

Common Application Prompt 1. Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.

As I embark on a relaxing Sunday evening sail with my little brother, my longing gaze lingers on the rippling water. *I should have been a mermaid.* It isn't because of my conference swimming championship. I think it's more the part when the mermaid gets out of the water, loses her tail, tries to walk, and inevitably falls. Graceful in the water but clumsy on land, that's me. I am always on a boat, paddleboard, or tirelessly swimming my laps in the pool. The rare times when I am not on the water, I am falling off bikes, dropping my books, or tripping over my two left feet. My brother's less than subtle elbow into my ribs shakes me from my reverie.

I nod, flash him my "you don't need to tell me" smile and tighten the main sheet to succeed with the broad reach upwind. As we arrive under our small town's drawbridge, our boat slows to a halt. The wind and our forward progress are blocked within the channel under the bridge. The boat is in irons, and I wince as the thrashing noise of the whipping sail assaults my ears. Looking skyward, I see the roaring stream of beach traffic heading west. I am reminded of the link between the mainland and the barrier island, a strange cultural comingling much like my own.

On the previous Friday, I threw my cold, chlorinated hair into a ponytail and ran out of the YMCA at 6:30 in the morning to meet my mom. My race pace for 6,000 yards in practice didn't slow as I rushed to school; a kiss and a recovery drink were my mom's well wishes for my day. I met my math team as they piled, in calculated fashion of course, into their assigned carpool rides. I traveled with Suraj, a 14 year old prodigy who is in my grade and self proclaimed captain of the team. Instead of a 26 gram protein drink, his mom handed him a clipboard with math practice problems. While I took an hour nap on the car ride to recover from practice, Suraj scribbled away solving for limits and proving theorems. We both dreamed of our own version of success.

After we arrived at the competition, my friend and I nervously entered the conference room. I was different from my teammates; I did not have 800's on Math SATs, and I hadn't been competing since the fourth grade. I was simply there because I loved numbers. When I took time to observe the students around me, I felt the familiarity of competition and finally relaxed. The competitors roamed the conference room, with their Beat Headsets and a Gatorade for hydration, anxiously waiting for their math division. Finally at ease I chatted it up, with my teachers and friends, awaiting the challenges I would soon face.

I hear my brother yell, "Hannah, pay attention." I move to the starboard side, and I begin to hike-out. I feel the speed of the boat increase and the wind tickle every pore in my body. As I look back at the bridge, a smile crosses my face. Just as the bridge connects two different landmasses, I am connected to two worlds: a finite numerical world and an infinite aquatic one. I am just not your average math competitor nor your average elite swimmer. I am the "Pocket Protector" superlative on my swim team, and I am told by my math teacher that the kids I compete against do not swim because math is "their sport." The smile grows as the bridge fades

behind us and open water expands ahead. I think about how much more land there is to travel. As much as I would want to experience life as a mermaid, I think, for now, I want to stay human. I love my "worlds," and I love my life.