

Question 2

Suggested time—40 minutes

(This question counts as one-third of the total essay section score.)

Reshma Saujani is an attorney, author, and activist who founded Girls Who Code, an organization that works to advance opportunities for girls and women to find careers in the technology sector. The following passage is excerpted from Saujani's contribution to *American Like Me: Reflections on Life Between Cultures*, a 2018 anthology of essays by prominent Americans with backgrounds in multiple cultures. The excerpt begins after Saujani discusses founding a multicultural student organization at her high school. Read the passage carefully. Write an essay that analyzes the rhetorical choices Saujani makes to convey her message about the nature of bravery.

In your response you should do the following:

- Respond to the prompt with a thesis that analyzes the writer's rhetorical choices.
- Select and use evidence to support your line of reasoning.
- Explain how the evidence supports your line of reasoning.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the rhetorical situation.
- Use appropriate grammar and punctuation in communicating your argument.

Years later, when I ran for political office for the first time, I was exercising my bravery again. I had enjoyed several years of a lucrative career at a Wall Street law firm but longed to make my life more about helping to build communities and improving the future of this country. I wanted to push myself. And much like barging into Schaumburg High to start a diversity club, the idea of running for public office felt good—like I was flexing that bravery muscle again. So I bravely quit my job. I bravely ran for Congress. And I bravely lost by a landslide.

But I did it authentically, as myself, as *Reshma*. In the early stages of campaigning, I was told to change my name to Rita, given the advice that people are more likely to vote for you if they can pronounce your name. But my bravery had brought me this far. I wasn't going to stop now. I could never turn my back on Reshma to become a Key-Chain Rita.¹ And losing authentically allowed me to articulate something I was passionate about. I wanted to find a way to address the fact that American girls are often raised to value perfection over bravery. They want to be Sweet Valley Jessicas² instead of Schaumburg³ Reshmas. So I ran my campaign on a platform of bringing computer science into every classroom and making sure girls were given equal access to learning coding. I focused on this because the process of learning to

code—building something from the ground up, using trial and error, failing and starting over—allows you to see for yourself that perfection is pretty pointless. And bravery leads to wonderful things.

I should know. After the election loss, I had the gall to start a national nonprofit called Girls Who Code, and I don't even know how to code, myself.

But thanks to my childhood, growing up with two very brave immigrants as parents—who just like me were children of immigrants in Uganda—I now know it is more important than ever to be brave and proud of my identity, to own my role in changing the world, one election loss at a time.

Yes, I did run for office again a few years later. And yes, I lost again. But bravery is contagious.

On election day, I was running around in the rain shaking voters' hands up to the very last minute. I met a woman—I did not catch her name—who was rushing to the polls. As she passed by me, I smiled and said, "Who are you voting for today?"

She hesitated, flustered but kind. Embarrassed she couldn't pronounce it correctly, she fumbled out an *uhh* as she frantically pulled one of my fliers from her bag.

"This woman," she said as she pointed at my name on the piece of paper.

Even though she needed a cheat sheet to remember

5 who she was voting for, I couldn't help but swell with
pride that I had an Indian name. I couldn't help but
think of my parents. When they chose to name me
Reshma, did they dream of a world where it would be
unthinkable to go by Rita instead? I had spent years
7 assimilating as a child, and for the first time, I thought
I knew why my parents named me Reshma.

Maybe they didn't want me to blend in as much as
I thought. They blended in *so I wouldn't have to*. They
paid the ultimate price for my authenticity. They gave
5 up their community, their careers, their language, their
own *names*. These were the steep taxes they paid to
make a better life for me. Assimilating in the ways my
parents did can invite accusations. Changing your
name and hiding your accent could be seen as passive
7 or fearful gestures. But my parents' immigrant
experience reveals the great reserves of bravery and
pride they had in order to survive in a new country
with no familiar community of support. I think my

parents are the bravest people I know. They traded in
75 their names for the freedom and privilege I experience
every day. Because of them, I have the platform to be
brave. They built the stage I stood on at the PRISM⁴
assembly. They laid the groundwork for a little girl
named Reshma to grow up and become the first
80 Indian-American woman to run for Congress.

They changed their names so I wouldn't have to.

¹ Earlier in the essay, Saujani recalls a childhood incident
in which she was unable to find her name in a display of
key chains with names printed on them.

² Sweet Valley is a fictional suburban community near Los
Angeles that was the setting for a series of popular novels
for young adults.

³ the suburb of Chicago, Illinois, where Saujani grew up

⁴ acronym for Prejudice Reduction Interested Students
Movement, the multicultural student organization Saujani
founded

**Begin your response to this question at the top of a new page in the separate Free Response booklet
and fill in the appropriate circle at the top of each page to indicate the question number.**