

What Can't be Said Must be Written

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I look around the room and I see fifteen other students. We are all the same age, we are all in the same class, yet we are all so different. I hold in my hand a book, the corners of the pages are bent, and the cover is all black with white lettering across the top. Every student in the class has the same book and has read the same chapters. For now, we all wait while the professor expresses his interpretation of the book. We sit and listen like the good students we are. "But what do you think?" he asks. The dreaded words begin to ring in my ears. What do I think?

Actually, I think a lot. Thoughts pour into my head like a waterfall. Thoughts on the author's prose, on the As I ponder the question and try to gather my thoughts, others start to speak up and voice their opinions. What a difference between me and my peers. It takes me a while to gather my thoughts, and even then I can rarely articulate them. The silent room is soon filled with voices bouncing back and forth- shouting ideas, arguing claims. As the chaos fills the room around me, I stay silent.

It is not that I don't want to participate, but there is a force that won't let me speak. I open my mouth, but stare blankly into the middle of the room. I can't imagine what I look like right now. Probably like a deer in the headlights or a wide receiver when he realizes the ball is headed his way. My head feels like a jail cell, my thoughts constrained, hitting up against a wall, hoping to break through. As voice by voice barges in to the conversation, each overpowering another, I sink deeper and deeper into my chair.

My heart is racing, my hands are shaking--I am stunned by the speed of the conversation around me. I know I need to participate to get credit for the class so I try to come up with something to contribute to the conversation. I jumble together some of the ideas that have been clogging my head, but, as I begin to speak, I freeze. I can't move and only manage to come up with the words, "I agree." Realizing I said nothing of importance, I struggle to come up with more to say. By the time I think it through, the conversation has already grown, escalated and moved on without me. I'm back to watching the other students' voices fly across the room. There is a certain rhythm to the conversation. Like the swell of an orchestra, the voices increase to a crescendo. As the symphony builds, I know my voice should jump in, but instead I am the soloist who stands in front of the audience, paralyzed.

I can't say that there is a real reason that this happens to me. This occurrence isn't unique to the classroom setting either. When there are large groups of people, I become incapable of communicating my thoughts even though I have plenty to contribute to the conversation. It may have to do with the fact that I am a shy person, but I think there is much more to it. As cliché as it might sound, I think it is because I am a writer. I can't handle the idea of an incomplete argument. I need to be able clearly and concisely state my opinion and come up with the best evidence to support it. With the fast-paced conversation around me, I don't have the time to come up with a full, well-written argument. Neither are my peers, but it doesn't seem to faze them. Interesting to think what helps me so much with my writing assignments actually hinders my ability to participate in the class.

Finally, I snap back to reality and try to come up with a solution to my fear of talking to these people. To escape the mess around me, I reach into my backpack for my notebook and pen. I open to a crisp, white piece of lined paper, hoping to articulate my thoughts. My

trembling hands write “What *I* think” on the top of the paper. My heartbeat slows back to its normal rhythmic pace and a feeling of absolute Zen overcomes my body. Words begin to pour onto the paper: arguments, answers, and questions, all relevant to the conversation. As I write down each word, a weight feels like it is being lifted off of my shoulders. I look down at my paper, covered in chicken scratch. There were my thoughts. There was what I wanted to say.

The chatter in the room begins to die down. The deep voice of the teacher rumbles, “Any other opinions?” I turn my head and look at those fifteen other students again. Some have beat-red faces from the breath-taking conversation they just endured. Others roll their eyes, annoyed by the opinions of their peers. I just sit there with a slight smile on my face. “Any other opinions?” repeats the professor. Still silent. “Okay, that’s it for today. I’ll see you next week.”

The students begin to gather their things and form a mass exodus for the hallway. I sit in my seat for a minute, looking at my lined piece of paper. “What I think.” I love the sound of that. I finish up the last of my thoughts, rip out the page, and closed my notebook. I am happy. I leave the piece of paper with my professor. As I walk toward the now empty doorway, I look back at him. He reads my notes and smiles. He nods at me and says, “See you next week.” Satisfied, I put my notebook in my backpack so it will be there for me the next time, too.