

A Letter to a Freshman

My name is Sydni Van Hoose, and as I would with any other letter, I would love to first introduce myself. In a general sense, one can say I am an amateur golfer, an over-enthusiastic artist, and, of course, a senior, living proof that you *can* make it through high school in one piece. With you being my pen-pal for the moment, however, I think I can share with you the not-so-general parts about me, the hair-pulling, gut-wrenching experiences that have shaped me into who I am today. So, beware, this letter is without-a-doubt going to get personal. Through this, through a discussion about my rollercoaster of a self-esteem, I want to emphasize the importance of self-worth— a factor I have learned is necessary in order to enjoy high school.

For the majority high school, just between you and me, I had the *biggest* crush. Sure, he was out-of-reach, maybe even kind of bigheaded, but I honestly couldn't help but be obsessive; the thought of us together made my head spin. His name? His name was *Winning*. Between me and another student in class, *Winning* was a rather sore subject. Both of us would bring him up around the other, purposely trying to get a rise, and would flaunt him whenever we had the chance. Don't tell anyone, but sometimes I would even tear up at the sight of those two together— it wasn't that I was unhappy for them, I just never felt like I stood a chance.

Because of this unhealthy crush, this extreme case of academic competition, I spent the first three years of high school believing I was never going to be "good enough." It got to a point where I had completely given up on all my hobbies, choosing instead to plow my way through the year by focusing *only* on school. You know that episode of SpongeBob SquarePants, where SpongeBob loses his famed square shape and extravagant personality, and transformed into a duller version of himself? Yeah, I began feeling like that. I had put so much pressure on myself trying to fit the mold of a future Valedictorian, trying to prove my worth, that I had become the round, straight-toothed version SpongeBob who had absolutely no personality.

Since junior year, when I was told my school no longer followed the class-ranking system, I have been attempting to squeeze out as much of the high school experience as I can, trying to catch up on anything I may have missed out on during the three previous years of lifelessness. This year specifically, without any classes with my prior competitor, I have been able to explore my hobbies and stress the practice of self-worth. Promise me, whoever may be reading this, to save your time and learn to value this above everything else. By emphasizing happiness, my senior year, a year filled with the pressures of college applications and scholarships, has been the most fulfilling; if you stress this going into freshman year, you will no doubt have a wonderful high school experience.

So, pen-pal, has letter letter helped? I'm sure by now you have heard the basics: "study hard," "get involved," and everyone's favorite, "be yourself." While these tips *are* definitely advisable, I wanted to share with you something personal to me, a recent lesson that has made me into the content person I am today. I hoped that by doing this, you will be able to avoid the lousy, toxic type of "crush" that brought me such intense heartache. After all, since then, I have learned that I would look much better with *Happiness* than I would be with *Winning*.

With love,
Sydni Van Hoose

P.S. No one even liked the round, straight-toothed SpongeBob.