Stanford University Application QuestionsA long, thin rectangle to divide sections of the document

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# **COMMON APPLICATION PERSONAL ESSAY**

## 6. Describe a topic, idea, or concept you find so engaging that it makes you lose all track of time. Why does it captivate you? What or who do you turn to when you want to learn more? (250-650 words)

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For my fifteenth birthday, my parents were anticipating a request for something “normal” for kids my age, like a smartphone or maybe video games. Needless to say, they were shocked when my wishlist resembled an expedition packlist for an amateur entomologist, including a microscope and a can of ethyl acetate, a highly flammable chemical commonly found in nail polish remover, which is used to preserve collected insect specimens. While owning a pint of volatile nail polish has likely put me on several government watchlists, I would gladly give up my TSA PreCheck in order to study the fascinating world of insects. It has provided me with the ultimate chance to explore and develop my interests in the natural world, giving me newfound respect for the creatures who, despite serving countless vital roles in ecosystems worldwide, are universally despised and feared by most individuals.

It may seem strange that somebody would ever find insects to be anything more than the creepy crawlies that are associated with ruined picnics and that dark corner in the garage. Yet, when you choose to ignore the stereotypes that have ruined the reputations of these critters, you start to notice the hidden and awe-inspiring world of insects. Since taking a nature studies course in eighth grade, I have had a strong desire to explore and learn as much as possible about my local environment. Inspired by this class and the displays at my local museum, I ultimately expressed my interest in entomology by creating my own insect collection. With over 70 specimens, it showcases the immense diversity of insects found in my backyard, from the cuckoo wasp, a delicate solitary wasp smaller than a grain of rice, to the ponderous borer, a colossal longhorn beetle that can barely fit in your palm. When they are not scared off by some of my more fearsome specimens, I have also been able to share my collection and passion for insects with younger children and my peers, with the intention of hopefully inspiring them to have a greater appreciation for these often overlooked creatures.   
 In addition to collecting bugs, another way that I have furthered my interests in nature is by becoming a certified California Naturalist. Earning this certification through a college-level class offered by the Pacific Grove Museum of Natural History in collaboration with the University of California Cooperative Extension, it had a massive impact on my overall understanding and passion for the environment.

Each participant was expected to complete a major capstone project related to either citizen science or environmental stewardship. For my capstone, I chose to combine my interest in entomology and the interpretation skills I gained from this program to create a 30 page field guide of the local dragonflies and moths currently on display at the Pacific Grove Museum. I designed this guide to act as a complement to the museum’s existing insect collection, which lacked any detailed information for the displayed specimens. By providing museum visitors with several interesting facts about each specimen on display, my guide hopefully enabled museum visitors to develop a greater awareness for their insect neighbors.

One year after gaining my certification, I am still hard at work expanding my original guide to include the other major insect orders on display at the museum. As the majority of people are blind to the world of insects and their dramatic decline in recent years, I hope that my guide has made more people in my community aware of insects, having a positive influence on local conservation efforts. After all, people tend to protect the things that they love, and love the things they know. **(604 words)**

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