, and forever, the most beautiful once ever,

since I was young. But when it's time for them to return to Sicily, are always the worst moments, because saying goodbye to my family, and not knowing when I would see them again, it's frustrating for me, and leaves me a sense of darkens inside me, because the most important thing that my parents taught me are to make a life of our own, and love your family. Therefore, I am so close to my family, especially my cousins. In all this, the tree helps me remember the best moments spent with them and then helps me both morally and mentally, to face any kind of challenge to problem that arises. Every day I spent some time talking to the tree, most of the time I tell it, the craziest things I've done with my cousins, like the time we jumped from a 12 meters rock near the beach where I live. Sometimes I even tell the tree, my feelings when I was around my friends, where the only thing that surrounded you was happiness. "The Tree of Dreams", is where all best memories can live, where I can forget everything, and it also helps me to immerse only myself to what nature has to give us, where I can be the protagonist of all my dreams, where I am the key to change the story, where I will decide where it will take place and how it will end. Every day I ask myself a question, "who are we to decide our destiny?". Only now I understand what the tree has tried to tell me, with past memories. We are the key to our destiny, and we are the necessary component to finish it in the best possible way, because after all, if we really believe in something, everything is possible.

## **GROUP FOUR: GUISEPPE, SANTI, LENESHA, MINHAI**

### **SANTI GIL** **Growing Pains**

As a kid, growing up, as a kid does when growing up, there were many times when I would mess up, forget, or misunderstand something. Now obviously it's common to do these things as a kid, but usually it's the job of the parents to correct them in a way that they understand what they did wrong, and to make sure they know what to do to not let it happen again. My parents didn't really understand that too much, which is why I almost never take myself too seriously, for better or worse. This is not to say I do not respect or have confidence in myself, I do, I just don't see the reason why they would get so mad when they did. My parents each have their own mental issues on their own, so when they were together it was double the nonsense.

The earliest instance I can remember is around 2010-2011 when I was 11 or 12. Having just drank through three of them my dad told me to throw out the water bottles. Now the "system" we had of recycling bottles in the house was to throw the cap out, rinse the bottle, and put it in the blue bag. So I went to the kitchen, and took off the cap. It was water, so I felt no need to rinse the bottle with something that was already on it. You wouldn't rinse yourself in the shower by adding more soap, unless you want a longer shower. Yet my dad still yelled at me to rinse the bottle. I tried to explain to him that it was redundant by doing that, to no avail. Lesson learned: nothing.

Then came school assignments. My parents were ludicrously hard on us about doing good in school, in the worst way possible. They were always pressuring me to do better, and I was never really good at math. I recall getting yelled at for not understanding how to subtract properly. This never did any good for me. It only frustrated me to wanting to do better, and

feeling bad for myself when I didn't do better, which would then lead to parents taking away things, like my phone, or the computer. We also weren't allowed to play video games on weekdays, which made no sense to me. All "immature-wanting to play a video game-I'd never be able to focus" tendencies aside, when I'm done with what I have to do, why shouldn't I be able to enjoy myself afterwards? It only ever felt like a punishment. But all of this manifested in 2012 when they divorced.

My parents were kind of religious. Not too much, but enough where you had to take God seriously in the house or you might get struck by lightning or something. With this, I know divorce can never happen to us, because it would be a sin. Yeah, no, it did. It was November 2012, before Thanksgiving. I forget where we were coming back from, but regardless it was me, my dad, my little brother and my little sister in the car. It was pretty cold, we all were bundled up with our puffy jackets that made us look out of shape. My dad was talking about putting up a tree, while we were trying to tell him it's too early to do that. We pulled up to the house, and we see some guy speaking to my mom at the door. My dad walks in and the guy tries to hand him a piece of paper, while my dad ignores him and heads inside. I take the paper, and I read that it says "DIVORCE". Obviously there was more on the paper than just that one word, but that was all I needed to see. Obviously I could see why it got to that point, they weren't good together, which can be a story of its own. However, this situation mattered because everything felt turned against me, and events afterwards during the divorce process would double down on that feeling. My mom's treatment to my dad was disgusting, and at the same time, I wasn't emotionally mature enough to know, help, or understand how my Dad felt. This made going into high school hard, as I had to associate with new people, at the same time dealing with what was going on at home. One of the ways I was able to deal

with all this was humor. Being around all that negativity is probably what gave me a dark sense of humor, but this allowed me to find the humor in many things. Obviously not everything though, otherwise I would be a psychopath. I realized that balance is necessary between work and fun.

However you find it, if you don't find a way to have fun with what you're doing, you will never feel happy. I love learning, and it is fun, but being yelled at to learn, or to do something, is not. Maybe I could've done things differently, I do regret not being social enough during this time, having someone to talk to probably would've helped, but nonetheless, I am who I am today because of it. I try to find happiness in the dark times, because if you don't you will be lost.

## **GROUP FOUR: GUISEPPE, SANTI, LENESHA, MINHAI**

### **LENESHA ROBINSON** **Acting Out**

I've always loved school. I loved learning. I loved being able to come home every evening knowing that I learned something new. I've always wanted to become a Nurse Practitioner. It was in my nature to always help someone in need. And it was a bigger picture than the money. Wouldn't you want someone to help you in your time of need? I knew I wanted to become an NP ever since I was young.

I remember being in grade school, always coming to school with a long face. No one had suspected that I was unhappy. I was unhappy with my mom, unhappy at my dad, and generally everything else in my life. Was that a weird thing to say being that I was only around 6 years old at that time? My parents fought all the time; and I don't think they realized how much it would impact me and my sister's lives by watching them argue and bicker 24/7.

My parents eventually went to court and fought for custody of me and Alena, who was 4 at the time. Who ever said that household wellbeing didn't affect a child's academic wellbeing lied. My dad gained custody, with my mom having visitation rights every weekend. My mom moved to Washington, D.C. shortly after, which meant visitation rights were only once a month, if my sister and I were lucky.

About 5 years later, my dad moved out and married his high school sweet heart. Ironic, right? That left my Aunt Natalie, my dad's older sister, to raise me and Alena. I loved my parents, but this settlement had caused me to grow a loathing feeling for them. This wasn't supposed to happen...but it did. I was a wonderful student, but, I was unhappy because of what my parents had put me through. I began to act out in school, and



soon would be later on in life, outside of school. I became more distracted and grew an even shorter attention span than what I already had.

Growing up with my aunt was probably the best thing that ever happened to me. When I turned 17, she gave me the best gift ever, which was no more curfew. I know it may seem like something minor, but for a teenager who “ran the streets,” as my aunt would say, it was a more than sufficient gift. The only agreement that we made was to call her to make her aware of my last known location. This was in case I was in danger. My aunt was one of those paranoid guardians who always watched those I.D. channels where people go on killing and kidnapping sprees.

I excelled in high school and I knew that nothing would be stopping me from going to college and obtaining my Nursing degree. However, misery loves company. Somewhere along my high school years, I’ve befriended many people who were not really my friends. They were merely people who were lost, unhappy souls that needed to fester off people who were already happy, or at least on the road to being happy. That’s where I was at. Looking back at the past, I wondered many times why I would hang on to a group of people that I didn’t see in my life in 10 years. Then I figured out. Although I had a family that loved me to the best of their ability, I was still missing that love that I needed from my parents. My mom wasn’t there, and my dad was there, but, he wasn’t **THERE**.

I began breaking curfew times, which were probably midnight or 1am. Again, I went through this phase of “acting out”. I stopped being family oriented for a while, ran around with my “friends” doing things that wouldn’t benefit them nor myself. I became this angry person that I didn’t like at all. For one semester, my grades even dropped from A’s and high B’s to mid or low C’s. That doesn’t seem like such terrible grades; though, for a person who was always an A student, it seemed like

I was failing. It's as if I wanted to hang around my friends all the time, but keep a great track record in school. When I was 17, my friends and I had gotten into a fight in public. I was arrested, but later let free because I'd never been in cuffs before. In 2015, I graduated with an average of 84. I knew that if I wanted to become a Nurse, I couldn't act the way I previously did in high school. I isolated myself from those high school "friends" and set my own path. It took me a while, about two years to mentally prepare myself for college, and I asked myself if I was really ready to intake what is destined for me. I was.

I never understood what it was like as a parent to split from your family. I was so mad at my parents for so long, until I was aware of what it was like for them. They didn't split because they didn't love me and my sister. They were still young and they needed the time apart to focus on themselves and establish a fulfilling life. I learned many things in school, however, I think life was and still is my greatest lesson. I thank my parents because their situation forced me to grow up faster, and learn so much more at such a young age. Never let obstacles completely halt your aspirations. Facing my obstacles made me realize that there is so much to live for and so much to work hard for. Always push forward to achieve your dreams, because you will not only make yourself happy; the ones that really love you and are rooting for you will also be ecstatic when you cross that finish line.

I currently go to New York City College of Technology to continue my education to become a Nurse and, soon after, a Nurse Practitioner. I realized that no one will live your life for you, so you must accomplish what you want. You cannot let past boundaries define your future. You must remember that your dream will only reflect your reality if you put in the work to earn it. My life is a book; my experiences that lead to better days are written with pen, my experiences that lead to mistakes are

written with a pencil, and the pages will be blank, ready for the experiences that I've yet to undergo.

## **GROUP FOUR: GUISEPPE, SANTI, LENESHA, MINHAI**

### **MINHAJ UDDIN** **Inspiration**

When I was really young I use to have a passion for cars. Thats all I played with and what I always wanted and if I didn't have my toy cars with me all I would do is cry. I would have all kinds of cars little ones and big ones. My dad actually got me this car that I could ride around the park but it was fun while it lasted until the battery got messed up and that meant that I would have to buy a new one, but it was alright because I was getting to big to fit in it anyways.

When I got a little bit older at like the age of 12 I would actually study cars. I would search up cars and see which ones were faster than the others and I would use up all my time research what car I want when I get older.

Thats where school comes into place because I wasn't the best in school. I would always fool around in school when I was young. I wouldn't listen to the teachers and I would do what would only please me and benefit me, but little did I know that all they were trying to do was help me and make me successful enough to get the car that I wanted when I was older. My parents played a major role in my understanding for me to do better in school. My mom would always tell me that when I finish college with my bachelors degree she would by me a car and I feel as if that keeps me going in school.

When I went to high school I forgot about all of that. I went into high school saying that I was going to pick up my act and do better and make everyone around me proud and not let them down, but what did I do I let them down again. At that time I was even worse. I would go to school but I would cut my classes. Thought that was the cooler thing to do. I made a lot of friends thinking that what they were doing was benefiting me. I would

go to class sometimes and I would barely pass my classes. Hanging out with those kids might have been one of my mistakes that I made in high school and I feel was a major role into why I wasn't succeeding in life. As I went into my senior year of high school my guidance counselor told me that if I didn't pick my act up I would graduate high school and that had to be one of the worst things someone could have ever told me and that is when I really realized that I had to pick my act because I wasn't going to let my family down.

I feel that the reason that I am continuing with everything in my life is because of my mother. She is one person that has always had faith in me and no matter what I did wrong she would scold at me but would never give up on me. She knows and believes in me to become something successful in life. I still till this day cant thank her enough for doing what she does for me and being by my side. That is why I will always promise myself that I will never let the number one woman in my heart down.

As I entered college I came in with a whole different mind set. I have left all my bad habits behind and I was ready to work and become successful. When I came to college and I started my first semester and I entered my first class because it was kind of hard for me to get rid of my habits. I found it hard for me to learn without getting distracted. I find myself getting distracted very easily like when my phone vibrates or buzzes I would look at it and text back whoever texted for a while and then I would look up and I was lost. That affected me pretty hard in math. That was a subject that if you didn't pay attention or you were lost it was hard to get back on track with the class and it would tend to happen to me a lot. It took me a while but I ended up getting rid of the habit but at the end of the I feel that it was about time that I got back on track and I feel as if I am mature now and the way I think is also mature. You should work hard and leave the past in the past and just keep growing as a person

and you will become successful. Then maybe I will get my dream car.

## **GROUP FIVE: STANLEY, HAIDER, KARINA, JAY**

### **STANLEY DESIR**

#### ***Ayo Ock Lemme Get Uhbaconeggandcheese***

I'm at a family function sitting with my cousins and close friends. We're explaining our struggles with growing up in the boroughs. When it was my time to speak, I said: "Don't trust nobody, be aware of your surroundings and shit could always be worse." Those were the three main ideas I learned growing up in New York City. My oldest brother is 34 and he's been in and out the feds since he was 18. He got two strikes. My other brother is 24 and it took him 7 years to get his diploma. I'm going to break down each main idea. We live in one of the most populated cities in the world. You meet a lot of people and you open up to them. Just don't trust anyone. Growing up in Flatbush, you see a lot of behavior which we would describe it as "snake" or "shyste". I watched my brother's so-called "friends" snitch on him and claim he committed a number of crimes. It was painful to see at a young age. At the age of 7, I already had it instilled in me that trusting someone is dangerous. I'm now 18 and I really never had a lot of friends. Yeah, I know people and they know me but I try to keep my close friends to a small number. I got trust issues. Majority of my close friends are either Haitian or Jamaican. I'm Haitian and I grew up with a lot of Jamaicans and other Haitians so I feel like I can trust them and I connect more with them. You're probably wondering if my brother's experiences influenced me to be in the streets. It didn't.

Whatever happened to them, fueled me to be on a guided path throughout my life. I never got in trouble with the law, I respect everyone around me. Where I'm from most people would describe me as a "nerd" or a "citizen", but in reality, I'm just tryna get through life.

Every day when I leave my building I always have my head on a swivel. Believe it or not, I was afraid that at any moment someone would walk behind me try to mug me and blow my brains out. I've kind of been feeling like this since middle school. I would always hear about drive-by shootings and stabbings in broad daylight so that easily triggered me. I learned to be aware of my surroundings very fast. I look at it as a positive because I'm always alert. Now to the last main idea. "Shit could always be worse." That right there, any NYC baby could relate to me. 99 % of our parents are guardians work to make ends meet and provide for us. Whenever we see homeless people on the street or on the train, we sit back and say we're grateful to be in the situation we are in because others would love to be in our situation in a heartbeat. Whenever my mom would fess me up about my school grades I would always be mad, but then I would think to myself some people wish their mother was alive to even be on their case about school. The way I learned in NYC impacted the way my academics went because I couldn't end up like my friends. Growing up here there are 3 scenarios if you don't have an education. You're either going to end up in prison, a bum on the streets or 6 feet under. Since grade school, I always maintained an 85+ average in all my core subjects. Especially with my parents being Haitian, my mom was always on my ass about school because she wanted me to have a good future and didn't want me to end up like my brothers. Caribbean/West Indian parents believe school is the number 1 thing in life and you need to complete and handle everything by a certain age. I was always stressed out because everyone in my family would say they're counting on me and it takes a toll on a 13-year-old. I never was the one to be suicidal because who in the world would want to take their life, but I would always once in a while imagine what would it be like if I was to die or not even be born. Most of my friends or family would of never even in their wildest dreams think of me having those thoughts. I



never want to think like that, but when I do it just makes me wonder. While I'm explaining myself to my cousins and friends, their faces are just in awe. I don't think they ever knew what I was going through inside. I'm not the one to open up to people because like I said before, I don't trust people. Some people would look at my story like I'm damaged or been through stuff. I don't look at it like that. I'm truly thankful for it all because I believe New York City made me an adult way before I turned 18. A lot of kids in other cities don't have my vision or attitude until after college or later on in life. I learned a lot of life lessons living in New York City.

## **GROUP FIVE: STANLEY, HAIDER, KARINA, JAY**

### **HAIDER MAHMOOD Fuck School**

I am in my high school auditorium having a good time with my friends. Its 1:30 because I usually skip this US government because if I go I end up falling asleep anyway. If you deeply inhale you can smell the pizza the school has been serving every Friday for the last 50 years. I feel comfortable and happy that I'm hanging with my friend but at the same time I feel guilty for not going to class. I look around and see multiple people crossing through the auditorium wearing the gym outfit trying to get to the C-Gym. Then there's those multiple group of friends just like us who didn't feel like going to class.

Why is class so important to me? Why would I feel guilty if I've been skipping classes for the last 3 years of my high school? Because this year its graduation. If I pass my classes I get to go to graduation and if I fail I would have to do another semester in high school. Even though I never was interested in going to graduation I still knew inside me that it was a once in a lifetime moment. So why was I not going to class. For two reasons one because I had a bad group of friends around me and the second being my accent.

The reason I hung out with these people is because even though they were a bad influence they were just like me. We all would be going through the something like a problem in life and we could count of each. We all would skip a classis and at the same time and meet and in the auditorium and talk about it. The best part is we didn't judge each other, and we always helped each other find solutions. The reason we would have skip class is because all of us got out of school at different times and none of us had lunch senior year.

Growing up with my mom teaching me Urdu and only speaking to me in Urdu confused me in a lot in middle school a lot. When I went to school and where we spoke English transitioning from my Urdu to English I developed an accent. Even though I could perfectly understand people in English, when I tried to reply they couldn't understand me. This limited my ability to speak a lot with my friends, I couldn't communicate as much and couldn't participate in activities. The reason I'm telling you this is because in high school I didn't have a heavy accent, but the point was that even when you don't have the accent no more it's the fact that having it makes you uncomfortable at times.

What was the point of coming to school? What's the best way to make money if I leave? What can I do to change my habits? What can I do to boost my confidence? Questions I would ask myself every day. It wasn't until I realized that life was all about evolving, becoming a better version of yourself. At the second I decided it was time for me to change everything. I met up with all my friends and everything I wanted to do just left my mind. It went back to just having fun in life. As much as I wanted to do good in school I also wanted to have fun. I have this mentality if something isn't fun I really don't want to do it. I realized before I tell my friends I must change my mindset. It took a week to see that I really wouldn't be something in life if I didn't graduate. I went to my friends and told them we should start going to class.

I finally had enough courage to say those magic words. They looked at me and asked what happened. I told them everything I started thinking of for example we would have no careers and be making no real money in life. I started to convince them all to class too. Now that I started going to all my classes my only problem left was my accent. I asked everyone I knew what I could do about that and they said just practice. So, every day I would go to an English tutor that would teach me a bunch of

new words and then I would go home finish homework asap to practice my words and that really helped because by the end of high school my accent started fading away. As classes end I got my report card and going to class really paid off because I didn't fail any. Summer came, and I did the same thing every day I would practice my words.

In conclusion working hard in life really pays off. changing your mentality can really get you somewhere in life. If you want to accomplish something, then you must put everything you got into it. its good if you change your bad habits but even better if you change your friends too. To succeed together is the best feeling knowing all of you made.

## **GROUP FIVE: STANLEY, HAIDER, KARINA, JAY**

**KARINA RAMSEY**

### **Not as Seen on TV**

Coming from a small island into this big country with so many moving parts it was very intimidating; not to mention attending school in America for the first time. School, where I come from, was basic and very religious. We had our own stuff that made it fun, however, when I watched TV as a kid, school in America just seemed like so much fun. So, it's my first day of school in America, and I was super excited. I walked in not knowing that a uniform was required because on tv they never wore uniforms. I met my teacher, and to my surprise, he was also from a small island as well, so I wasn't as nervous, because he was kind and welcoming. I walked into the classroom, and the first thing I said to myself, in my head was, "this doesn't look like what was on tv."

The kids on TV had lockers, cool book bags, didn't wear a uniform, they seemed very free-spirited, the food in the cafeteria looked good, they had classes like music and dance, and it just didn't look like school was a lot of work in America. However, in reality, the students looked bored, everyone was wearing uniforms, and the teacher was actually teaching. The food was terrible, there were no lockers, we were locked in a building like we were in a prison even the windows had bars. One thing I liked about my school in the islands was the fact it was near to a beach, so I would sit in my classroom with the windows open and feeling the gentle breeze passing seamlessly through my hair. I didn't expect a school in America to be such a rip off from what I saw on tv, or maybe that's just schools in Brooklyn.

I took my seat next to the radiator with my back facing the window and sitting next to me was a young lady by the name of Khadijah. Khadijah was very welcoming, she instantly said hi to

me, told me what topic we were on and did the simplest thing, ask me what my name was, oh and did I mention she was black. I've always thought that I would be in a classroom with a bunch of white kids but, to my surprise, my class was predominately black. The teacher got in front of the class and began to teach math, my favorite subject by the way, and then he asked a question. Me, being me and knowing the answer to the question, I raised my hand with no hesitation. He called on me, and I answered. Instantly I felt different. It wasn't because my answer was wrong, it was because it didn't dawn on me that I was different from everyone else until I spoke and didn't sound like my fellow classmates. I didn't have an American accent. Then I felt the eyes. Almost all the students in the classroom were looking at me. I felt out of place like I didn't belong. I looked like everyone else, we were all black....but yet a bit different.

My brother also started school that same day as me but was put in a higher grade. His experience was very different from mine, because that afternoon when we were talking about how our first day went, I noticed that the way he spoke, and his English was different. Again, me being me I said to him "wha you talking in style for." I said this because to me home was our safe haven, where we all spoke the same way, and I didn't have to be the orange chip is a bag full of yellow chips, because at home we were all orange chips. However, it seemed like I was the only one having a hard time adjusting. To my entire family, I just needed to start speaking "proper."

My family, who mostly speaks the same exact way as I do, is telling me that I need to talk "proper." I knew what they meant by proper, they wanted me to speak like my American peers. "Proper" to my family is speaking English with correct grammar and change of accent.

Granted my grammar was horrible and to this day still needs improvement, hearing them use the word proper didn't sit right with me. It didn't because to me, they were implying that the

way I spoke wasn't right and that wasn't ok. It made me feel like they forgot that in our home country mostly everyone spoke this way. At this point in was wondering to myself "should I stop being who I am?"

I am a person who takes the time to think about what people say and take it into consideration. The issue was that, I wasn't purposely speaking with my accent, I just couldn't turn it off and switch to talking like an American, like I guess my brother could do. I literally couldn't because I genuinely tried to. I tried because I didn't want to feel out of place in a place where I would be spending a lot of my time. Then I meet the Liberian at my school, when I met her and started speaking the first thing she told me was that she loved my accent. That was something I have never heard before, and I didn't know if I should say thank you or not. She went on to say, "you should never lose your accent, it makes you very unique." After she said that to me, I went home and thought to myself, "she's right, I should be proud of my accent. No one else in this place speaks like me." Over the years I have come to embrace my accent, and I love the way it comes out when I'm happy, sad, or mad. My education was never flawed because of the way I speak so, I will continue speaking with my accent, but in a professional setting I will speak "proper."

**GROUP FIVE: STANLEY, HAIDER, KARINA, JAY**

**STORY TIME: *THE LAZY HARD WORKER*  
Jay Vandenburg**

**Ya:**

One kid is: short, ugly, unpopular, not too smart, and not to mention slow. On the other hand there's another kid: smart, handsome, hell of a lot cocky and hella fun to be around. If you haven't figured it out yet both kids are me the, the first is when in was younger a total Noob and the other is me now. For as long as i can remember I have always been in school. There haven't been a time where I wasn't in school, well except this one time after high school when I took a semester off and then started college but that don't count, that was basically an extended weekend. Being in school all the time obviously meant I'm constantly learning. The cool thing about it is that it wasn't always about academics somethings include fashion( the way I dress and choice in clothes) the way I talk ( the way I speak around people whether it being with friends, family or even professors). Even the way I carry myself and let's not forget sense of humor. All of these attributes learned in one environment amount different people.

**Slow Kid:**

Flash back to fifth grade, here I'm around nine or ten years old attending Cumberland Primary school, Guyana ( yea I'm Guyanese not Spanish sorry) this is also where I met a teacher by the name of Sarah, Sarah isn't her real name but I dislike her so much I don't wanna say her name so we're gonna call her Sarah.....bitch. Sarah is/was I don't know if she still a teacher



but when I was in school she was a math teacher and I guess a good one since her students were usually really smart or they could've been naturally smart, but she had a really horrible attitude and starting school a year before I should have made it really tough being that I wasn't developed as the other kids were, so yea it was hard yet I maintained a pretty decent G.P.A. Sarah was really tough and fun fact **“she didn't like me”** I know right now can you not like me I'm me. Fast forward to summer of 2009, I may have dropped back a bit in class so my mom sent me to lessons or as we call it in America “Group Tutoring” since it was a bunch of other kids there as well. Of course it was for math which meant I had to go to Sarah's house for tutoring since she knew the material we were going to be using the following term. (Before you ask why her house, shit wasn't advanced like that ight), that was the worst summer ever, for 6 whole weeks, 5 hours a day from 9am to 1pm. She taught at a fast pace which made it hard for me to really understand most of the topics because well in was slow so yea it was hard, she would get mad at me for this exact same reason because the other kids understood what she was saying in not one flat, then there's me Mr. slow poke in the corner behind struggling...smh. She would get so mad that she would take away my break ( after an hour or two of being there she would give everyone a break, well everyone but me. In a nutshell I couldn't get a break until I finished my work and got majority of the problems correct. It was so bad shawty would take a shower, come back and still be dick riding, like yooo let me get this down. At the end of the that summer I can't remember if I learned anything but I do remember hating those five hours of being there, and each morning riding my bike to her house. Went back to school and had my regular teacher, with her it was much more different, she was much more understanding and explained things clearly and my with that my grades improved as well. Usually After school is dismissed a few of us would stay for a few hours to

further grasp topics we were having trouble with. So one magical day Sarah decided to come to our class to help us. Ok step back a bit, while I was being tutored by her one of my bad topics was scientific notation and she knew, back to present, Sarah knew scientific notation was a tough topic for me but little did she know I've improved. After completing some problems assigned to us, Sarah proceed to the front of the class where she walked up and down like she got a stuck up her ass...wouldn't be something new...she went over the answers and I'm getting them correct and she makes one comment that pissed me off, she says " good to know I wasn't wasting my time" not only did she piss me off but try to the take credit for my improvement acting like she helped nah son f@%\* outta here, but I couldn't say that to her cause my momma ain't raise me to be disrespectful plus I'm a kid and she's an adult so I had to eat them comments. Fast forward to finals, did pretty good, didn't get the score I wanted but good enough to pass. After that I moved to good old New York City. You'd think that since Sarah was horrible toward me it'll affect my view of other teachers, well it didn't, I looked at it as her pushing me to do better and I did.

## **Fast Kid:**

Moves to New York late December a days before Xmas, when we got out the airport my ed ass was so amazed that I can see my breath you can tell I wasn't from NYC \*face palm\*. Since it was December I had to start school the following January and yes I was behind a whole semester. Anyway go to the middle school I would attend which was Virgil Grissom M.S. 226 in queens N.Y, got to the school and head to the main office. When I left Guyana I was already in 7th grade ( remember this) so as we're there they hit my parents with "you came to the right school" and I'm like ok cool, then the lady continues today that I'll have to start from 6th grade because I'm too young to be in

7th grade so that meant I had to repeat 6th grade all over again and I'm in my head like wowww you deadass, nah lemme top I didn't know wtf was going on all I knew is that I had to repeat cause I'm young. Turns out that because I started school early I was now ahead of my new classmates. Before I knew it I got through 6th grade with flying colors same with 7th grade, 8th grade though that's a different story.

### **Drip:**

Though it may have seen transparent it actually wasn't, for instance I left out the fact that I was a total introvert. It was also the time that puberty kicked in and my interest in girls skyrocket but life reminded me that I can't flirt and I knew nothing about women. You'd think a guy like me can fitness some cheeks...wrong but it wasn't a total loss. I became friends with many females and learned about most things that guys should know about females such as what females say vs what they mean, the meaning behind the way she acts at times or around a certain person. I was always taking in information about females to the point where I even learned a bit about their menstrual cycle. So all in all I didn't leave middle school learning nothing. High school was a bit different, everything was different in transit tech; the people (kids, I was low-key older than most) the teachers, the atmosphere, and more. All of these things took some adjusting to and had to be done quick so you won't be an outsider. In then this eventually made me a fast learner and at the same time picked up the east New York slang which I mostly use. Other aspects like the way I carry myself and how I dress took more of an observational approach due to being around a mostly Hispanic/ African American community which I took influence form. My sense of humor obviously got from my friends, the use of pop culture, physical observation combined together created what we know as "roasting" which everyone enjoys. Though I may seem like an outgoing person I'm actually

not but it Is something I'm learning to do amongst other things (yes that includes flirting, nah I'm low key slick) so that is where I am at currently, refining my DRIP.

## **Reflection:**

Even though I'm lazy by nature I'm also a hard worker which I'm sure Carrie knows and also why she doesn't tell me anything when I bitch in class. One thing I've learned is over the years is that everything is a learning experience. Even when you lose you win, I've interpret this to its either I win or I learn, there is no lose. I'm always learning and I usually Apply those things to my daily life so that things don't seem boring or predictable, I also share this info to help others so they can about living a life that best suits them. You love and you learn, it's cliché but it works, try it sometime...see y'all in the next paper \*deuces\*

## **GROUP SIX: LATRELL, MICHAEL, NICK, DAVID, ERIK**

### **LATRELL GREENE** **Under Pressure**

A scene from my experiences that I look back on fondly was the moment that I learned how to conquer my nervousness, and not fearing pressure when performing my learned and practiced skills in front of an big audience. In my school, for Black History Month, we celebrated by having performances of poems, dancing, music and speeches by both students, and faculty of the school. I was one of the people performing, and I would be performing a pretty well-known 3 minute ragtime piece titled Maple Leaf Rag, published in 1899 by Scott Joplin, an African-American composer. What brought me to that moment was my taking the time to learn complex melodies at home with my old 61 key keyboard. Of course, with there not being enough keys, certain melodies that required a larger range of key-playing were off limits. After about 5 years of inconsistently showing interest in playing the piano, my parents finally agreed to buying a complete 88 key digital piano, fully-weighted keys and all! With access to a larger range of octaves and keys, I practiced more songs, varying in genre, and became more confident in my playing.

About a year later, in my senior year of high school, even though I didn't take a music class, I took interest in the school's music classroom, and its mechanical upright piano. Because it was the end of the day, and the room was empty, I decided to play some music on it, both to examine the way it sounded, and for fun. Thinking no one from the other room on the other side of the hallway could really hear me, or really paid attention, I played it, and though it needed to be badly tuned, the ragtime song that I played on it still worked. After finishing the song, and being unaware of any real audience, I was surprised to hear

applause from the music teacher and two other teachers from neighboring rooms. The music teacher told me that she was impressed with my performance and asked me if I wanted to perform for Black History Month on her behalf, since she wasn't going to be able to attend and hadn't put anything together for her students. Reluctantly, I accepted, mostly because it'd feel wrong to just sneak into her classroom to play music, and then decline when asked to perform. That hesitance was there because that was suddenly a large amount of pressure than what I was used to. Even though I was confident in my ability to retain the songs on my own, there was still that almost irrational hesitance regarding my confidence with recalling it flawlessly in front of a large audience. It was because of this, that as the day approached, I got more and more nervous about the coming performance.

Then came the moment. After about a week and a half of practicing with the goal of making sure I couldn't possibly mess up, the moment finally arrived. Behind me and to the left of me was an auditorium teeming with around 150 students, in front of me was the auditorium's in tune upright piano, and underneath me were the pedals to the piano, and although they didn't work, they weren't really needed for the song I was playing. The air in the room was really warm, but I wouldn't know if it was really that warm, or it was my nervousness making it feel that warm. I was still nervous, and even though I practiced the song I had already mastered every day for about 10 days, the feeling in my thoughts that I might still mess it up was still present. It felt like there was still a sizable chance that I might mess up in the middle of the song and forget what came next. Telling myself that even if I did, I would try my best to get back on track helped in a way, but not too much.

When the hosts of the performances introduced me, I felt the adrenaline and pressure hit me, but instead of being overly nervous, when I played, it was almost calming knowing that my

nervousness, and the adrenaline was helping me stay sharp, and not messing up the piece. Getting closer to the end of the performance, I was calmed because I knew that even if I did mess up at the end, I'd already made so far, so perhaps it wouldn't be so bad. I actually started to feel more and more content with my playing, and when I finally finished, it felt like the nagging weight of nervousness and pressure that accumulated from this performance over the previous days was lifted off me, and I felt a wave of the feeling of accomplishment. From that point, I think that I had learned the lesson to trust that when I'm in the moment of applying skills that I spent time learning and refining, the sense of pressure wouldn't always impair my ability to perform, but it can enhance it. Rather than doubting your abilities under pressure, you could look forward to it helping you stay sharp in the moment that it's there.

## **GROUP SIX: LATRELL, MICHAEL, NICK, DAVID, ERIK**

### **MICHAEL VIGNOLES**

#### **Contagious Energy**

Most of my days started out at eight in the morning. Orange rays of light began to peak out of the clouds as the train whizzed by. New Yorkers were still yawning, lulled by the sounds of the train, their long tired faces adorned with bags under their eyes, and their dazes were always far away and out of focus. You could tell some were still in dire need of their morning coffee. Then there was me, in my own world. My shoulders were getting sturdy to every beat of lil Wayne. That's how I got hype for work, like I'm Tom Brady about to win another Super Bowl. The store was located in the heart of the city, right under the Empire State Building. It shone its light above, like a beacon, leading me home. This first day at the flagship store was like no other. Customers and staff were looking at me like I was absolutely crazy on drugs. I was screaming at the top of my lungs welcoming everyone into my store, I didn't mind the stares though. Not one customer was going to pass me without being greeted. I screamed "She's a size 9 in women and the hubby here is a size 11 in men!", to a couple that came in. It was followed by a slight second of confusion in the customer's eyes, as she wondered how I knew their size but I didn't stick around to long to explain, I was already running downstairs getting their shoes. As I ran back back up the stairs, everyone could hear me yell, "We can't stop and won't stop!"- my signal to let customers and staff know that I'm giving 110% in everything I do. Both staff and customers constantly asked my manager, who I had been working with for a year by then, "Who is that and why is he so loud? Is he always like that?". Without batting an eyelash she would reply, "That's just who he is".



In my eyes, to be the best manager one could be, you have to be able to motivate every employee under your wing as well as anyone that walked into your store. I was able to get the opportunity to become a manager at the highest volume store, because of the energy I exuded and the relationships with customers I was able to make. Oddly enough, my motivation was knowing that the world we live in has gone to shit. For example, we have a buffoon of a president in office; we have concentration camps separating children from families, and people of color who still do not feel safe enough to buy a bag of skittles and an Arizona. At times it feels like we as individuals have no power and control to make a difference. With a set of rosy colored glasses on, it was then that I realized that I met hundreds of people around the world virtually everyday and that I could then have the power to impact every customers lives that I crossed paths with. Even with something as small as my famous greetings. In a world that makes you seem so small at times, I finally found a way to make a huge impact.

I once had a family who was visiting the city from Wales while working at the store. They were a couple, with their daughter and son. While spending time with them for the first time I didn't think anything out of the ordinary would come of our interaction. I made them laugh and they even bought a lot of items from me, though they didn't seem to intend to. It was when the family came back the next day, and the day after just to visit me that I felt that this was something different. Their hotel was right next to the store so they always ended up visiting at least once a day during their trip, just to say hello to me. On their last day in the city the family and I took a group selfie, and they said next time they come back to the city there going to come and find me. I was shocked that our small interactions had grown into a bond almost friend like, with my confidence on the rise I let them know that the next time they would see me I would be running the store. This family only served as a

reminder to my manager of how much my presence, kindness and energy meant to them, how it set me apart from all of my other coworkers. With everything seeming to fall apart out in the outside world, I was just happy to be able to bring a smile to this family everyday on their trip in the city, letting them into my own little world for a while.

One last experience I remember with a customer, started off seemings awful. It is not often to see a customer who's shopping and looks so unhappy at the same time, so when they came in they caught my attention almost immediately. This customer came in with her friend, both from Long Island and visiting the city. Without mentioning why she looked so miserable I proceeded to help her with shoes. My goal was to get her to try something on but it was also now to wipe the unhappiness from her face if even for just a second. I brought the shoes out she asked me for and some other ones that I thought she might like. One thing I learned was that customers who you are able to make laugh and connect with were the easiest to persuade to buy. I knew I wanted to make her laugh so I pitched some socks because I knew I would be able to make jokes with them. My favorite line to go in with was, "I have some socks. You get five pairs for only nine dollars. That's Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, you don't have to do laundry. That's also five days worth of warm-sie toes-ies". At first it was rough, she was still visibly upset but then she began laughing and suddenly it was like she forgot why she was so sad to begin with. Later that day I found out that the reason she was so sad was because her boyfriend broke up with her and her friend was trying to show her a nice day in the city. I had only managed to heighten the niceness of the day.

These were just some of the experiences that I believed were so small, and yet ended up leaving an impact with each and everyone of these people. What amazes me more is how many other lives I've impacted but just never really realized it. I've

learned that regardless of whether you give out love and positivity or hatred to this world, it will always return tenfold later. My job was to persuade customers to buy products from my store, however, I was the best at it because it became much more to me than that. I truly cared and wanted to give a one of a kind shopping experience, leaving all customers with a smile at the end of the day regardless of what was happening in that awful outside world. I can't control that outside world, but in *my* world, *my* shoe store, I was able to make smiles for everyone.

## **GROUP SIX: LATRELL, MICHAEL, NICK, DAVID, ERIK**

### **NICHOLAS WOJNO** **Pixelated Thoughts**

Among the rubble of a destroyed city, a woman wearing a black military uniform, red armband, and black hair tied in a ponytail runs to take cover behind a pillar of high that has collapsed and now holds itself up from its own remains above her. Slinging her marksman rifle over her shoulder, she looks down the scope and watches a tall man made of metal, with a minigun fused onto its right arm, slowly march its way over to a man hiding behind another pillar 30 meters away with an assault rifle between him and the metallic man. Adjusting her view, the woman flicks off the safety and takes a deep breath as her finger lifts off of the trigger guard and onto the trigger right before...

Scenes like this are what filled my mind for several years of my life. The scene written above was taken from when I roleplayed online with people in a sandbox game called Garry's Mod on a server themed around the Terminator universe. The event ended up with my character experiencing a near death experience after taking the attention of the terminator away from her teammate, where the terminator turned and fired its minigun in her direction with the bullets tearing through the concrete and through her ballistic plate vest. Even though there is such a story behind it with, what was to me, such vivid images, there was no animation from the models for all the things that happened. I along with two other people typed out sentence by sentence the actions that took place. Through watching how people structured their sentences, I slowly picked up the basics of grammar which are lessons that I take with me today because it just feels natural for me at this point. Garry's Mod wasn't the only game that I learned grammar through. I even started

through a game called Warcraft III which came out in 2002, and then an expansion in 2004 called The Frozen Throne. After watching my brother do it a couple of times, I got an interest and tried it myself. Since I was only eight at the time, the things I learned showed in my ability to increase my ‘reading level’ throughout elementary school. I got to excel in writing assignments and my teachers always considered me a good reader, which I only have my experiences of roleplaying to thank.

It’s also amusing to me that during my years of roleplaying through video games online, the ones that often had mistakes in their grammar were the ones who tried to correct others. They often were disliked and given the term ‘Grammar Nazi’ to describe them. Most people never bothered with correcting someone, unless they were atrocious, so those who did it regularly were naturally disliked. The greatest fall of a grammar nazi was the moment they made a mistake and were called out for being full of shit. I naturally never paid attention to these things too much, but it was amusing to watch people argue out of character over the small things. These small things were exposed to me and I got to learn niches in grammar that I’m sure I would never use, however no such experience stands out to me after not interacting with roleplaying for years. With these years away from roleplaying though, I can proudly look back and see the other things I’ve learned from video games.

I’ve learned the composition of air by looking at filters on a space station, learned the geography of Europe slowly while establishing myself as a great power after starting as a lowly elector in the Holy Roman Empire in 1444, and so much more. Through a variety of games, I was able to be exposed to a variety of scenarios which taught me so many things. Video games can be a great way to learn things and it’s disappointing to me that so many people consider them a waste of time where nothing can be learned. Stating that video games bring out

violent tendencies in people and are only harmful to children is a view that I can't help but feel is ignorant. I can't deny that video games often get people rowdy due to some people's competitive nature, but to say that games only make people violent seems off when gamers are stereotypically shut ins, who are abnormally quiet when outside. I've seen people who could tell you facts about random parts of World War 2. If you wanted to know what tanks were reliable and which were a pile of junk, or the facts of battleships such as the Konigsburg or the St. Louis cruiser, there is a person who can tell you all about it depending on which gaming community that is explored. I personally view games as a great way to learn things, it just takes a little bit of searching past the most popular titles.

## **GROUP SIX: LATRELL, MICHAEL, NICK, DAVID, ERIK**

**DAVID WU**

### **More than a Game**

Ever since I was a little kid, I loved the game of basketball. The speed of the game, intensity, and aggressiveness always got me excited to watch the stars play. It started off with me spending time with my cousins watching games on television. Little did I know that playing basketball would have a much greater impact on my life than I could have ever imagined. It was a unique sport to me which led me to picking up a basketball at the age of 10. I would go to the backyard of my house just to practice by dribbling around. My older cousin would take me to the local parks to shoot around. It was when I was 13 I actually learned the correct way to play basketball. My friends and I went to an indoor court and one of my friend's cousin showed up. He was the one who taught me how to shoot the ball correctly, how to dribble the ball in many ways, and how to play defense. I don't believe people when they say that Basketball is just a game. I believe that basketball can teach people a lot of things in their lives. One of the lessons I learned was that life isn't fair. I soon learned that when the referees in the game were making horrible calls or calls that didn't make sense at the time. It seemed that all the calls that were being made never went our way and the referee never made the correct call when the call needed to be made. This happened a lot in a lot of games so I learned to accept it and just move on. Another lesson it taught me was how to have good sportsmanship. Playing any sport in general involves both wins and losses. You learn to be proud of your success without despising your opponents. You learn to accept failures and come back stronger next time. Over time you will realize it's not really the win or loss that makes a difference. If you gave everything you've got, no matter what the outcome is,

you can walk away with your head held high. This also applies in life too that everything you do does not always go your way. There are highs and lows but if you continue to give whatever you do your very best you will always emerge victorious. Another lesson basketball has taught me is how to make sacrifices and time management. In order to balance sports and other activities, you have to make certain sacrifices. This, for me, would mean cutting down on free time, so that I can balance studies and sport. A lot of time management is involved here too. In life too, nothing worth having comes easy. Sacrifices need to be made at every step in order to achieve what you aspire to. Through sports you learn how to do this and how to utilize your time for your greater good. Another lesson I learned from basketball is that nothing comes easy in life. It all comes down to hard work and dedication. A lot of the stars in the league states that they didn't make it here by luck but by all the hard work they put in everyday to deserve to be in the league. If you really want to excel at something, hard work is the only way. It is the same with any other field in life. If you want to get better at school or get a raise at your workplace, the only way you can do it is by hard work. There are no shortcuts to this. We are always taught to dream big but what we don't realize most often is that our dreams don't work unless we do. There is no substitute to hard work, ever. Basketball has also taught me to not dwell on my mistakes but to learn from them. If I don't make a shot or lose my dribble, I just get back on defense and don't mess up on the next possession. In basketball, you are taught to never give up. A few minutes can change the game in so many ways. Even on days when your shots just don't go in, you have to keep trying and help your team in the other areas. You need to contribute in the defense, go after loose balls, make good passes and help in any way you can. You can never give up, not on the game, not on your team, and especially not on yourself. You keep trying until the very last second. In life too, there will be many



occasions where you will want to give up, but you need to fight and work hard. The most important lesson that basketball has probably taught me is leadership and communication. Basketball is a team sport and in every team there's a captain. If the team isn't communicating, I step up and take control of the team. I would tell them what play to run and they would respond by doing the play. To a lot of people, Basketball is just a game but I believe it can teach people these things by playing the sport. It is a gateway to learning life lessons.

## **GROUP SIX: LATRELL, MICHAEL, NICK, DAVID, ERIK**

### **ERIK YAN**

#### **Video Games Taught Me More than School Ever Did**

Life is a whole learning lesson. The way we learn is completely up to us. I think the best way of learning is to make the process fun and relatable. Something that made learning fun for me was video games. Video games does not look like it would teach you anything that is taught at school but it instead teaches you social skills that school just doesn't seem to teach.

Playing video games has taught me a handful of things. I think a game that taught me a lot is Rainbow Six Siege. My friends and I would play this every day. There are times where not all my friends can get on to play for whatever reason, which forces me to play alone. Playing Siege alone was difficult due to Siege being a team oriented game where having intel and communicating it to the rest of the team is key to winning. Since I was just playing with random people when my friends weren't on, I didn't really talk to any of the people on my team. I kept seeing my teammates getting killed but I was busy dealing with my own enemy, but once I'm done with my opponent, my teammate's enemy stopped fighting with them and decide to go finish me off. With the lack of communication, I didn't really know and I get killed. It went on like this for the whole game and in the end, we lost the game. The next game, I tried giving callout to my teammates and we actually won the game without the other team even getting a chance to win a round. The fact that we are all strangers and were able to come together to win forced random people and I to have to talk and interact with each other. As strange as that may be, this can be carried over into the real world.

Since playing video games have gotten more complex than in the past, majority of games filled with so many things to do.

This also helps improve multitasking skills. In Siege you have to worry about all kinds of things, such as the enemy team, traps, and if the gamemode is hostage then also that. You also have to worry about the time and your teammates. I say teammates because in this game your team can technically kills you, it is strongly recommended not to by the game but, that doesn't really stop people from doing it, so it is good to watch out. All these facts forces you to have to multitask. This has kind of improved my multitasking skills because it forces me to finish a certain task within a given amount of time. The timer in the game is probably the thing that helped me the most in multitasking because you only get three minutes a round. Sometimes you lose track of time when you are worrying about your own life in the game. The traps in the game can take down a significant amount of health away from you and can give away where you are to the enemy team who can just come out of nowhere and kill you.

Decision making isn't really taught in school from my experience, I think I've felt more of a decision making in video games than in school. As I have said before about how you have to multitask, you also have to decide how you want to approach things and how you want to do it. There have been moments where I had to decide whether I had to get into the objective or kill the last guy on the other team because time was ticking. This taught me about making the important decision and how it will impact the final moments of the round. In school, I'd get choices but I felt like it didn't really matter which one I chose, the results would generally be the same. While on Siege, If I did not go into the objective while the time almost hit zero, I would have lost the round and our team would've been put at a disadvantage.

The most important things I think I've learned is probably patience. There are times in Siege where you have to wait for the other team to come at you so that all you need to do is kill them. If you go rushing in, the other team will be ready for you

and catch you off guard. School never really taught me patience because I'd get homework or other assignments due the next day so I never really put much time into the work. It wasn't straight trash but if I had more time, I'm sure it would've been better.

Having an objective to accomplish in a video game brings together everyone that is playing. You won't really find the kind of teamwork in videos in like school or somewhere else with people that do not know each other. It also taught me how to multitask better which school kind of helped but it didn't really feel as impactful as learning it from playing games. Decision making and patience were things I felt like were something I'm glad I learned because there are a lot of decisions to make in life and some things in life can't really be rushed so having patience helps. I find that learning these values from something other than school is more interesting to me because it appeals to me a lot more.