

Psychosocial assessment of the soloist

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The Soloist By Colleen Austin SOWK 587a University of Southern California
Professor Brittani Morris Strengths Based Assessment2 Character

Identification Describe the character you choose as your focus. Include race, ethnicity, age, religion, sex, marital status, living situation, educational level, internal strengths (coping mechanisms, skills, experience, ability to connect to others, resilience, determination, flexibility, commitment, loyalty, etc.).

Mr. Nathaniel Anthony Ayers is a middle aged, black African-American man.

He is spiritual but identifies with no specific religion, he does pray in the movie, saying the Our Father. He is unmarried, and is homeless. He displays signs of mental illness, most likely schizophrenic as evidenced by his paranoia and he hears voices. He began to hear voices in adolescence. At one point he thought his sister was trying to poison him, so he forced her to eat the food she brought to him. He lived in the basement of the home he grew up in. It wasn't obvious, but he must have remained living with his sister after his mother died.

When he went to Juilliard, he got an apartment and the voices became more prominent. There is no evidence that he was ever diagnosed with a mental illness. He has a difficult time maintain relationships with others because he is mentally ill and continually talks to himself. Nathaniel has a high school education. He was also accepted and completed some classical music training from Juilliard, according to a teacher there, he just stopped showing up. What happened in his life from that point until the present is unknown. Although he is homeless, one of his possessions is a violin, which only has two strings.

In doing this, Nathaniel shows determination, because even though he doesn't have a complete instrument he stills continues to play it. Strengths Based AssessmentPage 3 Nathaniel shows loyalty to his music. He is always playing his violin and in fact talks about his loyalty to his music when he states that " he is holding on to his faith in the power of his music. " (The Soloist, 2009) Nathaniel shows a lot of inner strengths. He has determination, which is evident by the fact that he continues to play the violin, although it only has two strings.

He is resilient, evidenced by the fact that he has been homeless for many years, schizophrenic and yet he is surviving on the streets of L. A. Nathaniel shows no flexibility. When Lopez brings him to the apartment, he says that he will play the violin there, but he will not stay there. It was not his apartment he said. II. Significant Relationships Describe 2-3 significant relationships this character has to other characters in the film, both in terms of role and in terms of the resources and/or challenges that this character offers to your focus character.

Nathaniel's most significant relationship is with Steve Lopez, a reporter for the Los Angeles Times newspaper. Lopez is fascinated by Nathaniel when he discovers that he is a classically trained musician, who is homeless and writes a column with Nathaniel as his subject. It isn't clear at first what Lopez's motives are, other than to write a column that is entertaining and widely read by Los Angeles. Initially, it is obvious Lopez is using Nathaniel as his focus. Lopez is divorced although he continues to have a relationship with his ex-wife who is also Strengths Based AssessmentPage 4 is boss at the Times. In fact his ex-wife tells him that there is possibly a book that could be

written about Nathaniel and essentially accuses him at one point in the movie of exploiting Nathaniel. This relationship shifts over time. He is single and finds himself thinking about Nathaniel's "plight." He becomes emotionally invested in Nathaniel, in that he feels that he can help this homeless, mentally ill man toward a better life. What he doesn't understand is that Nathaniel is comfortable in his life. He has become accustomed to his homeless life.

Lopez, although his latent motives appear to be altruistic, actually causes Nathaniel a great deal of stress. He tries to convince the manager of the Lamp Community that he should force Nathaniel to see a psychiatrist and be put on medication. David, the manager of the Lamp Community could be another of Nathaniel's significant relationships. He allowed Lopez to leave the cello that was donated by a reader at the facility, because that was the only place that Lopez would allow him to play it. He didn't want him to have it on the street.

David was instrumental in helping Lopez to finally learn what the best thing was that he could do for Nathaniel. Lopez needed to be his friend, David told him. That was really what Nathaniel needed. Someone he could trust. David was, in this sense, an advocate for Nathaniel. He made Lopez understand that Nathaniel didn't want to see a psychiatrist and even if he did, there were no guarantees that he would even take his medication. It is possible that Nathaniel knew that on medication he would not be the same musician.

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Graham Clayton, the music teacher, was another character whose relationship to Nathaniel was significant. He was teaching Nathaniel to play

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music other than Beethoven, Nathaniel's favorite. In fact, there was a statue of Beethoven in a square and that was where Steve Lopez looked to find Nathaniel. Not only did Clayton offer music lessons, but he also offered him spiritual guidance. He set up a recital for Nathaniel, however when Nathaniel showed up to play, he began to hear voices and when Clayton put his hand on his shoulder, Nathaniel reacted with such fear that he nearly assaulted Clayton.

Nathaniel ran, which was one of his best coping mechanisms, that and playing music III. Community Analysis Describe the two most significant groups/communities that your focus character belongs to and/or aspires to belong to in the film. There is one significant community to which Nathaniel belongs. And one community that it appears he would like to belong. The first community is the Lamp Community, a shelter for the homeless and often these homeless people are mentally ill. The other community is the music community. Nathaniel wanted to be a classic cellist when he was younger.

He was excited when Lopez brought him the cello and wanted to keep it with his grocery cart full of belongings. The Lamp Community offered Nathaniel food, shelter and clothing. However, he spent most of his time sleeping on the streets, going to the facility only when he needed something. They did offer group sessions for the homeless, but it wasn't clear what the topics of the group discussions were. The music community would have offered Nathaniel the opportunity to advance his career as a musician, however because of the schizophrenia; the audience was a Strengths Based AssessmentPage 6 barrier to Nathaniel's playing his cello.

Lopez found an accomplished music teacher who was willing to teach Nathaniel to bring him back to the level he was at when he was at Juilliard, and even brought him new music to play. Playing music and being part of the music community was something that Nathaniel desired, however, his illness prevented him from becoming fully invested in pursuing it. I think the Lamp Community was a valuable community resource for Nathaniel. It was a safe place for him to go, and in fact the night after the disastrous recital, Lopez found him there having a meal and David told him that he had spent the night in his apartment.

When asked why he spent the night there, Nathaniel alluded to the fact that he wasn't a young man anymore and that his body couldn't take the streets. I think that if Nathaniel wanted to see a doctor and take medication, he could have gotten those resources from the Lamp Community. The music community could have provided a less intimidating arena for a recital. Although it seemed to be a very relaxed outdoor atmosphere, putting Nathaniel up on stage was asking for disaster. Perhaps the music community could showcase musicians like Nathaniel in a much less intrusive setting.

Analysis of the Symbiotic Relationship. (This wasn't required but I wanted to add it.) I think the relationship between Steve Lopez and Nathaniel Ayers worked both ways. The scene where Lopez falls off his bike, goes to the hospital where everything is chaotic, then goes into an MRI and is claustrophobic has so many similarities to Ayers' life it may have been purely coincidental. I think that was an experience that Lopez had to draw upon while he was trying to " help" Nathaniel. Just like Steve Didn't want the help

at the hospital, neither did Nathaniel want Strengths Bases AssessmentPage
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Steve's help. The mere act of trying to get Nathaniel out of his comfort zone was enough to trigger a schizophrenic episode. At the end of the movie, Steve realized that the best thing that he could offer Nathaniel was his friendship. Nathaniel trusted Steve by the end of the movie. When they first met, Nathaniel wouldn't shake Steve's hand, but at the end of the movie when Steve offered him his hand, Nathaniel took it. Strengths Based AssessmentPage 8 Resources Foster, G. , and Krasnoff, R. (Producer), & Wright, J. (Director). (2009). The Soloist [Motion picture]. United States: Dreamworks Pictures.