



BRAIN STUFF AND MOUTH PARTS

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Imagine I am an alien. I might not have a mouth part. I grew up on a small planet near the star named Betelgeuse. Imagine, if you will, that as an alien, I live forever, never aging, always watching since the dawn of human kind. I watched your ancestors grow and begin to communicate with your best friends' ancestors. Communication was the greatest discovery for humans. Suddenly a whole new world was open to these strange bipeds, and they were able to share their experiences. Just think! To be able to communicate their thoughts in sounds made by throat, tongue, and lips. Still these creatures had no basis on which sounds meant what, and many confrontations were brought about because of this.

Imagine thousands of years have passed. I might not have a mouth part. Many languages have been born into the world, and some of them have died midway through childhood. Some cultures have begun to use markings, small arbitrary symbols to represent sounds or even ideas. People who understood these symbols wrote them down on large pieces of parchment and tucked them away in large archives for others to read in the future. Then there was a fire, and many of the writings were burned. Despite this, writing has not died, and now, as an alien who lives forever, I spend time watching distressed students poring over unfinished papers.

Imagine your mind. It is connected to your brain with thin rivulets of consciousness. It has a metaphorical mouth part. There are many things about the mind that are confusing: the ways you think, feel, and express yourself through voice and body. Contradictory thoughts often swirl together within it, pooling at the tip of its metaphorical tongue. These thoughts are abstract, and there are few ways, if any, to express them. Take a breath. Untangle those threads of mind-matter that are cumbersome and focus on a single string, a single thought. Find that it is not so difficult to understand this thought now. It is part of you, so quickly press pen to paper. Imagine I am an alien. I might not have a mouth part. From my small planet near the star of Betelgeuse, I witness extraordinary variety. I watch as each touches pen to paper or clicks upon their computer processors. I watch and see that everyone's paper does not only start and end differently but is created in a different fashion. The human's writing process is diverse, ever changing. Apparently writing is always difficult no matter who you are. The process from thought to language to paper is as varied in humans as the ice crystals that make up the rings of Saturn.

Imagine a thought. It is yours. It is the one thought that is your complete understanding of your self, your body, your room, house, school, family and friends, your whole reality (if there is such a thing). Now your professor has asked you to write an open-ended paper that encompasses all of these things. This thought that is so much you, more than anything else, is now asked to become language. Suddenly this thought needs to be translated, as if this thought is sand and English is a sieve. You cannot speak written language onto the page. Slowly sieve your thought, *yourself* through a pen, sprinkling it onto paper. Find that your writing is not the same. There is substance lost in every word, and this frustrates you. Flip through your dictionary or thesaurus that is always nearby to find the perfect word. It is an arduous and difficult process, but your brain stuff is equal to it; slowly a semblance of your thought is laid down upon the page.

Imagine a paper and the perceived fear you or others often have about writing. Imagine that paper, that work of yourself you have put so much time into, as a form of communication. Realize the constraints the English language presses upon its people like a saturated ink stamp. Realize that a written work is nothing more than a thought that has been translated into language, into English, into an arbitrary symbol you place upon the utter whiteness of the page. Please, do not lose hope. The need to communicate in new and exciting ways upon the page is more important than ever, and it is always a creative process—deciphering one's own thoughts.

Imagine you are finished. You are ready to use your mouth part to talk about your open-ended paper. You feel calm; the process of your written word has given you a deeper understanding of the thoughts which spawned it. The convoluted and contradictory thoughts that swirled around your mind are now in order, filed away as it were, within the grooves of your brain. Now realize that through writing and the written language there is new understanding. What once seemed so complex is now communicable. You see now that writing is not only a process of communication but also a process of internal reflection. You are ready. Print out your paper; it is almost class time.

Imagine you are in class. Your peers all have mouth parts. They are preparing to look at your paper, that part of you that is so much your thoughts yet really none at all. Imagine another person climbing in and around your brain gears and commenting on your synapses as if they understand the intricate concepts revolving there. Just imagine what your brain stuff is doing when you decide to write a letter, a word, or a sentence. Imagine the mental gears turning, synapses firing, and any other number of brain functions striving to turn your thoughts inexplicably into language. You can change this, rephrase that, but in the end you realize it can never be finished, never be perfect. The best you can do is give thought and look within your process of word craft. Take some extra time to marvel at what a miraculous invention the written word is. Once you are content with a piece, put it away, lay it aside; for you have found that a piece of writing is never finished; it's just put away and stored for later, much like the archives that were burned so long ago. As you think of it: the end is only a product of time; finished, a product of now. It is something you decide, not your classmates and certainly not your professor.

So remember: when you feel unsure of where to start or when to end, there is no right way to begin expression. There is merely your way, which you will find is the only way, the best way that works for you. For just as each person is different so is every writing process, and as the rings of Saturn

are always changing so it is with humans. Now take a breath and cap the pen or fold down your laptop. I see from my small planet near the star of Betelgeuse that it is a beautiful day, one that will not last forever.