

## SUNDAY

Time to open a new file. Control-S. Done.

Mom and Dad have gone. Today ushers in the reign of Granny Ed and the Evil-Smelling Pooch.

I'm speechless.

Ok, not for long. Am extremely grouchy and even a good rant won't help. I'd talk to Fishbone, but in spite of his tremendous goodwill, he is still "only" a cat and therefore unable to contribute much in the way of verbal advice. He's also busy right now, contemplating the borders between the recently established Cat Zone and Dog Zone. The borders

were Gran's idea. A way to keep the beasts separate until some kind of peace agreement has been reached.

Thisbe, STOP! Write something with a point to it.

Since this is a new file, I should introduce myself. I am an imaginative sort of person, I guess. You wouldn't call me "flamboyant," but I definitely think of myself as "creative." Genetically I am a combination of the fleece-and-corduroy combo (on my dad's side) and the Lycra People (on my mom's side). I don't like Lycra because it's sexy. I like it because it stretches and doesn't fight back when you put it on. I am a bit lazy about my appearance, but I prefer to think of myself as "relaxed."

I do fine in school. I don't stand out but I don't let myself fail, either. With two parents who've been in school forever, I would never live it down. My hair's a disaster and I have mostly given up on it. Unlike my clothes, my hair's been putting up a good fight for years. It actually won years ago, but my friends (or the people who I thought were my friends) never told me. I do not dye my hair blond or iron it flat every morning, like they do.

I love pizza. I don't buy slices; I eat the whole thing. I worship at the temple of carbohydrates and celebrate the tao of toast (or is that "taost"?). I hate meat.

I keep to myself at school, but my mind is a buzz and jumble of hundreds upon hundreds of stories. Teeming, breeding

stories that chatter to me and to one another, rearranging their characters and climates and geographies . . . their societies and centuries and cosmologies . . . at the same time. I am an honest person and would never tell a lie, but my brain is Story Central, churning and bubbling in a big saucepan. One day I'll serve up such a steaming, hot bowl of wickedly nutritious Story Soup that I'll be famous. Just wait.

One of my favorite places to make up stories—or watch them happen, since that's how it feels—is on the bus. I'll sit on the swaying, rattling bus, watching a woman with a sheltie puppy on her lap. The woman spends the whole journey trying to stop the dog from chewing on the large leather buttons on her jacket. I make a mental note of the woman's expression. She's not aggravated but she's firm. The right adjective can be found later.

That's when I start to wonder. I take the adjective-less expression and turn it over in my mind, wondering about the old coat with the big brown buttons. It's vintage, surely? Maybe it belonged to her mother? Maybe this woman—let's call her Elizabeth—lost her mother many years ago and describes her, even now, as a mystery: a woman whose cautious spirit never quite inhabited her body. She never really knew her mother, did she? Wait! Maybe she only wears clothes that once belonged to her mother. Perhaps I might marry Elizabeth to Thaddeus, a man whose personality could be compared to "a dangerous undertow."

And then I will get distracted because there is a girl about

three or four years old kneeling on a seat on the other side of the bus. The girl spends the journey trying to work out how the panels of the bus fit together, tracing every screw and joint with her finger.

These elements—these people, dogs, and buttons—drift through my journal every day, as stories without endings. In my own mind, I call them “bustories,” but I’ve never mentioned this to anyone else. I write in my journal constantly. “Religiously,” my dad says. I hate that. I tell him it’s not worship; it’s a visit.

So, Elizabeth and Thaddeus: Welcome to my journal! How do you like it in here? You are just one tiny sliver of the story pies that fill my day. Now that I’ve started writing the slices down, I really want to share them.

Somebody might like what I write. But who can I show my writing to? I want someone else to read my words. But not these ones! I live in mortal fear of someone else reading my journal.

Dear Reader (unless you are me, but slightly older):  
**STOP READING AND CLOSE THIS FILE!**

*Now to my purpose:*

AUDITION LIST

Role: My Reader

Melinda: No!

Kel: No no no no noooooo

Mom/dad (for they are as one flesh): Definitely not

Mr. Oliver: 10 out of 10 as an English teacher. Zero otherwise  
(and especially in the clothing department)

Granny Ed: Dad’s mom, recently arrived from Seattle with stinky pooch in tow: EEK! No way

I must be a good writer. So many “inventive and surprising” ways to convey a simple no. That’s what last year’s English teacher put on my report card: “Inventive and surprising.” What did she mean? That I surprised her by writing in a language I’d invented? She must have got a little giddy with the thesaurus.

Since I’ve already introduced myself, I guess I should say something about my girls. Melinda and Kel. They have been my friends for years, but lately things have been weird. We used to be like three superheroes, or prima ballerinas, or an all-girl band, or little detectives solving terrible mysteries together. We slept over at Kel’s and toasted marshmallows in her fireplace when it rained on Halloween. Melinda loved to eat. It was first on her list of “10 Things I Love.” We all made those lists. For Melinda, “eating” came way above “ponies,” “butterfly barrettes,” “new ballet shoes,” and “anything yellow.” We hung out in her kitchen and made cookies. Or we made the dough and ate the whole bowl of it raw. Felt sick for days. Melinda and I went to ballet lessons together. That’s where we met Kel. I always thought it would be more fun to stamp my feet instead of pointing my toes, but I went along with it. I got into tap dance later.

We were an excellent team. Melinda with her long blond hair and delicate, dramatic limbs. She looks like a pale, icy pixie with a pointed chin and quick movements. Then there's Kel with her dark hair in a bob. Her whole head of chestnut hair swung together like glossy fabric when she twirled in dance class. She's shorter than Melinda and her face is rounder. She doesn't say much. She's like Melinda's shadow, in all senses. And then there's me. The third amiga with the big head of crazy hair, brown eyes, and short limbs that I can fold up really, really small when I'm watching people and I don't want them to notice. Which is quite a lot of the time.

But let's be clear about this new Era of Weird. It didn't begin with one of those fights you see in the hallway at school. Nobody yelled. Nobody pulled anybody's hair. Nobody slammed a locker door and accused anybody of kissing her boyfriend, or spreading rumors, or "looking at her funny." Nobody threatened to kick anybody's \*ss, and nobody had to go and get a teacher. In other words, there have been no cosmic explosions. Our friendship just seems to be drifting and dribbling away into a distant black hole in the strange solar system that is high school and the after-school universe of endless reality TV shows.

Oh no. I hear Granny Ed and the Evil-Smelling Dog. Better sign off and patrol the borders of Cat Zone.

## Week One, April 2

### MONDAY

*Monday morning again, and it's another English class for the ninth graders. The teacher, Mr. Oliver, notices that Thisbe is trying to pay attention, but she looks preoccupied. Maybe something happened before class? He hopes it wasn't serious. She is a good student, and he doesn't want to see her wander.*

*Today the class is starting a new assignment. The theme is "Audience." They're going to look at stories from the reader's point of view. The students will work in pairs or groups on the same story. They'll read the story or watch a movie adaptation of it, and then explore their reactions to it as its audience. Mr. Oliver says the students should take some risks, be creative, and write their responses in whatever form they want. The finished project is due on the last day of class.*

*There's also an online option, if they wish, with the students at another school. Ms. Patinsky teaches ninth grade at Westerley High. If they want to collaborate with her students, they should refer to Option b in the handout they're about to get. He points to a Web address on the whiteboard.*

*Mr. Oliver expands on his subject: Who is the audience of a story? Does the author always know? Can you tell from the way a story is written? Who do you think J. D. Salinger had in mind*

**Audience Assignment  
Mr. Oliver, English 9  
Johnson High School**

*when he wrote The Catcher in the Rye? Are you the reader he imagined? Why or why not?*

*Thisbe looks up when her teacher mentions J. D. Salinger. She catches his eye only for a second. She's a wonderful writer, and he wants to keep an eye on her. He wants to keep an eye on David, too. David looks a little distant today, wearing headphones around his neck and one of his vintage gas-pump attendant shirts. Having a bad day? Everyone else just looks blank, even the ones taking notes. One kid in the back is spinning his pencil as he lies almost horizontal in his chair, with one leg flung out into the aisle.*

*There's the bell. Time to wrap up.*

**Introduction:**

In this team project, you will have a chance to consider a novel or short story (or movie adaptation) from your own point of view. I'd like you to start with these questions:

- Which novel or short story have you chosen and why? Tell me about the main characters and their situation/conflict. What is interesting about them?
- Where and when is the story set? Whose point of view do we see? (e.g., Is there a narrator?)
- Who is the intended audience of this piece? How does the author's view of his/her audience determine the language, setting, characters, etc. of the story?

**What to do next:**

**Option (a):**

- Please read/view your story and write in your project journal, either during or shortly afterward. Talk to friends and family about your reactions to this work. How did it make you feel? Why did you care about the characters? I want you to think about yourself as a member of the author's audience. Why might this book have been written for you?
- Explore the idea of Audience however you like. How does the audience bring meaning to a story? How is the audience different for a novel, a movie, or a play? Can the audience determine whether or not the story is a success? How?

**Option (b) Online:**

- The same guidelines apply, but your team members would be posting comments to a blog that I've created with a Westerley High English class.
- You may share your words and email addresses, but no photos of yourselves, no home address/telephone numbers, etc. Your messages will be plain text—but I am confident that you don't need all that fancy formatting to create magic with your words. 😊
- To contribute to the site, please go to the address I gave you in class. Your first task is to post a message introducing yourself.

**How you'll be marked:**

- Title or question: 10%. Come up with a brief, focused question or title for your project. Extra points for wit and ingenuity, I promise.
- Project development: 20%. This mark is for all decisions, activities, and teamwork. This includes communication with me about challenges/issues and communication with your team members. If you need help at any time, please ask (instead of festering quietly in a corner . . .).
- Presentation: 20%. Please share your favorite moments from the story and why you have chosen them.
- Final report, including project journal: 50% (or stun me with your brilliance and we'll talk about bonus points). **You have 12 weeks to complete your mission. No late assignments, wimping out, or pathetic excuses, please.**



Mr. Oliver handed out a new project today. We are supposed to do this project in groups. We can also do it on his blog, but I don't think any of the other contestants were interested in door number two. There certainly won't be any surprises about the groups people choose. I already heard Melinda and Kel arranging their little twosome. I have decided to work online; I don't care if everyone else thinks it's geeky. This project is a good idea. It could be interesting to talk to students at another school. Otherwise you start thinking that this school is the whole world. That this is all there is and that these people are so important. Hmm. Maybe if you took all these smart, shiny people and put them in another school, they might not look so great. They might not be powerful. They might NOT be cool.

Today was particularly weird. Out of the blue, right after lunch, Melinda and Kel started calling me Frisbee. Literally at the same moment, as if they'd decided to do it together. They know I hate it. They know that kids in elementary school called me Frisbee to tease me. Right after that, I sat next to Melinda in Mr. Oliver's class while she was doing her smiling, fake I'm-so-interested-please-give-me-an-A thing. I couldn't help myself. I wanted to turn around and poke her with my pencil. HARD. I should have been able to think up something funny and cutting to say back to them, but I couldn't do it in class. That would be stupid. About as stupid as calling me Frisbee. Why do they think it's funny, anyway? All I could say was, "My name's from a BOOK, dummy!"

You'd know that if you'd ever finished reading a book in your life!" and then I felt worse. Fighting with your friends is so pointless. I mean, you should fight with enemies, right? Which makes me wonder. What does that make Melinda and Kel?

I should focus now, and follow Mr. Oliver's instructions to post on his blog. I did my best to keep the assignment paper safe between two books, but it still got squashed. Looks as though the books were having a fight over who got to eat it first. So, I smooth it out with my hands and fold back the corner that was chewed off in the battle. Ok, here we are, at his address. Hmm. Nice template, Mr. Oliver. I wonder if you picked that green and orange border. Looks remarkably like the color scheme on one of your less well-chosen garments, if I may say so.

Time to be brave and introduce myself. Name? Thisbe. Comment? Here goes.



**At 4:30 PM on April 2, Thisbe said:**

Hi everyone! My name is Thisbe and I'm at Johnson High School. I would like to use this site to share my writing with an Audience. I've never done that before. I'm looking for some honest (but gentle!) criticism to help me kick off my brilliant career as a novelist. 😊 Thanks for reading—see you online!

Thisbe



Later today:

Where is everyone? When do I get my chance to be inventive and surprising? I'm stopping by every hour, but the only message there is mine. I have twelve weeks to finish this assignment, and if it goes on like this, there won't be much to say. I really hope someone else logs in.

I'm going to write in my journal and keep the discussion site open in the background. Oh, my journal. My habit, my passion, my obsession, my prized possession. I have written in a journal since I was nine years old. I have spent five years, or approximately 260 weeks, on this particular project so far (sure beats anything Mr. Oliver could give us in English!). It has traveled through many notebooks before it reached its current status, as a well-stocked folder on my hard drive. I spend hours writing in it, itemizing and recording observations about the world, the people I know, and their funny habits.

At this time, I'm mostly writing about myself. Long, rambling essays. I didn't use to—which is just as well—but I have been very preoccupied lately. And now, with my parents away, it makes a great escape from Granny Ed and her evening walks with Chutney. She's staying here for three whole months and I've been *dreading* it. I have never been alone with her for that long. That's another 77 dinners, 78 breakfasts, and 22 lunches with her until my parents get home. I think.



**At 6:30 PM on April 2, Thisbe said:**

Hello everyone! Thisbe here again. That's Thisbe as in THIZ-Bee. I would really like to share my writing with someone. I write poems and lots of stories, but I never finish them—and I NEVER share them. If I knew I had an audience for my writing, I might actually finish something! Could you be my audience? If you join me in this project, I promise to be unusually brave and listen to your comments on my work. We could write up my stories and your comments as our final project. What do you say?

Thisbe

## TUESDAY

Fishbone is keeping me company. It's nice. He usually goes out at night, but with Mom and Dad away, I think he's freaked out. He sat by the front door when they came down with their bags on Sunday. Just looked at them with his big, desperate eyes, twitching the end of his fluffy tail. It was kind of pathetic until I noticed that he was sitting on the mat (the mat is No-Man's-Land, i.e., both Cat Zone and Dog Zone). Hey! The cat sat on the mat. I don't think he saw the humor. Fishbone is a superior feline, but even he doesn't make jokes. It is his only shortcoming.

Mom and Dad must have called about sixteen times before they got to the departure gate. You'd think I didn't even know where the fridge was. I'll be fine. Peanut butter is food. Frozen waffles are a meal. And with Granny Ed here, I won't have a minute to feel lonely. And then there's Chutney (Dog-Smell Central). It definitely won't be quiet. . . . I could

actually do with some loneliness after two weeks of Dad being SO perky about his trip, trying to decide which of his ugly sweaters he should take with him (none of them, I suggested helpfully). And he kept making terrible jokes that attack so fast you can't hide when you see them coming. They just smush you in their stupidity. I'm annoyed just thinking about them. He laughs, wahahahahaha, all pleased with his joke, and my mom shakes her head. Why does she put up with it? I hope he gets whatever it is out of his system while he's away. Then he can come home from England all de-stupidified and be my normal, quiet dad again.

RANDOM THOUGHT: When do fathers stop dressing well? Were they fashionable once? When do they drop off the edge of the fashion radar?

While my folks are away, I will spend every spare moment figuring out the meaning of "Audience." If I'm going to be a real writer, my audience will not be English teachers. It will be made up of many, many readers over my lifetime, including hundreds (thousands?) of people I've never met or even heard of, who will want to pay for my words. What a thought.

For the "project development" part, I'm going to write notes in my journal. I won't show Mr. Oliver my entire journal, of course: I will just copy and paste the useful bits into my assignment afterward. I might have a lot to say about this. Someone will actually read my writing! Who will that be? What will he/she think of me? I'm hoping that while I'm avoiding my grandmother, I'll write something brilliant. I

don't mean "brilliant" in the sense that my parents' work is (according to the blurbs on the back of their books). My mom is working on *Geoffrey Chaucer, Feminism, and the Medieval Bodymind* (whatever *that* means). I love my mom, but I'd like to write something that NORMAL people read. Or any people, in fact.

So . . . about my tiny grandmother. She's nuts. Or, to use her own VERY English word, "bonkers." Tonight she was making pasta sauce in our kitchen, when she spotted a mosquito clinging to the wall above the cabinets. She hates mosquitoes. She made me get a chair so she could reach up and whack it. She grabbed the spoon she'd been using to stir the sauce, climbed up on the chair, and WHAMMO! The mosquito was three-dimensional one second and two the next.

She hadn't cleaned her weapon first, so when she whacked it, the pasta sauce went splattering halfway across the wall. It looked as though she had killed a small bird instead of an insect. Ed thought this was hilarious. And I had to clean it up, naturally. I did it in a hurry because I was VERY hungry by then, but mostly because I was afraid she'd turn off all the lights, grab a flashlight, and pretend to be on *CSI: Vancouver*. I'm not kidding. In my grandmother's world, life is one big comedy. Must be where my dad gets it from. I sure hope he can be serious when he gets to Oxford on this trip and has to eat dinners with somber academics in gowns.

But at least we didn't have to go to a yoga class for grannies. When she's at home in Seattle, she goes three times a week.

So far, she hasn't mentioned finding a class in Vancouver. I live in dread of being dragged along to sit cross-legged and chant with a bunch of old ladies.



**At 6:00 PM on April 3, Thisbe said:**

Hello everyone. Or, since I seem to be the only person here, "Hello, Me!" Right now, my grade for this project is an F. If anyone feels like posting something and raising it to an E, that would be great. In fact, I'd appreciate it so much that I'd make you a cinnamon bun. Just send me your email address, and I'll email it to you.

So you need more of an incentive? All right then. Since I know I'm not the only person with this site address, why don't I do a little dance to keep you shy folk entertained? \*Bends down and laces on tap shoes. Coughs quietly and stands up, squinting into the bright lights.\* Here we go.

\*Shuffle. Shuffle. Toe, heel, toe. Shuffle, stamp. Shuffle, ball change, stamp. TA-DA! Eyes and teeth! Sparkle!\*



I spoke to Mr. Oliver in the hallway at school today. He said it's ok if nobody else logs on to the blog. But that would be pointless! This whole assignment is about Audience, and I'll have to write for someone else—for real—sometime; someone other than my teacher, the Newly Bearded Wizard of Literature Land. He might give me marks for trying, but I'd be really disappointed, and I told him so, while trying not to

stare at his facial hair. I think he would be, too. I think he had big ideas about bringing two schools together. Guess we aren't as willing as he thought. Guess he didn't realize How Wild The West still is, ha ha ha. Sounds like a bad cowboy movie starring Mr. Oliver as the hairy hero in huge pants and leather boots that look as though they've been chewed on and spat out.

Mr. Oliver paused for a moment, then said I would "still have to reflect on my experience." The reflections just have to be "authentic."

Well, NOBODY has replied yet, and it is making me authentically nervous. But now that I have spoken to Mr. Oliver, I must have earned at least 2.5% of that Project Development mark. Yippee.

When I told Melinda and Kel about my plans, they looked at me as if I had said the stupidest thing in the history of the world. Yet another moment when my famously sharp tongue fails me. There I was, ready to level some terrible insult—Kel was wearing that silly superior look she has (mainly because her vocabulary is so small, she probably used up all of her words earlier in the day)—and I think I said something like, "Oh sure, ok then." Killer.

Why is it that when I don't need to be nasty, I can make an incredibly witty observation that turns into a cutting put-down? That hurts someone's feelings. That ruins someone's day. That probably makes her go home and write

about *me* in her journal. About how cruel I am. I didn't want to make a joke in the cafeteria about that blue-haired girl. I don't care if her hair is blue. And she doesn't really look like the girl who blows up into a massive blueberry in Willy Wonka's Chocolate Factory. She's not even slightly round, and if she were, why should I care? Why should I care if she puts stripes in her hair and lies in bed all day eating chocolate? It's not up to me what other people do. . . . I don't know why it seemed to matter before now. I don't want to think about the way her face looked after I made the Violet Beauregard comment.

But I do want to use my own writing for this project. I need to know what other people think of it. I thought my friends knew how important writing is to me. I guess I was wrong.

What will it be like if someone does respond? Will it be strange? Will it be fun? Will it be terrifying? Or jolly, thrilling, super, smashing, and terrific?

Note: These last words were included out of respect for my parents and the English relatives they are staying with. *Sorry*. With whom they are staying.

Wait. What if, after all these years, it's awful to have an audience? Maybe I am the only person who thinks my stories are any good? GULP.

RANDOM THOUGHT: Does nobody else my age want to be a novelist? What is wrong with them?

Well, let's see: Big surprise, Melinda and Kel are making an argument that classic novels should be turned into movies starring Jude Law and Ashton Kutcher. They're planning all of this on Kel's couch, eating popcorn and dreaming of their futures as movie stars. So meaningful. So Authentic. I can't wait for the sequel.

Mr. Oliver, by the way, is not a movie hero. He is not cool. I'm not cool. That's why we get along. I'm just a literature geek like my mom and dad. They quote Shakespeare when they burn the toast. Real world nothing. That's not why I write. If I wanted to be real, I'd log off and "socialize." Yeeuuch.

Nothing from Mom and Dad by email yet. Just a couple more phone calls that sound as though they've melted. Meanwhile, I am spending my nights with Granny Ed, watching TV while she scratches Chutney's head and shouts, "EAT SOMETHING!" at the women in my favorite shows. We were going to go out this evening, but after a fantastic sunny day, it suddenly started raining *really* heavily. Typical Vancouver. You think spring is here and then it pours—and you never know how long this miserable rain will stick around, if it's visiting or here for good. Kind of like Granny Ed and Chut.

## WEDNESDAY

**At 12:30 PM on April 4, Iphis said:**

Hi Thisbe! Liked the dance. You might want to use your arms