**Assignment for Wednesday, June 7th:**

Read, annotate, and reflect on the following personal statements. Please use these questions to inform your reading, reflection, and note taking. When you are done, write a short summary / analysis of each essay in your spiral notebook that addresses the three questions listed below (one paragraph per essay – three paragraphs total).

* What are the strengths of this personal statement? Think theme, style, voice, structure, etc.
* What are the weaknesses of this personal statement?
* What do we learn about the author of each essay?

**Essay 1**

Time and again, I'm asked how I survive without a cellphone. When a friend says something funny, how do I file it away for later? When inspiration strikes on the bus to school, how do I snatch it out of the air and preserve it for my next story before it fades away? When I encounter an especially beautiful sunset during a run, how do I record it for posterity? To a proud Luddite like me, the answer couldn't be simpler: I pull out a pocket-sized notebook, the kind I've kept on my person at all times ever since middle school, and capture the moment in a quick scrawl or sketch.

Taken together, my collection of notebooks--all shaped and colored differently, many with covers stained by ink or rainwater, some so worn out from constant use that they barely stay shut anymore--gives a complete account of the last four years of my life. I can trace the archaeology of my handwriting from the sturdy red notebook I first picked up in eighth grade to the half-empty sketchbook I've been working my way through since spring. Here, in the green notepad from 2015, I can find a jazz riff that was stuck in my head, notated on a hastily traced-out musical staff. There, in the black notebook from the year prior, is a sketch of the skyline of New York, which, for all its roughness, captures my memories of mingled awe and claustrophobia more perfectly than a photograph ever could.

These fragments of my life, all preserved in a shorthand somewhere between cursive and the jagged readings of a seismograph, don't just record the world around me. They capture how I react to the world, how I experience it and interact with it. A phone runs the risk of distracting its user from the rest of the world, but my notebooks allow me to engage with my surroundings--to respond to them and learn from them.

My approach to the accretion of knowledge is, to say the least, nontraditional. Much as I can learn from books and classes, the world around me has just as much to teach me if I take the time to pay attention. When I jot down a line from a poem or scribble out a description of a lake during a hike, in a sense I'm taking notes on life, improving my understanding in some tiny way of the world I live in.

One of my earliest notebooks ends with a long series of inscriptions from a group of students from Beijing, Hong Kong, Tokyo, and Seoul whom I met at a writers' workshop one summer. At the time, we compiled the doodles, signatures, and reminiscences to amuse one another, but as the years have passed they've taken on a different meaning: these are fragments of people I may never see again, flashes of insight into how they saw the world. I don't have many photos, but I don't need them.

In the same way, my scribblings from years past serve as gentle reminders of who I used to be. Like anyone, I change as I grow, but my expanding collection of notebooks ensures I never lose track of where I began. Weaving through my notes on life is a trail, meandering but distinct, that leads from my past and points with ever greater clarity toward the person I someday will become.

So, when I come to the top of a hill and reach for my notebook to sketch out the valley sprawling at my feet, it's not because I forgot my cellphone. It's because I want to file this moment away for later and inch just a little closer to understanding myself.

**Essay 2**

I decided we needed a conference. I jogged out to the mound like it was a normal visit, but once I reached the infield cutout I realized I had nothing to say. Rob raised his eyebrow at me, expecting something, anything, to come from my mouth. I just looked at him, thinking.

All the usual signs were there. Minutes before, he had thrown his third straight pitch for a ball and then kicked the dirt. I threw him the ball back and he snatched it viciously with his glove. He took one quick lap around the mound and pushed dirt back in the hole with his cleat, as if the mound were to blame for his performance. The next pitch was ball four. He put his hands on his knees and every so often peeked up to look at the ump. When he lifted his head up, I could see his jaws clench. The veins in his neck began to bulge. I pushed my arms down to my sides, with my palms in the dirt. This was our sign for him to calm down, but Rob wasn't looking. He finally stopped and got up, but looked at his father in the stands, not at me. I think he wanted daddy to save him. He couldn't help him though, not today, not while he's pitching, not ever.

The implosion is the tipping point for a pitcher, the moment in time where everything goes downhill. It is not a physical phenomenon. The velocity is still there, but the will to spot his pitches is gone. He no longer believe she has it, so he gets wild, throwing too high for no better reason than the last pitch was too low. When he does manage to throw a strike, he leaves it right down the middle, and it gets creamed. He loses that fearless demeanor he started the game with, pitching defensively instead of attacking. His will to succeed is gone.

As the catcher, I am the only one who can prevent the implosion. The pitcher closes himself off from his coaches and other teammates, but opens himself up to me. I am conveniently located between his two worst enemies--home plate and the umpire--so I become his only friend. He allows me to receive his pitches, and knows I will put my body on the line to bail him out when he spikes a pitch into the dirt. When I come to the mound to talk with him, he listens, as long as I have something to say.

Unfortunately, that day I still had nothing. Just to fill the silence, I asked him about the cute girl sitting in the third row in the bleachers behind the dugout. He looked away, but I thought I saw him fighting back a smile. I kept at it. "Yeah don't worry about it, she likes me better anyway. Girls love a guy in a chest protector. "This time, a laugh. It was all I needed to hear. I sprinted back behind the plate before he could decide to sulk again, and set up for the next pitch. Strike one.

**Essay 3**

He finally did it as we stood awkwardly on my porch after our date at Tastee- Freez, Ice Cream. My first kiss. Underwhelming but with a boy I really liked (especially because he bought me a vanilla-orange twist). Immediately after, I scrambled up my creaky, wooden stairs. A kiss in middle school warranted a sleepover in my basement with my friends; full of analyzing details and binging on Sour Patch Kids.

Or maybe it happened after the homecoming football game freshman year. I was under the bleachers in the almost pitch dark with a guy I used to play with on the swings. After working through biology with him all semester, we started to see past the cooties.

Maybe it was at a Halloween party junior year with a boy dressed in the worst Batman costume I'd ever seen. It didn't mean as much as I had imagined but it eased a lot of my nagging apprehension.

Or maybe none of these things happened.

Maybe I've somehow made it to my senior year having never kissed a boy. Junior prom? Nothing. Summer before senior year? Nada. Not after the dance this year, nor at the movies the next weekend. So despite being a seventeen and a half year old girl, I'm still new at this and nervous beyond my wits.

I guess kissing boys might just be my Kryptonite, my sword in the stone, the villain I have to overcome with my two best friends at my side and a lightning bolt on my forehead. There could be worse things to have to deal with. I know. I worry about limit definitions, the atomic mass of calcium, leaving my small town, medical school, and the people in the world who don't have clean water. On top of that, I worry about kissing.

Unintentionally, I've developed some valuable skills throughout the process. I've never fallen apart crying over a text, or dropped everything for an invitation to go hiking at Thacher Park. Independent from the moment I could voice that I wanted to ' do it by self' when I was two, I've always been the one to say 'You deserve better,' a universal theme when my friends' relationships go badly.

Most importantly, though, I've learned to value my friends. I watch them travel through relationships in what seem like revolving doors, brief and inconstant, but despite the changing of the guard, we have stuck together through bad coaches, tough classes, unfair rules, ridiculous standards, high expectations, and some very, very dumb boys. We hunker down and weather the seemingly endless storm that is high school.

Someday I'll look back on my life in high school and this worry will seem trivial and childish. Like everyone else, I'll inevitably encounter far greater issues than the lack of a peck on my mildly chapped lips. I'll be worrying about anew patient I have, or how to perform a difficult surgery, or how to make my kids listen when I tell them TV will rot their brains. It's not really about snogging, or relationships, or even boys. It's about growing up and finding my own path to do that, and being okay with wherever that path takes me.

Adolescence is kind of like making it to the major leagues. The players that are good enough will make it to the bigs, but sometimes it takes a convoluted path through the minors to get there. I know eventually we'll all get to college, find jobs, have families, and create the rest of our lives. But until then, if you know any seventeen-year-old boys who understand my love of physics or hot wings, or that sometimes I just want to read a book, send them my way.