

Producer's Note: Inside the Making of “High School Hustle”

Alayna Ly | Summer 2022

Hi! My name is Alayna Ly and I’m the producer of this audio story. I hope this note provides some extra context and clarification.

Was this story inspired by the producer's life?

Yes! I produced this story when I was a senior in high school. The main character, Andie, isn’t a carbon copy of me, but we share some similar traits and experiences. Here are some examples:

The first level, “Tough Conversations”, was inspired by my relationship with my parents. My parents immigrated to the United States from Vietnam. They always emphasized the importance of education and financial stability. I’ll be the first person in my family to go to college. While I’m thankful for the opportunity, I’m worried about not living up to my parent’s expectations. I don’t want their many sacrifices to go to waste.

The third level, “Sudden Death”, is about Andie writing her personal statement. She chose to write about how she feels disconnected from her family’s culture. This was the topic I chose for my own personal statement! Writing my personal statement felt like unpacking 18 years’ worth of emotional distress.

The fourth level, “The Final Choice”, is where Andie contemplates going to college. In my own life, I always knew I **would** go to college. But “do I **want** to go to college?” is an entirely different question. I knew that my dream career required a college degree, but I didn’t know if I had the capacity to commit to another four-to-six years of school. Right now I’m college-bound and I’ll admit that I’m very scared. I know the future will have many challenges, but I’m determined to make my loved ones and myself proud.

Why do Andie and the Narrator sound the same?

The two main characters, Andie and the Narrator, share the same voice actor. This was done to emphasize the main conflict of the story: Andie vs. herself. The narrator was a manifestation of Andie’s self-doubt and worries about the future. This story took the “self” in “negative self-talk” literally. To differentiate Andie and the Narrator sonically, they had different vocal tones. Andie is meant to sound tired because she’s a high school senior on the edge of burnout. On the other hand, the Narrator was upbeat and bold. To add additional contrast, I added a robotic filter to the Narrator’s voice and added glitches near the end.

What does the ending mean?

At the end of the story, Andie decides to “quit” the game. The game refers to the unhealthy mindset she developed during high school. Andie was adamant about attending college and was willing to overwork herself to accomplish that goal. But, she failed to realize how detrimental it was to her health. After some self-reflection, Andie “quit” the game because she wanted to prioritize her happiness. It wasn’t explicitly said if Andie would attend college or not. In my mind, after “quitting” the game, Andie would reevaluate whether she truly wants to go to college. She would make her decision without the berating voice of the Narrator in her head.

Final Words

Thank you for taking the time to read this producer’s note. Creating this audio piece over the past few months has been therapeutic. By the time this has been posted, I’ve graduated high school. This story felt like a final send-off to these past four years. My high school experience was a blur of loneliness, frustration, sadness, and happiness. Ultimately, I’m thankful for the people I met along the way and the knowledge I gained. Congratulations to the class of 2022! We made it!

Until next time!

Alayna