

THE COURAGE OF CHILDREN:
BOSTON AND BEYOND
VOLUME XXVIII

MAXCOURAGE

2019

Award-winning essays on courage
written by sixth grade students participating in
The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum

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We dedicate the 28th edition of
THE COURAGE OF CHILDREN: BOSTON AND BEYOND
to the following partners and volunteers, who continue to
demonstrate their unwavering support to advance our mission
by sharing their expertise and passion to educate students
around the globe.

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*former Senior Program Director for Secondary English Language Arts
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CHAMPION OF COURAGE AWARD

We honor ALEXANDRA MARSHALL as the 2019 recipient of the *Champion of Courage Award*.

She has been the driving force behind this annual essay publication since the inception of The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum, Inc. in 1991. Lexa’s guidance, leadership, creative direction, and dedication have shaped *The Courage of Children: Boston and Beyond* into a vivid expression of children’s courage around the world, and we are deeply grateful for her never-failing commitment to the mission of this organization.

ELSIE WILMERDING AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING

The MAXCourage Board of Trustees is honored to present the inaugural Elsie Wilmerding Award for Excellence in Teaching to DAVID RUSSELL for serving as a tireless champion of both his students and the field of education. Named in honor of our late board member, this award celebrates Elsie’s talent and passion for teaching, and the tremendous impact teachers have in the lives of young people.

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PREFACE

BY ALEXANDRA MARSHALL

These young authors have in common an uncommon ability to confront their fears. By discovering and articulating their own courage they become role models for their peers, while also offering essential lessons for the adults in their lives. As one student describes the challenge of achieving self-acceptance, "If you take anything from this writing, understand that you are not alone in life."

In defining courage some students choose to honor people who dare to protect others in need, with heroic examples from the Holocaust and aiding today's suffering refugees. Others see the direct connection between those who discriminate on the basis of religion or ethnicity or gender identity and the school bullies who create another version of the same daily terror. One student writes, "Standing up for people you love is courageous, but standing up for people you don't know is even more courageous." Another realizes, "There I was, between the bully and the kid soon to be my friend."

In addressing a recent gathering of supporters of MAXCourage, a speaker described his own experience in the military with this simple and brilliant definition: "Courage is a team sport." It is about establishing trust and giving and receiving support so that - on the playing field or the battlefield, in the classroom or at home - when you need it, you have it.

The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum is a dynamic and flexible program created for the Boston Public Schools and now also embraced by a range of other public, charter, pilot, parochial, and independent schools. Its reach is regional, national, and international, this year involving 32 schools in and around Boston and 18 schools from beyond, including Belize, Cambodia, Mongolia, Spain, and Yemen.

The collection of "Courage in My Life" essays in Volume XXVIII is the evidence that courage creates community. "I chose to be the voice for others when they didn't have one," exemplifies the courage of one of these inspiring sixth graders. And because all students possess this individual power to motivate others through the expression of their own courage, by assembling these beautiful essays they have written, the effect is orchestral.

Alexandra Marshall is the author of six books. She has coordinated the annual selection and publication of "Courage in My Life" essays since the founding of the MAXCourage Curriculum.

MAX'S STORY

BY STEPHANIE WARBURG AND CHARLOTTE HARRIS

Max Warburg was born and brought up in Boston, Massachusetts. Not long ago, Max lived in an apartment near the center of the city with his parents and his brother, Fred. Max was two and a half years older than Fred. Max had wavy light brown hair and bright brown eyes, and Fred had straight black hair and hazel eyes, but when they smiled, they looked a lot alike even though Max was much bigger.

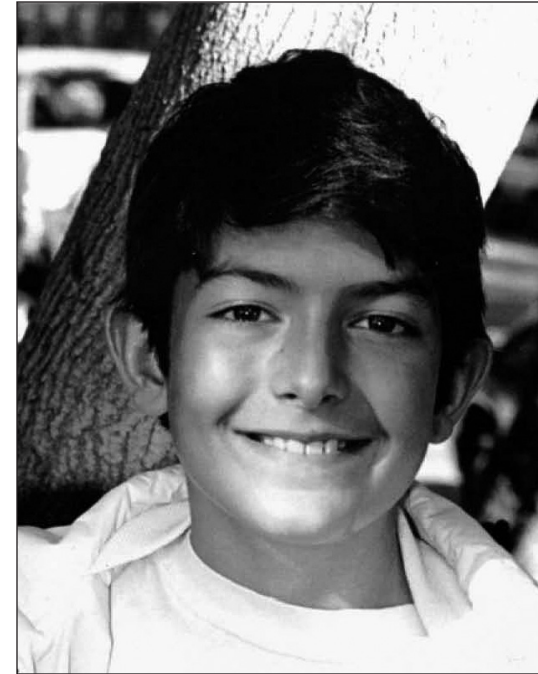
The boys liked sports. They liked to swim in the summer, ski in the winter, and sail whenever they got a chance. Mostly, their father, who is an architect, had to work, but as often as he could he took the boys sailing, teaching them to tie lines, trim sails, and steer a course.

“Here,” he would say, “Max, you take the wheel. Fred, you hold this line tight and Max will sail us out of the harbor.”

And Max would. He'd stand at the helm the way he thought his father stood. Eyes on the sail to be sure it didn't spill its wind, both hands on the big wheel, and feet spread apart, wind blowing his hair and puffing out his jacket, Max would play the part of the captain, dreaming of the day he would have his own boat. He knew exactly what he wanted: a sixteen-foot, drop-centerboard boat called a 420, just the right size for a twelve-year-old, which he figured he would be before he would ever get his 420. Then he could take Fred on some great sails, even on the days his dad was too busy. Better yet, then he could race and maybe win.

He knew what he'd call his boat, too. Take It To The Max, he'd call it, not just because it had his name in it, but because it sounded like the sky was the limit and that's how Max felt.

Max had other dreams. Ever since he was little, Max had been good at imitating people. His mom would talk to someone on the phone, and when she hung up, Max could imitate her 'talking to a stranger' voice or 'talking to her best friend' voice perfectly. He could hear an accent once and reproduce it exactly. He could mimic actors and other kids, making his friends laugh and fascinating everyone with this ability.



“You ought to be an actor when you grow up,” people would tell him. So he started looking at the actors on TV with his mind on learning acting skills and camera angles.

“Mom,” Max said one day, “do you think I could ever be on TV?”

“Well, I don't see why not if you work at it,” she told him. Max's mom was an artist, and it pleased her to see her son interested in growing up to be in one of the arts. Max joined a children's theater group and went for acting lessons. He started to gain the confidence an actor needs, and signed up with an agency that looks for children to act and model. One day a call came.

“Max, do you think you're ready to act in a television commercial?” the agency representative asked. “Sure I am. Will my friends be able to see me?” he replied.

“Not this time. This commercial is going to run in New Jersey, but maybe next time. Will you do it anyway? Right away?”

“Oh, yes! This is my first chance!” Max ran to get his mom, and, alive with anticipation, Max, Fred, and their mom drove to the studio. They spent a day taping and re-taping. Max watched the professionals, followed

directions intently, and caught on quickly to what was expected of him. When the long day was done, Max tried to guess when the next time would be that he would get a chance in front of the cameras. He couldn't have guessed then that six short months later he would be a frequent talk show guest, but not for a reason anyone would want.

For Max, acting was fun and easy, and so was schoolwork. He loved to be with his friends in school, and he loved to read and figure things out. He loved to laugh and play jokes. At school, they called Max the peacemaker. Kids would argue or get to fighting, but Max would get into the middle and try to calm things down. Being a good sport and thinking of the other guy were Max's way. In tense situations, Max would be the one to lighten things up with a joke.

Not everything came easy. Living in the city surrounded by buildings and pavement, Max didn't have much chance to play ball, but he wanted to. As soon as he was old enough, Max joined a baseball league. They played on the Boston Common. Max was the youngest player and afraid of the fastballs coming straight at him. A couple of times he didn't get out of the way of the ball and it hit him, but he didn't let it get him down. For one thing, he knew Fred was watching and he knew as the big brother he'd better get right back up. Max was philosophical about his shortcomings. "I'll be better next time," he would say, and then he'd work at it. He never missed a practice. Even though he never got to be the best player on his team, by his third season his teammates knew they could count on him for a solid performance.

During the summers, Max and his family left the city for the seashore.

One morning in July 1990, when Max was eleven, Max's mom needed something at the hardware store, and Max was looking for something to do. "I'll go. Let me do it," he said, and he got on his bike and pedaled off toward town. About a mile from the house his front tire hit a pocket of sand the wrong way. The wheel skewed around sideways and Max fell. He landed on his shoulder, the breath knocked out of him. Hot burning pain filled his stomach and chest, making him curl in a ball and squeeze his eyes shut.

Max knew something was wrong, more wrong than just a fall from his bike. Max's mother knew something was really wrong as soon as she saw him walking beside his bike, steps slow and head down. Before he could get in the house she had him in the car and on the way to the local hospital emergency room.

"Max fell off his bike and he doesn't feel right," Max's mom told the doctor.

The doctor felt Max's back and side and the smile left her face. "What's this here? His side is all swollen. I think he's ruptured his spleen. Max is in trouble."

"What kind of trouble?" Max and his mom said, almost at the same time.

"I'm not sure, but we need to find out fast," said the doctor, frowning with concern.

She called an ambulance to take Max to Children's Hospital back in the city. Siren and lights clearing a path, the ambulance rushed up the highway to Boston, barely slowing down for the tight corners near the entrance to the hospital. Max was wheeled straight into the emergency room.

"This doesn't look good," the emergency room doctor said.

"If my spleen is split, why don't you operate on me and sew it up?" Max wanted to know.

"Can you sew Jell-O? That's what a spleen looks like. Not much to look at, but good to have because that's what your body uses to clean your blood. Mrs. Warburg, this boy is going to be here for at least ten days."

Sad and frightened, Mr. and Mrs. Warburg made their plans. Max's mom would stay with him, and his dad would take Fred back to the shore to keep things as normal as possible for him. The news from the hospital wasn't good. It looked as if Max had leukemia, a dangerous cancer in his bone marrow, but the doctors weren't sure which kind of leukemia he had. Some kinds were less difficult to cure, and some were easier to bear than others. Hoping their son had the commonest kind that could be cured, the Warburgs started to learn about leukemia.

The results of the blood tests came back. Max had a rare form of leukemia, found in one in a million children. The lab doctor told Max's parents, "Now that we've seen these results, I wonder how Max ever got himself off the ground and back to the house the day he fell off his bike. He must be a very determined boy."

"Yes, he is," Max's father said. "He is going to need to be."

It was Dr. Susan Parsons who told Max what he had. “Leukemia is hard to beat. You’ll have to have chemotherapy and radiation stronger than one hundred thousand X-rays. In order to test your blood and feed you, we’re going to have to make an incision near your heart and insert a tube. You can’t play ball and you can’t play soccer or ride your bike. If your spleen gets hit again, it will kill you.”

Max thought a bit. “Tell me what is going to happen.”

“You have to have a bone marrow transplant. Do you know what that is, Max? That means taking the fluid out of the middle of all your bones and then putting in the fluid from someone else’s bones in its place. We can’t do it unless we can find the right donor – someone whose bone and blood type match yours almost exactly. Often, not even members of your own family are a close enough match. Right now, there are about six thousand people out there looking for the one perfect match to save their lives. You’ll be joining them, Max. Your chance of finding a match is about one in twenty thousand.”

Again, Max thought a minute. “So, there are six thousand others. Okay, I’ll be six thousand plus one. I’ll be one of the lucky ones.”

“You already have been. Because you fell off your bike, we were able to catch your disease early, before there were other symptoms. If we get a donor fast, time will be on your side.”

After ten days of testing, they let Max come home to the apartment in Boston. Every week, in order to adjust his medicine, he had to go to the hospital for blood tests, which meant a little needle, and for blood samples, which meant a big needle and a tube. Max hated needles. His mother knew he hated needles and wondered when she didn’t see him flinch each week as the nurse aimed the needle toward his arm. Even the nurse, who had seen so many different kinds of reactions to needles over the years, was surprised by Max’s calm.

“What are you thinking about, young man?” she said to him on one of his visits to the blood lab, not really expecting a reply.

Max answered very seriously, “First, I wait and prepare myself. Then I put all my energy where the needle is going to go, then I make fun of the needle.”

On his own, Max had found a way to conquer a fear that, if he did not get the best of it, could make it harder for him to get well.

No sports for at least six months, he’d been told, so he found a calendar, tacked it up, and drew a smiling face on the date six months away. Max had a goal. He knew he’d be sick for a while but he knew when it would be over. On the space for February 6, 1991, beside the smile he wrote, “Cured” and underlined it in red.

In September, Max went back to school. When he told Nurse Hoolihan at the hospital that the kids didn’t seem to understand what was wrong with him, she said she’d come to his school and explain. The kids listened carefully to Nurse Hoolihan, but it was Max they wanted to hear from.

“How did you catch leukemia?” asked someone, saying out loud the big question in everyone’s mind.

“I didn’t just catch it,” Max said matter-of-factly. “First, I had to have inherited a particular gene and then I had to have what my doctor said was an accident in my blood cells. One cell went crazy. It started making the other cells produce too many white cells and platelets. My white cells are crowding out my red cells, and that’s not good for me. But, listen; no one can catch this from me.”

You could see the kids were relieved. They stopped sitting so stiffly and acting so polite. Even Max’s teacher and the other grownups in the room seemed to relax a little.

“What can we do for you?” Max’s best friend wanted to know.

“Don’t treat me funny. I’m not supposed to bump my spleen but I’m the same old Max.”

There were reminders at home, too, that his life had changed. Max had to choose whether to give up his kitten, Fantasy, or have her claws out so that she couldn’t scratch him and start an infection. Max couldn’t bring himself to hurt Fantasy that way, so he found her another home. He missed his kitten. “Be careful, Max. Be careful,” it seemed to him his mother kept saying. He missed hearing her say, “Off you go and have a good time,” without a worried look.

The hospital did what it could to find a donor for Max so he could have the transplant that could save his life. His parents were tested and Fred

was tested, but no perfect match was found. Close relatives were tested and then friends of the family, and still no match. Wait, the hospital told them, a match might be found in the new national marrow donor registry.

His parents were troubled by waiting. The registry had too few matches and too many other people who were counting on the registry but hadn't been helped. "We can help. We can learn how to do donor drives." It was going to be hard, but they knew they had to try. What they didn't realize at first was that Max would make the donor drive succeed. At first, only the family worked on the drives. Then they were joined by many of their friends, and soon, old friends were joined by the hundreds of new friends Max found through television and radio.

Max's campaign for a donor was called the "Max + 6,000." Always, Max wanted people to remember that this wasn't just for him. It was for Max and all the others in America who needed the one perfect donor. Many people didn't really know what leukemia was all about or about bone marrow transplants, or how to help even if they wanted to help. One morning, figuring he had nothing to lose and plenty to gain, Max called a radio station to see if he could make his appeal on the air. He spoke on local radio shows. He was invited to talk on Channel 4 and then Channel 7 and then Channel 2. Smiling into the camera, Max would say, "Leukemia is a blood disease that starts in the marrow of bones. I need new bone marrow in order to get better. Come have a simple blood test and see if you can be my donor. Perhaps you will be my MUD, my matched unrelated donor."

Tom Bergeron, one talk show host, said to Max, "You're good at this. You look as if you're enjoying yourself."

"I am, sir. I wanted to be on TV and here I am. Maybe this is what I was getting ready for. Even if no donor turns up for me, I can help someone else."

For the people watching Max, it wasn't pity that moved them; it was Max's cheerful way of thinking of others before himself. The stations asked him back again and again. Hundreds and eventually thousands of people came to give a sample of their blood and promised to be a bone marrow donor if their type matched the type of anyone in need.

The Boston Globe and *The Boston Herald* picked up Max's story. "Max waits for his rescue," said one headline. "Max leads charge against disease." The

reporters who met him liked Max and wanted to help him. Their stories reassured people and gave them practical information about when and how to become a bone marrow donor.

At every donor meeting, there was Max wearing a "Max + 6,000" button and a red carnation. Red for blood, he said, and laughed when people asked how he could joke about something so serious. Max would shake each donor's hand and say thank you. "You may not help me but you probably will help somebody," he'd say.

Every week, Max's white cell count got higher. Every week, the need to find a donor got more acute. "It may be getting too late," Dr. Parsons worried. "We have to find a donor soon."

Days slipped by. Weeks slipped by. Leaves on the trees outside Max's window turned red and orange and then brown and fell away in the winds of early winter. Max, Fred, and their mom and dad talked about the little events of each day and about the distant future but not often about the immediate future. They talked about missing the rest of the summer at the shore and about Take It To The Max, the dreamboat. The boat came to mean so much. It meant another summer growing up. It meant having a future. By mid-October, nearly three months after Max's leukemia was discovered, there still was no donor. "I'm going to order the 420 for Max," his father said. "It will mean a lot to him knowing the boat is started." He called the boat builder, who said yes, he could have the boat ready by spring. By the time Max was well; his 420 would be ready to put into the water.

With no donor found, surgery went forward to improve Max's chances later on, just in case a donor could be found. On November 15, Max's spleen was removed. He recovered for a week in the hospital and for six days at home. Then, on November 28, the hospital called. The lab had found the miracle match among the last batch of samples.

"Who is it?" Max asked.

"We don't know, but it's a perfect match!" the nurse said. Later, during long December days in the hospital, Max and his dad sent the anonymous benefactor a picture of the intravenous bag that held the life-giving bone marrow with a letter that said, "This is all we know of you but we want to thank you!" Much later, Mr. and Mrs. Warburg learned that the donor was a doctor in Seattle, Washington, whose great-, great-, great-, great-grandfather

all the way back to the 1800s in Europe was the same as Max's.

Now, with marrow from the donor, treatment could begin to pave the way for the transplant that might save Max. Chemotherapy would be the worst part. "Your hair is going to fall out, Max," Dr. Parsons told him. Max could see that other kids in the cancer ward had little or no hair. "It's part of getting better," he told Fred. But he wasn't sure he would be brave enough. He had seen others going for their treatment and returning exhausted and in tears. He was determined he wouldn't let the treatment sink his spirits.

First Max had a tube implanted in his chest, as the doctor told him would happen, for giving medicine, taking blood samples, and for feeding him because he wouldn't be able to eat normally. He would have to be almost in isolation in a special environment called the Laminar Flow Room. In the sealed room, ducts brought a steady, moving stream of oxygen down and away from the bed, blowing foreign substances away from Max as his system tried to accept the strange marrow and begin making its own blood.

Except for daily trips to the Total Body Irradiation room—the hospital people called it the TBI—Max had to stay in the isolated room and could see few visitors. When his mom and Fred visited each day and his dad came in the evening, they had to scrub like doctors and wear cover-up coats and hairnets. Even a touch could harm, so there could be no hugs to give comfort and love. Each morning the halls were cleared of contaminating strangers so Max, inside a tent, could be wheeled through the empty halls to the treatment room.

Knowing he'd be lonely and expecting he'd be scared, Dr. Parsons had given Max a tape recorder so he could make a record of what was happening to him. Max told his tape recorder, "Going to TBI is really cool, like being in a space ship. The air coming in from the top of my oxygen tent is exhilarating. I feel like a great explorer from the next century gliding in on his chair."

The experience in the room wasn't exhilarating. The drugs made Max sick. He had to stay on a metal table, head on blocks, neck stiff and body sore, for a long time. When finally he sat up, he threw up. The vomiting meant he was done for the day. On his tape Max said, "The table is real hard and it makes my head so stiff, but it's fun because I can blast my music as loud as I want so it reminds me of home."

The first seven treatment days were chemotherapy and irradiation. The eighth day, the transplant itself, wasn't at all what Max expected. Instead of an operation with doctors cutting him open, Max lay on his bed all alone while the new marrow flowed into his body from a transparent bag of clear fluid suspended over his head and connected to him by a clear slender tube.

"How is that going to get into my bones?" he wondered while he watched, then later heard the doctors themselves marveling that the marrow sought its way to the right places once it was safely in his system.

The blood count was critical. After the transplant, Max's white cell count was zero. They wouldn't let him out of the Laminar Flow Room until his count was 3,000. One day after the transplant, his count was 20. The next day it was 100, then 150, then 300. Max had a long way to go, but he was making it. His body was rebuilding. Slowly the days passed.

Max knew these days would be hard. The pains doctors had warned about became the pains he felt. Max didn't complain. Instead, he tried to cheer up other patients stuck, as he was, in the hospital for Christmas. He got his parents to help. Max's mom and dad brought in a whole Christmas dinner for all the kids and their families in the Jimmy Fund wing, the part of the hospital where Max and the other children with cancer were staying. Teddy Kennedy, Jr., who had cancer when he was thirteen and was now all grown up, brought presents for the kids, along with living proof that they could get better.

Max yearned for breakout day, the day the doctors would let him go out of his room. Finally, early in the New Year, on January 2, Max woke to see balloons on the isolation room door and crepe-paper streamers overhead. The nurses, especially Nurse Rohan, his favorite, were celebrating for him. This was it; he was out! He went by wheelchair to the hospital door, then into the fresh air for the first time in 35 days, and then home. He loved the smell, he loved the look, and he loved the feel of home! Everyone in the hospital had been great to Max and he was grateful, but home was where he wanted to be. Back in his own room, Max saw again the calendar with the smile marking February 6. It was still almost a month away. "Not quite cured," thought Max. "But maybe I'll be better by then. February 6 will be a happy day."

But it wasn't. Before long Max was back in the hospital with a high fever. Dr. Parsons sent him home again, uncertain what was wrong. Back he went again for ten days and again he came home no better. Still he had a fever and still he threw up. On February 6, he went back to the hospital again. The smile he was now famous for was still there, but it seemed to waver at the corners of his mouth. Max went back to his isolation room and this time he would have an oxygen mask, the sign of mortal struggle.

Max's mom and dad and Fred were at the hospital every day, staying with him until the evening when Max, heavy with drugs, fell asleep. The long days in the hospital were hard on Fred. He played with Max, but it wasn't like the last time Max was in the hospital. One day, sick and exhausted after a treatment, Max was being pushed back to his room in the wheelchair. Fred had had it. Right on the edge of crying, he pulled hard on his mother's arm, making it difficult for her to push Max's chair. "Come on, Fred. Max needs you to help out," she said.

Max was used to being the helper himself. Knowing he was needed, he said, "I can cheer Fred up. Put him here in my lap."

Fred went into his older brother's lap, glad to be riding the long corridor and glad to have Max acting like his old self. The two rolled along, Max's head hidden and arms waving out from under Fred's armpits, a four-armed, laughing pair all the way from Pulmonary to the Transplant floor. Hearing them, the nurses couldn't tell that one of the laughing boys was perilously ill until, rounding the corner, they recognized Max and his family.

"That's like Max," they told his mother. "At night on the transplant floor, the younger kids cry. They're in pain and they miss their families. I hear Max call to them, 'Don't cry. I'm here. You've got a friend!' You have an unusually brave son, Mrs. Warburg."

"I'm not sure he realizes," his mother said. "He says to me, 'Mommy, do you think I'm brave?' I don't know why he doubts."

"How does he keep his laughter? How can he keep on smiling?"

"That's Max," said his mom. "That's the way Max is."

On March first Dr. Parsons told Max his life was threatened. The blood transfusions and medicines pumped into him weren't working well enough. The doctors' skills and the hospitals' resources and Max's own incredible will were losing against the disease. Max saw the solemn faces around him. His body swollen in places, emaciated in places, spotted with sores in places, Max looked Dr. Parsons straight in the eyes and said, "Well, okay, so what's the plan? How are you going to get me well?" They looked at Max in disbelief, to see his conviction so strong despite his ordeal, and took heart themselves.

"Come here to the window, Max, come look," said his father.

There in the hospital driveway below, high on a truck and with mainsail flying, was *Take It To The Max*. Max's eyes widened in pleasure, his delight was evident in every gesture of his excitement. He glowed, knowing the care and love that brought his boat to him at this place at this time. Nurses and doctors all came to exclaim about Max's treasure and enjoy his infectious happiness.

That night, Max stayed up until close to midnight working on a project with his dad. When he was ready to put out the light, Max and his mom and dad prayed together and thanked God for all the help He had given and all the people who had been so kind to him. Then Max went to sleep.

Max died in his mother's arms, holding his father's hand, at 6:55 a.m. on March 5, 1991.

In the days that followed there was a terrible silence. The silence swelled and roared, because silences can do that if what you want to hear isn't there and what you don't want to hear is everywhere. Then stories started to fill the empty spaces, stories about Max.

Many stories ended with a shake of the head, a glance away, and the simple statement, "Max amazed me then. He was so brave. Children amaze me. I am amazed by the courage of children."

COURAGE OF BOSTON

COURAGE IN MY LIFE

The mission of The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum, Inc. is to strengthen the literacy skills of participating students. Our nonprofit program, provided free of charge, invites educators and students to explore the idea of courage in literature, their own lives, and within the broader community.

The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum is a yearlong language arts program, founded to honor the life of Max Warburg, a courageous sixth grader whose steadfast determination and heartfelt hope in the face of his battle with leukemia continue to inspire our work.

Since the program's inception in 1991, the Courage Curriculum has positively impacted the academic performance and increased the communication skills of over 200,000 sixth grade students in Boston Public Schools and surrounding public and private schools. By connecting with Max's story and with award-winning literature featuring courageous young people, students come to recognize and celebrate the role that courage plays in their own lives. Our work with talented classroom teachers allows us to empower young people to continue to act courageously, to the benefit of their classmates, families, communities, and themselves.

The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum, *Courage in My Life*, works to improve the reading, writing, and critical thinking skills of students. We inspire participants to celebrate acts of courage in their own lives and the lives of others. We train and support teachers in the use of the Courage Curriculum to improve their own instruction and to engage and inspire their students to make meaningful connections to literature. The success of the program is evidenced by the resulting quality of students' writing and individual pride in their work. This is accomplished through a direct correlation between its emphasis on literature content and writing competency.

Although it is intensely focused on classroom practice and teacher instruction, The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum also disseminates this work on its website, in this annual publication of essays, and at an annual awards luncheon for Max Warburg Fellows. The luncheon draws families and the larger community together for a culminating event, to celebrate the outcomes of the program and the students' efforts. The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum has been featured in academic journals and other publications, positioning the program as a national model for excellent school and community partnerships.

Our sixth grade program, *Courage in My Life*, focuses on exploring and understanding the nature of courage, featuring the following novels: *Bridge to Terabithia* by Katherine Patterson; *Facing the Lion: Growing up Maasai on the African Savanna* by Joseph Lemasolai Lekuton; *Maniac Magee* by Jerry Spinelli; *Number the Stars* by Lois Lowry; *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* by Mildred D. Taylor; and *Taking Sides* by Gary Soto.

This year, 1,203 Boston sixth graders submitted essays, and over 4,000 students participated outside of Boston and worldwide. The Courage Curriculum program continues to grow on a local, national, and global scale. Max Warburg's legacy continues to inspire young people to recognize and celebrate the courage in their lives.

HOLDEN MILLER

SCOTT LARIVEE, TEACHER

Mary Lyon K-8 School

Courage. Almost everyone has demonstrated it at least once in their life whether big or small. Swimming with hydrophobia, that's courage. Standing up to a bully, that's courage. Graduating after having academic difficulties, that's courage. This is my story about a period of my life I had to push through, despite the circumstances that I had overcome. As the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche once said, "That which does not kill us makes us stronger," and indeed that is true because after all I have been through, I am definitely stronger.

It all started when I was six. I was visiting my grandfather in Elmira, New York with my father. I don't remember the specifics, but I remember how it happened. My father was a biker. He loved biking passionately. It was like so many other afternoons; my dad decided to go on a bike ride. I hugged him goodbye and don't remember much more of that day until I was told that my father had died in a tragic accident. Fortunately, nobody else was harmed. The driver who was responsible for the accident had sun in his eyes and couldn't see my father. I was traumatized by this news and was taken to the hospital due to a panic attack. Losing my dad was a horrible hit for me. I loved him so much. My mother had left us when I was three because she was suffering from mental health issues and drug addiction. He had been my constant since the beginning of my life. I didn't understand why it happened. I didn't know what I would do without him. I ended up with my loving grandmother, and that marked the beginning of a new chapter in my life.

My grandmother was a wonderful woman, a great cook, and a kind soul. However, she was very protective of me and babied me. I was a brat and got into a lot of trouble at school and at home. It didn't help that I have ADHD and was unmedicated, which made me say and do things I regretted. I was held to low expectations and had no rules to follow. This was not helping my future.

One day, I was using my grandmother's phone in the car, which was one of the few ways I entertained myself other than some old books and a decade-old computer. Suddenly a text appeared. It said that my mother had died of an overdose in Las Vegas. It didn't affect me right away because I was angry at my mother. What I learned later helped me understand her a little better because I didn't realize all the bad things that had happened to her and how people manipulated her in the rehab center she went to for help. Even though I said I didn't care, part of me grieved the loss of my second parent.

Today I forgive my mother for not being there for me. She tried her best to care for me, and it wasn't her fault that she suffered from mental health problems and addiction. At the time I was resentful, spiteful, and angry. I wondered why this had to happen to me again. "What have I done to deserve this?" "Why me out of billions?" I wondered. As the Dalai Lama once said, "We can never obtain peace in the outer world until we make peace with ourselves." I had no peace within myself. My grandmother predictably was upset that I had to hear this grim news in such a fashion. I hadn't yet recovered from all I had been through. Anyway, I found a way to survive. I played video games all day to cope with the anger and sadness. I hid behind my video games where I didn't have to think about anything. It wasn't healthy since I didn't do much else and I didn't do well in school either. I just didn't

care about much. When I thought it couldn't get much worse, it did.

My grandmother told me she had cancer. One year after losing my mom I had to face another loss. I cried a lot. After a few months she passed away. I didn't cry when she passed away because I had shed tears already. I was happy she had passed because I knew wherever she was she was at peace. I knew my grandmother had died weeks before when she was in too much pain to speak and eat.

Soon I was angrier than ever. The flames of my rage, rekindled by my grandmother's untimely demise, were like lighter fluid on a bonfire. I had no desire to be calm. I just wanted something good to happen to me for once. I was traumatized over and over again, leaving me no time to recover. I felt like a wrestler with an open wound on his head being smashed over and over onto the floor. I didn't think my life could ever change, but it did.

I ended up living with a close friend of my dad, Sara. We used to quarrel a lot because I was stubborn, complained a lot, and generally was not very pleasant. But she taught me how to behave and helped me get my life back on track. It was hard to trust Sara. After all, how could I trust her when I really didn't know her? I can only remember meeting her during a few visits to restaurants back when my father was still with me. Most important, how could I trust that she wouldn't leave this world like everyone who was close to me?

Eventually, I fought against the anger and fear that crashed upon me in waves. I tried harder and learned to compose myself in school and at home. Now that my list of horrible occurrences was no longer growing, the inferno that burned inside started to cool. I began to accept Sara as my mother.

Now, I don't know what I would ever do without her. She doesn't baby me, and she has high expectations of me. The rage is more of a puddle than an ocean. I put all my mental strength into getting better grades and into less trouble. I am no longer in a bad place in my life and have become much more stable. Sara taught me life lessons that have helped me understand how to be a better person. She always reminds me to not procrastinate, and I have worked hard to change my ways. I'm now in a new school, and I never get into fights with my classmates. I have better grades and even made the honor roll.

My dream is to become a therapist and help other children who have experienced trauma in their lives, no matter what those horrors may be. My next challenge is to overcome my ADHD, and I am confident I can do just that. I'm not perfect, but nobody is. All that matters is that you be who you are and try your best to improve. I've learned that life can be tough and anything can happen at the most unexpected times. One day, if the storms of life crash down upon you, plant your feet and stand strong until the storm subsides. This is my motto and my story of courage that has made me as strong as I am today.

“ONE DAY, IF THE STORMS OF LIFE CRASH DOWN UPON YOU, PLANT YOUR FEET AND STAND STRONG UNTIL THE STORM SUBSIDES.”



JEREMIAH RILEY

LINDA ROACH, TEACHER

St. John Paul II Catholic Academy

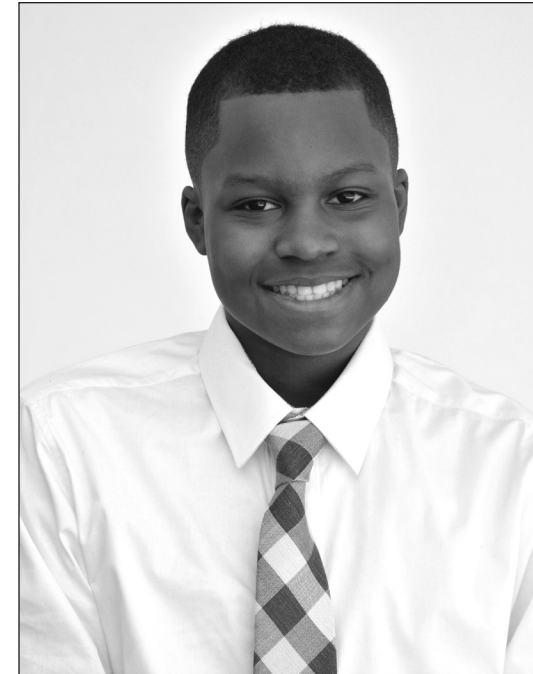
Courage is learning to live with pain and separation. Courage is finding out who you are.

It was two weeks before the end of August, and then I'd be going back to school. I was watching a movie with my younger brothers, feeling bored out of my mind. A few minutes later my mom called me to come to her. I was thinking that I was going to help her wash the dishes, but I was wrong. Instead she told me that she wanted to have a talk with me and only me. My mom was giving me the, "I'm not ready for this," type of look. She told me that she had a discussion with my aunt and my grandmother about me going to live with my aunt. They felt this would be a good idea because there was a lot of drama in my mom's life. My father lives in Georgia. I wondered why she didn't send me to live with him? Then I figured that she probably felt he wasn't able to take care of me because he has made some poor decisions with his life.

When she told me this, I felt scared. I did not want to leave my mom or my brothers. I did not want to leave my home, my room, my life! I could not speak. I had to think. I just stood there and thought for a while. I thought about how my mom had me when she was only 16 years old. I thought that I had messed up her life just by being born. Then, I said, "Yeah, I'll go live with Auntie Angie."

A few weeks later, I packed my things... all of them. My clothes, my shoes and my phone. My mom and I drove to Auntie Angie's house, and when we got there my mom spoke to my aunt for some time while I went into my cousin's room and unpacked. The next thing I heard was my mother's voice calling me. When I went over to her, she told me that she loved me and that she wanted me to make good decisions. She hugged me, kissed me, and then said goodbye.

I remember the first night in my "new home." I felt so sad. I was missing my mom and brothers. I fell asleep dreaming. I wish I could remember what my dream was about but I can't – not now anyway. I started a new school. I made new friends but I miss my old friends.



Every day I am living with courage. I show my courage by bearing my pain. I try to get through my days just like everybody else, but inside I hurt so much. Courage has allowed me to figure out that I am not a mistake. I did not ruin my mom's life. In fact, I am beginning to understand that I am me. I am a good me. No one can ever take me away from myself. I have the courage to live... live as me.

**“COURAGE HAS ALLOWED ME TO FIGURE OUT
THAT I AM NOT A MISTAKE.”**

DINERO STARR JELLEY

LEILA HUFF, TEACHER

Buckingham Browne and Nichols School

During a class project, we created individual family portraits. Students and parents were invited to watch the videos one afternoon. The day started off great. I went to school, walked in bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, friends bombarded me with laughter, and I felt extremely jubilant. The teacher gathered all of us to sit with our parents. As my mother held on to me, the videos began. One after the other, I noticed the same pattern: mother, father, siblings, house, and vacations. When I saw my project emerge onto the smart board screen, I began to tear up. Why did my home look so different from everyone else's? At that moment, I immediately wanted to stop the video. Embarrassed, ashamed, stunned, and humiliated, I hid in my mother's arms. My head stayed stuck to her, my body was numb, and I had shortness of breath. The video seemed to be missing something. Why did I not have a dad? Why did I not have a home? And why was my skin color different? Then I started to think: maybe I should have made up a story to fit in with everyone else. My classmates came from wealth, and my mom and I were poor. Fear got the best of me because I knew I would be rejected and never fit in. Afterward, I felt as if I belonged on the "island of misfit toys."

The next day I refused to go to school, because for the first time in my life, I truly realized my circumstances. There I was, assuming my classmates would think less of me because my home was a room in a homeless shelter and our grocery store was a food pantry. Would they know my clothes were from the Salvation Army? At home, my mom reminded me of a Dr. Seuss quote she often refers to: "Why blend in when you were born to stand out?" What she meant was that I might seem different, but there is nothing wrong with that. I also have to make a positive outcome out of everything, no matter how much words, or what people think, can hurt.



Courage to me is when you are going against all odds, and achieving where you are not likely to succeed. Courage is having the confidence to be seen as the person you truly are. When I think back on the situation, I now understand that I did go against all odds. I am still embracing my differences in the same community I started off in. When I was younger, I thought I was taking away from my community, but now I realize I am adding to it by teaching my peers another way to live. I achieved my goals and persevered in the new school community I entered, even if at first I believed I would not succeed. Maybe all of us, at some point in our lives, have experienced a situation that made us feel like a misfit toy.

“COURAGE IS HAVING THE CONFIDENCE TO BE SEEN AS THE PERSON YOU TRULY ARE.”

MULUGETA NORWICH

THU-HANG TRAN-PEOU AND MANDY LAM, TEACHERS

Josiah Quincy Upper School

It takes love and courage to start a new family. Courage means finding trust, being brave, and willing to learn something new. I showed courage the day I got adopted – when I was trying to be brave, learn something new, and be willing to trust a stranger who later became my mother.

In 2012, I was five years old, living in an orphanage in a town in Ethiopia, a country in Africa, that kept me safe and helped me in my life at the time. One day, I noticed something strange. There were random people walking into our orphanage. I did not know what was going on. I was confused to say the least. I got scared when a lady came near me. I did not understand what she was saying at all. However, her voice was soft and reassuring. Then she left and came back again. She came back four more times and then on the last visit she came back for me. The people who took care of me at the orphanage told me I had to go with this lady. I was scared. I was confused. I didn't have the words to say no or to refuse. However, I knew I had to go.

Suddenly we were in a car. I didn't even know where we were going. I was terrified, but I stayed calm and did not try to run because I believed that something good would settle down in my heart. As soon as we got to the airport, I was terrified by the thought of leaving behind the only home I knew at the orphanage. Were they abandoning me? Would I ever see them again? Where was I going? Who were these people? These thoughts rushed through my head all at once. I tried to run back home, but the people stopped me. I was scared and I didn't know if I would live or die at this new place because I had never left my orphanage before.

Imagine if you were randomly and suddenly taken from your home and you did not know where you were going with a stranger – would you show courage or be scared and try to run away every time you could? Well, it was hard to stay calm at a momentous time like this, you would think. I was five years old at the time, and it was incredibly hard not to scream and try to run away, because I was scared.

Courage. Courage gave me the ability to be brave and the strength to learn something new. It was courage that helped me learn to trust. I was taken from the only place I once called home. I learned to trust a person I did not know. I learned to trust to go to a new place, where no one understood what I was saying, in order to build a new home with a new family in a new land.



Without that day, I wouldn't have a wonderful family, great friends, or a place I could now call home and live life again. I am very happy I went with the stranger. I wouldn't change that day for anything in the world. That stranger who took me home, took care of me and gave me a permanent home, is now my mom. My life changed the moment she came to our orphanage. I used to not like much stuff that I enjoy now – such as playing sports, eating a lot of food, and hanging out with friends. I have many new friends. I grew about three feet in height within a short period of time because my mom was feeding me when I never got enough food in the orphanage. My mom was very kind in getting me because she could have picked anyone, but she picked me. I did not only move into a home with someone. I got a wonderful family who cares for me. I now have a mother who loves me and whom I love. I have a great school and a safe environment to learn and grow.

It was courage that taught me how to be brave and be ready to learn something new. In the end, I learned the meaning of family, home, and love.

**“IT TAKES LOVE AND COURAGE TO START A
NEW FAMILY.”**

LILLYANAH LU

PETER LABOY, TEACHER

Bellesini Academy

Some people's courage is hiding deep within them. I had to find my courage deep beneath my anxiety. Courage to me is the ability to do something that frightens you. I definitely displayed that kind of courage during the gas explosions on September 13, 2018.

On September 13, 2018, I arrived at my house after a long walk from my bus. I was on FaceTime with my friend when my dad burst into my room, "Lilly! Pack your bags, we are moving to Florida!" He joked around, not taking the situation seriously. I could tell something was wrong, but I could not quite put my finger on it. Suddenly, I heard helicopters. All went silent, but it was not a good silence; it was an ominous silence. "What's happening?" I asked. "There are gas explosions all over South Lawrence," he replied. I started packing my bags immediately because everyone was being evacuated.

I stayed strong even though I did not know where my mom or brother were, or if they were safe. I was heartbroken because for me to stay strong, I needed to know they were okay. All the smoke in the air and the gas smell made my eyes cloudy and watery. I had to deal with that, because if I was in my house then it could catch on fire with me in it. My dad and I knew we would not make it to North Lawrence in our car because of the traffic, but I had the courage to do something else.

The fire truck horns were blaring and the smoke was spreading. There was traffic no matter where we turned. My dad brought up our bikes from the basement. I automatically knew what we were going to do. I strapped my backpack to my back and we rode. We rode through the traffic of fire trucks and ambulances. I started to lose control of my bike and lost my grip on the handles from all my sweating, which was caused by my nervousness. I gripped my bike handles tighter and pushed through. Thankfully, we arrived at my aunt's house safely, where my mom and brother were already waiting for us.



I was extremely frightened, but I had enough courage to keep going and to trust my instincts and follow my dad's instructions. I had the courage to pack my bags despite not knowing where my mom and brother were. I had the courage to ride through all the traffic and smoke. I had the ability to do all these things even though I was scared and confused. This experience taught me that I have more strength within me than I realized.

“I HAD TO FIND MY COURAGE DEEP BENEATH MY ANXIETY.”

EVAN HERO

MELANIE ALLEN, TEACHER

Rafael Hernández K-8 School

I have always been a very cautious kid. I was scared of going down slides of any steepness. The fireman's pole in the school playground was always one of my enemies. In fourth grade, I overcame my fear of the pole, but then the playground got renovated, so I got scared of the pole again. I haven't gone down it since, and I still don't use the monkey bars.

But nothing was harder than learning how to swim. For most people, swimming is easy. All you need to do is hold your breath and jump in. If you need a life jacket or a pool noodle to stay floating, get a life jacket or pool noodle, and jump in again and have fun. It's as easy as that, right? Well, not for me. I hated swimming. I hated getting water in my face.

At age four or earlier, kids usually start jumping into pools with a life jacket on, wanting to feel what it's like to get their faces underwater. My cousin started doing that when she was three. When I was four, my dad was holding me in a pool, and he went underwater with me. I had only spent about half a second underwater before going back up to the surface, but I immediately started crying like crazy. My parents had to take me out of the pool to calm me down. I hadn't breathed in any water or anything. It's just because I got water in my face.

When I was seven, I went to a summer camp called Kids Arts where we all went to a pool every week. And yes, I did have to make my dad meet me at the pool. All I did was stand in a corner at the very shallowest end and talk with my dad about random stuff. I didn't dare go more than six inches away from the wall because it was "too deep" even though I wore a life jacket.

Then one day a boy with a purple swim cap and a light blue bathing suit came over to me and said, "Hey, you wanna swim?"

You mean stand in a corner and talk about stuff? 'Cause other than that, no, I thought. Other people went to swim with the boy, but I just stayed in the corner with my dad.

I knew swimming was fun because everybody's faces showed me they were having fun. People were smiling and diving in the water, and then they came back up above the water and kept playing. I knew swimming would be fun. It just wasn't fun for me yet.

Because I was so scared of water in my face, I started going to one-on-one swim lessons every Wednesday. My swim teacher's name was Morgan. I remember chasing various floating toys around the current pool on a kickboard, such as rubber ducks and stress balls shaped like apples. Then she made me do my greatest fear. Getting my nose wet. I know you might think that's nothing, but I freaked out.

After days of getting my nose wet, I figured out how to keep all the holes in my face from getting water in them. I put my thumbs on either side of my nose to plug my nostrils, then I plugged my ears with my index fingers. All I had to do was close my eyes, hold my breath and go underwater as quickly as possible. And that was the

first time I purposefully submerged my body underwater. This took a lot of courage.

My grandmother has a big pool in her backyard in Florida. When I was eight, we went to visit her. We bought goggles, ear plugs, and a nose plug to make sure I didn't have to occupy my hands with covering my ears and nose. But now I had to keep adjusting everything to make sure there was a 0% chance of leaks. I was scared that if my nose got too slippery from water, my nose clip would fall off, too.

Once I learned some real swimming strokes, I was no longer flailing my arms and legs around like a fish out of water. My mom was right in front of me with her hands out over the water and with her palms up. Then I would jump off the first step to try to get my body across the water onto my mom's arms. While she held me on the surface, I did the "froggy legs," and I was able to move myself to the other end.

Even now, at eleven years old, I still need to work on swimming. But I realize that these fears will just take practice to overcome. For example, I wanted to see why I was scared of water in my face, so I decided to stick my face directly into the shower stream. I noticed that nothing happened.

It has taken many years to get to where I am now. I still don't jump into pools. My friend always tells me that I'm not fun to play with when I'm in pools, because I'm scared to mess around. However, she doesn't realize that, for me, what I am doing is already challenging and takes courage. I have graduated from my ear plugs. I don't need them anymore! Now I can swim across the pool with my head underwater the entire time, all in one breath. I'm much more excited to practice swimming. Each time we go to a place that has a pool, I'm eager to learn something new.

I'm still a very cautious kid, and I'll probably always be a cautious kid. But maybe some cautiousness will be good when I'm a rocket scientist! You need to get everything exact and perfect before the rocket goes into space with humans. Too much cautiousness, though, can prevent me from fitting in with others. While other people are clowning around in the pool or playing a more daring game, I won't be having fun with them due to fear. I now realize that when I trust myself, I can get my face wet and swim. I've learned that the next time I'm feeling too cautious about something, I should just go for it. Hey, maybe in the future someone can teach me how to go down that fireman's pole without hurting myself.

"BUT I REALIZE THAT THESE FEARS WILL JUST TAKE PRACTICE TO OVERCOME."



DANIELA MARIA SOLORZANO LOPEZ

TERESA DAWSON KNOESS, TEACHER

James P. Timilty Middle School

For me, courage means to be brave and not to be afraid of doing what you have to do. Everyone is born with some imperfection, and we have to make the best of it. I was born with severe dry skin, and when I was little I had to put cream on my arms every day. It was the worst, and when I was in kindergarten I always had to cover my arms so people could not see what my arms looked like. I was scared to show my arms because people were going to make fun of me or just say “ew.” When I was in elementary school, some kids would look at my arms and make comments.

In second grade, I met my friend Samantha at church in Religious Studies class. She told me that her little brother also had dry skin on his face and whole body. She showed me a picture of him. I could not see his eyebrows because of the dry skin! While my dry skin won't heal completely, there are ways to make it better. My parents get me creams that help a lot, but it does not completely heal, and I always pray to God that one cream will finally work for my skin and it will no longer be dry. When I scratch my arms, it burns, and when I put cream on, it burns as well, but my mom says I have to use it so my skin can heal.

Sometimes I feel ugly with my dry skin, but I often feel beautiful with my dry skin, too. I know that it is the way I was born, and I'm actually happy with the way I am. I don't care that people judge me. My mom and my dad tell me, “Don't listen to them.” They are absolutely right.

Sometimes people call me names or just say that she has “that and that,” but I still don't care. What people say about my skin is really their issue, not mine. Still, sometimes when it is hot in my room, I start scratching really hard.

Even at night, I might wake up itching. Dry skin is tough, but I have to get used to it and keep working with it until I find a solution. My younger brother also suffers from severe dry skin. He gets up in the night, scratching his legs. One night, I woke up and I did not feel any pain. I had sleeves on, and when I uncovered my arms, I saw both arms were red and covered with scratches. I told my mom and she took my brother and me to the doctors,



where they gave me and my brother cream.

Sometimes it makes me sad that he suffers the same way I do, and sometimes I pray for my family so we can get better. I am interested in studying medicine to find a cure for this. After studying, I would work in a research laboratory to study dermatology and how certain medicines affect dry skin. In addition to looking for a cure, I also think that it helps that my family helps each other so much.

Since my parents both work long hours, my older sister takes care of us several days a week. She is also busy working some days, so my godmother takes care of us too. She is the nicest person I have ever met, and I am thankful that she takes care of us. Having a supportive family that helps each other really helps me to have courage.

Part of having courage is being happy about what you have, and I am happy about what I have and who I am. I am happy, courageous, and brave. I have my family at my side to thank for that. It helps me keep my itchiness and severe dry skin in perspective. I am also grateful for my friends who do not judge me and see all the wonderful things about me.

“I DON'T CARE THAT PEOPLE JUDGE ME. MY MOM AND MY DAD TELL ME, 'DON'T LISTEN TO THEM.' THEY ARE ABSOLUTELY RIGHT.”

JAMESON GRUENER

SARA DEOREO, TEACHER

Proctor School

In life, problems are common. Sometimes they are huge problems, and other times they are itty-bitty small problems. Sometimes it feels as if there are no solutions, like nothing's working. It's just as if there is a huge wall, Empire State Building high, and you can't get past it. That's exactly how I feel with my eczema, which is a common dry skin problem.

It all started back when I went to Boy Scout Camp last summer. It was a very enjoyable time between card games and merit badges, but there was a tradeoff. That Thursday night for dinner, they were serving an Asian chicken and rice dish, which probably contains either nuts or sesame oil, or both, which I am allergic to. So I got a separate meal that night and all was fine.

But when I woke up the next morning, my stomach, face, neck, and arms were covered in bright scarlet rashes. I didn't know what had happened. I thought it was because I swam in the mucky pond. But I guessed wrong because when I went home that Saturday, my mother thought otherwise. She thought my meal was cross-contaminated by either a cook touching both the sesame oil and my meal or by me touching something that had sesame oil on it. Either way, I had disgusting, aching rashes all over me. After a week of itching, I went to the doctor.

She gave me a huge list of things I could do to help my skin, such as bleach baths and changing my wardrobe to only cotton material, and she also gave me a lot of recommended creams to rub over the rashes. This was all working until about a month ago when things started going downhill.

I had asked for many cotton clothes for Christmas, and I was excited when they came. They looked ugly to me, though, but I had to wear them for my skin. I knew the problem would be having to go back to school on the second of January with cotton clothes that were so out of style and a face as red as a tomato picked in the summertime. On the first couple of days back, I wore clothes that weren't all-cotton. But my skin broke out into rashes, and no matter how good my clothes looked, I couldn't look even partly good with a red face.

I went back to school with my new ugly sweaters. My peers were full of questioning comments. "You are really trying a new style of clothes" was common, but there were others like "Why are you so different?" I also hated the staring. I have a red face covered in rashes. So what? You have no idea what I have been through! Some days of that week I just ran home and shoved my face in a pillow. (Of course it had to be all cotton.) I was so done with this mess. If only there was a magic wand that I could wave in the air and, whoosh, my skin problems would be all gone! But life doesn't work that way. If it did, I would have no skin problems and be living in a



condo overlooking the ocean in the Bahamas. But it doesn't.

On the Wednesday of that week, I woke up to a bowl of corn flakes with berries and milk. After I ate, I sat on the couch and talked with my parents before getting ready for school. All of a sudden, I was so unbearably itchy! I dove my face into a pillow, which would have been fine if it was 100% cotton like my bedroom one. But this pillow was mostly polyester, which only made things flare up more. I ended up spending the rest of the morning in the upstairs bathroom, lathering the moisturizing cream all over my neck and face. I told my dad I couldn't make the bus, and that I probably would be able to go to school around nine. But the rashes just seemed to get worse and worse, and soon, before I knew it, I was taking the whole entire day off from school.

I didn't want to stay home. I wanted to have a real face. One with the natural color of my skin. Not a red one. I also didn't want those stupid comments or staring. Now I was crying. I wanted to scream as loud as I could, "Just go away, you stupid skin! I hate my life! I kind of want to die." I then thought of something completely terrifying. Will I always have skin this red? I hope not. What happens if I can't get the job I want or get into a college because of my skin? Now I was whining like a baby. Was life worth living because of my skin? I just wanted to scream out for the rest of the day. But it's not like my skin would have turned back to normal if I did.

Courage doesn't work that way. You see, you can't stop living your life if something doesn't go your way. You just have to have faith in yourself to keep moving and accept the fact that it may not change the way you want it to. And that's exactly what I did. On the next day, I didn't listen to the comments people said about me. I didn't think about the people staring at me. I put on as much cream as I could, whenever I could. And I did the hardest thing ever. I put on a smile.

**“AND I DID THE HARDEST THING EVER.
I PUT ON A SMILE.”**

CHLOE McGRATH

ALANNA EDSTROM, TEACHER

Saint Agatha School

A few months ago, I experienced courage within myself for the very first time. I believe that courage is when a person does something even though he/she is afraid.

Courage can be as simple as telling people your opinion or just telling the truth. Courage can also be as substantial as saving lives during a fire. It does not matter whether someone has shown courage in a small way or a large way, they both matter. I exhibited courage when I was playing outside in the front garden with my younger brother Michael.

I had just returned home and my brother wanted to play outside with me. It was a bright sunny morning, so I agreed. We began playing tag when suddenly my brother started screaming. I turned around, quickly, to see what the problem was. The moment I turned around, I saw my neighbor's dog, a large pit bull named Lola, charging directly at my brother. Lola had apparently escaped from her yard, and, though this had happened before, she never chased us like this. Without thinking, I attempted to stop Lola from catching my brother. I darted in between Lola and my brother Michael. This caught the dog's attention. Because she could not see Michael, Lola began chasing after me instead.

My mind raced as I was running away. I started to think that maybe if I gradually slowed down, Lola would as well. Before I put my plan into action, I glanced behind me only to discover that Lola was growling and showing her teeth. This frightened me quite a bit, but I began to put my plan into action. As I began to slow down, I told Michael to go into the house where he would be safe. My brother did what I told him to do, which allowed me to cautiously slow down.

Soon, I came to a complete stop, but Lola began to walk around me in a circular manner. I was so scared. I began wishing that Lola's owner, Joe, would catch her and take her inside. Surprisingly, he did. About five minutes after I made that wish, he came out. He was calling Lola's name because he thought she had gotten lost. Immediately, I called his name and indicated that Lola was near me. In an instant, Joe ran over to his raging dog and brought her back to his house.

Then I noticed Mom opening the front door to see if I was all right. She



came out to question me about the incident. As I was giving my explanation, Joe ran over to profusely apologize for the commotion and trouble that Lola had caused. Finally, we all went back to our houses, safe and sound.

I felt courageous after that. I knew that I needed to help my brother and keep him safe. At the time, I did not hesitate to act. I felt proud that I had made the right decision, but it was scary.

“I FELT PROUD THAT I HAD MADE THE RIGHT DECISION, BUT IT WAS SCARY.”

ASHLEY MEDINA ANZIANI

MELANIE ALLEN, TEACHER

Rafael Hernández K-8 School

I think courage is having a fearless face even when you're scared out of your mind. There are so many different ways of showing courage, like someone asking their boss for a promotion.

It was a normal day in the Rafael Hernández school, when Ana C. called room 204 down to the auditorium. We all lined up not expecting much, just some awards and cringy songs from middle schoolers.

We finally arrived at the auditorium with minutes to spare. The first few kids walked in with a speechless expression on their face. I heard muffled music but didn't think much of it, until I walked into the room to hear... "JUJU ON THAT BEAT," a group of older kids yelled from the other side of the room. I continued to walk but this time at a slower pace, as slowly as possible. Once I accepted the fact that hip-hop music was playing I couldn't help but laugh, and suddenly I was dying with laughter. It was so funny to me, yet not to anyone else. Luckily I didn't catch too many eyes. All the attention was on the music. Two or three kids were dancing along as the rest of the kids stood in confusion.

The music stopped, because the assembly was starting. I quickly sat down next to my friends so we could talk about what just happened. Minutes later our teacher Vanessa gave us a warm welcome and we started the assembly.

Whispers about what just happened filled the room. I still couldn't believe it.

An eternity passed with me clapping and whispering, trying not to get in trouble.

Now we were on our last round of awards. Still none of my friends had gotten an award, but it's not like we were expecting to. And then I heard the name of one of my closest friends. Now I wasn't clapping – I was yelling! She walked up in embarrassment because of me, and then I started to whisper. "I can't believe she got an award, I'm so proud" I whisper-yelled to my friend as if I were the mother.

"I can't believe it eith-

She tried to finish her sentence before she was rudely interrupted by the microphone saying loudly, "Ashley Medina A-a-anziani," fumbling my last name.



I sat there confused, and my friends had to give me a nudge. "GO!" they told me, smiling and clapping.

I awkwardly walked out of the area of chairs and scrambled on stage. I stood next to my best friend as the rest of the names were called, and it turned out my sister and I got the same award. As the time came to exit the stage, some more hip-hop music came on.

"Now or never," I said in my head.

I took a step forward, but my friend tried holding me back. She grabbed my arm without saying anything, yet her eyes told a story. I knew she would feel second-hand embarrassment. Nonetheless, I shook her loose.

At that moment, I knew that people would laugh... and it didn't bother me. I don't know what came over me when I started to dance. I don't dance in front of my parents, let alone middle schoolers, but I burst with joy as I danced the "JUJU ON THAT BEAT" dance on stage. When I finally got off, the room once again filled with whispers. This time it was not about music. This time it was... about me. I flopped down in my seat with a great big smile, noticing all my friends with shocked expressions.

That day I knew I found courage in a new way. It wasn't like someone asking their boss for a promotion. I found courage by being me. I don't regret a thing, not the dancing in front of my peers or my silliness on stage. I showed courage, and I'm proud.

"I FOUND COURAGE BY BEING ME."

ROBERT (BO) STEAD

COLLEEN CLIFFORD, TEACHER

Beebe School

I love baseball. As much fun as it is, you need courage to play. In third grade, I moved up to the Minors, which is a big step from Farm League. In Minors, players pitch instead of the coaches. The first year of Minors was tough because I wasn't used to a kid pitching. Sometimes the pitches were wild, but I did good. Once, I got an inside-the-park homerun and got the game ball that day. The next year in Minors I was introduced to catching. I wasn't very good at first. I was scared that the batter would hit me accidentally or that my gear would fall off and the ball would hit me. Sometimes I missed the balls, but later in the season I got good. I jumped and dove for the ball and stopped almost everything. My arm was getting stronger, so I could throw the ball to second base quickly and get the runner out. I was no longer nervous. I knew my gear would protect me. I had a very good season.

I also played second base sometimes. Once I was playing second and a kid started stealing. I ran over to cover the base and they threw the ball to me. The kid slid straight into me. I was launched into the air and almost hit my head. I had to leave the game. I wasn't sure that I ever wanted to play second again, but I loved it so I did. To this day when I cover the bag I get a little scared that I will be slid into and hurt, but I try not to think about it because when you make the plays it is awesome! We made the playoffs that year. The last game came down to the other team having players on second and third. I was afraid that I would let a ball pass and runs would score, but we won the championship!

The next year, I moved up to the Major League and the pitches can come at you at 65 mph. It was pretty scary because one kid could pitch even faster than that. He was 5'8" and around 180 pounds. He could also hit the ball over the fence. Playing against him was like playing against one of the Red Sox! Everyone was scared to go up against him. In the beginning of the season when this kid pitched, I used to jump out of the batter's box when the ball came across the plate. I was afraid I was going to get hit by the ball and have to go to the hospital. My coach told me to stay in there, but I couldn't help it. If I wanted to hit the ball like I did last year I would have to stay in the batter's box and be brave. I had a helmet on, and if I got hit I would get on base! I got more confident. I stayed in the box and hit the ball. I also got hit by a pitch a few times but shook it off and took my base! Sometimes you have to put yourself in a scary and uncomfortable situation and have courage to succeed and do something you love!



**“I LOVE BASEBALL. AS MUCH FUN AS IT IS, YOU
NEED COURAGE TO PLAY.”**

KIARA BENJAMIN

SHARICE MOORE, TEACHER

Mother Caroline Academy and Education Center

“Just close your eyes and keep your mind wide open.” - *Bridge to Terabithia*.

What courage means to me is to do something without fear. An example of courage is standing up to a bully without fear or playing a sport. You have courage playing a sport because when you step onto the field, you are ready to play with or without fear. In this essay, I will give examples of when I had the courage to do all this stuff, and how you can have courage yourself.

My first example of courage is about playing sports. When I walked onto the field I could feel my heart beating out of my chest. I knew at that moment I had to give it my all, so I went out there and gave all my heart. I had a lot of courage going up to the ball knowing I could get kicked in the face. Being the goalie is the hardest position, yet I knew what I was signing up for. I was signing up for a lesson in courage. Being a goalie takes courage because you are going to get hit in the face with a ball many, many times but you can't be scared of that. You can't be scared of anything on the field, or in the world.

You should also give courage. You can give courage by cheering someone on. Little acts of kindness could make someone's day better and give them the courage to do better. I will give you one example of giving courage that is my own personal story about being on the field very close to giving up. The cheers of the crowd gave me courage. I showed courage because, when the crowd cheered for me, I knew I could do it. If you are in any situation where someone needs a cheer, you can cheer them on as well.

My last example: showing courage by standing up to a bully. Standing up for yourself means that you have no fear of others. You should stand up for yourself because if you don't, you will be very miserable in that school. You should also stand up to bullies with courage. Standing up to bullies with courage will inspire other people to stand up for themselves as well. It will also stop bullying for you and your school. This will help you have courage and confidence at school, at home, and in any other activities.

In conclusion, you should show courage because it will affect you and the world around you. I showed courage in all those situations because I knew it was going to help me. You can show courage every day by just doing simple acts of kindness. It will help because doing those acts of kindness will make other people want to do them as well. You should always show courage and be confident.



**“YOU SHOULD ALWAYS SHOW
COURAGE AND BE CONFIDENT.”**

ANTWAUN HENRY

DAVID RUSSELL, TEACHER

McKinley South End Academy

The day I arrived at the McKinley School was a day I displayed courage. I woke up angry because I had to start school again. Through the break I was having so much fun that I didn't want to return.

On that day I took a shower, found my clothes, and got dressed. I was still angry but got in the car anyway because I wanted to give the school a chance.

Once I arrived at the school I walked into a classroom and sat on the windowsill for about 30 seconds. I then got up from the windowsill and left the building because I didn't want to be there. A teacher talked to me and got me back in the building. My mother saw me and told me to really give it a chance.

After she encouraged me to stay I saw a nice kid who helped me go into the classroom. His name was Anthony Vincente. Anthony helped me get my assigned computer and get comfortable in the classroom. After getting help from Anthony I felt like I was a part of the class now. It took me a while to get used to the classroom rules, but with the help of my mother encouraging me, it became easier to come to school daily.



“THE DAY I ARRIVED AT THE MCKINLEY
SCHOOL WAS A DAY I DISPLAYED COURAGE.”

JASMIN GUZMAN

KRISTINA DOLCE , ROBIN ROBERTO HORGAN,
AND SASHA OLIVEIRA, TEACHERS

Esperanza Academy

A time I felt courage was when I went on a plane by myself. On December 30th, I went to the airport with my mom to find out my plane got delayed twice, which just made me even more nervous than I already was. I started to make up excuses for why I shouldn't go on the plane, but my mom wouldn't change her mind. After a while, I gave up on the excuses.

Then the flight attendant came to me and brought me through security. We kept walking toward the gate, and as I got closer to the airplane I started to get a mixture of nervous and scared. I have always been scared of planes, but this time I was even more scared because my mom was not there with me. Once we finished getting checked in, I got to board the plane first. The flight attendants greeted me with warm smiles and snacks, which made me feel better.

Once I got to my seat, I was praying that no one would sit next to me because I get very uncomfortable being around strangers. Luckily the gods heard me somehow, and no one sat next to me. After a bit, the plane started, and then all that fear and anxiety came rolling in like an "unwanted guest." Then when the plane stopped, I realized that it's only a plane, basically a flying car! I gathered the courage to calm down, put my headphones in my ears, and listen to music as the plane started to move again. Once the plane was in the air I was perfectly fine. I was not scared at all, and I had courage throughout the ride.



**“AFTER A BIT, THE PLANE STARTED, AND THEN
ALL THAT FEAR AND ANXIETY CAME ROLLING IN
LIKE AN ‘UNWANTED GUEST.’”**

LIAM GRUENER

JULIE SCOTT, TEACHER

Proctor School

Courage to me means working through what seems to be the impossible. Not many things are impossible and many things are just simply difficult to do. I'm an example of this fact. Have you had to face a deadly nightmare in real life? When I was about eight years old, my personal nightmare met me in Florida. My nightmare started when I was in a hospital. I remember it like this: one mouthful of blood, another mouthful of blood, and then a reality. I woke up to a lot of doctors in the room, all wearing scary-looking masks. Then the pain started to kick in. I faced what no kid should ever have to face at such a young age.

The next day I was given a diagnosis, and the doctors didn't think I had a great chance of survival. Then I was told about my future and that I could be living for months on end in a full body cast. I was petrified. I had Stevens-Johnson Syndrome, which is a rare and serious disorder of your skin and mucous membranes. Often, it begins with flu-like symptoms, followed by a painful red or purplish rash that spreads and blisters. Then the top layer of the affected skin dies, sheds, and then heals. I probably wasn't going to make it home for Christmas that year. My family was on a vacation in Florida and the vacation was supposed to be a gift. However, this vacation took a dramatic turn. I was going to have to use courage to survive this terrible nightmare.

With a positive attitude, I could live and go home by Christmas. I just had to be treated for all my symptoms. On December 16, 2015, I was checked into Nemours Children's Hospital in Orlando, Florida. That day was just the start of torture. I had been taken by ambulance from an urgent care center to a hospital. I had been pricked with needles at least four painful times, and I was done with this. I was just overwhelmed by everything: the pain, the doctors, the noise, my fear, and my future. However, this was just the start of the nightmare.

Soon enough, the next day came, December 17th, and I knew that my flight going back home for Christmas was leaving in two days. If I missed that flight, Christmas would not be the same. I wanted with all my power to go home, be better, and be home for Christmas. I wasn't going to get better quickly if I didn't fight through the pain. However, my doctors didn't think I had a great chance of leaving by then or even surviving this fight with the disease. I also couldn't buy another plane ticket back to Massachusetts because all the seats were sold out due to the Christmas holiday. My goal was to make it home alive.

The next day was December 18th and the orders were to drink a quart of water and eat a small container of Jell-O, and if that were to happen, I would get to leave the hospital. This would be my first time eating solid foods in three days. By then,



thankfully, the conditions of my syndrome were not as severe, but I didn't just get healthy in an instant. I had to prove to the doctors that I wasn't weak or disabled. It was then that I walked for the first time since December 16th, the first time in about two days. I took medicine orally and ate food by myself, and this was a goal. This definitely didn't come easily; just taking a small sip could take me a long eight to ten minutes as my mouth was blistered severely on the inside. The blistering was so severe that you could see how neatly lined up my taste buds were on my tongue. Every mouthful was painful but I did it, and the doctors didn't believe I could do it. Finally, I was good to go home. Later on that day, I got to make the phone call to my family back at the hotel, to tell them I was going home. All that hard work really paid off. I had been through so much and learned a lot. I learned that if I put my mind to it I could accomplish almost anything. Courage got me to success. Hard work can beat what seems to be the impossible!

**“I LEARNED THAT IF I PUT MY MIND TO IT I
COULD ACCOMPLISH ALMOST ANYTHING.”**

ANOUSHKA MITTAL

THERESE EVANS, TEACHER

South Boston Catholic Academy

I'm sorry, but I don't have any of those stories you're probably looking for where I face my fears and save millions of lives.

My story that I'm about to tell you is about one day when I was at the beach with my friends and my parents. I was active and excited; I wanted a way to take out my excitement and hyper feelings. There was a platform in the water that I spotted. I jumped onto the platform as my parents and friends were heading back to the parking lot to leave. But what I didn't realize was that the platform was wet and naturally after I landed, I slipped (luckily not face forward though). My stomach twisted and I couldn't move, breathe or hardly talk. If I called for help I wouldn't be able to breathe and it could make matters worse. Nobody noticed that I wasn't there. In the end, I decided to call my mom for help. I was right that it would make it harder for me, but had I not called for help, it could have gotten worse. Calling for help took courage, so that's a courage story for you.

What even is courage, though? To each person, courage can be different. Many people say courage is bravery, a noble act. Scientists may say courage is a probability, a chance that could result in multiple outcomes. Teachers might tell you that it is a scenario that depends on the situation. I disagree with all of them. I say courage is an act of the people, to do what it takes. It is undoubtedly a display of bravery, boldness, and strength. Almost like a show of power. The greatest of criminals and best of people must have courage, if they will see it through. Courage is a skill necessary to survive: it is the true indicator of one's character. The outcome may be dangerous, but you should not be afraid; that last phrase before the semicolon is one you may hear a lot.

They say if you have courage you can't be afraid. But no one can face fear forever. I say accept fear. That in itself proves to be courageous. As Mark Twain once said: "Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear — not absence of fear." Prove to the world that courage is a part of life, perhaps with various endings, but all that matters is that you had courage. Wrong or right, you had courage.

Somehow the words just came to my mouth for what to say and what to think about courage. Sappy as it is, it's real and now we have to deal with it. Don't pretend there are no sappy or "cheesy" things in life. One of those



somehow cheesy things we have to deal with is courage. If I were you, I would go deal with courage, embrace it. Maybe you won't have a superhero story of your wonderful courage to tell one day, but if you really think about it, you'll have your own different stories of courage. A story that is unique to you of how you faced something one time. That is courage, and despite all the different stories of courage, one thing will always stay the same. You should know what I'm about to say right now, what all of this has been about. Courage.

**“I SAY ACCEPT FEAR. THAT IN ITSELF PROVES
TO BE COURAGEOUS.”**

NICOLAS TSE

TED DOOLIN, TEACHER

William H. Ohrenberger School

What does courage mean? Courage can have several meanings. It can be as basic as public speaking. To me, courage is stepping out of your comfort zone.

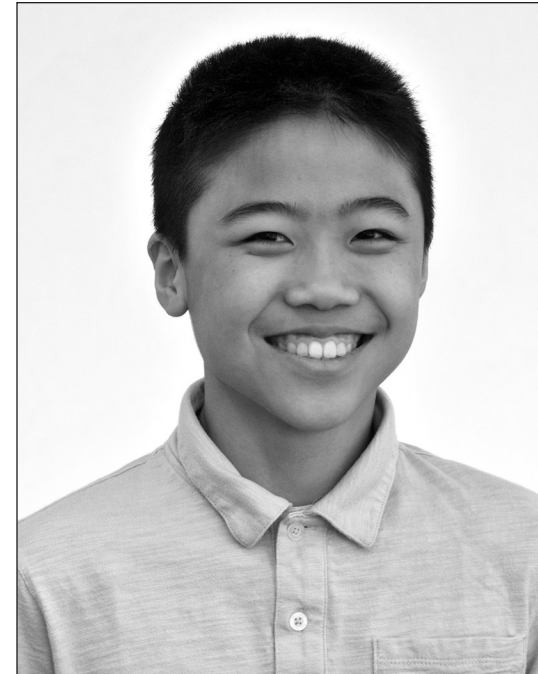
A couple of months ago, on a windy school day, the middle school basketball coach came up to the 6th grade pod and asked each class if they wanted a form to try out for basketball. A couple of my friends and I took the form.

When I got home, I was just watching one of my favorite YouTubers. The video I was watching was about Asian Stereotypes. I'd watched this video before, but when I watched it this time, something occurred to me. One of the stereotypes was that Asians can't play basketball, and I knew about this stereotype. It just never bothered me until now. I kept wondering to myself, is that true? Should I even try out for the team?

The day before the tryouts, I was still torn. I didn't know if I should try out or not. Then it hit me. Even though people told Jeremy Lin and Yao Ming that they couldn't play basketball, they never gave up. They tried and tried, and they both became amazing NBA players. I know many Asians that are great at basketball. Why can't I try to be great like them? So that's when I decided that I was going to try out, whether I made the team or not.

The day of the tryouts, I saw many older kids, and a few kids that are in my grade. The tryouts were an hour and a half long. I was nervous, but I tried my hardest and gave it my all. We had another tryout two days after the first one, and after it ended, the coach announced who made the team. He announced many 7th and 8th graders. There was only one spot left on the team, and he said my name. I made the team! I was on the Ohrenberger Owls Middle School Boys Basketball Team.

That is why I think courage means stepping out of your comfort zone. That day, I showed courage. And as Jeremy Lin says, "Strength doesn't come from what you can do... it comes from overcoming the things you once thought you couldn't."



“ONE OF THE STEREOTYPES WAS THAT ASIANS CAN’T PLAY BASKETBALL, AND I KNEW ABOUT THIS STEREOTYPE. IT JUST NEVER BOTHERED ME UNTIL NOW. I KEPT WONDERING TO MYSELF, IS THAT TRUE? SHOULD I EVEN TRY OUT FOR THE TEAM?”

MIRACLE EBBI

GREGORY SIMKINS AND ALISON SPADE, TEACHERS

Boston Renaissance Charter Public School

To me, courage means the way someone overcomes an issue when they are scared. In my opinion, courage is in everyone, even though they don't know it.

I love basketball and shooting hoops with my brother and little sister all the time. My parents enrolled me in a basketball camp for two weeks. Two days before the trip I started to practice and practice. It's very difficult as the only girl playing at a huge basketball court surrounded by boys because I feel like an outsider. When I get home, I usually sit down on my bed to brainstorm ideas. This time a question popped into my head, "Why can't women play in the NBA?" After that thought, I ran as fast as a cheetah out of my room to ask my mom.

"Mom, why can't women play in the NBA?"

"I don't know, dear. Why did you ask me that question?"

"I just don't want to feel sad or left out when I get to camp," I said.

"Oh, honey, you won't feel left out. Maybe ask your dad."

When my dad got home, I asked him. As usual, he said, "Ask your mom."

"I already did!" I begged him to answer me.

"Maybe because it's a special rule that they created."

I am a very curious girl, so I told myself that I wouldn't stop until I found out why women can't play in the NBA. The next day I asked my teacher, Mr. Simkins, and he told me, "They are a private company and made the rule. I know it doesn't sound right to you, but that's the way it is in the NBA. The government is not a part of this." I was happy that I found an accurate answer, but I still think it's unjust.

During the car ride I was both nervous and excited, and my stomach felt like little worms were swimming through my belly. Unfortunately, when I got there I realized I was the only girl in a group of 100 boys. During the game, I was benched. The coach was only letting the boys play. I started to tear up little by little. I was angry.



When I asked him if I could play, he said, "Little girl, go back to the bench where you belong. You will stay there the rest of camp, so don't try to think that you will get by me. You will never succeed in anything, little girl." I never thought that he would say that to me, because I was just ten years old at that time. I was so embarrassed that I stayed in my camp room all day, I didn't open the door to anyone, not even the counselors and staff.

I thought about what he said all night, and I didn't sleep well. I saw there was a competition on the last day of camp. To show the coach that I could do it, I joined. He tried to argue with the owner of the camp about letting me play, but the owner was on my side. I was able to play, even though I was the only girl, and this changed me.

During the game, I made twenty shots and I was happy. It was a tie game, and I was so nervous that I felt like I was going to throw up. I made the last shot and our team won the game. Everyone was happy for me, and that was the first time people embraced me in that camp. Most of all, I felt like a winner.

Even though the coach tried to make me lose by putting me with the worst players, it didn't work. At the end, the score was 92-87 and I was happy about that. I showed him that I could do it, even though I was afraid that they might laugh at me. I was full of joy.

Remember never to give up on your dreams, because you can succeed and conquer anything if you believe in yourself. I showed courage by being strong against discrimination. Believe in yourself, because I did, and I will never forget that day.

**"I SHOWED COURAGE BY BEING
STRONG AGAINST DISCRIMINATION"**

MARK SNEKVIK

SYLVIA RUA , SHARON ENNIS,
AND NORAA RICKETTS, TEACHERS

Curley K-8 School

“Mom, I don’t know what to do,” I bemoaned. It was March, and Regan registrations were due soon. In Jamaica Plain, most boys aged four to fourteen play in the Regan Youth Baseball League. Signing up wasn’t usually a discussion. Just an “Oh, Mark, I signed you up for Regan this morning,” from my mom. But this year was different. Over the past couple of years, I hadn’t been enjoying baseball as much, because I was constantly stressed at practices and games. I knew that if I missed a grounder or struck out, I would seem to be hated by teammates. It’s funny how kids wouldn’t like me if I made a mistake, and then change their opinion about me in an hour after I hit a double. I hadn’t changed at all, but suddenly everyone liked me.

So here we were, my mom and me sitting at a table deciding if I should quit baseball and do band and singing, or continue baseball. After much debate, what came out of my mouth was “Okay, I’ll quit band and singing.” Why, you might ask, did I make that decision after all my distaste towards baseball? Because I had no courage. I didn’t want to face the questions of why I had quit and feared being teased and mocked over it. I didn’t want to be considered gay, just because I did musical things. (No matter how much kids say they support gay people, and even if they do, they’ll still consider anything gay as a derogatory term for a boy who doesn’t play sports, instead of what being gay actually means.)

So I told my band teacher I had to quit. She graciously understood. Later at home that day I started crying, thinking of the band performing and me not with them. But when I pictured a baseball game and me not playing, I felt fine. Of course I would miss out on some things, but I would much rather that, compared to feeling miserable for five hours of my week at baseball. I thought back to a few years ago, when my brother Stephen came to a practice of mine. After the practice, he said to me, “Mark, you seemed so stressed and unhappy. Do you even like baseball?” Lying on my bed that afternoon, it hit me. Stephen was right. I dreaded practice. So why should I be spending five hours of my week doing something I was only doing because of what friends said I should do? I suddenly had the courage to quit.

The next day I asked my mom if there was time to change my mind. I explained what I was thinking about the previous night, and she said she would try. Well guess what? It worked. I had officially quit baseball. But that courage to quit wasn’t the only courage I would need. None of my friends knew I had quit yet, and I allowed them to believe I was going to play like normal, not lying but not telling the truth.

The day came when teams were announced. I dreaded school the next day, because everyone would be talking about it and I knew I would have to tell everyone I’d quit. I feared I would lose a bond with my friends from baseball, possibly leading to us not being friends anymore.



At recess that day, my friends all started talking about baseball. Comments such as “Oh, what team are you on?” “I got Coach __ (groan),” or “I got this sick new bat, bro!” floated around. I’m a talkative person, so my friends quickly noticed I wasn’t saying much. And then one of them asked, “Mark, what team are you on?” Crap. I mustered the courage to answer, thinking, if we’re only friends because I play baseball, maybe we shouldn’t be friends.

“Oh, I’m not playing this year.”

“What, why? It’s seniors, we get to steal bases!”

“Because I had to either quit baseball or band and singing, and I chose to quit baseball.”

“Wow. I thought you liked it a lot.”

“No, I always felt stressed at practices and games.”

“Oh.”

And that was it! No “I’m not your friend anymore,” or “Wow. Thanks for lying to me for seven years.” Just a few questions and they moved on! I felt so proud of myself. A weight in the shape of a baseball had been lifted off my chest.

Looking back, I realize how many opportunities in music I’ve had that I wouldn’t have gotten without the courage to quit baseball. Courage helped me to not be afraid to make tough decisions. Courage reassured me that my friendships were real, and to accept my love of music. Most important, courage made me not be scared of being considered uncool and weird. Without courage, I’d still be miserably standing on the baseball field.

**“MOST IMPORTANT, COURAGE MADE ME NOT BE
SCARED OF BEING CONSIDERED UNCOOL AND WEIRD.”**

THOMAS KLUBOCK OAKES

CAROLYN MILLER AND AMY HIGGINBOTHAM, TEACHERS

Dennis C. Haley Pilot School

To me, courage is when it is hard to be yourself, but you continue to be yourself because that is who you truly are. Some examples are expressing opinions that others don't have, and coming out to your family. Max showed courage when he was optimistic and inspiring in the face of leukemia. I show courage because I know it would be easier for me to conform to stereotypes, but I continue to be myself.

"What lovely daughters you have," said a nice elderly woman in a voice as sweet as honey. Instantly, my cheeks heated up. I dropped my gaze. I hoped my family wouldn't address what she said. "Don't say anything," I silently willed them. Glancing at them, I saw that their smiles had stiffened, like a smiling statue. Thankfully, they just said "Thank you," and we left the Roslindale Library. It was a warm and sunny May day, around noon. As I crossed the sidewalk, I remember wishing that I didn't have to worry about this kind of situation. However, that was not the first, and I knew it wouldn't be the last time this would happen to me.

My name is Thomas Klubock Oakes. I'm the proud son of Katharine Klubock and Robert Oakes, and a proud twin brother. Unfortunately, when most people look at me, they don't see the real me. They see stereotypes that make them think that I'm a girl. A stereotype is an untrue belief about a specific group of people. A big stereotype is that girls and women have long hair and like pink and purple, and boys and men have short hair and like blue or red. This is not true, because I'm a boy with long hair, and my favorite color is purple. Because of stereotypes, it's hard for me to be myself without putting myself in embarrassing situations.

One gray day, my parents announced that we were going out to eat. There was a dull ache in my stomach and my palms were becoming moist. As we got to Fornax, the small bakery and restaurant in the middle of Roslindale Square, we took off our raincoats and wiped the rain from our faces. As always, Fornax was cozy, warm, and dimly lit. I could hear the wrrr of the bread cutter. I tried to make myself as inconspicuous as possible. When I go out, I try not to be noticeable so people don't make a mistake and call me a girl in front of my family. When my family got to the counter, after my parents ordered, the person taking our order said, "What can I get for you girls?" I didn't say anything. I usually don't, because I don't like to make a scene or cause the person who made the error to feel really guilty.



As my family sat down at a table and began to consume the warm soup and fresh bread, I was silent. The more I thought about what had happened, the more I felt furious. "It's not fair!" I thought. I was as mad as a wet chicken. Anger spread through my body. When we got home, I lay down on the couch. My black and white cat, Baxter, jumped next to me and settled down. I hugged him close, feeling the warmth of his body and the softness of his fur. I read for a little bit, but I couldn't really focus. The anger I had felt was replaced with a feeling of hopelessness. I was a sinking stone that had no idea how I could get myself out of the situation. I thought about how much easier it would be for me if I conformed to stereotypes. I imagined cutting my hair short and looking like "boys are supposed to look like." The next minute, I felt disgusted with myself. Was I really going to not be myself to make it easier for other people?

I'm ashamed to admit it, but for a second, I thought the answer was yes. I thought about how much easier it would be for me if I didn't have to worry about people calling me a girl. After a second more of contemplation, I thought, "No. I'm going to be myself with no apologies." I knew that in the future, people might never know who I truly am as a person, as a human being. However, I won't let them make me live a lie. What I learned from this experience (and others) is that you can't compromise yourself to fit someone else's definition of who you should be. It would be easier for me to conform to stereotypes, but then (and now) I continue to be myself.

"I SHOW COURAGE BECAUSE I KNOW IT WOULD BE EASIER FOR ME TO CONFORM TO STEREOTYPES, BUT I CONTINUE TO BE MYSELF."

NATALIE KEATING

JENNIFER GAYDA, TEACHER

Linden STEAM Academy

Courage doesn't always have to be for the greater good. Sometimes, when you've done all you can for others, you have to be courageous for yourself. Just being honest, truthful, and confident is the key to courage. But some people don't realize how hard it is.

When I was in third and fourth grade, my friends and I were uneducated and poorly influenced. We would joke about things that shouldn't be joked about. But when my friends would joke about being gay, I would feel uncomfortable and upset. See, I was raised in a home where I was taught that couples could be boy/girl, boy/boy, girl/girl, or any other relationship you feel the most comfortable with. In fourth grade, I met a new girl, and I felt something. I thought I was jealous of her, or maybe I wanted to be her friend. I wasn't sure, but I couldn't stop thinking about her. I finally realized that I liked her.

I was upset and ashamed, thinking that I would be bullied. But I still wanted to tell someone so they could give me friendly advice. My best friend (at the time) and I were playing truth or dare, and he gave me a common truth question.

He asked me, "Who do you have a crush on?" I blushed, embarrassed, but I answered truthfully because it was in the rules of the game, and I trusted him with my secret.

"Oh," he said, taken aback. "Um . . . So does that mean that you're . . .?" I could tell he was careful with his wording, so as not to offend me. I went on to explain to him about pansexuality, and by the end, he seemed to understand the concept.

"So, are we cool?" I asked hopefully, trying to hold back tears.

"Yeah, of course! We're friends, we support each other." I was so happy, I burst out crying with relief. Everyone else in the class looked at me, unsure of why I had randomly started weeping. I wiped my eyes with the sleeve of my polo shirt and went back to work. My friend cleared his throat and started typing on his Chromebook.

I finally came out to more of my friends, and I'm not going to lie, I was really afraid of what would happen to me. But the people I told were so



supportive, it gave me courage. I came out to my parents, sisters, more friends, and even people I didn't talk to a lot in my class. Now, most people know, and I am proud and really open about it. I learned that when you are frightened, be courageous. It can be really helpful to talk to someone who will react with positivity and care. You won't regret the outcome.

“SOMETIMES WHEN YOU’VE DONE ALL YOU CAN FOR OTHERS, YOU HAVE TO BE COURAGEOUS FOR YOURSELF.”

NOLAN BRENNAN

KRISTINA MCGEARY, TEACHER

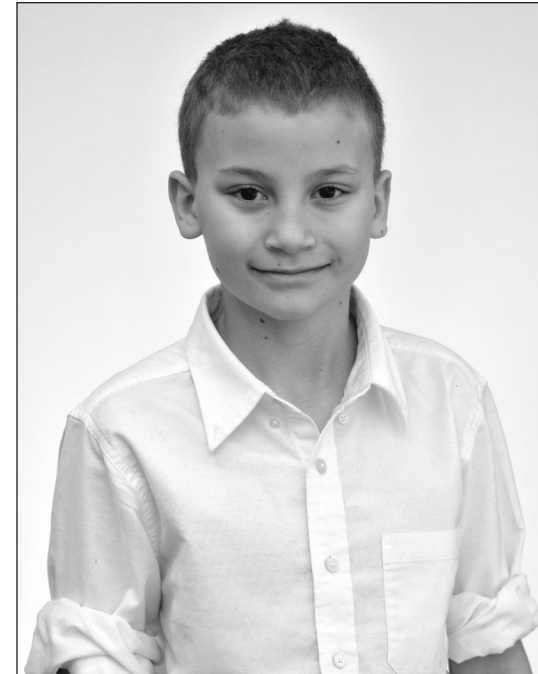
Oliver H. Perry K-8 School

About two years ago, when I was in the fourth grade, I had a friend named Griffith or Griff for short. Griff is still my friend to this day. During this time in the fourth grade, I unfortunately had a bully. His name was Brady, and he threatened me and made fun of me until I would cry. Then he would brag about it to the school.

After a couple of months of him bullying me, he got other people to make fun of me too. He eventually started to make fun of others as well. I thought this was the last straw. I was going to go to the principal. But once I did, she did nothing. I think it is because the bully's parents gave a lot of money to the school. So I decided to tell every other teacher that I had class with, but once again nothing happened. So I gave up.

All of this went on for about two more months. Then, I saw Griff crying. I didn't know what to do. So I asked him what was wrong and he said that Brady was making fun of him. I told him not to listen to him, knowing it wasn't as easy as it sounded. A little while later, Griff painted his nails. He got made fun of so much that he was crying before school had even started. As soon as I got home from school that day, I instantly looked for my mom's nail polish and found the girliest shade of blue I could find. The next day when I went to school with my painted nails, no one made fun of Griff anymore. They all just made fun of me instead.

It's weird, but in a way I liked being made fun of. I think it's because I knew that my friend was not being made fun of anymore. This made me feel great. Griff removed his nail polish, but for some reason I didn't. I still don't know why. Maybe it's because it made me feel good or maybe it's because I knew that I was somehow helping others. I do think it is a little bit of both. I painted my nails three more times after that which led me to dyeing my hair purple on my birthday. I have enjoyed dyeing my hair since then and now I am not afraid to admit that I am bisexual, or that I like girly music. To me, courage is doing what's right no matter the consequence.



“IT’S WEIRD, BUT IN A WAY I LIKED BEING MADE FUN OF. I THINK IT’S BECAUSE I KNEW THAT MY FRIEND WAS NOT BEING MADE FUN OF ANYMORE.”

NAZAURI TURNER

SONIE FELIX, TEACHER

Dearborn STEM Academy

Having courage is a really good thing. To me having courage means to be brave and to have the ability to face your greatest fears. You have to be able to believe in yourself and be able to express how you truly feel inside. Having courage helps to define your character and shapes who you are in this world.

Have you ever been scared or didn't have the courage to tell your friend and family something secretive or important? One time I showed courage was when I "came out" to my mom and told her that I'm bisexual. I was on the phone with my boy best friend (Lorenzo), and I told him about how I wanted to "come out of the closet" and tell my mother that I am bisexual. He said, "You should just tell her, Nazauri. Your mom is kind and understanding."

"But what if she doesn't accept me and gets mad? What am I going to do?" I responded.

"You can do it. I've never known you to be afraid of anything," said Lorenzo.

That same day I gathered up the strength to face my fears and went upstairs to my mother and asked her if we could talk. She said, "Yeah, what's wrong?"

I told her how I was developing feelings for a girl that I knew in our neighborhood and I wanted to be more than friends with her. I looked into my mother's eyes as she displayed a look of confusion. I became scared and nervous that she wouldn't accept it. I bowed my head and slowly left the bedroom.

All of a sudden I decided that enough was enough and went back to the bedroom to ask about her acceptance. I valued what she thought about the situation and wanted her advice. To my surprise, my mom was standing at the door with her arms wide open, and my frown slowly transformed into a smile as I ran into her arms.

I was really scared at first to tell my mom how I felt because I thought that she wouldn't listen to what I had to say and that she would be angry. I looked into her eyes once more and asked her if she accepted it. She looked at me and said, "I understand, but are you sure you're not just going through a phase?" I stood there in silence. Then she sat at the foot of the bed and



said, "If you're not going through a phase, I will accept you either way."

A wave of relief came over me and I gave her the biggest hug that I had in me. After we had the talk I walked away with a huge smile on my face, all because I was happy that she didn't get mad at me for telling her the truth. Now I talk to my mom about how I feel and what goes on in my mind. I feel a lot better that she knows my sexuality and that I don't have to hide it from her anymore. I am glad that I told her, but I'm still scared to tell my father about it.

To me courage doesn't only happen once. We are faced with challenging situations every day. Sometimes it takes a while to gain back your courage. When I'm ready, I will have the courage to tell my father next.

**"YOU HAVE TO BE ABLE TO BELIEVE IN
YOURSELF AND BE ABLE TO EXPRESS HOW YOU
TRULY FEEL INSIDE."**

SILAS LAWRENCE

CHRIS BEESON, TEACHER

The Park School

People think to be courageous you have to be some huge muscular hero. They're wrong. Anyone can be courageous, because being courageous isn't just having to go through something. It's choosing to go through something.

For me, I had to show courage by standing up for the people I love. I was at Coco Keys and I was talking to some kids in the lazy river. We were all talking about sports and stuff. Then these two men walked by, and they seemed to like each other. So, one kid gags, all the other kids laugh, and some start saying things like "Gays are so weird" or "Your mom's gay." All of them were laughing and having fun, but I couldn't.

Even if my moms weren't lesbian, I don't understand how these kids could put down a group of humans so easily without any remorse at all. I could talk about how that made me feel about my situation at home, though it honestly wasn't about my family or me. I didn't think about my family at that moment. I knew if I didn't stand up for gay people or any kind of people, I wouldn't know what kind of person I am. When you are put in a situation like that, we all say we would stand up, but it's harder to do it in reality.

I had to do what I thought was right. I told them that everyone should be valued for who they are. I asked them how they would feel if some eleven-year-olds were talking about who they liked. That made them think, and they all said they were sorry to me. I told them that they should be apologizing to those guys, not to me.

Standing up for the people you love is courageous, but standing up for people you don't know is even more courageous. It's crazy how some people can be so disrespectful toward people who are humans just like them. I will never shame someone for who they are. You have to stand up for people who are considered "different" from others. You have to realize we are all humans. Standing up for people, in my opinion, is the most important thing you can do. When you stand up for someone, you give them a chance to be who they are, without pressure to fit what people think is "right."



Be courageous. Don't stand in the shadows and watch people be shamed for who they are. I want to show that people are different and should be proud of that, but in the end, we can all relate and appreciate that we are different. Spread that message. Don't let anyone stop you, and be the most courageous person you can.

**“WHEN YOU STAND UP FOR SOMEONE, YOU
GIVE THEM A CHANCE TO BE WHO THEY ARE,
WITHOUT PRESSURE TO FIT WHAT PEOPLE THINK IS
‘RIGHT.’”**

LUCY CAREY KEESBURY

HELEN SULLIVAN, TEACHER

Hurley K-8 School

Courage means something different to everyone, but to me it means facing your fears, being brave, and having an open mindset. Courage means learning to live while everyone silently judges you. Or in my case, not so silently.

I have had to show courage multiple times. One time in particular was last year, when I was in 5th grade. That year was like finding a worm in an amazing-tasting apple.

The year started off great. I had a few friends, I loved my teachers. However, there was a really powerful group of girls that controlled everyone. They threw cups at my back and made grossed-out expressions behind me when they “thought I couldn't see.” They made it so I could see their faces. I refused to buy into them, so I was the target. I have been teased about being short for most of my life. This was different. This was worse.

I told my mom and my sister, but I still didn't tell my teachers. My mother said that the reason this girl was bullying me was because she had a bad life and was jealous that I had such a good one. I know that this is true, but it is no reason to pick out two people and bully them for an entire year.

It just got worse when I didn't tell my teachers. Then, one day, on a really chilly, wet day in March I was lying on the field talking with my best friend, with my head on her stomach, when we saw two “popular” girls walk past us about 15 times. Their faces were so disgusted when they saw us sitting together like that.

We were talking about what we would do after high school, when one of the nicer girls told my best friend to go with her. Then, after a moment of hesitation, she also told me to follow her.

She brought us to the stairs that led into the gymnasium. “Everyone thinks that you are gay and dating each other,” she told us, kind of hesitantly.

“What?!” I yelled. “How could people think that? They all know that we're just best friends!”

“Who started the rumor?” Maya, my best friend, asked calmly.



The nice girl replied, naming the mean girl. This was the worst thing that she had done that year.

We weren't dating. We knew that, but other people didn't know.

We walked up to another nice girl and asked, “Do you think we're dating?”

“Yeah, it's really obvious that you are. Aren't you? You are really cute together,” she replied.

I couldn't stand it anymore. The next day, right before we went to art class, I told my teacher about how it was hurting me emotionally. Of course, Maya was by my side every step of the way, and still is. After we told our teacher, the rumor went away. Although I do still hear it from time to time, I just shake it off and laugh, while hoping inside that the memories don't resurface.

I showed courage in a way that many kids, especially middle school girls, have to face every day. My experience with bullying was bad, and did make my anxiety worse, but it was not as bad as it could have been if I hadn't told my teacher. On the whole, I became a better person after this, and I have sworn that I will never bully anyone no matter how much I don't like them.

“THIS WAS DIFFERENT. THIS WAS WORSE.”

MAYA ROMAN

HELEN SULLIVAN, TEACHER

Hurley K-8 School

How do you think it feels to be bullied? What are those feelings circling around you? What do you use to help you? It's courage!

It was a sunny day. On sunny days I'm always happy, but this one was a little different. There was a girl in my class who reminded me of the saying, a bad apple spoils the bunch. She always bad-mouthed me and my friends, she constantly tripped me and my "sister," and she almost always wore her famous smirk, wherever she was. She sat at the desk in front of me, and she was always talking about me. I was used to her insults, but the minute she opened her mouth, my whole world turned upside down.

She said to her friend, "Don't you just want Maya to leave the school? She's so ugly, annoying, and stupid!" She whispered so I "couldn't hear it," but I obviously did. She wanted me to hear it.

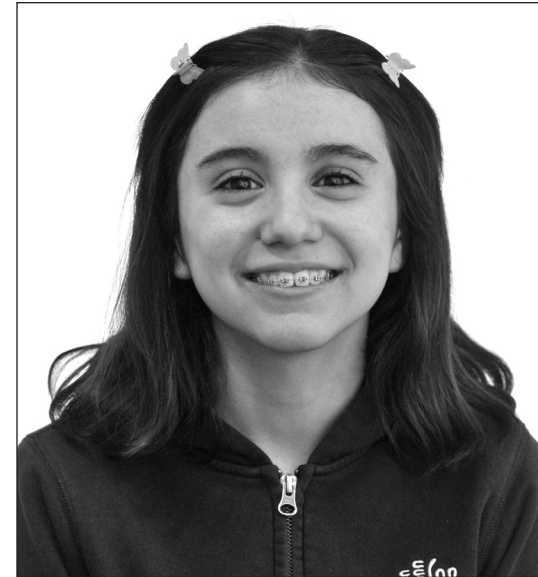
Her friend was surprisingly a really nice kid, but he was very popular. This time he wasn't so nice though. He played it cool and tagged along with the teasing. At that moment I felt very insecure, because I knew she was right about what she had just said.

When I got home, I went straight to the bathroom and locked the door. I put my back against the door and slowly slid down to the floor. I felt dejected. Then I began to cry. I looked at my reflection and started bad-mouthing myself, crying harder. I hated how all these favored girls always got everything their way. All of a sudden, I heard my cats meowing from outside the bathroom door. I opened the door to see them looking at me with sadness filling their big round eyes. This is when I realized that I have to keep strong for all my loved ones. I knew my courage would help me. Courage was a solution to many things.

The next morning, I took the bus to school. I was listening to music on my flip phone while I was sitting in the bus. When I arrived at school, I went to my classroom. I knew I had to stand up for myself the moment I saw her smirk. I sat at my desk. She didn't do anything until lunch. She reminded me of a wild lion preparing to attack its prey.

"Maya and Lucy are dating! She's a lesbian!" she said with an unforgettable smirk.

One of the nicest girls I knew told me how the mean girl sent some girls to spy



on us. Just because my friend had her head lying on my stomach does not mean that we were dating. I wasn't too pleased with what she said, but now her friends were spying on me, and that annoyed the heck out of me. Lucy and I weren't dating, and I knew that.

So I used all my courage to go walk up to her and tell her, "Would that be a problem if we were? Do you think you can hurt me? Well if you do, you're wrong."

She was muddled, and it was really obvious that she thought I was too wimpy to speak up for myself. Then her sassy look returned, and I knew what would happen next. She said, "You really think you're strong? Do you think you are important? Do you think you are beautiful?"

My response was, "I think about what is on the inside not on the outside. Don't think you're special just because you're popular."

I'm currently in the sixth grade, and, thankfully, she has left the school for good. She was a really smart girl, who needed to be aware of her attitude and how it affected others. I am relieved that she's gone to a different school, but I am now mindful about why she was rude. She must have been going through very rough times, and she may also have had many insecurities.

To me, courage can mean a lot of things and it can really depend on you, your situation, how you think, and what you do. In my case, I used courage to help keep myself healthy and happy, for the sake of my loved ones. Courage doesn't have to be participating in something big like a social movement. It can be small, day-to-day things. I am a proud Peruvian-American girl, proud of being myself and having courage.

"I AM A PROUD PERUVIAN-AMERICAN GIRL, PROUD OF BEING MYSELF AND HAVING COURAGE."

MAREYLI FIGUEROA

MELANIE SMITH, TEACHER

Josiah Quincy Upper School

“What if he didn’t have Autism?” I’ve wondered that my whole life. My mom always told me that I had to be born. You might ask “Why?” Let me answer that for you.

I have an older brother who has a condition called Autism. Autism is a developmental disorder that can cause difficulty in interactions, communication, and learning. When my brother and I were younger, my brother couldn’t speak clearly and no one understood him... besides me. I was the only one capable of understanding what he tried to say.

For me, during the time he couldn’t speak, it was normal. I helped translate for him on a daily basis. I realized that it was very important for me to help him speak. Every time he would yell out something in gibberish, I would just tell him what the word is. I helped him learn how to speak English.

As my brother was growing, he was getting bullied at school and he wouldn’t even notice. People would make fun of him because of his condition. One day, I overheard someone talking about how my brother got in a physical fight last year, and how it was “funny.” I didn’t say anything. When my brother and I got home, I told my brother. He said he didn’t care and to leave it alone, but I refused. I had to do something if he wasn’t going to do anything.

The next day, I was just walking down the halls, getting to class, and that person, the same person who talked about my brother, came up to me. That person said, “Say it to my face.” I didn’t know what to do, so I didn’t say anything. The person walked away saying, “That’s what I thought. You guys are so irrelevant.” I was really frustrated about what to do because I had never stood up to someone like that, a bully. So I started thinking about what I should do. I couldn’t leave the situation like that.

After school, at the basketball court, the person came up to me once again. I said it. I said it to her face. “Stop commenting on things that aren’t your business. Don’t talk about my brother.” I actually said it. She put her bag down and came closer and showed me that she wanted to fight. As she was coming closer, one of her friends defended me by stopping her. I went straight home before she could even put her hands on me.



Courage. What is courage? Courage is a choice, and I chose to help instead of stand by. I chose to be the voice for others who didn’t have one. My brother is older than me, but I have to be the one to act older. I’m like his big sister. I have to set good examples. I have to defend him. My name is Mareyli Figueroa, and I love someone with Autism.

“I CHOSE TO BE THE VOICE FOR OTHERS WHO DIDN’T HAVE ONE.”

MARC GAGNE

JOYCE BAIO, TEACHER

Saint Patrick School

Courage is a difficult trait for many to master. What it means to me, is to do something that will extend your comfort zone, which will enable you to complete more of your goals. It takes courage to do anything that you don't think you can do or want to do. If your courage is inhibited, your ideas will not be accomplished. Also, if you are going through an arduous time, you have to keep moving, not give up, and show enough courage to survive. You will always be confident enough in yourself to do anything once you know that you possess courage.

I am always having a tough time at school. I have a twin brother who is in the same grade and class as me. My brother has a group of friends who pester me and leave me out, and he is like their "ringleader." I show courage by trying to ignore them or think about something happy when they treat me unkindly. Also, most of the boys in my class like him better because he is funny, so they always cheer for him when we are playing a game or sport together. I show courage because none of this will matter when I am an adult. I try not to let their antics annoy me, even though some things do. I just plow right through and don't create a brawl with them. "Mom will deal with this later," I say to console myself. Then I avoid them if they are being really mean to me. If I let them pick on me, I will start to actually believe what they are saying. I will then have low self-esteem for the rest of my life. It takes immense courage to believe in yourself when other people try to destroy your desire to participate in an activity, or try to humiliate you with their unkind remarks.

I feel much better now that I am showing abundant amounts of courage. I used to let everything bother me, and I would go home feeling sad every day. It makes me happier to know that my mom and dad will always be nice to me, support me, and love me. It is important to show courage because then other people will know that you are confident, and so they will not pick on you. I learned how much it can do for you if you have this trait within yourself. Knowing I have courage helps me through some of the toughest days at school.



“WHAT IT MEANS TO ME, IS TO DO SOMETHING THAT WILL EXTEND YOUR COMFORT ZONE, WHICH WILL ENABLE YOU TO COMPLETE MORE OF YOUR GOALS.”

PIYA VAGHELA

COLLEEN CLIFFORD, TEACHER

Beebe School

Courage has many definitions. To me, it means doing something even though you know your friends are going to judge you. I used to talk about my favorite books all the time, and my friends said I was annoying, which I guess was true. But when I stopped talking about books I really didn't know what to talk about. In afterschool, my friends usually hang out with this person that I was friends with in fifth grade. I had already realized what kind of person he was by his personality and how he always judged everyone by what they liked. My friends always used to tell him my mistakes. My friends looked up to him. The boy always judged you if you did that, or you watched this, or you liked that. Even though I knew who he was, I couldn't believe I actually wanted to be friends with him.

The boy wouldn't stop. There was this group of girls that the boy would always make fun of. If they did each other's hair, he would say "Why do girls do each other's hair? It's so annoying, like, it's just hair." The worst thing about it was that I had been friends with some of the girls in that group. The next day, I wanted the boy to stop judging everyone, so I stopped being friends with him. My friends were still friends with him, and I wanted them to see what kind of person the boy was, but I knew it wasn't my choice to make to decide who they could and couldn't be friends with. Soon after I stopped being friends with the boy, my friends would tell me that he was talking about me and how I'd made the wrong choice.

A few days later, I became friends with someone new and I realized how different it felt to be friends with someone so kind and caring. I knew that I made the right choice, and I didn't care what the boy and his group of friends said about me. I knew that the boy was still talking about everyone's flaws and mistakes, and I knew I had to put a stop to it. I knew I had to try to talk to him about it, but I was too scared because I knew how he could be when people wanted him to stop doing something that was bad, but which he thought was good. I had to stop the bullying and teasing. I didn't just have to stand up for myself, but I had to stand up for others, too.



I worked up the courage to go up to him and tell him everything that he did that made me and many others feel self-conscious. He actually respected my opinion. Over the next few days, I noticed that he stopped teasing and bullying everyone. I realized that there was always good in people who you once thought were bad. I became friends with the boy again and we never talked or teased anyone again. It takes a lot of courage to stand up to an enemy, but it takes a lot more to stand up to a friend.

“IT TAKES A LOT OF COURAGE TO STAND UP TO AN ENEMY, BUT IT TAKES A LOT MORE TO STAND UP TO A FRIEND.”

LOVELY ANNE GEROCHI

JANE WRIGHT, TEACHER

Salemwood School

Courage. What is the true meaning? People say it is the ability to do something that frightens you. To me, courage means the ability to do the right thing, like telling the truth.

The last school year was difficult for me, and it wasn't because of my academics but because of what happened outside of school. Toward the end of the year, I stayed after school to hang out with a few friends. My friends and I played a game at the playground with a couple of boys in our grade, and one of them was two years younger than me. We somehow ended up on the field chasing one another. My sweater was coming off my waist and I didn't want to trip, so I took it off and threw it on top of my bag. I continued to chase the guys for fun, and then they started to laugh and point. I heard some of them making comments. I realized they were looking at my butt, and then one of them kicked me on my butt. It was too terrible to deal with at that moment, so my friend and I decided to leave and go home. When I arrived home, I called my closest friends and told them about what happened. My eyes were full of tears, and I couldn't hold back my feelings. One of my best friends was so angry at the guys that the next day when we went to school, she almost punched one of them. I forced my friends to promise me not to tell anyone about what happened, especially an adult.

A few days later, I got called during recess to talk to the assistant principal about what happened. She told me to tell her who was there and what happened, from my point of view. At first I was very reluctant to talk about it, but then I realized that if I didn't say anything it wouldn't get better, and that my emotions would always be hidden. I told her all that I could recall and she explained to me how what they did was sexual harassment. At that moment I tried to hold in my tears, but after she left I ran to my friends and cried. None of us knew who had told her until one admitted to telling. I was so furious that I couldn't even speak. A while after that talk, I was called to have several meetings with the assistant principal. We talked about how I was feeling and she asked me if I wanted to talk to the guys. I didn't know how to say no, so I nervously said yes.

One day during guidance, our guidance counselor talked about problems in our school and then went to the topic of sexual harassment. He used



me and one of the boys who was there as an example. He said that if I were to touch the guy somewhere he didn't want to be touched, that would be considered sexual harassment. It was quite ironic how the roles switched. At the time I didn't know that our guidance counselor was clueless about the incident, so I assumed he knew. I went home and found out that the school called my mother. She gave me a whole lecture on the subject and then my sister found out.

The next day was the meeting, but two of the guys were absent. I was called to the office at two in the afternoon and that was when the assistant principal told me who had kicked me. To my surprise it was a third grader and not one of the boys from my grade. The boys arrived and I asked them a few questions. After the conversation, the assistant principal told me that everything was recorded in their school records. It was all finally over, but even today I can't seem to forget about that moment. Whenever I see the boys in the hallways I try to avoid any contact. I became more insecure, and whenever I wear leggings I always have something like a flannel around my waist.

Looking back, I am glad that I got to tell the truth and to find out the truth. It's important to have courage because you may be hiding something and feel as though you can't express your emotions, when you can.

“IT’S IMPORTANT TO HAVE COURAGE BECAUSE YOU MAY BE HIDING SOMETHING AND FEEL AS THOUGH YOU CAN’T EXPRESS YOUR EMOTIONS, WHEN YOU CAN.”

CHRISTOPHER GUERRA

AMBER MALM, TEACHER

Clarence R. Edwards Middle School

“Cough, cough.” This sound may not be important to you, but to asthmatic people, this sound is a gamble for their life. Over three million people have been diagnosed with asthma, and the result is a person who can’t run for even two minutes without having to gamble for their life. And some people think you can just stop it, easy as that.

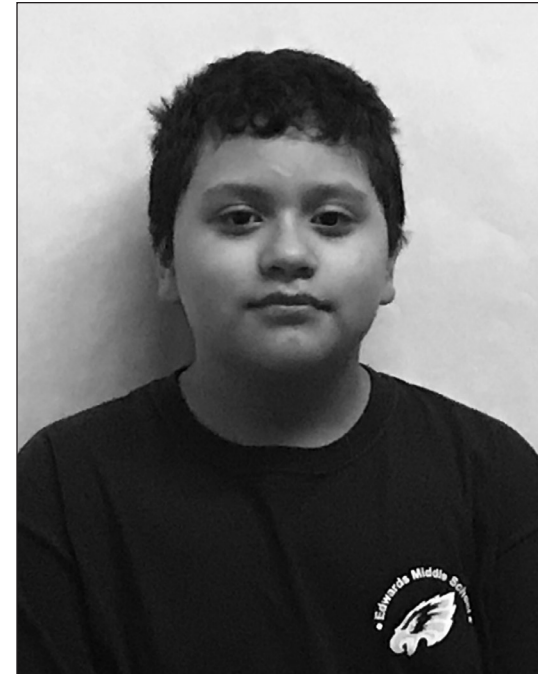
One day, when I was walking down the street with my friends, they challenged me to a race. I was about to tell them about my asthma, but before I could say anything, they started the countdown. One minute after “Go!” I had already started dying. And you wanna know what they said?

“Hey fat boy, you can’t run?” Because of my weight, combined with the asthma, I really couldn’t run. They bullied me many times after that. Then it turned from verbal bullying to physical bullying. I sustained a lot of punches from them. One day, I just couldn’t handle it anymore and told them, “Leave me the hell alone. I can’t run because of my goddamn trachea being holed up!”

And they came back with, “C’mon fat boy, what kind of disease is asthma? And if you do have it, just stop it!”

Just stop it. They think it's easy as that? Every single day, every time I wake up to see sunshine, it might be the last. It's courage to sustain the pain you go through every single day, just to show somebody that you, too, are a human being.

In conclusion, I still walk and go to school every day to show that asthmatic people are still people. The fact that I’m still alive is amazing because ten Americans die from asthma every day, and I’m still walking here. I represent the asthmatic, and I represent survival.



**“IT’S COURAGE TO SUSTAIN THE PAIN YOU
GO THROUGH EVERY SINGLE DAY, JUST TO SHOW
SOMEBODY THAT YOU, TOO, ARE A HUMAN BEING.”**

TIANA FRANCIS

TED DOOLIN, TEACHER

William H. Ohrenberger School

What I think courage means is being brave, strong, and staying powerful during a painful situation. My story of courage took place one day in the beginning of June when I was still in the fifth grade. It was a typical school day, just like any other day, when nothing exciting or boring took place.

That day I got on the school bus that I rode daily to and from to school, and I sat in the back of the bus with my friends. Sometimes I think that if I hadn't been sitting in the back things would have been different. I was sitting in my seat when all of a sudden I felt something wet hit my face, so I turned around to see what it was. Someone poured juice out of the windows, and it hit me. As any normal person would, I asked for the boy to stop pouring the juice. Instead of saying sorry and stopping, he poured the remaining amount of juice on my face. To stop him from pouring any more of the juice onto me, I hit the bottle out of his hand. Then things got super out of control, when he pushed me onto the ground and started to choke me. He also hit me in the face.

I was scared, but I knew I needed to show courage. I tried to defend myself, but it just got worse every time I tried. Other people tried to help me, but he was hurting them as well. I remember two or three girls got hurt from trying to help me. Sometimes I tell myself they wouldn't have gotten hurt if it weren't for me. Eventually our bus driver intervened, stopped the boy, and drove us back to the school.

At school I told the principal what had happened. I guess he didn't understand that I had gotten hurt pretty bad. I was feeling pretty dizzy at the time, so he called my mom and told her what had just happened. My mom thought it was just something little, like a verbal fight, because the principal told her that's what happened. When I explained it differently, my mom came to the school and saw that I didn't look good. My face and ears were red, and I couldn't walk right. We went to the doctor's and were told I had a concussion, two ear contusions, something called conjugate gaze, and a sprained neck.

That whole summer was filled with endless boredom. I couldn't do anything really but physical therapy, MRI appointments, eye appointments, and constant checkups. By September this was still going on, in addition to appearing in court. I was scared to talk in front of a judge for the first time, and I kept looking back at my mom. The first time I didn't have to talk much, I just answered a few questions. It took courage to speak in court.



I did have anxiety and depression from the situation. At times I will admit I did take self-harm into consideration to cope with this pain, but luckily I didn't do that. I will say that I am better but not as happy and cheerful as I was before. I am lucky that the boy left the school so I don't have to worry about him anymore. It still crosses my mind from time to time and brings back harmful memories, but then I think to myself that I got out of a bad situation that could have been worse than it was. I am working on trying to be happier. Someday, maybe not today, or tomorrow, or in a few weeks, or maybe not even in a year, but someday I will be happier.

If I could go back in time I wouldn't. I wouldn't go back in time because I wouldn't have felt courage, so I wouldn't have been able to show as much sympathy as I do now to people who have been in a situation like mine. Hopefully, I will now have a better summer and beginning of my school year. As much pain as he has caused me, I can thank him for one thing: for making me recognize that I am brave. Now I am strong, now I know how to deal with situations like these. I can thank my mom for also making me brave and helping me.

When you're up against a trouble,

Meet it squarely, face to face;

Lift your chin and set your shoulders,

Plant your feet and take a brace. - Edgar Guest.

**“SOMEDAY, MAYBE NOT TODAY, OR TOMORROW, OR
IN A FEW WEEKS, OR MAYBE NOT EVEN IN A YEAR, BUT
SOMEDAY I WILL BE HAPPIER.”**

LADNA ABDI

MONA IVES, TEACHER

Alhuda Academy

I used to think courage was saving someone or being a superhero like in the movies. Although this is a form of courage, you don't always need to be a hero to be courageous. Courage isn't something you inherit, it's something you achieve. I learned this when I overcame a fear myself, by standing up for myself, my culture, and my religion.

In the fifth grade one day, everything seemed normal. I was the only one in my school who wore a hijab except for my little sister and her friend, but that was it. I thought people in my school had gotten used to it. Although sometimes I would still get questions about why I wore it, there were fewer than before, and the questions usually came only from new students.

I was sitting on the bus going home, and this boy asked me to take off my hijab. Respecting my religion, I said, "No." Instead of asking again, this time he leaned over, grabbed me, and suddenly pulled off my hijab! I was filled with so many emotions. It's hard to describe. I was sad, angry, devastated, humiliated, and even embarrassed because my hair wasn't looking that good. I didn't cry, though. I was determined to look strong. He pulled it off very quickly and it took me by surprise.

As soon as he did this, other kids on the bus were angry and yelled, "Why did you do that?" He just shrugged it off, saying he didn't know, he just felt like it, but I knew he was lying. I was happy that the other kids showed the courage to speak up for me. Even though I had told him I wouldn't take it off, he still had the audacity to pull it off! I could feel the anger rising in me and my cheeks getting hot. For a moment I thought I might hit him, but I had to keep it together and show others I wasn't scared. I had to stop my anger at what he had done to me from starting a fight. Taking control of myself, I ignored him and held my head high.

When I got home, I told my mom, and she could see I was pretty upset. She marched over to the boy's mom and complained. His mom apologized and said her son already told her what happened, warning her that he was in trouble. In school the next day, my dad told the principal about it. She wasn't so happy either, so she talked with each of us.



After that, the boy suddenly started being nice to me. He asked if I was going to call the cops on him. I still felt very angry and violated by what he did, but I said no, and eventually I forgave him for it. Courage wasn't just looking strong and being fierce. It took a lot of courage to let go and forgive someone for hurting me.

I learned that courage is bravery to do the right thing when situations are tough. It includes things like controlling my temper and forgiving others for their mistakes. And, courage is letting go of pain so that we can live another day, keep going, and grow.

“COURAGE WASN'T JUST LOOKING STRONG AND BEING FIERCE. IT TOOK A LOT OF COURAGE TO LET GO AND FORGIVE SOMEONE FOR HURTING ME.”

AYA ABDULNOUR

GUS POLSTEIN, TEACHER

Brimmer and May School

“Doing the right thing is not always easy and it’s not always popular, but isn’t it enough that it’s right?” -Senora Roy

I like this quote because it represents my beliefs about what courage means. I believe courage means doing what’s right even if it’s hard. It could be small, like standing up to a school bully, or it could be bigger, like fighting racism. Sometimes even the smallest things can help. At one point in our lives, most of us learn a valuable lesson. I learned mine when I met Sarah Mardini, a refugee of the Syrian Civil War. I met Sarah through a school project in Fourth Grade when we had to interview a refugee. My mom heard that Sarah was giving a talk, so I got to meet her, and I decided to interview her. The lesson that her story taught me was to always do what you believe is right, even if other people don’t agree or if it’s not allowed.

Sarah Ezzat Mardini was sixteen when the Syrian Civil War started. When the first bombs came down, Sarah and her family were very scared. After one year, Sarah begged her parents to let her leave Syria and go to Germany. They agreed to let her go on one condition: she had to bring her sister, Yusra. Sarah and her sister left their family in Syria and traveled on buses and planes to get to the smugglers’ camp. From there, they could get on a boat to Greece.

The part of her story when she showed courage is when her boat broke down. It was a rubber dinghy and was meant for about six people, but there were twenty on board. Fifteen minutes after departure, the motor broke down. Later, two men jumped off the boat and started pushing it. Sarah came from a family of swimmers. Her dad was a swim coach, and she and Yusra were competitive swimmers. She started thinking, “I am a swimmer, I should be helping these people. If anyone dies, I will never forgive myself.” Sarah and Yusra decided to jump into the water and start pulling the boat. They swam for three and a half hours. Sarah ended up hurting her shoulder, and now she can’t swim anymore. She paid a price for doing the right thing.

Even after she risked her life to help people once, she wasn’t afraid to do it again. After her trip, Sarah would sit on the shore every day looking for refugees who were in trouble and needed help. Unfortunately, she was convicted of “human trafficking” for trying to help other people who had experienced what she had. Recently, Sarah was released from jail in Greece.



She did what she believed was right, even though it was dangerous.

After I heard Sarah’s story, I learned that you should always stand up for what you believe is right. Sarah ended up paying a price for doing the right thing. This showed me that courage is more complicated than only being brave. It’s doing something for someone else even though you know it may hurt you. Sarah’s example of courage inspired me more than just learning about the Syrian Civil War itself. I decided to take action. I convinced my classmates to write letters to refugee children. We also made friendship bracelets. This was a courageous act because the Syrian government was threatening many people, including Sarah, for spreading their message. We still decided to help. We wanted to respond to the message that she shared, instead of knowing everything but not doing anything. After I heard her story, I learned that doing something courageous helps me to create my own story, and to impact the stories of others.

“THE LESSON THAT HER STORY TAUGHT ME WAS TO ALWAYS DO WHAT YOU BELIEVE IS RIGHT, EVEN IF OTHER PEOPLE DON’T AGREE OR IF IT’S NOT ALLOWED.”

LEEN ATTIA

TYLER MURPHY AND HAMZAH HENSHAW, TEACHERS

Al-Noor Academy

What does courage mean? Courage is facing your fears with confidence and the belief that you can do anything you set your mind to. It ranges from simple acts, like asking a question in class, to more complicated ones, like standing up to a bully. You may have to make courageous decisions that can change your life and your family's life forever. That's the exact decision my grandfather had to make.

My mother's family is from Iraq, a country that has been ruled by dictators and faced many wars over the decades. At the age of 9, my mother and her three brothers, along with my grandfather and grandmother, traveled away from their home country seeking a new beginning. Whenever my siblings and I ask my mother about why my grandfather made that choice, she always tells me that if we were able to meet him and ask him ourselves, he would tell us that he did it for his kids, that he wanted his children to be able to grow up in a "healthy environment where they can freely practice their religion and pursue their dreams." Of course, this was an extremely hard decision for my grandfather to make. Just this one decision would forever change his children's lives and the way they view the world.

The family had to travel through the desert to cross the border with a scarce amount of water. My mother told me that whenever it was his turn to have a sip of water, my grandfather would always give his turn to someone else. He did this so many times that by the time they crossed the border, he collapsed from dehydration and had to be rushed to the hospital. That sacrifice, the one my grandfather was forced to make for the well-being of his family, is what courage means to me. Although I never got to meet my grandfather, his courageous story inspires me every single time I have the pleasure of listening to it.

Even nowadays, we see the story repeating at the borders of many other countries. Families are being separated at the borders, sibling from sibling and child from parent. Every last one of these families is terrified they will be deported back to the country from which they were escaping. They refuse to be sent back to dangerous conditions like war or gangs and muggers hiding in every corner. I know that the families in danger of getting deported back to the countries they are escaping have enough courage and hope deep down inside of them to make it through anything and everything... just as my grandfather did.



“THAT SACRIFICE, THE ONE MY GRANDFATHER WAS FORCED TO MAKE FOR THE WELL-BEING OF HIS FAMILY, IS WHAT COURAGE MEANS TO ME.”

MICHELLE RALLO

KARLEI FURA, TEACHER

St. John School

She came to America in 1999, leaving her home, afraid of what she might face in a new, strange place and with very little money to survive alone. Leaving her friends, especially her family, brought a lot of pressure. This courageous person I know is named Leni.

Before she even decided to go or to stay, people didn't want her to leave and tried to persuade her in many ways to make her stay. Leni had lived in Brazil for most of her life, on a nice little farm, so cozy and warm with so many animals, in a huge city. In this magical city everyone knew everyone, and they were related somehow in a peculiar way you wouldn't imagine. Seeing all the people who wanted her to stay, you would have thought she would. Even her mom did everything she could to make her stay, telling her, "If you are unhappy in your own land with your own people, now you're going to a strange land and you will be unhappy as you are in your own land because you will be divided, and you won't know if you are to come home or to stay there to make a new one." Leni knew that if she left, people would be unhappy with that option, but she had to pick what was best for her life. Even though she could have made fine money in Brazil where she lived, she decided it was best to go to America.

What does courage mean to you? For me it is believing and trying to succeed in life even if you fall down. In life you can have horrible days, but this will only make you love the good ones more! Coming to America was hard for Leni. She had roommates to live with so she would only pay half of the rent, and she also got some jobs that helped her pay for food and rent. First she found a job at a Brazilian restaurant as she tried to learn to speak English. After her first job she got another job as a housekeeper. There she worked her way up to becoming a house manager and a chef, in a huge glorious mansion! What a life, right?

During Leni's time in America she would walk places and see a friendly man with a happy smile almost every day. Leni soon spotted him somewhere else, so she thought she might be being stalked! She was way wrong, though, since he only went in the same direction as her because, when she was going to see her friend, he was going to see his uncle who lived in the same apartment. They soon got to know each other. She found out his name was Michael, and before you know it they were getting married. When they got



married it was at a restaurant, not a church, but it was still good as long as they had each other. The wedding was so magical they thought it would never end.

The path that brought Leni to America was hard and difficult, but along the way she met a gentleman who made her stay and be less homesick, and he also made her feel happy. If it was not for Leni and the man she met, I would not be born today. My mom is the most courageous person I know. She taught me to believe in my dreams and to have courage. I'm so proud, and glad, she came to America.

**“WHAT DOES COURAGE MEAN TO YOU? FOR ME
IT IS BELIEVING AND TRYING TO SUCCEED IN LIFE
EVEN IF YOU FALL DOWN.”**

VIOLET COLLIER

JEANINE STANSFIELD, TEACHER

Warren/Prescott K-8 School

To me, courage is helping others despite the fact that it could inflict problems on you, or harm you.

Thousands of people each year cross into our country because their lives are threatened in their home countries. These people can be sent back to their countries, end up in jail, or end up in detention centers. Sometimes these people bring their children with them to escape danger. These adults and children are often labeled illegal immigrants, and they are in desperate need of help from American citizens with courage. One of these courageous Americans is my grandmother, an American citizen who grew up in Argentina and is fluent in Spanish in addition to English. She uses her skills and courage to help immigrants whose lives are in danger in their own countries to legally immigrate to the United States.

There are numerous things my grandmother does to help undocumented immigrants. One thing she does is to accompany undocumented immigrants to their monthly ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) meetings. At ICE meetings, undocumented immigrants are interviewed and are told either that they are going to be sent back to their country or that they can stay in the U.S. temporarily but will have to return a month later for another meeting. My grandmother helps the immigrants answer each question correctly, so that the interview goes well. One immigrant she accompanied was a lady named Marta. Marta has five children, two of whom were born in the U.S., making them American citizens, but the other three were born in Honduras and are labeled undocumented immigrants. Thanks to my grandmother's accompanying her to these monthly meetings, Marta and her five kids are able to stay in America for another month, hoping for a better future. My grandmother's actions require courage because many people look down on those who help immigrants, yet she does it despite what people think.

My grandmother also helps undocumented immigrants by participating in the Rapid Response Network. The Rapid Response Network helps undocumented immigrants by monitoring ICE's treatment of them. When an ICE officer knocks on the door of an undocumented immigrant's house to arrest them, the immigrant calls a phone number and notifies a member of the Rapid Response Network. When these rapid responders get the call



they immediately go to the immigrant's house and start videotaping the ICE officer. They do this because it is illegal to arrest an undocumented immigrant unless there is an official arrest warrant. If the officers do not have an arrest warrant, then the Rapid Response video will be proof that the officer broke the law.

My grandmother has been arrested as part of civil disobedience protests to bring attention to lawmakers to make better immigration laws. She was one of two hundred people sitting on the steps of the U.S. Capitol in 2018 wearing all black with green gloves to demand that DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) kids be allowed to stay in the U.S. All two hundred protesters were arrested. DACA is a program for children who were brought into the U.S. illegally by their parents when they were little. DACA allows them to remain living in the U.S. because it was not their choice to come here, and therefore they should not be punished for coming into the U.S. My grandmother showed great courage because she was aware that she was going to be arrested and brought to a jail cell, and she stood up for the DACA kids anyway. Many people would not risk getting arrested because that could affect their daily lives. For example, if she were to apply for a job, the manager might not hire her because she had been arrested. My grandmother thinks it is worth it to get arrested because her actions will bring more attention to this issue and lawmakers will hopefully create better laws about immigration.

When I asked my grandmother what she does that is courageous, she said, "The immigrants I advocate for have courage, not me." This selfless drive to help others is what I think takes courage.

**“THE IMMIGRANTS I ADVOCATE FOR
HAVE COURAGE, NOT ME.”**

VICTOR TEPLYUK

ERIN HANNON-FOLEY, TEACHER

Roosevelt K-8 School

My great-grandmother, Olga, lived a normal life, in a normal small town, and everything was fine until World War II started. She lived in a little town in Ukraine and she knew a few Jews that she was friends with. During 1941 the place where she lived was taken over by the Nazis. Nazis would find Jews and kill them.

On a normal, fine day my great-grandmother was working, busy with patients, when a man came to the hospital to ask if he was seriously sick and would need to stay at the hospital for some time.

“Am I ill at all?” asked the man.

“You’re looking fine, but I can check,” she replied. “I’ll take some tests, Is that alright with you?”

“Yes,” he answered.

“Okay, so the results of the test just came out and you seem to not be sick,” she explained.

“Are you sure?” the man asked with a worried voice, and started to kind of look really scared. “Are you sure that I’m...that I’m not sick... at all?”

“You seem to be fine, but...,” Olga started to say but didn’t finish.

She knew that the person wasn't sick, but when she told him that he was fine, after seeing his reaction and the despair in his eyes, she realized why, and made a really courageous decision.

“Well, I could be wrong,” she said. “Let me check the results one more time.”

Then, with all the courage that my great-grandmother had, she pretended to check the results one more time and said that she was wrong. She said he was badly sick, and that he would need to stay at the safe and cozy hospital for some time.

Not even two days had passed, and word had spread among the Jews in the country that someone had helped hide a person in the hospital. Soon, about every two days or so, someone else would come and ask to stay in the hospital.



Some of the other people working in the hospital started realizing that something was a little off. My great-grandmother's sister was one of the first people to realize what her sister was doing, and that changed her life forever, in a good way.

“Is it true that you are helping hide Jews in the hospital?” asked Olga’s sister. “If that's true, then that's great, but it’s really dangerous.”

“I never said it, but...yes,” Olga whispered. “How did you find out?”

They continued talking for a long time, and Olga’s sister agreed to help her. And so, by the end of World War II, the hospital was crowded with people who could have been killed if they had not been helped. The Nazis left the country not knowing anything. Most Nazis didn’t go to the hospital because they were afraid of getting sick, but if they had found out, everyone would have been killed.

World War II had ended, and when my mom was six she learned this story after a Jewish person recognized them and thanked them. Then I found out this story from my mom, and now you have learned this story from me. I learned that doing something courageous and taking a risk can make a big difference. I also learned that to do something courageous, you don't need to be someone amazing and brave, you just have to continue going forward without stopping.

**“I LEARNED THAT DOING SOMETHING
COURAGEOUS AND TAKING A RISK CAN MAKE A BIG
DIFFERENCE.”**

AI SOSA IDAHOSA

COLLEEN SHAW AND ANNE MARIE SCHILLER, TEACHERS
Boston Renaissance Charter Public School

To me courage means being able to fear something just enough to recognize that the fear is holding you back from something great. During that realization is when courage is born. The best example of my definition of courage is my mother, Queen Idahosa. My mother, like any other courageous person, feared. She feared accomplishing her dream of nursing, but through courage she was able to accomplish great things.

Since she was little, my mother always had a dream to come to America and become a nurse. However, as my mom grew older she became more and more discouraged about her dream. When she was in primary school in Nigeria, it was very unlikely for a person like her to ever accomplish a dream like this. Later, in her high school years my mom developed a personal assumption that she was not good at science or health, and she started to believe she wouldn't achieve her goal of becoming a nurse. When it was time to apply to colleges my mother decided that her dream of nursing would have to stay on the sidelines, and that she would become an accountant like almost every other Nigerian person. Eventually, my mother got married to my father and, soon after, moved to America.

At first, my mother got a job as social worker. She made enough money to support our family, but the job didn't make her happy. One day after she came home from work I asked, "Mom, what is your dream job?" She replied, "My love, my whole life I have wanted to be a nurse, to help people." Then she sighed and said, "I was scared and thought I could never do it." Little did she know that the words we exchanged would be the reason she decided to go through the most torturous and magnificent six years of her life. She attributes that conversation to the moment she realized she had the courage to finally go after her dream.

She knew she could do it. There were many challenges as an immigrant African woman with children. However, she persevered and went on to receive her Associates Degree from Roxbury Community College, and later to attend Salem State University for Nursing. There were times when my mom felt the whole world on her shoulders and just wanted to quit, but still she never gave up. She showed she had the courage and kept faith because she knew it was worth it in the end.



My mother learned that fear is the only thing blocking you from the door of greatness. My mom wants to let the world know that no matter who you are or what your background is, this world is full of opportunities for everyone. You must learn how to seize the things you want, or the chance will pass you by.

**“MY MOTHER, LIKE ANY OTHER COURAGEOUS
PERSON, FEARED.”**

MIA O'LEARY

JEANINE STANSFIELD, TEACHER

Warren/Prescott K-8 School

“Success is not final; failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts.” — Winston Churchill

Courage is when a person does not give up when things are difficult. Life became very difficult for my aunt. When she was young she started drinking and partying. My aunt was smart and attended UMass Amherst where she continued to party, but drugs were added. Some drugs contained opioids, which leads to heroin, and she became addicted. This caused her to have an unhealthy lifestyle and make bad decisions in her life.

She did not care about herself or anyone else. In 2007 she had a baby, but he could not live with her. He had to stay with me, my grandma, sister and grandfather. My grandmother had difficulty taking care of two babies and a four-year-old girl. It was decided that the baby would live with his grandparents on his father's side.

My aunt was living on the streets for a long time. That's not easy when your body and mind crave drugs, which she would do anything to get. She was always going to rehabilitation hospitals and jail with supervised probation. Then she had a little girl, and after a while she noticed that she was sick and tired of being addicted to heroin and other drugs. She was always away from her family and friends, and she wanted them back. She went into a long-term program for women, with her daughter. She sought help to stop being addicted and received help from her family, friends, and people in AA (Alcoholics Anonymous). It took many years and hard work to become clean and stop using drugs.

My aunt went back to college and became the first certified drug counselor in Massachusetts. She is the Director of Recovery Support Services for North Suffolk. She works to help addicts in different courts throughout Boston. She has had meetings with the mayor and the governor and many other officials. She is available at all times to help anyone who needs help to become clean. My family is very proud of her for being clean for eight years now. She has a family with three children and a nice home. She is very happy with her success, and so is everyone else in our family. A lot of women look up to my aunt, and she is a role model to many young girls who use drugs. I choose to write about my aunt because she is one of the bravest women.



“A LOT OF WOMEN LOOK UP TO MY AUNT, AND SHE IS A ROLE MODEL TO MANY YOUNG GIRLS WHO USE DRUGS.”

McKAYLA GARCIA

JANE WRIGHT, TEACHER

Salemwood School

I interviewed my mom about her construction job back in 1997, when she worked with a group called the “Local 88 Sandhogs.” The Local 88 Sandhogs are located in Quincy, Massachusetts. My mom told me that it took a lot of courage and girl power to work around the construction site with mostly men. One day when my mom was working on the Big Dig the boss told my mom to go into a 180 ft deep hole. The thought of this is really scary, but my mom had the courage to go inside that big hole.

Mom ran the slurry tank and put black tubing on the tiedowns (all of this was inside the hole). When she was doing this she was on the Shaughnessy Manlift, and she would give the machine operators signals when to boom up or boom down. While in the hole a man told her to lift a two-man heavy pipe up to the drill (this pipe was for two people, but she was alone). When my mom went down into the hole she felt really scared. But even though she was scared she still had to honor my grandma and my grandpa. My Granddaddy was a foreman in construction, and she didn’t want to let him down. After my mom lifted that two-man heavy pipe her boss actually fired the guy who told my mom to lift it.

My mom was a strong woman for carrying that pipe! My grandfather was very proud of her! This might not be courageous to others, but it is to me.



**“MY MOM TOLD ME THAT IT TOOK A LOT OF
COURAGE AND GIRL POWER TO WORK AROUND THE
CONSTRUCTION SITE WITH MOSTLY MEN.”**

COURAGE BEYOND BOSTON

COURAGE BEYOND BOSTON

FEATURING ESSAYS FROM OUR NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS

The essays featured in this section were written by students participating in our national and international programs. They represent the universal nature of courage and support our conviction that all people have the capacity to be courageous.

THE MAX WARBURG COURAGE CURRICULUM'S GLOBAL INITIATIVE

The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum began working with international partners in 2007 in response to a growing interest in implementing an accessible, proven curriculum. To date, the program has been taught in 16 countries, including El Salvador, Pakistan, India, Lebanon, Thailand, and China. This list continues to grow, as our organization forms partnerships with schools and learning communities across the globe to engage students in the reading and writing process, while empowering them to discover, recognize, and celebrate the courage in their lives.

This year, we are honored to continue our partnerships with The Cambridge Cambodia School, Mawr Volunteers in Yemen, the Personal Development Institute of Mongolia, The American School in Barcelona, and Dr. Marcia Harris and the three schools in Belize. We are grateful to each of these partners for their compassionate work with teachers and students in their respective countries and for sharing in the vision of The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum.

We welcome any organization wishing to work with The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum. Recognizing that the stories of courage from children across the globe enrich the educational experience for all students, we seek to share our materials and offer educational opportunities for children outside of Boston.

COURAGE IN MY LIFE NATIONAL ESSAY CONTEST

The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum proudly hosts the *Courage in My Life* National Essay Contest, open to students in grades 5-8 in the United States. This program engages students in the reading and writing process, while encouraging young people to write about personal experiences with courage.

We are proud to share inspiring essays written by courageous students from across the United States in Volume XXVIII of *THE COURAGE OF CHILDREN: BOSTON AND BEYOND*, including our national essay contest winner, Mayah White from Barnstable Intermediate School in Hyannis, MA and honorable mention candidates Talyah Alsibae from Beverly Hills Academy in Beverly Hills, MI and Camilo Correa Buitrago from Barnstable Intermediate School.

All schools that participate in our national program are given access to teaching guides and online resources. We encourage participating schools to deepen their experience by exploring and implementing our sixth grade curriculum, and we continue to offer support and guidance to make this possible.

MAYAH WHITE

MICHAEL ANDREWS AND ANNE VOHS, TEACHERS

Barnstable Intermediate School, Hyannis, MA

Courage in My Life National Essay Contest Winner

As my mother ran up to the separation event obstacle, she knew she had to nail the hanging punching bag over the white tape line.

Courage to me is pushing through when something is hard. I first experienced what courage means when my mother decided to become a police officer at the age of thirty-nine. My mother had always been a stay-at-home mom, and she was home with us all of the time. Becoming a police officer in these dangerous times is difficult enough as it is, and my mom's age seemed to make it even more challenging. She didn't let that get in her way.

Mom first sat each one of us kids down and asked if we were okay with her becoming a police officer. She gave each child something and told us this was going to be tough for a while, but everything would be okay. My mom said, "We can do anything we set our minds to. Even if it takes a year or two, that's not that long." My mother gave me a bracelet of a fallen soldier that she wore every single day. This meant so much to me because my siblings and I are raised by patriotic parents. The bracelet reminded me of my mom, and to be thankful for our courageous soldiers who fight for our freedom. My mom was going to fight for our community, too. I can remember the moment when both of our faces had tears running down them, as she handed the bracelet to me.

When she got hired and signed the book, Mom was so excited. She had completed everything but the physical ability test. She could do every obstacle on the test except one. She had a hard time with it because of her size, and it was easy for other people because they were bigger. At the PAT test there is an obstacle course, and at the end of it there is a take-down maneuver. A heavy punching bag hangs from a chain and the recruit has to grab the bag, move it forward, and pull it down over a white taped line. Mom failed this part of the test. When she sat down with the chief of the department and he told her that she wasn't able to proceed without completing it, she was devastated.

My mother knew if she didn't keep her head up and keep going, she would



never become a police officer. My mother would be in the basement every day practicing that obstacle with a workout band, a white taped line, and a punching bag hanging from the ceiling. She would do it over and over, a million rounds of exercises. When the department was hiring again, my mother was hired for a second time, but she had to go through the entire process.

When it came time for the PAT test she was ready! She passed the test this time and was ready to start the academy. The group of four that my mom was hired in would go home to their families and say the academy was awful, but not my mom. She would come home every day and say she loved it; it was amazing! My mother was so very proud of herself for not quitting. She persevered. My family thought she wouldn't say she loved her training for long, but she said it every day until the end. My mother graduated the academy number one in Physical Training and won the 100% Award on November 15, 2017.

Every day when my mom grabs her backpack and heads to work, we smile at each other. My mother pushed through when it was hard and fought through her challenges. My mom is my role model for courage. Whenever things get hard for me, I tell myself that if you don't quit, you can accomplish anything, just like Mom.

**“I FIRST EXPERIENCED WHAT COURAGE MEANS
WHEN MY MOTHER DECIDED TO BECOME A POLICE
OFFICER AT THE AGE OF THIRTY-NINE.”**

TALYAH ALSIBAE

SARA COYLE, TEACHER

Beverly Hills Academy, Beverly Hills, MI

Courage in My Life National Essay Contest, Honorable Mention

The dictionary definition of courage is “the ability to do something that frightens someone.” Some people think that the only definition of a word is in the dictionary. Personally, I believe that everyone has their own definition of courage and an example or person they look up to who embodies it. I’m grateful to have so many courageous and brave people in my life. One of my main role models of courage is my mom.

My mother is a very hardworking woman; she always likes to be useful or do something to help someone. She is a very selfless person; she will always offer a helping hand. My mom works around the house and has another job besides being a full time daughter, sister, wife, and mother. She is a lawyer. My mom is very good at what she does. She commutes to work every day and still has time to do my sister’s hair every morning. I’ve seen her speak in a courtroom; she is the voice of the people and she tries to make our country safer. Every day she speaks in front of people, some with and some against her. But she is brave and courageous. She speaks her truth no matter if people agree with her, and she also wears a hijab. Her courage in the courtroom and outside doesn’t just represent her work or the people, it represents our religion and our culture.

One day my sister, my mom, and I were walking out of one of our favorite Arabic stores carrying bags full of spices, bread, tea, and more. As we were walking to the car an older man looked my mom straight in the eyes and did a hand gesture towards my mom that clearly showed him slitting his throat. He turned with not a pang of guilt on his face and walked away. My mom wanted to burst with anger at the man for doing that to her in front of me and my sister. But my mom remained calm and walked away while holding us tightly at her side to set an example for us, even though she knew what that man did was not nearly okay. My mom walked to the car with us, furious, scared, and in shock. I stood by the car stunned at what happened. I was confused about why that man did that to my mom or why anyone would do that at all. Was it because of her hijab? Was there another reason? All these questions and concerns brewed in my head. My mom quickly put us in the car and was able to get a picture of the man’s license



plate and called the police. It was a silent ride home.

Around the time this happened, the hate for Arabs and Muslims was growing larger and the world was becoming a scarier place. Later, the police came to our house to ask my mom a couple questions. While my mom was inside with the police my dad took us outside to ride our bikes to distract us from all the commotion. My mom said the police thought it was because of her hijab and all the hate going on in the news towards Muslims and Arabs. My mom told me that if I were to ever witness someone doing that again I shouldn’t engage with them. I should just walk away calmly because, if I were to yell or be rude back, things could escalate. I took that to heart. This was the first time I witnessed racism and how cruel the world can be, and my mom handled it so courageously. I saw what a great person she is to look up to.

**“ALL THESE QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS
BREWED IN MY HEAD.”**

CAMILO CORREA BUITRAGO

MICHAEL ANDREWS AND DAWN TRAYNER, TEACHERS

Barnstable Intermediate School, Hyannis, MA

Courage in My Life National Essay Contest, Honorable Mention

There I was, between the bully and the kid soon to be my friend. He had a fierce look on his face, and if looks could kill, I would be dead by now. Courage might mean different things for different people, but for me it's standing up for what you believe is right. Every time I think of courage, it brings me back to 5th grade.

I was at recess doing touches with the ball. It was a nice warm spring day, one where you could feel the wind touch your skin. I saw a kid on the floor and another one standing next to him. I ignored it because I thought he just tripped, but then the aggressor - with no fear - started kicking his victim. My helping instinct took over, so I walked toward them.

I stopped halfway. I was terror-shaken. I tried to look for a teacher, but there were none around. I was thinking, Is he going to beat me up if I go over? But, it is the right thing, I told myself.

Finally the voice inside my head defeated my fear.

"Stop this. It is not right," I stated.

He shouted back with the intimidation of a lion, "What are you going to do about it? Protect him?"

My fear was correct. I was beaten up, bruised and bloodied. By that time, the teachers realized what had happened. They were shocked and separated us immediately.

"Thank you," the kicked boy said.

"For what happened there?" I answered back, wondering.

"Yes," He replied.

"Not a big deal," I said.

"My name is Carlos."

"I'm Camilo. Do you like soccer?"



"A lot," Carlos replied.

From that point on, we started hanging out, and the bully was suspended. That experience taught me something. I learned that even if you are scared to a point where you can't move, you should always do what's right.

**"THERE I WAS, BETWEEN THE BULLY AND THE
KID SOON TO BE MY FRIEND."**

LYRA PAIGE DEMONDONCA

SCOTT HESS, TEACHER

Keith Middle School, New Bedford, MA

When I was living with my grandmother, about five or six years ago, we found out that she had colon cancer. She had to go to chemotherapy a whole bunch, so she wasn't home a lot of the day. My step-grandfather took advantage of that. He didn't treat me like the little girl that I should've been. He touched me in ways he shouldn't have. Without going into detail, he did things he never should have done to anybody.

Now, we've moved from North Carolina after my grandmother died from the cancer. He moved to Kansas, and I moved here with my great-aunt. He re-married and has another granddaughter. In order to be sure he does nothing to her, we reported him.

I had to talk to the police about what happened. They didn't have enough evidence to arrest my step-grandfather, but if someone else reports him, he'll be arrested. Reporting him took courage. It was one of the scariest things I've ever done, telling my aunt about him, but I did it because it would've been selfish not to. If I didn't speak up, someone else may have been mistreated. So, that's courage. Doing things even though they are scary. Being brave is standing up to someone.



“IT WAS ONE OF THE SCARIEST THINGS I’VE EVER DONE, TELLING MY AUNT ABOUT HIM, BUT I DID IT BECAUSE IT WOULD’VE BEEN SELFISH NOT TO.”

VIRYELIZ CABRERAS

NILA POPE, TEACHER

Roosevelt Middle School, New Bedford, MA

The word courage could mean a lot of things. It means strength and bravery to me. These words remind me of my grandmother. My grandmother is an amazing woman. She has always been there for me.

When I was four years old, my grandmother was diagnosed with kidney failure. It was difficult to be medically treated in Puerto Rico where we were living. We moved to Springfield, Massachusetts hoping for better results.

Before we moved to Massachusetts, my grandmother talked to one of her close friends who lived there. She asked her friend to try and find an inexpensive apartment for us. Luckily she was able to do that and eventually found us a beautiful apartment.

However, when we first moved to Springfield, we didn't have a place to live or a car to get from place to place. We had to stay in a shelter, which was very difficult for my grandparents. When we went grocery shopping, we always had to walk. We used shopping carts to carry the bags of groceries. Sometimes my sister and I would get tired of walking. My grandmother would then grab all of the bags out of the cart and tells us to get inside it and go to sleep. My grandfather couldn't help very much

After about five years, we all moved to New Bedford, Massachusetts. We moved because the doctors told us it would be better medically for my grandmother. We eventually moved to Boston, where the doctors were more familiar with my grandmother's condition

When my grandmother went with her friend to a hospital in Boston, they told her that one of her kidneys was working perfectly fine. They also told her that she would need a kidney transplant from someone who had compatible DNA with her. All of the family were tested, but no one was compatible.

The doctors told my grandmother that unfortunately, she would have to go on dialysis to help keep her alive. She has been on dialysis for two years now and the doctors have been trying to find someone in the USA that is compatible with her DNA. No one has been found yet. It is very sad.



My grandmother takes care of all of the family. Sometimes when she comes from the hospital she is really tired and not feeling well. She still comes to school and picks up my sister and me. Then we go and pick up my cousin at daycare.

Sometimes my grandmother acts as if everything is okay. She doesn't like it if anyone treats her like she is sick or not feeling well. She always tells my family that if she dies, she wants to die with her boots on. At first I didn't understand what that meant. I learned that it means if she dies, she will want to die out of bed and doing what she loves to do. My grandmother is not scared of anything. She is a very courageous woman, which has taught me to grow up just like her.

“MY GRANDMOTHER IS NOT SCARED OF ANYTHING.”

BRANDON MCKENNA

DEBRA MENDES, TEACHER

Normandin Middle School, New Bedford, MA

What is courage? What does courage mean to you? To me courage means to do things, even though they are challenging.

My story of courage starts in 2014 when my mother was diagnosed with colon cancer. It was an uphill battle which lasted about two years, but in 2016 it overcame her and she died. With her death, I moved to my grandparents' house. My grandparents were constantly crying and visiting her grave and, unfortunately, my brother just stayed upstairs, only coming down for food. With my grandparents always out of the house, my lonesome brother continually upstairs, and my lack of internet, I felt lonely a lot of the time. About two months later, it was time for school. I had never been to another school, so at first I was very nervous and awfully shy. But on the third day I met Ben Moniz. Ben made me feel much better about myself, and he eventually became my best friend.

A while later, in the spring, I had plenty of friends and I felt like I fit in. I thought things couldn't get any worse, but I was certainly mistaken! My father died. Just like that, I was back in the prison that is depression and I thought I could never escape. For the rest of the school year I felt like I was completely different from everyone in my class, and I thought I would always feel that way. However, during summer break my aunt made me go to a summer camp for kids like me who've lost a parent.

When I first got to the camp, I thought it would never change my outlook, but it did. Everyone at the camp was so supportive, and they all had empathy toward me. After I went to the camp, I finally accepted myself and grew. The lesson I learned from this experience is, if I can overcome the deaths of both my parents and grow, I'm sure I can overcome anything that challenges me.

"Just like that, I was back in the prison that is depression and I thought I could never escape," but a door opened and I was released.



**“AFTER I WENT TO THE CAMP, I FINALLY
ACCEPTED MYSELF AND GREW.”**

JULIANA LOPES

DENISE ASHWORTH, TEACHER

Roosevelt Middle School, New Bedford, MA

Being gay (or pansexual, to be precise) can be a struggle sometimes. Being pansexual means you might be attracted to anyone, no matter their gender or sexuality. For someone who is gay, bisexual, pansexual, transgender, or lesbian, it can be hard to be yourself in front of the world most of the time. About 75% of LGBTQ students get bullied in school, or harassed electronically, and are no longer able to feel comfortable in school because of this. Homophobic parents can make the situation worse. This type of rejection often causes gay kids to feel self-hatred, simply for being true to themselves.

I've needed to have a lot of courage about my identity for many years. When I first realized I was pansexual and began to be attracted to both girls and boys, countless things ran through my mind at once: "What if my parents find out?" "What if they don't accept me?" "What if everyone in my family thinks of me differently because of this?" It hurt to think like this, and I was terrified that my parents might find out soon. Eventually, things went downhill.

One day, I lay in my bed, tears running down my face. That day, my feelings really hit me. My mind made me imagine such atrocious things about what would happen if my parents found out I was pansexual. Then, my dad entered the room. He asked me what was wrong, and I told him I was fine, but I knew that he could see right through me; he could see the pain in my eyes, he could feel the sorrow in my tears that dropped to the sheets of my bed. He refused to accept my answer and sat next to me on my bed, and asked again what was wrong. My heart pounded out of my chest, my tears fell bigger and harder, knowing that I had to tell him. So I did. I explained to him that I was pansexual, I explained to him that I'd begun to like girls more than boys, but I could still be attracted to both. While I was telling him this, he paid attention to me; he cared about everything I was saying, and told me, "I understand how you feel, and that's okay. I accept you just the way you are, because you are still my daughter."

As soon as he said that, I felt as though I could fly. It felt like a thousand weights were lifted off my shoulders. I was so happy; I hugged him as tightly as I could. I thanked him frantically, again and again. I thought that after this day, I'd be able to finally stop worrying about my sexual identity, and I did stop... but not for very long.

One cool June night, my mom and I were watching TV together while my mom was relaxing on Facebook. I glanced over to see an ad for a Pride festival that went on in Providence. I told her that I wanted to go to one of the Pride festivals, and my mom asked me why. I took a deep breath, feeling slightly hesitant, but I dug for more courage and told her I was pansexual. I could tell right away her reaction would be different from my dad's. Her facial expression seemed surprised and maybe a little confused. I had expected this would happen, so I explained to her about the LGBTQ community, but instead of clarifying things, it only seemed to overwhelm my mom with too much information all at once. Like many people who feel overwhelmed, my mom seemed to be frustrated by my coming out. To be fair, I



know it was probably a lot for my mom to take in; unlike me, she most likely felt like my announcement came out of nowhere. My identity had been on my mind for years, but from my mom's point of view, it had suddenly popped up out of nowhere. All of a sudden her "baby girl" was maybe a totally different person than she had imagined me to be. It was probably a scary, bewildering moment for her, and she might have felt quite a lot of pressure, too, as she looked over to see me gazing at her with hopeful eyes.

My mom's worries and fears made her reach out for explanations. She felt that I was rushing my decisions about my sexuality, and that thinking about this part of my identity was "too sexual for my age." She then brought up how the internet was a dangerous place, probably because she felt I was being influenced by people in the online LGBTQ community. When my mother said these things to me, it made my heart drop to my stomach; it made me nauseous; it made me want to curl up in a ball and cry. I had been hoping so much that we'd be able to connect and understand each other, but at that moment, it seemed impossible. The tsunami of emotions that had washed over my mom was now towering over me. I rushed to my bedroom, so that I could be alone when the wave finally crashed over me.

My mom's response made me lose most of my courage to come out to the rest of my family. Suddenly, my insides were churning, and I just wanted to cry as though my heart were broken, but in my head was a little voice... a voice that told me not to give up... a voice that reminded me that even when I feel misunderstood, it shouldn't bring me down. My mom and I do still debate about this issue every now and then, but I believe that on the inside, she's slowly coming to understand and accept me. We may not always see eye to eye on this, or on other issues, but I love my mom, and I know she loves me. She helped to make me who I am, and that includes my identity, the way I see the world, and how I treat people. My family is all about respect, and despite our differences, I will always respect my mom.

Some folks say that gays are bad people, but that is totally wrong—it's those who think hatefully about gays that are bad. If you are gay, bisexual, pansexual, trans, or any other identity, that is totally fine. You are amazing, and even when people label or misjudge you, that doesn't make it true. Hold on to your courage. Be yourself, fearlessly, because identifying as gay doesn't make you any less human than anyone else.

"HOLD ON TO YOUR COURAGE."

OLIVIA DEALMEIDA

LINDSAY WORSTELL, TEACHER

Normandin Middle School, New Bedford, MA

One of the most horrifying situations is when I have to confess my feelings to someone. Coming out to my mother and friends became an issue I didn't want to face. I heard all of these stories about how bad things have become between parents and friends because a person came out, and the person being told doesn't agree with or doesn't respect the truth. I never knew if this was true or not, but I was still scared. I tried to build up enough courage to do it, but I just couldn't. That has changed though, because I've started making new friends and they are so open about coming out and being themselves. Their courage has inspired me, and I finally did!

One Friday I felt like I was ready to tell my mother. After procrastinating for a while, I called my mom into my room. I started shaking. All of these thoughts were going through my head.

What if she's going to hate me?

What if she thinks there's something wrong with me?

But I pushed all of that aside and told her.

"Mom, you will love me no matter what, right?"

"Yes, of course," replied my mother, and then I finally told her.

"Mom, I'm panromantic." I said.

I was shaking and then my mom said that she didn't understand either of those terms, so I had to explain them to her. "Panromantic means that I like all genders including they-them."

Then my mom sat me down and explained to me that it's okay to be who I am. I was so relieved.

My friends were a different story. One of my friends that I told is homophobic. She has been my friend since second grade. I decided to tell her last year and she wasn't too pleased. She avoided me for the rest of the year, and that really brought me down, but I knew this couldn't stop me from being myself. I confronted her about it, and she told me it was disgusting and that I should stop.



And this is when I lost a lot of my confidence. I felt like I had to change myself for people to think of me as human. So throughout most of the summer, I tried to be someone I'm not.

But then I came to Normandin, and all of that changed. I've met people who are really accepting at this school. So many of my friends are really open-minded, and they all love me for me.

All of these events lead up to where I am today. I'm more confident in myself than I was before. With the help of my friends and family, I am very happy with who I am today. People's courage inspired me to build up my own courage to tell my mother, and one day, hopefully, tell my father.

"I FELT LIKE I HAD TO CHANGE MYSELF FOR PEOPLE TO THINK OF ME AS HUMAN."

LEEANN (JOSH) AMARAL

MALISA SIVERTSEN, TEACHER

Keith Middle School, New Bedford, MA

What is courage? Courage to me means to persevere through a tough or confusing time. As I write this, I understand my own family may not agree with it, you may not agree with it, and many others may not agree with this. This is my story of a pansexual who comes from a Christian family.

May 3, 2018. I remember this day because this was the day I made the decision to accept my identify as a pansexual individual. I am proud of who I am. A person who is pansexual is attracted to all genders, not just male or female. My fifth grade teacher challenged my understanding of identity and gave me the space to define myself. Until now, I did not have the vocabulary to put this into words. I still struggle to feel accepted as I wrestle with my gender identity. This is the hard truth, the hard truth that does not sit well with the rest of my family. I am okay with that because this is me: not them. This is my experience: not theirs.

Gender is a new thing that puzzles me, because although I do understand I was born female, I feel as though I am different. In my family, I have always had people saying I'll always be a girl, but I'm not exactly sure that's the case. Since I was nine, I've understood that I'm different. I have always been described as a tomboy and still am to this day. That's not who I am. Currently, I am in the process of defining my own identity. I understand that people reading this may be confused, but this is me.

If you take anything away from this writing, understand that you are not alone in life. You matter just as much as everyone else in this world, whether you're gay, straight, or somewhere in between. Through my story I hope to convey that coming out as a member of the LGBTQ+ community may be difficult, but be proud of yourself even if others aren't. This is a huge step in life. If you are accepted in your family, that is amazing! If not, then continue to make yourself proud of being you, and you will find your chosen family soon. If you are in the community and have been told you are a nuisance, or called homophobic slurs, then DON'T LISTEN TO THEM! They don't define who you are.



Finally, this exemplifies my courage because I am not only telling my story of identity development, but I am helping others find theirs. I want my story to empower those of you reading this. I want you to understand you are not alone in your struggle. You are loved no matter who you are because everyone has a place in this world. Never give up!

“YOU MATTER JUST AS MUCH AS EVERYONE ELSE IN THIS WORLD, WHETHER YOU’RE GAY, STRAIGHT, OR SOMEWHERE IN BETWEEN.”

GABRIEL RODGERS WEIL

DAWN AUSTIN AND SOPHIA HILL, TEACHERS

The American School of Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain

Courage is one of those special words that has many meanings. For me, courage means persevering through hardship and risking your own life for others. Both of my great-grandmothers were Holocaust survivors and showed immense acts of courage to save their lives and the lives of others around them. Their circumstances forced them to be courageous, and the courage they showed was superior to anything I've ever done or could ever imagine doing. So for me, it is an honor to have two great-grandmothers who are Holocaust survivors.

My great-grandmother on my father's side was called Granny Peggy. She was from a small town in Poland, 48 kilometers from Krakow, and was the oldest of five siblings. One day, in the early 1940s, Granny Peggy was at her home with her family when neighbors came to warn them of the Nazis coming into town. Her parents told her to run away, which she did, out of the back of their house, never seeing them again.

One of her acts of courage takes place in Plaszów Labor Camp before she was sent to Auschwitz. Peggy had been caught with false papers and was moved there, where she worked as a seamstress. One day, the head of the Fire Brigade from her town came to visit her. He told her he could smuggle her out. Peggy knew that if they were caught, they would both be shot, and 20 random prisoners would be sentenced to death by hanging. Ultimately, she declined the offer as she did not want 20 people to die because of her. Because of her selflessness, she potentially saved the lives of 20 innocent people.

Incredibly, I have another courageous great-grandmother, on my mother's side, who was called Granny Channa. She was from a small town in Lithuania and was the youngest of four siblings. In the early 1900s, before World War I, her uncle moved to South Africa and slowly started to bring his nieces and nephews over to work for him. In the 1930s, Channa was left alone in Lithuania with her mother because she was too young to go to South Africa. Soon after, her mother died, so Channa moved to Kovno, and stayed with two of her cousins. In mid-1941, the Germans invaded Lithuania, and Channa and her cousins were sent to the Kovno ghetto where the conditions were unbearably harsh. Eventually, Channa was sent to a concentration camp in northern Poland called Stutthof.

One of Channa's acts of courage takes place after the death march. The death march occurred in January 1945, when all prisoners were marched from concentration camps in different parts of occupied Europe to Germany because the Allies were pushing the Germans back. While walking in the snow, many people dropped dead.



Channa courageously fell to the ground and lay there, faking her death, hoping no German soldier would notice her and shoot her. After the Germans passed, she ran to a nearby farmhouse and found a mother and a daughter. They took her in and cared for her until the war ended.

In the spring of 1945, the Germans were retreating, the Russians were gaining more land in the East, and the Allies were gaining land in the West. When the Russians swept through towns, on the race to Berlin, they raped and abused women, stole things, beat people... so when the Russians knocked on the door of the farmhouse where she had been hiding, Channa was the one who went to open the door. In fluent Russian, which she knew from growing up in Lithuania, she said, "Hello soldiers, there is nobody here, nothing is here, there is no use for you to be here. I do not know why you are wasting your time by looking in a house where there is nothing." So the Russian soldiers left, and Channa saved the mother, the daughter and herself. Her willingness to risk herself to repay the mother and daughter for everything they had done for her is an outstanding act of courage.

I wrote this essay because I feel it is a duty for me to share these stories of my history with others. I feel it is a duty because if I do not share the true horrors of what happened to all Jews, the truth will disappear. Both Granny Peggy and Granny Channa left me this legacy, which I will pass to my children, and that I shall never forget.

**“BOTH GRANNY PEGGY AND GRANNY CHANNA LEFT
ME THIS LEGACY, WHICH I WILL PASS TO MY CHILDREN,
AND THAT I SHALL NEVER FORGET.”**

GIANNI WOOD

DAWN AUSTIN AND SOPHIA HILL, TEACHERS

The American School of Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain

To me, courage means facing new situations with bravery and strength. Courage comes in all shapes and sizes and sometimes dominates how much confidence you show. I showed courage various times throughout my life, but I always thought there was one event that taught me the most about courage. This moment was when my great-grandmother passed away.

After getting off the plane in India, the smell of cow waste and spices hit my nose instantly. Here I was fulfilling the wish of my great-grandmother. As I look back on this moment I believe that I possessed immense courage. When someone in the Hindu culture dies or passes, they desire to pass in their home country. Sadly, since my great-grandmother was too sick to travel from New Zealand, she could not be set off to the Ganges, a sacred river located in India.

So, it was up to my mother, brother, and me to go to India in her honor. Many do this, but I thought that I was not ready to take on such a delicate task.

I was glad I was doing this for her, but deep down I was afraid and anxious for the moment I knew was coming. My mother looked troubled as well, but I knew she was trying to show courage for my brother and me. I knew that I needed to stay strong for this moment. While in India, we received a FaceTime from my great-grandmother. She was not well, and I knew that she was going to pass. I mustered up all the courage I had in me and said my goodbyes. The call ended, her life ended, tears came, the tears came to an end, the day ended.

Looking back, this moment taught me how to push through moments such as this and handle them better. This is important because you need to be strong in these moments or you'll be brought down by them. My great-grandmother was important to me because she was not only a great spirit but a mentor.



“I MUSTERED UP ALL THE COURAGE I HAD IN ME AND SAID MY GOODBYES. THE CALL ENDED, HER LIFE ENDED, TEARS CAME, THE TEARS CAME TO AN END, THE DAY ENDED.”

GUSTAVO FRANCO

CORLAN GALVEZ, TEACHER

Our Lady of Guadalupe R.C. Primary School

Cayo District, Belmopan, Belize

Growing up, one of my biggest fears was having my mom and dad separate and ending up with a stepparent who would not like me and would be abusive towards me. I had a few classmates who went through those situations and they were very sad. Their grades fell and they started to have discipline problems. I always prayed that my mom and dad would stay together forever, and I believed a split like that could never happen to me. But it did. My parents separated, and in came a stepmother.

I cried at night when no one was listening, but my worst fear came true. I did not want to pray anymore because I thought God had forgotten me and did not care about me. I always prayed to Him, so how could He forget me when He knew this was my biggest fear.

Things changed for me: homework and school work were always incomplete, and I hated my stepmother. I tried to do everything to make her life miserable. I lied about her. I answered her disrespectfully, and anything she told me to do I did the opposite so she would get mad, because I believed she was the one who caused the separation and she was going to take my father's attention away from me and my sister.

The scariest thing happened when I got the news that my dad was going to marry my stepmother. I was angry and scared at the same time. I could not sleep, and I felt empty and lonely. I did not know what to do and who to talk to, but then I met my teacher Mrs. Galvez who could tell I was scared and needed help. My teacher spent a lot of time talking to me, and she had students from my class who lived with stepparents sit with me and share their experience. She also had me start to pray again from the heart, and told me to be patient because God is always listening to His children. The more I talked with my teacher and classmates and prayed to God, the more I started to see my stepmother in a different way. She was quiet, kind, humble, and caring.

My teacher told me it would help me if I could sit with my stepmother and my dad and share how I felt. I was so afraid I could not sleep, but all my classmates would be waiting to know how it went.

I prayed first, and then I went to speak with both parents. They both



understood what I was feeling and explained many things to me that I did not know. I started to speak more often with my stepmother, and I realized she loved me very much because she tried to teach me how to be independent so I could do things on my own. I became a more courageous person after all my trials, and I have never regretted giving my stepmother a chance. One thing I love about her is that she always makes sure that I visit my mother as much as possible, and when there are special occasions she takes me to buy the best gifts for my mom.

The day they got married I cried, not because I was sad but because I became a stronger person. I had nearly destroyed a very good relationship for my dad, who was in love and always worked hard for me and my sister to be happy and comfortable. If I should ever meet someone who is going through the same situation, I will share my experience with them and tell them to pray, give the stepparent a chance, and be brave enough to say how you feel in a respectful way. Thank you for reading my story.

**“THE DAY THEY GOT MARRIED I CRIED, NOT
BECAUSE I WAS SAD BUT BECAUSE I BECAME A
STRONGER PERSON.”**

ZAHID VIDAL

SELMITA RUSSELL, TEACHER

Raymond Sheppard Nazarene Primary School

Cayo District, Belmopan, Belize

On a hot day my mom, my brothers and I went to the river. We had just finished eating burgers. My mom told us not to go into the water yet, but my brother did not listen. A few minutes after he went in, he started drowning. I saw what was happening and I knew I could not swim to save him. I also could not stand and watch my brother die, so I jumped into the water to help. I was able to get him out a little when I started to drown. I only remember telling myself, "I can't die, my brother needs me!" So, I fought and found the courage to save the little brother I love so much. I felt a rock in the water that I used to brace myself and push both of us out of the water. I am so grateful I was able to help my brother.



“I ONLY REMEMBER TELLING MYSELF, ‘I CAN’T DIE, MY BROTHER NEEDS ME!’”

JANICE GALE

ARCELIA COC, TEACHER

United Evergreen Primary School

Cayo District, Belmopan, Belize

When I was three years old, I was scared of riding a bicycle. Sometimes when I watched movies that involved people riding bicycles, I wanted to try, but I was very afraid to do it on my own.

One day my mother told me I just need some courage to start riding. I didn't know what courage meant at that time, but for some reason that stuck in my head for the rest of the night. I couldn't sleep that night, and all I could think about was courage.

Early in the summer it was time to take off the training wheels from my bicycle, and this was the moment I feared. Then the words of my mother came back to me, screaming at me "You can do it; you just need the courage." My dad took off the training wheels and I tried to ride, but it didn't work because I didn't believe in myself. My dad then put the training wheels back on.

A few years passed and I was now six years old. My family and I started to practice riding the bicycle again. I started to ask myself what courage was, and I decided to ask an adult. My dad told me that courage was believing in myself and that I had the ability to do it. So, my dad decided once again to remove the training wheels, and I got on my bike and started riding.

Courage was just the thing I needed because I was riding all by myself. Both of my parents were cheering for me as if I was in the Olympic games. I was so proud of myself for beating my biggest fear. Now I see what my parents were talking about. It was just me who was letting myself down, until I found the courage to fight my fear. Ever since, I have been riding all on my own.



**“IT WAS JUST ME WHO WAS LETTING MYSELF
DOWN, UNTIL I FOUND THE COURAGE TO FIGHT MY
FEAR.”**

KIM SOK CHEA

PHALLA OL, TEACHER

The Cambridge Cambodia School, Grade 8

Kauk Rovieng village, Cambodia

The meaning of courage is to be brave enough to struggle to overcome every type of obstacle, no matter how difficult. I am inspired by a girl in my village named Sothy. Her parents are poor farmers and she is the oldest of three children.

When she was 13 years old, Sothy’s father told her he was going away. He said, “My dearest Daughter, when I’m not here, please help take good care of your younger siblings, your mother and your grandmother, because your mother has not been well and your grandmother is very old. So you are the only one who is able to take good care of them when I’m gone.” She asked him, “Where are you going to go, Father?” He told her, “I’m not going to go to the rice field anymore. I’m going to look for a job near the Thai border to earn and save more money for the family. I’m not sure if I will spend one or two years away before I can get back home, Daughter.”

Sothy’s father went away under the sad glistening eyes of his daughter and wife who watched him until he was out of sight. Afterward, Sothy was entirely responsible for the family’s burden. Besides going to school, Sothy spent her days earning some money by washing clothes and carrying water for the rich families.

Two years later, Sothy’s family expected the father would return home, but instead a man came to tell her and her mother that he had died in Thailand. Soon after someone else arrived who said that Sothy’s father had just married a new wife. Since Sothy’s mother was a crippled person and had mental problems, Sothy continued to have increasingly more difficulties in her life.

Sothy made cakes for selling, she did housework and homework, and she took care of her mother who always sat laughing and crying alone. Sometimes her mother walked away from home and hid herself at a small cottage. Sothy would go there and scream, “Mom, Mom, let’s get back home!” Sothy’s mother heard the noise but couldn’t even recognize her daughter’s voice. She would furiously growl at Sothy, forcing her daughter to get help from their neighbors to bring her home. Eventually some adults went to inform the village chief and a chief of community about



Sothy’s mother. They helped to send Sothy’s mother to the hospital to get treatment and medication so she would sleep well.

For this academic year, Sothy is now 15 years old and she has passed the exam to study at the middle school. She is named as the model student of Cheung Prey district and has struggled to study hard for her family. Sothy is very happy because it seems that she has a new life again. Her mother is now able to do farming and take care of her younger siblings. Sothy determined that she will endeavor to study until she has become a teacher in Kauk Rovieng village. She has always advised her younger siblings to study hard even though they don’t have a father and they live in poor conditions. Life does not depend on laboring work, she tells them. We create more through learning.

“SOTHY MADE CAKES FOR SELLING, SHE DID HOUSEWORK AND HOMEWORK, AND SHE TOOK CARE OF HER MOTHER WHO ALWAYS SAT LAUGHING AND CRYING ALONE.”

“សុំ ធី ផ្ការីនំ លក់ ហើយនាងក៏ ផ្ការីកិច្ចកាវផ្ការីនំ កិច្ចកាវសាលា ព្រមទាំងមែនទាំងមុតាយនាងដំលែ តាំងតែឥឡូវ គុយសើមយំមុននាក៏ ឯង។”

SREY PICH PHEAP

PHALLA OL, TEACHER

The Cambridge Cambodia School, Grade 8

Kauk Rovieng village, Cambodia

Courage is the strength of every human who dares to struggle against every obstacle in their lives. If we go forth, we must not turn back even if there is something against us. With courage we try our best to achieve that goal. I do hope that the next generation of kids will have this same courage.

I once saw a movie, a story about suffering and the consequence of a child's life beginning at his birth until he was mature. That child's name was Shanny and he was the son of a king named Preah Soriya (which means "the sun"). When Shanny was born, his skin was a black color, which upset Preah Soriya very much. In fact, Shanny's father hated him so much that he wouldn't acknowledge him as his son.

Preah Soriya thought that Shanny's mother, Preah Me Chhaya, must have had a secret lover because Shanny's appearance was so different from his other children. So Shanny and his mother were expelled from the palace to live at the dark place where they couldn't see the sun. Even though Preah Me Chhaya entreated Preah Soriya to recognize Shanny as his son, he refused.

Twelve years later, Shanny grew up and was appointed by the God Sevak to become the God of Justice who would judge all karma of every God. Then there was a man named Reahou who wanted to defeat King Preah Soriya. Shanny knew about this and he thought that his father, Preah Soriya, might be overthrown by Reahou, so Shanny asked his mother, Preah Me Chhaya, to allow him to help his father even though he realized that his father didn't accept him as his son.

This battle was made up by the God Sevak because he wanted to trick Shanny and his father into meeting again. The God Sevak then told Preah Soriya about what had happened. Henceforward, Preah Soriya accepted Shanny as his son and dispatched armies to return Shanny's mother back to the palace. As for Shanny, he was fearless and did his best to protect the dynasty of his father from Reahou's attack until he won the battle. From this story I learned about the courage of a lonely person named Shanny who endured against every challenge. All the gods were so happy to see Shanny's family living in harmony again, and from that time, the whole universe harmonically stayed in peace.



“COURAGE IS THE STRENGTH OF EVERY HUMAN WHO DARES TO STRUGGLE AGAINST EVERY OBSTACLE IN THEIR LIVES.”

“ភាពក្នុងលាហ៍នាគ គឺជាកំលាំងថាមពលរួមស្រស់ស្រាយ
លើកងទ័ព លាហ៍នាគព្រះព្រាហ្មណ៍ ឧបសគ្គគុណភាពនៃស្រី
ក្នុងជីវិត។”

OTGAN ALTANTUUL

ERDENECHIMEG MJ, COORDINATOR

School #1, Grade 11

Uyench soum, Khovd province, Mongolia

The 21st century is the century of rapid technological development. However, people became ill with the illness of laziness. By procrastinating and leaving the things that I should do today for tomorrow, laziness had become my 'best friend'. The day July 22, 2018 was an unforgettable day that changed me once and for all. You must be wondering why? This day, my mother and I talked about my future. My sister's ambition was like blazing fire. However, mine was like a soft stream heading towards the end of the world. At that moment, I got the feeling of a hammer knocking my head out. The only thought in my head was the past, present, and future of my life. The past is always a lesson. I understood that I had to learn from my past, use the present time efficiently without regret, and build my future. On that day I declared war against laziness. I planned to memorize ten English words a day, translate books, and focus on biology. But it was not easy to act on it, because laziness still pestered me.

I pictured a bright future and kept only good thoughts in my head. Days passed and it was finally the first day of school. This time I walked in with a different mindset. I had set a goal to enroll in the Mongolian National University of Medical Science. By winning the war against laziness, I pictured my dream and future more brightly. I realized that you can achieve what you want by putting in effort and emotion. In my opinion, courage is not winning a fight against anyone else but yourself. Most successful people in the world are those who are courageous and, most important, those who conquer the illness of laziness. I am most proud of my victory against laziness, because this is how I came another step closer to my purpose. I will always work towards my dream. Create a bright future of your own.



“MY SISTER’S AMBITION WAS LIKE BLAZING FIRE. HOWEVER, MINE WAS LIKE A SOFT STREAM HEADING TOWARDS THE END OF THE WORLD.”

“Миний эр зорчийн түүр”

*21-р зуун бол технологийн асар хурдтай хөгжсөн зуун гэдэг
хүннээ нь залуугаар өвгөд нэрвэгдсэн. Өвгөд хийг ёстой зүйлээ хэ айд
хүжсээр хэийг табицаар залуугийг миний хөлийн сэлгэ хайз бүлгэн байлаа.
2018 оны даваа уугаар сарын арван хоёр нь энэ өдөр бол миний амьдралын*

ANKHBAYAR AMARBAYAR

ERDENECHIMEG MJ, COORDINATOR

Olonlog Tuv, Grade 9,

Khovd province, Mongolia

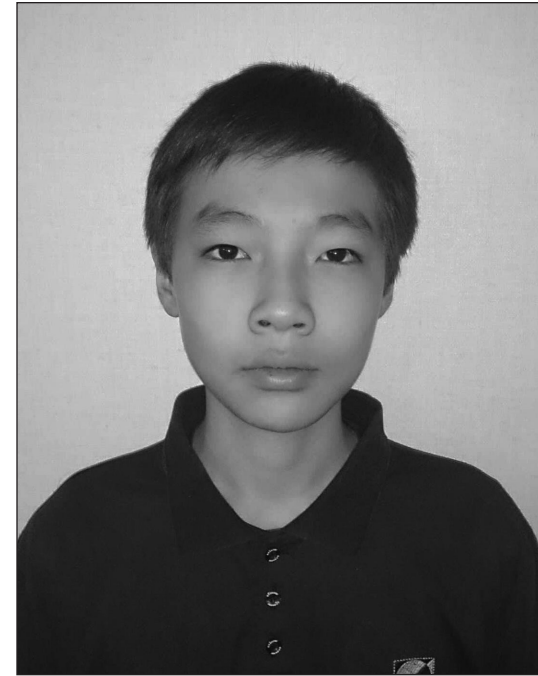
I had a dream that I could create a game. So I watched hundreds of tutorials on YouTube and started inventing a game from the ground up, but never finished it.

I wondered what was going wrong. There is a problem with what I am doing and it is hard to solve, like an annoying math problem. I like to learn things, but halfway in I face a blockade. It stops me from progressing any further into what I like to do. What started out as an ambitious and wondrous project—and a whole summer break of time—was going into the trash bin after all, just to be forgotten. But then another idea burst to life when I was lying on my bed pretty bummed out. Now filled with joy and hope, I couldn't sleep that night—I was that excited. A week later tragedy struck again and destroyed everything.

"How could I let this happen?" I thought to myself. After this I thought maybe I am not quick enough to pull this off before my idea dissipates. It was time for school and I knew I wouldn't have much time to dedicate to my hobbies.

Day by day time passes. Now it is spring break and how refreshing it is to be walking out in the open streets. A few new ideas have been circulating around my head recently, but with no success. I look at the trees; they look dead. I am thinking, "Why? Why can't I ever finish things, and what is this weird feeling of unaccomplishedness in my recent teenage years. Am I okay?"

Either way I will never stop creating things just because I couldn't finish them. And that is what I call my courage.



“EITHER WAY I WILL NEVER STOP CREATING THINGS JUST BECAUSE I COULDN’T FINISH THEM.”

ERKHEM HULAN

ERDENECHIMEG MJ, COORDINATOR

School #2, Grade 8

Bulgan soum, Khovd province, Mongolia

Courage, in my opinion, is knowing that there are opportunities in life beyond the people who try to drag you down. Today they may belittle you, but what is important is who you become tomorrow and not what they call you today.

When I was in elementary school, kids mocked me for my bad grades. This discouraged my will to go to school. I stayed home for several days. When my family found out and tried to talk to me, I refused. Yet my family did not give up. They kept trying to counsel me about my problems every day. Weeks passed by, and I had reached the peak of loneliness. I finally got up the courage to talk to my family; however, it did not rid me of my fear. It did not leave my mind how my classmates mocked and laughed at me. I kept asking myself why I attend school, but never found the answer.

Tired of all this, I convinced myself to go to school. I disregarded whoever tried to tease me. This helped me achieve success. Five years had passed, and I had become one of the top students, unlike my previous self. At this moment I found the answer to my question about why I go to school.

Courage, in my opinion, is to do whatever makes you happy. People talk about you when you are different from them. They can keep talking! You have more important things to do and achieve in your life. I showed courage by leaving this situation behind. I became a happy kid like others. To come in agreement with yourself and adapt to change is the biggest courage. Courage is to accept and face your fears and overcome them. A person shows courage to reach his or her dream.



“TODAY THEY MAY BELITTLE YOU, BUT WHAT IS IMPORTANT IS WHO YOU BECOME TOMORROW AND NOT WHAT THEY CALL YOU TODAY.”

Ховд аймгийн Булган сумын Мунхуйн Булган цогцолдог сургуулийн 10^д ангийн
Мунхуйн Эрхем Хулан
Мунхуйн хувьд нь зорин үргэлжлэн талархсан доорх нь шийдэл, хийж зүүн
хүчээр хүчирхийлэл нь түүн андгарагд багасч байсан түүн дарах. Мөн:
онгодог нь талархсан талархсан байсан хэргийн нь маргааны нь нь
байсан нь үзсэн байсан нь талархсан нь түүн нь түүн нь түүн нь түүн нь.

ARIUNJARGAL BOLOR

ERDENECHIMEG MJ, COORDINATOR

School #2, Grade 9v

Minjit Bulgan school, Khovd province, Mongolia

People describe “courage” as learning something important from their parents or their mistakes or by not giving up on any challenges they face in life. But for me, courage is to face all my fears and reach my goals.

When I was just a small kid, there was a girl named Zulaa. She was an older student in high school. She used to hate her stepfather, because he was so violent to her sisters and mother. Her stepfather used to send her to the cold mountains in the harsh, cold winter to herd the sheep during her winter school breaks. Soon, she got very sick and was transported to a hospital, which was 25 kilometers away. A doctor named Ari saved her life. She had the pain in her heart for years, but she never gave up on her studies. She had a big dream to be a doctor.

She passed all of her exams very successfully and had the chance to study as a nurse at a medical school, when she graduated from high school. Her time as a medical student was not easy because of her stepfather’s domestic violence. But she never failed because her dreams were strong.

After graduating from the medical school, Zulaa became a nurse at a local hospital. She worked so hard and helped to pay her sisters’ tuition. Yet she was always bright and courageous.

She looked after her stepfather in his elder life. I learned to never ever give up on my dreams whether I am sick or healthy. I learned to forgive people however they treat me, and to show love and respect. That is the biggest “courage” someone could ever have.



“I LEARNED TO FORGIVE PEOPLE HOWEVER THEY TREAT ME, AND TO SHOW LOVE AND RESPECT.”

Эр зориний түүх

Эцэстэй эр зориний авч тэр, аргаар асаа аргаар, өөрөөр үргэлжлүүлж авч
бүхэл эрхэнд байх зорилго мэтээр үргэлжлүүлж. Миний түүхэнд аийг аийг гэдэгт гүйцэт
эийг авчсан зорингоо хүртэх юм.
Миний дара байхад Зүлээ нэгэн нь байсан. Түүн аийгээ үргэлж эийг байх нь
маргагүй! Эцэстэй тэр, түүг а нь үргэлж зорилгоо гэдэгт байхад байхад эийг гэдэгт
байхад. Эцэстэй түүгээ эийг...

ERDENE MUNGUNTSESTEG

ERDENECHIMEG MJ, COORDINATOR

School #1, Grade 9

Altai soum, Khovd province, Mongolia

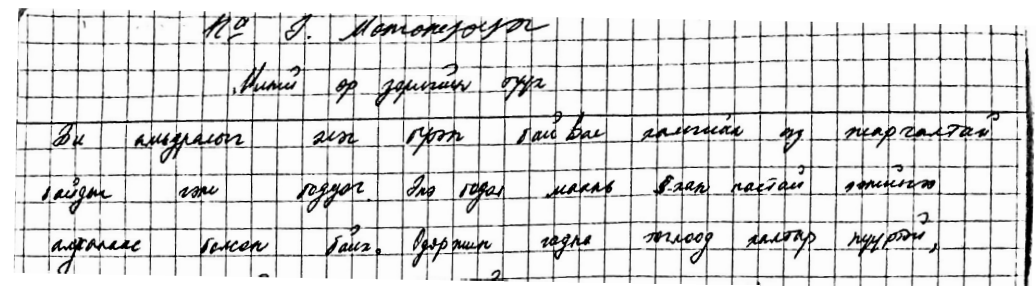
I would define happiness as a full family. The reason for my definition is that I lost my mother when I was only five years old. After a long day of playing outside, my mom would greet me with a warm smile and a hug, full of love, while dusting off my “deel” (traditional Mongolian clothes). I will never forget this feeling.

One sunny day I got out of the house without even having breakfast to play outside. That day I came home to cars and horses parked outside my home. Just a minute before this happened, I saw a white van with a green cross leave my house. When I walked inside, I was met with a room full of people, but could not find my mom. I was unable to comprehend anything going on, and my father drove me to my grandfather’s. He came back after one week. On the way home, I asked him many questions, but he didn’t utter a single word. The only thing that he said was to not ask about my mother. When I arrived home, I saw a portrait of my mother wrapped in “khadag” (specially made band of silk). It was the same as my grandmother’s picture at my grandfather’s home. But my mother wasn’t there. At that moment, I understood what was going on all this time. I stood there like an idiot not knowing what to do, and I couldn’t eat for two days. I used to recite this poem I wrote to my mother.

*Dung smoke pouring forth
I was born in a herder's home
On the wilderness steppe
I think of my native land
I was dropped into this land
Learning to love one's being
I was washed in a crystal river
Like mother's milk remembered
These Mongolian people
Loving their homeland...*



“AT THAT MOMENT, I UNDERSTOOD WHAT WAS GOING ON ALL THIS TIME.”



ALIA'A AL-JUNAID

ENAS SABEHA, TEACHER

Tokyo School, Sana'a, Yemen

We were living in a peaceful country, and suddenly, life became upside down. We left our home. The war got worse so we fled to the village. I was in grade four. I went to grade five in the village, despite the difficult circumstances. I was determined to continue my education. But we had to leave again to Hodiedah City before the final exams. In Hodiedah I went to a new school, where they registered me but only let me attend without receiving a certificate. When the final exams were due, I asked my father to let me go back to the village to take my exams. He initially refused, but upon my insistence he agreed. I went back to the village and successfully completed the exams.

Perseverance is more important than anything. I am currently completing my education in Sana'a, after we moved here.



“PERSEVERANCE IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN ANYTHING.”

“التصيم والإرادة أهم من أي شيء آخر”

SOLAF JOBRAN

HANA ABDULMOMEN, TEACHER

Abjad Primary School, Sana'a, Yemen

Courage is a necessity to overcome fears and to achieve desired goals. Fear is something that exists in all of us. There is no hero without fear. There are different types of fear that we may face in our lives. The one that I learned from my friend was the hardest one to me.

My close friend "Sara," who was my neighbor too, was one of the first sources of happiness in my life. We were like sisters. We loved each other so much. We shared our wishes and dreams. We used to see each other every single day. We also used to wear the same clothes and eat our favorite food together. We played the best games, like hide and seek. Our best times were when we sat on the short wall separating our homes for hours at a time.

One day Sara was ill. I thought that her illness was minor and that after a few days she would be fine. But later the symptoms of her illness kept increasing. Her face was pale and her body very weak, because she could not eat anything. The doctors said she had a dangerous disease. She had cancer. She needed surgery immediately. Her family was shocked and I was shocked, too.

Before the surgery, I went to visit her in the hospital. I thought she would be in a miserable state, but she was strong and she had the most beautiful smile on her pale face. She took my hand and said: "Do not worry, my dear friend. I will be fine, and we will play together again." I saw courage in her eyes. I was so sad and worried, but she gave me the courage to overcome my worries.

After the surgery, she started her chemotherapy. During this period, she started losing her long beautiful hair. The chemotherapy was very painful, but she remained strong. She always said: "I will get better and live a long life, with long beautiful hair."

Eventually, she started to overcome the dangerous disease. Her life started to come back to normal. She came back home with an even prettier smile. I was very happy that we could play together again. I really learned from her what courage means. She loved life, and I loved my life with her.

Two years later her cancer came back. This time it was more dangerous than before. It did not react to treatment, and the doctors said that she only



had a few days to live. Her family did not tell her that, but she felt the sadness in her parents' hearts. She said to me: "Solaf, I know that I am going to die, but I want to live the few days I have left happily. I want to make my family happy too. I do not want them to cry."

At this point, I had to be courageous. I had to reward her with the feeling of bravery she had taught me. I stood by her. I loved her even more. I spent those last days with her. At the end, the cancer defeated her weak body, but it could not defeat her brave soul.

"I HAD TO REWARD HER WITH THE FEELING OF BRAVERY SHE HAD TAUGHT ME."

"كان يجب علي أن اكافئها بمشاعر الشجاعة التي تعلمتها منها"

YUSOF AL-MAQALEH

MALIK MOHAMED, TEACHER

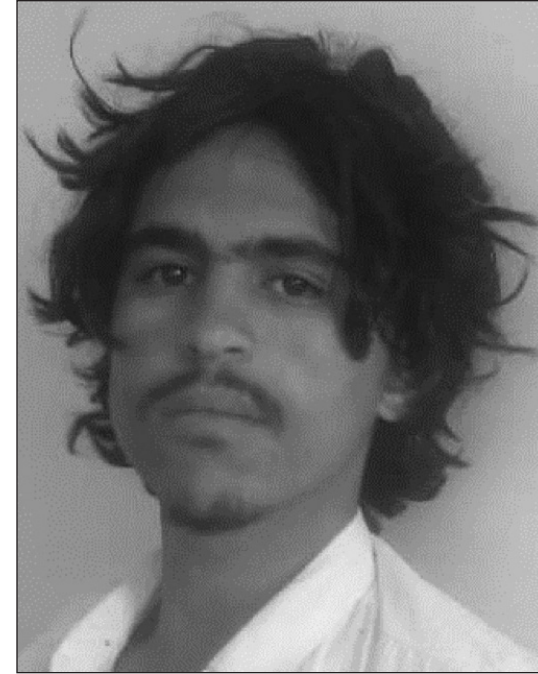
Al-Ahrar School, Ibb, Yemen

I was born in Maqaleh village, Ibb province, Yemen. I was born in the old zone and I lived with my family in a rented house. My family was my mother, father, and four brothers. I was the eldest. I was very happy with my brothers. We used to go to school, and we were happy to have our younger brother come with us.

When I started school. I used to miss my brothers so much. One day my brother got sick. My father took him to the hospital. He was not cured so he took him to the capital Sana'a. I was so worried about him. When they came back I learned that my brother was suffering from a rare disease that has no cure. I was very sad about him and my mother. My brother got worse and worse. He lost consciousness and feeling. Then he could not speak. Mom was caring for him. I noticed her crying away from us. My father was trying hard to secure the medication and other needs of my brother. I started to help mom in caring for my brother, and with the housework. I thought many times about leaving school, but Mom refused and encouraged me to continue my education.

After a while my other brother got sick. After he traveled for medical examinations, it was concluded, as I feared, that my brother had the same disease. When mom learned about that she was very upset. She became diabetic. She lost much of her health. I had to do most of the housework. I learned most of it and how to care for my brothers. I had to leave school. After two years I went back to school. But my mom got sicker. I could not care for my brothers and my mother. I decided to study from home. My mom taught me about housework. I was happy to care for my family. When mom went to the capital Sana'a to get medical care, I stayed with my brothers. I cooked, did the laundry, and even helped them bathe. I talked to them and they understood me. We communicated with our eyes.

Mom was very sick, so I decided to go to Sana'a to see her. I stayed with her in the hospital. She told me "Yusof, take care of your brothers. I trust you, Yusof." After that mom died. I was very upset. I almost lost my mind. Her words are still going in my head. After she was buried, I went to my brothers. I hugged them and cried. It is the only time I cried in front of them. I could understand their eyes. They were asking, "Where is mom?"



I now have a bigger responsibility. I must help my father. I work in farming, in carrying stones, in construction. I take breaks and go to check on my brothers. I continue to take care of them and play with them despite their sickness and inability to understand many things. I sleep beside them and feel their warmth. At the same time, I continue my education. I would like to complete my education and become a doctor. I would like to cure my brothers and all people who need me. I still remember the words of my mother, and every time I remember them I have more energy to continue

“I STILL REMEMBER THE WORDS OF MY MOTHER, AND EVERY TIME I REMEMBER THEM, I HAVE MORE ENERGY TO CONTINUE.”

“لازلت أتذكر كلمات أمي، وفي كل مرة أتذكرها أعود أكثر نشاطاً”

HASSAN AL-AWF

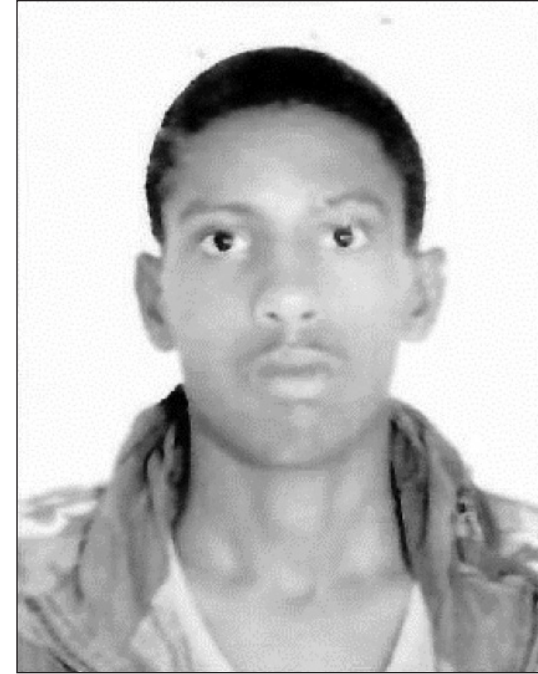
NAWA AL-HAMLI, TEACHER

Al-Motaseem School, Sana'a, Yemen

As usual, I race with the sun, who wakes up earlier. Again, my body disappoints me. It was very tired from the work of the previous day. I work cleaning cars in a fish market beside our home. I wake up early to earn some Riyals to help my father, who provides for my family of ten people. When the sun spreads its rays, I ask pedestrians about the time. When it is close to eight, I run to school and put my tired body in my seat, at the back of the class.

Because of my work, I am unable to study a lot. Despite all, I am happy to help my father and fulfill some of the needs of my younger brothers. Sometimes I skip school after the fourth period and go to work in the fish market. In the afternoon I go to my friends to see what they learned in the last two periods. I copy everything. Sometimes I feel tired and overwhelmed, but I continue. When we have exams the shop owners ask me to stay home and study, and they provide me with some money to help my father.

Recently one of my teachers learned about my story. She wanted to help me. I have a deal with her that is helping me study more. I saved some of the money I earned in a month. She provided me with additional money, and I bought some socks and other things to sell. Instead of washing cars, I go out in the afternoon to sell in the market. Now I can attend the whole school day. I can now learn more and do better in school. At the same time I help my family.



“SOMETIMES I FEEL TIRED AND OVERWHELMED,
BUT I CONTINUE.”

“أحيانا أشعر بالتعب والاحباط، لكنني استمر”

WEDAD AWNALLH

ELHAM AL-ARIKI, TEACHER

Rabe'a Al-Adawe'ah School, Sana'a, Yemen

I was playing hide-and-peek with my friends in the neighborhood. I was counting, 1,2,....7, when I saw a terrifying light, something like fire coming from the sky, followed by sounds of explosion, and rocks flying in the sky. I cried, and turned around, but I could not find any of my friends. I ran home to my mom. Mom was also scared. I could see that in her face, although she tried to calm me down. At that time I had a thought, "How could rocks destroy us, how could they destroy our hopes and ambitions?" I asked my mother, "Mom, how could a small rock destroy our life? Aren't we stronger?" "Yes, we are stronger than rocks. Rocks cannot defeat us if we have courage," Mom replied.

I will not give up. I will continue to live. I will not fear war, I will not fear explosions and rocks, and I will continue to play hide-and-peek. I have learned to be strong and courageous.



**"I WILL NOT FEAR WAR, I WILL NOT FEAR
EXPLOSIONS AND ROCKS, AND I WILL CONTINUE TO
PLAY HIDE-AND-SEEK."**

**لن أخاف الحرب، لن أخاف الانفجارات، ولن أخاف سقوط
الاحجار، سأستمر في لعب الغميضة**

