

## Four Years at Compass School

Sara Lepkoff

The challenges that we face can make us into who we are. We learn from our mistakes and strive to repeat our successes. If we never take a chance, we are unable to grow as a person. As I look back over the past four years at Compass School, I recognize that all of the challenges and chances that I have taken have only made me into a stronger person. As I became stronger, I felt more confident to experiment, to question, and to share my knowledge (with the community. Each class has helped me to develop this confidence through assignments that have pushed my limits and questions that have made me stop and ponder. For this, I have to give credit to the supportive Compass community which has also helped me recognize my courage.

This collection of work from my 10<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade years gives evidence to the growth I've experienced. The majority of the pieces show a strong writing component. Each writing assignment shows the clear "voice" from a writer who has grown to understand her thoughts more clearly. Often, I used to hide my writing, afraid it wasn't "good" enough, or that others were better than me. Through a slow process, I've taken more pride in my writing, allowed myself to be more creative, and stopped challenging my thoughts.

The pieces also show my willingness to think more logically and critically, especially in subject areas I used to dislike doing, such as science. Thinking logically can be hard for me, but its rewards are that I'm more engaged in the tasks at hand, and can not only observe but apply my previous knowledge to come up with new data or ideas. Acquiring knowledge and especially remembering it can also be challenging for me at times. It takes a lot of effort, but my perseverance definitely shows across the board in the various tests that I have taken over the past couple of years.. What the tests don't show though is the knowledge I've acquired of my own learning styles and how best I can improve my skills at memorization and general study skills.

Outside of academics, my community is one of the most important things to me. I feel closer to a community when I contribute my skills and give back to people in need. I work extra hard to seek out people who need help and to take tasks seriously and give them my best effort. My own personal development has also helped me to overcome all of the challenges in my path. I have found that while it is not always apparent to me at the time, reflecting on each piece of my work later on can show the rewards of doing things that are not always easy.

I face my next two years with a sense of pride in what I've achieved knowing that this supportive community will continue to allow me to think outside the box and take advantage of opportunities as they arise. And, if all else fails, I have learned that all I have to do is put one foot in front of the other, one step at a time. I look forward to really enjoying the growth that I know I will experience. I also look forward to opportunities to develop my leadership skills and continuing to understand how to best take care of my mind and body, while gaining perspective on the things that I least enjoy. I know inside the small walls of Compass School I will experience many more great things, perhaps bigger than I can imagine.

## **Knowledge**

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Knowledge is one of the most important realms, and can be the hardest. The pieces in this realm show the understanding I have for a variety of concepts, as well as my application of that knowledge.

One piece that shows my skill in a particular part of knowledge is my Humanities vocab quiz. I have always been very good at learning and memorizing words. The quiz required me to memorize numerous vocab words and use each word in a sentence. The studying that I did before the quiz was actually fun and not very stressful for me to complete and I ended up passing the quiz with a high score.

Another piece that shows my strength in knowledge is my math poster. Each person in my 9<sup>th</sup> grade math class was assigned to make a poster on how to solve a specific algebraic equation. Using my math notes, I was able to make a poster that was fun for me to complete and showed my understanding of the math. The poster is also visually appealing!

A piece that shows my improvements in understanding concepts is my Light, Sight and Sound Science Test. This test was the final test in that class and included a lot of concepts. This test was a bit challenging to complete, but by studying with complete and organized notes I was much more confident of the answers. Overall, this process helped me get a good grade for the test.

I have struggled with certain aspects of the Knowledge realm. It can be hard for me to learn and memorize complex concepts. The final exam for my Spanish class this year was definitely a challenge to complete. I found that this Spanish class was often challenging in general because we had to learn concepts fairly quickly and then remember the knowledge we had learned. The final exam included conjugation of the reflexive verb *tenes*, and how to form a command in Spanish. These are both complex processes. I studied a lot to improve my chances of passing the test. I took the test and got a pretty good grade, but I corrected my test to bring my grade up further. I feel that I dealt with this struggle well, but next time I hope to advocate earlier on that I am really struggling with understanding the concepts.

I hope that learning new concepts and ideas will become easier for me. I also look forward to advancing my skills in application of knowledge, especially on tests and projects.

## Critical Thinking

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My curious attitude and drive to figure out the answer show through in the pieces of my Critical Thinking Realm. Much of the work in this realm is centered on using my previous knowledge to figure out a new answer. This could mean asking the right questions, making a smart decision, or thinking of a new and creative way to present my logic. My work in this realm shows that I have applied myself well, and with confidence.

An indicator within this realm called Creative Thinking and Expression, represents one of my pieces of work very well. In my 9<sup>th</sup> grade year our Humanities class read the book, *Speak*. As an assessment of our understanding of the book we were asked to take a essay test with questions that dealt with the themes of the book, and the motivations of the character. The book is written in a seemingly simple writing style but there are a lot of deeper motivations in the book. I was able to express my understanding of those themes and take my own creative ideas into account.

Another indicator that represents my skills in this realm is Reasoning and Logic. A current events project I completed in my 9<sup>th</sup> grade year asked us to link a current article in the news to something we were learning about in our American History unit. The piece not only shows my strength in understanding the concepts in the article but that I am able to seek the important information, and use my skills to find relationships between to seemingly different subjects.

Not all of these pieces in this realm came without some challenges. Over the past two years, I have grown and sometimes struggled to understand how to figure out the answers and how to use my skills to create a creative presentation of that knowledge.

One example of my improvement in the Problem Solving and Decision Making indicator, is the salty stuff experiment created in my 10<sup>th</sup> grade year. The two experiments helped us to understanding more about Chemistry through hands on demonstrations. At first, I wasn't sure how to find the answer. With a bit of brainstorm and evaluation of my options, I was able to find an answer that I was confident with and could justify. This shows my increased confidence when coming up against a problem, but also my improved skills with finding the best solution or explanation.

My ability with numbers and general problem solving is a weak point for me. I still struggle to find a way to understand the content and to know where to go from there. Though my pieces lack clarity or correctness, it is clear that I am trying my hardest to work off what I do know.

An example of a challenging piece to complete was my Math Journal Entry. The challenging part was that I wasn't just that I was processing information, but that I had to actually figure out why a specific answer was true. I overcame the problem by asking a lot of questions, and using the information that I knew already to try explain the question. This gave me a successful answer. I felt I dealt with this challenge well by making up for the fact that I didn't know how to move forward by asking questions. In the future, I will try to ask enough questions before I start so that I will be able to complete the data on my own.

I feel that I have made a lot of progress in this realm over the past two years. I hope to continue to keep improving especially in the indicators of Reasoning and Logic and Numeracy. I feel confident that I will be able to keep using my curious mind to solve the problems and unsolved mysteries in my path.

## Personal Development

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Without the confidence to learn and take the risks that come along with trying new things, we can't mature. I have learned that my own personal development is the building block for all the progress I've made these in my 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade years. The success I've achieved is not just shown in this realm, but in all the realms that I've put pieces in.

All the pieces in this realm showcase this growth. An example that shows how I've grown is the microscope lab I completed this year. Our forensics class was asked to do a lab that helped us get familiar with looking at evidence under a microscope. We were asked to draw six different pieces of fabric as they looked under the microscope. I was surprised at how exciting it was for me to complete this assignment. I enjoyed being able to view objects up close and illustrate them in detail. While most of my peers found it boring, I took my time to complete the project and found it the most interesting part of the class. This assignment allowed me to discover an interest that I was previously not aware of. This insight into my own personal interests has prompted me to look for opportunities to work with illustrating under a microscope again. During my current project for Project Week, I will incorporate microscope illustrations into my project.

Another example that provides further evidence of my growth is the report card I received for my chemistry class. Not only do the grades themselves show that I am more confident in my work, but the comments include my strength in science inquiry and problem-solving.

The improvements in my confidence are also apparent through my work in this realm. A specific example is the candle lab. This lab was part of our chemistry class and was to help us apply our knowledge of heat and heat transfer. Our challenge was to build a container that would hold water and that would allow us to raise the temperature of that water a significant amount. I had often dreaded these types of labs in the past because it is often challenging for me to apply my knowledge and use my own ideas to solve the problem at hand. I pushed myself to create a good project and took a bit of a leadership role in my group of two. It turned out that the lab was very successful.

Other indicators in the personal development realm are harder for me to achieve. One of these especially is organization. A piece of work that shows this struggle is the Constitution test that I took in humanities. This was the culminating test in our study of the U.S. government, its constitution, and the voting process. It required a lot of notes and memorization. I had a hard time organizing and taking notes for this test. Though it took a lot of extra time, I was able to get a good score in the end.

I hope to gain a lot more knowledge of myself as a learner and to find new ways to grow and improve myself as a person. I know that the coming years of high school will have their share of challenges but I feel that I am ready to take on those challenges with what I've learned so far.

## Communication

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Communication is the most common form of sharing information, whether it is through reading, writing, or verbal expression. Assignments that are meant to communicate ideas or information are my favorite assignments because, they allow me to show off, and indulge in my passion for words.

A piece of work that shows this strength is my 1940s museum exhibit on Eleanor Roosevelt. For our Humanities class of 2008, we had to present information in a museum about the 1940s. I chose Eleanor Roosevelt as my topic, because of how inspirational her ideas were. I was able to present my information in an organized and creative way. I feel that I gained much insight through my research and by the end of my project I was proud to share the insights I had gathered. I heard a lot of positive feedback from people who viewed my exhibit.

A piece of work that shows my skills in writing was the "El Norte" in Spanish. Our Spanish class in my 9<sup>th</sup> grade year, watched a movie chronicling two Guatemalans, a sister and brother, as they escaped the violence of their homeland and traveled illegally to the United States. We wrote a letter in the voice of one of the characters to show our understanding of the characters, and their motivations. I was able to use the information I learned about the character in the movie and imagined a way to convey what the character might say in a letter. The writing is in Spanish, but it still is a strong creative piece.

This 10<sup>th</sup> grade year especially has pushed my capabilities as a writer. I feel that I have made improvements that show through in my pieces.

One that provides a good example of my improvements is my Oral History paper. To write this paper, I interviewed my grandfather about his experiences in the 1940s. At first I wasn't sure how to start. I felt that I wanted to write a fiction piece, but I wasn't sure where to start. To decide what to do, I wrote an outline describing the two main characters in detail. This was a new step for me. I often am impatient to start writing but taking this one extra step was important to the outcome of my paper. I feel this paper is the best fiction piece I have written in a long time. I hope to continue to write fiction, now that I realize how much more competent I am.

Writing is only a part of communication. Communicating to a group of people, and presenting your knowledge in a way that holds attention and teaches something is another important part. This is the part that I find the hardest in the communication process.

A piece that I was challenged by in this area was my brochure on the planet Venus. Each person or pairs of two in our science class presented information about specific planets. I picked Venus and worked individually on a 3-D brochure. It was hard for me to envision how to make it interesting and how exactly I would present the brochure to the class. The research was a lot easier for me, and I had to make a rush with the presentation of the brochure and design part. I feel that it is a good piece of work and has good visuals. I think that next time I will make a point of scheduling time to brainstorm and make a "design" outline, much like I would make for any piece of writing.

I feel that I have made a lot of discoveries about how I can make my communication skills even better. I feel that I will be able to keep enjoying creating pieces in this realm, and I hope to keep improving my presentation design skills and writing skills.

## **Community Involvement**

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Ever since I started attending Compass School, I've felt a big appreciation towards the community. I have become more interested in giving back to the Compass community especially these past two years. In different ways, the pieces in this realm show my dedication to the Compass community and beyond.

My Library Community Service is an example of my dedication to the Compass Community. I have been part of the Library Team since 7th grade. I loved being able to be involved in that particular Community Service, because I was able to be around books, and I felt comfortable to share my ideas of how to keep improving the Library. The Library Team is a small group. I felt that I worked very well with them, we all helped each other to stay on task. Our collaboration made us able to get our various jobs done, and we learned more about each other.

A piece that shows my strength in giving to the Compass Community and beyond, is my Sixties Poster and Exhibit. The poster and exhibit were meant to inform people about advertising in the 1960s. The exhibit was in a "sixties" museum put on by my 9th and 10th grade humanities class last year. It was our final project for the study of the decade. I was very interested in making my exhibit informative and interesting, and many people commented on how interesting it was. I think it shows that I was very interested in putting the school in a good light and that people responded to my exhibit shows that my effort was helpful for our class and for our school.

My increased involvement in the community is partly due from my improvement in this area. A piece that shows this improvement is the my Gratin Museum Exhibit. During our school's Winterm projects, I was involved in making an exhibit about New England Garden's and their wildlife for the Gratin Nature Museum. I worked on this exhibit with one other person to assemble the exhibit. The idea that we came up to exhibit the information was my idea, and I helped to plan many of the steps to completing the exhibit. Though we both had good ideas and were engaged in the project, I was taking the initiative to make sure the project got finished on time and confronted problems with my own creative solutions. This was good for the exhibit overall and our team.

Though I have improved a lot in this realm it has not always been without a challenge. I am referring to a job opportunity I took in Marlboro, Vermont with my old friend and former teacher, Ann Gengarely. I was asked by her that she was in need of another person to help mentor students, in one of poetry workshops. This poetry workshop was an after-school program where I would help mentor a small group of students, ages 7 to 13. I was a bit reluctant to take the opportunity because I wasn't sure if I could do the job well enough. I often have issues with being assertive with children. I decided to help her out, and ended up enjoying working with the students. I hope to continue to help mentor students in the future. I feel glad that I helped my teacher out, and that I learned a lot from the process.

I hope to continue to be involved in the compass community and other people who are in need. I feel that I have learned that even a little added effort towards others can really influence situations or even problems to the better. I am confident that I will continue to find opportunities that help my community, and give me more improvement in my Leadership Skills, and motivation to keep staying involved.