

**Carroll University's Pre-College Programs
Aim to Build Emotional, Social, and
Academic Aptitude of High School Students**

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Abstract: How do high school students build the skills necessary to be successful in college and career? How do they develop the courage and aptitude to be contributors to their communities? Carroll University's Pre-College Programs aim to nurture high school students academically, personally and socially. Through mini lessons, field trips, cultural experiences and volunteering, students from underserved communities learn about themselves and their role in the world. As English skills are integral to academic success, in addition to reviewing the scope of Carroll University Pre-College Programs, specific strategies for building career and college readiness are explored.

Carroll University's Pre-College Programs began in 2004 with just seven students and the idea that all students, regardless of socioeconomic status or ethnic heritage, should have equal access to higher education. As time passed, this one program grew into several programs supporting hundreds of students.

Today, 14 years later, Carroll University Pre-College Programs administer three pre-college enrichment opportunities which attract students from Waukesha, Milwaukee and New York City:

- *Horizontes en Carroll* is a week-long residential summer program. Sixty students from Waukesha, Milwaukee and New York City live on campus for one week and

attend three mock college courses. They learn about career paths by visiting area businesses. Outside of the academic and career focus, they learn college skills through leadership-building activities and daily reflection within mentor groups. Given funding from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, they must qualify for free or reduced lunch to attend this program.

- *Project Pioneer* is a Saturday enrichment program which focuses on teaching 21st-century skills through Carroll University's annual liberal arts theme and project-based learning. Through partnerships with select high schools in Waukesha and Milwaukee, 9th-12th grade students interested in attending a four-year institution of higher learning are invited to campus to engage in the unique curriculum. In each of the three Project Pioneer academies, students work in teams to tackle real world issues. From organizing a fundraising walk, to addressing education inequality in post-war Bosnia, to writing local representatives about a challenge in our community, students practice and build their abilities in the four Cs: communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity.
- *Pioneer Bridge* is an orientation program for first generation college students entering their freshman year at Carroll University. Funded by a grant from the PNC Foundation, this program invites fifteen students to move into their residence halls one week before freshmen orientation. During this time, they engage in workshops and activities designed to expose them to campus resources, build self-advocacy and leadership skills, and create a supportive community.

Though the reach and scope of the three programs are different from those 17 years ago, the goal is the same: to ensure that students from all socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds have access to higher education. This is especially important as the higher education achievement gap in the United States continues to grow. In fact, according to the 2016 State Report Cards published by the DC-based Young Invincibles organization, between 2007 and 2015, the nationwide gap in higher education attainment widened 2.2 percentage points between white Americans and Hispanic Americans and 0.4 points between white Americans and African Americans. Furthermore, the report specified that the state of Wisconsin sees the second highest university attainment gap in the nation

between whites (45%) and African Americans (22%), making pre-college programs like Carroll University's all the more important.



Ramirez. After spending four years as a Spanish teacher in high-need areas, I recognized successful students in our K-12 public education system were often underprepared for success at a university. These bright young people lacked social, organizational and cross-cultural skills needed to succeed in their new environment. Therefore, when I heard about an opening for Director of Pre-College Programs at Carroll University, I was eager to apply and take action to fill these gaps.

When I was selected to fill the role in September 2014, I was pleased to find that dozens of high school students from across Milwaukee and Waukesha were just as eager to join me in this endeavor. My first undertaking as Director of Pre-College Programs was the Saturday enrichment program, Project Pioneer. And despite the 9am Saturday start time, 25 to 35 high school students attended the program week after week.

Given this captive audience, I wanted to build an engaging experience that would expose students to the opportunity of higher education and complement their high school education. Furthermore, given my background working in underserved neighborhoods, I was especially keen on providing our participants, most from low-income families, with

access to the same enrichment that was commonplace for their higher income peers. Finally, I knew that many first generation college aspirants struggled to understand the transformational power of a college education simply because they did not know anyone who had benefited from one. I hoped to change this through opportunities to build near-peer relationships between the high school participants and our college mentors.

The criteria for student participation was simple: my team and I recruited students interested in pursuing higher education and who would commit to attending and actively participating in the 12 Saturdays throughout the year. Though we looked at grades and test scores, we wanted to give the message that in Carroll University's Project Pioneer, the growth and development in one's future were valued much more than the circumstances of one's past. Therefore, we accepted any student who made a commitment to stepping outside of their comfort zone, learning and progressing.

Together, the program instructors and I built a curriculum that focused on developing 21st-century skills through experiential learning. Some of the instructors who were hired under the previous director stayed on, while I recruited others through connections in Waukesha and Milwaukee. Regardless of when a teacher joined the team, the common thread among all teachers was high expectations for students. Our mostly Hispanic and African American students were already exposed to lowered expectations for people of color. Therefore it was important that our Project Pioneer teachers respected our students' talents and helped them see their potential.

We divided each academic year into academies. The first and second academies consisted of six Saturdays, and the final academy consisted of four. On the last Saturday of the year, we hosted a "Celebration of Learning" where students practiced etiquette and had an opportunity to share their achievements with friends, family and members of the Carroll community at a catered lunch.

Throughout Project Pioneer, we took advantage of our location and incorporated Carroll University students, professors and alumni into our workshops, lessons and field trips. We encouraged the high school students to explore their interests and talents and engage in discussion around how a college education could help convert these interests into a

fulfilling and successful career in the field of their choice. The program instructors and I wanted our students to know they belonged, and could have success, on a university campus.

Jorgensen. In 2013, one of my colleagues at Arrowhead Union High School asked, “What do you do on Saturday mornings?” She proceeded to discuss Dr. Donnie Hale and his work in the Pre-College Programs at Carroll University. I was intrigued and interested in helping students who didn’t grow up hearing that college was an expectation. Receiving my masters’ degree from Carroll, I was eager to give back to the institution and help a student population vastly different from the one I served teaching English at a suburban high school.

After an interview, I accepted a position to work with Project Pioneer. On Saturdays throughout the next academic year, between 25 and 35 high school students from Waukesha and Milwaukee engaged in academies. According to the Project Pioneer website, students participating in Project Pioneer were completing activities to “lead them through exploring their community and identifying a challenge within it, researching that challenge and finding solutions, and taking action.” In each lesson, literacy remains paramount as college and career require developed and mature English skills. As published by *Thoughtful Learning*, “By understanding how ... to create effective, well-grounded communication, students can harness the power of new technology and be inspired to learn.” In each activity, lesson and project, we challenged our students to contribute to their communities in a positive way.

Although Hale left Carroll a few years later (to become Florida International University Faculty Director of the Education Effect at Booker T. Washington Senior High School), I stayed on to work in the Pre-College Programs, now under the direction of Maria Ramirez.

The program ebbed and flowed, morphing as the directors changed. Several instructors faded to two. College mentors were added. But weekly visits to the participants’ high schools and the mission of the program remained the same.

My work at Project Pioneer, that first year in 2013, led me to Horizontes en Carroll, “a program which welcomes upwards of 50 high school students from Waukesha, Milwaukee, Racine, and Harlem (NY) to campus each summer to experience university life and gain academic, social and life skills.” At the summer camp, students developed career and college readiness skills and a better understanding of the college experience. In 2015, I taught a variety of mock college classes. In 2016, I facilitated a poetry reading and a Horizontes en Carroll literary magazine.

Similar to the activities at Horizontes, throughout the academic year, Project Pioneer instructors focus lessons on not only student growth and skill acquisition, but also on how students can impact their communities. During each activity, mentors and instructors rely on a specific discipline literacy skill--reading, writing, listening, speaking or thinking--and students regularly are asked to refer to the four Cs. As an instructor, I aim to balance high expectations, skill development and achievement with enjoyment. As a Saturday program, student attendance relies on engagement and perceived value.

To encourage attendance, each day is balanced with ice breakers, small discussions, lectures and work time. We want to excite students about Project Pioneer and to attend subsequent Saturdays. By involving them in self-directed, relevant activities and including authentic experiences with audiences and deadlines, I’ve watched students become active participants with increased motivation.

In surveys administered after each of the three Project Pioneer academies, students say similar things:

I love coming to Project Pioneer. I never minded waking up early on Saturdays because I know that I am going to come to something that will help me in my future. On other Saturday mornings, I am just sleeping in at home when I can be here improving my future.

I can do more than I believe I can. I can make a change even if I’m someone small.

Something I learned about myself while attending the academy is that everyone really has a voice and we have to learn how to use it wisely. I learned that my voice is important because my ideas matters and this really helped me because now I'm not as shy and scared of sharing my thoughts and participating a lot more!

Ramirez. In order to engage students in the Saturday academies and demonstrate how learning can connect to the world, we draw from Carroll University's yearly liberal arts theme to guide our curriculum. Ranging in topic from human rights to time and citizenship, we use Carroll University's theme as a base to build learning experiences for students. In 2016-2017, for example, we leveraged Carroll's citizenship theme to build three distinct academies which explored digital, local and global citizenship.

The local citizenship academy was especially timely, as it came just after the 2016 US presidential election when many of our students, most of whom are students of color, were scared and frustrated by the negative commentary around Latinos, immigrants and other minority groups. In a climate where many felt they must back down and stay quiet, I wanted them to know they had a safe place where they could speak freely and be accepted. Additionally, I wanted to ensure that they had an opportunity to share their voices and experiences with their peers and community in a positive and constructive way.

In this academy, we began by discussing what local citizenship meant and how we, as local citizens, can get involved in our community. Community service and involvement is an important part of the college experience for Carroll University students, and we wanted to model this for our pre-college students as well.

We encouraged the high school students to become active members in their local community by identifying an issue they were passionate about and writing a letter to a local leader or politician. Students wrote letters on topics ranging from preserving city parks and green spaces to summer employment opportunities for teens to immigration

reform. For many, this was a new experience. They began without understanding that several community leaders represented them at various levels of government or that they could use their voices to influence decisions. But by the end of the academy, when they were asked what they learned, one student commented that

local citizenship has to do with where you stand in your community. You impact the community as well as your community impacts you. Your voice may seem like something small but getting together with others who go through the same struggles as you can get together to create a change that starts socially and escalates to a more political change.

Another mentioned that “I should not be afraid of letting people hear my voice.” College mentors and Project Pioneer instructors wrote alongside the high school students, speaking to Carroll University’s reminder that citizenship is a lifelong endeavor.

Beyond finding their voices and learning how to write letters to community leaders, the students learned from their peers. Given that about half of our participants live in a city considered one of the most segregated in the United States (Downs, 2015), we make sure to provide the opportunity to get to know peers from different ethnic and racial backgrounds. Though just a few miles separates Milwaukee’s African American Northside and Hispanic Southside, students frequently comment they do not have friends outside of their racial or ethnic group. Project Pioneer is an opportunity to bring together our young people from across Waukesha and Milwaukee and change this reality.

Jorgensen. Students attend each academy knowing the year’s annual theme. To supplement the annual theme, individual projects (like writing advocacy letters) allow them to grow and acquire literacy and college-readiness skills. Communal projects allow them to collaborate, learn from each other and develop leadership skills.

Each student is required to be an active participant both on Saturdays and throughout the week. To hold them accountable, they and their parents sign a participation contract by agreeing to “1. Be present, 2. Be actively engaged, 3. Be respectful to people, their space,

and their belongings and 4. Be prepared.” Additionally, students and parents are told the following:

Your duty is participate fully as a Project Pioneer participant. Don't worry, no one expects you to have all the answers. Instead, we challenge you to come up with answers as a team. Remember, young people have valid ideas, are vocal and want to be heard. We strive to hear ideas and support dreams. This journey will be filled with some amazing moments—some tough, frustrating, awesome and surprising. In fact, every week, we ask you to think of one connection, one question, and one aha moment through your reading and investigation to discuss during our time together on Saturday.

During the week, college mentors visit each student's high school to field questions, connect students with resources, and remind them of deadlines and expectations. By serving as mentors, college students also fulfill a Cross-Cultural Experience credit.

Carroll University's mission (2018) “provides a superior education, rooted in its Presbyterian and liberal arts heritage, and draws upon its Christian tradition to prepare all students for vocational success, lifelong learning and service in a diverse and global society.” Inspired by this, in 2015, students planned a communal project. A current Carroll University student, Emina Halilovic, proposed a charity walk to benefit education in her home country of Bosnia, and Project Pioneer participants helped bring her vision to reality.

Halilovic's “Walking in Their Shoes: Going the Extra Mile for Children's Education” was a 5K walk, aimed to both spread awareness of education inequity and financially support transportation to school for Bosnian children. Our high school students created promotional materials and distributed them to local businesses. They also Skyped with the children they were helping (Halilovic serving as a translator) and coordinated day-of activities for participants, including face painting, card-making and an interactive photo booth. In each interaction, they practiced not only the four Cs but also professionalism, speaking and listening skills, proper eye contact and decorum. By participating in this event, they saw firsthand how language arts skills are integral to success.

In 2015, the event raised \$2,300 and Halilovic used the money to provide meals and transportation for eight school children in Kamenica, Bosnia. This walk also fell on [Global Youth Service Day](#), which allowed Project Pioneer participants to join a global movement of youth giving back. Reflecting on this experience, students said the following:

Participating in the walk made me feel really good because I am helping make some else's future better.

I've never been in a walk-for-a-cause event before so that was [a] neat experience. It made it even better that it was on Global Youth Service Day.

I gave me some idea about what those kids were going through and appreciate what I have.

It was something new to help kids from the other side of the world and it felt good. I learned to appreciate things more.

According to Owens (2017):

Emina is a great example of how a young person can take the initiative to make their dreams a reality. She has used her imagination to create programs and events that positively affect Waukesha and the world all while working to the highest standards in school. And, most importantly she is committed to giving back to the community that has given her so much.

Project Pioneer participants, through both Halilovic's example and the resources on Carroll's campus, began to learn that their voices matter and that each person, no matter how old, can make a significant contribution to the world. One student said, "It impacted me by being able to do things for others for a good cause ... I thought it was very fun and exciting" while another said, "It helped me realize that you can help other people around the world with the help of others, and think it is totally worthwhile."

The following year, Project Pioneer participants again aided Halilovic in planning and coordinating the event.

Ramirez. Despite the education reforms taking place in schools across our state, many experiences remain inaccessible to low-income students. From the four Cs to intercultural relationship-building, to applying skills and knowledge to real-world scenarios, Project Pioneer offers young people a variety of learning experiences that ensure they prepare themselves not only academically, but also socially and emotionally, for both success in college and in their future careers. Indicating success, Project Pioneer students have gone on to study at universities from UW-Platteville to Howard University and Carroll University.

While success in the traditional classroom is defined by rigid state standards and assessments that measure a limited scope of knowledge, success in Project Pioneer is defined by personal growth, self-awareness, and connectedness to one's community. As one student commented after the local citizenship academy, "This academy has taught me a lot about perseverance and courage. You should be able to get up and take action yourself," while another reflected that "I have learned to speak with confidence and I have learned that it's important to take risks in life because the outcome can be great." After all, while test scores and grades will open the door to a college education, soft skills like perseverance, self-advocacy, and confidence in one's abilities despite failure are also necessary for college readiness and success. In one meta-analysis, researchers found that students who engaged in social and emotional learning similar to those offered by Project Pioneer experienced an 11% increase in college graduation rates (Taylor, Oberle, Durlak & Weissberg, 2017).

Jorgensen. In the program, instructors introduce students to both campus life and college academics. During Project Pioneer 2015-2016, in addition to individual and group projects, they read and analyzed *The 7 Habits of a Highly Effective Teen* by Sean Covey, watched movies and videos, and spent time with community organizers.

In the summer of 2016, instructors wanted Horizontes participants to familiarize themselves with the vocabulary and systems used in a college classroom. Students participated in several mock courses, where they were exposed to a syllabus and challenged to both acquire and apply new skills. In my English course, students produced a literary magazine of student work. For many, this was the first time they had been invited to add “published author” to their resume.

Relying on an authentic audience and purpose (both in the literary magazine and the poetry reading), they developed and applied English skills in a meaningful way. Cultivating a safe and creative space where expectations required them to actively participate allowed them to use these activities as catharsis.

At the end of each academy, as well as Horizontes, students completed a survey requiring them to reflect on what was accomplished and what they wanted to improve. At the end of Horizontes, I was humbled and excited by the survey responses. One student commented that at first “I cared of what the people will think of me and then I realized this is a safe environment ... I got good at sharing my ideas and what I thought.” While another student said the course helped him “step out of my comfort zone and develop skills that I can use at school and in a career. I am so glad I continue to participate in this program.”

Whereas the traditional classrooms our students come from focus on meeting state standards and achieving “proficient” scores on standardized tests, our programs focus on student interest and engagement. And through this, the Pre-College Programs at Carroll University are able to connect experiential learning to students’ lives, grow their abilities (especially when it comes to literacy and the four Cs) and excite them about the possibility of higher education.



Conclusion

Students have shared that much of their high school days are spent on computers, working through online programs. During the Pre-College Programs, we limit the time they spend on devices and focus instead on hands-on, experiential learning. This helps them, at least anecdotally, engage and find their voices. It also increases their interest and buy-in.

In each program, they explore community issues, challenges at home and hopes for the future. In a survey after the local citizenship academy, they were asked if they felt their skills improved. In terms of communication, 91% agreed. For critical thinking, 83% agreed. For collaboration, 87% agreed. And for creativity, 79% agreed. These results are typical for each academy.

But it is just this strength that could also be considered one of the program's greatest challenges. In a data-driven culture where outcomes are judged by numbers, it is difficult to share our successes with the world.

Though 88% of program participants in 2016-2017 reported that skills learned in Project Pioneer are helpful to them in their personal or academic lives, how can we better

understand how these skills truly impact their lives? Does our consistent weekly attendance and engaged student body prove that the programs are relevant and helpful? How can we measure the impact of their improved literacy skills?

We know our programs are beneficial because we see growth, because the students report the positive impact on their lives and because our partner schools echo these observations. But given the small program staff (just one full time staff member along with the part-time instructors and student work-study mentors) and nebulous nature of the soft skills and socioemotional development we promote, we have not yet been able to effectively quantify the benefit of our program.

In subsequent years, we hope to continue to provide experiences that will allow those from disadvantaged backgrounds to reach parity with their higher income peers, preparing these young people for success in higher education and careers.

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Student Exemplars

Student work, both in community endeavors and daily activities, can demonstrate student growth, achievement and success. The following pieces were published in the 2016 Horizontes en Carroll Literary Magazine.

“Where I’m From” by Te’asia Stocks

I am from hours of yanking and pulling,
From hair grease, braids, and barrettes.

I am from unconditional love but short tempers
From Te’Asia, Punkin head, or Cita

I am from money doesn’t grow on trees
From a small white house surrounded by neighbors of different skin pallets
I am from white, tans, and, blacks different but alike

I am from memories of Lucinda
From destruction from a King and struggles from Timothy
I am from bullet wounds that heal into an irreplaceable mother
And love and passion creating a stronger bond than DNA
I am from snowball fights in the house
And birthday parties in the yard each year

I am from thy trees and fruit of thy land shall the locust consume
From genes that produce an abundance of melanin
I am from years of bondage
From chains, tears and blood
I am from stories of the motherland
From beats and lyrics of Alicia Keys and India Arie

I am from eight counts
From sisters I never had and practices I wish I never had
I am from blue ribbons and jazz shoes
From the footsteps of my ancestors

“I’m From Chaos” by Deja Smith

I am from different seasons.
From the heat the warmth and the cold.
I am from many places, some tiny, some big, some good, some bad.
From one mom and five other moms.
I am from the trash that sits out in front.
From a place where no one ever sleeps.

I’m from the plain white walls and velvet curtains.
From the soul food and fights.
I’m from a house, not a home.
From the nosey lady that lives down the street
And the “next week” and “I don’t have its”

I’m from the violent side of town
From the gun shots fired
From the mothers crying
From the babies dying
From the terrible house fire down the street

I am from all of these things that happen around me.
Because even if they are not directed towards me,
They still affect my life in some way.

“I’m From Kilwaukee” by Keyjuan Scott

I’m from Kilwaukee

I’m from a city where bullets fly and your friends will die.

I’m from a city where you have to say be safe, because your friends can die.

I’m from a city where people like to send shots and catch the opps.

I’m from a city where you’re here one second then the next you have to call the reverend.

I’m from a city where they say there’s no hope.

I’m from a house never truly felt like home.

I’m from a house where the only things that felt at home were the roaches and the mice.

Man, those nights were long.

I’m from a home where we fought and hurt each other for so long.

But don’t get it twisted. we love each other.

I have my family’s back just like they have mine.

I’m from a family that loves one another but hurts one another.

I think about the times when family would come over for holidays and

Mama would cook and we sit and laugh until somebody started acting an ass.

I remember the fights and guns pulled on one another.

How I remember the laughs and then the cries to just get along.

But the cries were just hopeless requests on the wind, like the hope for the youth.

“Where I’m From” by Alberto Flores

I am from a neighborhood where I can play soccer or rest peacefully,
but not a hundred percent peacefully.

I am from a soccer, kindness, and looking for peace,

I am from a peace that people can enjoy.

I can be negative, but positive at the same time.

I’m from a confused soul looking for answers,
but what answers could be found?

What is wrong? Or what is right?

I'm from people that seek not just peace, but justice.
I'm from people who are afraid to speak up...but why are they afraid?
I'm from my family, a son that doesn't know how he can change the world.
But is that even possible? It is, but it will require effort and followers that will help change it.

I'm from ideas, from thoughts that it can't be fully decide...but why?
I'm from loving everything, but hating what we do.
People judge for what they can't understand, but talk like they know everything.

I'm a normal person like everyone else,
from pain to hate,
from hate to anger,
from anger to sadness,
and from sadness to happiness.

It doesn't matter what we do because is the way of how we do it.
We don't know if we are going to change or who will make that big step to change it.
This is the way of life
and let see what our destiny take us.

"Where are my people?" by Keyjuan Scott

These people aren't with my own.
These people are violent and care only for their own.
Are these my people?
These people only care for their own as do I.
They don't want to get along, and everything that is right is wrong.
Staying home and studying—
no, they will call you a lame.
Be nice to people and you're a fake.
Be friendly to people and you're a ho.

Go and rob someone and you're the guy.
Go and smoke and you're the guy.
Go and kill someone and you're wanted by all the desirables.
They want to pack a pistol and put it to someone's dome.
These people seem to only want to do harm.
These people morals are all out of whack.
But I'm no better than them
So are these my people?
These people aren't with my own.
These people are violent and care only for their own.

"Hands" by Ty Davidson

My family has different hands. My mother's hands are dark like chocolate and dry like paper because of all of the hand sanitizer. Her nails long and colorful like a rainbow. My little brother's hands wide and flat. They are clammy, like his hands jumped into water before I touched them, before I touched them.

My hands are soft and caramel with short nails. The polish is chipped off like I wanted to take it off but I decided not to. It is like the nails are taking forever to get undressed.

But my father's hands, my father's hands, are big and brown with cuts and scars like his hands have been through a war. Calluses, like rocks and knuckles, are permanently swollen from all of the fights they've been through when he was younger and from all of the labor he has done.

His hands yet, big, rough, and damaged are soft when he plays with babies, when he is comforting others or when he touches my face and tells me he loves me. When he touches my face and tells me he loves me. My father's hands.

“My Skin” by Evelyn Rojas

Everybody in my family has rich caramel skin color. My mother, my sister, my grandma, my grandpa, and everyone else in my family is on the tanner side. My mother has a glow to her skin that makes her look healthy with little freckles living on the bridge of her nose and under her eyes. My sister has dark rich cream-colored skin with little white marks dancing around her body. My grandparents, oh my grandparents, they're the darkest. They've been kissed by the sun too many times. They've been only touched by light. They make me seem like a small marshmallow. My skin is different. I'm on the paler side. I don't look like I'm from Oaxaca. I don't have a healthy glow. I don't have freckles or white little marks. I have pink little rose petals on the apples of my cheeks. I have what my mom says “Patas de Pollo” which means “Chicken Legs” because they are pale. I have my veins on display because my skin allows you to see them. Even if I do gain a bit of color, I will still be the odd one out. Although I'm not super pale or super dark, I will be the one to stand out in a family photo.

“Eyes” by Ashley Urich

Everyone in my family has brown eyes. They have brown eyes that sparkle when in the sunshine. Brown eyes that can, at times, be very dark. They have eyes that remind me of warmth, home, and love. My mom's eyes are brown but if you pay close attention you could see where they differ from the rest of my family.

My mom's eyes are very light brown. They shine like a maple tree that's in the sunlight. Her eyes are happy, loving, and hardworking. They show my reflection of the smile she brings me when I see her happy eyes.

My brother's eyes are dark brown, black almost. His eyes remind me of protection and potential. Sometimes I wonder what those eyes hold, maybe all the emotions he likes to hide to stay strong. I have another brother whose eyes are a mix of both. His eyes represent youth and curiosity. When I look into his eyes, I see a future. I see a life that hasn't been started yet.

I have one more younger brother: a new addition. Like me, his eyes are unique for a family of brown eyes. He has blue eyes. His eyes sparkle like a bright blue ocean, and when they change, his eyes gleam like the moon reflecting off a sea. I see innocence and bravery when I look into his eyes. I think of the planet, Neptune for their color.

Although me and my youngest brother differ from the family we also differ from each other. My eyes are also unique. They aren't blue or brown, they're green. No wait, they are blue. Oh, I meant gray. Yellow? Brown maybe?

I guess I forgot to mention they're not just one color. My eyes are a mix of all those. My eyes can be as blue as sky when I'm very happy. They can be as green as a grassy field when I'm calm. Yellow as a sun rise when I'm tired. Gray as a piece of graphite when I'm upset. Lastly, brown. Brown. My family's color. The color that represents happiness, youth, and protection all at once. The brown eyes that I love seeing, they stand out to me because they are different. Most people complain about brown eyes but I consider them a blessing.