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Monster (and not the cookie monster kind)

Even though seaweed makes my nose crinkle,
I feel my heart tighten as I peer into her Bento Box.
Perfect rice balls, tiny green flecks.
Peaches, sliced. Topped with cinnamon and sugar.
That's right, cinnamon and sugar.

A brown paper sack. Cheetos. A half-eaten granola bar. A bag stuffed with dry lucky charms.
Somehow he's still fast. Not only fast, but the fastest runner there is.
How? How is that fair?

The shiny plastic tray, the yellow package.

The classic:

A lunchable.² Stale, cold, crackers. Greasy salami. A tiny Airhead?

¹Tollner, David. "A Cry for Help in Soup." Alphabet Soup, 2021, <https://specialeducationcounsel.com/blog/alphabet-soup-special-education-law-appetizer/>. Accessed 2021.

² Vawter, Eve, "The Untold Truth of Lunchables," Mashed.com, Mashed, February 2, 2021, <https://www.mashed.com/157874/the-untold-truth-of-lunchables/>. Before Lunchables were Lunchables, the company mulled over their different options for names: Walk Meals, Crackerwiches, Mini Meals, Lunch Kits, On-Trays, Square Meals, Go-Packs, and Fun Mealz. With the meals containing dangerous

I don't even want it.
But I do.
Not for the food, but for the *look*.

~Homemade soup, still piping hot~

A tiny roll. A brownie.

The **biggest** apple I've ever seen

a huge "organic"³ sticker slapped over its smooth red skin. It was four dollars at the farmers market, she lets me know with a cHoMp.

My mouth waters.

What do you have? She asks.

A sandwich *again*? Her eyes smile tauntingly as she slurps her soup.

I nod, staring down at my pb&j.

I look into my lunchbox again, pull out an apple, then a cheese stick.

My eyes light up.

Today's different. I also have a treat.

I hold up my cookie in triumph.

She stretches out her hand.

"Give it to me."

I gulp so hard I feel it in my toes.

I hand her the cookie. That's what a good friend would do, right? That's what friends do, share.

She stands up and demands I walk her to the bathroom. She doesn't want to go alone. I stand up without hesitation and follow her.

She eats my cookie as we walk.

"Wow, this is good," she remarks, crumbs flying out of her mouth.

I shove my hands deep into my pockets and smile at her, but not with my eyes.

The next day, I ask for one of her chips.

She licks them in front of me, saying that now she can't share.

Sorry.

I nod,

as if I understand. As if she were right. Of course, she's right. Right?

amounts of fat and sodium and "filler ingredients" like cornstarch in their ham, it's not hard to see why they focused so much on the presentation and marketing of their product.

³ Campbell, Jeff, "What's The Cost Difference of Organic & Non-Organic Food?" The Grocery Store Guy, 31 Oct. 2020,

<https://thegrocerystoreguy.com/what-is-the-cost-difference-between-organic-non-organic-food/>.

On average, organic produce is 20% more expensive than non-organic produce. In my mind, people who ate organic things had their whole life together.

She has another perfect lunch.

Sunchips, salad, and a triple chocolate cookie cookie for dessert. I don't even dare to ask for a bite.

She must have a perfect family, too, I think, sighing.

My mind makes an equation:

a perfect lunch = a perfect family.

The next day, I come to lunch → she is crying. *Is she crying? She is crying? She is crying?*⁴

She is crying.

The next day too, and the day after that.

*Oh, how the cookie crumbles*⁵ I whisper to myself, smiling.

I bite my cheek, how could I think such a thing about my friend?

I'm a monster. And not the cookie monster kind.

To make me feel better about myself, I offer her my fruit snacks without her having to ask.

She snatches them.

It wasn't until much later—until I stopped hanging out with her, until I stopped caring what she thought about me, until I ate my lunch with pride—that I realized the depth of her struggles.

I learned that

a perfect lunch ≠ a perfect family.⁶

⁴The perfect girl with the perfect lunch, what could she be crying about? Her shiny bag of chips, although full of preservatives, was still shiny. Just like the shining tears on her face.

⁵"That's the Way the Cookie Crumbles." The Idioms , Largest Idiom Dictionary, <https://www.theidioms.com/thats-the-way-the-cookie-crumbles/>. The phrase has originated in the French language as "C'est la vie," which means, "such is life."

⁶The more I think about her, the more I realize that even though she had an all-organic Whole Foods lunch, she was in a lunchable situation. At first glance, she was shiny, happy and brightly colored. She made kids jealous and seemed to have it all together. But give it time, the truth will be exposed: her family's "ham" was chalk full of preservatives and cornstarch, holding the meat desperately (but artificially) together. The cheddar cheese, a little too neon orange, revealed that her mom, although depressed, slapped a smile on her face, and went throughout her day, pretending to be just a little *too* happy. The crackers, cold from the fridge, and then warm from being jostled in a backpack all day were soggy now. The holes in the crackers were empty promises that never would be fulfilled.

Bibliography:

Campbell, Jeff. "What's The Cost Difference of Organic & Non-Organic Food?" *The Grocery Store Guy*. 31 Oct. 2020, <https://thegrocerystoreguy.com/what-is-the-cost-difference-between-organic-non-organic-food/>.

Jeff Campbell has been a leader for Whole Foods Market for over 2 decades, assisting hundreds of stores. This source discusses the difference between organic and non-organic foods, especially produce. It explains which vegetables are worth buying organically and which ones are not, and what the benefits are of buying organic foods.

I used this source because it confirmed my belief that organic foods are much pricier but also more "put together" than non-organic foods and to gain more insight into something that my family does not place value on.

"That's the Way the Cookie Crumbles." *The Idioms, Largest Idiom Dictionary*, <https://www.theidioms.com/thats-the-way-the-cookie-crumbles/>.

I searched for this source because I was curious about the origin of the Idiom, "That's the way the cookie crumbles." I have heard this a lot, especially when things do not go people's way. I was able to use it as a bit of commentary and a side note in the footnotes. It also connected very well with my cookie theme throughout the essay.

Tollner, David. "A Cry for Help in Soup." *Alphabet Soup*, 2021, <https://specialeducationcounsel.com/blog/alphabet-soup-special-education-law-appetizer/>. Accessed 2021.

I had a creative vision: I wanted to buy some alphabet soup and write a deep message with it and use it for part of my lyrical essay. My dreams were crushed however, when after multiple stores I still could not find any alphabet soup. I wondered, is it something that's just in books and movies? I was googling it to see where I could buy some, and I stumbled upon this image. Perfect. Even though the actual source is relatively unrelated and it discusses special education and mental health, I appreciate being able to use the image in my essay.

Vawter, Eve. "The Untold Truth of Lunchables." *Mashed.com*. Mashed, February 2, 2021. <https://www.mashed.com/157874/the-untold-truth-of-lunchables/>.

This source by publisher Eve Vawter, although meant for entertainment, was educational as well. It covered pretty much everything there is to know about lunchables: their origin, their name, why they are so popular, the rise of brunchables, their nutritional value, and everything else in between. It was very thorough and provided a mix of facts and commentary.

This source inspired a big part of my essay. Learning “the hidden truth” about lunchables made me realize that things, even simple things like lunchables are not always as put together and as simple as they might seem from the outside. I was able to use this idea to further my depth of my essay and create a metaphor for people’s lives.

Intention Statement:

My lyrical essay “Monster (and not the cookie monster kind)” is about the difference between what something appears to be and what it really is. It dives into judgment, family dynamics and how relationships inside the home impact relationships outside of the home. Writing this was a very new experience for me; I have written many poems, and countless essays, but it was invigorating to be able to combine the two and write with no boundaries and endless creative freedom. Even though these experiences happened in middle school, I wrote this piece in present tense to allow the reader to feel in the moment. I indulged in using different font sizes, inserted some squiggles, and used untraditional capitalization to have a child-like, playful tone amidst the seriousness. I also experimented with questions and italics to emphasize certain words and phrases. One of my favorite creative things to play with was spacing and white space. For example, I split some sentences onto different lines or put multiple sentences on the same line. It was difficult to integrate research into my personal experience, so I referred to “Consider the Lobsters” by David Foster Wallace, who famously used footnotes in his satirical article. I followed his example in adding my own thoughts into the footnotes and making them longer and more in-depth than I usually would think to. In addition to Wallace, I took inspiration from Eula Bliss who wrote “Time and Distance Overcome” among other non-fiction pieces. In “Time and Distance Overcome” Bliss lulls the reader into a sense of comfort and almost boredom in the first half of the article by discussing the history of telephone poles. The second half, however, dives into the history of lynching in a brutal, honest manner. I tried my best to apply this technique a bit differently by combining a mix of childish details and thoughtful commentary. Finally, I thought that the photo at the beginning perfectly summed up my essay— that seemingly perfect lunch, that seemingly perfect soup— had a hidden message in it.

I was able to get very helpful and productive teacher and peer feedback. In my first draft, I had described everyone's lunches and then simply wrote “jealousy” and the end of each paragraph. Following a suggestion, I added an additional phrase that implies jealousy instead of spelling it out, and I am much happier with the result. I was also encouraged to expand more into the dysfunctional family aspect of my piece, which I did in the footnotes. Finally, I was encouraged to shift away from the prose format and lean more into an essay. I worked and experimented with this idea, and even though I changed it into a little bit less of a poem, I kept the formatting relatively the same because I felt that the pacing worked more effectively and it was easier to read. In the end, I hope this piece will allow readers to reflect on their own experiences in a memorable way.