

Introduction to the Common Application for Undergraduate College Admission

Students' stories matter.

One reason they matter is that their personal experiences and background can help them demonstrate their strengths and capacities to colleges and potential employers. Let students know that the purpose of today's warm-up and lesson is to get to know one another and to discuss how their stories are sources they can draw on when applying to college. In this lesson, students explore the relationship between work done in StoryCorpsU and their goals, especially the connection with the Common Application for Undergraduate College Admission (Common Application).

- **Objective:** To understand the relationship between work done in StoryCorpsU and their goals, especially the connection with the Common Application for Undergraduate College Admission (Common Application)
- **Standards:** Applicable **Common Core Standards**
- **Time:** 45 minutes
- **Preparation:** Review the Common Application learning object and other lesson materials; make any student copies needed for the lesson
- **Materials:** Student copies of the **Building Community Grid**, *The Common Application* learning object, **Making It** animation, student copies of the **Listening Activity**, computer, speakers, Internet connection, and projector or Smart Board

EXTENDED WARM-UP: BUILDING COMMUNITY (10 MINUTE FACE-TO-FACE ACTIVITY)

1. Distribute the paper copies of the **Building Community Grid** to the students.
2. Provide the following instructions to the students:

“Using the Building Community Grid that I have provided to you, you will need to walk around the room and ask each other questions, such as ‘Can you talk about an achievement you are proud of?’ If the person says yes, write his or her name underneath the question. If the answer is no, move on to another question or go to someone else and ask the same question. Each question should have the name of only one of the people in your classroom, and nobody’s name can be used more than once. If necessary, you should ask your interviewee to spell and pronounce his or her name.”
3. Model the activity by approaching a student while holding the Building Community Grid and asking a question from the grid. For example, you might ask, “Do you practice and/or play a sport for more than five hours per week?” If the student says yes, write his or her name on the page.
4. Students circulate until they have written an answer for every question (or time runs out).
5. Ask students to move their chairs into a circle.



DEBRIEF (5 MINUTE FACE-TO-FACE ACTIVITY)

- Ask students, “By a show of hands, how many of you filled in every square?”
- Choose three or four questions from the Warm-Up and invite students to call out the name of someone who answered yes to that question (e.g., “Raise your hand if you found someone who participates in a school club on a weekly basis,” “Who did you find?,” and “Snap if you also wrote (his/her) name down for this category”) and invite the student to share more (e.g., “What club are you a part of?”).

ACTIVITY: THE COMMON APPLICATION (15 MINUTE DIGITAL LEARNING OBJECT AND FACE-TO-FACE DISCUSSION)



Explain to students that they are going to explore the Common Application through the Common Application learning object. Students can view this learning object individually, in small groups, or a whole group as a guided activity using available technologies. This learning object can be viewed at: <http://storycorps.org/storycorpsu/common-application/>

This interactivity explores the Common Application for Undergraduate College Admission that is used for getting into some colleges; also known as the Common App. By completing this standardized

college application just once online, students are able to use it to apply to multiple colleges that use the Common App. The stories that students share in the StoryCorpsU lessons can help with the essay section of the Common App. A [printable version](#) of the interactivity follows the lesson.

As part of the interactivity, students have ranked the essay questions found on the Common App and written brief story summaries. Ask students if any of the questions in the “Building Community” Warm-Up relate to the Common Application essay prompts.

ACTIVITY: NOE’S STORY – MAKING IT (10 MINUTE DIGITAL LEARNING OBJECT, LISTENING ACTIVITY, AND FACE-TO-FACE DISCUSSION)

1. Tell students they are going to watch [Making It](#), a StoryCorps animation of 19-year-old Noe Rueda being interviewed by his former teacher Alex Fernandez. Noe reflects on his childhood growing up in Chicago and talks about his first business venture. Ask students to listen for elements of Noe’s story that he could write about if he were writing his Personal Essay for the Common Application. The students can view this animated clip individually, in small groups, or a whole group as a guided activity using available technologies. This animation is available at: <https://storycorps.org/animation/making-it> and there is also a [printable version of Making It](#) available for students to read at the end of this lesson.
2. Invite a volunteer to summarize the animation. Ask the rest of the class if anyone would like to add to the summary provided.



3. Distribute the paper copies of the Listening Activity to the students. Ask them to select one or more prompts that Noe could respond to if he were writing his Personal Essay for the Common Application, and to cite evidence or summarize details from Noe's story that could be used to respond to the prompts they checked off.
4. Review each prompt and ask volunteers to share the elements of Noe's story that relate to the prompt. Examples include the following:

- If Noe talks about his experience of beginning to work at a young age, his work experience links to the essay prompt regarding a "story ... central to [his] identity."
- If Noe talks about stereotypes in which neighborhoods are deemed to be "bad," and the people who live in those neighborhoods are assumed to make money selling drugs, his perspective can be linked to the essay prompt regarding challenging a belief or idea.
- If Noe talks about his mother as a hard worker and source of his motivation to go to college, this story could be linked to the essay prompt regarding an event that marked his transition from childhood to adulthood within his family.



DEBRIEF (4 MINUTE FACE-TO-FACE ACTIVITY)

Lead a short discussion with the class using the following prompts:

1. "Does any of Noe's story remind you of something in your own life? If yes, how?"
2. "How do you think Noe's experiences growing up could help him get into college and be successful?"

CLOSING: ARMS UP IF ... (1 MINUTE FACE-TO-FACE ACTIVITY)

Close the lesson by reading a series of prompts. Direct students to: "Raise your arms if ..."

- "you believe that your personal history can help you get into and succeed in college."
- "you can think of one experience or accomplishment that demonstrates a strength you possess and could help you get into college."
- "you already have an idea for one of the essay questions on the Common Application."

Associated Common Core Standards

The StoryCorpsU curriculum aligns with the following Common Core State Standards:

English Language Arts: College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening.

<http://www.corestandards.org/>

Comprehension and Collaboration

1. *CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1* Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on relevant topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
 - *CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1b* Work with peers to set rules for collegial discussions and decision-making (e.g., informal consensus, taking votes on key issues, presentation of alternate views), clear goals and deadlines, and individual roles as needed.
 - *CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1c* Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that relate the current discussion to broader themes or larger ideas; actively incorporate others into the discussion; and clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions.
 - *CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1d* Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives, summarize points of agreement and disagreement, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views and understanding and make new connections in light of the evidence and reasoning presented.
2. *CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.3* Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, identifying any fallacious reasoning or exaggerated or distorted evidence.

Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas

3. *CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.4* Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task.
4. *CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.5* Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.



Building Community Grid

Objective: To understand the relationship between work done in StoryCorpsU and our future goals, especially the connection with the Common Application for Undergraduate College Admission.

WARM-UP: BUILDING COMMUNITY GRID

Can you talk about a teacher, past or present, whom you could use as a reference on your college application?	Do you have a plan for taking the most challenging courses available in high school?	Do you have an after-school or weekend job?
Do you practice and/or play a sport for more than five hours per week?	Can you talk about a time you set a goal and worked hard to achieve it?	Do you consider yourself a leader, and can you point to an experience where you demonstrated leadership?
Can you talk about a time you ever challenged a belief or idea?	Do you practice playing a musical instrument or sing for more than five hours per week?	Can you talk about an achievement you are proud of?
Are you involved in your church or other community organization on a weekly basis?	Have you ever experienced failure and learned a lesson through that experience?	Do you participate in a school club on a weekly basis?



Listening Activity

Which of the prompts could Noe respond to if he were writing his Personal Essay for the Common Application?

- Some students have a background, identity, interest or talent that is so meaningful that they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.
- The lessons we take from failure can be fundamental to later successes. Recount an incident or time when you experienced failure. How did it affect you, and did you learn from the experience?
- Reflect on a time when you challenged a belief or idea. What prompted you to act? Would you make the same decision again?
- Describe a problem you have solved or a problem you'd like to solve. It can be an intellectual challenge, a research query, an ethical dilemma – anything that is of personal importance, no matter the scale. Explain its significance to you and what steps you took or could be taken to identify a solution.
- Discuss an accomplishment or event, formal or informal, that marked your transition from childhood to adulthood within your culture, community, or family.

What evidence or details from Noe's story could be used to respond to one of the above prompts? Summarize below:

The Common Application Learning Object

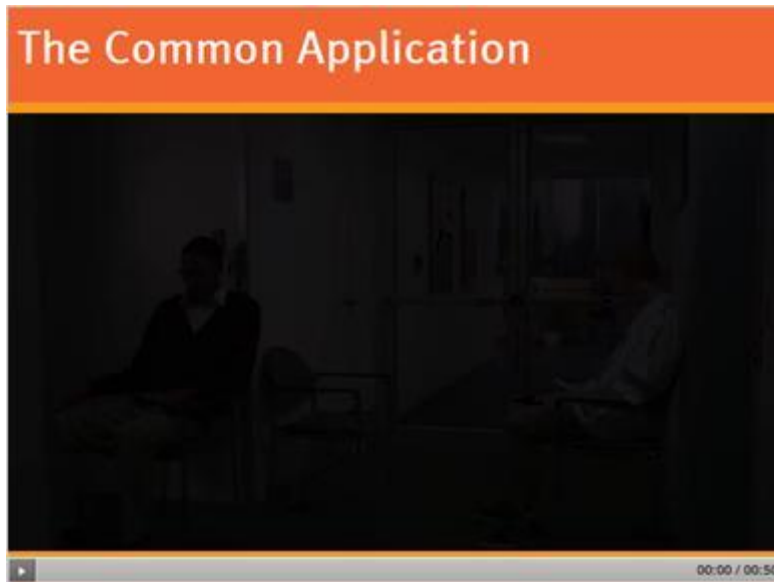
Introduction



The Common Application



Video Part 1



Derek: Hey, you here for the Common App thing too?

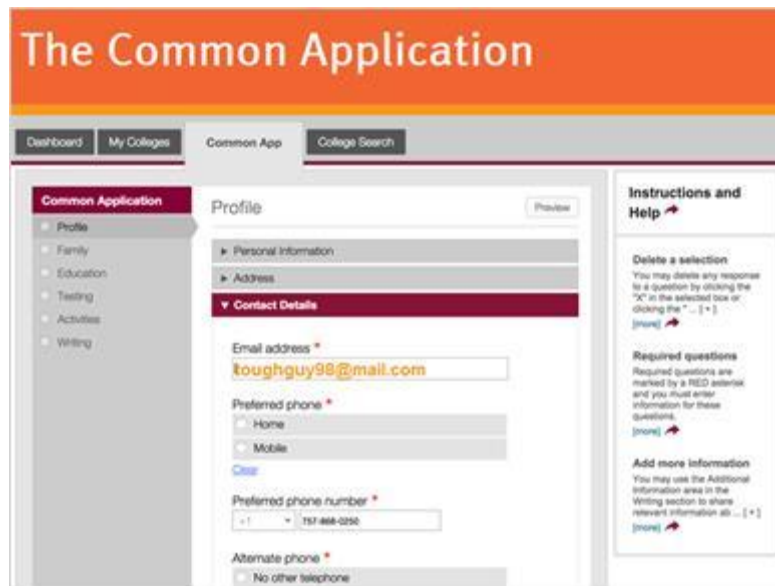
Sam: Yeah, I guess so. When I got to school today my teacher had the slip for me.

Derek: Yeah, same.

Mrs. Washington: Looks like we have a packed house today. Derek I think you're up first, I'll be with the rest of you shortly. The reason I wanted to meet with you today is to talk about the common application for undergraduate college admissions, also known as the Common Application for Undergraduate Admission. By completing this standardized college application just once online you'll be able to use it when applying to multiple colleges. I'll walk you through the main part so you know what to expect. Let's take a look.



Profile



The screenshot shows the 'Profile' section of 'The Common Application' website. The page has an orange header with the title 'The Common Application'. Below the header is a navigation bar with 'Dashboard', 'My Colleges', 'Common App', and 'College Search'. The main content area is titled 'Profile' and includes a 'Preview' button. On the left, there is a sidebar menu with options: Profile, Family, Education, Testing, Activities, and Writing. The 'Profile' section is expanded to show 'Contact Details'. The form includes fields for 'Email address *' (containing 'toughguy98@mail.com'), 'Preferred phone *' (with radio buttons for 'Home' and 'Mobile'), 'Preferred phone number *' (with a dropdown for country code and a text box for the number), and 'Alternate phone *' (with a radio button for 'No other telephone'). On the right side, there is an 'Instructions and Help' section with three sub-sections: 'Delete a selection', 'Required questions', and 'Add more information', each with a '[more]' link.

There are the six main sections that you will have to complete online. The first and second section is your profile and family information. Make sure that this information is current and correct and that your email address is something that you want colleges to see. For example, if your email address is toughguy98@mail.com, this might not be a good choice.



Test

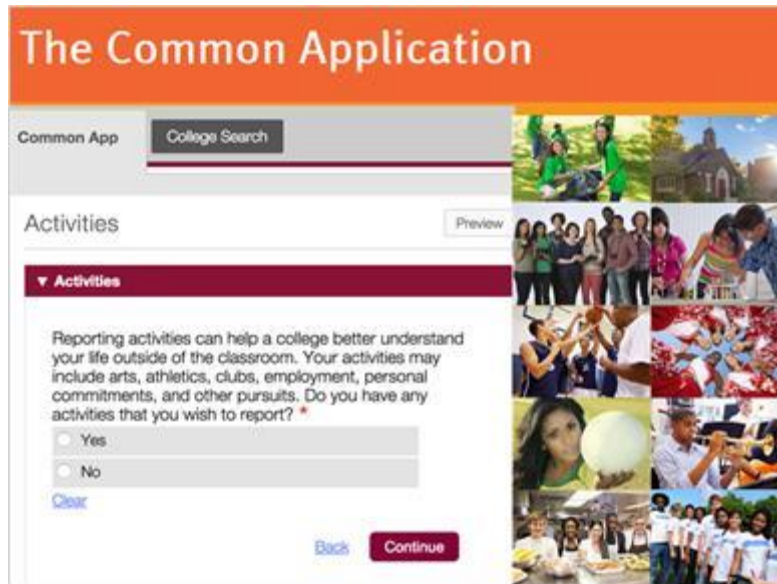


The education and test sections are pretty straightforward. You will need to provide information about your current school and any other schools that you've attended, your GPA, class rank, honors or awards, and your current classes.

The testing section allows you to list your scores on standardized tests like the ACT[®] or SAT[®]. As you may know, the ACT[®] and SAT[®] are separate exams that students from all over the world take to get into college. These exams are one way to assess your readiness for college.



Activity

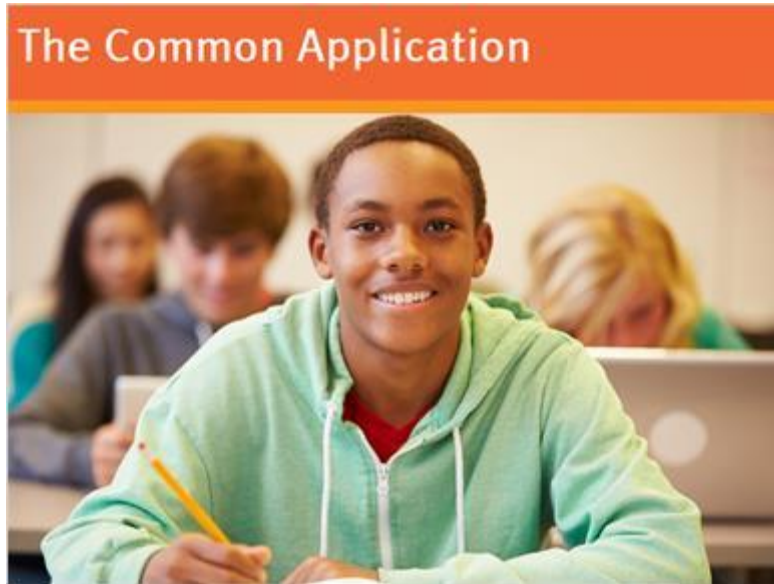


The screenshot shows the 'The Common Application' interface. At the top, there is an orange header with the text 'The Common Application'. Below this, there is a navigation bar with 'Common App' and 'College Search' buttons. The main content area is titled 'Activities' and includes a 'Preview' button. A dropdown menu is open, showing a question: 'Reporting activities can help a college better understand your life outside of the classroom. Your activities may include arts, athletics, clubs, employment, personal commitments, and other pursuits. Do you have any activities that you wish to report?'. Below the question are two radio button options: 'Yes' and 'No'. There is also a 'Clear' link and 'Back' and 'Continue' buttons at the bottom. The right side of the screenshot features a collage of images showing students engaged in various activities like sports, arts, and group projects.

This activity section gives you a place to list and describe your participation in groups, organizations, churches, clubs, or employment. Think about your extracurricular activities - you know, things like sports, drama, clubs, student council, music, yearbook committee, interests, and hobbies beyond the regular curriculum or program of courses. This is a great place to show other strengths. If you work or volunteer somewhere, make sure you include it here. Don't be afraid to brag on yourself.



Essay



This last main section is my favorite. Here you have the opportunity to pick one of five essay prompts and write about yourself or different parts of your life. The StoryCorpsU lessons that you will go through this year will prepare you for this essay section by helping you think about the value of your own personal story.



Video Part 2



- Mrs. Washington: I know this seems like a lot of information at one time. Do you have any questions about the Common App so far?
- Derek: I got a bad grade in Math.
- Sam: I really hate admitting this but last semester I got a C in history.
- Brianna: I really blew it in PE.
- Derek: What-
- Sam: can-
- Brianna: I do about that?
- Mrs. Washington: I would suggest that you work as hard as you can in your classes to get the best grades possible. If you start getting better grades right now, colleges will recognize and value your improvement. Grades aren't the only thing colleges consider when reviewing your college application. An important thing to remember is



that colleges are also interested in how you spend your time outside of school.

Derek: That's good to know. I tutor young kids at my church.

Sam: I volunteered in animal shelter.

Brianna: I read at the community center a couple of times each month to senior citizens.

Mrs. Washington: That's great. Colleges like to see that you're involved in extracurricular activities. They say that it's better to spend a lot of time on a few activities rather than a little bit of time on a bunch of different activities. They want a picture of your whole life. In order for you to show this on the Common App, you'll need to reflect on your course performance, extracurricular activities and inventory where you're good at so you can best represent yourself. Identifying your strengths is something you will use and build upon throughout your entire life.

Derek: That makes me feel better. The last thing I'm not so sure about is the essay section.

Sam: I don't have much to say and I'm better writing gaming code than writing essays.

Brianna: I saw that I can write up to 650 words. That sounds like a lot.

Mrs. Washington: You do have a lot to say. Everyone has a story to tell and that story is a crucial part of you getting into college. Don't forget, the stories that you'll share in the StoryCorpsU lessons, they'll help you out with that part of the Common App.

A response essay of 200 to 650 words it really isn't that much. Your StoryCorpsU personal stories, they'll be longer than this. Let's take a closer look at the essay questions.



Essay Questions

Essay Questions on the Common Application

Some students have a background, identity, interest or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.

The lessons we take from failure can be fundamental to later successes. Recount an incident or time when you experienced failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?

Reflect on a time when you challenged a belief or idea. What prompted you to act? Would you make the same decision again?

Describe a problem you've solved or a problem you'd like to solve. It can be an intellectual challenge, a research query, an ethical dilemma - anything that is of personal importance, no matter the scale. Explain its significance to you and what steps you took or could be taken to identify a solution.

Discuss an accomplishment or event, formal or informal, that marked your transition from childhood to adulthood within your culture, community, or family.

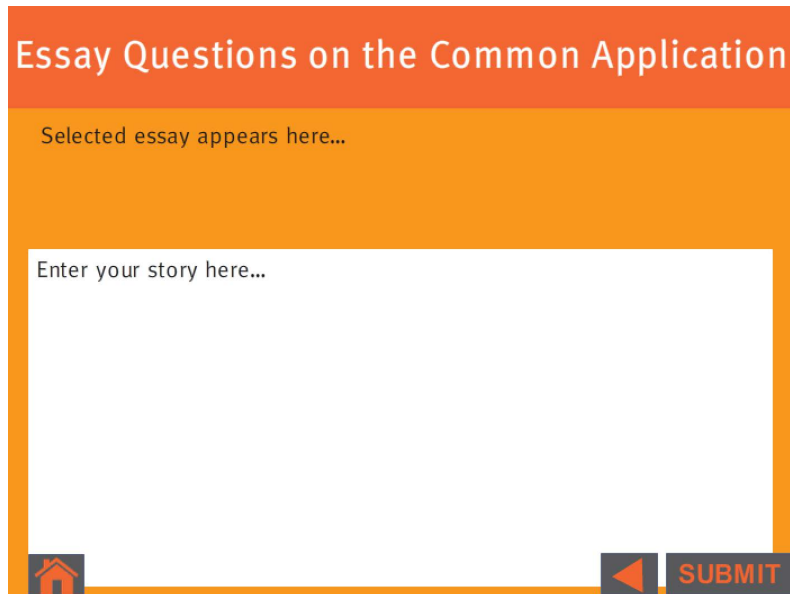
Here are some of the essay questions on the Common App. Just like these students, you should take a look at them and select the essay question that you would most want to answer. Then click *SUBMIT*.

Choice
Some students have a background, identity, interest or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.
The lessons we take from failure can be fundamental to later successes. Recount an incident or time when you experienced failure. How did it affect you, and what did you learn from the experience?
Reflect on a time when you challenged a belief or idea. What prompted you to act? Would you make the same decision again?
Describe a problem you've solved or a problem you'd like to solve. It can be an intellectual challenge, a research query, an ethical dilemma - anything that is of personal importance, no matter the scale. Explain its significance to you and what steps you took or could be taken to identify a solution.



Discuss an accomplishment or event, formal or informal, that marked your transition from childhood to adulthood within your culture, community, or family.

Your Story



Essay Questions on the Common Application

Selected essay appears here...

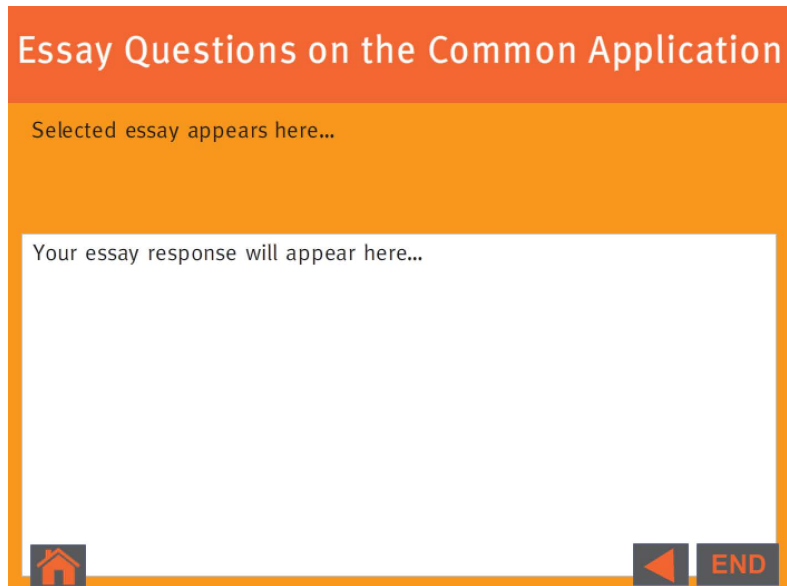
Enter your story here...

Home icon | SUBMIT

Now you see your top two essay questions with a field beneath each. Take a moment to write a two-sentence summary of the supporting story or stories that you might use to answer this essay question. Then click *SUBMIT*.



Screenshot



You might want to take a screenshot, print, or email your story



Making It



StoryCorps Listening Clip: Noe Rueda and Alex Fernandez

Noe Rueda talks to his high school economics teacher, Alex Fernandez, about launching his first business venture.

“I wasn’t like other kids.”

Transcript:

NR: I was eight years old—I think second grade. I would literally go outside my house, there was like a little bench, I’d put all my products there and sell them. I didn’t make much. I made, what, 20 bucks a week? But for an eight-year-old, you’re a millionaire with that kind of money.

AF: That’s a lot of comic books and stuff, yeah.

NR: But the thing is, I wasn’t like other kids. I didn’t go buy Pokémon cards [*laughs*]. The little money I made, I gave it to my mom. The first time, I remember she was cooking. And, uh, I came up to her and I told her, “Mom, I know you don’t have money, so here’s 15 bucks I made.” She turned off the stove. She turned around, started crying, and hugged me. From that point on, I just dedicated on getting money for my family.

AF: How did you make that money?

NR: First of all, the one thing that comes to people’s mind in a bad neighborhood is drugs. But I did not sell drugs. The reason for that is, first of all, I know it’s wrong. Secondly, I picture my mom—how disappointed she’ll be if she finds that out. So I actually started helping on a construction site. And this was in fifth grade. It was bad on my bones. I like, I have bad shoulders, bad knees from all the stuff I was carrying.

AF: When you were younger, did you realize kind of like, hey, this isn’t normal or this isn’t what other people go through?

NR: Well, I always knew I was poor. But I remember one time in particular. My shoes were all scraped up, so I got paint and I painted them white. Some kid fell and tripped in front of my shoes and noticed. And he pointed it out and, uh, laughed. And that’s when it hit me really hard, like, I’m actually poorer than I thought.

AF: How’s your first semester of college been?

NR: Things are great. I just think about it, like, being the first one to go to college in my whole family of like 50 of us. That’s my biggest motivation.

AF: I’m really proud of you that you went this far. And I just want to have you come back in like 10 years, dressed really sharp. You know, in like a suit.

NR: Nice shoes [*laughs*].

AF: Nice shoes, and finally have a pair that you haven’t painted. You know, and I’ve had so many students where everything’s stacked against them. What happens is they get almost there, and then they just quit. You know, I really want you to be the one that finished. To be the one that actually did it. And I want you to get everything you’ve ever wanted.