

Emil Damji



Jacob Lawrence, "War Series: The Letter" (1946), [Whitney Museum of American Art](#)

Decision Day

It starts before you're old enough to understand
Plan, Prepare, Position
A well-orchestrated performance
In anticipation of Decision Day

Sports and activities - just for fun...
Piano or violin - you can choose
Explore a new language - Latin, Mandarin, Arabic...
In anticipation of Decision Day

Pressure mounts

Chest pains and panic attacks from an imperfect grade
Retake, Revise, Redo
Nothing is ever good enough
In anticipation of Decision Day

Anxiety threatens to steal your breath

"Am I good enough?"
Seeps into your soul and invades your sleep
More: service hours, awards, activities, leadership roles...
In anticipation of Decision Day

Depression envelops your self-worth

Hearing that the "perfect" student was rejected
Scrolling through acceptance reels on Instagram
Preparing for the silent judgment of College
Sweatshirt Day
Will I make it through Decision Day?

The Day of Decision

The letter arrives
After years of writing
Essays, Poems, Abstracts
Words, Words, Words
Only one word matters

Artist's Statement

This painting stood out to me because of its framing, simplicity, and the mood it creates. I wasn't exactly sure what the painting was about until I read the title, "War Stories: The Letter." I saw the person in the middle leaning over the table in a way that made me feel that they looked sad or stressed. I decided to write about the college application process because just last week, the junior class was required to complete a lengthy survey that required that we reflect on our past experiences in preparation for kicking off the college application process. I think that my generation is facing a lot of pressure around academics and unspoken competition to get into the best schools. I can imagine how this can lead to panic attacks, anxiety, and depression. One interesting line to note is about College Sweatshirt Day. When writing this and reflecting on my poem, I realized how much judgment and gossip I hear every College Sweatshirt Day and it made me feel a sense of stress.

I organized my poem into six different stanzas, each with a different theme. I employed repetition, by repeating the phrase, "In anticipation of Decision Day," to emphasize the continued stress and anxiety that college applications induce. Additionally, I use alliteration in stanzas one and three to emphasize the points I am trying to get across and to emphasize the fast-paced rhythm of the process. I also included emotions that crescendo at depression in italicized lines in between stanzas to emphasize how stress and pressure build as the process goes on. I chose to begin the poem when the subject is young and innocent and thinks that they are doing what they love for fun.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in 2021, more than 42% of teens reported experiencing poor mental health. This is due to various factors including peer social pressures, academic pressure, and the negative effects of social media. My poem is intended to highlight this major issue in the U.S. facing teens today.