

Story of Self: *Brilliant Imperfection* by Eli Clare



What is this? An excerpt from Clare's nonfiction book *Brilliant Imperfection* (2017)

Text:

When nondisabled folks ask me whether I'd take the imaginary cure pill for cerebral palsy, I know what my answer is supposed to be. My questioners expect me to say, "Yes, of course, I'd take that pill in a heartbeat." And when I don't, they're puzzled and disbelieving. They wonder if I protest too much or am defending myself against the unpleasant truth of my misery. How can I possibly not want a cure?

It's simple. Having shaky hands and shaky balance isn't as awful as they imagine, even when I slip, totter, descend stairs one slow step at a time. My relationship to gravity is ambivalent. On mountain trails, I yearn to fly downhill, feet touching ground, pushing off, smooth and fluid. Instead on steep stretches I drop down onto my butt and slide along using both my hands and feet, for a moment becoming a four-legged animal. Only then do I see the swirl marks that glaciers left in the granite, tiny orange newts climbing among the tree roots, otherworldly fungi growing on rotten logs. My shaky balance gives me this intimacy with mountains.

I would lose so much if that imaginary cure pill actually existed. Its absence lets me be unequivocal. It opens the door to brilliant imperfection.

Part 1: Analysis

Read through the story of self above and then answer the questions below.

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1. What aspect of **selfhood** is this writer focusing on?

2. What are the **moments** or **events** they focus on in relation to that aspect of selfhood?

3. What is the **tone** of this piece? Or, how does this writer **feel** about the aspect of selfhood they are writing about?

4. What **details** and **images** they use to communicate that tone/feeling?

5. What are **three words** you would use to describe this writer, based on this piece of writing? What can you tell about their personality, values, or passions?

Part 2: Write-alike

A write-alike is an exercise in which you take inspiration from the format, structure, and themes of a piece of writing, but replace the original content with your own.

The Original:

The *Brilliant Imperfection* excerpt is a prose essay in first-person about how an aspect of the writer's self that others find pitiful--his disability--allows him to connect with the landscape in a special and unique way.

Questions To Think About For Your Write-alike:

- What is something about me that other people have trouble understanding?
- What is something about me that gives me a unique perspective on the world or a unique ability that most other people don't have?
- What are particular things that perspective or ability allows me to notice, appreciate, or do?

Starters For Your Write-alike:

One way to start your write-alike could be by imitating Clare's sentence, "How can I possibly not want a cure?"

You could begin by writing, "How can I possibly not want to change _____?"

Then provide details and images, like Clare does, to show why this aspect of your selfhood is special and important to you--even if no one else gets it.

Examples:

To find examples for this exercise, visit www.storiesofselfworkshop.com/writing_samples.html

- Gabriel's *Brilliant Imperfection* write-alike
- Gayatri's *Brilliant Imperfection* write-alike

Your Turn:

Set a timer for 15 minutes and go!



A large rectangular area containing horizontal lines for writing, spanning most of the page's width and height.