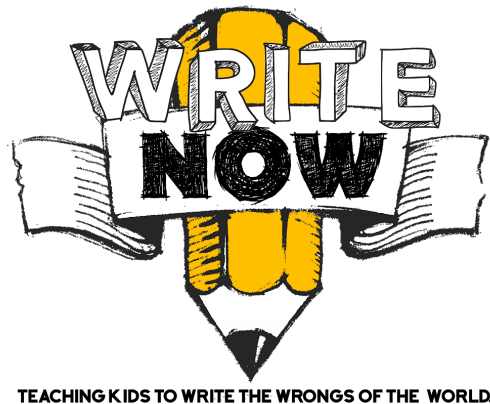


# WRITE NOW:

## TEACHING STUDENTS TO WRITE A WINNING SCHOLARSHIP ESSAY

Handouts Created and Provided by

Joaquín Zihuatanejo



Joaquín Zihuatanejo is an award winning teacher and World Poetry Slam Champion from Dallas, Texas. He holds a BA in English and Secondary Education from the University of North Texas. He also holds an MFA in Poetry from the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where he studied under Natalie Diaz, Sherwin Bitsui, Santee Frazier, and James Aronhióta's Stevens among others. His latest book, *Arsonist*, won the Anhinga-Robert Dana Prize for Poetry and was published by Anhinga Press in October of 2018. He is currently writing a work of nonfiction, *Dollars for Scholars*, which is a guide of sorts to help students navigate the scholarship process with emphasis on the scholarship application essay. He is also currently

writing his first children's book and two new poetry manuscripts. Joaquín has two passions in his life, his beautiful partner Aída and poetry, always in that order.

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Link to Joaquín's award-winning poem, "This is a Suit":

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jfZnOIoKh4E>

Link to Joaquín's award-winning poem in ASL, "Poem for Jon":

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WZEAKD7Ndt4>

Link to Joaquín's award-winning poem, "Final Exam for My Father":

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KcmjgvUO9u8>

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The following is the prompt and scholarship application essay that Latinx student, Brittany Stinson, from East LA wrote that won her admission and full tuition scholarships to five different Ivy League Schools: Yale, Columbia, University of Pennsylvania, Dartmouth, and Cornell. Brittany chose to take her talents to Stanford.

Prompt 1: Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.

Reader 1:

Managing to break free from my mother's grasp, I charged. With arms flailing and chubby legs fluttering beneath me, I was the ferocious two year old rampaging through Costco on a Saturday morning. My mother's eyes widened in horror as I jettisoned my churro; the cinnamon sugar rocket gracefully sliced its way through the air while I continued my spree. I sprinted through the aisles, looking up in awe at the massive bulk products that towered over me. Overcome with wonder, I wanted to touch and taste, to stick my head into industrial sized freezers, to explore every crevice. I was a conquistador, but rather than searching the land for El Dorado, I scoured aisles for free samples. Before inevitably being whisked away into a shopping cart, I scaled a mountain of plush toys and surveyed the expanse that lay before me: the kingdom of Costco.

Reader 2:

Notorious for its oversized portions and dollar fifty hot dog combo, Costco is the apex of consumerism. From the days spent being toted around in a shopping cart to when I was finally tall enough to reach lofty sample trays, Costco has endured a steady presence throughout my life. As a veteran Costco shopper, I navigate the aisles of foodstuffs, thrusting the majority of my weight upon a generously filled shopping cart whose enormity juxtaposes my small frame. Over time, I've developed a habit of observing fellow patrons tote their carts piled with frozen burritos, cheese puffs, tubs of ice cream, and weight loss supplements. Perusing the aisles gave me time to

ponder. Who needs three pounds of sour cream? Was cultured yogurt any more well mannered than its uncultured counterpart? Costco gave birth to my unfettered curiosity.

Reader 3:

While enjoying an obligatory hot dog, I did not find myself thinking about the 'all beef' goodness that Costco boasted. I instead considered finitudes and infinitudes, unimagined uses for tubs of sour cream, the projectile motion of said tub when launched from an eighty foot shelf or maybe when pushed from a speedy cart by a scrawny seventeen year old. I contemplated the philosophical: If there exists a thirty-three ounce jar of Nutella, do we really have free will? I experienced a harsh physics lesson while observing a shopper who had no evident familiarity of inertia's workings. With a cart filled to overflowing, she made her way towards the sloped exit, continuing to push and push while steadily losing control until the cart escaped her and went crashing into a concrete column, 52" plasma screen TV and all. Purchasing the yuletide hickory smoked ham inevitably led to a conversation between my father and me about Andrew Jackson's controversiality. There was no questioning Old Hickory's dedication; he was steadfast in his beliefs and pursuits—qualities I am compelled to admire, yet his morals were crooked. We both found the ham to be more likeable-and tender.

Reader 4:

I adopted my exploratory skills, fine-tuned by Costco, towards my intellectual endeavors. Just as I sampled buffalo chicken dip or chocolate truffles, I probed the realms of history, dance and biology, all in pursuit of the ideal cart-one overflowing with theoretical situations and notions both silly and serious. I sampled calculus, cross country running, scientific research, all of which are now household favorites. With cart in hand, I do what scares me; I absorb the warehouse that is the world. Whether it be through attempting aerial yoga, learning how to chart blackbody radiation using astronomical software, or dancing in front of hundreds of people, I am compelled to try any activity that interests me in the slightest.

Reader 5:

My intense desire to know, to explore beyond the bounds of rational thought; this is what defines me. Costco fuels my insatiability and cultivates curiosity within me at a cellular level. Encoded to immerse myself in the unknown, I find it difficult to complacently accept the "what"; I want to hunt for the "whys" and dissect the "hows". In essence, I subsist on discovery.

### Mr. Z's Scholarship Essay Checklist

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Does it address and effectively answer the prompt?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Does it have a fantastic first sentence? Does it have an exceptional last sentence?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Is your thesis clear, effective, and well written?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Is the first verb active and passionate?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Check all the verbs in the essay. Are they active and passionate? How many common linking or "be" form verbs that are anchoring sentences does the paper possess? There should be no more than three.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Are the transitions between paragraphs smooth and seamless?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Are the arguments you are presenting and defending done in a clear but creative fashion?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Do you have sentence structure variation?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Is your diction impressive while still maintaining your natural voice?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Is there a feeling of resolution by the time we reach the conclusion?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. Does the essay flow seamlessly from the last argument presented and defended to the concluding paragraph?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. When the language needs to be concise and free from superfluous words, is it?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. Have you spell checked and grammar checked the paper using the computer?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. Have you spell checked and grammar checked using that amazing brain of yours?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. Have you had a student you trust as a sounding board do a peer editing of your essay?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 16. Have you had a teacher or adult you trust as a sounding board do a mentor editing of your essay?

- \_\_\_\_\_ 17. Have you read the paper aloud to check for flow, voice, and grammar?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 18. Is the paper free of contractions and informal voice unless it is necessary to the voice and argument being defended?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 19. Did you employ imagery, or sensory details, to bring the essay to life in the reader's mind?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 20. Does the reader end up rooting for you, believing in you, early, often, and as they walk away from the essay?

### Resource List

#### Apps:

1. Scholly
2. Apply.Me
3. CollegeHunch
4. Fastweb College Scholarships
5. ScholarshipOwl

#### Websites:

1. Zinch.com
2. Fastweb.com
3. Cappex.com
4. NextStudent.com
5. SuperCollege.com

#### Books:

1. *Dollars for Scholars* by Joaquin Zihuatanejo due out from Coolspeak Book Publishing early 2020
2. *The Ultimate Scholarship Book* by Gen and Kelly Tanabe
3. *How to Go to College Almost for Free* by Ben Kaplan









