

Note both the Common App and National Merit Scholarship prompt. Sam wanted to be able to use this essay for both applications, so we worked to ensure that his essay could address both prompts. This a great example of how you can potentially repurpose the same essay for multiple applications/prompts.

Sam

**Common Application: Discuss an accomplishment, event, or realization that sparked a period of personal growth and a new understanding of yourself or others. (650)**

**National Merit Scholarship: To help the reviewers get to know you, describe an experience you have had, a person who has influenced you, or an obstacle you have overcome. Explain why this is meaningful to you. Use your own words and limit your response to the space provided.**

In this revised version, Sam's essay now begins with his story, painting a picture of his experience and drawing the reader into the narrative

What we saw in the slums of Jinotega would dampen anyone's spirits. Families, simply existing, lived in a patchwork of cardboard and tin huts. Children, scrambling around barefoot or in raggedy flip flops, wearing hand-me-down clothes that clearly did not fit, chasing chickens through the alleyways. The local school consisted of three rudimentary brick buildings and a barren schoolyard of concrete and dirt, bound by a torn, rusting fence. To get there, one had to cross a dry river bed littered with garbage, soiled diapers, and an occasional dead cat. This memory epitomized a trip my family made to Nicaragua to teach young students at the school in the small town of Jinotega. While it was a meaningful cultural experience for us, it served a greater purpose as a catalyst for a series of realizations that would impact my life experiences profoundly.

Throughout this version, you can see suggestions for edits to be made for grammar/usage, as well as for repetitiveness, redundancy, and clarity

As a privileged child living in an idyllic suburban neighborhood, I witnessed for the first time a world of public scarcity and impoverishment. Observing Jinotegan lifestyle, I recognized how fortunate I was to be born into circumstances where I did not have to worry about where my next meal was coming from, where I would sleep next, or if my school would ever have hot water or flushable toilets. I took this realization experience to heart by learning to see my own

~~privilege~~acknowledging that my privilege was what enabled me to travel abroad in the first place.

Prior to ~~this revelation in~~ Nicaragua and as a 12 year-old, I ~~felt like a member of the masses was like everyone else~~ did not give my socioeconomic situation much thought. Viewing my surroundings through a lens of privilege prevented me from really seeing the world as it is. However, when I returned to my advantaged life, I began to question society and its materialism and indifference. ~~N~~As far as I could tell, none of my friends thought about global poverty or child starvation, as they threw out half of their lunch ~~or complained about eating their vegetables~~. I found myself in ~~a~~ perceived isolation, struggling to comprehend their lack of awareness. As I grew older, I became frustrated with my peers and their obsession with technology. My naive young self became disappointed with the developed world and its abundant wealth, allowing people like the Nicaraguans to continue living in poverty.

My disdain for how the world ran conflicted with my outgoing and amiable attitude. Half of me wanted to delete all of social media from my life, which I ~~saw plainly~~viewed as a tool for self-promotion and indulgence. My other half wanted to stay active in social circles because the fear of missing out was too much to handle. I struggled to push materialism away, ~~despite my newfound values~~, and often fell for the next big fad.

This version of Sam's essay also included a connection to literature that we ultimately completely deleted because it really had no connection his experience in Nicaragua.

~~Literature helped me sort through my frustrations and refine my emotions. Through reading the narrative essay, "Look at Your Fish!" by Samuel H. Scudder, I learned I could hold my beliefs while continually challenging them with opposing ideas. Digging into *Fahrenheit 451*, I learned the dangers of ignorance and prejudice. The confusion I felt after my time in Nicaragua related particularly well to Montag's struggle in *Fahrenheit 451*: a feeling of isolation~~

~~in a population whose main focus was being entertained and distracted. In literature, I encountered worldviews that made me aware of my own blinders and pushed me to reconcile with them.~~ I was disappointed in myself for having those materialistic desires, and this disappointment led to a humbling depression. I would compare my sadness in not getting the newest iPhone with the Nicaraguans' ability to live happy and fulfilling lives despite the lack of accessible resources.

~~These realizations~~ This development from my formative years have already made an impact on how I view the world and its injustices, fostering a desire to spark a change in the community, locally and globally. What I saw humbled ~~me~~ and inspired me to do ~~more~~ and be more. ~~Not only do~~ I strive for self-improvement ~~by trying to have an open mind in discussion and through daily reflection~~ on my actions of privilege each day, ~~but~~ and I ~~also~~ endeavor to be ~~in more~~ in service to others. ~~To that end, through a local program, I have shared my love for skiing with people with special needs, helping them experience and interact with the beautiful Alaskan outdoors in new ways.~~ I do not know where this journey of self-reflection will take me, but I hope my modest actions will evolve into something that can have a lasting impact.

In this iteration of his essay, Sam has expanded upon his ideas and moved parts around, but it still a work in progress. Something that is reflected in this version, and that we continued to work on through revision, is the length. At this point, his essay is much longer than the maximum 650 words the Common App allows. By the final version, his essay is much more concise and pointed. Only the most necessary words and points are included in order to get the message of the essay across to the reader.