Richard Rodriguez’s essay “The Achievement of Desire” is more than a simple story, it is an autobiography of the major changes that Richard perceived in himself as he educated himself. Much of the story centers on how, through education, he felt himself pulling away from his family. The essay is very heavy with self-analysis and self-discovery as he compares himself to definition in a section of a book that opened his eyes to his path in life. In this book, *The Uses of Literacy* by Richard Hoggart, he uncovered what he believed was the only accurate description of himself: “the scholarship boy.”

Rodriguez with this essay further defines the concept of “scholarship boy” for the reader and for future scholarship boys. He forces the reader to reflect on the advantages and disadvantages of repeating his experience as scholarship boy. Following the author’s description of himself growing up, his references to Richard Hoggart’s description of “scholarship boy” is repeated through the essay. Whenever Rodriguez describes a new stage of his educational career he brings the reader back to Hoggart’s description, and the technique works quite brilliantly. The quotations add context and flavor and bring an “impartial” outside voice into the essay. This creates an effective reality that I feel makes it easy for the reader to relate.

The essay has a thread of sadness running through it, as Rodriguez relates and reflects upon the challenges he faced and the eventual alienation he felt from his family. He is saddened by the fact that, as a scholarship boy, the more he focused on education, the less his family and tradition seemed to matter. Sad is a recurring word and theme in this essay. Throughout the entire essay he returns to the adjective sad; he obviously feels that this is a very important and constant emotion. From his early childhood he seems to place a very high value on seriousness and reflection, even stating about books that “A book so enjoyable to read couldn’t be very important.”

The very first phrase that Rodriguez reads from the *The Uses of Literacy* is “He has to be more and more alone, if he is going to “get on.”. This goes hand in hand with the fact that Rodriguez doesn’t seem to have much of a social life. The lonely life of a scholarship boy also implies that feelings and emotions of the scholarship boy are too personal and complicated to be shared with those with less education (such as his parents) Rodriguez states that “I kept so much, so often, to myself. Sad. Enthusiastic.”

At the end of the essay Rodriguez makes it clear that the sadness he feels comes from the fact he feels he has suffered much for the detachment from his family that his single minded, goal oriented, educational life created. He seems to express through his essay a huge sense of loss that he wasn’t involved in a vital part of his life: the close relationship with family and friends. His writing serves as a warning on losing family connections and a heartfelt expression of the importance of balance.

The repeated return to Hoggart’s views, and Rodriguez repeated return to expressing how much he was affected by his reading them, shows us that Rodriguez the young unconnected reader eventually becomes became the mature connected reader. It seems that Rodriguez radically changed after having read *The Uses of Literacy*. He shows us that sometimes a big piece of our internal conflicts can be resolved by discovering our personal truth through another person’s writing. Rodriguez comes to grips with his own perception of himself through Hoggarts
perception of others who lived as he did. This simple acknowledgement of a stereotype of the “scholarship boy” connected Rodriguez with the knowledge of the existence of others like himself. No longer feeling totally alone, it gave him a better framework to look back and analyze the stages of his life. In Rodriguez case, the result of this reflection, was that rather than feeling superior to his family and peers by submerging himself in education, he feels like he missed a part of life, like he left something behind. Once isolated he now sees the need for connection.

Rodriguez is present in 3 different forms in his essay: the child, the graduate student who reads The Uses of Literacy, and the adult who has “completed” his education. As the child Rodriguez, the only important goal became bettering himself and becoming the perfect “scholarship boy”. He separates school life and “home” life and shifts importance from family and tradition to schooling, and “the balance is lost” he writes. In fact, through the essay he hardly makes any mention of social life and friends, like they didn’t exist at all. He really feels that he has no time for family and friends. Schooling and education are his main focuses and he writes that -- “with ever-increasing intensity, I devoted myself to my studies” He feels that this sets him apart from the “normal” children of that age who play and have fun. What seems to be his driving force and motivation in his early years is the image of his teachers. He even tries to use “their accents” to become more like them.

He replaces the natural authority figures of his parents with his instructors. He feels they are giving him form and quotes Hoggart “(The scholarship boy) tends to make a father-figure of his form-master” This quote by Hoggart is inserted in the text in a unique manner making it stand out from the rest of the quotes, this accentuates its importance to Rodriguez, and thereby the reader.

He grows frustrated with his parents who he feels do not comprehend a single thing of what he is doing at school. His brother and his sister motivated him because they “often brought home the shiny school trophies I came to want.” He not only wanted education, but the physical evidence and awards to prove he was well educated.

As a way to prove his education to both himself and the outside world, Rodriguez the “scholarship boy,” loses himself in reading. He wants to read everything that is “important” and tries to distill an entire book into a page of ideas and concepts that he puts in his notebook. In his reading he fails to be creative and Rodriguez always waits for someone, namely teachers, to determine what he will read. He mentions this as an important characteristic of the scholarship boy; He emulates his educator’s habits and suggestions and mannerisms and ways of speaking, rather than taking his own initiative and forming his own ideas.

He started reading with an old nun and a whole new excitement seems to hit him. He discovered the “fellowship between the reader and the writer.” But even so, he continues to read to learn, to prove he is full of education and not for the pleasure of reading. He proves this point when he says, “a book so enjoyable to read can’t be very important.”

The second form of Rodriguez we see is the changed and older Rodriguez who is the graduate student. We follow him to England where he reads Hoggarts The Uses of Literacy. This is a
major turning point in his perspective. Hoggart’s description of the “scholarship boy” totally resonates with him. Rodriguez sees for the first time a connection between what a book says and how he lived his life. It almost seems from the essay that this is the first time Rodriguez actually connects with a book. He was always the outsider, reading a book like looking at a bug under a microscope. But Hoggart connects with Rodriguez by showing him a mirror reflection of what Rodriguez feels about himself.

Rodriguez has lived through all the stages of a being the “scholarship boy” and now can reflect on the trials and tribulations of choosing that life through Hoggart. The revelations in Hoggart’s book open him up to the realization that perhaps in his single mindedness he missed out on an important part of his life. *The Uses of Literacy* finally opens him up to a realization that what he has “lost” may be more precious than what he has earned and learned in all these years.

The final form of Rodriguez we hear from is the mature writer of the essay. He has lived his life, discovered the existence of people like him and has thoroughly analyzed how’s and whys of becoming a scholarship boy. He comes to the awareness that the relationship with his family, friends and traditions are perhaps greater than his happiness for his personal success. But, ironically, his parents are a big part of why he pushed for his education; His parents’ life experience had been quite harsh, a life of hard manual labor. Knowing that their child will have a great future life is one thing that would definitely make them happy.

In the text it is clear that Rodriguez experiences remorse and regret for having his feeling that he abandoned his family. Rodriguez uses Hoggart’s book as a reference and as a comparison to his own life. In his essay his opinions and views are always suggested after Hoggart’s quotes. “He rarely feels the reality of knowledge, of other men’s thoughts and imaginations, on his own pulses…””. But none of the descriptions by Hoggart seem exactly perfect to fit Rodriguez because of his particular situation and his identity as a minority; Although close, Hoggart’s scholarship boy doesn’t describe the exact situation in which this particular scholarship boy finds himself, but it was the closest thing Rodriguez could find. So Rodriguez has to challenge even Hoggart’s description in the end. Rodriguez actually lived through what Hoggart only describes. Hoggart was using his knowledge, not his personal life, as far as the reader knows. The whole truth of who he is more complex than Hoggart’s stereotype, so even that must be challenged. Rodriguez relating to the scholarship boy in *The uses of Literacy* changed him by providing validation and a framework of reference. It gave him the attribute of reflection and imagination. By comparing himself to the image of himself given by Hoggart he could make a self-analysis and feel better for himself by knowing he was not alone.

By the end of the essay Rodriguez has significantly changed from the “scholarship” boy he used to be. He developed an acceptance and a reflective attitude towards the past. He no longer is the “mimic” and shy but is very open about his feelings in what he writes. He is now in control and has become a creator and developer of his own important ideas. He is not imitating what people have told him but instead creates this essay using Hoggart and his past life as examples of the unique path he took. It is a tale of achievement, but at the same time a cautionary tale that whatever we strive for should include balance between heart and mind. In the end he accepts his
parents and relatives and culture for what they are, but also accepts himself for what he is, and what he was. We should all end up so lucky.