Examples of Parallelism from *This I Believe* Essays

Do Now Responses – Feb. 14, 2018

From Tony Hawk’s “Do What You Love”

* “It was a kid’s fad, a waste of time, a dangerous pursuit, a crime.”
  + Hawk is showing the wide range, but constant disapproval, of people’s views on professional skateboarding.
* “I’ve come to realize that the only way to master something is to keep at it—despite the bloody knees, despite the twisted ankles, despite the mocking crowds.”
  + Hawk explains the obstacles that he has overcome in order to pursue what he loves. The first two items identify physical pain, while the third item shifts to emotional pain.
* “And although I have many job titles—CEO, Executive Producer, Senior Consultant, Foundation Chairman, Bad Actor—the one I am proud of is ‘Professional Skateboarder.’”
  + Hawk lists his many accomplishments. The list shows that he has accomplished a lot and includes several titles that sound important; however, he says he is most proud of being a skateboarder, the title that many people have dismissed as “a fad” or “a waste of time.” He also includes “bad actor” at the end of his list or important sounding jobs to add some humor to the essay.

From Brian Grazer’s “Disrupting My Comfort Zone”

* “…I made a list of people I thought it would be good to meet. Not people who could give me a job or a deal, but people who could shake me up, teach me something, challenge my ideas about myself and the world.”
  + Grazer describes the people he wants to meet and they ways he wants those people to affect him. His use of action verbs—shake, teach, challenge—represent change or disruption, and that’s the central message of his story.
* “So I started calling up experts in all kinds of fields: trial lawyers, neurosurgeons, CIA agents, embryologists, firewalkers, police chiefs, hypnotists, forensic anthropologists, and even presidents.”
  + Grazer includes a long list of experts in a variety of fields to show how far he has gone to “disrupt his comfort zone” and how he wants to learn about anything and everything.

From Jane Hamill’s “A Grown-Up Barbie”

* “The blond-haired, blue-eyed Malibu Barbie I loved looked nothing like my red-haired, freckled self.”
  + Hamill contrasts the image of the Barbie with her appearance to show that even though she may not fit the stereotype, Barbie has inspired her to be whatever she wanted to be.
* “I learned to sew so I could make outfits for Barbie and her friends, who took turns being the airline pilot, the doctor, the fashion designer.”
  + Hamill shows Barbie’s endless possibilities for careers; similarly, she learned she could be whatever she wants.
* “For me, as a kid, Barbie was about cool clothes, a cool job, cool friends, and cool accessories: the airplane, the apartment building, and the camper.”
  + Hamill’s repetition of the word “cool” emphasizes what Barbie was all about—being cool and having it all, the perfect life. Also, she uses parallel structure when she lists the three possessions. This are all big ticket items that show the variety of Barbie’s life. She was going places—from the city to the wilderness; no place was off-limits. She lists multiple items emphasizing the materialistic mindset she once had.

From Ivory Harlow’s “Peace Begins with One Person”

* “They come in the front door, wander to the counter, pick up the menu, and look around the diner for something they can’t short-order: a connection.”
  + Harlow demonstrates how dull and aimless her customers’ lives are without a human connection.
* “In an age of online chat, online shopping, and even online school, it’s no wonder people come into the diner starving for human connection.”
  + Harlow uses parallelism to emphasize how most people nowadays use the internet to connect when they could connect in person. The internet is substituting for and detracting from genuine human relationships.
* “This kind of thing gets me wondering if something as simple as a short stack of pancakes can bring about a small shift in society.”
  + Harlow balances “a short stack of pancakes” with “a small shift in society.” Even though she describes both as small, the reader understands the small shift in society is an important move; she demonstrates how seemingly small acts can create a big change.

From David Copperfield’s “The Gift of Kindness”

* “Kindness is taken for weakness, rube-ishness, stupidity.”
  + Copperfield emphasizes the negative associations people make with being kind.

From Yasir Billoo’s “The Right to Be Fully American”

* “When I’m in America, my beloved home, I find myself defending Islam, my beautiful religion.”
  + Billoo balances two parts of himself – being American and being Muslim—to demonstrate the conflict that arises from being both.

From Quique Aviles’ “I Will Take My Voice Back”

* “Crack is a killer. Crack turns a lady bug in your house into a hungry rat. Crack transports you into paranoid obsession.”
  + Aviles repeats “crack” to demonstrate that the drug is all-powerful and all-consuming.
* “I can function on drug street corners and at wine-sipping theater receptions.”
  + Aviles uses parallel structure to contrast the “duality” of his life that his drug addiction has created. He tries to maintain the appearance of a sophisticated writer and performer, represented by the “wine-sipping theater receptions,” but he struggles with the darker side of life, represented by the “drug street corners.”
* “I am also a crack addict and an alcoholic, and that’s how a lot of people see me: a pipe head, a drunk, a problem, an epidemic, a disaster area.”
  + Aviles uses parallelism to reflect that he is a really worn down man that is losing a lot. People don’t see him as a valuable person; they see him only as a loser. Much of the essay is about how people perceive him and who he really is, so this list describes how people view drug addicts.
* “I want to keep playing with verbs / Write letters to old friends / And ask them to keep writing / I want to hold on to the lives of consonants and vowels.”
  + Aviles lists his desire to keep writing as a way of connecting with others because he wants to live rather than allow his crack addiction to kill him. The list emphasizes the connection between his words and his recovery.

From Bela Fleck’s “Doing Things My Own Way”

* “When I’m at work—whether it is writing, practicing, or editing and mixing CDs—I obsess.”
  + Fleck’s repetition of –ing verbs emphasize that he obsesses over every part of his craft—from the beginning stages through the finishing stages.

From Joshua Yuchasz’s “We’re All Different in Our Own Ways”

* “What if everyone talked the same, acted the same, listened to the same music, and watched the same TV programs?”
  + Yuchasz causes the reader to think about what life would be like if everyone were the same—dull. The repetition of “the same” reflects the monotony of this type of world.

From Catherine Royce’s “I Always Have a Choice”

* “Ultimately, I will be unable to move, to speak, and, finally, to breathe.”
  + Royce uses parallelism to emphasize the extent of her condition and what her life will eventually come to demonstrate the importance of making good choices and making every day count. Instead of simply saying that ALS is going to kill her, she provides the process of her body with ALS.
* “Everything I have ever known about myself—how I look, how I act, how I interact with the world—is rapidly and radically changing.”
  + Again, Royce is showing how her condition has impacted every aspect of her life—from her physical appearance to her behavior, from herself as an individual to her interactions with others.