

Story Discovery Questionnaire

Step 1 of the CollegeReadyParent essay process. Free to copy, print, and share.

Strong essays start with true stories, not good vocabulary. These questions help your student find where their real material lives. Best done out loud, together — parent asks, student talks, someone jots. The goal isn't polish; it's honesty, reflection, and voice. Circle the two answers with the most energy behind them — those are the essay candidates.

1. What's something you've taught someone else to do?

Examples: teaching a younger student a song; showing a sibling how to budget; walking a friend through a science concept.

2. What do people come to you for?

Examples: advice, calm, organization, troubleshooting, someone who actually listens.

3. What moment changed how you see the world?

Examples: volunteering at a shelter, experiencing loss, watching someone overcome adversity, meeting someone from a very different background.

4. What challenge required real growth or resilience?

Examples: moving schools, family struggles, injury, a mental-health challenge, an academic setback.

5. When were you proud of your impact — even if no one saw it?

Examples: carrying a group project, helping a struggling teammate, staying committed after others quit.

6. What do you love learning about even when no one makes you?
Examples: space, ecosystems, music theory, how computers work, leadership, social movements.

7. What frustrates you about the world — and what would you change?
Examples: inequality, access to healthcare, food insecurity, how people treat animals or the planet.

Circle the winners

Which two answers had the most detail, emotion, or energy? Write them here — they feed the Theme-Building Worksheet, the next step.

A note for parents

Your job in this step is interviewer, not editor. Ask the question, then follow up with “what happened next?” and “how did that feel?” The details your student mentions casually — the parking lot, the broken clarinet, the 6 a.m. shift — are usually the gold. Write those down verbatim.

Free Resources — No Account, No Cost, No Data Collection

Full essay toolkit for parents	collegereadyparent.org/essay-toolkit
Brag sheet builder + recommendation kit	collegereadyparent.org/brag-sheet-builder
9th-12th grade planning checklists	collegereadyparent.org/checklists

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