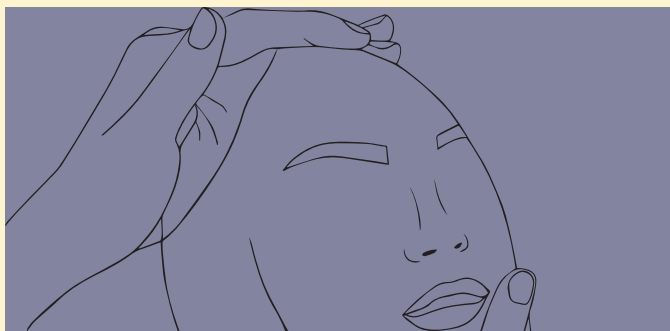
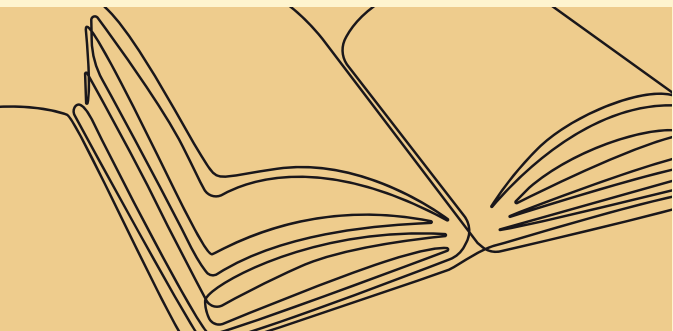


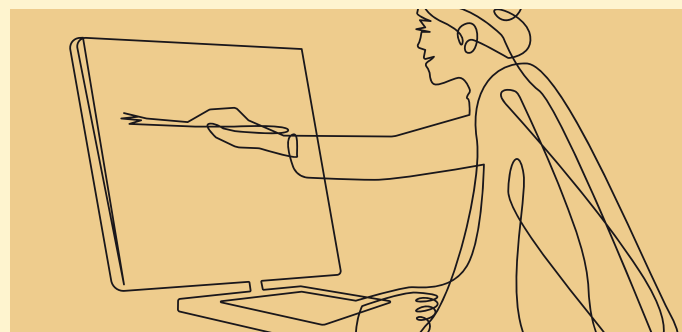
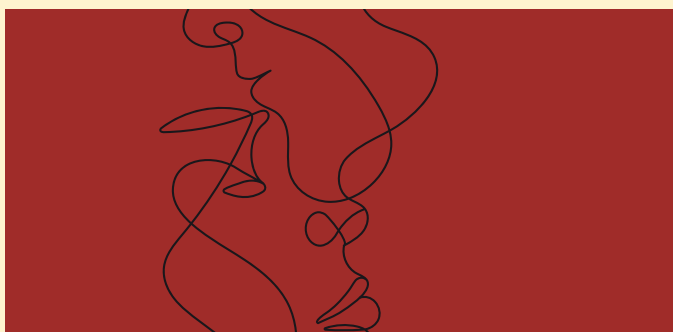


COUNCIL FOR OPPORTUNITY IN EDUCATION
OPPORTUNITY MATTERS
BOOK CLUB

STUDENT ESSAYS & ART *Challenge*



2023



COUNCIL *for* OPPORTUNITY *in* EDUCATION

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Council for Opportunity in Education is profoundly grateful for the engagement of the national speakers during the 2023 Opportunity Matters Book Club. Their support of this initiative and encouragement of the participating students is greatly appreciated.



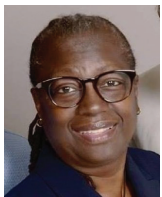
DELORIS DAVIS GRANT

Professor, AP English and Drama
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COUNCIL FOR OPPORTUNITY IN EDUCATION
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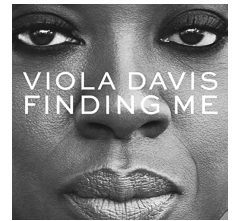
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INTRODUCTION

Building from the success of 2021's Good Trouble Book Club, COE again invited TRIO students to engage in discussions about how their lives are reflected in literature.

The featured book for 2023 was *Finding Me: A Memoir* by Viola Davis (2022). Acclaimed actress and TRIO Upward Bound alumna, Davis delves into her journey from her impoverished childhood in South Carolina to her rise as a prominent figure in Hollywood. She recounts her experiences of poverty, racism, and self-discovery, shedding light on her struggles with identity and self-worth. Through resilience and determination, she overcomes adversities to become a respected and influential figure in the entertainment industry.



TRIO programs across the country convened local book club chapters during the spring and summer of 2023. Clubs encouraged program participants to read and meet regularly to discuss the book. COE organized virtual talks by seven nationally prominent individuals and registered book clubs engaged in discussions on important themes and ideas explored in the book. Featured speakers in the 2023 Book Club included Professor of AP English and Drama at Central Falls High School Deloris Davis Grant; U.S. Federal Government retiree Dianne Davis Wright; No Kid Hungry Center for Best Practices Senior Vice President Courtney Smith; Clinical Psychologist Ashley Doukas; La Unidad Latina Foundation Executive Director and Jamaica Center for the Arts and Learning Director of Education Juan Carlos Salinas; Director of the Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Program at Louisiana State University Joe R. Givens; and U.S. Department of Education Division of Student Service Senior Director Gaby Watts. Participating programs also engaged locally prominent individuals to facilitate some book club discussions.

Deloris Davis Grant, a co-recipient of COE's 2018 TRIO Family Achievement Award, chaired our Book Club. Grant is an English and Drama teacher at Central Falls High School, where she and her sister Viola attended Upward Bound.

STUDENT ESSAY CHALLENGE PROMPT:

- **Letters to a Bully | One page** | Write a letter to someone who has bullied you. Make sure to identify the act of bullying and how it made you feel.
- **Narrative Essay | One page** | Do you think bullying is a severe problem in your school or community? Why or why not? Create a list of resources for victims of bullying.
- **Script | Two pages** | Create a short script for a stage or film. This script should include two or more characters. Your script can address the following topics: childhood hunger, racism, and self-identity.

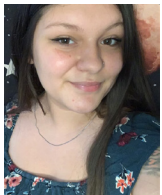
STUDENT ART CHALLENGE PROMPT:

- Themes from *Finding Me* must inspire the artwork.

From these prompts emerged the following student essays and artwork. For more information about other student opportunities from COE, visit coenet.org.

Understood BY CASSANDRA CARDOSA

The digital art I created expresses how I felt while reading and discussing the book *Finding Me* by Viola Davis. I related to a lot of the topics and themes in the book including poverty, trauma, and coming to terms with self identity. Though the book covered some hard to discuss topics, I feel my drawing describes how I felt by showing how I felt understood and didn't need to hold all my thoughts in. I learned so much from this book that helped my self discovery journey and my healing journey. I used a soft pastel like palette to show the comfort I felt in reading about Viola's experiences and how I related to them. I chose to include a book because I felt that reading those words from her point of view really helped me change my own perspective of my past. I used some symbolism such as feathers, flowers and butterflies because to me those things feel feminine and beautiful. In the book Viola talks about how her physical appearance made her think that for so long she wasn't beautiful until she realized that beauty is so many things.

**CASSANDRA CARDOSA**

Talent Search
Sinclair College
Dayton, OH

Letter to My Bully BY CASSANDRA CARDOSO

Dear Bully,

Throughout my childhood, you criticized me. The way I looked, the way I acted, the way I spoke. Even when I begged you for friendship and compassion, you still ruthlessly abused my mind, body, and soul. To this day, I am sometimes insecure about everything you teased me for. I was young, learning, and growing, but that was the past.

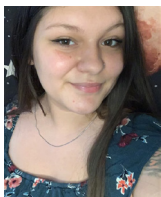
You didn't go to school with me, but your words and the bruises you left did. I was afraid to reach out for help, for someone to know I let this happen. You were bigger, stronger, wiser. You knew all the things to say to get under my skin. I was too tan, my hair too greasy, my shoes too small. You hurt my feelings without ever considering the things I went through at home. I was hurting and sad, but that was the past.

When the words stopped affecting me, you resorted to violence. I wonder if that ever happened to you. Did you get smacked? Did you get your hair pulled? Does the abused become the abuser? It was all unfair for you to take your anger out on me, a little girl, but that was the past.

Now, I don't have the bruises and scratches and scars anymore. Not from you. I still carry your words like titles that define who I am. "Ugly," "Dirty," "Skinny," and "Weak." Am I still those things? No. Though I still carry myself like I'm never afraid to hear those words again. I've grown, I've learned, and I've persevered. I am nothing to you now. Not your play toy. Not your punching bag. Not your emotional toilet to release all of your trauma onto. I will not use my words to hurt others, nor my hands. I will heal the world as I heal myself. You did not get the best of me, and you never will. I've moved on from that part of me because that was the past.

Sincerely,

Your Daughter, Cassandra



CASSANDRA CARDOSA

Talent Search
Sinclair College
Dayton, OH

Dear Self BY JAYNETTE DURHAN

Dear Self,

You are a bully, and it is time for a change. It is no secret that we have had a complex and challenging relationship throughout life. There have been moments when external factors and people have been downright vicious toward me, but no one has ever bullied me the way you do. It is time to face the internal struggles that have held me back and caused immense pain.

Unexpected traumas and circumstances beyond my control have reared their ugly head throughout my life. I have experienced heartbreaks and all-consuming grief, but nothing has managed to inflict the deep wounds you have. You transformed the mirror into a relentless enemy and distorted my perception of self-worth beyond recognition. You amplified the voice of doubt and empowered that voice to destroy any shred of confidence I might muster. You made simple tasks seem insurmountable. You made me fear joy and happiness and added numerous unnecessary difficulties to my life. Breathing became an act of courage instead of being a physiologically effortless process.

Reflecting on our past, I am determined to break free from self-sabotage. Self-doubt is no longer in competition with the voice of reason. I understand that change will not occur overnight but compassion for myself and pride are taking control now.

There will be no more allowing you to degrade my self-esteem. I will nurture it and embrace the imperfections that make me unique. I will recognize my strengths and celebrate my wins. I will no longer succumb to your taunts and criticism; instead, I will listen to the kind, supportive voice you have drowned out for too long. I will lend that voice to others and help them to silence their fear and find their inherent worth.

It is time for you to rest now. Our journey will require patience, compassion, and a commitment to personal growth. I will no longer entertain the negativity, and I will surround myself with positive influences. I will engage in activities that nourish my spirit and inspire someone to face their antagonist.

Moving onward, I will acknowledge your impact on me, but I am reclaiming my power and rewriting our narrative. I will be my own most significant ally and celebrate my victories. I will face the mirror and maybe even smile. Too much time has been wasted doing it your way.

With determination and resilience,

Your Greatest Fear



JAYNETTE DURHAN

Student Support Services
Northwest State Community College
Archbold, OH

Quietly Spoken BY RENATA LARA

CAST:

Amapola-Ines New Student
Miss Nelson 4th Grade Teacher
Emily Student
John Student
Samantha Student

CLASSROOM SETTING:

It is the middle of the day, and all students have just returned from recess, so they are energized. Students quietly whisper as the new student walks in through the door. It is 2000, and there is still quite a bit of racism and prejudice faced by Hispanics as they start their lives in the United States. As the new student makes their way to the front of the class, the students break into a heavy amount of chatter.

Miss Nelson: Okay, class, we have a new student joining us today. (Addressing the new student) Why don't you introduce yourself?

(Amapola-Ines stares at the ground, nervous to look up and face the class)

Miss Nelson: Come on, don't just stand there. Tell us your name. Or do you not know how?

Students start to laugh and make other jokes. The new student slowly lifts her head. The new student takes a deep breath and tries to keep a smile on her face to not show any sign of weakness.

Amapola-Ines: (With an accent) I-I am not good with English, I am still practicing.

Emily: Why are you here if you can't speak English?

Miss Nelson: Now, Emily, don't be too harsh. It is not entirely her fault that her parents did not teach her well.

Amapola-Ines: I am practicing; I will get better. My name is Amapola-Ines Castellano Cortez.

John: What? Miss Nelson, how are we supposed to say that name? It is not fair and too hard.

Amapola-Ines: It is not hard; my name is easy. I can teach you.

Miss Nelson: The only teacher here is me, and John is correct, your name is too long, too difficult.

Emily: Miss Nelson, why don't we just change it? (Students started laughing and blurting out new names)

Amapola-Ines: But my name is easy. Call me Amapola.

Samantha: No, your name is weird. It sounds like "I'm a pola." Are you a polar bear?

(All the students start laughing.)

John: She probably doesn't even know what a polar bear is.

Emily: Let's name her....

Miss Nelson: Alright, kids, that is quite enough. Perhaps our efforts are better spent trying to improve her English. God knows we have no use for students who cannot properly communicate.

Samantha: Let's just call her brown girl.

Amapola-Ines: My name is Amapola-Ines. You can call me Amapola. Please.

John: No one will call you that. Better get used to it, brown girl.

Amapola-Ines: Amapola please.

Miss Nelson (bending down to face the student): I believe it is time for you to make your way to your seat.

As Amapola-Ines makes her way to her seat, all eyes are on her. There are whispers from all the students as they call out new names to give her. Amapola-Ines tries to keep her head held up high, she knows this would not be easy; however, the moment she gets to her seat, she slowly puts her head down on the desk.

Emily (leans across the desk and whispers to Amapola): You will never belong here.

Amapola-Ines: Me quiero ir a casa.



RENATA LARA

Student Support Services
Black Hawk College
Moline, IL

Excerpt from Deathless SCRIPT BY LUIS REYES LOPEZ

All of the following is from the author's imagination.

[Narrator speaks soothingly] Viola Davis once said that memory is deathless. These events are all inspired by actual events; perhaps not in my life nor yours, but others have experienced this so travel through this connected deathless memory and find how we all live in the same cruel life. These are the memories of a thousand people but singular as well.

[Voice fades out as the camera blurs, running across a hallway and stopping at the door numbered 84].

(Mumbled screaming of a fight erupts from behind the door, a man and a woman are arguing, but it's hard to tell what the argument is about).

[Camera moves inside, where a tall man argues with a short woman with two kids huddled in a corner on the floor].

[Woman screaming] Get out! They are my kids! Get the fuck out!

[The woman begins to push the man out with all her strength, they both end up outside, and the voices become mumbled as the camera faces the two siblings, the eldest a small girl hugging her little brother with tears in his eyes as the eldest one turns on the TV.]

[Elder sibling] Look at Bear Grylls going to eat that nasty thing!

[The older sibling tries not to cry while the parents fight, the younger looks at the TV as he tries to cheer his older sister by mimicking Grylls.]

[The door opens to their mother with tears as she crouches down to them.]

[Mother] As you can see, me and your guys' father fought, ok? Everything is fine, now if we ever fight again, turn on the TV like you did or play and take care of your little brother, ok? Also, don't ever open the door unless I tell you. Got it?

[The kids shake their heads, nodding yes to their mother. As she heads back out, she looks at them with despair still in her eyes.]

[Camera fades out to a small room where a boy sits on his bed, bags under his eyes, and tears stream down as he lays his head on his hands.]

[Boy] I need to tell them; what if they don't react as badly as I think? I will try; it can't be that bad, correct?

[The boy thinks back to seeing his friend crying on his bed after he tried to tell his parents he was pansexual.]

[Boy] I can't run and hide forever. If I don't do it today, they will find out someday.

[The boy walks by pictures of him with his family and others of his friends, he imagines them all aflame after telling them the truth, but he throws the thought to the back of his mind as he walks. He sees Jesus on a cross.]

[Boy] If Jesus is as kind as Mom and Dad say he is, he will accept me and be proud of what I do today.

[As he walks to his parent's room, his mother smiles.]

[Mother] Hi, Johan. What's up?

[Boy] Mom, I am gay.

[The mother's face darkens as she yells for her husband. As they fight and scream, the boy gets smaller. As his parents fight, he cries.]

[Boy] I should have stayed silent. I should have been quiet. Why did I speak? I knew this would happen.

[The camera spins to a high school; a boy of color is being kicked at, crying his heart out.

The school is mainly white other than one boy, a Hispanic kid, walking around when the bell rings. A group of people call him over. He tries to avoid them but is forced to walk to them. When he sees a large, strong, athletic boy, he goes to them with his chest cramped by fear.]

[Bully #1] Hello, friend. Why did you tell the teacher that Anderson was bullying you? It's not good to lie.

[Two children restrain a boy who a bully is kicking. Despite the boy's efforts to inform teachers about the bullying and the resulting harm he suffered, the school took no action. Anderson, the bully, remained enrolled in the school. Despite the ongoing physical abuse, the boy's frustration grew as the school failed to intervene or offer assistance. When he inquired about the school's actions, he was simply informed that they couldn't reveal any details. The bullies continued relentlessly attacking him, leaving him severely injured and unable to endure any longer. He was left to suffer without any support or assistance from others. Amidst his pain, he realized that there were limited options to end this torment.]

[The camera goes back to the apartment where the two siblings are. Their mother is nowhere to be seen while the two siblings watch Bear Grylls eat a maggot.]

[Younger sibling] Bear is eating worms! I wonder what that's like.

[Older sibling] Probably doesn't taste good. Imagine that one Good Bar you ate but slimy. I bet that's how it tastes.

[The two siblings laugh as their father, a tall man with little hair, comes in. He smiles when he sees his two children.]

[Father] Come on. Let's go to the park!

[The two kids smile happily as they run off and get dressed. Their father takes them to a large park in St. Paul, where they have a small picnic and happily throw little pine cones at each other. Still, distractions only blind one of the troubles. One day they will run out of pine cones, or they may seem happy even ten years from now, but the troubles still exist, and so do memories, for aloof they are deathless.]

(Spoilers for the ending) The scene shifts to the future. Instead of residing in a small apartment, they live in a medium-sized house. However, the mother and father's arguments persist even in this new setting. Despite their marriage, their challenges have not abated; if anything, they have intensified. Regardless of their marriage's outcome, they still bond with their children. Their difficulties seem unending, and any hope for improvement remains elusive. Yet, by standing together, they find a way to make these trials more bearable, even if they never truly resolve.

This is an excerpt from a longer screenplay.



LUIS REYES LOPEZ

Upward Bound
Dakota County Technical College
Rosemount, MN

Viola Davis Book Theme Presentation BY NORMA ROBINSON



NORMA ROBINSON
Student Support Services
Black Hawk College
Moline, IL

Dear Dad BY MYKAYLA YOUNG

Dear Dad,

I am writing to let everyone know what went down behind closed doors. I am going to start with this. You knew what abuse I had gone through with other kids, my mom, and life in general. Even through all of this, you were my biggest bully. You knew exactly how to get to me. You knew exactly how to get under my skin. Even through all the words, I was still fighting for myself, and you stole my voice by throwing me into the hospital every time I said something back.

When you stopped taking your meds, you were forcing some down my throat when you knew what might happen. My health was manipulated. I was told that I had PCOS (polycystic ovary syndrome). You made me do KETO, thirty carbs daily, one-thousand calories daily. In three weeks, I had lost thirty pounds, and when I brought that up, you bullied my body; you shamed what I had worked for.

When you didn't work, I was to blame. You stole money from me because you didn't want to work and blamed me for the financial hardship. I was the scapegoat of all of your life problems. You didn't spare me, only yourself and Jesse.

You didn't do anything when Jesse would hurt me, you would tell people how strong he is, but you wouldn't think to stop him from touching me or from hitting me. You didn't care when Jesse jumped on top of me and moved his hand up my thigh touching where no person should touch. The worst part is you only saw me pushing him off. After him pushing me down, hitting me to keep me down, jumping on me to keep me down, and me screaming for help, I got in trouble. You heard my screams, and still, you chose to bully the fact that my brother could touch me with no consequences.

You abused your daughter instead of being the "man" and "father" you said you were. You abused your son behind doors too. When your daughter reported you, she was the bad guy for what she saw. Even when I was trying to protect someone I love. I gave you a chance after chance that you weren't who I knew you were deep down. I wanted my father because I couldn't have my mother.

In all reality, you bullied my mind. You bullied my body. You bullied my will to be me. You bullied my emotions. You bullied my dignity. You bullied my friends. You bullied anyone who didn't believe you. You bullied my stories. Most of all, you bullied my closest family just to get to me. You may be my dad, but I will never be able to forgive what you did.

Your Daughter,

Mykayla Young



MYKAYLA YOUNG

Upward Bound
Dakota County Technical College
Rosemount, MN

FOR PRE-COLLEGE YOUTH

COE offers opportunities for low-income, first-generation students to gain experience working on Capitol Hill, studying abroad, and more.

Learn more at coe.net.org.

OPPORTUNITY MATTERS BOOK CLUB

The Opportunity Matters Book Club encourages TRIO participants nationwide to discuss texts exploring themes of opportunity and student identities. TRIO programs create local book club chapters, allowing participants to read and discuss selected books, alongside COE-organized virtual talks for registered clubs to engage with book themes.

JURASSIC WORLD RULE YOUR FUTURE STEAM CURRICULUM

The Jurassic World Rule Your Future STEAM curricula emerged from a initiative between the Council for Opportunity in Education, Internet Essentials from Comcast, and NBCUniversal. Three sets of curriculum were developed by experts in the respective fields of Paleontology, Genetics & DNA, and Animatronics. Each curriculum includes six two-hour lessons and a capstone project. By placing real-world scientific principles in conversation with the fictional story-world of Jurassic World, this program effectively engages students through the collective lenses of Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics.

NATIONAL STUDENT LEADERSHIP CONGRESS

Each summer, COE hosts more than 150 TRIO high school student delegates from Upward Bound, Upward Bound Math-Science, and Talent Search programs across the United States and territories to participate in a rigorous 6-day leadership experience in Washington, D.C. During the Leadership Congress, the delegates sleep, study, and dine on the campus of American University. In addition to meeting their Senators and Representatives on Capitol Hill, delegates participate in community service projects, conflict resolution workshops, and spend much of the program engaged in a Mock Congress. This requires students to research critical policy issues, draft legislation, and debate their peers with their assigned team.



COE sponsors various student opportunities, from a national book club and the annual National Student Leadership Congress for pre-college TRIO students to Washington, D.C. internships and short-term Keith Sherin Global Leaders study abroad for TRIO college students.



STUDENT OPPORTUNITIES

FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS

Contact **Angela Holley** at Angela.Holley@coenet.org.

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KEITH SHERIN GLOBAL LEADERS SEMESTER IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

Through the Keith Sherin Global Leaders Washington Semester Program, one high-achieving TRIO college student is selected each semester and supported with tuition, housing, and a small living stipend. The Washington, D.C. public policy program includes a semester of study at Marquette University's Les Aspin Center and an internship placement in a Congressional office.

KEITH SHERIN GLOBAL LEADERS STUDY ABROAD

The Keith Sherin Global Leaders Program ensures inclusive international opportunities for all students, supporting TRIO college students with leadership skills in a three-to-four-week program. Since 2000, over 350 low-income, first-gen, and disabled students have engaged in COE-sponsored study abroad programs in countries like Great Britain, Mexico, the Netherlands, South Africa, and Spain.

TRIO CAREER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

COE's TRIO Career Development Program (TCDP) offers TRIO SSS and McNair students paid internships and jobs, fostering professional growth through mentoring, skill-building, and connections to premier employers. Through personalized guidance, students develop career plans and gain the preparation needed to vie for coveted roles in both public and private sectors.

THOMAS R. WOLANIN CONGRESSIONAL INTERNSHIP

Each year, a paid internship lasting four to six months is granted to a federal TRIO program participant, including time in COE's Washington, DC office followed by an internship in a Congressional office. Named after the late Thomas R. Wolanin, a strong advocate for first-generation students and access to education, this opportunity benefits recent graduates of TRIO programs.



COE supports diverse student opportunities, including a national book club, Washington, D.C. internships, and short-term Keith Sherin Global Leaders study abroad experiences for TRIO college students.



COE President Maureen Hoyler poses with the Davis family at the 2018 National TRIO Family Achievement Awards in New York, NY.



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