

Dear Reader,

Hello.

Isn't that a curious word? With five simple letters, you can change your life. The letters create the word you speak when you greet someone new for the first time. Two syllables with the power to pierce the barrier between total stranger and lifelong friend. Its power is often underestimated, used only in passing, being mixed in with the 'good-day's and 'how-do-you-do's. That single word has the uncanny ability to ignite friendships.

It is the word that you say to your friend when you meet up for lunch. It's what you say when convening for a movie or to go on a road trip. You exclaim it when you see that very same friend for the first time after a long trip. It's what you shakily mumble the night you ask them on a date. Fast forward a year or so, and you will find that the first word gasped when you meet up at that very same street corner where you met with a shimmering ring in your pocket, is a simple, quiet, "Hello."

Words carry power, and locked away within their letters are intricate emotions and beautiful connotations. Yet we belittle them. We cast them aside like a child does old toys. We dull their vibrant textures and tones. Why would you ever paint over the Mona-Lisa or demolish the Taj Mahal? This intrinsic power is tossed and lost in the meaninglessness of everyday melancholy.

This letter you are reading is a simple attempt to bring awareness to the power of words. Throughout this short discourse, I will discuss some of the most important words in my life and how they've altered my perception of the world around me and shaped my identity.

Now don't get me wrong: I'm no psychologist or linguist or anthropologist or etymologist or philosopher. I'm only a high school student. I spend my days in class taking notes on polar bonds and my nights hunched over books, studying for college entrance exams and binge watching hospital dramas on Netflix. I don't have any fancy initials after my name to impress you. However, that's not important. Continue reading at your own risk. If my deficiency of prestige frightens you, then I encourage you to put down this paper right now.

Are you still here? Good. Let's get this excursion started.

In that hopefully enticing introduction that you just read, I discussed Hello. There are three more words I'd like to cover, the first of which is:

Home.

It has many different connotations and everyone has their own interpretation of Home. Whether it is a specific location, community, or state of mind, home is always one thing: harmony. Now, I understand that it's unfair to define one word by using another, so let me attempt to explain my reasoning.

A few months ago I had a bad day. Everyone does. However, everything that could fall apart did. One poorly pulled Jenga block resulted in my entire tower crashing down into chaos. From the moment I walked through the school doors and took my seat, I was ambushed by a test that I had completely forgotten about and hadn't studied for. Now, to a student whose lowest grade is an A, failing a test was a punch to the face, and boy did it sting.

At that point I thought, "Okay, well the worst is over, right? What else could possibly go wrong?"

Thanks to my use of that cliché phrase, the karmic balance of the universe was deeply upset. Just like when any sitcom character utters the above phrase, the floodgates of bad juju burst open.

In mathematics, we were studying how to find the inverses of matrices using determinants and imaginary identities. Don't worry reader; I didn't understand any of it either. That wasn't the bad part. Thanks to some bad breakfast berries, my stomach and I had a disagreement. I proceeded to spend my lunch in harsh discomfort. (I'll spare you the details but let's be honest, we've all been there and know what it's like.)

The rest of the day seemed to brighten up, until I got a ticket on my way home for a broken taillight. After the ticket, I stopped at the grocery store to get some muffins because muffins are a tangible piece of heaven. When buying the muffins, a store clerk thought that I placed something from the store in my pockets, so I was detained, questioned, and almost arrested. Of course I wasn't guilty, and after some video surveillance digging, I shakily walked back into freedom. Finally, as the icing on the cake, I found out that my grandmother, who I was extremely close to, had been defeated a few hours earlier by cancer after battling it for five very grueling, but unsuccessful years.

By the time I had stumbled into my house, I felt as if my soul had been surrounded, blindfolded, hogtied, beaten, and slowly cut up into little pieces that were then squashed into a tiny little ball. I was utterly defeated. Luckily, I remembered that I was home. Now, when I say home, I don't mean my house. Although my house is nice, it's not what I consider home. Home is a little ways away from my house. If you walk from my house across the street, you'll find a little dirt path. If you proceed on that path, you'll find a mountainside on your right. Proceed upwards for five minutes, and crawl between a crack in two boulders into a clearing. Welcome to my home.

The clearing is about a meter long in any direction, with barely enough space to lie down. Trees have grown around the clearing, creating an impenetrable dome. Their branches are intertwined in a warm immortal embrace, protecting me from the troubles of the world. A small opening between two of the branches provides a window to the sky and all of its beauty. You are able to observe the clouds as they dance and twirl into majestic figures in the sky. If one looks long enough, you can see the constellations come alive and joust with one another, reminiscent of a fireworks show. You can lie down and be protected on all sides. To me, it feels as if I'm being embraced by the world and quietly being told that everything is going to be all right.

After my extremely inauspicious day, my home was able to bring me back into harmony. And this is what I think home is. Home is a place where, no matter how tangled the threads of your life get, you can go to unwind and feel in tune with the very tapestry of life. Most people think that they can only have one home, but to me that is incredibly fallacious. I know that I have more than one; the clearing that I described above is only one of them.

My home is also Colorado, with its teeming mountains blanketed in soft forests and the babbling brooks that slither through the valleys. The snow-capped peaks are always standing tall in the background: you might call them silent guardians. Even when you're indoors, you know that they're always there. They are the big siblings I've always wanted, but could never have.

My home is also my bed, accompanied with my slumbering cat, nestled deep into the crook of my legs. The warm glow from the lamp casts a fiery glow on the walls, with the shadows flickering in a rhythmic motion. A computer is set upon my lap. The screen displays episodes of sitcoms, whose poorly written lines and exaggerated dramas always seem to drive away the frets of the day from my brain.

Finally, my home is also my mind: The outlook I bring to my experiences. We've all experienced those imperfect days, but that's no excuse to pout. We are only on this planet for a limited time and once our clock runs out, we're done. There's no such thing as a second chance. So I always remember to look at the bright side of things. So what if I had a bad day? There's nothing I can do to change it. Besides, it'll make a wonderful story someday. I learned an important lesson about changing taillights and never wearing baggy coats in stores. Most importantly, I can put my heart at ease knowing that my grandmother has finally escaped constant, excruciating pain. Whenever I feel down, I just remember the very wise words of Eleanor Roosevelt: "Yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, but today is a gift. That is why they call it the present."

Now, I've just spent 1,500 plus words rambling about my version of Home. Although I said that I would attempt to define the deeper meaning of the word, the truth is that I lied to you. You can't define Home because your Home is different than mine. I have four different versions, while you may only have one or maybe seven. All that I ask is that you observe

yourself, and make a note when you feel a wave of belonging wash over every particle of your being because once you know you're home, nothing can take it away from you. It's up to you to protect it at all costs.

Love.

What is Love? The dictionary defines Love as "an intense feeling of deep affection." In simple terms, that is correct. But I'd like to add to that. Love is an intense, immeasurable feeling of deep affection and unquestionable devotion. Love is absolute. Love isn't an irrational number, it doesn't come in halves or eighths. You either have it or you don't. People of this generation tend to overuse and waste it, throwing it around willy nilly.

When a group of teenaged girls at Starbucks explains how they "L-O-V-E" Becky's new sweater, it's just wrong. A more appropriate phrase would be to "enjoy," or to "like," or to "be fond of." Come on people, if you overuse a word, it loses its meaning! With everyone throwing it around like Oprah does with gifts, it's no longer special.

Telling your husband "I Love you" means nothing nowadays if you also use Love to describe your pants or a floor. No wonder 50 percent of marriages end in divorce.

Human emotion is complicated, and expressing it is even more so. The word Love was created to describe the highest form of appreciation towards something, and nothing short of that. So wake up people, and start using Love responsibly.

Now, if I haven't bored you to sleep yet, there's one more word I'd like to discuss with thee. And yes, I really did just use the word thee. I don't care if it's outdated and nerdy. I'm the writer and you're the reader, so if you haven't given up on this paper yet, you'll just have to deal with it.

Safe.

Protection from external threats and internal corruption is paramount for our society. We all want to be safe. We want to feel impervious to all forces. We want to protect what we hold most dear. For many people, that would be money. For others, it might be a photo album or a loved one. (When that word is used appropriately of course!)

We want to be as safe as possible, so society twists and turns through extraneous measures to do so. Our military is the largest in the world. We spend billions of dollars on weapon development every year. Anyone can buy a gun if they're resourceful enough. Yet with all this protection, it's ironic how we are failing to keep the most important thing to us safe: the environment.

People are animals, despite how much we try to deny it. At our core, we are simple mammals with opposable thumbs and a prefrontal cortex. With the power of resourcefulness and innovation we've managed to escape the food chain, and yet we forget how important our role in it is. We are the protectors of nature. Our duty is to keep it safe because we are equally dependent on the soil that grows the grass that feeds the cattle that will eventually feeds us. Without any one piece, the rest of the puzzle wouldn't come together.

With the advance of technology and science, we are continuing to develop the natural resources around us, not always taking into consideration the consequences of those actions. Some (COUGH) minor (COUGH) examples would be the BP oil spill, the Chernobyl meltdown, toxic waste in rivers, cancer alleys, and the influx of CO₂ in the atmosphere possibly leading to melting ice caps and the extinction of numerous species, possibly even our own.

We've already discussed the concept of home and how I deeply enjoy venturing out into the woods and experiencing the harmony of nature. However, that concept would be considered void if there wasn't a place to call home. In order to go out and experience my home, I have to get in a car that exhales invisible gas into the atmosphere that lights a match and holds it to the earth's crown, causing the ice caps to melt.

What can we do about this? In my humble opinion, we need to recognize the fragility of nature and the fact that we are dependent on its preservation. However, we can't just stop using the land without drastic consequences because we must take from it to survive. Thus, as we continue to develop our resources, we need to take into consideration how our actions will affect the people and environment around us. We need to conserve our resources with future generations in mind.

When deciding whether or not to murder a forest, we must ask ourselves, "Will my great-great-great-great-great-great-great-grandchildren be able to use this resource with its current rate of consumption? Will future generations be able to meander aimlessly in these woods and find solace from the intricacies of life like I have done nearly every day?" If the answer is no, then stop using it and find a better way to get what you want.

Every person, those who live in the present and those who will live 200 years from now, deserve to have a place to call home. This planet is the only home that we have, and we need to protect it and keep it safe because we aren't going to get a second one. We spend our days protecting ourselves from the threat of other humans. But I, dear reader, implore you to expand your concept of safety to include not just your home, but everyone else's. Ultimately we all share the same home: Earth.

Okay, I'll admit that my pontification has taken up enough of your time. I would like to sincerely thank you for reading all of this letter with open eyes (and hopefully an open mind). I understand that I'm an under-qualified person to be discussing the intricacies of humanity. Just

because I've expressed my opinion doesn't mean that I'm correct, or incorrect. That is for you to decide. I've shared the words Hello, Home, Love, and Safe with you, and I'm going to leave you with one more to decipher...

Goodbye.

Sincerely,

Nick Tarasewicz

Abstract



In this essay, I define my sense of place in many different ways with the main overarching relationship to place being a spiritual one. Although I feel attached to certain physical locations, the reason I do so is because of the psychological implications that the place has upon me. As a result, my community attachment is a combination of rootedness and relativity. This can be seen in my essay when I discuss how, “my home is also my mind, the outlook that I bring to my experiences. We’ve all experienced those very imperfect

days, but that’s no excuse to put.” My environmental ethic is a unique blend of sustainability, conservationism, instrumental value, and the land ethic. This is shown when I discuss how, “we need to recognize the fragility of nature and the fact that we are dependent on its preservation. However, we can’t just stop using the land without drastic consequences because we must take from it to survive. As we continue to develop our resources, we need to take into consideration how our actions will affect the people and environment around us. We need to conserve our resources with future generations in mind.”