

**Prompt:** Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.

A tree branch scrapes against my backpack as I pump away up and up. I refuse to change my gears and concede to the whims of the hill. It feels like a race against the sun as it seems to climb the hill along with me. I smile a little bit to myself, knowing, also, that if I don't reach the top of this hill by 7:15, then I won't make it in time for school. In this moment, I question my motivations for biking to school. *Why not just take the bus or get a ride?*

Noticing the time, I shift into a higher gear, realizing this isn't a day where I can pedal lackadaisically up the hill. *Screw this hill for beating me up all the time.* Angry at the hill today, I know that the anger is only fleeting. Perhaps a victim of the binding effects of Stockholm Syndrome, I've actually grown very fond of the hill. Its determination to beat me up on sprint repeats, cross country workouts, and bike rides to school has inspired my admiration. The hill, in some ways, has been a friend throughout my high school career.

*My quads are burning.* In a different moment, I would consider thanking the hill for being my motivator. Because it's so close to where I live, I like to think of it as uniquely mine. I suppose, then, that everyone has their own hill. The only hill that I work on is my own; others' hills aren't necessarily larger or smaller or better - just different - than mine. Once in a while, my track coach or a teacher will encourage me to beat another up 'their hill,' but it never motivates me quite like my hill does. Because I want my hill to be worn down, travelled in a variety of ways; my hill is always my strongest motivator.

*Focus. It's a hill - what are you talking about?* Nearly half a mile of paved blacktop with green on either side of it, the hill seems impossibly large. Perhaps on a day when I'm not

pedaling furiously up the punishing slope, in a moment of self-reflection, I might consider the shape of the hill as indicative of who I am. The slope continues to climb the farther it goes up, almost like it has a fear of stagnation. It reminds me of my insatiable desire to continuously improve my times in track, to reach my full academic potential, even to help the community.

*A little bit more, almost there.* Maybe others are biking up their hills at the same time as me. I smile at this thought and picture myself cheering on my cross country teammates as they run up their hill. I think back to leading summer practices and showing the younger athletes that running up their hill isn't as daunting as they think. These thoughts help me push a little bit harder as I near the top of the hill.

I reach the top of the hill just in time. I know full well that it will be there again tomorrow, but that excites me. I will always have my own hill to serve as motivation, and I hope that I can use my hill to help others travel theirs.