

All About Me(dia): A Collection of Hermit Crab Essays

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What is a "hermit crab essay?"

American essayists Brenda Miller and Suzanne Paola define the hermit crab essay as a piece of creative nonfiction that takes another form to structure inquiries, narratives, and reflections (as a real hermit crab moves between shells of different shapes and sizes). Put simply, these essays take on everyday forms, or "shells," such as to-do lists, love letters, or obituaries, encouraging innovation and rule-bending. Thus, I elected to use this niche, versatile genre to explore how the media we consume shapes us as people, and especially how it impacts our actions, thoughts, and beliefs.



Image Credit: Brooklyn Pet Supply

Some "Shells" I Used for this Project:

- A TV/movie transcript of a diehard Ariana Grande fan's TikTok livestream
- A faux Wikipedia article dissecting "Hamilfans," the absurd cult followers of the hit Broadway musical, *Hamilton*
- A series of album "liner notes" about my personal experience growing up with the *Little House on the Prairie* TV series

Results

After eight weeks of writing, revising, and workshopping with my peers, I learned many valuable hermit-crab writing techniques, including:

- "Putting the Crab Before the Shell" – When I started my first essay, I believed that once I decided on a template and chose a topic somewhat related to it, the paper would easily fall into place. However, this approach became stifling, and I learned it was more efficient to decide what message I should relay first; here, I realized that the "crab" of the essay (the "living thing" inside of it that needs to be revealed, and the tone/metaphors needed for it to do so) must take priority over its "shell" (the structural aesthetic) for full effect.
- "Hijacking" the Form – I also learned to be more comfortable "hijacking" different shells, adding footnotes and asides to let my own voice and commentary infiltrate the set templates of these pieces to imbue them with humanity, relatability, and wit.



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Conclusion

In writing about and researching different impacts of media from various perspectives, I have concluded that depending on how we interact with it, the media we encounter can either ground us, helping us to *embrace our true selves*, or *push us further from ourselves* as we strive to emulate its often idyllic, unrealistic depictions of life and society—if we're not careful, our media could detach us from the connections that matter beyond the screen.

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References

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