

I hate English. I've struggled with it forever, constantly scrambling my words, always reminding myself to use "bigger vocabulary," and never writing anything truly meaningful. Why push myself to say something through such a barren language when I have drawings instead?

To my four-year-old self, the art world was infinite. Nothing— not even dried out Crayola markers— could stop this buzzing brain. Even though all I had created up to this point were unidentifiable scribbles and random cat scratches, my parents thought I was a gifted, meant-to-be artist. If this were a joke, they wouldn't have given me a project to create a plastic plate design.

From that point forward, I was the kid people wanted for their group art projects, I was the free portrait person, the creative genius of the group. I even stretched out my art field into Chinese watercolor paintings. Despite being the artist other people wanted me to be, I was the artist that I wanted *myself* to be. Who knew a plastic plate could cause such an impact?

I was constantly encouraged to be my artistic self, but there were always people there to criticize my work. There were schoolmates who noticed me drawing in class who asked questions related to how I should draw something more "sensical" like there wasn't enough meaning in my drawings. I couldn't even describe my art so what was the purpose? Was I wrong to call myself an artist? Even though there were moments of praise for my creations, were they real if the others thought I wasn't good enough? The kind comments never felt sufficient enough and so neither did I.

The negative comments got to my head. How could I create something that means so much to me, but mean nothing to someone else? Every time I tried explaining how or why I did anything in my art pieces nobody seemed to understand. I wished the negativity of these interactions never hit me as hard as they did because the authenticity of my imagination I had been building up for years got destroyed by the expectations of my peers.

Freshman year of high school, I took a Drawing 1 class. This was a class meant to expand my creative palette and help us not feel scared to create whatever we wanted to. There was something I dreaded in this class though— the presentations. I can't even begin to try and count the number of times I hoped for something to come up and save me from these catastrophes.

I didn't expect myself to do well on the presentations but, man, I didn't want people to try and describe my art. It was one thing to speak about our own pieces but I never felt prepared for the inevitable after-presentation questions. What if people didn't understand what I said about what all these random squiggles meant? They say your world is your oyster, but I was stuck in my oyster. I couldn't breathe doing the thing I love.

It took this, a strike of realization, to make me question why I felt this way. Even though I was in a mid panic, maybe I was exaggerating. This was only the first time these presentations were happening and I had barely met my classmates. They were so much kinder than my monstrous imagination made them out to be. Maybe it wasn't my terrible English that made my art "bad."

Listening to my schoolmates made me realize that I misunderstood what they were saying before. It wasn't that they thought my art was questionable, it was that my art was interpretable. People see my art differently and give their own meaning to it. If people can interpret my art and be happy doing so, it's all I want. I've learned to not be defined by how good or bad my English is, and let my art speak for itself.