

Editor's Note

For “My Green Light,” Sofia Rodriguez-Mata plays with an image from Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*. How do you feel about her use of this image? Is it accessible to you (even if you haven’t read the book)? What might that say about Rodriguez-Mata’s conception of her audience? The green light serves as one of the major organizing principles of the essay. If you examine where the image is used, would it help to integrate the image differently, or is it working well as it is? Consider the conclusion. How does the author signal to the reader that she is wrapping things up? Does it feel like an appropriate end to you, or are you surprised that it’s over?

My Green Light

Sofia Rodriguez-Mata

“Class, your new writing assignment will be a fifteen page essay on the symbols, motifs, and themes in *The Great Gatsby*.” Cue the mumbled profanities and groans from twenty five students, including myself. I would fight back the impulse to get up and ask “Who honestly thinks Fitzgerald wrote this with the hopes that we’d compare Gatsby’s green light to the American dream? What if he just wrote this to spite his bratty wife Zelda?” Needless to say, I’d snap a pencil or two when I heard ‘writing assignment.’ My writing experience in high school involved three steps: Remembering an essay was due, usually ten hours before the deadline, skimming through Spark Notes, and going on a two or more hour writing frenzy. A day or so later I would get the essay back with a large red A on the right hand corner and proceed to shoving it into my backpack. It’s not that I was ungrateful; high school writing had just killed my love for writing. I was a drone, slave to the Jane Schaffer writing method. I probably would have continued sleep walking if it were not for my 11th grade English teacher, Ms. Arreola. Ms. Arreola challenged me to be an involved writer by snapping me away from my apathetic state; her criticism and high expectations built my skill as a writer and made me consider each written assignment as an attachment of myself.

Coming to English class junior year was everyone’s worst nightmare. At least one student cried during class, and if not, we all sank as low as possible in our chairs. I could no longer daydream during class from fear of being made a fool out of. I quickly learned to be fully prepared for class; preparation involved writing notes and researching even the simplest of readings. Ms. Arreola was critical during class; she would not accept an uneducated answer, she demanded in depth and well thought

out responses. I began to analyze and pull apart the novels we read at any time, sometimes in the shower, before I went to sleep, and even during conversations with friends. To write rough drafts, I would create outlines of the plot and pair them together with the scribbled notes I wrote on novels. Eventually my thought process became the most important and time-consuming step in writing.

When I finally had to get around to writing successful final drafts, I needed complete peace. I remember driving myself early in the morning to Barnes and Noble and plopping down on a sofa along with my cup of coffee to write. Something about the hundreds of books and the ideas circulating in them inspired me. Instead of writing for a few hours, I would stay the whole day, making sure my writing was as close to perfect as I could get it. I would often panic, wondering what Ms. Arreola would think of my responses. The extra stress definitely made me work harder. My essays became an extension on my character; a poorly written essay meant I was a hollow person and an “A” essay meant I was an individual with unique ideas. For the first time ever, I was going to a teacher for feedback on my writing. The more I visited Ms. Arreola, the more I began to love coming to class. I loved the challenge it brought and the amount of knowledge she had to share with me.

Writing was finally a free expression of art, not just a requirement. I thought before I wrote and read before I turned anything in. In a way I began to do what I should have done from the start. The grades on my essays went from scoring low grades to high grades. Just like Gatsby molded and built himself up to reach his green light, so did I. My writing style has continued to morph since junior year. Currently, I view writing assignments as tests of my skills and seek to improve every time I write something new. The green light in *The Great Gatsby* symbolized Gatsby's hopes and the American dream. To me, the green light is my hope to continue on my path to becoming a successful writer.

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