

This is the final version of Sam's Common App essay. It compared to previous drafts, it now fits within the word count limit (650 words), tells a specific story, and adequately explains what he learned about himself from that experience. It is also devoid of grammar/punctuation errors, is cohesive and flows well.

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

The story that opens the essay is now more descriptive, evoking the senses and feelings Sam had while he was in Nicaragua.

What we saw in the slums of Jinotega would dampen anyone's spirits. Families lived simply in a patchwork of cardboard and tin huts. Children scrambled around barefoot or in raggedy flip flops, wearing ill-fitting hand-me-down clothes, 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 epitomizes my family trip to Nicaragua to teach young students in the small town of Jinotega. While it was a meaningful cultural experience, it also served a greater purpose, catalyzing a series of realizations that would impact my life profoundly.

Here, the essays smoothly transitions from what he experienced in Nicaragua to his reflection upon what effects that experience had on him.

As a privileged child living in a idyllic suburban neighborhood, in Nicaragua I witnessed for the first time a world of poverty. Observing Jinotegan lifestyle, I recognized how fortunate I was to be born into circumstances where I did not have to worry about the source of my next meal, where I would sleep, or if my school would ever have indoor plumbing. I took this experience to heart by acknowledging that my family's relative affluence was what enabled me to travel abroad in the first place.

Prior to Nicaragua and as a twelve-year-old, I did not give my socioeconomic status much thought. Viewing my surroundings through a lens of privilege prevented me from seeing the world as it is. However, upon returning to my advantaged life, I began to question society and its indifferent materialism. It seemed like none of my friends thought about global poverty or child starvation, as they threw out half their lunch or complained about eating their vegetables. I found myself in perceived isolation, struggling to comprehend their lack of awareness. As I grew older, I became frustrated with my peers' technological obsessions. 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, amiable attitude. Half of me wanted to remove social media from my life, which seemed a tool for self-promotion and indulgence. My other half wanted to stay active in social circles because the fear of missing out

Notice in the final version of this essay, there is a stronger focus on how Sam wanted to change and have a positive effect on his own community, rather than just focusing on the negative things he felt about society after returning from Nicaragua

was overwhelming. I struggled to push materialism away, but still asked for the newest pair of skis. I was disappointed in myself for having those materialistic desires, and this disappointment led to a humbling depression. I would compare my sadness about not getting the newest iPhone with the Nicaraguans' ability to live happy, fulfilling lives despite the lack of accessible resources. Recognizing this divide allowed me to be more introspective into my own life, which in turn allowed me to identify and more frequently reject those consumeristic desires.

This realization has 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 in Jinotega humbled and inspired me to do more and be more. I strive for self-improvement through daily reflection on my privileged life, and I endeavor to be more in service to others. I do not know where this journey of self-reflection will take me, but hopefully my modest actions will evolve into something with a lasting impact.