

Prompt 11: Rehearsing for the Awards Show, or If I ruled the World

Over the years I've occasionally met students who wondered if they had anything to contribute to the genre of creative nonfiction because their lives were not dramatic or noteworthy, by their lights. David Sedaris's essay, "The Late Show" reminds us that we can turn a bout of insomnia into an essay. What's interesting is the way we think and the way we "read" the world around us as a text.

This prompt will trigger a short personal essay, not a narrative-based memoir. And you get to do a bit of cultural criticism as you do it. You might need to do a little research to make the critiques sharp.

First, reflect on "The Late Show" by David Sedaris and note what he is saying about our celebrity-obsessed, looks-obsessed culture. In each section, what is he saying about who we are? About who he is? Savor the narrator's delusions of grandeur, and the humor thereof. What is he saying about the media and about Monica Lewinsky's comportment during the Clinton scandal? (Are you too young to even remember what this was? Eek!) What is he saying about how gay writers and celebrities are constructed by the media and their fans. (This is just to prepare you for discussion. You won't be actually writing about this.)

Now, go to town on your own version of how life would be if you were ruler of the universe. This can be a scathing cultural critique or political commentary or utopian, sci-fi fantasy, or a self-mocking tribute to your wild dreams of success and fame, but be sure to let it reflect as much about the culture we live in and its preoccupations and obsessions as it reveals about your own dreams and daydreams and aspirations and sense of humor.