

50 YEARS OF EXCELLENCE

Stone Soup Creative Writing Project

kids inspiring kids

PROJECT FOR WRITERS

THE PROFILE: A CROSS BETWEEN FICTION AND NONFICTION

MENTOR TEXT:

“Old Lee” by Amy Lin, (age 13)

[Old Lee] never told his boss about his eyes and kept on doggedly steering that yellow bus down the street. Of course, even though Old Lee had driven that bus for ten years and knew the route well, it was still dangerous, for the passengers too.

TURN THE PAGE to read THE FULL PIECE.

WRITING TIP:

A profile is the presentation of the life and character of a real person. Technically, it is a work of nonfiction. However, as in fiction, profile stories are most interesting for readers when they focus on a significant life challenge or problem. In this story, Old Lee’s problem involves a moral dilemma. If he stops driving, he won’t be able to help his sick wife—but if Old Lee keeps driving, he puts his passengers (and himself) at risk because of his bad eyesight!

ACTIVITY

WRITE A PROFILE ABOUT ABOUT SOMEONE WHO HAS/HAD A PROBLEM

STEP ONE: BRAINSTORM OPTIONS

Interesting people, and people with interesting problems, make the best profile subjects. Old Lee may be “just” a bus driver, but he is clearly a character, and the problem at the core of his life is dilemma that we can feel in our hearts. Make a list of three or four potential profile subjects. These can be people you know or someone you have read about or know from some other source. Yes, you can profile a fictional character too. Profiles are not biographies. They are more like character sketches: short pieces that offer a glimpse at a portion of a person’s life during a challenging time. Note the problem/challenge that each subject faces and then choose the person to write about whose problem/challenge you personally find most interesting.

STEP TWO: DRAFT YOUR PROFILE

A profile can be written like a short biography, one that covers just a small portion of your subject’s life—the part of their life with the problem/challenge that you feel is engaging. Amy’s profile of Old Lee is partly a personal narrative: Old Lee is a family friend, and she has concerns and opinions about the moral dilemma at the heart of her profile of him. Find the story in the person you chose to write about.

STEP THREE: REVISE YOUR PROFILE

Revision is always about strengthening details. Read the profile aloud to yourself, or read it to someone else. As you read, note a couple places where you can make the story stronger—a description here, dialogue there—little changes to add vivid detail. Celebrate your revised work by sharing it with a reader.

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MENTOR TEXT

Old Lee

by Amy Lin (age 13)

When my family lived in Taiwan seven years ago, there lived a man in the house across from ours. He was called Old Lee. The “Old” was a term of respect since he was about sixty years old at the time.

My earliest recollection of Old Lee was his coming to visit my family. I remember that he was a wizened little man with scanty gray hair. My parents liked to chat with him. Old Lee always brought a bag of peppermint candy for me. I didn’t like them, but I ate them anyway so I wouldn’t hurt his feelings. Old Lee was always cheerful when he came to visit us. I remember him making my parents laugh under the light of the living room lamp at night.

Old Lee was a bus driver. The money he made from it was the only income for his family, so he was rather poor. He used to wear ragged blue pants and the same old sneakers day after day. His poverty didn’t seem to bother him at all. There was always a funny, lopsided smile on his wrinkled face.

It was about a year after my family knew him when I discovered somehow that Old Lee had a problem with his eyes and was almost half blind. It was sad news to our family. When we tried to comfort him, he always brushed it off, saying it was nothing and that it wasn’t as if he were totally blind. “Don’t worry, after all, I’m not. My blurry eyes aren’t going to keep me from my normal life. I’m not giving up yet.”

What really surprised us was that Old Lee was still continuing to drive the bus. He never told his

boss about his eyes and kept on doggedly steering that yellow bus down the street. Of course, even though Old Lee had driven that bus for ten years and knew the route well, it was still dangerous, for the passengers too.

But he had no choice. His wife was always sick and his eighteen-year-old daughter was a regular good-for-nothing. How else could he support his family? Besides, he told me he loved driving. It’s been in his life for a long time. My family stopped dissuading him after trying to do so for two months. We figured he knew what he was doing.

He did. During the last two years that I stayed in Taiwan, he was still working hard at his job and never had a single accident. When our family went to the States, we never heard from him anymore.

Maybe it was wrong for him to drive when he was in that condition. I guess that is something you could argue over. But it was the fact that Old Lee had a determination in life. Some people would have felt their lives were helpless and not worth anything when their eyes were half blind.

But Old Lee had to do it for his family. He knew he was able to drive that bus, and he wasn’t going to sit at home doing nothing if he could.

I really look up to Old Lee because of his optimism. But more importantly, he is an impressive man with his willingness to keep on going and never giving up.