Dr. Robert Miltner asked his students in College English I (ENG10001) to describe a particular place and explain why it was important to them. In “Song of the Sea,” Tiffany Bodis revisits her summer getaway—the beach—and feels the stress of her everyday responsibilities slowly melt away. By writing of her sensory experiences, Bodis reveals how one’s observation of the natural world intensifies with the renewed state of mind that comes from abandoning the worries of the daily grind and embracing a refreshing, child-like curiosity.

Every summer, I, along with millions of other inlanders, head out of town and leave my troubles behind. The internal clock that paces me slows down and I prepare to relax. Ah, vacation, who does not love it? My ideal vacation destination is anywhere the ocean is. Whether it is the scenery, the air, or the sound of waves crashing, something here creates a change in me. Stress melts away, my worries float out to sea, and I become a different, younger version of myself. Although I have only traveled to a different place, it seems as though I have traveled in time also. I am transported to childhood where nature becomes a playground, there is plenty of time to play, and the daily goal is just to have fun. Without ordinary responsibilities, I am free to relax, enjoy, and absorb all of the beauty as a child would. Being at the ocean allows me to observe the natural world in a more elementary and carefree way.

Even from a distance, I know I am at the ocean. The thick humid air smells of salt and sea life. My skin gets a damp, vaporized feel as though it is expelling toxins and becoming invigorated and cleansed. As I quickly walk up a dune, millions of sand particles shift under my flip-flop sandals. Footprints of mine have reshaped the sand permanently, as the particular placement has been rearranged and will never be the same again. Beside me, dry-looking golden sea oat plants rustle in the gentle ocean breeze, creating a grassy hum that harmonizes perfectly with the soft lull of waves breaking ahead. Nearing the top of the dune, I finally see it—deep, midnight blue water in constant motion as far as my eyes can see. As the hot sun blares down on me, it briefly puts a spotlight on a dancing section of water and creates a sparkle even more striking than a flawless diamond. For a moment I pause to take in the beautiful vastness of it, and then feel my body rushing to become a part of it, rather than just an observer. Moving quickly, I feel the sand underneath becoming more condensed. Kicking off my flip-flops, I am reminded of how hot sand can get in the sun. Finally I arrive, my feet soothed by the cool water, and my senses are ready to take it all in.

Staring out to sea, the color blue is very apparent. The water ranges from a clear light blue nearest me and deepens in intensity and hue the further I look. Where the periwinkle blue sky meets the blue-black water, another shade of blue creates the horizon. Sweeping my head from left to right, I see a unification of sky, horizon, and water. This is all I see, for there are neither skyscrapers, towers, nor any man-made obstructions blocking the view. Occasionally a touch of white offsets the blue, in the form of a cloud or the crest of a distant wave. Adding vocals to the harmony of the sea oats and the waves, seagulls soar over the water, calling out. As my eyes scan different areas of water, I ponder what is unseen. Softening my visual focus allows me to catch a quick glimpse of a porpoise jumping above the water for a brief second. After looking for where it might jump again, my eyes begin to wander closer to shore. Watching the surf break, a few feet away, I notice the water elevating and falling at different speeds, directions, and levels. Because of this motion, and also phosphorous, the fallen waves become trimmed in crisp white. The fallen wave is propelled towards me and my legs feel the water’s momentum pushing towards shore. Then, as quickly as it is rushes in towards shore, the sea pulls that wave right back out. A mist of water sprays on my burning skin, reminding me of how hot the sun is. Finally, noticing people
swimming in the water, I realize how captivated I have been in the scenery and decide to jump in.

For a variety of reasons, being at the ocean takes me back to childhood. Just like a kid, I splash around in the waves, build sandcastles, and dig in the wet sand for small mussels. Toys are my companions; time is my friend. The motion of the water peaks my child-like curiosity and imagination as I try to fathom how this movement is possible without the help of a mechanical device. As people get older, they stop questioning and accept that things just are they way they are. Being at this mysterious ocean causes me to question nature like I did as a youngster. Unlike at home, I am able to enjoy a day at the beach without the pressures of everyday life consuming me. While on vacation, people escape the day-to-day stressors that can cloud the ability to be still and observe. Some people believe that observation can take place anywhere and anytime. Scott Russell Sanders articulates this idea by declaring, "[s]ince Einstein, we have learned that there is no center; or alternatively, that any point is as good as any other for observing the world" (103). Sure, anyone can observe the physical characteristics that make up a place. What Sanders neglects to address is the value of the state of mind during observation. For me, the most profound observations ever made have been during my innocent child-like state, when the nagging voices within are temporarily quieted.

Eventually, the time comes to leave the beautiful ocean and head back home to the stress and worries waiting to accompany me once again. Although I do not want to leave, I know that by doing so, I will be able to return again with renewed interest. Accessibility changes appreciation; I enjoy looking forward to returning to a child-like state. As I travel back to the future, I notice the scenery along the way. For a short time my observational skills, heightened by the trip, remain sharp. Then, transportation complete, my behavior and thought processes become adult again. Now is the time to begin planning my next vacation.

Work Cited