

〈論文〉

***Using Diane, I am Japagaijin and  
the Cultural Experience Model for Language and  
Culture Learning in a Japanese University***

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**Teaching Context**

This classroom-based research project was conducted at Sapporo University in Sapporo, Japan, for an intermediate English conversation class from 2005-2006. It was my intent to connect process and content for language and culture using Pat Moran's Cultural Experience Model for the process of learning and *Diane, I am Japagaijin* (Brown 2001), a book of essays I wrote in Japanese on my experiences being a foreigner in Japan, as the cultural text for the content of learning.

The ten students enrolled in this class were a mix of sophomores, juniors, and seniors in the economics department. They were interested in English and were ready to work hard to earn credits for this class, which could be applied toward a university-sponsored study-abroad exchange program. Even though they were not English majors, the students were motivated to develop their language skills and eager to learn about foreign cultures because they were candidates for this program.

The main objective of this project was for students to concentrate on utilizing learning materials not only for their vocabulary or grammatical merit but also for the cultural experience that could be gained by having the learning follow the stages of the experiential learning cycle.

I was able to engage the students in a different kind of learning that moved away from the traditional methods of grammar-based translation and focused instead on an approach that required the students to think for themselves by generating their own learning materials. I accomplished this by using the experiential learning cycle based on the Cultural Experience Model as the process of learning in the class and three essays taken from my book, *Diane, I am Japagaijin* as the content for the learning in the class.

To do this, I developed a student handbook (Appendix) to guide my students' learning in using the Cultural Experience Model, which is a language and culture learning approach that mirrors the four stages of the experiential learning cycle. I designed the handbook so that the students could use the four skills of speaking, writing, reading, and listening as they moved through the four stages of the Cultural Experience Model.

Using the handbook, the students summarized, experienced, questioned, and finally responded in English to the cultural text, *Diane, I am Japagaijin*. The students were required to read, write, listen, and discuss on three different essays taken from the cultural text. In applying these four skills, they moved through the Cultural Experience Model by first stating the main idea and summarizing the essays. They continued to the next stage of the cycle by discussing, in English, similar experiences they had had. Next, they questioned the cultural meaning underlying each essay by comparing and contrasting American and Japanese culture. Questioning the culture involved writing questions and discussing possible reasons behind typically American and Japanese behaviors. Finally, students responded to the essays by doing a reflective writing task in their journals. Through speaking, listening, reading, and writing using the Cultural Experience Model together with the *Diane, I am Japagaijin* essays, the students were able to use English to relate in a personal and meaningful way to the cultural text and each other.

A class vote determined which three essays we would use. We covered two stages of the Cultural Experience per essay for each 90-minute class. On the last day of class, students completed a final feedback questionnaire. The student-generated materials resulting from the student handbook, my teaching journal, and final student feedback derived from this classroom-based research project proved that my students did in fact experience progress in both their language and cultural learning by using essays from *Diane, I am Japagaijin* as the content of the class and the Cultural Experience Model as the process driving the learning experience.

### **The Cultural Experience Model**

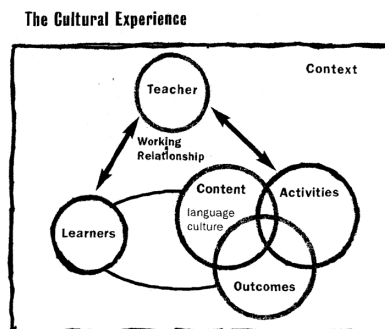
Patrick Moran (2001) advocates an experiential approach to teaching and learning language and culture. He proposes an application of the experiential learning cycle (Kolb, 1984) to a cultural experience that consists of any encounter between learners and another way of life, be it first hand through direct involvement with people of the other culture or indirectly through learning materials in the language classroom.

Learners encounter another way of life through a cultural experience. He defines the nature

of these cultural experiences as consisting of the content of the activities in which the students engage, the outcomes that are intended or achieved, the learning context, and the nature of the relationship between teacher and students.

Moran further explains that the cultural experience consists of content and process (Crawford-Lange and Lange, 1987). The way of life is the content, and the learners' encounters-the kinds of activities they undertake and the outcomes they achieve-are the process. The teacher, through a working relationship with the learners, is an integral part of this experience. This experience, in turn, is very much a function of the particular context or learning circumstance in which the culture learning takes place. The diagram (Moran, 2001), illustrates the cultural experience.

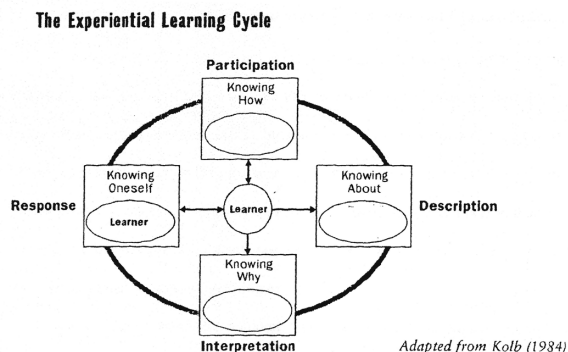
This classroom-based research project focused on the expansion of the language learning in my Japanese classroom, which had been limited to drills in vocabulary and grammar, to include the Cultural Experience Model, which is based on the experiential learning cycle. The experiential learning cycle consists of four stages: *participating* in an experience, *describing* an experience, *interpreting* an experience, and *responding* to an experience.



In the language classroom, culture is the experience and language is the means to comprehend, analyze, and respond to it. Moran identifies four language functions students need to learn the language used to learn the culture. These four “knowings,” which mirror the experiential learning cycle stages are *Knowing about*, *Knowing How*, *Knowing why*, and *Knowing Oneself*. These four cultural knowings of the Cultural Experience challenged my students to understand better and relate to both a different culture and their culture in English.

The diagram (Moran, 2001) is an illustration of the experiential cycle. The learner is in the center. In the participation, description, and interpretation stages, the learner's attention is focused

on the culture. In the response stage, the learner's focus is shifted to self.



First, students read an essay from *Diane, I am Japagaijin*. Then, they used their student handbook, which provided them with strategies describing how to apply each of the four cultural knowings and a checklist of focus questions to clarify each step. I also used the student handbook to evaluate students' learning and evaluate teacher's roles in learning for the four cultural knowings.

Through the experience of applying the four cultural knowings of the cultural experience to the essays from *Diane, I am Japagaijin*, my students became more aware of how their cultural conditioning influences the process. I found that by using the Cultural Experience Model with the *Diane, I am Japagaijin* essays as a means to learn language and culture, my students became more aware of how to distinguish observation from interpretation, insider viewpoints from outsider viewpoints, and their own culture from another culture.

### ***Diane, I am Japagaijin* and the Cultural Experience Model**

After reading an essay from *Diane, I am Japagaijin* in its original Japanese format, students clarified any questions they had about the text through class discussion. I then asked my students to refer to their handbooks, which outlined the cycle of the cultural experience and provided guidelines to summarize, practice, question, and respond to the essay.

I designed the student handbook so that it would be flexible enough to be utilized for any essay introduced in the book. The handbook included focus questions, which were an effective way to scaffold student learning. They guided the students through the four cultural knowings and thus generated the student class context, which became the data I analyzed.

For students to learn more about American and Japanese culture in a personal and meaningful way, I first had them summarize the essay in English by describing the main idea and

what happened in the essay, with some details to support their findings. Summarizing verified comprehension of the materials. It also served as an exercise for the students to learn how to gather information based on the content of the material, instead of relying only on transcribing the words from Japanese into English.

Next, students practiced using English by experiencing the language through class discussions based on the topic of the essay. Students interacted with each other as they conversed in English on the cultural theme of the topic to practice developing language skills. By engaging in English, students were able to experience the different cultural values, beliefs, and attitudes of American and Japan.

Then, they revisited the main idea of the essay, this time to question the different cultural meanings of values, beliefs, and attitudes in Japanese and American culture. Students discovered explanations for these differences. These class discussions resulted in a more in-depth use of English and led to a greater understanding of the two cultures.

Finally, students were able to connect themselves to the reading by journaling their personal thoughts and feelings on the main idea for each topic. In these reflections, the students recorded their feelings, ideas, and beliefs about Japanese and American culture.

During this cycle of summarizing, practicing, questioning, and connecting to the cultural text, students were engaged in integrating the four skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening, therefore linking content and process for this inquiry into the effect of the cultural experience on language skills.

As students discovered that they were required to "think" in an English language class, as well as become personally involved in the material, they experienced a higher level of self-awareness. I think this was one of the most important learning outcomes of this classroom-based research project.

### **Evaluation of Students' Learning**

In evaluating the outcomes of my students' language and culture learning. I analyzed the data I collected on students' work as well as my note taking and journaling based on m observations. I based my evaluation on how students engaged in following the four tasks Moran describes to assess language and culture learning for the four cultural knowings.

Moran describes the first task as being able to demonstrate comprehension of the information presented by summarizing the topic/theme of the cultural text.

Here is a sample of student work, using the focus questions in the student handbook (Appendix) as a guideline for summarizing. Students worked in groups, then pairs, and finally individually to compose a summary of the essay. This sample shows how the student was able to express the main idea as well as give some details to support the idea without simply writing a direct translation of the Japanese original.

*“The Level of Ability for Japanese People”*

*This essay is about the difference between the Japanese and Americans in how they judge their ability.*

*Diane went skiing with some Japanese friends in Furano. They asked her, "Can you ski?" and Diane said, "Yes, I can." However, the course was too steep, and Diane ended up crying at the top of the mountain.*

*After that, Diane decided to be more humble about her level of ability. One day, Diane entered a golf competition. Diane was humble about her ability as a golfer. There was a Japanese woman who also said humbly that she was not a good golfer as well. However, this woman won the championship that day.*

*Diane wants to know what Japanese people mean when they say they can or cannot do something.*

Moran describes the second task as being able to demonstrate the performance of the cultural behaviors by practicing the topic/theme of the cultural text. Here is a sample of a student work using the focus questions in the student handbook as a guideline for practicing. Students conversed on the topic/theme of the cultural text using focus questions that were strategies for how to carry on a conversation in English. This transcribed conversation shows how these students were able to discuss a personal experience in English based on the topic of Japanese telepathy. They were able to ask and answer questions, give more information, respond and give and opinion.

*“Japanese Telepathy”*

*Student A: I made some curry rice. I sat down at the table to eat my curry rice and I asked my mother, "Could you get that for me?" and she brought me a glass of water. But, I wanted her to bring me a spoon.*

*Student B: I don't understand.*

*Student A: Well, I always make spicy curry, so my mother thought I needed water.*

*Student C: My father just yells, "Hey" and my mother knows he wants tea.*

*Student B: Oh, I see.*

*Student C: You should have said, "Could you get me a spoon?"*

*Student A: Yes, I only pointed to the kitchen.*

*Student C: I know! Your mom should have said, "Do you want a spoon?"*

Moran describes the third task as being able to demonstrate the ability to give cultural explanations by interpreting the topic/theme of the cultural text. Here is a sample of student work, using the focus questions in the student handbook as a guideline for questioning. The students brainstormed together as a group exercise. They focused on finding possible explanations for implicit cultural behaviors found in Japanese society to explain the differences between North American and Japanese communication styles.

*"Japanese Telepathy"*

*How do you explain the differences between North American  
and Japanese style communication?*

*The difference between North American and Japanese style communication is low context and high context styles. North Americans use a direct, clear style of communication. They give more explanation and detail. This is low context. Japanese people have a high context style. We try to read people's feelings, guess meanings, and do not explain in detail. We are more indirect. To build a good relationship between Japanese people, this is important. We must think how the other person thinks or feels. In Diane's story, she is using high context style of communication. In Japan, it is rude to ask for something for free and an indirect way is more effective. But we are sure that even for Japanese people, "telepathy" does not always work.*

Finally, Moran describes the fourth task as students being able to express self-awareness by connecting themselves to the topic/theme of the cultural text. Here is a sample of student work, using the focus questions in the student handbook for responding. This was an individual assignment for each student to write his or her feelings and ideas on the three cultural texts. The journal was a place for students to reflect on their connections to the topic. This journal excerpt shows how the student expresses self-awareness in reflecting on national characteristics.

*"National Character Begins from Childhood"*

*I have never thought about our national character. Having them and comparing to another culture made me clear what I need to focus on. I think every country has a different national character and each country has strong and weak points. I enjoyed discussing with my classmates and listening to their opinions. I talked with my Chinese friend. She said, "We can not talk freely because Chinese government is so big and has so many people. If everyone talked freely, the*

*Chinese government could not manage the people.” I believe it is important to know both sides of personalities and then we must respect each other’s national character. Japanese people don’t like to stand out and we want to keep harmony in the group. I think that Japanese people have feelings to each other. I think that harmony is connecting to that feeling. Maybe Japan’s style is restrictive, but it has a value all its own. I think that if someone wants to go to America, he has to become a “squeaky wheel”. But, if someone goes to Japan, he has to be careful not to “stick out” and “get hammered down.”*

I believe these examples demonstrated that language and culture learning outcomes were positively affected by moving through the stages of the Cultural Experience Model. By using the student handbook, the students were able to participate and accomplish the main objectives of the four cultural knowings by following the focus questions in a way that was personal and meaningful for them.

### **Student Final Feedback Questionnaire**

This classroom-based research project was a dynamic and multifaceted process. The essays used with the cultural experience created a student-centered learning environment that was novel to all of the students and subject to change as each experience grew into the next. The cultural text, the Cultural Experience Model, and the student handbook acted together as a three-part frame to support the student’s language and cultural learning. Each student’s experience polished a different facet of this project, as each became his or her best resource for learning language and culture. The three-part frame was made most apparent in the students’ final feedback. Their participation was positive and cooperative because they learned to find their words to describe, experience, question and respond to each essay.

#### 1. What was interesting about this approach?

*(T) “For me, asking questions about the two cultures was the most interesting thing for me because we used only English to make and discuss questions.”*

*(R) “I had never used English to talk about my personal experiences to relate to the subject before, so I felt very close to the subject matter.”*

*(A) “While thinking about my own personal experiences, when I talked about those, I came to understand the differences between American and Japanese cultures. I could talk about my own experiences with these essays.”*



2. What was difficult about this approach?

**(T)** *“Trying to understand the differences between Japanese and American cultures was difficult because I had never thought about this before.”*

**(A)** *“The first time I tried to just summarize the essay was difficult. It is easier to just translate from Japanese to English, but after doing this, I learned how to do it by actually thinking about the meaning behind what the author is trying to say by using English.”*

**(R)** *“I had never thought about Japanese culture. I had never asked myself, ‘Why do I do that?’ ‘Why do I say that?’ so at first, it was difficult for me to express my ideas.”*

3. What was positive or negative for you in this approach?

**(T)** *“Nothing was negative, but the most positive thing was trying to make questions in English to try and understand more about American culture using English.”*

**(R)** *“I had the chance to think about the difference between Japanese and American cultures. It was difficult for me sometimes because I never thought about my culture. I was confused by it and it was difficult to explain.”*

**(Ru)** *“The positive thing was that I had a lot of time to put my ideas into shape, to make sentences in English and to write them. I also liked being able to talk with my family about Japanese culture.”*

4. What was meaningful to you in this approach?

**(T)** *“Being able to go through the four steps of the cycle was meaningful to me in this approach. If we had only summarized the essays, it would not have been meaningful. All four stages were meaningful because we connected with each part in English and not in Japanese, so it was a deeper experience and I felt excited, thrilled, and satisfied by it.”*

**(R)** *“I felt I could relate to, and connect with essays by thinking about them step by step, and not only asking questions, but thinking about me to see the whole picture.”*

**(A)** *“I really had a chance to think about my own culture. In Japan we have *Tatemaie* {the feelings you show} and *Honne* {the feelings you keep in your heart}, which are two words that explain the character of how Japanese people communicate. I learned the difference between how we are humble in one situation and how we act humble in another situation. This was very interesting for me.”*

5. How was this approach different from your past English learning?

**(T)** *“I had never used English as a way to communicate in discussions on comparing and contrasting between Japanese and American Culture.”*

**(R)** *“My past English studies were ‘one way’ with the teacher dictating a long sentence for us to repeat, translate, and transcribe. I almost never had a chance to speak or discuss anything about that sentence. On the other hand, this approach is ‘two way’ because we are sharing our experiences in discussions, we are relating to the subject by comparing and contrasting Japanese and American culture, and we are giving voice to our opinions and beliefs in feedback.”*

**(A)** *“This is the first time I have ever experienced this kind of study. In school, I have read English novels and essays, but only to read them and translate into Japanese. I have never used English to share my experiences and compare or contrast my experiences with the material or other students in the class.”*

6. What did you think about learning language and culture together?

**(T)** *“I prefer learning language and culture together because this gives me a chance to use English and I can compare contrast culture, which is a more meaningful experience.”*

**(R)** *“I think we need to learn language and culture together because we can relate more deeply to the subject. Japanese people don’t give voice to their opinions, but Americans say what they think, so if I want to communicate my ideas to Americans I have to know that in their culture, people express their opinions and that is how I have to communicate my ideas.”*

**(A)** *“I think it is important to learn how to speak English, but to know about culture is important too, because if I can understand about different cultures, I can understand more about what people think.”*

7. How do you feel this approach helped your speaking, writing, listening, and reading in English?

**(T)** *“It helped my speaking the most because I used English to express myself and discuss with other classmates. I think it helped my listening because it was a good experience to listen to my classmates speaking in English. I learned new vocabulary and practiced grammar by writing in English.”*

**(R)** *“It helped my writing and speaking because at first it was difficult to explain my ideas, but I had a lot of time to think about language and culture deeply by first writing what I wanted to say and then discussing about what I had written. It helped my listening because I could listen to other people’s ideas about culture, and the language they used, to describe their feelings and some of their ideas were very different from mine. I had many chances to read my sentences to the other students, but sometimes I worried about whether they could understand what I was trying to say.”*

**(A)** *“I think it was very helpful for my writing because I had to use both Japanese-to-English and English-to-Japanese dictionaries to check for meanings and vocabulary. It helped my speaking because I was using vocabulary and grammar*

*by speaking about my own experiences and not just repeating the English from the essays. I listened to read other students' writing and speaking parts, so I noticed the way they used English and understood what they think and it added to my learning too."*

8. How do you feel this approach helped you think about American and Japanese culture?

**(T)** *"I feel that Diane's class was very great. I appreciated her class because it was the first class where we used only English to study English. I have studied English since junior high school, but I had never used English."*

**(R)** *"It helped me think about Japanese and American culture. We talked about our experiences and talked about proverbs. This was how we could think about the differences between Japanese and American culture. It was difficult and I got tired, but I know that it is important to take the time to think about things and I need this approach to help me learn how to communicate what I am thinking about."*

**(A)** *"This approach was very helpful because I noticed how two cultures are different, but I did not just read about the two cultures. I interacted with the reading, so I felt I really learned more. It was very interesting because, as a Japanese, maybe I cannot say everything I think, but when I use English, I can communicate in a different way by speaking out about what I think or want to say."*

### **Conclusion**

Japanese English language learners are not used to discussing how they have studied English, or think about studying English beyond vocabulary and grammar points. However, their feedback shows how they had acquired the necessary vocabulary and grammar during the twelve weeks of writing, speaking, listening, and reading their summaries, experiences, questions, and responses to handling the material confidently and candidly.

When I asked the students how they felt the approach helped them with their language skills, they all focused on writing, speaking, and listening, but did not say much about reading. The fact is that the students were writing out summaries, speaking on the topics, and questioning the culture with each other, but they did not recognize the role of reading their work as being another valuable skill that they had made progress in developing. I think they focused more on writing and speaking because, being student-generated, these activities were the most difficult for them and required the most energy. These students were used to reading and listening to prepared English texts and materials to translate into Japanese, but now they had to figure out how to express what they were thinking and feeling. Even though this represented the biggest challenge, they gradually became more assured about their ability to choose their words to discuss their connections to culture

in writing.

The class agreed that the approach helped with their listening from talking with each other in class. However, I have to take into consideration why they did not notice that reading was just as much a part of the experiment as the speaking, writing, and listening skills were. My feeling is that they did not get that impression because the only English they were reading was from their work. They may not have accepted it as "genuine" because it was not derived from an English textbook. After summarizing, practicing, questioning, and responding to the three different essays in *Diane, I am Japagaijin*, my students were most impressed that they were finally getting a chance to think in a language class about themselves, their culture, and another culture.

American culture places a greater emphasis on writing and speaking as a means of self-expression. However, the Japanese culture places a greater emphasis on reading and listening to understand how others express themselves.

The Cultural Experience Model demonstrated itself to be the perfect model for conducting my classroom-based research. I was able to provide my material, *Diane, I am Japagaijin*, which proved to be an appropriate cultural text for students to summarize, practice, question, and connect to in English. By developing a student handbook to guide student's learning, I could also document and evaluate both student learning and my learning.

One semester of classes, focusing on one approach to cover three essays chosen by the students, proved to be a manageable challenge that was interesting to them. Implementing the four skills of English to relate and connect themselves personally to American and Japanese cultures was a unique method of study for them. I know that these students have spent years translating sentences and memorizing vocabulary words to learn enough English only to pass a test.

On the other hand, these are the same students who also wanted very much to communicate in English, to experience a foreign culture and understand more about their culture. Of course, it was difficult at times because this was a new challenge, but they were motivated because they were able to engage with the material on a personal level. Engaging with the material made the learning more meaningful and, therefore, a positive experience. These students found meaning in studying language and culture by being aware of how they were influenced by their direct participation in the language and culture learning.

In retrospect, I realize that I did not include a question in the final feedback questionnaire that would have directed the students' attention to the cultural resource text used in this experiment. Most of my questions were centered on the approach and not on the material. Although I did not ask

the students directly how they felt about using *Diane, I am Japagaijin* as a cultural text for language and culture learning, the students themselves validated its usefulness as an appropriate text for learning language and culture, because it was this cultural resource that sparked their discussions, ignited their questions, and elicited answers to their responses.

## APPENDIX: STUDENT HANDBOOK

### *Diane, I am Japagaijin, A Cultural Text*

Essay Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Name/Date: \_\_\_\_\_

#### SUMMARIZING

**Directions:** After choosing an essay from *Diane, I am Japagaijin*, please use the following strategies and checklist to help you identify and clarify language and culture learning in English.

#### **SUMMARIZING for Cultural *Knowing About***

This means you will describe in your own words what happens in the reading and describe what you think are the three most important events and or details from the reading. **Be prepared to discuss your summary in class.**

#### **Checklist of Focus Questions for Responding to the Cultural Experience**

- What was the main idea of the essay?
- What happened in the essay? (To whom, where, what, why, when, how?)
- Give some details about what happened

#### EXPERIENCING

Essay Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Name/Date: \_\_\_\_\_

#### **EXPERIENCING English for Cultural *Knowing How***

This means you will practice English vocabulary words and grammar based on the topic/theme of the essay by discussing on the theme/topic represented in the essay. Please refer to the checklist of focus questions listed below. **Be prepared to discuss the essay in class.**

#### **Checklist of Focus Questions for Responding to the Cultural Experience**

- Ask questions: Do you? Can you? Are You? Have you? WH questions...etc.
- Re-Ask questions: And you? How about you? You mean...etc.
- Respond to questions and statements: Uh-huh, Really, Oh-No! Give an opinion (I think...), State a belief or an idea (I believe...), Share your feelings (I feel...)...etc.
- Give more information: Add more information to your response (and, because, so, but then, if, or...etc.

#### QUESTIONING

Essay Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Name/Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### **QUESTIONING for Cultural *Knowing Why***

This means you will question the underlying cultural theme that is addressed in the essay; for example, questions that *address confusing parts* of the essay, or *thought questions* that the essay makes you wonder about. **Be prepared to discuss your findings in class.**

#### **Checklist of Focus Questions for Interpreting the Cultural Experience**

- What cultural meanings; for example, values, beliefs and attitudes can you find in the essay?
- How do you explain these cultural meanings?
- What evidence supports your explanations?

### **CONNECTING**

Essay Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Name/Date: \_\_\_\_\_

#### **CONNECTING FOR Cultural *Knowing Oneself***

This means you will make *at least three connections* between ideas or events in the essay to *your own experiences, the world around you, or other literature*. **Be prepared to turn this in as a journal project.**

#### **Checklist of Focus Questions for Responding to the Cultural Experience**

- What do you think about the topic?
- How do you feel about the topic?
- Do you agree with the topic?
- What more do you need to know about the topic?
- What have you learned about the topic?

### **JOURNALING FOR CONNECTING**

Essay Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Name/Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** Write in your journal to record feelings or ideas and beliefs that relate to you personally, based on the ideas or events represented in the essay.

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