Award-winning essays on courage
written by sixth-grade students participating in
The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum’s *Courage in My Life* program
The Board of Trustees and staff of The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum, Inc. would like to express our sincere gratitude and appreciation to those individuals and organizations that gave so generously of their time, talent and energy to *The Courage of Children: Boston and Beyond, Volume XXV.*

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**ROXBURY COMMUNITY COLLEGE MEDIA ARTS**
Marshall Hughes, Pamela Green and Oliver Seagle

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Luke Randolph – Merrill Hawkins, Teacher  
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The Courage of Children: Boston and Beyond
Volume XXV is dedicated to

It is with immense and heartfelt gratitude that the 25th Anniversary Edition of The Courage of Children, Boston and Beyond is dedicated to:

Rick and Nonnie Burns
David and JB Greenway
Ambassador Swanee Hunt
Kasey Kaufman
Joan Bennett Kennedy
Alexandra Marshall
Berneda and Louis Meeks
Beth Pfeiffer
Emily Pope Taylor

whose twenty-five-year commitment to sustaining the Max Warburg Courage Curriculum has been a remarkable gift. From its inception, they have helped create, promote and support this curriculum through their belief in the mission, manifested by: leadership in the classroom; or on the Board, Advisory Board or in an advisory capacity; or through financial support. Their efforts have been invaluable. Because of their commitment, Max Courage has grown from a local to a national to an international initiative with partnership schools from Alabama to California; Mozambique to Cambodia; Pakistan to Belize. All embrace the message, that, children, through literature, can learn to recognize courage and can discover the courage within themselves to stand up, and do the right thing, and, by doing so, enhance their lives.

Keith Casto – Grade 7 – Syri Kohn, Teacher
Cordova Middle School in Cordova, Tennessee

Glenda Yesenia – Maritza Trejo, Teacher
Glasswing International in San Salvador, El Salvador

Taylor Burton – Grade 5 – Tina Kovach, Teacher
Charles A. Mooney School in Cleveland, Ohio
Max Warburg Partnership School

To Klang – Phalla Ol, Teacher
The Cambridge School for Cambodia in Cambodia

Teodora Nitu – Grade 8 – Alyssa Goldearb, Teacher
International School of Indiana in Indiana, Indianapolis

Dv’Anne Castillo – Angelita Cruz, Teacher
United Evergreen Primary School in Belmopan, Belize

Lucy Hicks – Grade 8 – Billie Carlock & Stefanie Wynne, Teachers
Heritage Middle School in Ringgold, Georgia
Max Warburg Partnership School

Ethan Yan – Grade 8 – Karen Tiegel, Teacher
The Nueva School in Hillsborough, California

Parvathy Nair – Janet Holt, Teacher
Good Hope Middle School in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania
Max Warburg Partnership School

Donia Al-Shalali – Yasmeen Al-Mass & Altaf A-Malhani, Teachers
Abajd Primary School in Sanaa, Yemen
“It was about four years ago when I heard the news: my dad wanted a divorce. I was terrified, disappointed, angry, sad, confused, and most of all, heartbroken.”

The eloquent specificity of feeling revealed in these opening sentences is both unique and typical of the power of The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum to help children understand the complexity of experience that defines them. This boy’s heartbreak is described with piercing honesty: “My dad was my hero,” he writes, and then, “My mom is my new hero.” But this 6th-grader’s enormous maturity is revealed in his essay’s closing sentences when he acknowledges, “He ruined our lives. I hope I have the courage to forgive him someday.”

To be able to articulate a range of emotion that opens into an ultimate resolution is the goal of the “Courage in My Life” essay-writing assignment. For the 25 years since MaxCourage was first implemented in the Boston Public Schools, the children who seem to benefit from it most dramatically have been guided by their teachers to steadily advance their ambition as writers by complicating the task. We readers see the proof of their ability to analyze a difficult situation in order to move forward, and we celebrate the pride they feel in discovering the courage that is required, and which exists within them, for meeting the harsh demands of their daily lives.

Over the years, new themes have emerged in these essays, with parents who are absent because of deportation, with racial profiling taking the form of Islamophobia, and with bullies targeting those with disabilities. But we have also seen how these common themes draw children together, and how a child then becomes able to recognize that “the biggest bully there is: yourself” can best be confronted by “not letting your self-doubts and insecurities get you down.”

In seeking to impose order on the chaos of their young adolescence, these children find the courage to possess their lives in a new way. They change their own behaviors in order to better succeed, and they become mindful of the struggles of others in their classrooms and at home. Their teachers and their families also learn valuable lessons about courage, and with the Curriculum’s ever expanding reach, so too do their readers across the country and around the world. But even more important than the creation of all these deep and wide connections are the ways that, by writing and sharing their essays, so many children have learned to trust themselves and each other.

Through the writing of these essays the classroom expands, and as is evident in this 25th volume of “Courage in My Life” essays, while the particular examples may vary in detail, there is a consistent intensity of feeling. Common themes draw children together and can motivate action, and reaction, with a true clarity of purpose that displays the urgent and inspiring value of their courage.

Alexandra Marshall is the author of six books of fiction and nonfiction. She has coordinated the selection and publication of “Courage in My Life” essays since the founding of The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum.
The mission of Max Warburg Courage Curriculum, Inc. is to strengthen the character development and 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 year-long language arts program dedicated to strengthening the character development and literacy skills of students in Boston and beyond. The organization was 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 continues to inspire our work.

Since the program's inception in 1991, the Courage Curriculum has positively impacted the academic performance and increased the essential knowledge of over 150,000 sixth and ninth grade students in Boston Public Schools and surrounding charter, pilot, public and parochial 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.

Through two school-based programs, Courage in My Life and The Courage of My Convictions, the Max Warburg Courage Curriculum works to improve the reading, writing and critical thinking skills of students; to inspire participants to celebrate acts of moral courage in their own lives and the lives of others; and to 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, and the direct correlation between its emphasis on literature content and writing competency.

Both programs use a layered approach that reinforces classroom work; individual reading, writing and critical thinking skills; professional development and training opportunities for teachers; and draws families and the larger community together for a culminating event to celebrate the outcomes of the program and the students' efforts. Although it is intensely focused on classroom practice and teacher instruction, The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum also disseminates this work on its website; in training institutes for teachers; in this annual publication of essays and at an annual awards luncheon for Max Warburg Fellows. The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum has been featured in academic journals and other publications positioning the program as a national model for character education program and excellent school and community partnerships.

Our sixth grade program, Courage in My Life, focuses on exploring and understanding the nature of courage, while our ninth grade program, The Courage of My Convictions, emphasizes the importance of putting courage into action. The Courage in My Life curriculum features 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.

Today, nearly 100% of Boston Public Schools' sixth-grade classrooms benefit from this curriculum, reaching more than 3,500 students and their families annually. The curriculum is also taught in classrooms across the country and as far away as Thailand, Cambodia, and the United Kingdom. The Courage Curriculum's sixth and ninth grade programs continue to grow on a local, national and global scale. Max Warburg's legacy continues to inspired young people to recognize and celebrate the courage in their lives.
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 was 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.

“No 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 parked and went inside to spend 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 fast balls coming straight at him over home plate. 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 the short distance to the ground. 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.”

“Statistically, I think you’ll be okay, but 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 the answers 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.

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 6:55a.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.”
What does the word courage mean to you? Courage to me is when you get out of your zone: Doing the unthinkable. I showed courage to my mother and myself by reading in front of the class. Something so simple can show so much courage.

Being a black female student, mean people in this world look at you and think things. “African-American females are most likely to not graduate from high school.” Growing up I would hear that a lot. Half of my family didn’t. That’s why it has always been so important for me to do well in school. Unfortunately, for me growing up, reading was a huge challenge.

“Reading.” Hearing it just makes me want to run away. I was always scared to read in front of anyone. Kids made fun of me. Kids would call me all types of names. People would make fun of me because I was “some dumb girl trying to read.” Every time I had to get up in front of the class to read, I would almost cry, but I didn’t say anything at the time. Sitting there holding back tears, with the constant reminder that I’m not as smart as the other kids. Most of the time I would never show my work because I didn’t want people to know that I can’t read that well, and am unable to see my mistakes.

But I didn’t want to be the kid who couldn’t read. I wanted to prove them wrong, to show them that any black female girl can read as well as anyone else, maybe even better. So I did. I practiced every day; sounding out words, learning the rules, reading books that were above my grade level. I worked so hard. It was my goal to better myself, and I did! My scores were higher than last year and the year before. I showed them all, as well as myself, what I could do. I reached my goal.

To me, courage is getting out of your zone. Doing the unthinkable. To me, having higher ELA scores was the unthinkable. I always thought I would stay at the same low levels. I never wanted to show my work, or read out loud. But if I wanted to reach my goal I had to. I had to ask for help and push myself to reach my goal of improving my reading. And this is how I showed courage to myself and others.

“I worked so hard, it was my goal to better myself. And I did!”
Courage. What does that word mean? There are many definitions of courage, and everyone has their own meanings for the word, but my definition for the word is being brave and taking risks. A good quote from Muhammad Ali describes the courage I’ve shown: “He who is not courageous enough to take risks will accomplish nothing in life.” This means that if you don’t have courage and take risks, you won’t achieve your dreams and live your life to the fullest.

When I was born, I was very weak. I couldn’t walk at all at a year old, so I found a way to butt-scoot around. I even had a heart surgery and two foot surgeries to put metal rods into my feet, which made it even harder to butt-scoot around.

At two years old, I went to school. It was very hard for me to walk around. I was always jealous of how my friends always got to run and play. Then, the greatest news came. I was going to get two more surgeries on my feet so I could walk! That was the best news I had in about a year! I didn’t understand because I thought I was going to crawl forever. I was just being myself all week.

The big day came two long years later. My parents put me into their car at night. I thought we were going to the mall. They carried me to a large building and set me on a special bed with a TV that I watched “Ben 10” on. A lady came and told me to pick what design cast I wanted. I picked a design that was white with soccer balls on it. After a few nice long minutes watching “Ben 10,” the doctor wheeled my bed into a large white room with beeping noises. It smelled like plaster. Before I could explore some more, a few people with white suits, a hairnet, and a blue mask came inside the room. One of them told me to sleep as another one put a nice warm blanket on me. I got an oxygen mask that smelled like bubblegum. I took some nice deep breaths and got comfy. Suddenly, I fell asleep. When I woke up, I was in a hospital room in a different bed with my mom. I heard a noise at the door. My doctor came inside and he handed me a teddy bear with the same casts as mine. I stared down and I saw my casts. I was going to walk!

Sadly, when they took off my casts, I could walk, but poorly. My feet were facing out instead of facing forward. So, I got these things that strap to my feet to help me walk called braces. Wearing braces makes me have to wear a specific size of shoe that fits the braces. I wear them every day and I still wear them now.

A few weeks later, I went to physical therapy to strengthen my legs and hamstrings. I went there every week, yearning for the day I could walk with full strength. The training there was torture. It was even harder with my braces since they are heavy and weigh my feet down. I couldn’t take it. The training was fun sometimes, though. I got to play games, and I could bring my cousins to race with me on little carpet scooters in the hall, or just play board games with them. The hard parts were balancing and walking properly down stairs. Through the weeks of training, I got better and better at walking. I could run too! My thoughts and dreams that I thought were impossible came true! Now, I can run and walk! I run in a different way than my friends, but I feel like I am one of them and I am.

Courage is being brave and taking risks. That’s what Muhammad Ali’s quote means. My story is an example because I worked hard, took risks, and reached for the sky to achieve my goal. I wouldn’t have accomplished anything because I wouldn’t be able to walk without working hard in physical therapy. Courage is a very powerful thing that got me here now.
Just writing this essay is taking every ounce of courage I have. I am admitting to the world something that I have been trying to hide. I have trichotillomania. Someone once said, “Courage is not defined by those who fought and did not fall, but by those who fought, fell, and rose again.” Courage to me means that when I feel the urge to pull out my eyelashes, after just looking in the mirror, and feeling, even for a split second, the urge to pull, I stop and look away. Keep doing what I’m doing. Don’t give in. Change the channel in my brain, as my mom tells me. Resist, resist, resist. I have to fight my brain every day. I struggle every day. I don’t want to do this. I don’t want to look this way. I don’t want people to know that there is something wrong with me, but it is right on my face for the world to see.

Trichotillomania means to pull out one’s own hair. In this case, the hairs are my eyelashes. I cannot control doing it. I think of it as a little monster in me, and it’s not actually me. It’s my brain. I have to think of it that way because if I don’t, I feel ashamed of who I am. My friends have noticed that my eyelashes aren’t quite right. They have said things about how my eyes look. They have made fun of me for it. I have not told them what the name of my disorder is called. When they question me, I always evade the answer. I have only admitted that I do this to my mom, dad, and two sisters. I don’t like that I do it, that I can’t control it, and that people notice it. I do not want my friends to know about it. That is another risk of doing this essay. They are going to find out. That’s why writing this is taking all my courage. Courage is to not give in to this urge, to fight it every day. I am at war with my brain, and I will not give up.

Trichotillomania changed the way that I see myself. My brain has a hiccup. I am not perfect. Perfect does not exist. I hope when you read that, you realize this is a good thing. It takes a lot of energy to try and be perfect. Now I set small goals for myself, and I delight in small victories. A victory for me is taking a shower, looking in the mirror, and walking away without pulling.

Courage is admitting that I have trichotillomania. Courage is going to battle with my brain. Courage is believing that I am going to win, not my brain. “Courage is not defined by those who fought and did not fall, but by those who fought, fell, and rose again.” Step one: pass in this essay. Step two: battle my brain. Step three: a full set of eyelashes. I will beat this. I will not give up!

“NOW I SET SMALL GOALS FOR MYSELF, AND I DELIGHT IN SMALL VICTORIES.”
Christopher Smith, Jr.
Matt Elliser, Teacher
Neighborhood House Charter School

Courage means to be brave and to have good and high spirits, but also willing to do things for other people. Some people say that cheerleading is only for girls, but I am the one who wants to change that theory.

One day I was thinking of doing cheerleading and I had no doubts about it. I started telling my friends what I was going to do. It all went wrong when I started going to practice. I would get teased and people would say, “Oh you’re a girl now. Only girls do that. Are you going to wear a skirt?” Those were some reasons that made me have doubts and believe that cheerleading is not for me. I thought that I should quit.

One day, my coach pulled me aside and said, “You don’t go out there to perform. You go out there to prove that cheerleading is not just for girls, but for boys too. You go out to show that you are the best boy there is.”

After that day, I have been trying my hardest. Every time I do, I am getting better and better. To this day, I have no regrets about doing cheerleading.

Courage helped me get through a tough time and hurtful comments and helped me be the best that I could be. I will never stop having courage because it is a good thing to have when you believe in something.

I know for a fact that I won’t end up on the streets smoking, or in jail for a crime. I want to encourage boys that just because people might say something bad about you, you will have a chance to prove them wrong. With courage, I will have the chance to do that.

“Courage helped me get through a tough time and hurtful comments and helped me be the best that I could be.”
What is courage? Courage is an act of bravery, which means conquering your fears. I show courage by standing up and speaking for the poor and the needy.

My mom inspires me to be a really good kid and to try. I show courage when people need me the most by helping the homeless men and women. I try to reach out to them. I offer food and comfort. I try to be strong for them. It takes courage to help out a person who I don’t even know, and I do it without fear. I know they need me, and I am not afraid.

It’s not a personal reward; the reward for me is when I see them smile, with or without teeth. I love them in some ways because they are who they are, and they need me. I look at the poor as my children and I want to take care of them.

I’ve always believed that it takes real courage to stand outside with a sign that says, “Please help, I’m homeless.” Honestly, I don’t think I could do that. That is really difficult, and it takes a real man to ask for help. That is a different type of courage.

One day, I was looking around for homeless people when I saw an old man. I went up to him and gave him a $10 bill. He was so happy that he smiled, revealing only three teeth. He said, “You know, I’m going to eat right now.” After that he put the money in his pocket and walked off. My mom and I followed the man and he did in fact go and buy food with that money. All day long I felt blessed that I was able to provide that man with a meal. I felt warm inside; my mom cried.

Some people may consider what I do as a good deed, but I consider it my job.

Ever since that day I’ve felt like I needed to do more, so I began making bracelets and selling them for the homeless. I make “Survival Packs” with the money I earn. The “packs” consist of small, useful items, such as food and water. 

I look for people in need and distribute them. There are so many homeless people, and only me, which means that I may not be able to reach everyone. This drives me to work harder, become stronger, and to find the courage to continue.

What I’m trying to say is this: I know that it takes courage to go into a burning building or to sacrifice your own life for someone else’s, but I found out that real courage is the act of giving to others in need.

“The reward for me is when I see them smile.”
Courage is a million things. It can mean running into a burning building and saving six people, or skydiving. But it can also mean something different. Every day, people face smaller, less dangerous things, like facing bullies, or dealing with a disorder. Courage to me is standing up to the biggest bully there could ever be: yourself. It means not letting your self-doubts and insecurities get you down.

We were all playing soccer, including a group of sixth grade girls. They were all very good friends. So no one was surprised when, once we were all led to the field, they split up as a team.

Not very many people were really playing though. Half of us were just talking to our friends. Finally, one of the coaches realized that no one was doing anything and he came over to reorganize us. He switched who was playing whom until my team ended up against the team of good friends, the sixth grade girls.

“OK, so we’re going to change up the teams,” he said. Immediately, I heard the chorus of voices coming from the other team.

“Noo!” they groaned in unison. My fists clenched up. WHAT had they said?

“What, so you’re just going to leave them?” the coach asked in disbelief. He apparently had that same idea as me.

“Yeah!” they said, as though there was no problem with what they had just said.

“OK,” the coach said. He walked back to the other coaches. The other team walked away a little bit to talk about the positions, and our team started to talk too. I turned around and walked over to the fence as I fought back tears. How could they be so mean? Then, a little voice in my head that I knew all too well whispered, “You’re not good enough. They don’t want to be on your team. They don’t like you.”

This situation might not seem like that big of a deal, but when I look back on this, I can still imagine the feeling of being unwanted. I can still hear the little voice telling me the things I couldn’t bring myself to admit. And I remember having to be brave and go back there, trying not to let the voice bother me.

That little voice talks a lot. In fact, it feels like all the time. If I get a problem wrong in math, it says something along the lines of, “You’re not smart enough.” If someone says something that sounds really intelligent, it says that I could never have thought of that. If someone says something about their friends, it laughs and says, “Ha, You don’t even have half as many friends as them.” It points out all my flaws, and it really brings my self-confidence down. It voices my insecurities.

It takes a lot of courage to not let my insecurities change me. Every day, something triggers a torrent of self-doubts. It’s a snowball effect. Maybe it starts with: You’re not smart enough. But it ends with: You’re stupid and horrible and bad at everything and no one likes you and all your friends are just pretending to be friends with you. I have to tell myself over and over that I’m overreacting. Sometimes I talk to one of my friends for reassurance.

This goes on every day, and somehow I manage to find the courage to keep on going. I definitely have had moments where all I wanted to do was go home and hide under my covers. Or moments where I really believe that I’m not good at anything and no one likes me. But the reassuring voice wins sometimes too. Sometimes it manages to beat back the insecurities. But it takes courage to win against my self-doubts. It takes a silent courage, a courage that isn’t recognized as much as other types, to not let your insecurities and self-doubts bother you, and to keep being true to yourself.
If you know anyone from a different place, you will probably understand this story. Courage to me means being strong, learning new things, and discovering new ways to learn.

I was six years old when I moved to snowy Massachusetts from Jamaica. I had to adjust to my new climate and the cold. I was afraid of going to a new school with new people and new teachers. My Jamaican accent was not getting me many friends. I didn't understand most classes, and I had to endure the taunts and insults from kids about the way I spoke.

However, I knew in third grade that something had to change. I started staying after school and during lunchtime to get extra help from my teachers. There were sacrifices to be made. I had to cut my recess time. I continued to be tormented by kids because they thought I wasn’t smart or because my voice sounded weird to them. During this time, there was much to put up with, but I knew I was getting smarter and I knew people were going to talk. I let them. I thought to myself, “I am just getting smarter!” As a result of my hard work my test scores were improving, and I passed to go on to fourth grade. The kids in my class were shocked. But I wasn’t.

It felt wonderful to know that I was smart. So you ask me, what does courage mean to me? Courage can mean many things, like bravery, fearlessness, spunk, pride, mental, moral or physical strength. Courage to me means being strong through thick and thin, and taking risks in learning new things and adjusting yourself to new challenges. This is what courage means to me.

“I KNEW I WAS GETTING SMARTER AND I KNEW PEOPLE WERE GOING TO TALK.
I LET THEM.”
My mother is the strongest and most courageous person I know. She has stuck by my side during the worst situations one can imagine. My father passed away 10 years ago when I was only two years old. Despite her own devastation, my mother had the courage to continue being the best mother she could ever be. Not only did she have to hit a restart button on her life, she decided to fulfill her childhood dream to become a nurse. After my father’s death, my family wasn’t doing so well. In the first five years of grieving, my mother’s grandmother (and her inspiration) passed away. Her grandfather died shortly after. In addition, her main supporter and idol, my uncle, suffered a slow, terrifying death due to pancreatic cancer.

Throughout all of these tragedies, my mother could have given up and thrown in the towel. Instead, she focused on the positive things. My mother saw my success in the academically talented program in school. Many great things happened during the course of those years.

During my mother’s teenage years, most people said that she would never be able to be a nurse due to her hearing loss. Massachusetts Rehab Center gave her hope. They developed a stethoscope for the deaf. That stethoscope gave her faith in her dream career. Currently, my mother is working on getting her bachelor’s degree in nursing. She is grateful to have this chance to get back up and focus on school while being an extraordinary mother. My mother has also been emotionally courageous by not excluding me from my father’s side of the family. I visit his side of the family often and have created an unbreakable bond with them. She could have excluded them from my life, but instead she did the opposite. She supports them being a major part of my life. My mother has told me every story she can think of about my father, and so has my family. Throughout my life so far I have learned that my father was just like me in almost every way. My father was tough, yet sensitive, just like me. He also enjoyed some of the same activities as me. He would always cook and spend time with family.

After writing this essay, I have concluded that my mother, without a doubt, is the most courageous person I know. I also have learned much more about my father just through this essay. This essay was a bonding exercise between my mother and me. Because of my mother’s acts of courage; she has taught me to follow my dreams, even during tough times. Her decisions have impacted my life and inspired me to be the best person I can be. Her constant pursuit of her dream to become a nurse pushes me to want to achieve a powerful career of my own one day. Who knows, maybe I will be the next District Attorney of Middlesex County.

“**Because of my mother’s acts of courage; she has taught me to follow my dreams, even during tough times.”**
Courage, to me, is facing your fear. Just like in a book I read, *Facing the Lion*, this boy faced his fear by going after the lion. Also, this boy was getting bullied because he was overweight, but he kept moving on. In my life, I was facing my fear by changing into the person that I really was. It took courage for me to change.

I bullied a girl. I made her life so miserable just because I didn’t like her, the way she acted, and the way she was treating other people. I was with her for three straight years and I bullied her for three years just because I didn’t like her. I didn’t care how she felt. I didn’t care if she cried or anything. I just thought about myself. I had friends that bullied her too, so it wasn’t only me. I’m not proud of the things I did to her. I used to scream at her with childish words. I used to fight her when she didn’t want to. I used to make other people bully her when I wasn’t at school. I did so many things to her and I’m disgusted with myself for doing those things. I got more and more popular each day, just because I was a bully. Honestly, I really thought I was the man.

I started to get into a lot of trouble. I was getting a lot of suspensions until one day the girl’s mom came and wanted to sue me. I thought it was really funny, but when my mom told me how things were going to go, at that moment I knew that it wasn’t really funny any more. I was scared of changing and becoming who I really was. I was so afraid people wouldn’t accept me, that they would always think about the old me and come to me and tell me to do things to other people.

I decided to make a change in my life with my attitude and my actions. When people came up to me to tell me to bully someone, I said no, because that stuff is childish. I started to become more mature. I changed my attitude. People looked at me differently. Instead of teachers calling my mom and telling her that I hurt someone, they called her and told her when I did something good. I felt proud of myself when teachers were telling me that they heard from other teachers that I was changing and not bullying people any more.

It was hard for me to have the courage to become the person I really was. I am not saying that I completely changed, or that I became a whole new person. I changed the parts of me that people disliked. If I have a chance to say sorry to the girl I bullied, I will, and I will mean it this time. I’m just proud that I had the courage to become the person that people like. I’m even more proud that I became someone that I like.

“I’M EVEN MORE PROUD THAT I BECAME SOMEONE THAT I LIKE.”
Aidyn Reid
Jeanine Stansfield, Teacher
Warren-Prescott School

Courage is a powerful thing that gives the most powerless person the strength to make his or her own choice.

While I can’t recall any significant moments when I was courageous, I do know someone who was. When she was 17, a high school Senior, she was rebellious yet she had a 3.7 GPA (skipping at least half of her classes). She grew up in a strong, Catholic household and was the stereotypical teen that didn’t listen. She had been in a year and a half long relationship with a boy her parents didn’t approve of, and then she got pregnant. Ashamed, her parents moved her to a small town where no one would know her, and they then told her she had to give the child up for adoption.

Over the next several months she researched her options. She wanted to be able to keep the baby without the guilt her parents had planted in her brain, of keeping the child from opportunity. She vowed to do everything she could for her baby, whatever it took to be what the child needed. Her baby was born in 2004. Looking back, I’m glad she kept me.

“Courage is a powerful thing that gives the most powerless person the strength to make his or her own choice.”
Courage is many things: standing up for a friend or stopping a bully, or it can be the smallest thing, like helping a teacher.

Walking into school, I thought it was going to be a normal day, but I was so wrong. I couldn’t tell what was coming. It all started when I walked into homeroom and we had our first class, social studies. I walked in with my friend Keena and I saw three posters in three sections of the room. One said, “Agree,” another one said, “Disagree,” and the third one said, “Unsure.” I was confused about what was going to happen, but I decided to go with the flow. The teacher told us that we were going to listen to a sentence and move towards the section of the room that had the response we agreed with. She asked us the first question: “Do you think immigrants are stealing jobs from Americans?” I said no, and I went to the “disagree” side.

I stood my ground and explained why. After the next question, I still was at the “disagree” side and explained why. Then the conversation brought up ISIS, and I kind of froze because I am Muslim. My father grew up in Lebanon before he moved here, so I wanted to know what was going down. One thing I do know is Muslims don’t kill, and ISIS is killing the traditional culture. Then the question was, “Do you think Syrian refugees should be allowed in America?” I started thinking what I should do. Should I move to “unsure?” What will people think if I go to the “disagree” section? I started getting really nervous. I was about to move to “unsure” and then I thought to myself, “What am I doing? I am a Muslim.” So, being scared, I put on my big girl face and went to the “disagree” side. Literally the whole class, aside from Hasan, who is also Muslim, was on the “agree” side. Then people started saying things like, “Syrian refugees should not be allowed here,” and “They’re going to terrorize the city.” I froze hearing all these thoughts. I felt like running outside the room until I decided I should speak my mind and tell the truth about Muslims. I raised my hand and the teacher asked me why I disagreed. I stood my ground again and explained that everyone should have a chance at freedom, just as much as we all do. Then, I explained the truth about the culture of Islam. The truth is that Muslims don’t believe in killing people. It is the people who are pretending to be Muslim, acting like they are part of our culture, but it’s not true. Right after I said that, the teacher said that I was right and then two people from the “agree” side came over to the “disagree” side. Even though most people were still in the “agree” section, I still felt so much better. Courage is many things, big and small. During this class, I showed courage and defended my culture. I am very proud of myself.

“I felt like running outside the room until I decided I should speak my mind and tell the truth about Muslims.”
Courage is the one thing that happens every hour, maybe every minute, but people just don’t realize it is courage. Courage is not letting your fears stop you from what you believe in. My name is Luke Randolph, and I am eleven years old. I don’t know who my father is, but he’s out there somewhere. Without a supportive dad in my life, public speaking is more difficult than it should be for me. If I have to get up and talk in front of everyone, it is kind of scary. I’m not totally petrified about it, but I just wish I was less scared to get up there. One way I’ve worked on public speaking was through joining the Model UN team at school. Model UN is the young adult version of the real United Nations, discussing real UN problems. I guess I forgot that there was a lot of public speaking and a conference with nearly a thousand people involved in it. Because if I did remember that, then that chilly fall day when my mom asked me if I wanted to do Model UN, I might have said no. Luckily for me I said yes, just like my identical twin brother, Gavin, did.

Before the conference, our team, composed of twenty-five sixth through ninth graders from Park School, had to practice. This meant obtaining and researching your country, receiving your topic, writing a position paper on your topic, and writing an opening speech. My partner Will and I were assigned to the country of Indonesia and the topic of access to clean drinking water. For me, it is just so much easier to write what you mean and not have to say it out loud to everyone. I had to get up and share something a lot in those practices, whether it was about Indonesia—or my opening speech. But this was only in front of Park School kids, and I knew most of them. Instead, at the conference, I had to talk in front of many more people and kids I didn’t know, but they also didn’t know me. One thing is for sure, though: talking in front of twenty kids, most of whom I know? Easy. Talking in front of many more kids, kids I don’t know? Not so much a piece of cake. This was only the practices though. The real reason we did the practices was to prepare for the conference.

It was the day of the conference and I was hesitant. What was it going to be like? What were the people there like? Gavin and I were dressed up in our coats and ties, looking the part of a real UN delegate. My mom, brother, and I got into the car and drove to Northeastern University, where the conference was taking place. When we got inside, it took us a minute to find our team. When we were all there, we went into a humongous hall to listen to the opening ceremony. From there, we broke up into our committees. Will and I were the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) and found our room. Then our chair, or head of the committee, began the debate. He first asked who wanted to be put on the speakers list, and we raised our placards, and we were picked second! The first delegation did their opening speech, and before you knew it, Will and I were up. Will started us off, and then it was my turn to talk. Many thoughts went through my head, like, “What if I mess up? Please don’t mess up.” When my voice came out it sounded strong and I felt good. Before I knew it we were done, and I realized we nailed it! As time progressed, I got more and more comfortable. Eventually, it didn’t seem like we were some of the youngest in the room, or that it was our first conference.

Soon it was over, but our time was not wasted. Our committee made two unanimous resolutions, the final passing of a rule made to better help the problem we were given, one of them Indonesia (us) was a major sponsor of. In the end it all worked out. At the end of the day, they gave out awards, and although Will and I didn’t get an award, two of my friends, who were also another major sponsor of our resolution, got the best delegation award for our committee. Although I didn’t get an award from the UN, I got another reward: finding out that public speaking isn’t that horrible. In the past, I have done other things, like read a poem on stage, but Model UN changed me the most. With a small family the need to speak publicly is rare. I wasn’t pushed to publicly speak ever before. That day, I faced my fears and triumphed over them and conquered them. I found courage in myself that day, and by believing that I could conquer my fears, I did conquer them. Yes, courage does happen, almost every second, and my courage was one of those seconds. I didn’t let my fears stop me from doing what I thought was right. It’s not every day that you conquer a personal fear. I found my way of conquering it in Model UN. No, you may not be afraid of public speaking like I was, but now I am not scared of public speaking at all anymore. After hearing my story, how will you face your fears?
As my grandmother would say, “You can’t always rely on others, baby girl.” Courage to me is bravery, being open to others, and believing. Courage is strength. You persevere, and you are confident.

My mom is deaf, so she can’t hear. I was about two years old when I learned how to sign. When I was seven years old, my mom had a problem. She was sick, and she didn’t think straight. My mom began to slip in and out of my life. On my eighth birthday, she never showed up. Deep inside it hurt, like someone stabbing you in the back over and over again.

In school, I would always act up and misbehave because of the situation with my mom. I would always get in trouble because I would ignore teachers. In class, I never paid attention because I was so worried about my mom and what she was doing.

One day, my mom came to my grandmother’s house where I was living at the time and still am. She was wearing ripped jeans and smelled like cigarettes. My grandmother found out that my mom was living on the streets. She had lost everything. My grandmother decided to help my mom out and give her money to at least pay someone to let her live with them. My mom got it together and took the money, and without her knowing, she moved in right next to my dad. The place my mom was living was a dangerous place, so I got the courage to talk to her. We sat on my bed and talked.

I said, “Mom, you need to get better now. Please, I know that you can do it.” She replied, “I know, I’m trying.”

“No, you’re not, because if you were, we wouldn’t even be having this conversation,” I responded.

After that, my mom changed big time. Right now she lives in a house with two roommates. She is looking for a job and only needs to pay 300 more dollars to get her driver’s license. She doesn’t smoke anymore and is going back to college! She is now in great health.

I am very proud of my mother. Courage, to me, is me and my mother. My mom had the courage to quit smoking and appreciate herself. I had the courage to talk to my mom about my problem, and hers too. Right now, I’m doing way better in school and I don’t have to worry about my mom because I know she is okay.

“I HAD THE COURAGE TO TALK TO MY MOM ABOUT MY PROBLEM, AND HERS TOO.”
I recall a time. It was a pleasant spring day. As I was walking to school, I enjoyed the peaceful breeze blowing through my long, flowing hair. I cherish that moment because it was the last time I felt my majestic hair blow through the peaceful breeze.

It wasn’t until I went to gym that I noticed a picture on the wall. I looked at it closely. I couldn’t describe it, it had so much emotion—I’d never seen anything like it. It was so mysterious because I have never seen people without eyebrows, eyelashes and hair. It was sadness. It was life. I imagined the big hole of emptiness these kids had in their heart. Splattered all over the wall were posters for “The Locks of Love Foundation.” They were asking for hair donations for kids suffering from cancer and alopecia. I knew I had to help them, so I grabbed a copy and went back to my classroom.

The next week was the day of the donations. In the past I had cried so hard whenever I cut my hair, even just by an inch. It had always been past my lower back. But I didn’t let my emotions stop me. I let myself out the door and headed to the fundraiser. I stepped into the room feeling as if squeezed in a bubble. As I sat down on the chair, the worst feeling of butterflies in my stomach attacked me. The hair stylist put my hair into two ponytails. The second I closed my jittering eyes my ponytails were cut off. I froze as I held my cut ponytails and the photographers took my picture over and over. I stared at my hair stylist and then I stared back at my reflection through the glass. My hair was gone; it was so short that I wasn’t even sure if it was me staring back in my reflection.

The next day, my photos were all over the Boston newspapers. As I entered my class, my hair caused so much pandemonium. Everyone was talking about the newspaper. When I turned around my teacher was standing in front of me with a present. I opened it to find a silver necklace with a pink pearl for breast cancer. I held onto that necklace everywhere I went because it reminded me of my grandmother. My grandmother, in Libya, had breast cancer and beat the disease. Unfortunately, my mother, siblings, and I had to escape the war in my home country and I no longer can visit my grandma. Whenever I look at that pearl I still imagine my grandmother and me sitting together.

That day I showed courage because I usually didn’t let anyone touch my hair and it now was cut off. I didn’t care. I didn’t care about being pretty. I didn’t care about showing off. I didn’t care that I may look like a boy. I didn’t care if people didn’t like the way I now looked. I cared about people suffering. The people with cancer could be you, your brother, sister, or your friend. Maybe my hair will take years and years to grow back but I know it will grow back. Cancer patients, however, can’t grow their hair back without help. I opened my heart. I will always remember what I did, and I will always do the impossible.

“They were asking for hair donations for kids suffering from cancer and alopecia. I knew I had to help them, so I grabbed a copy and went back to my classroom.”
Dads! I think of a dad as someone who is overprotective about a lot of things, such as boyfriends, and staying out after curfew in a “bad place.” Also, they might be overprotective about who you hang out with, and about your grades. Sadly, that’s only what I heard from my friends because I don’t have a dad. But, I manage to keep up my mom’s and my strength.

Imagine a two-year-old girl who looks confused and sad about her dad leaving her to go to Florida. Well, I was that little girl. I didn’t like the idea of having the “big man” to help me while I grew up when he wasn’t my real father. Eventually, I started to like “the big man,” who is my stepfather. He is tall, smart, helps me with homework, and is very fun. I remember playing the Wii and having epic snow fights. We have a lot of stuff in common. We play sports and our favorite show is “SpongeBob Squarepants.”

I felt really mad when my mom told me that my dad was in Florida. I even wrote letters to him, but he never answered. I used to tell him about all of the plays, dances, and the games that I won and lost. The worst part is on Father’s Day. At school, they write poems about their dads, and it made me cry.

One day, the kids at recess were playing soccer and I asked if I could play. They said, “A girl playing with us? Sorry, you can’t.”

“Why not? You are playing with a girl right now,” I replied. “But her dad taught her how to play. Last time I checked, you have a stepdad and they are not so great,” a boy said, and laughed. “That’s just a rumor, not all stepdads are bad,” I said. “You wouldn’t like it if I said that you are bad at cooking because your mom is not great.”

I took the ball away from them, moved past two people, scored a goal, and walked off the field. I left because I knew that if I stayed, I would get in a fight. Sometimes, I hold my feelings in too long, which makes me have anger issues. Then I burst out onto other people with anger, sadness and disappointment. This is because of my father.

I was courageous in that moment when I left by controlling myself so no one would get hurt physically or mentally. I’m grateful for my stepfather. Not all stepfathers get along with their stepchild.

Courage is something that you can’t see, but you can feel. My definition of courage is someone who will step up for what they believe in, voice their opinion and own their actions. I learned that there are all different types of families, and I am happy with mine.

“Courage is something that you can’t see, but you can feel.”
What is courage? When most people think of courage, they think of superheroes like Superman or Batman doing something super like saving someone from a burning building. But courage is anything someone can do to help others, or do to make something less scary for them, like going into a dark room to get something they forgot.

My name is Joshua Pascarelli-Healy. I had a bad case of OCD, or obsessive compulsive disorder. It basically has lasted my whole life. I thought nothing of it at first, but then it started to get a little worse and excessive. I was forcing myself to do things an even amount of times, or say “OK” after every sentence. It was hard to not do these things. This is also around the time when my anxiety kicked in too. It was a horrible feeling. If I didn’t do it, my stomach hurt a lot, so I had to do it. I didn’t know what it was at the time it started. I just thought it was a one-and-done kind of experience, but it didn’t stop.

I was trying hard to stop it, so at the age of around six I started to go to therapy. I thought one year would be OK, but it didn’t stop there. When the lady I was with had to leave and go somewhere else, I stopped for about half a year, but then it started happening again. I repeated this about three times with no success. I was still getting anxious and forcing myself to do these things. I tried so hard to stop it, but I couldn’t. I was also starting to get aggravated easily at small things, like if I got a question wrong on a test. I tried to stop it, but with no luck.

I started a new doctor last year and it was getting better. I was practicing at home too with my parents pushing me to do it. I also got my dog at this time, so when I got aggravated I would go to my dog, Bella. I was starting to get better at learning to manage my anxiety. I wasn’t getting mad at small things anymore. I was feeling better. I was pushing myself hard to not do those things that my body and mind were trying to force me to do.

Sadly, my doctor had to leave at some point, but I kept up what they had all taught me to do when these things happen. Today, I am still going to a doctor, but not so much for what has happened before. I may still get anxious or aggravated at some points, but I try to force myself not to, and to not do these excessive things.

I have changed from what I was before, and it was hard to do. I felt strain when I had to do these things, but I tried hard to push through it. It has been difficult and has taken a lot of courage to overcome this challenge. I am now not doing those things. I will always remember what I have learned from my doctors and I will put them to use. I may not be a superhero, but I got through all my fears and hard times that have bothered me my whole life.

“I MAY NOT BE A SUPERHERO, BUT I GOT THROUGH ALL MY FEARS AND HARD TIMES THAT HAVE BOTHERED ME MY WHOLE LIFE.”
Layla Brown
Matthew LaSpina & Cathy Schumer, Teachers
Boston Renaissance Charter Public School

It’s hard to define courage, but to me it means being brave and staying strong even when times get tough. If I hadn’t lived through a difficult bullying experience, I might have never found the courage inside me.

It was February break and I was on vacation with my family. We were in a hotel room in New Hampshire when suddenly my little sister woke me up in the middle of the night. She handed me my phone. When I turned it on I saw a whole lot of notifications from Instagram and i-message. As I read them, I began to cry. Why was I getting death threats, and why were people calling me hurtful names? For example, kids were calling me the “B” word and saying they wanted to kill me!

I woke my mom up. In tears and without saying anything, I showed her my phone. In a panic, she woke up my step-dad and showed him the messages. As we scrolled through them together, what we read shocked us. My heart was pounding because I was truly afraid of these death threats! In the dark, the yellowish glow from my phone lit up my face. Seeing my terrified expression, my step-dad told me that everything would be OK and we would get through this cyber-bullying incident together.

After our vacation ended, my mom asked me if I wanted to be pulled out of school. I was thinking about saying yes, but then I found my courage. I told my mom I wanted to talk to my principal, Mrs. Lawrence, and get through it. We showed her the comments that people sent me. When she asked me if I knew who could have hacked my account, I thought about it for a couple of seconds. Annijah came to mind. We were friends, but before vacation we got into an argument, and she told me she would get revenge. Mrs. Lawrence asked how she got my password. Suddenly I remembered that when we were video chatting about a month ago, she had asked me for my password so she could check the box for “knowing your best friend” in a teen magazine. Obviously, I made the wrong choice by telling her.

Like Sherlock Holmes putting the pieces together, I realized that Annijah had used my account to spread rumors to my friends that I was saying horrible things about them behind their backs. In the end, my friends found out the truth, Annijah was suspended, and I learned what it means to have courage.

I showed courage even though I was scared and didn’t understand what was happening. I stayed strong even when I wanted to give up. It took me a while to figure this out, but courage means being able to stand up for yourself. I discovered who my real friends were, and how to handle a difficult situation. This experience made me want to start an anti-bullying program to prevent situations like this from ever happening again.

“I STAYED STRONG EVEN WHEN I WANTED TO GIVE UP.”
I’d like to apologize before you begin reading. I’m not going to tell you my story about how I conquered a sad reality through my courage. Or about how courage held my hand when no one else would. I never thought I was courageous, not for one moment of my entire life. My story isn’t about an external fear that I couldn’t face or overcome. It’s about how I conquered my internal fears – about how I walked on the depressing tightrope of reality with no one to help me balance and made it all the way across. I wasn’t the one that found courage, courage was the one that found me. And my courage found me when everyone was diagnosed with the same terrible disease – not cancer nor a tumor, but Islamophobia.

And what was I afraid of? I was afraid that people would fear me, not me as a person, but me as a Muslim. For a long time, I felt self-conscious when I wore my hijab to conceal my hair, or prayed in public. Practicing these tenets of my Muslim faith made me feel scared and alone in my thoughts. I felt that people were staring and were judging me, on my religion, on my identity. WAIT, that was before I had courage. Now that I have found my courage, it goes more like this. I walk into a room and choose not to hear any whispers. I don’t freeze and feel embarrassed and self-conscious about my identity, I have finally found the missing piece of the puzzle and it is spelled C-O-U-R-A-G-E – courage is the answer. I am who I am because of courage. I used to believe what I was told about my faith by other people, but now I believe what I know is the truth. And as sad as it is, people are still infected with Islamophobia, but like most diseases this one comes with a cure...people being courageous enough to speak up.

The dictionary’s definition of courage is “the ability to do something that frightens one” but for me, courage is being able to stand up for what you believe in, even when it seems beyond impossible. Courage is the light in the dark. None of us were born with courage, but all of us will die with it. At some point everyone has to use courage – whether it’s for crossing the road when the sign says not to, or for running into a burning building to save a person you never met.

“I USED TO BELIEVE WHAT I WAS TOLD ABOUT MY FAITH BY OTHER PEOPLE, BUT NOW I BELIEVE WHAT I KNOW IS THE TRUTH.”
Nelson Torres
Aaron Cohen, Teacher
Jackson Mann K-8

It was about four years ago when I heard the news: my dad wanted a divorce. I was terrified, disappointed, angry, sad, confused, and most of all, heartbroken.

As a kid I had everything. I had a loving mom and dad. My dad was my hero. We did everything together. My dad kept us very busy. My brothers were on football and baseball teams, and I couldn’t wait for my turn. We went out every weekend. Birthdays and holidays were the best. We had it all, until one day when I woke up to a big argument about my dad cheating on my mom with a close family friend.

My dad considered her like a sister, or maybe that was just an act for him that led him to walk out on his family. He even took his mistress with him to my grandmother’s house. They broke up a happy home. It was then that everything came crumbling down. We lost our father, who at one point was our whole life. Then his girlfriend and her two kids became his life.

My mom got evicted. We had to leave my hometown and also my good life, my school, my friends, and my after-school program. My mom asked my dad to take us in until she got a new home, but he said no like a coward. He said he had no room for his kids. While we struggled, he and his new family had a home. We struggled a lot. We moved a lot; Cape Cod, Roxbury, Chelsea, and finally a shelter in Dorchester. We went to many different schools.

Still to this day I struggle. My mom is my new hero. She’s been strong for me and my two sisters. Even though it’s been hard and painful for all of us, my mom is courageous and gives us the courage to pull through together. Right now I don’t visit my dad. I’m still hurt, angry, and confused, and I don’t like seeing them together. It hurts so much that he doesn’t care about my feelings, so I don’t care about his feelings. There were plenty of times that he had us wait a month at a time without calling or seeing us. Now he wants to be a dad and force me to go with him. But I’m not ready to tell him how I really feel about him and about our new life. He ruined our lives. I hope I have the courage to forgive him someday.

“My mom is courageous and gives us the courage to pull through together.”
Maureen Baumiller
Erin Hannon-Foley & Claudia Lucia, Teachers
Roosevelt K-8 School

Have you ever had a tragic event happen to you and you didn’t get hurt, but others that were innocent did? Let me tell you about when the 2010 earthquake happened in Haiti. It changed the country of Haiti for a long time.

It all started on a normal afternoon in Haiti. The wind was blowing on the coconut trees from outside. The sun was shining so bright from the window, and my aunt was helping me with my homework. Even though I was born in Boston, my mom wanted me to be raised in Haiti with my grandparents, and I loved living in Haiti. People might describe it as poor, but it was relaxing, even with homework and school. I was watching TV while doing my homework. “Turn it off,” my aunt explained, “it’s a complete distraction. You’ll never finish your homework!” I did as she said, but as soon as I did the ground started to shake. Out of nowhere my aunt took my hand, lifted her baby out of the crib, and ran out of the house. In my head I asked myself, “What’s going on? I’ve never seen anything like this before!” As my aunt was dragging me and holding the baby, I could see in her eyes that she had experienced this before.

When we got outside, I could see the cement crumbling off the house, and my grandma was in there! I thought to myself that the house could fall any second, and my aunt was probably too scared to go back inside with the baby. She was pacing up and down, screaming “Mom! Mom!” I was so scared too, but I couldn’t leave my grandma. So I went back inside the house. The floor was covered in glass, and out of nowhere the painting of the fruit bowl fell and cut me. “Ouch!” I thought. When I got to my grandmother’s room she looked normal like nothing was happening. “Grandma, there’s an earthquake. We have to get out of here or we’ll die.” I took her hand and pulled her. She rushed along, and as we passed the TV, it fell and glass shattered everywhere.

We made it outside. My aunt, my grandmother, my baby cousin and I went to the front of the house. The first thing we saw was my uncle, my cousin and his father, my aunt’s husband. Everyone in the neighborhood was freaking out, so my uncle made a plan. The plan was that my aunt, her sons, my grandparents and I would go to my uncle’s house and sleep in the extra cars he had because it was too dangerous to sleep at my grandparents’ house. My uncle, his wife and daughter would sleep in tents outside. That was the plan for the rest of the night. My uncle’s sister-in-law, my grandmother, my aunt, and my uncle’s wife helped everyone get settled with food, sleeping bags and tents, and I tried to help everyone too, just to get my fear out of my head. I noticed everyone was trying to keep their spirits up and trying to look on the bright side of things.

My aunt’s phone was buzzing a lot. When my aunt finally answered, my mom was so worried. It was like she was going to have a heart attack. She hollered from the phone, “What’s going on Marie? What happened? Is anyone hurt?”
I could hear her even when the speaker was off and my aunt finally answered calmly, “No one is hurt; we just had an earthquake. Part of the back space of mother’s house is broken, and we’re lucky we made it out of the house before it collapsed.”

“Okay. Is Maureen okay?” She sighed, relieved.

“Why don’t you ask her? She’s right here.” She handed me the phone, and I talked with my mom. She told me everything was going to be okay.

That night my grandparents, my aunt, her sons and I all slept in a car. I had to sleep in the driver’s seat. I felt so uncomfortable. I started thinking, “What if I started the car?,” (even though I don’t know how to). “What if I never see my friends at school? What if they’re hurt?” What if, what if, what if- so many what ifs entered my head. So I tried to stop thinking about it, but couldn’t. My uncle came over and asked me why I was up, and I told him I was scared. He said, “As long as you believe in Jesus, you are always safe.” That did make me feel better, so I went back to bed. I felt so safe that it was like an ordinary night for me.

In the morning, I didn’t know I was going back to Boston. I thought I was going to grow up in Haiti, but then I saw my suitcase. I went with my aunt and her sons to the airport. I started to feel the same as the night before. I saw a lot of broken houses and people with wounds. I felt so bad, but I remembered what my uncle said, “As long as you believe in Jesus, you’re safe.” And I was always safe. That day I learned that if you believe that you’re safe, that means you’re always safe. So I went to Boston, went to school here, and that changed my life in a good way.

Courage to me is believing hard even though it looks like things are never going to work out. If you try and believe, you’ll be fine. In the earthquake, I thought we all were going to die. Instead, like my uncle said, “If you pray on it and believe, you will always turn out okay in the end.”

“IF YOU TRY AND BELIEVE, YOU’LL BE FINE.”
The way I see it, courage is knowing that you can either stand up for yourself or not, and then choosing to stand up for yourself. It took a lot of courage for me to stand up to my so-called “friends” who bullied me and made fun of who I am. One of my favorite quotes is in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*. “There are all kinds of courage,” said Dumbledore, “It takes a great deal of courage to stand up to our enemies, but just as much courage to stand up to our friends.” This saying truly proved itself in this memory of my life. Today, in 6th grade, I love to joke around and play with my classmates. In 3rd grade, however, things were much different; because, so was I.

When I was nine months old, my mom traveled to Jiangxi Province, China to adopt me. When people see me, they can easily guess that I am Chinese (or Asian). In the year 2013, some of my classmates started to tease me about my heritage, the way I looked, and basically just the fact that I was born in China. For example, one day they said, “Put your right pinky up,” and they laughed, saying, “You are swearing in your own culture.” By the way, it is a fact that raising your right pinky is NOT a Chinese swear. Another time, they opened a book halfway and put it over their head saying, “I’m Chinese, YIP! YIP!” They claimed “yip” meant “yes” in Chinese, even though it doesn’t.

Finally, I told my teacher and we were taken down to the principal’s office, but the problems were far from resolved. A short time after that, someone accidentally hit me in the nose with a tennis ball, and one of the bullies snickered, “Did he flatten your nose?” He said this because, being Chinese, my nose doesn’t stick out as much as others. Perhaps the reason that this particular insult hurt the most is because it is bad enough to be self-conscious about physical differences, but to be outright teased about it makes you want to hide away in a hole and never show your face again. I did not know it then, but somehow this incident made me stronger inside and in some subconscious part of my mind, I was determined to show both myself and the boys that they couldn’t, and wouldn’t, insult me or my heritage.

Starting that moment, I began to rebuild myself, to climb out of the pit of exclusion and discrimination and rise up in hope. I would prove that I am a real person too, in spite of their narrow minds, minds that allowed nothing different. Step by step, days became weeks and weeks turned into months. Still they would tease me, but each time I would raise my head and ignore them, later finding a time to pass along a kind word to them. Another saying I heard is “What goes around comes around.” Bullies may have been bullied themselves, so in turn they pass their bitterness down and bully others. By showing kindness to them, not hatred, they might choose that way also. If not, well I’m satisfied to know I tried my best. Thankfully I don’t have to worry about that. Most of the bullies have changed their ways and are now my good friends!

This experience has taught me many things, but one thing has stuck in my head for the past few years. I can now do more than accept my differences, wishing I was the same; I can rejoice in my uniqueness! Courage has been my rock to cling to, a ladder to climb up, a base to study my fears. Just as the word courage can have many different meanings, so can pride. I have learned to be proud of my differences, proud of what I look like; but most of all, I am proud to be Chinese!
In my opinion, courage is gathering up confidence to do something one would not otherwise be willing to do. Courage doesn’t just come to you; it takes time and effort to gather enough of it to do that courageous thing you could never execute before. In my case, I gathered up enough courage to stand up to those that used the word “gay” in the wrong way. Some people use the word “gay” as if to mean “misfit” or “abnormal.” This really bothers me because my parents are gay. I have two dads, and they are extremely kind, and far from misfits or abnormal. Whenever I hear people misuse the word “gay,” I go up to them calmly, not making a big deal of it, and say something like, “That’s not cool. My parents are gay, and they are nothing like the way you used the word gay.”

One time, I was in the gym at school with a bunch of seventh graders. When Jim, a seventh grade student, kept missing shots, Rob said to him, attempting to be funny, “You are so gay at shooting, Jim.” I was really taken aback by this comment. Why would someone use this word in such a bad context? So, after I heard this, I said to Rob what I usually say, “Seriously, Rob, don’t use the word ‘gay’ that way. That’s not what gay means.” After I said that, he made up some lame excuse, saying gay doesn’t mean that in his dictionary, but we both knew he was lying.

Another example of this sort of thing happened a month or two ago when I was peering over at a friend’s phone at pick-up. There was an ‘iFunny’ with a picture of a sign near the ocean that said, “Beware of jumping gay walrus.” My friend seemed to think it was funny, and he showed it to another person. Sure enough, that person seemed to think it was funny too. When I saw them both laughing at this homophobic humor, I told them how dumb and discriminatory that joke was. At the time, this friend of mine would consistently misuse the word gay. Nowadays, I have noticed that he doesn’t use the word in this way anymore, and I like to think that I helped that progress.

It is a unique experience every time I stand up to the people who misuse the word gay. When my friends still feel like it’s funny to joke about this, I try to tell them that this is really not funny at all. It is especially frustrating when I ask someone to stop using the word in that context, but they continue to do it. When I talk to my parents about this, they support my eventually, hopefully, having an effect on homosexual people everywhere.

“Courage doesn’t just come to you; it takes time and effort to gather enough of it to do that courageous thing you could never execute before.”
My definition of being courageous is being able to forgive, and find a way to love a person when you think forgiveness and love are impossible. Growing up, I was raised by my mom, aunt and grandmother. I was surrounded by caring women. My mom had a caring boyfriend, who I call my dad. What I did not know was that this man is not my biological father. It was not until last year that I learned the truth, and I learned that my real dad wanted to get in contact with me. This was a time when I had to find courage to forgive and say “I love you” to my father—a man I did not even know existed.

One night I was in bed sleeping, and I felt my mom thinking really hard about what to say to me, but I had no idea what she was going to say. Of course, I was really tired, so when my mom nudged me I said, “Yes, ma.”

She said, “I have to tell you something about your dad.” I was half awake, so I didn’t really care at that point. “What is it?” I said.

“Your daddy is not your biological dad. The one who is your biological father is in jail. He wants to talk to you.” I woke up fully, my eyes wide, and I turned around to look at my mom in her face. I stood up, wondering, “What? Who? How?”

I looked in her eyes, and I saw she was sorry for not telling me sooner. All my mind was saying was, “How, how can my daddy not be my dad? I can’t possibly love another father.” I thought, “It’s impossible.”

The next day, I went to school like it was an ordinary day, but I knew it wasn’t going to be an ordinary day. During the day, I would start to cry. I was incredulous that my daddy wasn’t my biological dad. He’s been there ever since I was born. I wondered about my biological dad. I thought, “If I have a biological father, why would he contact me now? Today’s not a special day.” It was all just a mystery.

When I got home, I did my normal routine, but it didn’t feel normal. Later on that night, we sat at the table eating dinner in silence. Then, the phone rang, breaking the silence. I got out of my seat to go pick it up. I looked at the caller ID, but it said “unknown,” I answered it, and said, “Hello. Hi, may I ask who this is?”

“Is this Kalis?”
“Yes, why?”
“This is your father. The one in jail.” Right there and then, I felt my heart sink.
“Hi,” I said nervously.
“It’s nice to finally to hear your voice,” my real dad said through the phone.
That’s when I got angry. I wanted to say, “I don’t know why. You could’ve met me a long time ago if you cared about being in my life.” But I only said this in my head. I didn’t say it to him. Instead, tears fell down my face.
“Are you crying?” he said to me.
“Yes.”
“I know it’s hard talking to me because you have never met me, but I just wanted to tell you I’m sorry for not being there, and I love you. I hope you can forgive me. I know it’s going to take some time, but I just wanted to tell you.”
“Thank you for calling me. I hope I can forgive you too.” After that, we hung up.

From then on, my dad and I talk once in a while. But though we talk, I still can’t forgive him. It needs more time. Because of courage, I am able to talk to my dad and express my feelings towards him. Because of courage, I will continue to work toward loving and forgiving. With courage, I hope I can find a way to love both my daddy and my biological father.

Don’t feel afraid to have courage and express the feelings that you feel.
Courage to me is helping out someone, even though your friends might judge you.

One time I showed courage was in the morning at school. I was unpacking my stuff and putting it in my locker. I was moving my chair into the morning meeting circle. Then my friends walked in.

They were yelling at a boy in my class. It was two against one. I felt like they were ganging up on him. I feel like sometimes my friends make a big deal about nothing. The boy kept on saying, “I’m sorry, yeesh!” and, “Okay, okay.”

I didn’t know what he did, but I did know that he was having a lot of trouble with his family. I kept thinking that this boy did not need this right now.

I took a deep breath and I told my friends to stop. One of them started talking about what he did but I cut her off. “I don’t care. You guys are being rude right now.” I said.

I remember seeing my friends look at me awkwardly, and confused. I remember feeling happy because I just helped someone, but also mad because my friends were being rude.

This took courage because I didn’t want my friends to be mad that I told them to stop.

The world needs courage because, without it, the world would stay the same. People would be mistreated, there would be segregation, women would still have to wear skirts and dresses, there would be racism, and many more reasons.

I showed courage by standing up for someone, even though I might have been judged by my friends.

Alexis Santos
Abby Barton, Teacher
Prospect Hill Academy Charter School

“The world needs courage because, without it, the world would stay the same.”
To some people, courage means staying strong or being fearless. To me, courage means being proud to be who I am. I am 12 years old. My nationality is Dominican and Portuguese. My skin color is lighter than black, but darker than white. I am proud of my nationality and my race. However, I don’t like how I have been called names simply because I am darker.

I have a family member who thinks that because he is white, he is better than me, because I am darker. He makes disrespectful comments about anyone who has darker skin. When I am around him, it takes courage to be strong enough not to say anything rude or mean back to him. When I am around him is when I must be the most courageous. Many people would be rude back to him, but I know that would be wrong. I know that no matter what he says, I am a good person. I am a smart person, and I am a kind person.

A lot of people think that you have to stand up for yourself in front of others in order to show courage. Instead, sometimes it takes more courage to be the bigger and better person and not say anything mean. If you do reply, it lets them think that they are able to bring you down. I am confident in myself to show the courage to not allow anyone else’s negativity to influence how I feel or react.

“I AM CONFIDENT IN MYSELF TO SHOW THE COURAGE TO NOT ALLOW ANYONE ELSE’S NEGATIVITY TO INFLUENCE HOW I FEEL OR REACT.”
Courage to me is showing bravery throughout the toughest times of life. Courage can come in different sizes. Courage to some may be riding a bike for the first time. To others, it could be walking into burning flames to save lives. My cousin, Michelle, has displayed a great amount of courage to me. In early 2008, Michelle was diagnosed with a severe form of brain cancer.

When I came home from school that day, my mom told me what was going on. She explained to me what brain cancer was and what was going to happen to Michelle. I was only six at the time, so I was kind of confused. The first thing I asked my mom was, “Is it contagious?” But as time went on, I began to understand what Michelle would be dealing with. I was upset that my cousin had to go through such pain, but I knew she was a fighter.

Michelle went through several surgeries. I would always visit her in the hospital to see how she was. As usual, she was up walking around and making some jokes. Throughout her treatment, Michelle kept her positive attitude. I was surprised that she could be so happy even though she was battling a life threatening disease. Not even I would be able to do that. Over time, Michelle got better. She started chemotherapy and each day got stronger. I remember when Michelle’s hair fell out. She acted as if it was normal. She was able to walk outside, go to a store, and hang out at the beach on warm summer days. Michelle was oblivious to the looks and whispers. She was so brave.

Out of nowhere, the cancer began to get worse. I didn’t understand why this had happened to such a kind and innocent person. Michelle began to get weaker. She was now given a wheelchair and cane. Michelle knew that she would get stronger, and she did. She started physical therapy and gained some strength, but her cancer kept growing. One day in October we did our first cancer walk. We walked around Castle Island about once or twice. Michelle came in her wheelchair. My family discouraged her from walking, but she did something I never expected. She stood up out of her wheelchair and she walked. People at the finish line congratulated her. She ended the walk with a smile across her face.

In late February of 2010, Michelle’s cancer got worse. She couldn’t do things like she used to. The doctors said she wouldn’t make it. They stopped treatment. Even though Michelle knew they were her final days, she stayed positive. She made sure each day lasted. Michelle lost her battle with cancer on March 3, 2010. It was really devastating to know someone you love so much could be taken away from you so fast. I truly miss Michelle, and hope that she is looking down on my family and me. Michelle’s courage proved that even through your toughest time of life, you can always have a positive attitude.

“Courage to me is showing bravery throughout the toughest times of life.”
Courage is when you do something where there is a risk of failure. Courage is stepping out of your comfort zone to overcome obstacles. I did this last year at my First Lego League (FLL) Competition, which was a Lego robotics competition. My team, The Electricitrees, represented The Park School, and consisted of seven Fourth and Fifth Graders. The challenges we faced were remarkable. An important part of this competition was programming the robots to complete tasks known as “the missions”. First, we had only eleven practices, or eleven hours, before the competition took place in December at Boston University Academy. Programming robots was time consuming, with many rounds of trial and error. Second, the team scores when the robots complete the task correctly, and receives a penalty if the robots don’t. Based on the two reasons above, our team decided to attempt only three out of the fourteen missions. The third challenge was that we would have one, and only one, chance to demonstrate how our robots would accomplish the tasks in front of hundreds of other teams and thousands of spectators on the day of the Competition.

All of these challenges made me so nervous that I started to have stress dreams about two weeks before the competition. In my dreams, we were at the competition. When I activated the program, the tiny robot started banging madly on the walls of the table. It made three backwards circles, picked up the poor Lego construction worker, and threw him off the table while breaking his head off. Then, the tiny robot committed suicide by driving over the edge of the table. The judges started coughing madly and politely tried their best not to laugh. Sweat beaded up on my forehead, and I was drowning. I would wake up with my teammates’ sad faces stuck in my mind for days.

Back to the reality. After many exhausting practice sessions, we were finally there, at the real competition! It was lunch break. Our programs were accurately executed, but we only planned to tackle three of the fourteen missions, while most other teams demonstrated how they could complete more than nine tasks! During the first half of the competition, our robotics team felt like a tiny chick with a genetic mutation, engaged in a one-sided battle against an angry eagle. The world was twirling around me. I was jolted out of my daze when my teammate, Tommy, slapped my back. We both agreed that we couldn’t win the competition at that rate, so we started to converse about what to do next. I asked Tommy if we should program a new mission. As if an imaginary light bulb lit up in our heads, we decided to go for our fourth mission, “Apprenticeship.” The steps of “Apprenticeship” are as follows: 1. Build a random Lego model. 2. Pack it in a Lego suitcase. 3. Put the suitcase at the end of the table. 4. Have your robot grab the suitcase and carry it back to the base. 5. Take the suitcase out of the robot’s grasp, unpack it, and then take the Lego model apart, and rebuild it. 6. Pack up the model in the suitcase and have the robot take the suitcase back to the end of the table. It would be difficult to even just program both tasks for the robot in thirty minutes, not to mention the long time that it might take to modify the program for better precision. After we spent twenty-eight minutes on the programming, a man’s voice said, “Two more minutes. Get ready. Right. Now, Team Electricitrees, please prepare to line up.” While Tommy, Nathan, and I were frantically overloading our own nerves trying to program the robot correctly, the starting bell sounded. With a heavy sigh, we slowly dragged our feet to the table.
A silence spread over the entire crowd, one so deep, mysterious, and tense that even a squirrel would feel alarmed. To us, though, it was as if the silence was roaring in our ears. Our hearts pounded. It was my turn to activate the “Apprenticeship” mission. I could feel the sweat beading up on my forehead, one tiny annoying droplet of sweat by another tiny annoying droplet of sweat. I activated the program. The judges cocked their heads sideways. Then the robot dragged along the course. My ears were becoming deaf from the silence. Slowly, it picked up the suitcase. The adrenaline coursed throughout my body. It made me feel queasy.

Then, the robot slowly turned backwards towards home base. It crawled with the speed of a child of a caterpillar and a sloth. It crossed the border of the home base. Step 4 out of 6: check!! Then I took the model out. I tugged at the pieces. The model wouldn’t come apart. It was too strong. My hands were sweating, dripping onto my legs and dissipating into my t-shirt. My hands started getting slippery. It was hopeless! I used all my strength to break the model and finally, it broke into many tiny pieces. I calmly picked the pieces up and quickly built the model back together. The robot continued. Step 5: completed! Step 6: completed! Bingo! Relief finally coursed through my body, sweeping away all the adrenaline. A happy bird chirped inside my heart, “We succeeded!”

This experience was unforgettable because Tommy and I stood up to the challenge and solved a difficult programming problem within only thirty minutes and in front of thousands of spectators! Looking back, I’m really glad that I took the risk. It’s not just that it worked out, it’s that I did something I wasn’t sure I could do. This was scary, but rewarding. I showed not only myself, but also my team that we are capable of taking on more challenges. Even if I had messed up the mission, I think I would still be glad that I tried, because that’s how I can learn from my mistakes. Plus, it was much better to take advantage of the opportunity and try than to just sit there and regret that I hadn’t tried. Our team moved from 21st place to 12th place because of “Apprenticeship.” Even though we did not get any award from this competition, I learned that success is not just about the achievement we get. It is also about the courage that we show by overcoming towering obstacles.

“Looking back, I’m really glad that I took the risk. It’s not just that it worked out, it’s that I did something I wasn’t sure I could do.”
Phaedra Hart
Karen Wheeler, Teacher
Keith Middle School

Courage to me means helping the ones you love through a difficult situation when you are having a hard time with the situation yourself. You stay strong for them.

A time where I feel I exhibited courage was when I was eleven years old and I went to visit my grandmother who had declined in her state of mental health. She was getting old and didn’t remember things very well anymore. Dementia is what the doctors diagnosed her condition as. She needed to go live in a nursing home.

That smelly, old, loud, crazy-like place scared me half to death. I kept going to visit her regardless. My visits seemed to cheer her and brighten her day, whether she knew me or not. Sometimes she did and sometimes she didn’t, and sometimes both in the same visit. I was scared. It was my grandmother’s body, but not the grandmother I knew and loved that I was interacting with. “Where did my grandmother go?” I wondered.

Time and time again, I would go see my grandmother in that smelly, old, loud, crazy-like place that scared me half to death. I got to know some of the staff and residents who worked and lived there, but that only put me a little at ease. I still had to stay strong for my grandmother. I would try to make our visits light and upbeat and play along with whoever she thought I was. One day I had the idea of bringing her beloved dog J.T. to see her. That visit not only cheered her up, but cheered up everyone else in the nursing home as well. However, visit after visit, I saw her decline. I knew her time with us was not going to be long, seeing this happen and hearing my family talk. I knew that I was going to lose my grandmother and she was going to die. The only question was, when and how? She made it through a pacemaker being implanted. We would go to see her many more times and find just a shell of a person, no longer animated like my grandmother was. I was scared to lose her, and I did in a way, but she was still physically before me. I had to keep my courage up to keep from bawling my eyes out. Crying is crying, but I felt as if I had to keep the atmosphere happy so as not to make her sad.

Not long after my last visit with the shell of my grandmother, we received a phone call saying that my grandmother had expired. Then the floodgates opened and all of my courage poured out of me.

Staying strong for the ones you love when they are in a dire situation is my definition of courage.

“Courage to me means helping the ones you love through a difficult situation when you are having a hard time with the situation yourself. You stay strong for them.”
Hi, my name is, Aaliyah Jade Dompier. I am here to tell you guys about the first time I ever got courage. What is courage? Do you know the meaning of courage, or even what courage is? The real meaning of courage in the dictionary is the quality of mind or spirit that enables a person to face difficulty, danger, pain, without fear; bravery. My meaning of courage is to be brave, face your fears, and stand up for someone or something, or to someone or something. My example of courage is getting taken away at age five, but I would call it, “The Bravery of Loss.” One question I always asked my family, is, “Would I ever see my family again?” Heads up: I had two other younger sisters at the time; one named Alannah Sky Dompier, and the other sister is named Azariah Lee Dompier.

My dad had a job at Walmart. He woke up at 5:00 AM, went to work, came back, went to sleep, and he did the same thing over and over every day. One day, when I was two and Alannah was one, my meme, (meme means grandma in French) went to check the mail and left the door open, so Azariah’s cat, Tico, ran out. Alannah ran out after the cat, and I ran out after her. My mom left Azariah up-stairs in her crib and came running outside. She saw me save Alannah from almost getting hit by a car. We all went in except for the cat, Tico. It was really hard for me because no one knows what would have happened to her. I got so, so, scared. I could have lost one of my sisters, if I wasn’t there to save her.

“I am so disappointed in you two. That is unacceptable. I could have lost you,” my mother said, looking at Alannah in the eye, disappointingly. “If Aaliyah wasn’t there, then you could have gotten badly hurt. There was a car coming and the driver couldn’t see either of you because you two are too short.”

There were two choices I had to make: getting mom, or getting Alannah myself. If I went to get mom, she could have been hurt, but when I came in, she wasn’t hurt. What I learned was if someone is getting hurt, go tell someone, but if they are going to get hurt before someone makes it in time, if you won’t get hurt, go help them, then tell someone once they are safe. Now, I still think that situation was pretty scary. At least I can be proud of myself. That was the first time I EVER had courage. My years of three and four passed by. Here is where I am at age five: I was signed up for a beauty pageant, but that doesn’t matter.

So here we are at age six, the main part of the story, when I get taken away. Someone knocks on the door.

“Knock, knock.”

My mom gets the door. It’s the family’s DCF worker, Pam. She comes in saying that all three of the kids had to get taken away. So she put me in a foster home. Alannah and Azariah got put in different foster homes, but while Dad filled out the papers, I sat on my mom’s lap crying with her.

“Mommy, do they really have to do this, and why are they doing this?” I cried, and asked. “I’m afraid they do, and they are doing this because Dad and I argue a lot, and you always block your ears. Also we didn’t know how to work together to take care of you guys,” Mom replied.

After the papers were signed, and my mom and I finished our little talk, Pam took me to a foster home. I spent my seventh birthday with the foster family. During that year, I went home at some point. This time, not my real home, because Pam kicked Dad and me out of our house. My mom stayed there. My dad and I had nowhere to live. We were homeless, so we went to a shelter. We were in the shelter for about four years. At age eight and nine, we never celebrated my birthday, because we were still in the shelter. At age ten, we found an apartment in Worcester. My mom moved to Quincy, and in the middle of the year 2015, April 30th, she moved to New Mexico. My mom is coming back to Boston soon. Now I’m eleven, at a program called Harrington House, and I go to school at the McKinley Middle School.

It was hard because through all these rough times, I still love my family. I still ask if things will go back to the way they were back then.
Being courageous is thinking on your feet, doing the impossible, being brave and facing your fears. Other examples of courage include going somewhere new to you and making new friends. Max had to use courage by facing Leukemia head on, and inspiring people in the process. I show courage when I come back to school after having a “bad day” due to my anxiety and depression.

When I have a bad day, it is a very horrible day. The reason I have “bad days” is because of my anxiety and anger issues against other people. So you don’t want to meet that version of me on that bad day. It feels like I become a ball of fire in my head, and afterwards I have a lot of depression. One Tuesday, I had one of the worst days I ever had.

That afternoon at the end of the day in homeroom, I was really upset with my classmate. My classmate, Larry, was teasing me all day, and I felt like I couldn’t ignore it anymore. I started to chase him around the school and called him names. I really wanted to punch him, but I didn’t. I was really mad and upset with him. I really couldn’t control myself or my feelings. What makes me different is the aftermath. In the aftermath of getting upset, I then get extremely depressed. I cry uncontrollably, punch lockers and walls, and leave to get away from the situation. I did these actions on this Tuesday, and as a result, I had to go to the emergency room to make sure I was safe. I felt like the world hated me, and it just went downhill from there. I knew I had to go back to school eventually and face everyone.

After this incident it took a lot of courage to come back to school and face my teachers, students, and friends. I felt nervous and very lonely. I felt like all of my friends wouldn’t want to be friends with me anymore after one of my “bad days.” Coming back into my homeroom requires courage because I was afraid someone would say something about the incident to me. When I have one of these episodes, it feels like the sun with no clouds.

To me, courage can mean many things, but it’s personal. I use courage when I have anxiety and depression and come back from it. It seems like I need courage every day, but I know I can grow from it. Courage can make someone become stronger, and I am stronger today for using courage.

“TO ME, COURAGE CAN MEAN MANY THINGS, BUT IT’S PERSONAL.”
My story of courage started with my dad and me. I was just five years old and we lived in the Dominican Republic. I didn’t really know my mom that much when I was growing up. We sometimes spoke on the phone and I knew her voice, but I never really knew the person on the other end of the line. When I got older, I started to realize that my dad could not take care of me by himself. When I turned seven years old, I had to leave my dad and move in with my mom. It was very challenging because I did not really know my mom, or what she looked like, or how she was as a mother. I had to leave all of my friends, which was heartbreaking to me, but I knew I had to do it. It took all the courage in me to let go of what I used to know and be open to being in a new place with a new part of my family. I had many reasons to find courage. First, it was for my dad, because he needed to be in a better place. Second, I knew I could have better opportunities in the United States with my mother. Third, I could finally meet the person behind the phone line after all these years.

As it was planned, I soon departed the Dominican Republic and got ready for my flight to the United States of America. Then, there she was—waiting for me at the airport. She had dark brown eyes and light brown hair and a voice like a librarian. And most importantly, she was my mom. After a while, I started to get used to Boston. I grew to love my two brothers, who I later met in Boston. I grew to love my mom, my new friends, and also my teachers at the new school. I especially like my 6th grade Humanities teacher. I love it here in Boston.

Courage taught me how to not hold onto the past. It helped me feel comfortable with my new life in Boston and to believe that there is hope for the better. Courage to me is when you go out of your comfort zone to do something better for yourself.
People have asked me what courage means, and my response has been, “I think courage is like a moment when you are in a hard situation but still show perseverance and effort to get past any obstacle or the hard situation you have been in.” One time I have shown courage was when my parents got divorced, and I remember that day perfectly.

It was May 18, 2013. I’ll never forget that day. My mother and father got into a huge discussion. Before, like in any other marriage, my mom and dad had their arguments. But never one like this.

I was frightened, hidden behind the couch, but I could hear my father screaming at my mother. Suddenly everything got quiet after a loud noise in my parents’ room. My heart sank from fear, as if I was standing in front of a monster. Then my eyes were filled with tears and started to fall onto my cheeks. After a little while, I heard my parents’ door open.

Suddenly, I heard my mom’s sweet-as-candy voice saying, “Yari mija, where are you?” as she looked in my room.

Sobbing, I said to her, “Mami, I’m right here. What happened with you and Papi?” So many questions hit my mind at that moment, but the most important one for me to ask my mom was, “Mom, are you okay?” I was so worried.

With her gentle voice, she said, “Yari, your dad and I are getting divorced and he’s leaving.” I could hear her voice starting to fall apart, and she started to cry. My mom was a strong woman, but she had her moments when she would start crying.

At that age, I didn’t really understand what was happening, but I knew my dad left. Some days I would go into my room and start crying because I missed my dad so much. I would beg my mom to make him come back, but her answer would be, “Honey, I can’t.”

After a couple of months I started to not feel so sad about my dad leaving, and I started to feel that my mom and I were better off without him. Then I realized that my mom and I were stronger without my dad. I realized that my mom was an independent woman who fought through life and never gave up, even when my dad left us. So was I.

“Then I realized that my mom and I were stronger without my dad.”
Courage means the quality of mind or spirit that enables a person to face difficulty or danger without fear; bravery. But I don’t think that definition goes far enough. I think that courage greets you when you face hard changes in your life, and when you need to stand up for yourself when something is pushing you down.

My oldest sister was born with Cystic Fibrosis (CF), which is an inherited disease of the secretory glands. Secretory glands are in charge of making mucus and sweat. My parents didn’t know about this condition until my sister was five months old. As she got sicker, my parents decided that she should take some tests to see what was going on. Soon, they got the bad news and were devastated.

She needed to have her own physical therapist, who still comes today to give her physical therapy (PT) every day of the week. She has many doctors’ appointments. The saddest part is when she has to go to the Children’s Hospital in Boston for as few as two weeks to as many as two months. The hospital is like her second home. She also has to take many medications to help her stay as healthy as possible, and now there is a new type of medication called “Orcambi” that she takes twice a day to help her stay at home for a longer time.

When I got to the age that I was able to know and understand what difficulties my sister had been going through, I immediately got the courage to do everything I could to help. I’d give her massages, get her what she needed, go with her to places so I could be by her side if anything happened, and visit her at the hospital.

I still remember sitting at the bay window in my house and watching her physical therapist give her PT for the first time. I gradually would take a step forward and sit on the chair in the same room as them. Soon, I would sit on the same couch that she had PT on. Finally, I started actually helping her with her PT. To this day, I’ve had the courage to keep helping. I also remember giving her massages and falling asleep by her side at night when I was younger. I was happy for what I was doing, and pleased to know that I was making a good change in someone’s life.

I have the courage to get her the things that she needs right away so she won’t hurt herself. I usually help her with her Sunday medication restock, which is getting her medications ready for the next week. I get the courage to go places with her whenever I can so that I can help her and spend time with her at the same time. She taught me what to do if something happens so I can help her in any situation. I also have the courage to visit her at the hospital. I visit her because I love her and I don’t like when I can’t see her for a long time, especially when she stays at the hospital for longer than usual.

Even though my sister has helped me to discover courage inside of myself, she is the most courageous person I know. I will always remember these words she taught me:

“H.O.P.E.– Hold On, Pain Ends”
What if somebody threatened your grandpa? One day, on June 3, 2010 my grandpa and I went to the store to buy some candy because I wanted something sweet. When we were in line, this random guy went up to my grandpa and me and he said, “Yo old man, buy me something or I’ll beat you up!” Then my grandpa said, “Excuse me, sir, please don’t talk to me like that in front of my grandson.” Then I went to the car and I got my older brother who is twenty-five, and I told him, “Some crazy guy is trying to hit our grandpa.” After that my older brother went in the store and said, “Leave our grandpa alone before I beat you up!” Then we never saw that dude again. This was courageous because, even though my grandpa was an old man, he stood up for himself to defend him and me. What would you do if somebody threatened your grandpa?

“HE STOOD UP FOR HIMSELF TO DEFEND HIM AND ME.”
Ambar Hidalgo
Kamanampata Dibinga, Teacher
William Monroe Trotter Innovation School

To me, courage means to have faith and accomplish something you didn’t think you could accomplish.

Do you know how it feels not being around your two younger siblings? Well, I do. I’m never around them, but I have faith and courage that one day I will see them and learn to love them. I cannot be sad all the time. I called my dad and asked him why I could never see my sisters, and he told me, “It just does not work out.” My mom told me not to be ashamed, and I said, “I’m not ashamed, he should be ashamed.” I used courage and figured things out. So, I called my dad’s wife and told her I wanted to spend the weekend with them! She picked me up on Friday, but my dad was not home. When my dad walked through the door, I cried because I missed him so much and because of joy. We watched a movie as a family, and my sisters and I had the best time staying up late. My sister told me she will never forget me and that she looks up to me. Then it was time to go. Now my dad picks me up on Fridays. I knew I could count on courage to get me through this situation.

“I KNEW I COULD COUNT ON COURAGE TO GET ME THROUGH THIS SITUATION.”
Courage to me is choosing the right thing over your own needs. It’s also overcoming obstacles with a positive attitude. A time I showed courage was the time I worked up the nerve to asked my mom to quit smoking.

My mom has been smoking longer than I’ve been alive. My mother has arthritis in her knees, which means she has a problem with her joints. She is ALWAYS in tons of pain, but she is always busy and is the queen of our house. Looking back, I can remember always seeing the little signs of her smoking. Whenever I would come into the car after her, she would smell smoky.

Then my dad finally pulled me over and whispered in a serious tone, “Your Mommy smokes.”

I quickly became more vigilant about my surroundings when I was near her. When I was in South Carolina to visit my grandparents, I saw her taking them out a pack of cigarettes. I never told her I saw them. But then I did the worst thing in the history of, well, EVERYTHING!!! I stole her pack of cigarettes. I hid them in my sock drawer when she was not looking, but she instantly knew I stole them.

“Ashley?” she asked calmly. She had a super big smile, yet her eye was twitching.

“Yes, Mother, dearest?” I responded, cool as a cucumber.

“Did you take something from me?”

“Not that I know of, no.”

“I know you took them. I do know you, you know.”

My mom came back with the pack in her hand. I ran into my room once she left to go to the kitchen. My room looked like the result of a hurricane, tornado, and war all wrapped into one. I was absolutely mortified. The drawers of my cabinet were on the floor and the clothes inside of them had fallen down.

“No! I know how much she cared about this pack of trash,” I thought angrily, as I put the clothes back into their correct places.

I continued stealing them, though. And failing. So my mom sat me down and explained why she smoked. I quickly felt sympathy for her. She was going through gallons worth of pain, and I took away her form of relief. Wait! I then realized I was trying to save her LIFE!!! Go figure!

“I have no regrets about my actions,” I stated. I tried to use my most serious voice, even though I ended up sounding really childish.

“I know,” she replied calmly. “You’re very brave to do this.”

“Yeah! I AM pretty great.”

Ever since then, my mom has made a lot of progress. She has not one but two “stop smoking” apps on her phone. For one of the apps, you have to choose a picture of why you need to stop smoking, and my mother put a picture of me! A couple of weeks ago, she celebrated a hundred days of not smoking. My mother is WAY braver than me and shows courage every day that she tries to quit smoking. I am very proud to be her daughter!
I was courageous when I went to the special Olympics. I had to meet new kids. I was afraid at first. I tried talking to people and I met new friends. I met lots of nice people. I was very happy.

It was really hot outside. I was sweating. I threw a ball really far. I got a medal. I got a sash and crown from Miss Massachusetts. I felt like a princess. I was happy and brave.

“I FELT LIKE A PRINCESS.”
“Never giving up is the key to being successful.” - Heidi Gerding. Courage means something brave that is done or going beyond fear and achieving something that changes you. This quote says that anything is possible. If you just try, you can accomplish many things. I was held back a grade, and it turned my life around. I am always trying to do my best on things, but just thinking back on the moment when I got the news makes me frustrated because I just feel like I want to go back and change what I did wrong before.

One of the biggest challenges I have ever faced was last summer when my mother had to go to a meeting at my school with the Head of School and the Assistant Head of School. They told my mother I was not meeting school expectations. They told my mother I had to repeat sixth grade because I was struggling in school. When I found out about it I was very frustrated and scared. I was trying not to pay attention to anyone at that time and just focus and pay attention to my schoolwork. I remember that on the first day of school I felt really uncomfortable with the other students. I also remember feeling really nervous when I saw my previous teachers. On the first day of school I was very quiet, and I did not talk to anyone for the first days of school. I told myself I was going to make friends with these students, so I started talking to people. I feel more comfortable talking to them and I get along with my fellow classmates very well and can talk to them without a problem.

I showed courage by being confident after I repeated a grade. I wanted the teachers to know that I have been trying to change when the teachers said they have seen an improvement in me. Now I ask teachers for extra help when I don’t understand some things. When I struggle I always ask someone a question. Before, I was really not paying attention to the teachers. The teachers would tell me to do my work but I would always talk to my friends or get distracted somehow.

I got help from my parents and teachers. Whenever I needed help they told me to ask them because it would make me better. But I should really thank my mother and my brother for helping me get through this. “I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear.” - Nelson Mandela

“I WANTED THE TEACHERS TO KNOW THAT I HAVE BEEN TRYING TO CHANGE.”
What was in that newsletter that got me so determined to do this? It wasn’t a whole lot really, just two or three sentences. For me, though, those two or three sentences meant a whole lot.

It seemed like a perfectly normal day. I was in class and it was the end of the day. My teacher was handing out the monthly newsletter and, as usual, I quickly glanced at it and put it in my bag. Later that day after school, I took out the newsletter and started reading it. When I was about halfway through with it, an article caught my eye. I looked down and read it. As I was reading it, my eyes started bulging and my heart started beating fast and hard inside my body. Thump, thump, thump. When I had finished reading it, I was surprised, shocked, angry, and upset all at once. We might be getting uniforms next year but the kids wouldn’t be getting a say in it!

As soon as this thought occurred to me, I ran over to my friends and told them about it.

“So we don’t get any say in this, like at all?” asked my friend Lexi.

I answered, “I don’t think so, but let’s ask Joe. He’s a teacher here and he’ll probably know more on the subject.”

We went over to Joe and he told us, “The teachers and principal have been voting on the subject for years.”

I had been going to this school for seven years and neither I nor any of my friends knew about this! What this information meant was that no kid had been getting any say on this matter for years! After we talked to Joe and got more information, we went back to our table and started debating.

“We should do something about this!” I said. “But we could get in trouble!” replied some of my other friends. “How can we get in trouble for standing up for what we believe in?”

This went on for a few days, but we dropped the subject eventually. A couple of weeks later, I was at a get-together with my neighbors and the topic of uniforms came up. I told them about my idea to do something about kids getting a say in getting uniforms. They said I should do a petition! What a great idea! That night, I went to bed so happy. It was like I had just been told I was going to Hawaii or Aruba. I was going to do the biggest thing that I had pretty much done in my entire life. I was going to stand up to adults and show them what I believed in.

The next day, I told my friends the idea of doing a petition and Lexi said that she would do it with me. Right away, we set out to make a plan. We would make a petition, then go around the school and get as many people as we could to sign it. That’s exactly what we did. During lunch, recess, and even a little bit of class time (the teachers let us!) we went around the school going to classes and saying, “We’re here because we want you to sign our petition to have kids get a right to vote on uniforms.”

Every class we went to, more people would sign, and Lexi and I would become more confident. This went on for two or three weeks, going to and from classes. When our petition was as full as it was going to get, we
took it to an SPC (School Parent Council) meeting. Lexi and I showed up at the meeting, and someone directed us to the science room, where the meeting was being held in the school. The tables had been pushed together, creating one big one, and chairs lined the perimeter. Lexi and I took our seats towards the back of the gigantic table, and everyone greeted us kindly. Both of us were really nervous but also really proud because we had worked so hard on this. Not only that, but we had taken a big risk with this. What if our friends were right that we could get in trouble for doing this? Not only that, but we were just kids and the adults didn’t have to listen to us. We could just read our essay and they could not even talk about the subject. However, I tried not to think those thoughts.

“It will be alright. Even if they don’t discuss it, at least we know we worked hard and actually did something instead of just sitting on our butts and complaining,” I thought to myself as we sat down.

The meeting started, and I could tell that Lexi was really nervous too.

“It’ll be ok,” I reassured her. “Even if they don’t do anything about it, at least we know that we tried. Right?”

“Right,” she replied with a lot more confidence than before.

“Welcome. We’re glad you could make it,” said my friend Liam’s mom. She had been really nice when we talked to her about the subject and had suggested that we come to the meeting. I think I speak for Lexi too when I say that we were really glad that she was there that night.

First, everyone talked about some school fundraising stuff, then, it was our turn. Lexi wanted me to read the essay, since I was the one who started this whole thing. So I stood up, back straight and looking as proud as I could, and started reading. When I was done everyone politely clapped, but they didn’t talk about it. Nothing! Not even a peep. I felt really bad after the meeting because, as I said before, we had put a lot of hard work, time, and effort into this petition and essay. Yet the people at the meeting didn’t even talk about it.

Then, we found out about the School Site Council (SSC). This council consists of the teachers and principal of the school. This was exactly where we needed to be! Lexi and I excitedly did research and went to the next SSC meeting a few weeks later. This was even more stressful because these weren’t the parents anymore. No, these were the teachers and the principal. However, we both had to do this. It was far too late to go back now. So we went, nerves and everything.

When we were at the school for the meeting, my hands were almost shaking and my voice almost cracking. But I just kept thinking, “You can do this, Natalie, you can DO this!” And I did do it. Just as before, there were other things to be discussed first, so we waited our turn. When it was our turn, I stood up and read as best as I could. After I read, everyone clapped, AND they asked questions! They really talked to us and asked what we thought they could do better about getting the kids involved or what we thought would be a good agreement. The entire rest of the day, I was so happy and proud that all of our hard work was worth something to them. Lexi was really proud too. I could see it. You wouldn’t be able to wipe that huge grin off of her face even if the world was ending. That made ME even more happy and joyous because I love to see people that happy. Also, we had achieved our goal, and we had done it together.

For the next month or two, nothing really happened. Then we got the news. There would be no uniforms! I was overjoyed! Even though the kids didn’t get a say, I knew we had helped the teachers, principal, and parents make that decision, and that’s honestly what made me happy to know that all of our hard work had paid off for the both of us. You know how I said that there was news? Well, that news came in the monthly newsletter.

In those few months, I learned something that I will always keep with me. I learned what courage really is. It’s standing up for what you believe in, even if it means taking a risk.

“We had achieved our goal, and we had done it together.”
What courage is to me is to keep going even though the times are difficult. I moved here in 2012 at eight years old with my mom while my dad stayed in Haiti. At first I was okay with it, until my mom said we were staying a little longer. A little longer turned into a year.

I got used to the United States and learned English watching TV (I’m not kidding). The more years I stayed, the more I missed my dad. Sure, I could call him, but it wasn’t the same. My dad has tried several times to come but they keep rejecting him.

When it was finally time to visit him in Haiti I was really happy to see him. We had fun during my week and he playfully teased me. When I came back to the United States, times were harder. Every day I acted like everything was okay so my mom wouldn’t feel bad, but inside it really hurt. One day my dad called me and I told him everything. I remember he said to stop worrying, that he would be here soon. I don’t know how he could be so calm about it, but I understood what he meant. Even though he’s not here, a piece of him will always be with me. Of course it still hurts knowing he’s not there, but I look at the bright side – at least he is still alive and nothing bad has happened to him.

My dad also sets an example for me. He was in the army and throughout all that he never gave up. I envy my dad for being so strong and having so much courage. He is always happy and loves helping people who don’t have anything. He believes a smile and hug are worth more than money. I love my dad, and I have the courage to keep going no matter how much it hurts.

I think having courage is a really hard thing, but if you have someone to help you get through things, it gets easier. It’s hard being without my dad, but he is the most courageous person I know, so I want to have enough courage to know that he is not gone and he will be back soon. That is what courage means to me.

“Even though he’s not here, a piece of him will always be with me”
I may seem like a normal, ordinary sixth grade child, but the truth is, I have to be brave every day. To me, courage is shown when you find ways to stay strong through all the hard times in life. Courage isn’t always about looking for heroes in the world; it’s about your own bravery and confidence. My mother and I have needed to find courage many times because we’ve been alone for about eleven years. We’ve been through tough times, and always tried to make them better.

When I was close to a year old, my father left us. That meant my mother had to raise me on her own, yet she also still had to go to work and school. My grandmother often took care of me, so that my mom could manage to put herself through school.

I was five when my father came back into my life. I began visiting him at his house for a few hours every Friday. Although I was there to see him and spend time with him, he never paid much attention to me. Whenever I visited, he went out to bars and would come back high. I dealt with this situation for about six years, until I couldn’t deal with it any more. At that point, I made a decision to stop calling him. Whenever my mom was working or at classes, I spent most of my time at my grandmother’s apartment. My father lived upstairs from her, but if he was home, I refused to go and see him. I tried to keep him out of my life as much as possible. It was easier to be happy if I avoided being around him. My father has used up all of his chances with me, and although it takes courage to admit that, I know it’s for the best, at least for now.

Today, I am twelve and on the honor roll at my school. My mother and I are still alone, but whenever she needs a helping hand, I am always there; and she is always there for me. When I need her, my mom is always by my side, we’re a great team. For example, if I need a little bit of money for something, she dips into her savings for my needs. When my mom is sick, I’ve always pitched in to do most of the housework for her.

My mom still goes to school, and she’s almost finished working towards becoming an R.N., which stands for Registered Nurse. My father, on the other hand, has not changed much. He still smokes and may do other unknown things. My mother and I have been doing well on our own, though. We even moved to a new and much bigger house. I now believe the tough times in life can actually make you a stronger person.

Sometimes I still wonder about what it would be like to have a more involved, supportive dad, but I have learned you don’t always need one. What courage really means to me now is to stay strong and work through those tough times when life brings you down.

“Courage isn’t always about looking for heroes in the world; it’s about your own bravery and confidence.”
Elizabeth Kudinova
Jacquelyn Wesner, Teacher
Loyola Academy at Saint Columbkille Partnership School

Courage, the word means something to us all. Courage has many meanings. The dictionary defines courage as, “Strength in the face of pain or grief.” Kids say “it is when you face your fears.” But everyone can agree that we all need courage in our lives. No matter how young or old you are, you will face the time where you must rely on your courage. My time came when I was just a little girl, just four years old. This is my story.

When I was four years old, my family moved to the United States. My twin brother and I didn’t know any English whatsoever. The first day of school, I remember it like it was yesterday, and that is when the trouble started. When we first arrived at St. Columbkille School, my brother and I were more scared than a scaredy-cat. When we walked into the K1 classroom of Mrs. Ward, I instantly almost peed my pants. All those faces, those weird words everyone was speaking. Not a single word made sense. So that was the moment of courage. With no language whatsoever I walked into the classroom.

A lady walked up to me, “Welcome,” she said. Now I didn’t know that word yet, so all I heard was gibberish. She pointed me to a chair and I guessed that it was my seat. I guessed she was my teacher. As the day went on, I just followed everyone else - when I saw they were eating, I ate, when I saw they were having nap time, I had nap time. That is how the day went by. I didn’t understand a single word and almost cried, but I persevered. I fought through the tears and stood up. I had to use the bathroom. As scared as I was, I walked up to the teacher. I needed to use the bathroom. Using my best acting skills, I acted out my want. I pointed to myself, my pants, and the bathroom. And Mrs. Ward understood.

I continued these charades until I learned some new words, like “help” and “please”. My parents told me to say, “restroom” if I needed to use the bathroom. And I learned quickly. The ABCs quickly became words, then words became sentences.

Even though I was only four, I felt pride in my ability to be courageous. There are many definitions and quotes on courage. But Bethany Hamilton’s words really stuck with me. “Courage doesn’t mean you don’t get afraid. Courage means you don’t let fear stop you.” As I continue to grow, I still remember my first day in school in America: My day of courage.

Everyone faces courage—from little children to senior citizens. My story explains that you start experiencing courage at a young age. And no matter how old or how young you are, everyone is courageous. Everyone demonstrates courage every day. And just as Mary Anne Radmacher said, “Courage doesn’t always roar. Sometimes courage is the quiet voice at the end of the day saying, “I will try again tomorrow.” My story isn’t as disastrous as other stories, but it definitely is a story to remind you about the simple courageous things we do everyday.

“And no matter how old or how young you are, everyone is courageous.”
Maryam Zad  
Kendall Allen, Teacher  
Malik Academy

What do you think courage is? To me, courage means: an act or idea that you are scared to do but you still do it. My example of courage is an act you might have faced... like going on stage! I have severe stage fright. Until the day I had to perform, I have completely avoided the stage. Have you ever faced this problem too? Let us see how I chose to deal with this situation.

My story begins in the classroom. The teacher started talking about, “Islamic Week,” which is a week full of fun performances and contests. Every class had to present something. Our teacher picked poems. When I heard this, I started getting a nervous feeling that began in my stomach and slowly started to take over my body. With each word the teacher spoke, the feeling grew. I was going to perform all by myself, in a different language. The poem was about summer. I got super nervous. How was I going to do this? Will I have to drop out?

While we rehearsed our poems in class, the nervous feeling became very small. Only the principal and a few teachers were watching at that point. In class I felt comfortable. The nervous feeling was not so bad that I forgot the poem and started crying. However, during the actual performance, I knew I would feel really, really tense. I dreaded my turn for reciting the poem. I was not looking forward to it at all.

During the performance, the little seedling of nervousness grew into a giant monster. My fear kept rising up. My turn for reciting the poem was quickly approaching. I dreaded putting my hand on the cold metal of the microphone. My turn came. I felt a sudden spark of courage. I gulped down the fear and stress and began reciting my poem. I was still a little bit nervous, but courage helped me to recite the poem. I did forget some of the poem and I was on the verge of tears that threatened to go over the brim. However, I kept my head held high and swallowed back the tears. I had done it! I had faced my fears. I was so proud!

Therefore, having stage fright and still going on stage is an example of courage. I showed courage in this way, because courage is doing something even though you are scared to do it. Whether my performance turned out negatively or positively, I was and still am proud of myself. I was proud because I had done something I was very scared to do, but I pushed myself and achieved something I would have never thought possible. I would even do it again!

“I HAD DONE IT!  
I HAD FACED MY FEARS. I WAS SO PROUD!”
Courage to me is having the power to overcome a fear, be true to yourself, and if you fail one day, then get up and try again. A good quote that describes the courage I have shown is a quote by R.J. Palacio. In her book, Wonder, the character Augusta states, “Everyone in the world should get a standing ovation at least once in their life, because we all overcome the world.” This connects to my story because I overcame something that was hard for me to do, and when I did that, it felt like I overcame the world.

I was eight years old and in the second grade. I was walking to the coat room to hang up my coat and backpack on my hook. A bunch of other kids, mainly boys, were in the room too, but on the other side. They were horsing around, talking, and being goofy. Then one said, “You are so gay.” I was eight, so I didn’t really know what that word meant and why it was bad. The day after, I heard them repeat it. I was still, in my mind, trying to figure out what it meant. Every day I would stand in the corner and hear them say it. One day, I went home and decided to ask my mom what “gay” meant. Then my mom proceeded to tell me that it’s when girls like girls and boys like boys. She also told me that my aunt was gay and a lesbian. I asked her if it was bad to be gay and she said something that I will always remember. She said, “Gay is not bad at all. It’s not bad to be yourself.” In that moment, I knew that I was going to do what was right.

The next day I went into school and did something that I could have been made fun of for. Once again, I went into the coat room and waited to hear them say it. When they said, “You’re gay,” I stormed over to them, (mind you, I’m eight years old), and yelled, “BEING GAY ISN’T BAD; IT DOESN’T MATTER WHO A PERSON LIKES.” Then I said, “WHY DOES IT MATTER TO YOU ANYWAY?” I said it so fast, they couldn’t reply. I saw that they were shocked, and I was too. They simply said, “Okay,” then walked away.

I stood in the coat room alone. I was petrified that they might bully me or be mean to me. They didn’t, though. They did say it again, but every time I would tell them not to say that in such a rude way. To this day, when people use the word “gay” in a negative way, I tell them the same thing I told the boys that day in second grade. If my friends are with me, they always have my back. I learned that it’s important to be who you are and to stand up for who you are no matter what other people say. You will feel great after you stand up for yourself and others.

Courage to me is being strong in a situation that you could end up being bullied in, and staying true to yourself and your family. It is even doing the small things that to others might not be hard or scary, but to you are. This is what R.J. Palacio was saying at the end of her book Wonder. My story shows courage because I stood alone and, like Palacio said, had the strength to take on the world, even when life seemed scary. I will remember that day forever, and I will think of how kids, and even adults, face challenges and take the same road I did: the road of good.

“I LEARNED THAT IT’S IMPORTANT TO BE WHO YOU ARE AND TO STAND UP FOR WHO YOU ARE NO MATTER WHAT OTHER PEOPLE SAY.”
What does the word courage mean to me? To me, courage means to stand up, even if you’re the only one.

One day last year, I was on the school bus heading home. It was near the end of the bus ride that the moment happened. My friend, who I have known for a few years, started teasing a girl on the bus that I barely knew. He started judging how she looked. He said, “You look Asian,” and, “Your eyes look weird.” But then he took her backpack and said, “I’m going to throw it out the window!” So I went to him and tried to take it away to give it to the girl who is getting bullied. I finally got it. He started yelling at me for standing up for a girl I didn’t know. I told him it was the right thing to do. I said, “How about if you were her, how would you feel?”

He didn’t answer, and we didn’t talk for days. For me, it was hard because I stood up to a person that I have known for years. I had never had a friend who was a bully, but it was scary only because I have never stood up to a bully before. I was proud of myself because it is hard to stand up to people you once trusted and counted on. I have learned many things from this experience. The lesson that I learned the most is to always put yourself in someone else’s shoes or position. I never thought much about it before, but since I experienced it, it is much easier to understand.

To me, courage means to stand up, even if you’re the only one.
Yumi Son
Linda Roach, Teacher
St. John Paul II Catholic Academy

To me courage is something that is given to those who are in need, to those who are in terrible situations and to those who have fallen very ill. I’m going to tell you all about my situation. I’ll probably have this condition forever, but from this day forward I will not be ashamed that I have it.

Courage is something that I have already experienced. I think to myself, “Wow! So that’s what courage is.” Then I realize, “This isn’t where my courage ends. I will still have more and more.”

The first few years I started school were the first few years I got teased. When I was younger, I wore lots of long sleeved shirts and leggings because I was scared that my classmates were going to find out I have Ilven. Ilven is a kind of inflammation that is on the left side of my body. I didn’t like that it was on my body. Then one day my parents said it was too hot to be wearing long sleeves so they said I had to wear one of my short-sleeved shirts. That day I didn’t want to go to school but I had to. When I arrived at school, my dad took me in. As soon as I walked in, heads turned. They were whispering and making faces. After I saw all those faces I was embarrassed. I went to sit on the rug and as I did, kids were moving away from me. Even my best friends! As my class and I were going outside to play, some bullies came up to me. They started to round up some of my friends to come and look at me. They started to round up some of my friends to come and look at me. I felt like a fish in a fishbowl. They started to hit me, lightly at first, then harder. When I was being picked up at the end of the day, I was sad but I tried to have a good face. That went on for a few more days. Then came the day when I was fed up with all of it! So when we got outside, that same group came to me when I had my head down. When they started to hit me, I stood up and yelled at them. I stood up and said, “Stop! What’s wrong with you guys? You’ve never seen skin before?” They started to laugh. I started to yell again, saying, “I’m just a regular girl like you.”

As my courage grew stronger, I felt relieved. I was still the fish, but now they were in the bowl, and I was in the ocean, being free to be me.

“This isn’t where my courage ends.
I will still have more and more.”
What is courage to you? My definition of courage is when you rise to a challenge and stand up to what you believe it right. The famous writer, Ambrose Redmoon, once said, “Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the judgment that something else is more important than fear.” What that quote means is that you cannot be selfish and only care about yourself, because some things are more important. I believe police officers, firefighters, and the army have courage because they risk their lives to save others in danger. I also believe that everyone has courage when you make the right choices using your mind and heart.

My brother and I were playing tag near my cousin Mel’s house when two boys came by. Geo and Mel both ran, hiding behind me. I asked, “What’s wrong?” They told me that the two brothers were bullying them. I didn’t know anything about this because I was at camp in the morning and wasn’t there to see what was going on. I asked, “Mel, did you tell your mom?” She nodded yes. “What did she say?” I asked. Mel told me, “She wants us to stay away from them and come inside when they’re outside.”

“Okay, I’m going to walk away and hide behind that car over there. Pretend that I left, and when they come near you, I will watch what they are doing, then I will jump out and scare them,” I said. The boys did come and were walking near Mel and Geo, so I watched. In their eyes I could see that they were planning something bad, so I moved to a position where I could run and stop them. I could tell they saw me because they ran away. Then I went home with my brother because it was getting dark.

On the way home, I was thinking, and I had some questions for my brother. “So these boys have been bullying you and Mel?” I asked. “Yes, I already told them to leave us alone, but they wouldn’t listen!” he said. I could tell he was about to cry, and he was really scared. “Did you tell mom or dad? Do they know about this?” I asked. He started walking away slowly, and then he stopped. A few seconds later he started walking but he wasn’t talking at all. I could tell he hadn’t said anything to anyone.

I wondered. If I told my mom and dad they would get really mad, and my brother would get in trouble. If I didn’t tell them, my brother would get really beat up and be in serious trouble! I didn’t know what to do. I continued walking with my brother until we reached home and I opened the door. My brother wiped the tears off his face so no one would question him, and he went to his room.

The next day I woke up and Geo was not in his room. As I walked downstairs I asked my mom, “Where’s Geo?” My mom responded, “He went to Mel’s house. You can go too if you want.” Oh, no! I thought. Geo might get hurt if he’s outside with Mel and no adult was watching them! I took off my PJs and put on my clothes as fast as I could and ran to Mel’s house. When I got there I saw my brother and one of the boys pulling his hair. “Stop! Leave him alone!” I screamed.

One of the bullies saw me and ran away, leaving my brother crying in the middle of the street. The other bully was chasing my cousin, and he was kicking her. “We need to get home now!” I said. I helped Geo get up. “Mel, you need to come home now too!” I said. Mel started opening her door and once she closed the door I left with my brother. I now knew the choice I was going to have to make was going to hurt my brother and hurt my parents.
“Do you know that Geo and Mel have been bullied by the boys next door to Mel?” I said. “Wait, they were bullied?!?! Why didn’t anyone tell me before?!” My mom was worried. She didn’t want my brother and cousin getting hurt because she cares about us, and when we get hurt, she gets mad. “Who bullied them?” My mom put the dirty dishes down, and I told her the entire story from beginning to end.

Seconds after telling my mom everything, my dad came down and he looked at my brother with tears rolling down his cheeks. My mom was talking to my dad in Spanish and I understood every word she said to him. “Did you know Geo and Mel were being bullied!” my mom said in her angry voice. “By who?” asked my dad. “The boys next door to Mel!” I said. Everyone walked outside, with my brother and me standing behind our parents.

As we got closer to their house Mel came outside when the boys started playing that annoying game where they go up to someone’s door and ring the doorbell, then run away so they don’t get caught. That someone was Mel. My mom rang the doorbell and a lady came out smoking and wearing dirty clothing. “How can I help you?” said the lady. “Your children have been bullying my son, and I want you to stop them now!” my mother said, almost screaming at the lady.

The lady looked at her children and made a face at my mom. “My kids wouldn’t do anything like that,” she responded. I thought my mom was going to scream at her again, but because she is so nice and calm, she didn’t. “Yes they did. I am telling you to take care of your children and make sure they don’t hurt my children,” said my mom calmly. The lady gave my mom another look and responded again saying, “My kids wouldn’t do that.” After my family left, and ever since then, even though their mother didn’t cooperate, Mel and Geo were never bullied again.

“My definition of courage is when you rise to a challenge and stand up to what you believe it right.”
I felt like my heart was going to stop the moment my mom told me the saddest news. Well, for me at least it was sad, and I’m going to tell you why. We were moving from the house I was born in, and my life was great there. It was nighttime on the day we started moving. I rushed downstairs to tell my cousin Taylor, who is like my older sister. I told her and my aunt that I was leaving the house. When I told them, they seemed depressed. My aunt told me, “I wish you didn’t have to leave, I’m going to miss you so much.” I gave Taylor a big long hug. I thought I was going to cry a river.

That’s when Taylor told me “Be brave, you can always come back for a visit.” Her words ran through my mind. I thought I couldn’t do it but I wanted to show my brother my courage and how strongly I can handle things. We packed and left. We had settled in our new home and I tried to hold in my tears so my brother wouldn’t start crying too.

It was late and we didn’t have time to unpack, so my mom and my dad pulled out mattresses so we could rest until the next day. Everyone was tired and fell asleep. I couldn’t fall asleep, and I just lay there and cried. Even though I was crying I forced myself to believe that I had courage. I needed to stop crying over something I had no control over. The house meant so much to me. Life was easy and safe there. I had lots of fun in that house and never thought we would leave. It’s been years since we moved from the house. Whenever I go visit my cousin and my aunt, it still takes courage. I will never forget all the good memories. Even though my life has changed, I haven’t, and will not, lose my courage.

Being courageous is like being strong, self-confident, and getting over stuff. I know that I will always have the courage to be brave about moving the next time.

“Even though my life has changed, I haven’t, and will not, lose my courage.”
Every day at school, my best friend and I would always talk to each other and do things that best friends do. Everything was fine, until lunchtime. I could see that my best friend was being bullied; they threatened to hurt her and beat her up. She was the type of person who doesn’t like to cause any trouble, so they targeted her because they knew she wasn’t going to do anything about it.

It kind of scared me because I didn’t want anything to happen to her. I would watch her come inside the classroom every day, and I could see that she’d been crying.

The bullying was so bad that one day during lunch, I saw cuts and scars on her arms. I grabbed her arms and looked at them. “Why did you do that?” I asked, sounding a bit worried. She looked at me and said her cat did it, but I knew she was lying because of the way she was trying to come up with an excuse.

I would get more and more worried for her, until I stopped and just had enough. “Let’s go!” I said to her. “Where?” she asked. “To go tell the teacher, because it’s not going to stop unless you just tell the teacher,” I said. I looked at her seriously.

Five minutes later, she told the teacher and was sent to the principal’s office to go talk about the situation. This made me proud because my best friend wouldn’t be getting bullied anymore, even though she might be called a “snitch.” But it was worth it because she would be safe and wouldn’t be hurting herself anymore.

Courage to me means being brave enough to speak up, determined to help another person out, and having the ability to step up. Don’t be scared to show your courage!
Courage to me means facing your fears, experiencing something new, and discovering that you like it. Also, overcoming obstacles with time. It’s like your first time performing on a stage and loving what you did, hearing the people clapping and cheering for you, and yelling your name. At the end of the day, you want to do it again. My story of courage is about when my dad left me and my family. We had to sometimes help my mother out when she needed help. I also had to be the bigger person and try my best in the situation.

I showed courage when my dad left me to go live with his mother. It was the saddest thing in my life because it was really hard not having a dad around. When I got older, he would help me with my kindergarten school work or kiss me goodnight at the end of the day before I went to bed. My dad left me when I was five or six, so I was old enough to remember things.

I remember the last Christmas with him. It was magical. On that Christmas day, I realized how much I really appreciate him. I am still grateful for the little things he does, and my family is as well. I do see him once or twice a year if I’m lucky, but I do miss him really bad. That’s why I feel bad for kids that don’t really grow up with a dad. You’ll persevere through it. I believe you will.

For me, not living with my dad takes courage because I miss out on all those father-daughter bonds: going fishing with him, telling him my first crush, and all that other cool stuff daughters do with their fathers. This is why I show courage. I don’t get to talk to him one-on-one on a daily basis. I wish I could grow up with a father. I would give anything and everything, but this is why I show courage.

Finally, I show courage when I am a team player at home. I have younger brothers who are twins, and are very active. I tell them to listen to my mother and to get ready for school. I help them with their homework and act like their mother. I love my younger brothers, but they have a lot of energy. I show them how to be a team player in the house. They look up to me and listen. I try to be a good role model for them because I don’t want my mother to stress and be tired. I show courage every day at home because I want my brothers and mother to be happy and not worry that my father is not living with us. Living without a father is the hardest obstacle you’ll ever have to overcome.

“I SHOW COURAGE WHEN I AM A TEAM PLAYER AT HOME.”
Penelope Gonzalez  
Kathleen Colfer, Teacher  
Bellesini Academy

Courage is when you are determined to surpass your fears. I had to deal with anxiety for two years. At the end, I realized that medication will not help me. I noticed that I could go through my anxiety with courage. Courage is a trait that helped me move on.

One day at the end of the school day, I went down the hall for parent pickup. Everyone was running to go home, except for me. I was just standing there. I did not feel safe there. I sat there crying and crying. I felt wrong. My mom started running over to me, “I’m so sorry.” She has never been late, but she knew something went wrong. The next day, halfway to school, I started to cry. When my mom asked me if I could go to school, I shouted, “I can’t!” I didn’t feel safe. I did not go to school for 17 days. I tried to go to school. But it got worse. My anxiety changed my whole life. All day I was crying and my face was red. I did not know what to do except cry.

All of this was getting stuck in my head. It was getting worse. I did not want to feel this feeling. I admitted to myself that I needed help. I needed to push myself farther. I knew that I could overcome it. I would do anything to get rid of this illness. I would not give up. I decided to go into therapy. I started to talk alone with the therapist, and she told me that anxiety was an illness. She taught me some breathing techniques whenever I felt anxious. I knew that I needed to be patient with myself. This was really hard to get through, but now I feel jocular and cheerful. I went to school again and my friend Janelle helped me through it. I felt courageous that I asked for help.

It was a rough month for me. I was courageous by admitting that I needed help with my anxiety. To have courage you need to be positive instead of worrying what is going to happen next. Positivity helped me move on. I overcame my stress, I changed my attitude, and I learned to show perseverance in times like this.

“I was courageous by admitting that I needed help with my anxiety.”
Courage is not always flying through the sky carrying an airplane. Courage is shooting for the stars and trying hard until you reach your goal. I show courage in little ways but hopefully they make a big impact. You don’t have to be a superhero to show courage.

My father is not always around. He flies to Africa because his music label is there. This has a big impact on me because I don’t always have a fatherly figure around. He has been traveling and trying to provide my family with a life that he imagines for us. I understand where he is coming from, but I would give up anything to just have my family around me.

I tried to act tough and not cry for the rest of my family, even though I was sad when he left. I tried really hard to be the “man” in the house, so I lived by the stereotype that men don’t cry. I would cry privately because I wanted to keep the image of the heroic prince who laughs in the face of danger. It continued that way for a while.

One day, I could not take it anymore. When my dad was boarding the plane to Africa, I cried, right there in front of everyone. In that moment, I finally understood I didn’t have to put on an act. I didn’t have to be a man yet, because I was only seven. I understood that it didn’t make me less of anything to cry and miss my father. I learned that showing emotion does not have any effect on manhood.

I showed courage by crying and finally understanding that what I was doing before, which was acting tough, didn’t show courage. It showed that I was following the stereotype that men don’t cry, and that is absolutely wrong in every way. It’s good to show your emotions, even when you might be made fun of. Showing courage can also be showing emotion.

“Courage is shooting for the stars and trying hard until you reach your goals.”
Courage Beyond Boston

A special supplement 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 true universal nature of courage, and support our strong 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 need for an accessible, proven literacy and character development curriculum. To date, “The Max” has worked with schools and communities such as Belize, Pakistan, India, Lebanon, Cambodia, China and Yemen. 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 partner with The Cambridge School for Cambodia, and students from Brandeis University’s Heller School for Social Policy and Management. We are grateful to each of these partners for their compassionate work with teachers and students in Yemen and Cambodia, 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 the 25th volume of The Courage of Children: Boston and Beyond, including our national essay contest winner and honorable mention candidates, and students from our national partner schools who have participated in the full curriculum. This year’s collection features essays written by students from: Birmingham, AL; Indianapolis, IN; Ringgold, GA; Mechanicsburg, PA; Memphis, TN; Cleveland, OH; Camden, NJ; Bronx, NY; Beverly Hills, MI and Hillsborough, CA.

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 continue to offer support and guidance to make this possible.

For more information about The Max Warburg Courage Curriculum and our programs, please visit www.maxcourage.org
Hello my name is Neveah Ramos, my age is 10, my culture is Garifuna. I am about four feet ten inches in height. My mother and I live with my grandparents. My life has been challenging living under my grandparents' roof. My mother is a single mother. My mom and dad aren't together anymore. My mother worked at Caves Branch Outpost.

One day, my mom came home and announced that she got an opportunity to work at McDonalds in Canada for 2 years. I was in total shock. I was excited but scared at the same time. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. At that point, I had no courage. No courage or confidence to face this challenge in my life. A few days passed, and the day came when my mom had to leave for Canada. As we drove to the bus terminal in Belize City, I felt sad and very scared.

When we arrived at the bus terminal, I was totally unprepared for the feelings that came over me. As I watched my mom get on the bus, I burst into tears. When the bus drove away, I started to cry hysterically.

I felt scared and alone. I realized that I had no courage to spend two years without my mom. My mom and I had never been apart for more than an overnight. As the days passed, I realized that I had to be strong for my mom. I started to feel more courageous as the days turned to weeks and the weeks turned to months. It took all the courage I had to survive this, but I remained courageous through it all because I know my mom was doing it to provide a better life for me.
How have you or how do you show courage? Me personally, I haven’t shown that much courage, but I will give you some examples of courage. In the summer of 2015, I was in Brownsville, Texas. My mom’s boyfriend moved to Camden, New Jersey to live a better life. My mom came to visit Camden while we were on summer break. The next month we were going to move to Camden, but I wasn’t sure I was going to move because I still had family that didn’t want to leave yet. So my mom gave me a couple days to think about it. The next three days I finally knew what I wanted to do. I wanted my mom and me to be happy. We went on the bus, and I was scared that I wasn’t going to fit in, but my mom found a house that was next to a new family. When we got there, we went to their house to introduce ourselves. I didn’t know if they were going to like my two sisters, my brother, and me. They had a son my age, and soon enough he would come to my house every day and hang out. Now, we are kind of best friends, and if it weren’t for my mom I wouldn’t have found this great place. It takes a lot of courage to move from your forever home. The moral of the story is that it takes a lot of courage even when you are moving from one state to another. Now, I am in Camden, NJ, and I have more confidence in myself and I know now that sometimes change is good.

In closing, I want to leave you with this quote, “If you have no confidence in yourself, you are twice defeated in the race of life.” –Marcus Garvey.
Marah Mossallam
Sara Coyle, Teacher
Beverly Hills Academy in Beverly Hills, Michigan
Honorable Mention, Courage in My Life National Essay Contest

Courage can mean doing something that frightens you, doing something that hurts you, being brave in a tough situation, or even just facing the smallest thing.

There are not many times I have been courageous or have witnessed courage, except this one time. It was a normal day, or at least we thought it was. My mom, my brother and I were in Palestine. While crossing the border, which was occupied by the Israelis, we were stopped by soldiers. My dad was not with us and we were alone. My brother and I couldn’t help our mom because we were so young. It was all up to my mom to take care of her children and to get us home safely.

In order to leave Palestine, we needed to go to the airport in Jordan and get through security. This is usually the hardest part of the whole trip. The soldiers told my mom that her ID card was invalid. My mom fought back saying that all of her papers were up to date. The guard replied to her saying, “Your American Citizenship means nothing here.” My mom was furious and refused to leave and get her ID card renewed. The guard decided to call the chief to talk to my mom and told her that she had to leave or else they would kick her out. My mom didn’t move.

The chief decided to call the head of the Palestinian police, and when he arrived he told my mom to come with him to get her ID card renewed. My mom had no choice but to trust and follow the man. It was Ramadan at the time, so my mom, brother, and I were all starving. The man then took us to the police station, where over one thousand officers were eating. My mom felt awkward being the only woman in the only station. The officer looked at my mom and told her not to worry and that there is another woman here, while he pointed at the other side of the room. My mom, brother, and I ate and filled our stomachs and then went to get my mom’s ID card renewed.

The officer took us into his car and we drove all the way to the Office of Palestinian Authority. Once we got there it took a while to get the card renewed. By the time my mom finished, it was almost midnight. We were all exhausted. When we reached the border, the officer had to go. My mom thanked him and he headed back to his desk. Unfortunately, the same man who had given my mom a hard time before was still there. He said, “Oh, you’re back. And with a renewed ID card I hope. “My mom decided not to argue with the man. He again told us we couldn’t pass. But, when he called the Chief of police, the chief said we could.

That was the scariest experience of my life. My mom is the most courageous person I have ever met. To me, courage means doing something that you never expected would happen, but you never give up for yourself or for your family.

“To me, courage means doing something that you never expected would happen, but you never give up for yourself or for your family.”
Jaylon Devin Moody

Melissa Perez, Teacher
Raymond Sheppard Nazarene Primary School in Belmopan, Belize

I have come to understand that life can be challenging and it takes courage to keep moving on. My story began when I was 13 years old. After 15 long years of promised love to each other my mother and father decided to part ways. My mother took it harder than my dad; she was so depressed that I can’t remember seeing her smile again. My older sibling in the United States knew the story and wanted mom to be her old self again. They asked her to get a visa to visit and move past her pain. With God’s blessing, she got her visa, and my sister sent her for three weeks later. Unfortunately there was no room for me so I had to be left behind with my family members. My mother promised to care for me financially when she got to the States.

Well, my mother left and everything was going well until the family needed to move on with their own lives. I was now 14 years old. One day, they sat me down and said I had to be a man because my mother wasn’t coming back for me. I was left to stay at my mother’s house, and I cried myself to sleep many nights. Thank God my neighbors looked out for me, and I still had the money my mother sent. Pretty soon, I began to go to church. My pastor told me he had a friend who had a grocery store and needed a helper. After speaking to his friend and sharing my story, he decided to help me out in my situation. And with God’s blessing I kept on working there 5 years. This was really hard work, but I kept telling myself that things would get better.

Then one day I met the love of my life. It was love at first sight. We dated, we laughed, and we cried. One day, I asked for her hand in marriage and she cried, “Yes!” Within a month we got happily married. God’s mercy came through for me in that, even though my mom left and never came back, I found a lovely wife who stands by my side. I have learned to accept the things I couldn’t change, and God gave me the courage to move on.

“This was really hard work but I kept telling myself that things would get better.”
Micah Burrow
Phylecia Ragland, Teacher
William J. Christian School in Center Point, Alabama
Honorable Mention, Courage in My Life National Essay Contest

Courage is the ability to overcome something that frightens you and be able to do it. There are many times we will be challenged with things in life and need encouragement to do it. It is always good to have someone around. There are many people who do perform courageous acts daily and are recognized for their bravery and courage. One very significant person who has shown courage and bravery in my life is my grandmother, Willie Mae Burrow.

She has lived eighty-nine years and was married to my grandfather for more than sixty-five years. She was a homemaker who raised seven children and numerous grandchildren. After my grandfather passed in 2012, my grandmother was left to live alone. Although she is surrounded by family and friends who visit her daily, deep inside I know she is afraid at times.

She possesses the ability to interact with the majority of her grandchildren and give good advice in tough situations. She gets up every day doing what she loves - cooking, cleaning, washing, and ironing. Generally on Sundays the family all meets at her house for dinner and church. She prepares the majority of food and deserts. Needless to say, she is a very good cook. Generally it is too much to eat in one sitting so there is always plenty to carry out.

It’s not every day that you can find an eighty-five year old that is willing to live alone and take on the responsibilities of a household. She gets up each morning with a smile on her face and goes about her way as if nothing has ever happened. I think that she is very courageous because of her attitude and her outlook on life. She never gives up and appears to never grow tired. She always finishes what she starts. This is why I am inspired by her and think she is a very courageous woman.

“I think that she is very courageous because of her attitude and her outlook on life. She never gives up and appears to never grow tired. She always finishes what she starts.”
KELSEY HINTON
Elizabeth Newsome, Teacher
Heritage Middle School in Ringgold, Georgia
Honorable Mention, Courage in My Life National Essay Contest

Courage is something that someone has or something that someone deathly wishes for. There are times where I have some courage or none at all. It takes a lot to engage or start a conversation with someone I don’t know. It takes a lot of courage to move homes and leave all of your friends.

When 4th grade was ending, my dad was notified that he was getting promoted to a Nashville store three hours away from our home in Indiana. They said we were going to build a house there and move during the summer. The terrible day finally came when we left I had to say goodbye to my best friends and relatives. I was told a week before school started that 5th grade was in the middle school. The first day was very hectic and I had no idea where I was going since I knew absolutely no one. I had to try and muster up some courage to ask for directions and say hello to people. Five weeks later I decided to join the band. The first few weeks I was stumped on how to read music and how to play my flute. However, after a week things were looking up and I had really good friend and became a pretty decent flute player. Then a year and a half later my dad got the news that he was being promoted again to Ringgold, Georgia. I was pretty frustrated and mad because I had to quit the cheer team before our last game.

When we arrived in Ringgold, it was hard to adjust. I was stuck in the same place again without knowing anyone. I went half the day without socializing with anyone… until band, where I met two of my best friends now, Alaina and Gabby. They helped me a lot and gave me the courage to talk to people.

Moving from school to school definitely takes a toll on you mentally. The first time we moved I created a chant for myself that I could do it, I just needed to talk to someone! I had to muster up any courage I had to just go to someone and say hi or to ask a question. There were times where social anxiety would take over and stop me from being able to talk to anyone. There were times where I would feel out of place or stupid for asking a question. It takes a lot of courage to not think you’re doing something wrong or stupid. You have to have a positive mindset.

Emotional courage is a key skill in moving schools. You have to be very positive. I would constantly doubt the way I looked or acted around other people. It would be hard for me to get up in the morning and go to school because I was not emotionally, mentally, or physically ready for the day. I always felt the need to change for the standards that were set.

Courage comes with time, and the more stuff out of your comfort zone you do the greater it becomes. It will help you be a conversationalist and become more unique and stand out. The idea of doing something different can be scary, but if you keep doing it, your confidence will build up.

“It takes a lot of courage to not think you’re doing something wrong or stupid. You have to have a positive mindset.”
Instead of the usual relaxing 4th of July, watching the parade and American football on television, in 2005 her parents had a special date at the hospital. That was the day Leila was introduced to the world. The doctors confirmed she was a big, beautiful, and healthy baby. Everything was normal growing up, or so it seemed! When she was almost three years old, her parents realized that both of her legs were growing abnormally. The joints at her knees were growing outward, making her appear bowlegged. No one knew at the time why that was happening or what was causing it.

At three years old, Leila’s parents had looked high and low to find a solution to the problem. Then a group of orthopedic doctors were visiting from the United States, so they managed to attend the clinic with her. Through the Rotary Club in Belmopan, Leila and her parents were able to get help from the Shriner’s Hospital in St. Louis, Missouri. It was then that they started to understand what was wrong. Leila was diagnosed with a rare condition called Blount’s disease, which makes the legs become bow. The condition was so rare that not much research had been done about it and so a sure solution seemed farfetched at the time. However, she had the best team of doctors working on her to make her legs better.

Since the age of three, Leila went back and forth to St. Louis a countless number of times and had undergone ten surgeries on her legs. It wasn’t always possible to have her mom or dad there with her in the United States, so sometimes she had to stay with a host family, the Clements. She would especially need to stay with the host family when she had major surgeries that would require months in a double leg cast to recover. She had to be physically and mentally strong to go through it all. Even through the pain of surgery, the worst part was being away from the ones she loved for such long periods of time. Her birthday and Christmas were the worst! Although she could talk to her parents on the phone, it was not the same as being there in person.

Leila has since turned ten years old and still attends an annual clinic to check on the progression of her legs. She knows that the ordeal is not quite over yet because she will eventually have to remove the plates and screws left in her legs after the last operation. For now, she is content that she is home with the ones she loves and her legs are straighter than they have ever been. She is even able to run around and play soccer.

Through it all Leila remains strong. She knows that if she were not as courageous, she would not have been able to withstand such torment. Her parents may not have been as courageous as she was, but they did what they had to do, to help Leila through it all. Her dad tells her all the time, “Leila, you are the bravest soldier I have ever known, and you have the battle scars to prove it!”

“Through it all Leila remains strong. She knows that if she were not as courageous, she would not have been able to withstand such torment.”
The meaning of courage is to struggle, work hard, have bold thoughts, and dare to express them. It can sometimes mean to suggest how to solve a quarrel that might be happening around us.

I would like to raise an issue that I recently encountered and dared to think about and solve. I saw my older brother often drinking alcohol, gambling, and not thinking about his pregnant wife at home. One day, he was so drunk that he became furious and unfocused. When he came home, his wife hadn’t yet prepared food for him and suddenly he became very angry, scolding and hitting his pregnant wife in a way that was dangerous to her and the baby.

I was at his house to borrow his bike when I saw my older brother and my older sister-in-law arguing with each other. Suddenly, I tried to solve the argument between my older brother and my older sister-in-law so that they would stop fighting. I asked, “Why do you hit your wife like that? I told him, “You know when you use violence against your wife it might cause danger to her and her baby. If you get angry, you should just talk and not use violence.” My brother then looked at me silently. He must have listened to me because, after that, he stopped drinking alcohol, gambling and being violent towards his wife.

The result of my courage was shown to me when I explained to my older brother to take care of his wife and to quit using violence in his family. I would like to clarify that “courage” isn’t just a braveness to commit to something that helps other people, other families and the national society. It can also mean the braveness to dare to do something that is acceptable to other people, other families and particularly, the national society, so it’s called “our courage.”
Courage is not just about facing your fears. It is also about being brave, standing up for what you believe in, and overcoming obstacles that are thrown your way. There are many obstacles you’re going to have to overcome as you get older. The only way you’re going to be able to overcome these challenges is by having faith and confidence in yourself. Courage doesn’t mean you don’t get afraid, it means you don’t let fear stop you from achieving your goals.

We have all faced difficulties in our lives, either it’s losing someone close to you, having something stolen from you, or being bullied. My difficulty was losing someone that wasn’t really that close to me, my grandfather. He was my father’s dad. My grandfather died on January 13th, 2015. My father and I went to the funeral and lots of people were crying, but my father and I had straight faces the whole time. It’s really hard to cry at the death of someone you never really had a relationship with.

I saw him once or twice out of the 13 years I have been alive. I see myself as being brave because I loved him even though I didn’t know anything about him, nor did he know anything about me. As I was sitting in the front row, in front of the casket, I looked down at my dad who didn’t shed any tears. He looked as if it didn’t phase him, but I knew deep down inside he wanted to show emotion. I wish I could have been able to have that kind of unbreakable relationship between grandfather and granddaughter.

I also wish that my grandfather and my dad could have had the best father and son relationship. But instead of being like his father, my dad became better by being in my life and my sister’s and everyone around us. You can’t make someone stay in your life. If they want to walk out of your life, let them. Don’t get mad and don’t get even, just do better.

I just want to thank my dad for staying in my life. I know sometimes I’m not the world’s best daughter, but who is perfect? My father is the most courageous person I know. He didn’t let not having his father around change how he was going to take care of his own children. He’s not only just my father, he’s my hero, my friend, and the only man that will always have my back.

“He’s not only just my father, he’s my hero, my friend, and the only man that will always have my back.”
Keith Casto
Syri Kohn, Teacher
Honorable Mention, Cordova Middle School in Cordova, Tennessee

Courage is like a warrior that fights through hard times and fear. Courage is a blessing that helps people through problems and gives them confidence. That is how I feel about it. I need courage to face a disaster and to help those in need. I needed it most when my family was falling apart.

I was but eight years old and in the third grade. My mother is an alcoholic. My stepdad, Brad, worked twelve hours a day. When Brad was at work, my mom would sometimes leave me, my five-year-old sister Kallista, my two-year-old brother Christian, and my seventh-month-old brother Chase, home alone to get alcohol. I felt mad and powerless when she did that. Then she would not come home for awhile, and since she was drunk and walking, she could have been hit by a car. When I watched her, I felt uneasy.

My mom got drunk on and off, even when I was at school. Then it got worse... I had just arrived home from school and I found my mom drunk on the couch. I felt very nervous, so I ran to my brothers’ room. Christian was crying and Chase was asleep. Kallista was already home because her school got out first. She said everyone was hungry. I felt I had to be responsible for feeding them, since my mom had not. I made sandwiches for Kallista and Christian and gave them chips and Kool-aid. I suddenly realized that I did not know what infants ate, and I felt scared. Fear had punched me in the stomach, so I knocked it to the ground. The baby mix! I swiftly mixed water and the powder. I held Chase while he vigorously drank the mix. I was glad. Mom, wobbling, got up and headed to the drugstore. All three of my siblings were now napping and I was watching them.

When my mom got back, she hid the junk she bought under the sink and passed out. I happily dumped the liquor, but I was aggravated because I had to continue this every single day and Brad never came home until 8:00 p.m.

One day, my mom bribed me with twenty dollars to change Chase’s diaper, and being eight years old, I accepted it. Then two days later I was screaming and crying because my mom never woke up! I only felt dread. Kallista was alive and I was overjoyed!

I showed courage by pouring the alcohol my mom bought down the drain and taking care of my siblings. A year later, Child Protective Services said Kallista and I could not live with our mom, and since Chase and Christian are Brad’s kids, they could not live with Kallista and me. My granddad came to pick us up, along with a few of our possessions, so we could live life without drugs. Now I have a family that does not drink or leave us alone.

Courage is overcoming fear and helplessness.

“Courage is overcoming fear and helplessness.”
Glenda Yesenia  
Maritza Trejo, Teacher  
Glasswing International in San Salvador, El Salvador

I demonstrate courage day to day in El Salvador. Every day I get up at 5:00 am and take a bath. I prepare breakfast for my brothers, I iron their school uniforms, I comb their hair, and I help them with their homework, while doing mine at the same time. When I come home from school, I wash their uniforms, feed them, and then help my mom in the afternoon. For all this, courage is necessary.

I do not tell them lies and I am honest with them but my life is very hard. I have very difficult problems with my family and this requires courage. However, it gives me unforgettable happiness because I love them even though my life is difficult. My brothers are three and eight years old and my mother works, and that is the reason why I feel happy.

It is hard on me. I help my mom wash my three siblings’ clothes, Yennifer, Jose, and Victor. I also wash my mom and dad’s clothes, as well as my own. It is even harder because I have to carry enough water to do it. Day to day I feel very proud of the way I am, and I tell them to stay strong because God loves you.

"Day to day I feel very proud of the way I am, and I tell them to stay strong because God loves you."

Glenda Yesenia  
Maritza Trejo, Teacher  
Glasswing International in San Salvador, El Salvador
Courage means to be strong and keep your life in order, even when bad things are happening. I found out the hard way when I first came to this school in September. I was so angry and my teacher didn’t know why I would walk out of class, throw books, yell, kick lockers, and curse at everyone. I was so upset about stuff, and then it got even worse.

My dad got shot during a robbery at my house. They shot him right in front of my little six-year-old brother. My mom ran upstairs and got her gun, and chased the robbers down the street. When the police came, they put my dad and me in the ambulance and talked to my mom. The police were just laughing and then they charged my dad because he had weapons he wasn’t supposed to have because he still has a felony from 15 years ago. They told my mom not to drive, but she drove to my auntie’s house anyways because she was so scared. We all stayed at her house that night while my dad was in the hospital. I was so mad at my brother and my sister for laughing about the robbery, but I was proud of my dad’s courage. He blocked my little brother from almost getting hurt. He took the bullet that was intended for my brother.

On October 18, we were raided by the S.W.A.T. team. They tore up the whole house and threw everything everywhere. They took all of our money, and then they took my mom and dad’s cell phones. And let me tell you, my mom and dad were mad and upset.

After that, I was having a lot of trouble concentrating in school and my grades were horrible. My mom told me that if I did well from December to March, I would get something good for my birthday in March. In December, I started behaving so well and then I really got myself together. I stopped taking medication for my behavior, and I became less angry. I worked with my counselor and stopped being sneaky. I really concentrated hard on my school work and did all of my make-up work.

Even though I was really mean and angry when I first came to my school, other students accepted me as a friend. It really helped me to help them. When I first came here, I only had 65% positive points on my Class Dojo. Now I have 94% positive for two months in a row! I know bad things might happen again, but I will show courage and protect myself and my brothers and sisters. If something bad happens at home, I will work with my counselor to get past it. I will concentrate on my schoolwork and try not to get F’s or D’s. I will have the courage to believe in myself and my future.

“I KNOW BAD THINGS MIGHT HAPPEN AGAIN, BUT I WILL SHOW COURAGE AND PROTECT MYSELF AND MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS.”
To Kleang
Phalla Ol, Teacher
The Cambridge School for Cambodia in Cambodia

Courage means to struggle, be patient, and overcome all our fears so that we can do a good deed. We cannot focus on the bad deed of another person to live with courage.

One of our neighbors has a car and motor washing business. He boasted a lot about his power and wealth. His land is higher than my family’s land, so water flows into our property from his business, making problems for us. He often gathers his relatives at his home to drink alcohol and play music until midnight. Many of the nearby folks almost got sick because they couldn’t sleep well when he had a party. The villagers asked my mother about this issue, and my mother shared the problems we were having with this neighbor. But people were afraid of his family because they are wealthy and were related to high officials in the government.

One day, I decided to persuade other neighbors to go to his house in order to offer his family some advice about doing good deeds. When we talked to them about the impact of his family behavior on the community, he looked respectful and seemed to accept what we had explained. However, when we returned home, his family still continued the same bad actions.

A little later, my mother had a serious ailment, and many neighbors visited her. My mother was very happy to see the folks who came to visit her regularly. At the same time, our difficult neighbor’s wife also got a serious sickness and almost died like my mother nearly did. He saw other folks coming to visit my mother, but when his wife also got seriously sick, he wondered why the neighbors didn’t come to visit her. I told him the reason folks didn’t visit his wife was because his loud family banquets and music were disturbing the neighbors and causing them to get furious with his family.

When this neighbor learned of what he was doing right and wrong from what I revealed to him, he changed his ways and became a better neighbor. I am very glad to have helped them to live in the right way.

“We cannot focus on the bad deed of another person to live with courage.”
Teodora Nitu  
Alyssa Goldfarb, Teacher  
International School of Indiana in Indianapolis, Indiana  
Honorable Mention, Courage in My Life National Essay Contest

Life is full of challenges. It’s a never-ending obstacle course we cannot predict. The only way to succeed or even to just pass through is to have courage. However, courage is often overlooked. We define courage as the act to save someone’s life or to stand for what you believe in. For me courage is doing something that may frighten you, not the world. It may be miniscule in the eyes of others but took all the courage in you to achieve. Whether it’s shown on TV or written about in the newspaper, it doesn’t matter. Recently I had to face one of these potholes and frankly, no one knows about it. No one ever spoke of it since. Most people don’t even know it existed. Except me.

In life we are always taught that your situation is not the worst or the best. Someone always has it better or worse than you. We watch and see bombs go off, and see killings around us. We see murders and people hungry, but we try to tell ourselves that they won’t ever happen to us. We recite this in our heads before we go to sleep. We don’t want to think about the possibility of it happening at all. We are in constant denial. But it happens. One minute you are watching a movie, and the next you are under your seat, trembling with fear.

Not too long ago my friend and I went to a movie with her little brother. Her mom was having dinner right across the street. Everything felt normal; it was just like any other Saturday. Suddenly, sirens were going off everywhere. A group of children ran into the theater crying and mumbling, but not screaming. All I could make out was, “There is a shooter.” I remember looking into my friend’s eyes and seeing the panic. We rushed out of the emergency exit to find a car swivel in front of us, and the sound of gunshots. We knew he must be out there. The only logical thing we could think to do was hide under our seats and hope he wouldn’t come in, or hope he would think we all evacuated. The movie was still running. I could hear the singing and water running coming from the movie. I tried to concentrate on that rather than my trembling fingers gripping my friend’s blue hunter boots. My mind kept thinking about what I have accomplished so far and where I wanted to go, and what I should have done and all the mistakes I have ever made. My thoughts washed away when I heard the sound of footsteps and a voice that said, “This is the police. Everyone please exit!” I stood up and saw the man in uniform in front of me and I relaxed a little bit. Everything was going to be okay.

In life, these potholes may slow you down or, if you let them, they can encourage you to go farther in your life. This experience definitely motivated me to take the most out of every day. It hasn’t always been simple for me to do that, considering my family issues and the trouble I have in school. I have often times felt sad and helpless. My motivations in life have been Mr. Niyibizi, my parents, and my sister. Mr. Niyibizi has been one of the most inspirational teachers I have ever had. He told me that I was brilliant and that I had a bright future. He taught me that when I am fishing for friends, it’s sometimes better to let the heavy fish go if they drag you down. My parents have always been a constant influence in my life. They work so hard for me every day at their jobs and work more when they are at home. Leaving the movie theater made me think, “Carpe Diem.” There is not time to waste! I need to live and work hard every day. Time is money and there is a whole world out there waiting for me.
Dy’Anne Castillo
Angelita Cruz, Teacher
United Evergreen Primary School in Belmopan, Belize

To me, courage is being brave and being able to face your fears.

As a young child, I attended Precious Moments Pre-School. I loved to do work and play. I also loved to do reading. I thought that I would be in pre-school forever. Until one week before I would have to leave Precious Moments to attend 1st grade at United Evergreen Primary School, my teacher, Ms. Ilya, announced that on Friday night, we would have a graduation.

I was wondering in my mind, “What is a gra-do-oo-ation?” Mrs. Ilya explained to us that graduation is a ceremony where you receive certificates that make it clear that you have finished pre-school and are ready for Infant 1. Everybody loved the idea of graduating. When I was told everybody would be there seeing us perform, my heart stopped. “What if I do something wrong?”

When I told my mom how I was afraid, she told me to go to the spare room. I began to sing and dance my heart out. When I finished, everybody clapped! At my graduation, I did my very best, and everybody clapped.

That’s how I conquered my fear of stage fright.

“To me, courage is being brave and being able to face your fears.”
Lucy Hicks  
Billie Carlock & Stefanie Wynne, Teachers  
Heritage Middle School in Ringgold, Georgia  
Honorable Mention, Courage in My Life National Essay Contest

There are many different definitions of courage. Many people obtain it, and many do not. Courage is valued greatly in life, for it is seen as a strong virtue that must be learned through pain and sorrow. Many times I find myself feeling as though I am an empty cup when it comes to being courageous. I am fearful of the unknown, afraid of failure, and in the past have backed down in the face of danger. But over the short fourteen years of my life that I have already lived, I have learned that courage does not mean that a person is void of all fear. Even in the presence of uncertainty, you must break the restraints of terror and despair to continue forward. It took time for me to fully understand this concept, but once I did, my entire life changed.

When I was young, my mother and father smoked, drank, and argued more days out of the week than not. I look back at it now and see that I was always indignant, unable to believe that what my parents were doing was wrong. I would sit in my room and listen to them yell and scream at one another, sometimes for hours at a time. I would hear them banging as they threw things, the doors slamming right before the house would get eerily silent. I never remember crying, though. I sometimes would walk by my parents’ room and see my mother sitting on the bed with tears running down her face. For me, it became a sign of weakness and I swore to myself I would never adopt it.

As the years continued on, things gradually worsened. Of course, being a five year old at the time, I never truly understood the severity of the situation. In fact, it was only a few months ago when my mother and I were discussing the sensitive topic that I learned about the ongoing abuse that took place right under my brother’s and my little noses. They were both to blame, neither one being a Saint, even in the lightest definition of the term. Yet, I was never in fear that I would be harmed, nor that my brother would. They did their best to keep the fights between them, not allowing us much access to what was going on in their personal lives.

It was February of 2009 when they first separated, and it lasted until March. I remember being upset that my father had left me so abruptly, but not entirely surprised that it had occurred. They were only able to stay together once again for two months before things began hurtling downhill. The fighting got more frequent, and my father was going to the pub, often coming home sloppily drunk. One of those nights, it got out of hand. From the moment that he returned, voices echoed through the otherwise silent house. I faintly recall them storming down the tight hallway, their faces red and angry as they spat curses at each other. Suddenly, my father had gotten to his breaking point. He turned on my mother, pinning her against the wall with his hands wrapped around her pale throat. He was hissing threatening words into her face, ones that I could not discern in the heat of the moment. I had jumped frightened from my bed, walking timidly to the open door that showed me my worst memory. After that, it is all a blur. Something overcame me, some feeling of panic in my chest that urged me to run out to confront him. “Stop!” I screamed, harsh and hysterical. The sound of my anguish-filled voice seemed to click in his brain. He took one look at me before dropping my mother, who was gasping for air. As he fled from the house, I ran over, helping my mother up from a crumpled pile on the cold hardwood floor.

Although she was sobbing and in pain, my mother called the police minutes after my father pulled out of the driveway. She did not try to hide what happened, and she did not let him get away with it. That is what I consider the courageous act throughout the whole ordeal. Sure, I put an end to the painful experience, but she was the one who got through it. Too many people in destructive relationships do not come forward, afraid to face the consequences. My mother was scared - she feared for her life, every day for months at a time - but that did not stop her from telling her story and ensuring that my father faced what he did that night.

Today, my father is a completely different person. He has changed for the better, and is allowed to see us once more. Even though it was so long ago, it has altered his life in unmentionable ways.

Nearly 70% of women worldwide experience physical and/or sexual assault in their lifetime, yet only 25% of these are reported to the police annually. This must end now. Domestic violence is not acceptable.
“I’m fascinated how often and with what whole-heartedness people will risk their lives to perform acts of courage, sacrifice, and compassion for total strangers.”—Guggenheim Fellow, author, and poet, Diane Ackerman.

Whenever I pass the SFJAZZ Center, I shiver, and have an uneasy feeling. I carefully place my steps and cautiously look around, like a shy rabbit. Every day, cheerful crowds gather outside before its doors open; little choristers walk past it on their way to rehearsals. In the evening, jazz, opera, and symphony lovers dine in the surrounding restaurants. The building itself does not look extraordinary, particularly during the day, but has a calm atmosphere enshrouding it. Its many right angles, plain slabs of concrete, and floor-to-ceiling glass windows project serenity and peacefulness. However, the Center reminds me only of chaos and fear. When I was in 2nd grade, I witnessed a robbery happening there, right in front of my eyes.

It was another chilly Saturday morning. As I said goodbye to my friends, who also came to the Conservatory for music lessons every Saturday, I amused myself by blowing into the cold air to create misty shapes. I could already imagine the enjoyable, relaxing Saturday afternoon I was looking forward to.

As our car approached the traffic light at today’s SFJAZZ Center, I saw a large man in a fluffy suit next to a shorter woman. The man looked like a polar bear, ready to pounce on its prey. At first, it seemed that they were playing around. I soon realized that something was amiss when they crossed the road, and the girl exclaimed, “Give it back! Give it back!”

My father immediately jumped out of the car, oblivious to the fact that the criminal was at least half-a-foot taller and much larger. I was lost and frightened. Everything happened so suddenly. My father and the victim chased the thief down the block towards the Conservatory, reaching the traffic lights at a busy intersection.

A short Hispanic man awaited him, and bravely tried to subdue the criminal by using the only thing he was carrying: a small backpack. He was like David, courageously standing his ground as Goliath charged towards him. The robber then tried to get into a black Mercedes, unsuccessfully, to my great relief.

As the victim got her phone back, an African-American lady, with curly hair and glasses with a thick black frame calmed and comforted her. However, the thief was not finished. I followed Goliath behind, from far away—on the other side of the road—like a little mouse quietly following a cat out of the house. He ran past the quiet Chinese and French American International Schools, and forced himself into a stopping taxi with a passenger inside. At this very moment, two tall local Caucasian men as big as our Goliath arrived and pulled him out. My father asked a driver, whose car was turning around the corner, to call the police. With some hesitation and shock, she did so, cradling her phone in her left hand. The criminal was pushed into a corner, surrounded on two sides by a black metal fence—a reminder of what he was about to face: jail. Police cars finally arrived, from different directions. The criminal stopped struggling as if reality hit him squarely in the face. There was no hope of escaping.

Whenever I am in the Civic Center area, this incident plays back in my memory like a movie, about courage and bravery. I take comfort in knowing that ordinary people from the community will unite and risk their lives for others. There are brave heroes who have the courage to stand up, and will preserve and restore a peaceful and calm environment when confronted by the forces of evil.

Courage sees no boundaries, in race or gender. Courageous acts can be spontaneous; performed out of love, care, or righteousness, and involve strangers from all walks of life. Courage helps us overcome fears of danger and selfish thoughts that dissuade us from reaching out of our comfort zones. Thank God for creating courage.
Imagine this. You are a five year-old, starry-eyed little girl getting ready for her first major dance performance. Moms getting their children ready, observing it all. Now, you would think that, at such a young age, the pressure of your first performance could not be felt. But for those of you that are thinking that, you are sorely mistaken. I could feel the anxiousness in me, as if it were pumping in my veins along with my blood, spreading to every part of my body. Seven years ago, I was that nervous, starry-eyed, little girl. What you just pictured is my story.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, sit back and enjoy your evening as we amaze you with the talents of these wonderful young ladies!”

I can still hear the MC’s voice ringing in my ears, adding to all the pressure. As we walked onstage for the introduction, my heart was racing, and my palms were sweating. The MC introduced us, and as the crowd cheered for us, my body began to settle, thinking that this might not be so bad at all. My teacher led us off the stage and to the small tent out back, which was our backstage, because this was an outdoor performance. As it turned out, the pressure was not over. My dance teacher explained how crucial this performance was in influencing the audience’s perception of us and our dancing. The last sentence she said was one I would never forget, “Ladies, the pressure is on.”

“And now, the moment we’ve all been waiting for, our dancers!”

I was one of the first dancers to appear on stage, being one of the youngest dancers in the group. It was my job to get the positioning right, so everyone would fall into line correctly. As I stepped into what I believed was my correct spot, I looked into the crowd for my teacher’s face, searching for her approval. Suddenly our eyes met. Her hand raised, and so did her thumb. She was giving me a thumbs-up. Should I have felt proud? Should I have felt encouraged? I don’t know. But what I do know is that I felt no emotion when my tiny ears picked up on the sound of the music starting to play. I began to dance.

Step here, step there. Turn, jump, kick. Power, grace, beauty, smile. All these words raced around my mind repeatedly as I progressed through the dance. I looked at my teacher whenever I could, hoping for another thumbs-up, or even a smile. I needed to know that I was doing well. I was about one-fourth of the way through the dance when I felt this strange feeling inside of me. Something was making me continue with twice the energy as before. Something was keeping a smile on my five year-old face. Something was making my heart jump. Something that was later introduced to me as courage.

That was the first time I had encountered courage. And I loved it. It replaced the pressure and nervousness flowing inside my body. I didn’t know if I was doing anything correctly, I just knew that I enjoyed it. I could see my teacher smiling at us, and that was all I needed. For the half of the dance that was left, I did what felt right. I did what felt natural. I did what I wanted to do. I wonder, “What would become of my dancing if I didn’t have courage?” But I do have courage, and because courage found me that day, I found a talent.

“THAT WAS THE FIRST TIME I HAD ENCOUNTERED COURAGE. AND I LOVED IT.”
Donia Al-Shalali

Yasmeen Al-Mass and Altaf Al-Malhani, Teachers
Abjad Primary School in Sanaa, Yemen

The meaning of bravery for me, is facing your fears. Bravery is not letting anything stop you from doing something you want to do.

In the past, I used to be scared of bombing and of the sounds of fighter jets. Every time I hear the sound of fighters, I get scared and run to my mother.

One day, there were a lot of fighter jets flying in the sky. I heard them while I was studying, and suddenly I heard a huge sound from an explosion shaking the building. When I got there my mom told me not to be scared and to ignore the sounds. She held me in her arms, I fell asleep, and when I awoke I went to school.

Everyone in school was talking about what had happened last night. I followed my mother’s advice.

My math teacher told us the same thing my mother said, to ignore the sounds of explosions. Many weeks later, another explosion happened, but I remembered what my mother had said. I was standing like I was hearing music on TV. Everyone was surprised. Another bombing happened, and I was comfortable because nothing would happen to me.

The next day, there was another bombing while I was in school. Everyone in class was scared except for me. I was trying to calm down my classmates. I had an idea. We gathered and started singing and playing until our laughter was louder than the sounds of explosions. From that very first day until now, I have learned that you should always try as hard as you can to face your fears. I try as hard as I can to face my fears, I listen to others’ advice, and I also give advice to others on fighting their fears.

If you help others get over their fears, Allah will help you and love you. I hope you are going to face your fears and beat it, and I hope you will help others as I did, and be proud of yourself as much as I am proud of myself.

“From that very first day until now, I have learned that you should always try as hard as you can to face your fears.”