

Assignments on “The Gift” by Michele Serros

The next set of assignments combines analytical and narrative writing. **Analysis** is the process of examining the elements that make up a piece and considering how those elements contribute to the piece as a whole. In college classes, you will often be asked to write in response to something you have read.

Turn to the personal essay, “The Gift,” in the *Readings* section of this workbook. Read it through at your regular speed the first time, just reading to find out what the essay is about. Then, read it a second time, more slowly, underlining parts that you like or that stand out to you.

Assignment A: Analytical response

In your opinion, what is the significance of the **essay’s title** to the story Serros tells us in her essay? To help you along in your analysis, consider the different ways in which Serros uses the word **gift** in her essay. The title is referring to more than one aspect of the story. Write about the various meanings that the title takes on in this essay. Bring in examples from Serros’ text to flesh out your analysis.

Your analysis should be at least one page of double-spaced writing.

Assignment B: Sharing My Gift

Think about the material things that you treasure. We often hear that it is foolish to covet material things because they are just objects; yet some objects (like Serros’ desk) may be highly significant because of the special meaning they have for us. Gifts, more than any other objects, whether they are gifts from people we love or gifts that we earn for ourselves, can have deep sentimental value.

Think about a gift that holds a lot of meaning in your life. Try not to think about human gifts (like your children), or abstract gifts (like education). Focus on an object that has meaning because it represents more than just an object. Your LIA may ask you to bring it (or a picture of it) to your group meeting so that everyone can talk about their gifts, thus sharing them with each other.

Write an essay about a gift that you received, or that you gave yourself, which holds special meaning. You may use Michele Serros’ essay as a model for your own. You may want to address the following questions in your essay.

1. What is the story behind how you acquired this gift? Who gave it to you?
2. Has your relationship to this gift changed over time? Does it mean more or less to you now than when you first received it?
3. Is this gift a legacy? Do you plan to pass it down to your children or keep it in your family in some way?

This essay should be two pages, typed, double-spaced.

Assignment C: Letter of Appreciation

In many cases, we don't take the time to thank the people who care about us because we believe that they already know how we feel about them. Sometimes we just feel shy to come out and say thank you; often it is easier to put our thoughts on paper than to express them verbally. A day may come when you wish you had expressed your thanks to someone, but it is simply too late to do so. As a follow-up to reading and writing in response to "The Gift," we are going to write letters of appreciation.

Write a thank-you letter to someone who has touched your life in some way or made a lasting impact on you. If someone does not come to mind immediately, here are some ideas of people you may want to thank: parents, aunts / uncles, grandparents, cousins, children, friends, spouses / significant partners, co-workers, former teachers, mentors, religious leaders, counselors, or of course, your LIA.

Follow the model on the next page for personal letter writing. Place your letter in an envelope addressed to the person you have written it to. Affix sufficient postage to the envelope. Do not seal the envelope yet. Your LIA may give you the option of sharing your letter out loud with the group. You will then give the sealed, stamped envelope to your LIA who will mail it out. It is very important that the letter gets sent, for it brings completion to this assignment. Treat this as an actual letter rather than an assignment; do not feel pressured to write anything that you may be embarrassed to send.

Note: you may wish to write a letter to someone who is deceased, expressing things you wish you had told this person while they were with you. In this case, you may address the letter to a person who can receive the letter on behalf of this deceased person, if you think it's appropriate, or you can mail the letter to yourself.

What should my letter say? Here is a format to follow if you feel stuck:

1. **Introduction:** greet the person and tell them how you're doing at this time. You may want to let the person know that you were asked to write a letter of appreciation for your English class, and this person came to mind.
2. **Recollection:** tell a story about a specific time in your life when this person had an impact on you, or recall a specific incident when this person came to your aid. If this person is very close to you, and has helped you on numerous occasions, isolate one or two events. It is far more effective to mention a few specifics than to speak in generalities, such as "you are always there for me." You do not want to sound like a greeting card.
3. **Appreciation:** formally thank the person for what they've done or what they continue to do for you. This section does not have to be very long.
4. **Don't forget to sign the letter.**

Sample Letter of Appreciation

Geneffa Jonker
Cabrillo College
6500 Soquel Drive
Aptos, CA 95003

June 1, 2003

Dear Linda,

It has been a year since you left us, yet I still feel the warmth of your presence and the fire of your rhetoric as I walk around the college or visit the house. I saw a beautiful bunch of California poppies when I drove by your house the other day. I remembered how you had wished to go to the Antelope Valley to see scores of them; "It's something I'd like to do before I die," you had joked. I wonder if you ever got to see them; I forgot to ask.

So much has changed since you left us so suddenly. I spent a year teaching within the Puente Project, and now I am the instructor for English 290. Every year seems to bring something different, but I take heart in the confidence you gave me as my mentor, friend and beloved colleague.

I'll never forget how you helped me when I first came to Santa Cruz in August of 2000. I had a week to find a place to live before the teaching term began. When things seemed hopeless, you came forward and offered your guesthouse to my husband and me. You helped us move in, taught me how to use the washing machine, and made sure I was comfortable in every way. You told me how you had fought to be able to hire someone for a basic skills position, and how delighted you were in my hire. When times get difficult, and budget cuts threaten the programs we most believe in, I remember your fire and your fight—how you never gave up when you believed in something or somebody.

I am so lucky to have known you and been your mentee for the brief time our paths crossed. Now those of us who loved you are left with your legacy to fight to maintain all that is good about Cabrillo. I wonder if you can know how much we miss you, and also, how much you are still with us.

With fondest admiration and many thanks,

Geneffa