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**Entrant:** Miles Bronson

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**Essay Title:** *Rose, Bud, Thorn*

Every Thursday at 2:15 pm, seven of us would meet in Mr. Fuentes' office for Advisory. We would all sit around the coffee table, except for Grace, who always sat alone in the corner. Even though I was the only male in the group and could have easily felt like an outsider, I was the person who made everyone feel like they mattered. Mr. Fuentes never joined us; he remained at his desk and started every meeting with a popcorn round of "Rose, Bud, Thorn." I usually started and then turned to Grace and asked her directly, "What is your rose?" I thought having a peer ask her would mean more to her than a teacher asking her. I wanted to make her feel seen and heard.

When thinking about my core values, it was hard for me to land on one word. "Empathy" came to mind immediately, as I pride myself on having the ability to emotionally connect with others who have varied lived experiences. Then I thought of "inclusivity," as it captures an active drive of mine: to include everyone. I intentionally do not have a friend group, which is a rarity at Choate. You have the rich kids who tend to stick together; the kids of color who bond over being minorities within a predominantly White community; you have the sports kids who tend to gravitate to their particular sport: the football kids, the soccer kids, and the hockey kids. I am part of the hockey community, for example, but I do not limit myself by only hanging out with them. I make an effort to connect with all the kids in my class and beyond. I even make an effort with the freshmen and sophomores, lending them encouragement and emotional support.

Owen, a recent transfer, who made the hockey team as a sophomore, wasn't getting much ice time. He was at the bottom of the lineup, but never showed his frustration or complained. When I didn't make the team my freshman year, I not only felt devastated, but I also developed a bad attitude. I told Owen how much I admired his energy on the bench and how his positivity was needed on the team. At a recent tournament, I was injured and couldn't play, so Owen got more shifts. He played incredibly well, helping his line get a goal. I cheered him on and celebrated him. He thanked me and shared that I had made him feel just as valuable on the bench as off the bench.

It made me realize that my core value, the word that had eluded me was "belonging." My empathetic and inclusive nature creates a feeling of belonging for others. In a world, where more and more people feel isolated and alone causing an actual loneliness epidemic, I see value in all people and bring them in.