

*The Battle*

A Nonfiction Short Story and Prose Example

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***Do you have a hard time telling left from right?***

My mouse hovers uncertainly between yes and no. The screen glows so bright that it nearly makes the words on it disappear altogether. The house is silent, and the room I sit in is dark. I have waited until no one else was home to do this. Perhaps out of insecurity or maybe it is just I because I have finally found myself in this situation. Either way here I am.

***Do you have a hard time telling left from right?***

Slowly, I move my pointer toward yes. Breath is trapped in my lungs, waiting for me to decide what I am going to do next. This is the beginning. If I start this test, I'll have to finish. I'll have to see. There is no turning back. Do I really want this?

The air rushes out of me as I settle on what to do. With a firm click I trek ahead to question two.

***Have you been considered a bad speller?***

My mind wanders for a moment, thinking of all the spelling tests for school. I've never been as smart as my sister. She's been receiving college level markings for reading as early as fourth grade. I am always behind her when it comes to anything related to the subject of English or reading.

The scene of me sitting with my chewed pencil and wrinkled sheet of paper with my mom quizzing me is a very common one.

Her eyes feel like they are boring into me. Surely there are two holes peeking out of the top of my bent head. She sees that I am utterly unprepared for this newest torture session.

"Spell the word 'chief.'"

I bite my lip and tap my pencil, trying to remember, to picture the word. The only thing that flickers across my third eye is an old Indian sitting on his horse looking regal as he gazes across his land, his people. I watch as he rides among the tepees and leads his tribe in a hunt for buffalo –

"Kayla," Her voice dissolves the image, and I am back, trapped in my stupidity. "Do you know?"

My paper is as blank as ever. I sigh in defeat and lower my head in a mixture of frustration and shame. The unshed tears burn through the back of my throat "No."

***Have you been considered a bad speller?***

I click yes once again and trudge ahead. The next sentence is short, but I still must look at it for a moment before I understand what it's asking. With it, more images come to mind.

"Kayla, please read the next paragraph."

Why couldn't my sister be here? The modern-day Hermione who is always so eager to volunteer to read in class. The girl who so effortlessly knows the answers and gets the perfect grades.

She could've protected me against this boggart before me.

My heart skips a beat as I look at the handout. A quick glance at the other kids and back to the teacher. She smiles warmly, oblivious to my dread. I want to shake my head and pull

my short hair over my face, but I have been taught not to be rude. Curse Southern courtesies.

I reach for the sheet and stand. My heart drops instantly. Cursive! Cursive with long complicated words.

The muscles in my throat jostle loudly as I swallow. It is a shame they aren't sore. Why can I never have laryngitis when it is useful?

*Take a deep breath. Don't overthink this.*

With a jerky start I begin to read. Gears in my mind desperately try to decipher the chicken scratch on the paper. The words are there, and I can see them clearly, but my eyes can't focus on them; they dance all over the page like ballerinas. I try to catch their meaning as they twirl and spin. My cheeks grow hotter as each second ticks by as I slowly slug through. *I am not stupid, I am not stupid, I am not stupid*, I chant over and over again like it will make it true. It becomes a tiny protection spell for my sinking heart.

Finally, I finish and take my seat. Blue fabric is all I focus on. Smooth my shirt and concentrate on getting rid of the creases. Don't think about the others rolling their eyes and snickering. There are no shared looks. You're just being paranoid, being ridiculous. The cursed sheet of paper slips into my bag so much easier than it had off my tongue. I raise my chin high, continuing my spell.

*You're not stupid, you're not stupid, you're not stupid.*

I had never received my letter to Hogwarts.

***Do you hate reading out loud?***

I decisively click yes.

***When saying a large word, do you sometimes have a hard time pronouncing it correctly or with the sounds in the right order?***

I have to smile at this one.

"It isn't that hard," my dad says, "Just sound it out."

"I know what the word is," frustration is building up, "I just can't get it out."

"Again," he persists, "Pa-tri-ar-chal. Patriarchal."

"Paartrichahl," splutters from my mouth. "Parcharrt—Partricha—"

My tongue trips over itself, and leaves me feeling it is too thick and clumsy for my mouth. I release an irritated breath. If this is a track event I am face first in the mud. Everyone else has all ready crossed the finish line.

I answer yes. Again.

I continue down the page, clicking yes more than no. I only stop when I reach the bottom of the quiz. Its bold color is unmistakable against the blinding white of the screen.

***Find out if you have dyslexia!***

There is only the one last dragon lurking under the text that I have to face. It's coiled up, and looks so friendly in its vibrant shade of blue. Submit will probably burn me. I think it will hurt.

I take a deep breath and close my eyes. If I do this, I will have labeled myself. Even if this is not an official diagnosis and no one knows about it but me, I will still be branded.

Do I want this?

Memories boil up as I sit here uncertain. All the times I felt weak, unintelligent. There'd been so many occasions where I thought I had conquered a word only to be stabbed in the back by it the second I turned around. How many cases have I written down a number and inadvertently switched the digits around. All of the hours I practiced reading, starting with the easiest books, the ones with pictures so I could improve.

I hate feeling stupid. It doesn't get easier to handle. It just gets worse because the older I get the more people say 'You should know this at your age'. They don't understand how hard I do try. How embarrassing this is.

The work, the struggle, and the effort sears away the shame I feel, even if it is just for this one short, glorious moment. I have lifted my chin up high- fought back the mortification that churned inside every time I'd made a spelling mistake. I remember the pride I felt when I could confidently write down a complicated word like knowledgeable or success without having to ask anyone.

I remember my personal battle.

If I click this, I will be branded. I will be branded forever.

*Do I want this?*

*Is it worth it?*

I open my eyes and glare at the button, the dragon no longer that unconquerable. With squared shoulders, I sit up straighter. Yes, I will be marked when I do this, but it will not be a shameful title. It will be one that declares my constant battle, my continuous fight. It will speak of how I have trained and mastered myself. It will decree of how I have won war after war.

I firmly grip the mouse, my sword in this fight, and determinedly click submit.