

Story of Self: “Preface” by Naoki Higashida

What is this? The introduction, or preface, to Higashida’s memoir,
The Reason I Jump:
The Inner Voice of a Thirteen-Year-Old Boy with Autism (2007)

Text:

When I was small, I didn’t even know I was a kid with special needs. How did I find out? By other people telling me that I was different from everyone else, and that this was a problem. True enough. It was very hard for me to act like a normal person, and even now I still can’t “do” a real conversation. I have no problem reading books aloud and singing, but as soon as I try to speak with someone, my words just vanish. Sure, sometimes I manage a few words--but even these can come out the complete opposite of what I wanted to say! I can’t respond appropriately when I’m told to do something, and whenever I get nervous I run off from wherever I happen to be. So even a straightforward activity like shopping can be really challenging if I’m tackling it on my own.

So why can’t I do these things? During my frustrating, miserable, helpless days, I’ve started imagining what it would be like if everyone was autistic. If autism was regarded simply as a personality type, things would be so much easier and happier for us than they are now. For sure, there are bad times when we cause a lot of hassle for other people, but what we really want is to be able to look forward to a brighter future.

Thanks to training I’ve had with Ms. Suzuki at Hagukumi School, and my mom, I’ve learned a method of communication via writing. Now I can even write on my computer. Problem is, many children with autism don’t have the means to express themselves, and often even their own parents don’t have a clue what they might be thinking. So my big hope is that I can help a bit by explaining, in my own way, what’s going on in the minds of people with autism. I also hope that, by reading this book, you might become a better friend of someone with autism.

You can’t judge a person by their looks. But once you know the other person’s inner self, both of you can be that much closer. From your point of view, the world of autism must look like a deeply mysterious place. So please, spare a little time to listen to what I have to say.

And have a nice trip through our world.

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 preface to *The Reason I Jump* is a prose essay about how an aspect of Higashida's self--his autism--means that he acts in certain ways that are sometimes mysterious and hard to understand for others.

Questions To Think About For Your Write-alike:

What are some specific things about the way you are or the way you act that others find really inscrutable and hard to understand?

How would you "translate" your experiences and feelings so that others might understand better what it's like to be you or why you act this way?

Starters For Your Write-alike:

One way you might begin your write-alike could be by imitating Higashida's line, "From your point of view, the world of autism must look like a deeply mysterious place."

You could start by writing, "From your point of view, the world of someone with _____ must look like a deeply mysterious place," and replace "autism" with some aspect of yourself.

For example, "From your point of view, the world of a girl with six sisters must look like a deeply mysterious place."

Then continue your story.

Examples:

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

- Faiza's *The Reason I Jump* write-alike
- Gabriel's *The Reason I Jump* write-alike
- Gayatri's *The Reason I Jump* 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.