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How I Became A Detective

I was not born a detective. My skills were not innate. In fact, they developed this year. It all started during the first week of my English class. Our first assignment was to read Bel Kaufman's short-story *Sunday in the Park* and be prepared to discuss it the next day in class. So, like a responsible student, I read it. I understood the plot, and I knew the characters. I was ready to go.

When the next class came and it was time for discussion, I found myself in a completely foreign intellectual world. It was remarkable. We spent over an hour discussing the symbolism of things I didn't even notice when I read the story. All of a sudden, a story that I believed was about a family in the park became a story reflecting class struggle and the justification of violence. My eyes opened to an entirely new aspect of reading that I was completely unaware of. I was intrigued to say the least. I felt like I had reached some intellectual level that I had never been before. Who knew something such as a sandbox could be so symbolic and have such meaning? After class, I asked my professor, how does one get to such a level where they read something and are able to pick up on little things that allude to such fantastic interpretations? I wanted to learn. With a smile, she told me time and practice. My career as a literary detective had begun.

My first case was to analyze an aspect of one of the short-stories we read in class. I chose the *Jilting of Granny Weatherall* by Katherine Porter because I was particularly fascinated with the ending. As I wrote my first draft and continued on to my second, I began to develop different ideas about the story, and the detective within me emerged. After rereading the piece a few times, I started focusing on a very specific item that was briefly mentioned in the text – an antique. Little did I know that the

antique would be the primary subject of my first essay when I uncovered its symbolism by relating it to other themes in the story. The paper was a success, and I quickly learned that focusing on a particular detail in the story was not only a good idea for writing a wonderful essay, but it also was my style. I thoroughly enjoyed it because it was like I was uncovering some hidden picture that neither I nor most people had ever seen before – like a detective solving a case. It gave my paper *purpose*.

This would lead to the most important development I made as a writer during English 1102. In high school, when analyzing literature, I would write about the big picture, and make a conclusion that was broad and unspecific. Through the course of English 1102, however, I learned that focusing on a very small detail or issue in literature led to a much better essay. For instance, your reader is more interested in what you are saying because chances are your ideas are going to be more unique because you are writing about a specific subject that most people are not. In addition, and most importantly, analyzing something very particular in literature allows your ideas to have more depth and complexity. This sounds counter-intuitive, because it would seem that concentrating on a small detail would make it more difficult to write a lot versus writing about a broad topic. However, I discovered this to be the opposite. When I analyzed something specific, I found myself opening new doors that led to new claims and ideas. To show this, what follows is an illustration of my thought process when I analyzed the antique – the “lion and clock”:

“...Hmmm....a lion – a lion often represents bravery and courage, so that's interesting...it sits on top of a clock though...why would that be? Maybe the clock represents time, so time may be symbolized as well...Dust collects on top of the lion...so it's in constant need of dusting off...maybe Granny's “courage” is in constant need of dusting off...the clock suggests that she may have lost her courage over time, or as time has gone by, her courage has become tainted (dusty)...”

This thought process would be the source of my writing throughout the semester. I have chosen to

include my essay “The Lion and Clock” as the first revised essay in my portfolio.

For our third paper, I was given the task of analyzing any of the plays we read in class. Due largely in part to my fascination with mathematics, *Proof* by David Auburn was my choice. My style of writing about a specific subject was apparent in this paper as well. While reading the play, I came across a particular thing one of the characters – Robert – writes: a mathematical proof. To be honest, it was very difficult to make sense of Robert's work. However, after a lot of thinking I was able to do so, and I used my newfound information to shed light on a specific aspect of Robert's character that I believe most people overlook when reading the play. Once again, like in my first paper, the small detail – the proof – led me to develop new claims and ideas. This is why I have chosen to include my essay, “Indeterminate Temperature” as my second revised essay in my portfolio.

In light of this, my portfolio illuminates my style of writing and analysis. My works reveal the detective within me, that is, my focus on taking small and seemingly irrelevant details into careful consideration, and attempting to relate these ideas to other aspects of the literature. In a way, it was like I was solving a legal case – not by solving what the author was trying to say – but by shedding light on something my reader may have not have noticed and encouraging them to see how I understood the story.