**Occasional Papers**

School often makes it feel like the point of writing is to turn you into a robot who knows the proper 5-paragraph structure and how to write a transition sentence. It’s not. Writing is supposed to help you take your thoughts and feelings and coherently communicate them to yourself and the world.

We will part of class reading and discussing what are known as “Occasional Papers,” or O.P.s. That’s because you are writing about a specific occasion, and you write them occasionally. If anything that’s ever happened to you (big or small, traumatic or mundane) has ever made you think, that’s what you write about. O.P.s are meant to:

-Describe an event

-Reflect on what something meant/made you think about

-Sound like a real person

-Spark discussion

Occasional Papers are meant to be read aloud, and should be written as such. This is your chance to experiment (or find) your narrative voice. Try using an em dash—just once. (Warning: they’re like Lay’s ©—you can never use just one). They are not graded on spelling or grammar. Let me repeat that: they are ungraded. This is your chance. Your sentences do not have to be complete. Your thoughts do not have to be organized, or even rational. They just have to be real.

You will be required to read one O.P. during third and fourth quarter (each). Second quarter is optional, but highly recommended. After someone reads an O.P., we will have a class discussion about the content—not the writing—of the paper. I have written a number, and will read a least one or two of mine to the class. It feels traumatic, but is also quite therapeutic (trust me).

Writing O.P.s will help you:

-Articulate and understand your own feelings

-Develop a personal writing voice

-Make this class matter “in your real life”

-Help you analyze and understand the meaning of everyday events

-Learn to like the sound of your own voice

-Become a better editor (reading aloud is the best way to actually hear your writing)

-Help you get to know your classmates and yourself. And me. As much as any one person can ever really know another, that is.