

Mandel Youth Humanities Academy

Alumni Perspectives (2023 Cohort)



Layla Tinsley //
Cleveland School of the Arts (2024)

Why were you interested in the Mandel Youth Humanities Academy (MYHA)?

I had been looking for a summer program or a summer job. I am interested in cultural anthropology, and I've been trying to find ways to dabble in my interests and explore this field. When I found this program, I knew it was very different from the other summer programs I had seen. It was about art, history, literature and all of the topics that really intrigue me.

Has anything surprised you about the program?

This program is not a classic classroom setting — it's very different from what I've done before. At the very beginning, we just jumped into reading Plato, and I was like, "Wow!" I love the focus on literature. I'm a big reader, and I like that the books we're reading are different from the books I'm reading in school. Right now, we are exploring theology, so we had a lecture on C.S. Lewis today. I'm about to start reading Lewis's *The Problem of Pain*.

What big questions are you exploring in MYHA?

Our big questions for this summer are "What is justice?", "How do we know what we know?" and "Who am I?" I've learned that these are big questions to keep pondering because I don't think they have definitive answers. When we were presented with the big questions in the first week of the program, I found myself at home later, just thinking about them and

wondering, what is justice? What about fairness — is *that* the same as justice? You find different answers every time you think about these questions.

What has been your favorite experience this summer?

I really liked going to the art museum. I attend an art school, even though I'm not a visual artist. I've been to the art museum plenty of times, but the MYHA professor who led our visit to the museum taught us how to look at art differently. First, we talked about it at the Mandel Center, and then we went to the museum to actually do it, working with real artifacts. I thought it was a very fun way to learn something new.

Is there anything you've learned that you'll take with you from MYHA?

We have done a lot of digging deeper this summer — deeper in our own writing, how we look at different questions and how we read books. We've been going beyond the surface level. I think this is something that will stick with me. I've also learned that you have to hold your values firm but still be open to learning and listening. These are the intellectual virtues we've been talking about. Openness and curiosity are things I want to practice more. I'm not one who likes to jump into new stuff, but after thinking and reading more about curiosity as a virtue, I want to try more new experiences and continue to be more curious about things — even when they may shake my values.



Michael Arcaro //
Villa Angela St. Joseph High School
(2024)

If you were talking to a student who was thinking about applying to MYHA, what would you tell them about your experience?

The thing that has been most surprising to me has been the amazing support from the program. For example, we have virtual reality equipment and gaming systems, I have transportation every day, and I'm fully supported in this program. We get incredible opportunities. We go off campus all the time, and that's how I learn best. I learn through experiences. I love being in the classroom, but getting to go out into the field every week around Cleveland and engage with my community is an incredible opportunity that I'm really happy to have.

Plus, we are exposed to so many impressive people. I attended a philosophy lecture with the dean of the Mandel Center (I had no idea he was the dean!). I've met people who work at the Cleveland Museum of Art, the LAND Studio and even a Cleveland mural artist. These are people who I never in a million years would have thought I would be engaging with.

What has been your favorite part of MYHA?

I have had a really good experience with the game studies part of the program. I think game studies give us a really great opportunity to engage with what we're learning in a less academic way. It almost tricks

students into learning because it feels like we're just playing a game. I'm a big believer in learning through play. We are doing that literally through the game studies, but we are also doing it when we are learning in our philosophy lessons to "play" with ideas and concepts. And it's fun!

How have you grown as a thinker?

When I go back to high school, I will be going on this retreat where I will have to give a public speech about "Who am I?", so I've really been using this summer to prepare for that. "Who am I?" has been one of our core questions in MYHA, and I want to incorporate everything I've learned here to help my classmates from school begin to think about who they are.

I have a completely new view on how I'm going to treat the rest of my high school education and how I'm going to treat university. I'm really excited to go to college and interact with professors on a meaningful basis instead of just focusing on being book smart and getting good grades like in high school. I really want to engage with knowledge, and this program has taught me how to do that.

Michael's Essay, "Education through the Dialectic," appears in the *MYHA Review*, Issue 2



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