

English III

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Is Success a Problem?

by Sadie Berry, Leo Gelardi, & Diesel Messenger

I get good grades, but I am not the best student. As a starter on the high school soccer team, I am not a star. I put in enough effort to comfortably get by, but no more than that. I do not strive for success; I am satisfied with my current state. I worry that the sacrifices to attain success would not be worth it, so I never try. I worry that if I attain success, it will only hurt me. However, I know that not everyone feels the way I do, and that they would do anything to achieve success. Is success really worth the trouble? – Leo

Online influencers are often perceived as perfect, posting countless pictures of themselves traveling without a care in the world. Everything looks insouciant, but the reality is that the picture they posted was only one out of the thousand pictures taken. Social media only shows the most successful side of people, which makes others feel like they haven't accomplished enough. If everyone posts only the best of themselves, is success real? Or is it only an illusion?

Many would agree that success stems from money – having enough to live comfortably and to do what brings you joy. Setting reasonable goals is also very important, according to Steven Berry, a local entrepreneur: "...success to me is setting smaller goals and achieving them and feeling like you've accomplished something." Failure to measure up to a lofty goal can lead someone to feel great dissatisfaction.

True success maintains the priority of one's own happiness, while also offering an organized, stable life. Though all individuals strive for happiness differently, a solid grounding in finances is essential.

The Psychology of Money

Wealth allows people to control their lives and to be self-sufficient. David Carey, owner of Hotel McCall and Jug Mountain Ranch, states: "By having the money, I am able to invest it into other projects that I find pleasure doing. [Money]... also provides security. If I get hurt, the family doesn't go into jeopardy. I think honestly

Life's Thrills

by Leo Gelardi

Walking into the library basement, I hear a heart pounding, and breath so heavy I don't know who it belongs to. Someone is walking down the stairs to the basement. I see the lower body of the person coming down the stairs. I can see his neck, but as he comes down a little further, I don't see a head. The mysterious being in the movie chases after the kid in the basement. My heart pounds as if I were in the movie, and I wait in excitement for the jump scare. Next, the kid slips around a corner and the headless being changes into a clown as he starts to catch up to the boy. Finally, the moment I was waiting for: the librarian pops out unexpectedly and knocks into the kid, saving him from the clown. I like that anticipation; I like the thrill of waiting for that scary moment.

Many people dislike horror movies; they don't like suspense and that uncertain feeling. However, for me to really enjoy something, I have to have some sort of suspense before my favorite part. When snowboarding, I don't like to start at the steepest part of the hill, I have to have some less fun parts where it's easier and less thrilling to build into that super fun steep section. Horror movies give me enjoyment based on that same system of starting a little easier then getting to that intense part I've been waiting for.

At the State Cup Soccer Tournament in northern Idaho, conditions were bone-numbing cold, windy, and snowy, resulting in poor visibility. The stakes were high, as this is what we had worked for all season. I felt the pressure of being the only starting freshman on the field. I play defense where often, whether we win or lose depends on my choices. Before the game, coach told us we would have to watch out for their striker, who is known to have trained at an Olympic training program.

I have trouble staying warm on the field. I attempt many things but none are successful. I try to see where the ball is -- to no avail. Tall and intimidating, the striker walks towards me, then puts his hand up to ask for the ball. He receives the ball to his feet; I get low in a defensive stance. He leans to the right, then to the left, then to the right again. If I let him through me, he's free to go to

having success for me is just allowing me to have options to do what I want..." By ignoring the significance of money, people find themselves with less time with family or for hobbies, thus impeding their contentment.

While Carey's businesses are very financially productive, he doesn't see the value in pure gain chasing: "I studied Economics and worked in banks for three, four, five years when I first started out of college; it wasn't interesting to me, and I made a lot more money doing that for a very long time before I worked in hospitality, but I didn't enjoy [banking] and that's why I switched." While money enables success, true success is achieved by working towards positive goals that bring contentment.

Taking classes at the North Fork School has been incredibly beneficial to my development as a writer. I progressed from not even being able to translate my thoughts on a page, to being a writer capable of precise poetic expression. The effort spent in these classes and our teacher's dedication facilitated such a productive environment. However, without the money necessary to pay for private schooling, this opportunity would never have been feasible. Financial ability was the springboard that allowed me to reach my academic heights. – Diesel

Student Landscape

Academic success benefits students by giving them avenues to pursue in the future. High school English and Economics teacher Ted McManus tells about the advantages of higher grades: "...for graduates it's a lot more obvious... for many of them, high grades open up all kinds of doors with colleges and jobs." Mr. McManus constantly sees this correlation between higher grades and successful options after school.

Ella Carey, an upcoming senior at McCall Donnelly High School, mentions how success affects her: "It is worth it because it's setting me up for college and I think if I weren't taking these [hard classes], I don't think I would be ready..." While students who work hard for high grades feel prepared for life after high school, academic excellence also allows people to thrive in the workforce and have more creative, fun job opportunities.

Academic achievement makes me feel confident. I strive to do my best in school because I crave the validation that having good grades gives me. I know that this validation is shaky

goal; if I choose the wrong moment to place my body in the way, we could lose. My muscles tense. I am afraid of what will happen if I let him through. I love this feeling: the joy of fear, anticipation, and pressure. He leans hard to the left once more, then quickly pushes to the right; we get into a race. Skillfully, I put my body in his path so he can't slide around me. Then I place my foot on the ball. With my back to the striker, I lean to the left, then spin around him to the right. Having beat him, I kick the ball up to our own striker so he can race for the goal. These events are the epitome of high stakes with high anticipation that gives me such joy.

Bugs by Diesel Messenger

A fly struggles in a spectral spider web. My foolish brain thinks it almost glimmers, but I know that it is as dark and dull as cinder. The spider emerges from the recesses of its web, preparing for a meal. *Oh right, I also have a meal to prepare.* I toss some vegetables in a wok and add teriyaki.

The fluid simmers angrily as newly-introduced heat rapidly vaporizes water -- trillions of simultaneous explosions. The commotion brings my brain back to the spider. I know the fly's insides probably don't sizzle as they're being melted, but if I were making a movie and something were being melted alive, a sizzling pan is the first sound effect I'd think to use.

I wish my mother were here; I could playfully torment her with the repulsive image of a spider's dinner. She would both laugh and grimace, exclaiming sarcastically that she'd failed as a mother. I would remind her that it was probably my dad's fault I ended up this way and that she should reject even the faintest idea that she could be anything less than perfect. For a moment I can almost hear her laughing.

My mind wanders back to the spider. I imagine that I can perceive the world through its eight dewdrop eyes and sensitive hairs: feeling the pressure waves that emanate from my gait, knowing exactly how fast I'm walking, how much force my feet exert on the floor, the tiny asymmetries that indicate the swaying of my hips.

Physics would be so much easier to understand as a spider; or at least the intuitive side of things. Organic perception can never be perfect, but internalizing the physics of the world in your

because one bad grade can send me spiraling. However, these good grades incentivize me to do well, and as long as there are grades, I will work tirelessly to do my best. – Sadie

Success isn't simply materialistic gains – athletes also gain non-material advantages from achievement. College athlete Bernard Kindall explains his experience: "If you see success and you put work into it, it is really nice to see it boost your confidence..." Bernard also has realized how athletic success ultimately impacted his work ethic: "I think it has definitely helped me like, mentally, just to be able to realize that if you work for something, you can do it." Bernard maintains that success emphasizes working towards practical goals, which if pursued, reinforce good self-esteem. Both athletes and strong students gain confidence and learn the value of a focused work ethic.

Potential Harm

With success comes both internal and external pressures. While a small amount of pressure fosters motivation, heavy pressure from friends, parents, and oneself creates an unbearable environment, where making one mistake can feel debilitating. "I have so many expectations," Jaeda Moyer, a freshman at the University of Hawai'i states. "Like, I feel like I'm always going to be expected to function at a higher level than other people." Jaeda often finds herself pushing to extremes when pursuing good grades, in order to prove she is still worthy. Such expectations are sometimes overwhelming and can lead a person to being overly stressed. Incentives like grades often exacerbate these tensions. With new school technology, students' digitalized class transcripts are a constant reminder of all their past mistakes, permanently recorded in real time. Bill Borg, Chemistry, Calculus, and Computer Science teacher at McCall-Donnelly High School, observes daily student pressure: "What is stressful to students is ... pushing themselves to do their very best." Everyone has a limit. Some students hold themselves to expectations beyond bearing.

Practical success requires people to overcome the toxic consequences of such an unbalanced mindset. Ted McManus states: "If [students] don't achieve [their goals], it's really uncomfortable for them, and it can lead to depression and, you know, mostly these are self-imposed problems..." Self-destructive behavior such as overworking and chronic stress can

exoskeleton would lead to an intimate understanding of the relationship between mass and motion, space and time.

Even just being that small would be a monumental perspective shift. I could no longer die from falling: the surface area of my body large enough in comparison to my mass to absorb the force of any Gs. I could scale our ceiling, climb down the ascetic green chandelier in spirals, and suspend myself with silk above our table.

I slide vegetables onto my plate and lay two eggs on top. Walking to our table, I sit to eat, chewing regularly at first. My thoughts soon pull me under and I space out, my food cooling in the evening air.

Bugs are so numerous and diverse. They're everywhere, and they'll likely still be everywhere in the centuries to come. Their small size, rapid birth rate, and tendency to live underground will make them most resilient to climate disaster and nuclear war. Even if humans eradicate everything else, bugs will likely stick around, and a world with only bugs would still be one of endless beauty and complexity and brutality.

I glance back at the spider, now finished wrapping its victim in silk, and, impossibly, I feel smaller than it, for despite my comparatively enormous stature and intellect, my species will likely falter and self-destruct while its goes on to inhabit the earth until the sun eventually swallows it in its last dying effort to remain a star.

I realize with grim humor the arrogance in comparing humans to bugs. Are we all really just insects, running around in circles, trying to see past the next horizon? The insects are going to make it across that horizon, leaving behind bomb craters and flooded cities.

If the world ends in my lifetime, and I had to choose one person to live through it with, it would be my mother. My mother is like bugs: if only she were left, there would still be so much beauty to explore -- tomes of memories to unravel, then sort, then do origami with, then joke about, and finally, when the sound of the air-raid siren drowns out every ounce of humanity left in us, to take comfort in.

I snap back to myself. My dinner is now room temperature. I sigh and dig in just as my eyes catch the beams of my mother's returning headlights on the wall. I wait a minute until her footsteps echo in the stairwell. She reaches the top with one last emphatic footfall that reverberates across our smooth concrete floor and rattles something, though I couldn't guess what.

become prevalent when students prioritize grades over their own needs or pursue those grades in an inefficient or painful way. However, McManus stresses that the biggest inhibitor to most students' academic success is surmountable: "For most students it's just work, you know, study habits and staying organized, those things. Like, I've seen some students who are quite smart, but they don't have academic success; they don't have the grades that they want because they're not willing to put in the work..." McManus sees negative consequences not simply from the desire to get good grades, but also from social expectations of a success-oriented mindset. Social norms force people into confining stereotypes, which cause them to suffer.

I have multiple learning disabilities, so I must put in extra work to do the same as someone else in school. I stress myself out in my goal to achieve good grades even without taking advanced classes. It feels like I have to work harder at something that may come easier to other people. I do not want to disappoint my parents who expect me to do well. – Leo

Fame: Not Ideal

Success may also lead to popularity, which can be very challenging to reconcile. The more successful someone is, the more attention received, both good and bad. Some are jealous of success, which makes them view prominent individuals in a negative light. DJ Green, an athlete at McCall-Donnelly High School, describes how some perceive him negatively: "People who see you as better than them don't like to see you do better than them." It's easy to categorize people based on special talents. However, these stereotypes can be crippling to luminaries and instill unrealistic expectations in observers. Jaeda Moyer adds, "I feel like people take a lot of stuff for granted, like what I do. I have to work hard and stuff, but I feel like people get to use the excuse that I'm naturally smart; but it's really just that I worked hard and I did what I needed to do." Clichés of the "star student" or "exceptional athlete" can cause others to overlook the work such students put into obtaining their special skill set.

Although a success-focused culture can paralyze people, pursuing success is not inherently problematic. Some may consider only those with a large amount of wealth to be successful. However, in McCall, Idaho, true

"Hola, mijo," she says in her English-accented Spanish.

"Bonjour, maman," I say; her using Spanish reminds me to use French. "Ta classe est allée comment?"

"You lost me."

"How was your class?"

"It was good. How was your evening?"

"I thought about the end of the world while my dinner got cold, so pretty superb."

"Huha, what about it?"

"How I'd want to spend it with you. Or... no, yeah, you."

"Damn straight, you better! I'm raisin' you right!" she says and then laughs. "Who else were you considering?"

"I was thinking maybe Bob Ross; I could get him to lull me to sleep with an ash-on-rusty-metal painting lesson."

"Ha, why not one of your friends though. Don't you think I'd get annoying?"

"Well I don't doubt that!" I pause and think for a few seconds. "On second thought, I'm not sure. They mean the world to me as well. I've never had a real falling out with any of them, but I guess I still feel like I know you the best."

My mother pauses, "Thank you. It's reassuring to know that I'm not just a bug to you. Sometimes, when you're in the thralls of a smear, I'm not so sure."

I laugh gleefully, then address my mother's perplexed expression, pointing out the spider's web.

"Earlier I was thinking about how nobody really notices bugs as anything profound. They regard them as pests, little machines whose only purpose is to inconvenience humans. But bugs are so bright and colorful! Even if all the other animals went extinct tomorrow, there would still be so much richness and complexity in the world because of bugs. I was thinking about how strangers don't usually see each other as significant, but that couldn't be farther from the case. Kasey, you *are* a bug to me!" I laugh again, more mildly, at the irony and look at her."

"Diesel," she says, "that was very sweet, but I know that your idea spewing is a sign that you're wasted tired. It's two a.m.. Why don't you get some sleep and tell me about the secrets of the universe tomorrow."

I sigh and reluctantly agree. Before I go to brush my teeth though, I check the spider's web. A new fly struggles in the thralls of the silk death trap, and as I look close, I notice, to my chagrin,

success is a stable and prosperous state of happiness.

The Gift of Flight

by Leo Gelardi

Dark and cold at day,
no sun in sight. I run a crazy lot,
but still I shiver.
So cold I can't smell; can't make out
all the shouts. I don't know
where to be;
someone's mad at me.
But the flying ball lands at my feet
as sun pops out of its cloudy cage.
I fly down the field like an eagle.
Defenders who can't fly
just stare. Then I cross
the ball, and I pass on
the gift of flight

Steven Universe

by Diesel Messenger

Steven Universe was embarrassing. I had always strived to be a quiet and respectable child, lest somebody belittle me as some "adorable little boy" or associate me with the characteristics of boys my age. While masculinity was discomfort and shame, and I withdrew from it as much as I could, femininity was terror, a nude walk through school. I didn't know who I was, but I knew that attempting to solve that question would attract attention and cleave the fabric of a social ruse of politeness. I was a very polite child. When I first glimpsed the pastel-colored woman-warriors of Steven Universe who sang and danced, and its goofy, lovable child-protagonist, I stood transfixed for a moment until I realized that some adult might laugh at me (or internally judge me in any way) for daring to view such a girly cartoon. I flushed, pretending not to watch.

But I couldn't hold myself away for long. I would sneak into one of the empty rooms in my grandparents' house and watch the show. The songs penetrated my psyche and I would mumble them while weeding the strawberry patch, watering the raspberries, or canning peaches, counting the hours until I could return to my parents. I held no resentment against my grandparents, but I drowned in loneliness those summer weeks when my parents would both be

that the fly is, in fact, shiny. Its carapace is smooth and the cable lights that line my ceiling glint off the charcoal chitin. I once again curse my arrogance, but not too scornfully.

Aspens

by Leo Gelardi

A white trunk with black spots:
lime leaves scattered across.
There is no smell,
but deer disagree.
Cold trunk; silken leaves
shimmer and rustle with gentle wind.
Taste like garbage to me;
but deer disagree.

Indolence

by Sadie Berry

I sit in my desolate room, dreaming of days when warm sunshine kisses my cheeks and makes them glow. It's been dark for what seems to be a lifetime, but in actuality it's only been nine months of winter in the cold, snowy town where I live. I peer through the curtains of the single window that I rely on for any sunlight in my frigid room. Luckily for me, the previous owners had planted an elderberry bush right in front of my window so even if I wanted any sunlight, I couldn't get it. *Ugh who would plant a stupid bush right there?* I think. *All I want in life is to feel the sun.*

A small crack through the branches admits some light gray sky. I wish it were the color of the ocean, and suddenly I am transported to a familiar scene. The salty air is reminiscent of warmer days I spend once school gets out, lying idly on the beach with no intentions or plans to do anything else. I feel at peace, knowing I have no assignments due and all my time is my own. The sand burns my back. I want to move to a cooler place but don't because it feels so nice: each grain of decomposed rock is a masseuse putting pressure on my reclining body. For a moment my porcelain skin fades into a darker color and little freckles like grains of sand suddenly appear all over my face.

My grandmother always used to call my freckles angel kisses. Her saying it made the cliché special to me. I remember the summer I spent in southern France with my Grandma long ago. She forgot to put sunscreen on me one day, and the beating sun burnt my face. The next day we found

gone fighting wildfires and I stayed on my grandparents' rustic property. My favorite activity after I had been kicked off the TV was to mount the soft, fabric, swinging chair, kick myself about the tree it was attached to, and ruminate. Much of that time was devoted to constructing alternative plotlines or what-if scenarios, many of which included me as a loved member of the cast, finding belonging there that I blindly yearned for in the real world.

Steven Universe was my daily escape, and I made sure to miss as little of it as I could. I mostly adored the dynamic characters and otherworldly and peaceful landscapes of ruins and greenery. In a few days, however, the show would touch my soul with the first love story I had ever taken pleasure in. Steven is raised by three women who act as superhuman protectors of earth. One of them, Pearl, was in love with Steven's mother, Rose Quartz. However, Rose fell in love with a human man and gave up her life to bring Steven into the world. The episode I watched revealed Pearl trying to come to terms with these feelings and manage accommodating Rose's husband.

Previously, I had been the type of kid to squirm at any mention of affection in a movie; I didn't understand why people would want to do something like that to each other. Pearl's story, however, broke my heart: one of the only times I have ever cried because of a work of art. My immediate and intense understanding of the romance surely stemmed partly from its being my first real exposure to queer stories, but it was just as much because Steven Universe had a queer aesthetic and characters with very non-normative personalities and arcs. Pearl's story breaks the paradigm of straight, boy-meets-girl sophistry not only by being a lesbian romance, but also by dealing mainly with characters who are already through with a current relationship and dealing with the aftermath. Despite being a kids' cartoon, the narrative weight of misunderstandings is earned and affects people in a regular, human manner.

Looking back at my adolescence, Steven Universe was highly influential on my early development from being someone who principally feared showing any kind of affection, to an at times pining romantic. It was the beginning of my queer awakening, when I first connected myself with that identity and group of people. Steven Universe has been a truly special

a plethora of freckles scattered over my already-freckled face, and my grandma was shocked to find how quickly they had appeared.

"Sadie!" She said as she softly grabbed my cheeks. "How do you have more freckles than there are stars?!" I stood carefully as she examined my face, not saying a word. "Looks like the angels kissed you again," she said.

My face lit up with a smile outer space could see and my grandma booped a few of the more prominent freckles. For the remainder of the day I walked around telling everyone about how the angels had kissed me. One little French girl and her friend around my age were astounded to see how many angel kisses I had. After that moment we became great friends. Although I do not recall their names, I do remember the day I spent with them. They showed me the beautiful town they lived in, and I was stunned to discover how different their customs were from mine. Even at five I could see huge differences in the ways of life between Americans and the French

The architecture, the music, the language: all was so rich and foreign. *Why doesn't the United States do it like this?* I pondered to my young self. Each building had statues, each cathedral's interior was masterfully painted by some artist. You could see each brush stroke behind every painting, showing how much care was put into the work. "Grandma Melanie?" I asked. "Why doesn't where we live look like this?"

"Because Americans are lazy," my grandma laughed.

After that, I truly believed it. Even now in my dreary winter room I long for something more. Something more culturally enriching compared to the bland American way of life. *Americans wish to get things over with compared to the French who dedicate their entire lives to mastering a profession.* My body comes back to my room. "Even I do things in my life just to get it over with." I think of all the homework I am avoiding and how unmotivated I am to do it. The papers stack up like mountains on my desk. Deadlines determine how I should spend my day and yet I just cannot bring myself to do my work. Even when I do find motivation to write an essay I just don't. I'd rather be doing anything else with my time, like exploring the vast world the internet has to offer. I am entertained for hours, staring at a screen displaying videos. At this point it doesn't even matter what the videos are about, I'll watch them anyway.

The internet is available for so much good but instead I use it to escape daily chores like

facet of my childhood, and I still look back on it fondly.

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working out or doing homework. The web grants me instant gratification. Most people just do tasks to get them over with so they can enjoy doing something they like. I tell myself, "I just need to finish this test and then I'll have spring break," or "I have to do three hours of homework and then I can be on my phone for the rest of the night." Is this how the French think? Or do they dedicate their lives to a specific craft or study for their higher education with attention years before Americans even think of that sort of focus? Of course, instant gratification in France doesn't seem as prominent as it is in Americans' lifestyles. Europeans know what to prioritize and how to balance work and play. They select a field about which they are passionate. Since I don't know what to do with my future and don't have any activities I'm overwhelmingly passionate about, I am scared. *Maybe that's why I can't do my homework. Maybe that's why I long for summer. Maybe that's why I wish I were French.*