

Alara's Personal Narrative — Yale Acceptance

I stood with my back to the class, trying to keep a smile as I stared at the little girl in front of me. She waved, and politely, but firmly, repeated, "I don't want to join."

"But why?" was the only thing I could think to ask.

"It's boring," she responded simply and gently.

I didn't want her to leave. "You'll see that it's not, if you just come and try," I said as softly as I could.

Finally, she shrugged and sat back at her computer.

For the third year in a row, I was in Gordes, a village in rural Turkey, trying to get this young girl, and several other students, to participate in STEM field activities I had designed. After volunteering in two school community projects, I had felt the curricula for these projects—designed back in 2007—needed improvement. We weren't making enough of an impact with the children since the curriculum only included activities such as watercolor painting, playing football, and dancing — things children could already do by themselves. So, I wanted to introduce something new. With the project I initiated, the children who have never seen an amusement park before rode the world's biggest roller coasters, travelled to cities they hadn't even heard of, and became the first Turkish astronauts to walk on the Moon, all through a pair of Virtual Reality Glasses. As an aspiring computer scientist, I wanted to inspire as many children as possible to become engineers, scientists, and innovators of the future. Knowing that the best way to catch the attention of 12-year-olds was through fun and creativity, I embellished the project with such magical technological activities, in addition to teaching them how to code on Scratch. I saw how much they enjoyed the experience when their laughter and screams echoed through the classroom.

However, for some reason, I couldn't pull that one little girl in. Trying to understand why, it dawned on me that it wasn't this single girl from Gordes I was talking to — I was confronting a whole cultural notion in which she didn't have a place in that room full of computers and electric cables.

Soon after, I saw that she was struggling. I assisted her and together we completed her labyrinth. While she liked the idea of creating her very own game, she still wasn't as impressed as I'd hoped. I racked my brain for creative ways I could make this labyrinth game more interesting. Together we added new features such as display alerts and a two-player option. With every addition, I could see that little by little her frown was turning into a smile, which encouraged me even more! At the end, we transformed that basic labyrinth game into a colorful, interactive, and multiplayer game that she was proud of creating. After it ended, she approached me, and with a mixture of happiness and embarrassment, and said, "I thought I would hate coding, but now I love it after seeing all the things I can do with it!"

I realised that I enjoy being a changemaker. I was capable of, and in fact responsible for, changing the things around me — whether it was revitalizing the curriculum of a traditional project or shattering the glass ceilings put on girls.

And I am definitely not done yet. By being a member of my school's Advisory Board for Community Projects and the Outreach Coordinator of our Robotics team, I am making sure that we establish the most impactful projects and touch as many lives as possible.

Now that I am about to start the computing education I have been dreaming of for years, I am more excited than ever to expand my own horizons and hopefully, in turn, share my passion with others.

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Content

Alara tells a nice, sincere story about overcoming a seemingly small obstacle--but it's very important and personal to her. This is in the scheme of a bigger community involvement project she's doing. She's not telling us she changed the world. She tells us about *wanting* to change the world through changing the perception of education for girls in Turkey. (She implies that if she can change perceptions of STEM for one girl, it could be possible for all in such a culture.)

The essay also tells us she can be a great leader. She can work well with people of all ages.

She'll work at something until she finds a solution.

The less obvious. And without telling us explicitly, she's showing us the importance of programmers and developers understanding the end-user. She's letting acceptance committees of computer science departments know that she understands user-interface design, not something that not all computer scientists are good at.

Delivery of Story

She begins with the complication or problem (one little girl isn't excited about learning STEM). She doesn't talk abstractly about it all, she gives us the story with dialogue. We can see the little girl complaining. We can imagine Alara's frustration and feel for her. We are along for her journey as she begins to inspire the girl.

By the end, we are onboard with her newfound optimism. She didn't begin with a terrible tragedy or trauma but with an important complication that has implications for the society around her. And she doesn't end it with pessimism but with hope.

Mechanics

It's free of spelling and grammatical errors.

It's organized well with helpful use of paragraphs.

She uses a variation of complex and simple sentences effectively.

Overall

So, well-done overall without having to write a deeply complex, philosophical piece. She told a memorable story and showed some of what acceptance committees *need* to hear--she will work hard to overcome an obstacle, she's a great leader, and can work well with people. Bonus, she conveys that she is skilled in her chosen field (not necessary, but helpful here) and she wants to change the perception of women's "place" in her society.

A copy of this essay can be found at PopulationMe.com.