

The Article, the Summary, and the Assignment

The Article

“Anxiety: Challenge by Another Name” by James Lincoln Collier

Between my sophomore and junior years at college, a chance came up for me to spend the summer vacation working on a ranch in Argentina. My roommate’s father was in the cattle business, and he wanted Ted to see something of it. Ted said he would go if he could take a friend, and he chose me. The idea of spending two months on the fabled Argentine Pampas was exciting. Then I began having second thoughts. I had never been very far from New England, and I had been homesick my first few weeks at college. What would it be like in a strange country? What about the language? And besides, I had promised to teach my younger brother to sail that summer. The more I thought about it, the more the prospect daunted me. I began waking up nights in a sweat.

In the end I turned down the proposition. As soon as Ted asked somebody else to go, I began kicking myself. A couple of weeks later I went home to my old summer job, unpacking cartons at the local supermarket, feeling very low. I had turned down something I wanted to do because I was scared, and had ended up feeling depressed. I stayed that way for a long time. And it didn’t help when I went back to college in the fall to discover that Ted and his friend had had a terrific time. In the long run that unhappy summer taught me a valuable lesson out of which I developed a rule for myself: do what makes you anxious; don’t do what makes you depressed.

I am not, of course, talking about severe states of anxiety or depression, which require medical attention. What I mean is that kind of anxiety we call stage fright, butterflies in the stomach, a case of nerves—the feelings we have at a job interview, when we’re giving a big party, when we have to make an important presentation at the office. And the kind of depression I am referring to is that downhearted feeling of the blues, when we don’t seem to be interested in anything, when we can’t get going and seem to have no energy.

I was confronted by this sort of situation toward the end of my senior year. As graduation approached, I began to think about taking a crack at making my living as a writer. But one of my professors was urging me to apply to graduate school and aim at a teaching career. I wavered. The idea of trying to live by writing was scary--a lot more scary than spending a summer on the Pampas, I thought. Back and forth I went, making my decision, unmaking it. Suddenly, I realized that every time I gave up the idea of writing, that sinking feeling went through me; it gave me the blues.

The thought of graduate school wasn’t what depressed me. It was giving up on what

deep in my gut I really wanted to do. Right then I learned another lesson. To avoid that kind of depression meant, inevitably, having to endure a certain amount of worry and concern. The great Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard believed that anxiety always arises when we confront the possibility of our own development. It seems to be a rule of life that you can't advance without getting that old, familiar, jittery feeling.

Even as children we discover this when we try to expand ourselves by, say, learning to ride a bike or going out for the school play. Later in life we get butterflies when we think about having that first child, or uprooting the family from the old hometown to find a better opportunity halfway across the country. Any time, it seems, that we set out aggressively to get something we want, we meet up with anxiety. And it's going to be our traveling companion, at least part of the way, into any new venture. When I first began writing magazine articles, I was frequently required to interview big names--people like Richard Burton, Joan Rivers, sex authority William Masters, baseball-great Dizzy Dean. Before each interview I would get butterflies and my hands would shake.

At the time, I was doing some writing about music. And one person I particularly admired was the great composer Duke Ellington. On stage and on television, he seemed the very model of the confident, sophisticated man of the world. Then I learned that Ellington still got stage fright. If the highly honored Duke Ellington, who had appeared on the bandstand some 10,000 times over 30 years, had anxiety attacks, who was I to think I could avoid them? I went on doing those frightening interviews, and one day, as I was getting onto a plane for Washington to interview columnist Joseph Alsop, I suddenly realized to my astonishment that I was looking forward to the meeting. What had happened to those butterflies? Well, in truth, they were still there, but there were fewer of them. I had benefited, I discovered, from a process psychologists call "extinction." If you put an individual in an anxiety-provoking situation often enough, he will eventually learn that there isn't anything to be worried about.

Which brings us to a corollary to my basic rule: you'll never eliminate anxiety by avoiding the things that caused it. I remember how my son Jeff was when I first began to teach him to swim at the lake cottage where we spent our summer vacations. He resisted, and when I got him into the water he sank and sputtered and wanted to quit. But I was insistent. And by summer's end he was splashing around like a puppy. He had "extinguished" his anxiety the only way he could--by confronting it. The problem, of course, is that it is one thing to urge somebody else to take on those anxiety-producing challenges; it is quite another to get ourselves to do it.

Some years ago I was offered a writing assignment that would require three months of travel through Europe. I had been abroad a couple of times on the usual "If it's Tuesday this must be Belgium" trips, but I hardly could claim to know my way around the continent. Moreover, my knowledge of foreign languages was limited to a little college French. I hesitated. How would I, unable to speak the language, totally

unfamiliar with local geography or transportation systems, set up interviews and do research? It seemed impossible and with considerable regret I sat down to write a letter begging off. Halfway through, a thought--which I subsequently made into another corollary to my basic rule--ran through my mind: you can't learn if you don't try. So I accepted the assignment.

There were some bad moments. But by the time I had finished the trip I was an experienced traveler. And ever since, I have never hesitated to head for even the most exotic of places, without guides or even advanced bookings, confident that somehow I will manage. The point is that the new, the different, is almost by definition scary. But each time you try something, you learn, and as the learning piles up, the world opens to you.

I've made parachute jumps, learned to ski at 40, flown up the Rhine in a balloon. And I know I'm going to go on doing such things. It's not because I'm braver or more daring than others. I'm not. But I don't let the butterflies stop me from doing what I want. Accept anxiety as another name for challenge and you can accomplish wonders.

(Reprinted from Models for Writers: Short Essays for Composition, by Alfred Rosa and Paul Eschholz, eds. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989.)

(Taken from: <http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:SBbkAZSY-8IJ:ecmd.nju.edu.cn/UploadFile/6/2534/wb2409.doc+anxiety+challenge+by+another+name+james+collier+argentina+pampas&cd=1&hl=pt-BR&ct=clnk&gl=us>)

A sample summary of Collier's essay:

In the essay "Anxiety: Challenge by Another Name," the author James Lincoln Collier shares his discoveries concerning anxiety. Collier's point is that, though many of us see anxiety as a negative thing, anxiety can also be a great motivator and teacher. Collier begins the article defining anxiety by using examples from his own experience. From these experiences, Collier developed three observations regarding anxiety: the first is that we should do what makes us anxious and avoid what makes us depressed. The second is that, to be successful and avoid depression, we have to be willing to endure a certain amount of worry and concern. The third is that, rather than avoiding those experiences that make us anxious, we should instead experience them until the anxiety they produce is reduced or eliminated.

The Assignment:

Directions: Using Collier's essay as your source, please create the following:

1. Two examples of a lead-in followed by the quotation.
2. One example of a lead-in placed in the middle of a quotation.
3. Two examples of using an ellipsis.
4. One paraphrase of a one to two-sentence passage of Collier's essay.