

HIGHLIGHTS OF AN EFFECTIVE ESSAY

- Introduction with a catchy lead-in and clear thesis
- Personal reflections dealing with your own experience
- Link to a “big picture” idea (e.g., an important social issue), which appeals to a wide audience
- An emphatic ending or “kicker”
- An appropriate title

My Turn

Newsweek Education Program

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• “You Can Call Me The Silver-Tongued Frog” by Jason Shen is reprinted from the July 8, 2002 edition of NEWSWEEK.

• This sample “My Turn” essay is a model, not a blueprint or format. However, your essay should include all of the highlights presented here.

Sample “My Turn” Essay



INTRODUCTION

- In your opening, include a “lead” or “hook” to grab the reader’s interest and suggest your purpose and meaning.
- Next, state your point. State how your personal experience links to a larger social context. Briefly define your meaning and suggest your conclusion.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

- Use details to define, support and expand on your experience.
- Use details to help the reader see and feel your experience.



My Turn

You Can Call Me The Silver-Tongued Frog

Tired of being teased, I got involved, got some confidence and earned a nickname I’m proud of

BY JASON SHEN

I can’t remember the first time the bullies called me Kermit. Or Froggy. Or Toad. It has become such an integral part of me that I can’t imagine myself without the nicknames.

It’s not easy being ugly. OK, not ugly. That’s too harsh. Not facially endowed. What else can you call a guy who resembles an amphibian? People say you shouldn’t judge a book by its cover, but among teenagers, the cover is what sells the book. I watched from the sidelines as my more attractive friends matched up and broke up without a care. For me, one glance from a girl was enough to feed my heart, which was shrunken from deprivation like a hunger-stricken stomach. I’d lie in my room, listen to Sister Hazel’s “Change Your Mind” and swear it was about me: “If you wanna be somebody else...”

At the beginning of my senior year of high school, I joined the mock-trial team. I needed a better way to spend my time than idling in front of my computer trying not to think of what my best friend was doing on his date with his girlfriend.

At the tryouts, in order to gauge my speaking skills, one of the lawyers who would coach the team looked me in the face and asked, “What do you think of the HIV epidemic in Africa?” Somehow, I stammered out a comprehensible answer. Surprisingly, I was awarded one of the six coveted attorney positions, while the rest of my 19 teammates were relegated to witness or clerk roles.

It was clear from the start that our training would be intense. One of the lawyer-coaches put it bluntly: “At work we charge 500 bucks an hour. We’re with you guys at least 10 hours a week. You do the math. Now you want to shut up and listen?”

At every practice, the coaches would cruelly criticize our every mistake and call us everything short of complete idiots. Our opening statements were too short, our direct examinations were too long and our cross-examinations just plain stank. Then, just before we’d break down, they’d build us back up by showing us how much we had improved. Before long, we were flexing our mental muscle like true lawyers.

After our two months of training, the first competition rolled around. Before we entered the county courtroom, one of our coaches offered us some not-so-gentle encouragement: “Winning’s not everything. It’s the only thing.”

When I walked to the podium in my suit to stand before the real-life superior-court judge and examine the “witness,” a new sensation grabbed hold of me. It took me a minute to realize that it was confidence, a feeling I had never fully experienced, definitely not while conversing with a girl or sitting alone at a party. At the end of the trial, I gave my closing argument. I forget exactly what I said that made the audience, and even the other team, stand up and applaud. I just remember smiling so much that it hurt, especially as the judge singled me out as a

“silver-tongued devil.”

The next month seemed the shortest of my life, as my team turned in a whirlwind of amazing performances. Before we knew it, we were in the sweet 16, the elite group that remained from the original 64 teams. Three rounds later, we advanced to the final match to determine who would go on to the state championships.

The opposing team was as polished and impressive as a real dream team of lawyers. They countered all of our normally impressive arguments with even more impressive arguments of their own. As I got up to give what I thought would be my last closing statement of the year, I told myself to relish every second of it. After this, it was back to the real world, where my speaking skills were of little value to my superficial peers. I practically cried during the best closing I ever gave.

I actually did cry when, after I finished, the judge announced that my team had won and the room exploded in a roar of celebration. I hugged my co-counsels to the brink of suffocation, then rushed around congratulating the rest of my teammates. One of my coaches heartily shook my hand and admitted with a grin, “Even I was impressed.”

Then I heard it. “Kermit!” I whipped around to see who had teased me. My best friend stood in front of me, beaming. To my surprise, he had come to watch me compete. “Jason,” he said, “I’ve never heard such an articulate frog.”

The team began to chant, “Silver-tongued frog! Silver-tongued frog!” In that moment I realized that I was no different from teenagers everywhere who struggle to be accepted; I won the struggle because I learned to accept myself. In that moment I was actually proud to be an amphibian. That moment was beautiful.

SHEN was the grand-prize winner in the 2002 Kaplan/NEWSWEEK “My Turn” Essay Competition. This essay was published in NEWSWEEK on July 8, 2002.

BIG PICTURE LINK

- Use details to connect your experience to a larger social context or theme.
- Discuss this “big picture” issue in ways that appeal to a broad audience.

CONCLUSION WITH A KICKER

- Leave your reader with a clear understanding of your purpose and meaning.
- One method of concluding is to restate your theme and support that statement with a personal example that illustrates your point.

