

# Paragraph Structure: Highlighted Student Sample

9th Grade ELA  
Examining Personal Identity in Short Texts

## A Window into My German Identity

Topic Sentence: green  
Evidence: yellow  
Explanation: orange  
Last Sentence: blue

"(citizen) (illegal)" provides a window into the lives of people who feel torn between their families' "illegal" cultural identity and their society's "citizen" cultural identity, a foreign experience for me, whose family has lost its traditional culture. Throughout the poem, the speaker describes the tension between his Mexican identity and American identity, such as in the third stanza in which he questions if someone is a citizen or illegal "If they have a baby and the baby looks white enough to pass (citizen). / If the baby grows up singing Selena songs to his reflection (illegal)" (Olivarez, lines 15–16). On one hand, the speaker wonders if he is more American than Mexican, since he can pass as white, but on the other hand, he wonders if he is more Mexican than American because he sings songs from the Mexican-American singer Selena. This speaker's experience is a window for me because it is quite different from my own, as my family immigrated from Germany more than 100 years ago. Throughout my childhood, I remember my mother often singing a few lines of rhyming German to me as I was falling asleep. Just recently, I finally asked my mother the name of the song and its meaning. However, besides the three lines passed down through the generations, my mother knew neither the name nor the meaning of the silly rhyme. My family felt immense pressure to become "American," which at the time meant speaking and singing in English. Consequently, I've realized that my family has lost so much of our traditional culture, such as music and language. All in all, on one hand, I feel dismayed by how much my family has lost in regards to culture, but at the same time, I've never questioned if I belong in the United States, a tension the speaker of Olivarez's poem grapples with.