# **Week 2. Paradigm Shifts - Discussion: Life Lesson/ Paradigm Shift Essay**

No unread replies. No replies.

* Post your essay in the discussion no later than Wednesday for full credit (yes, you have an extra day this week to post your initial response; please use it to proofread your essay and turn in your best work).

Life Lesson and Paradigm Shifts Essay Posting
Life lessons are often accompanied by paradigm shifts. Using college-level writing skills, prepare and write a 5-paragraph (minimum) essay on the following topic: life lessons and paradigm shifts as demonstrated by your pre-class reading. Your essay needs to include 3 elements:
 1. a brief summary of the main events of the book
 2. a discussion of how these events led to a paradigm shift (or shifts) for the main character(s)
 3. your own personal reflection on what lessons you took from the book, or how the book affected your own worldview
* Be sure to include an introductory paragraph where you provide a clear thesis for the essay, and where you give the name of the book and author.
* You should include some amount of direct quotations from the book to substantiate your claims, but don't overdo it on the quotes. No more than 10% of your essay should be direct quotations.When you use direct quotations,or paraphrase specific ideas from the text, you must provide a proper APA in-text citation, including the page number. (See *A Writer's Resource*.)
* Remember to write to a general audience who may NOT have read the book you chose to read - provide a brief summary of the book and its themes
* Include an APA formatted reference at the bottom of your posting.
* Refer to *A Writer's Resource* for editing for clarity, grammar conventions, correctness, and the basic grammar review, if needed. (See my Video Lectures on the writing process, particularly "[Evaluating and Revising Your Draft](https://sienaheights.instructure.com/courses/4405/pages/virtual-writing-center-lectures-on-writing).")

It is not necessary to include citations or references in your responses to your classmates unless you wish to include something we are not currently reading.

I read Mary Karr’s Lit (2009) as my pre-class reading. The book is a raw look behind the scenes of Karr’s life as she struggles with alcohol, guilt and her desire to become a poet. Growing up, a poverty-stricken child with mother and father both distant alcoholics, she finds herself making justifications for her drinking that she can no longer manage. Her husband and son take the back seat to her habit as her cravings for alcohol grow stronger. It is not until a fateful night behind the wheel, drunk, and almost killing herself, that she realizes she needs serious help beyond what she is able to find within herself. When she is still unable to come to terms with her alcoholism, despite support groups and a wavering sense of faith, she contemplates suicide instead. Getting the help she needs brings light into her soul and opens her up to a relationship with her “H. P.” (higher power), as she snarkily refers to God at first (Karr, 2009, p. 245). By the end of the book, she comes to terms with her reckless self, allowing her to right her relationship with her sister, mother, son and God himself.

Throughout the book, Mary understands that her behaviors and habits are destructive. At first, in her younger years, she is nonchalant about how these behaviors are affecting her life, her biggest fear being that she will turn into her drunk mother. As she ages, like most of us, she begins to reflect more and more, not only on her past, but what these behaviors are doing to her immediate present. The drinking begins to dig a deep chasm between her and Warren’s already distant relationship when she develops the desire for a child. Whether she feels this will fix her marriage or not, this is her first notable and semi-successful attempt to quit drinking, going cold turkey to prepare her body to hold a child.

Once their child, Dev, is born, a stressed-out new mother, holding down a teaching job and nursing a frequently sick little one, her mother, Charlie, comes to visit. Mary becomes distraught that she is unable to produce enough milk for her son and Charlie insists beer will boost Mary’s supply. This is the slight push that Mary needs to begin the cycle of drinking again. Soon she is sneaking liquor between her Dev’s nightly wakings. She attempts to hide her drinking, lying when Warren asks about the rapid disappearance of beer and wine he purchases, or retreating into closets to catch a buzz.

Mary makes many more attempts to squash her drinking problem before the book’s end. Denying that she has a *disease*, she seeks external help from support groups. She befriends “Joan the Bone,” another woman in her group, in hopes that she can provide the accountability she needs to remain sober for her son. Joan councils Mary, suggesting that she pray. Mary scoffs at prayer and religion. Joan recognizes Mary’s struggle, commenting “At this point in your life, you don’t know how not to drink yet. No alcoholic does. It takes training” (Karr, 2009, p. 209). When prayer fails, even though she was reluctant to *really* give prayer a chance, she takes on the guilt of her crumbling marriage and gets behind the wheel, drunk. Spiraling after the severe accident, she plans for suicide.

Fighting the urge to end her life, she checks herself into the “Mental Marriott” (Karr, 2009, p. 280). Fearful that she will lose her son and knowing that this is the absolute end to her marriage to Warren, Mary succumbs to the clarity that she has been seeking. This is the final push that she needs to get right in her heart. It is at her worst that she is compelled to pray, reaching out to God with the understanding that she is not capable to turn things around on her own.

Analyzing the entirety of the book, I can see that Mary feels alone, seeking love and attention from key players in her life: her father as she is young, evident from her visits with him as he nears death; Warren, her husband, as she feels him drifting away; Dev, her son, as she fears that her decision to get help will inevitably force Warren to fight for custody; and of course, her mother, Charlie, who has been too distracted by alcohol and men to realize her daughter’s desperate cries for help. All of this distance from the people she loved and depended upon, diminished her sense of self over time, allowing her to turn to alcohol to subdue her intense loneliness, filling the void. Had God been more prominent in her life initially, would this have changed the outcome?

Like Mary, I have been forced to take a hard look inward. I too felt the deep darkness that can accompany a loveless marriage and the weight of depression beginning to eat away at my sense of self. Although Karr’s disease was alcohol and mine was an unhealthy relationship, we both had to heal ourselves first to be able to overcome the demons that kept hold on us in the stagnant void of what our lives once were. The realization and transition to clarity was painful, as I doubt real internal growth is ever easy, but it was necessary for each of us to own our past to be able to begin to reform our future. Jill Bolte-Taylor beautifully sums up the breakthrough I have had this past year, by stating “We have the power to choose, moment by moment, who and how we want to be in the world” (Bolte-Taylor, 2008). Although there are many aspects of this life that are beyond my control or even within the hands of God, there are equally as many things that are solely in my control, and attitude directs most of them. I choose to be happy, I choose to be present, and I choose to be *Me*. All other obstacles will be handled with my head high and peace within. And life goes on.

References

Bolte-Taylor, J. (2008, February). *My Stroke of Insight* [Video file]. Retrieved from: <https://www.ted.com/talks/jill_bolte_taylor_s_powerful_stroke_of_insight>

Karr, M. (2009). *Lit.* New York, New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc.