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A Walk Across the Brooklyn Bridge

Word Count:1064

Part A

Positive Description

Walking briskly across the bridge I have to stop for a moment and wonder at the pattern of the lights on the suspension cables leading to the top of the pier supporting the ancient bridge. The lights shine as if they are attempting to replace the stars that the lights of New York overpower, and they are doing a good job. This constellation is a butterfly that unfolds its wings as I cross the bridge. The breeze is cooling the city down after another day that felt like a month, but the heat absorbed by the wooden planks warms my feet. I glance to my right and I can see the Statue of Liberty, tiny in the distance, making this moment seem more important than it probably is in the big scheme of things. Up here, I am not trapped in the long streets where the tall skyscrapers block my view of the horizon. Here I can see that there is more.

Negative Description

Drudging across the bridge again I am disgusted by the stench of fish from the Fulton Fish Market. It closed years ago, but the odor remains like a stain on the city. The breeze that overwhelms my senses does not bring relief from the humid day, but seems to only add to the sweat dripping down my back. As I look to my right I see worn out barges and old boats and I

am reminded of the constructed environment I am in. Nature is vindictive and only presents itself in order to laugh at all of the people living in this concrete jungle of their own design. It is as if it is saying, “You tried to get rid of me, but I am still here!” I jump, startled, my heart suddenly beating quickly, as I am abruptly tossed out of my thoughts by a homeless man rearranging himself on his bench. I did not notice the man under the lump of smelly towels and garbage in the dim light. His plight uncovers the fantasy that I have of being better off than he is. We are both on this bridge, neither here nor there, stuck in terrestrial purgatory, with no indication of when we can move on.

Part B

For the first words in each of my paragraphs, I chose words that to me represented the feelings I was trying to express in each of the paragraphs: “walking briskly,” to give the sense of energy or excitement and “drudging” to show tiredness. In the second paragraph, I wrote things like “odor” instead of smell and “concrete jungle” instead of city.

I also chose the subject matter throughout the content of the paragraphs to reflect the idea of that paragraph. In the first paragraph, I chose to talk about how the suspension cables looked like butterflies, and the lights on them looked like stars. I wrote about the Statue of Liberty, which has a general connotation of being a beautiful and important monument. Usually seeing the monument is a big event for people, so me just seeing it in passing, and at a distance made the moment all the more important because where I was then seemed to be even more important than seeing the monument. In the second paragraph I focused on the bad things like the smell and the homeless man. I also chose one thing, the breeze, to discuss in both paragraphs to emphasize the idea of it being a description of the same place with two different feelings.

When I chose the objects to be described for each paragraph, I chose things that related to the feeling I was trying to convey, and I left out things that could contradict that feeling. For example, in the first paragraph, I talked about the lights, and how they reminded me of the constellations in the stars. This was relating to heavenly things, accordingly, in the second paragraph, where I was trying to present a feel of being stuck in that place and time, I chose not to talk about the lights or the stars.

I also chose to use metaphors to exaggerate the feelings I was trying to represent. The lights on the cables, for example, would not have seemed as pretty unless I described them as a butterfly. In the negative paragraph it would not have seemed so hot if I had not written that nature was getting us back for trying to get rid of it.

If I were to change something in part A, I would exaggerate the positive more. I would make the first sentence more directly positive, and maybe take out the phrase that the day felt like a month. It works, to a degree, because the phrase does not directly speak of the bridge, but it does affect the overall positive tone of the first paragraph. I would also explain the butterfly-unfolding effect that the bridge cables have as you walk towards the supporting pier. It is really beautiful to see, but difficult to explain to someone who has not seen it. It is a kind of optical illusion, due to perspective. I considered saying something like, "An optical illusion due to my changing perspective causes a constellation of a butterfly that unfolds its wings as I cross the bridge." However, I felt that would de-emphasize the metaphor describing the suspension cables as an earthly constellation. It seems that it is more effective, in this instance, to maintain the theme of the bridge as a link between earth and the heavens, as the theme is continued in the

opposite manner in the negative description. Perhaps the simplest way to resolve the issue of describing the illusion would be to include a photograph.

Ultimately, I believe that I learned a lot writing this essay. It gave me the opportunity to consider how to describe two contrasting states of being in the same place. I believe the most engaging problem for me was to figure out how to maintain a sense of continuity across the two paragraphs. I achieved this through by maintaining an underlying theme of the bridge being a link between not only two places in the city, but also between two more conceptual places, earth and the sky.