

2023-2024

Humility

“Mike, I need to have a word with you!” A voice rang from downstairs. I grumbled at the sound. I just wanted to eat my taco in peace, but life seemed to have other plans. I forced myself to climb the stairs, knowing my report card lay on the dining table, probably read and re-read by my parents a billion times.

“Yes?” I asked, trying to keep my tone subtle, but not too subtle. Yeah, I was pretty much a goner. My mother stared at me with her piercing stare that made me feel like that time I had to get an x-ray of my broken finger; weird and prickly. She looked like she was about to confront me, but instead, she said, “How was your day sweetie?”

That got me taken aback. How was your day sweetie? Really?

I shrugged. “Fine, I guess.”

She leaned back. “Let's go get ice cream.”

My ears almost popped out. What was happening today?

“Ice cream? Really?” I asked in disbelief. My mom nodded and told me to get my twin brother, Matt. I agreed, but before I could get Matt, he strutted down the stairs, wearing a smug smirk and flipping his hair back.

“Mom, how was my report card?” he asked, stopping at the foot of the stairs.

Our mom’s eyes brightened. “Oh, it was wonderful, honey. All A’s but one B. Still really good.”

Matt smiled mischievously. “And Mike?”

I glared at him. “Why do you want to know?”

“Oh, just because I wanna see how good you did,” he said. As Mom shuffled through the papers he added quietly, “Because I wanna rub it in your face when Mom sees how bad you did and decides to leave you out on ice cream.”

“You wish,” I hissed back.

Mom found my report card and made it clear for us to see. “Same as you, Matt.”

I grinned, thinking I should probably go finish that taco for a celebration. Matt’s face turned the color of a tomato, but then quickly righted itself.

“Let's go get ice cream then,” he said, trying to grin. I just flashed him a smug smile and went to get my hoodie.

School a few days later was . . . not fun. Matt kept making fun of all the kids who got a lower grade than him, whereas I just watched and kept my mouth shut. It wasn’t fair that just because they scored slightly lower than him, he could bully them endlessly. The teachers kept trying to catch Matt in the act, but then he’d just pretend to be innocent, remind them of his ‘fabulous grades’, and then leave to find another victim. I had just sat down in ELA class, when someone tapped me on the shoulder.

“You need to stop!” I turned around hastily, to see a girl glaring daggers at me. “You’re not the king of the universe, in fact, quite the opposite when you bully people like that,”

I just stared, flabbergasted until something clicked. “Oh,” I told the blonde girl, “No, you must be talking about my brother, Matt. The one who was bullying everyone today.”

“You have a twin brother?”

“I wish I didn’t, but, yeah,” I mumbled.

Her brain looked like it was working furiously, but finally got the confirmation when Matt walked in.

“Oh. I’m sorry . . . then.” She turned around awkwardly and started talking to her friends.

I just kept my mouth shut, which was good, since our teacher, Mrs. Everhart, walked into the class.

“Today, we were supposed to learn about constructing an essay, but I feel that some people need to know this before.”

She grabbed a marker and drew in big bold words: Humility.

“What does this mean to you?” she asked, projecting her voice for force.

Some kids raised their hands, but, unfortunately, she called on me. I knew sitting in the front wouldn’t turn out well.

I cleared my throat. “Uh, I think humility means . . .” I moistened my lips, “It means being humble.

Knowing you’ve done something great, but not bragging about it.”

I said that last bit for Matt, so he might get something into that big head of his. He looked unaffected by my words. I sat down.

“That was a good example, Mike, but it goes deeper than that. There is no one definition of Humility—”

“There is in the dictionary,” Matt interjected.

“—Matt, did I ask you to speak? No, so please do not interrupt me again,” Mrs. Everhart said, before continuing, “Humility can mean many different things, but it always circulates to humbleness. And to show it to all of you, I would like to use an example, which I’m sure Matt will help me demonstrate.”

She gestured for him to join her at the front of the classroom. Matt looked nervous but quickly hid that under his smug expression.

“Okay, so we’re gonna pretend Matt just got an A+ on his paper . . .” She grabbed a sticky note and drew an A+ on it. Then handed it to him. He gripped it proudly, brandishing it to the class. I rolled my eyes.

“His grades are great, but then he goes around telling everyone . . .” Matt was forced to give his sticky note around, and it got passed between everyone in the class, eventually revolving around back to him.

“He has now told everyone about his grades, and possibly bragged about it as well,” Mrs. Everhart swiftly plucked the sticky note out of his and tore it in half. She let the pieces flutter to the ground before clearing her throat and saying, “The good things you do mean nothing if you use it for bad.”

Bravery

11/10/2023

By: Harshika Gidwani

The sad thing about doomsday is that it always starts out as a normal day.

Walter Beckett woke up on a normal day. He packed his writing utensils in a satchel and headed off to school with a kiss from his parents. After school, he returned home, ate an apple, then headed off to work on the farm. That was his everyday routine. The village he lived in was friendly, and there was no danger.

Until that night.

When an exhausted Walter shuffled into his small house, he sat down on the dirt floor and waited for his mother to bring him his dinner. He pulled out his paper, ink cartridge, and quill, and he started to write a story.

‘It was a lonely, narrow, river,’ he wrote, ‘the boy, sweeping his hair out of his eyes to take in his surroundings better, walked along the dry bank. All of a sudden, there was a loud—’

BANG!

Walter nearly dropped his quill. He stood up abruptly, not knowing what to do. Where had the sound come from?

“Walter?” his mother called from the other room, “What did you do?”

“I didn’t do anything!” he replied while peering through the crack under the door and watching a pair of big heavy boots stop outside towards his house. “Mother! Could you make haste and come here?”

He indistinctly heard his mother grumble.

“Mother! Hurry!”

Someone pounded on the door, “Boy! I heard you in there! Open the door, NOW!”

Walter trembled, “Why? Do you need something? I could surely arrange it for you. Perhaps a warm meal?”

“I don’t want your food! I want your door to be open!” the man shouted.

Walter’s mother ran into the room, holding her skirt up to her ankles and looking surprised.

“Listen, here!” she shouted back, dropping her skirt down with a graceful sway, “You can’t just barge into my home. I order you to leave immediately!”

Walter looked at his mother with pride. That was his brave mother.

“Charlotte,” another weak voice said, “Open it.”

The voice belonged to Walter’s father. Why would he want them to open the door? Unless . . . he was in trouble. Walter rushed to the door and wrenched it open. Standing there was an extremely large royal guard, and his father right beside him, looking terrified.

The guard sneered at them, “By order of the King, we are taking control of the village. You must pay your taxes: half of your produce; young boys the age of seven and over shall not go to school any longer and instead work in the fields; and a man in each home must serve in the army.”

His voice thundered in Walter’s head. No wonder Walter’s father looked so scared; he was going to have to serve in the army.

Mother recovered first, “What is this? We lived without a king for many years. We can live without one now, too.”

“Well, we’ve taken control now,” the guard’s eyes glinted, “Those who do not pay will receive a severe punishment.”

Mother had a matching look on her face, ‘We’ll endure whatever punishment you have for us. You can’t just march on up and take control of our lives!’

The guard snorted. He pulled Walter by the collar of his shirt and said, “Very well then. I will take this boy. That was the punishment.”

Walter’s voice seemed to disappear. He thrashed and flailed, but the guard didn’t let him wriggle away.

“WAIT! No! We’ll do it!” Mother pulled Walter back firmly.

He felt like he was a tug-of-war rope.

“That’s what I like to hear,” The guard let go of Walter and stomped away.

Walter didn’t know that that was the turning point of his life.

Walter’s family never had enough food to feed themselves, Walter hadn’t seen his father since that unfortunate day, and Walter couldn’t go to school, all after that night. The guards were rough and beat people who wouldn’t do what they wanted.

One day, as Walter stumbled back home from another miserable day in the fields, someone banged on the door.

Mother shuffled into the room wearily, “Open the door.”

Walter opened it and gasped, “Dad?”

“There’s no time!” he barged in and hugged them, then pulled back to look at them seriously, panic flashing in his eyes, “We’re running away. Tonight.”

Walter knew something like this was going to happen. He quickly packed his supplies into his satchel and waited in his room. There, he contemplated what was going to happen next.

“Alright,” his father flipped his helmet on. “Let’s go.”

The other villagers were waiting outside. They all looked pained. Walter joined his friends but held his head down. They would have to be as quiet as they could.

They trekked on. Walter hugged himself. His friends looked at him fearfully. When the air was still, and their houses were far behind them, they heard something. It was galloping horses.

“Run! GO!” Walter’s father shouted. Everyone broke into a sprint, but the army was faster.

Walter’s father stopped. He signaled for the other men to join him, all who were wearing army uniforms.

Walter stopped in his tracks, “Father! Run! What are you doing?”

His dad looked at him grimly, “Protecting. You go. Don’t look back. We’ll hold them off.”

Walter had tears in his eyes but he nodded. Before he turned around to go, he gave his dad a giant bear hug, like he always used to give him.

“Be safe,” Walter murmured, squeezing his dad tighter, “You are the bravest man in the world.”

His dad squeezed him back, then shoved him into his mother’s hands. They took off running. Walter looked back as he ran, thinking to himself, ‘That is my dad. He is brave, and he will keep me safe.’

Comment if you want a Part 2.

Creativity

10/27/20230

By: Harshika Gidwani

I dug my fingernails into my palms, hard. I watched as my peers screamed and thrashed around, clawing at their throats. I knew I was better than this. I would not give up.

We were trapped in a weird metal room with no way to escape. A type of oxygen-stealing gas leaked through the vents, which were bolted tight and made out of unbreakable material. This was a test to see who would get to go to MMA, Masterminds Academy. I gritted my teeth and ran my fingers along the sleek white metal, feeling for something that would turn the gas off.

“Opal!” someone yelled behind me.

I turned around and my best friend, Jason, pointed to the vent in front of him. I jogged over and examined it.

“This vent is a little different from the others. See how it is slightly tinted green, and the gas coming from it is white? It has to mean something,” Jason said.

I nodded, trying hard to keep my mouth shut. I pressed my ear to the vent and heard tiny coughs of smoke pluming out. Then, I ran over to my vent and pressed my ear to it. Nothing.

I did the same for the other three before I ran over and told Jason, “Only your vent is making noise.”

He nodded, we both pressed our ears on the vent, then I pulled back. The metal the vent was made out of was unbreakable, so we couldn’t crawl in. I turned my brain over furiously.

Every time the gas collided against the oxygen, tiny sparks erupted from midair. This gas...

“It’s flammable. This gas is flammable, and we can make an explosion that won’t break the vent’s metal, but melt it,” I said confidently.

Jason pressed his sleeve over his nose and mouth. “How?”

I bit my lip, thinking hard. There had to be a way. I glanced around the room. There were no bottles or containers that we could use to trap the air. I saw an inhaler lying on the floor.

I rushed to it and picked it up, then I went into a corner of the room with oxygen that was still untouched. I scooped some in the inhaler then sprinted over to Jason's vent where I pressed my thumb on the button.

"You should back away," I warned him.

He shook his head, "I need to stay. We both are going to make it into MMA."

He put his thumb over mine which was resting on the button.

I wanted to argue, but I could tell that he wouldn't budge.

"Okay. 3, 2, 1."

We punched the button. The second the oxygen erupted into the abundance of the gas, a deafening boom blew us backwards. When the smoke cleared, I saw that the vent metal was drooping down, a puddly shiny mess. As for the hole? Clear for me to crawl through.

"Okay, now I will go into the vent—" I started.

"No! I'll go," Jason protested.

I grumbled, "You have to understand. I have to go through it!"

"Why? Is there a problem with me going?" Jason yelled.

"I'm smaller, it will be easier!" I yelled back.

Everyone was staring at me.

Jason gritted his teeth but he beckoned for me to go. I tightened my grip on the inhaler, took a long deep breath, then held my breath and crawled through.

I could barely see, but I could tell I was getting closer by the increasing temperature. Closer to what, I wasn't sure. My vision started to get blurry from the lack of air. I inched forward and fell, landing face-first on the floor.

I desperately inhaled the oxygen that I had left in the inhaler. My vision cleared slightly. I was in the room from which the gas was coming from. A giant machine plumed out the poisonous air. Something clicked in my head, and suddenly I knew what I had to do.

The oxygen was gone from the inhaler, and I needed more.

I was probably risking everything when I screamed, "Jason! More oxygen!" and hurled the inhaler through the vent.

I heard an irritated oof, on the other end. Yeah, I was probably going to pay for throwing an inhaler at his head, but not now. The inhaler came flying back my way, and I wasted no time in releasing the air.

This boom was even bigger than the first one. It sent me flying backwards, and I hit my head on the metal. I held my breath, but there was no reason too. I had destroyed the gas machine, and pure oxygen floated back to me. It felt like a much-needed drink of water after not having oxygen for hours.

"And that's why you have to be creative!" I said weakly.

I'm definitely getting into MMA.

BEING PRESENT AND GIVING OTHERS MY ATTENTION

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10/13/20230 Comments

By: Harshika Gidwani

OPM - Being present and giving others my attention

The early light poured through my bedroom window and hit my face. I pulled my blanket up to my forehead to block it, but then the hot air started suffocating me, so I had to pull it down again. I groaned. Now that I had woken up, hundreds of thoughts swirled around in my head. I need to get new blinds, I have three assignments due today, I have to clean my room, my mom will be coming in–

“Noah! Wake up!” My mom yelled, pulling my blanket away from me, “You’re late for school!”

School. Why was school so early in the morning? Why couldn’t school start in the afternoon, when everyone had already finished their breakfast, eaten their lunches, and had enough time to open their eyes?

“Did you hear me?” My mom shrieked, pulling me out of bed.

I groaned. The overload of thoughts again came again. What am I going to wear? What am I going to get for lunch? Is Mom still taking me to Jacob’s house today–?

“Go get ready. I’ll see you downstairs.” My mom let go of my hand and stomped downstairs.

I had ADHD, so it was kind of hard for me to focus sometimes. Distracting thoughts constantly occupied my mind, and I barely had enough time to think about the present.

Anyway, I was already late for school, and I didn't want to have to do the "late kid walk" where everyone stares at you like you're an alien as you keep your head down and walk shamefully into your class. I quickly dressed myself, flung my books and lunch bag into my backpack, and trudged off.

I wonder what book I'm going to get this time. Will the library be packed? I want an adventure book . . . and a STEM kit. I hope they have Ozo-bots—

"Noah!" My best friend, Jacob, whisper-yelled at me.

I shook my head and then looked at him. Jacob pointed at our teacher, Mr. Lee, who was staring at me expectantly.

"Noah, did you hear the question?" Mr. Lee asked.

I could practically hear him grumbling internally about me.

"No, sorry," I said, my face burning hot.

Mr. Lee sighed, "We just watched a video about staying in the present, and that whole time you weren't in the present?!"

I kept my mouth shut.

"You kids always give me a headache," he muttered before shaking his head and saying, "Forget it. Free time!"

The kids whooped and bolted over to the game cabinet while I stayed in my seat and waited for Jacob to grab UNO so that we could play. Things were not looking good for me today.

Did I remember to put my name on the assignments? Oh, no, I forgot to turn one in. It's fine, I'll turn it in before I go home. Ugh, why does the cafeteria smell like cabbages—

"Earth to Noah!" Jacob waved his hand in front of my face, snapping me out of my thoughts, "Do you remember? We're going to have someone talk to us today on the stage."

I nodded.

Almost immediately, someone stepped out of the curtain folds and a spotlight swiveled onto him. He looked very professional: he was wearing glasses, a suit, and generally looking like a Harvard professor.

He tapped his very professional-looking shoe on the stage and said, “Good afternoon, students. I’m sure your teachers have explained to you why I’m here,” he nodded at the teachers then continued, “So, let’s get started. I’m Harris D. Fowler. I’m here to talk to all of you about staying in the present.”

I groaned internally. Mr. Lee probably ranted about me to this guy. Why else would Mr. Fowler be staring at me pointedly?

“You there, young man!” he yelled, pointing at me, “I can see that you are not thinking about the present moment right now, are you? Well, come up here!”

I could feel my ears burning as I trudged up next to Mr. Fowler and plopped down on the chair he asked me to sit on.

“A group of researchers from Harvard did an experiment on people,” he boomed so that the entire cafeteria could hear him, “They found out that our minds are wandering about 47% of the time. A reason for that may be that every single second, our sensory neurons send about 11 million bits of information to our brain, and our conscious attention can only handle 60 bits. The others go to your subconscious. That’s why it’s crucial to be paying attention to what’s happening around you; it can help you grow as a person. How? Well, when you pay attention and stay in the present moment, you can be happier, smarter, and more vigilant. Your brain needs to grasp information in the present, and when you overflow it with information that is not relevant, like stuff that is not in the present,” he paused and gave everyone pointed looks before continuing, but I thought I deserved to slip out of the present moment to think one quick thing: Huh. I’m glad I stayed in the present and listened to Mr. Fowler.

Open-mindedness is the willingness to actively search for evidence that goes against one’s favored beliefs, plans, or goals. Those demonstrating open-mindedness see the other side and fight the tendency to have a bias for their own views. And, rather than favoring the socially dominant views, they give attention to those that are less dominant.

– Positivity P2

Sources:

Positivity P2

TEDx Talks Paying Attention & Mindfulness

Teamwork

9/28/20230 Comments

By: Harshika Gidwani

Hira smiled faintly at her reflection in the mirror. She felt butterflies frolic in her stomach, but she attempted to stay calm. She couldn't afford to lose anything because of her nerves. She had to grit her teeth and work harder than she'd ever worked before to become the jammer in the bout.

Hira was part of a rollerskating team, and she was going to play in her first tournament, which is called a bout in the rollerskating world. In a bout, a person has one of two roles; the first is a blocker, who has to block the jammer from scoring points. A jammer has to rollerskate past the blocker to earn points. At the end of the match, the team with the most points wins.

Hira had gotten sore feet, she had been bruised, and completely beaten up for this moment. The moment when they decided who would jam in the bout. She wanted to be the star of the match.

"Hira, you coming?" someone asked.

Hira swiveled around to see her best friend, Danica, leaning on the doorframe, her rollerskates already on her feet. Hira nodded, then turned to strap her own.

She pulled the buckles tight— probably tighter than she should have— then skated out onto the blinding arena.

Once there, spotlights glared down on the skaters and their coaches. Her other teammates were standing against the wall in a strict formation, waiting for the coaches to give them their signal to race. Hira joined the ranks, then stared at her coaches.

Ms. Hailey skated to them and announced, "Racing shall commence in one minute. Remember: this is how we will determine who will jam and who will block. Try your best to be the fastest, and we don't mind a little hitting. Just make sure it isn't a hit that will land you in the penalty box."

Ms. Hailey gestured to the sad row of seats next to the arena, and everyone shuddered.

"On your marks. Get set. Go!" in one thunderous second, everyone took off at blinding speed.

Hira's vision turned into a blur as she skated and dodged. The end wall, which was the finish line, was inching closer. First, it was thirty feet away, then ten. It quickly turned into five, then within an arm's length.

Her palm slapped the wall and an airhorn blew to mark the end of the race.

"Well done, Hira!" Ms. Hailey said, beaming down at her student.

Hira felt a grin spread across her face. Danica flashed her a thumbs-up, and her other coach, Ms. Fern, nodded approvingly, but one girl glared rudely at Hira. The girl, Julia, had desperately

wanted to be jammer, but since she made it to the wall after Hira, she was most likely going to end being a blocker.

However, Hira didn't give this a second thought. She had made it to the wall first! Hopefully she'd become a jammer . . .

"The jammer in tomorrow's bout will be Hira Gupta!" Ms. Fern shouted.

Hira whooped.

"Tomorrow is going to be awesome!" Hira said to herself excitedly.

"Hira, wear this," Ms. Hailey slipped a rubbery cover on Hira's helmet.

The bout was in thirty minutes and if Hira had felt butterflies before, these were full-on dragonflies. To stay calm, she examined the helmet cover. It sported a green star on a white and blue striped background. The star was the mark of a jammer, and the rest of the design represented her team. Hira ran a hand over it and felt pride flare through her (and a little fear).

Julia was also in the locker room, and she looked mad. A scowl twisted her features, and a glare like a laser beam pointed towards Hira.

Hira flinched when she met Julia's eyes but didn't have time to concern herself with Julia. She double-checked her buckles, wrist guards, and knee/elbow pads. Then, with a deep breath, she skated out onto the arena. The crowd cheered and shouted her name. She skated around the rink once before lining up with her team.

"Work smart, hard, and tough," they chanted, then they separated to start the bout.

Hira could feel every pair of eyes on her as she ducked, dodged, and skated past the other team's blockers. Each time she flew by the blockers, a loud ding signal indicated that another point had been awarded to her team. The other team's blockers formed an impenetrable line so she wouldn't pass. She gritted her teeth and skated faster. Just then, she was knocked aside by someone!

"Ow!" Hira shouted, flailing her arms to break her fall.

She landed on her face, and her nose started bleeding.

"Time out!" Ms. Fern yelled, rushing over to her fallen student and helping her up.

She grimaced when she saw Hira's swollen nose. "You gotta ice that," she muttered, leading her to the locker room and setting her on a bench. "Wait here. I'll go get some ice."

Hira nodded, then winced as another wave of pain hit her. Just as she started to massage her face, Julia ran in.

“I’m so sorry, Hira! I don’t know what came over me! I just . . .” her voice trailed off as she stared down at her feet in shame.

“You did this?” Hira asked incredulously, staring at her teammate in shock. “You hit me? But—we’re on the same team! Why?”

“Because I wanted to be the star!” Julia said, balling her fists. “And you got it- and—”

“But we’re on the same team!” Hira repeated hysterically, “No matter who the jammer is, we either win or we lose! And now, we have a pretty good chance of losing because of this,” Hira muttered the last part while pinching her nose.

“What?”

“Look, this is a team sport. We have to work together to win! It’s not one person. It’s all of us!” Hira said.

“I got your ice!” Ms. Fern said, handing it to Hira. “Oh, Julia. You’re here. Good.” Her voice flattened, “You’re going to the penalty box.”

“What?” Hira and Julia exclaimed in unison.

“But she’s our best blocker and—” Hira started.

“And the person who hit you for no reason,” Ms. Fern said.

Julia lowered her head in shame. “Oka—”

“She thought I was the other team’s jammer,” Hira said suddenly.

“What?”

Hira repeated what she had said firmly.

“Oh. Well, In that case, I have to talk to the referee.” Ms. Fern excused herself and left.

Julia looked stunned, “Why’d you say that?”

“Because we’re a team,” Hira said firmly, “and will win as a team, or lose as a team.” She stretched her hand out to Julia, “Now, let’s do this thing.”

Teamwork:

You work well as a member of a group or team. You are loyal, reliable, and dedicated to helping your team achieve its goals.

Sources:

Positivity P2

2022-2023

The Magic of P2

6/2/2023

By: Harshika Gidwani

Howdy, everybody! How are you enjoying June? My birthday is soon, so I am super excited! Before you read my last article this year, I'd like to thank Alyssa Marx, our excellent editor, for giving me this exhilarating experience. I love writing, and Aly helped me display my skills to students and their parents. So, thanks so much, Aly, and good luck in 9th grade! And to the rest of the Griffin Post that will stay on the GP team next year, I look forward to working with you again!

Onto the story...

There was no way I was going to listen to that. Nuh-uh. I was already bored to death. I sat in my homeroom, waiting for the bell to ring. My homeroom teacher, Mr. Smith, was showing us Positivity Project... stuff. It was so dull. I would probably have fallen asleep if Mr. Smith hadn't placed me in the front of the room. I looked around the room and saw my classmates with their heads slumped on their desks and blinking slowly and tiredly, probably wishing the bell would just ring already. Then, at that moment, it was as though the bell had answered our prayers as it blared into the classrooms. The video hadn't finished when I leaped out of my chair and ran out the door. Why did they even show us that stupid P2 stuff? We could have a free advisory if it weren't for P2. Now wouldn't that be fun? If I were the principal, I wouldn't show P2 videos to the kids, I vowed. Later I would realize how wrong I was.

Twenty-four years later, I was promoted from teacher to principal.

Right! Now P2 shall be banished!

The students were overjoyed when I told them I was closing P2. No one liked it anyway. I started to feel good about myself. Yeah, that didn't last long.

Not long after my big P2-banning announcement, I noticed minor changes in the school. First, a gray tension seemed to hang in the air. It curled around school hallways, leaving the students almost always tense. It became rare to see someone smiling widely or joking in the hallways.

Next, more fights started to break out over even the smallest things. Students shared school supplies less, and there was an abrupt increase in lying to their teachers. I even caught one kid stealing some cookies from the teacher's lounge. I grew worried. What was happening to the kids? As their mischief and poor behavior grew more common, the kids' grades started to drop. By this point, I was freaking out. My—I mean—this school was in complete chaos. Urgently, I organized a meeting with the teachers.

Mr. Stankiez interlocked his fingers and stared grimly. He was into his early fifties and had been with the school longer than anyone at this table. Our newest teacher, Ms. Griffin had her lips pressed together tightly as her eyebrows furrowed. The teachers sat at the circular table, all looking concerned, no, worried. Finally, I broke the silence.

"How are your students doing in class?" I asked. The silence was so distinct, you could hear a slice of cheese dropped on the floor. Then suddenly, Ms. Jackson broke the silence.

"My math class is this close to failing. All of them." She held up her hand and left a gap between her fingers to indicate how awful the students were doing.

Mr. Watson, the science teacher, looked up grimly. "Whenever I'm teaching, I feel as though only the walls are listening. It's like all the students have lost the will to learn and their Enthusiasm."

That word tweaked some annoyance into my brain. Enthusiasm was one of our P2 characteristics.

"My students have lost all integrity and honesty. Their work has no creativity. They have a tight perspective and no humility. Their love of learning has vanished," said Ms. Jones, our STEM teacher.

My brain became even angrier after hearing about those P2 traits.

Mr. Davidson, our gym teacher, spoke up. "Their teamwork skills have gone low. Like, gone."

Ms. Griffin said, “ELA has lost its meaning to those students. The students don’t persevere in... anything. It’s like they don’t know how.”

Mr. Stankiez still hadn’t spoken, and his fingers were still locked together. When he finally spoke, all he said was, “We need P2 back.”

At that, I almost snapped. But I held myself. Could that be the problem?

“Alright,” I said reluctantly, “I’ll start P2 again.”

The students booed and yelled. But I had braced myself for this. I started P2 again. The changes were remarkable. You know when you are sick, but you take this remarkable medicine that destroys whatever malicious germ inside you, and you feel so good? That’s how the school was. Whatever looming tension was there dissipated. The students got better grades. Negative events just... disappeared. I have to admit, P2 changes you. And, to show future students that always follow P2, I put a big sign on a school wall. It read:

P2 helps you in ways you don’t notice

”

Now I feel pretty good about myself.

Enthusiasm

5/12/2023

By: Harshika Gidwani

I walked along the shoreline, the waves biting at my ankles while the sand squished beneath my toes. The beach was not very populated today, so if you were quiet, you could hear the crabs scuttling or the melodious splashes of the fairy fish. And don't think whatever I'm telling you is a myth. Because it's real. I have experienced it.

My name is Maxwell Octavian. I'm eleven years old with black hair and olive-green eyes. I'm not a big fan of the beach or anything. My idea of fun was staying home and playing video games all day. But my mom and little sister, Nora, craved to see the white sand, the soothing waves, and the occasional squawk of a seagull begging for a snack from our picnic, so we came here. Nora immediately rushed for the sea, and my dad had to chase after her, seeing as she was not wearing her floaties. My mom pulled out the sunscreen and rubbed it all over my face, before sending me off to "play." I quickly got out of there before my mom could remember to pull an itchy sun hat over my head. I picked a corner of the beach, free from soaked children and crusty red crabs. As I stared off at the sea, I remembered a story my mom used to tell me when I was little. It was about a magical fish that granted you all the happiness in the world. I remembered as she would take my little plush goldfish and wave it around like it was swimming. She would always start it like this:

"Many creatures lurk in the sea. Some are creepy jellyfish with stingers that electrify you!" With that, she'd reach over and tickle me. I'd burst into laughter and push her fingers away.

"Some are enormous sharks, that can chomp you right up!" She'd pretend her hand was a shark's mouth and try to nibble my toes. I'd hide them under the covers and scream for "the bad sharky" to go away.

"But the most important creature of all," she'd say in a hushed tone. "Is the magical Angelfish!"

"Ooh! Magical!" I'd exclaim every time.

She would nod secretively. "Some say the moment she sings her special song for you, you get all the happiness in the world!"

"All of it?" I would ask in awe. I knew the answer, but it was nice to hear it from my mother's lips.

"All of it." She'd tap my nose, then continue, "She is as blue as the summer sky, as big as a sting ray, and more beautiful than you can ever imagine. And her voice..." My mother would pause, as though listening to the fish's voice, which drove me insane from waiting. "Is as sweet as honey, fresh from the hive."

"I wanna meet the fishy," I would say.

“And you will, darling.” She’d tuck me in, kiss my cheek, and turn off the lights. It was like this nearly every day until Nora came along and my mom got busy with her. I was not jealous. I was getting too old for that story anyways.

I tried to ignore the sun glaring down on my neck. I was almost starting to wish for the hat my mom was supposed to give me. Maybe it was because of the heat, but I swear I caught a glimpse of an enormous blue fishtail. It was not a regular blue. It was the blue of clear skies, where not a single cloud was in your field of vision and everything seemed perfect. The tail’s size seemed too big to be a regular fish. I jumped to my feet and scanned the sea again. The fishtail popped out of the water again, then dove back down. Without thinking, I leaped into the water and chased after that abnormally large fishtail. It made no effort to escape, which was good because I was desperate to see it.

I swam into a coral reef, which gleamed with all sorts of different colors. I swam up to the surface to get some air then came back down, feeling excitement roaring through my ears. I stuck to the bottom of the reef and crept my way toward the fish. She still hadn’t noticed me, but I sure had. Just like her tail, the rest of her was abnormally large, like a stingray, I thought with a jolt. She was so glamorous, it was hard to put into words, with rippling sky-blue scales, like a mermaid. As I approached her underwater, I imagined angelic choirs singing in my ears. Was this really... the magic fish?

She turned around and saw me.

“Howdy-! Aaargh! Human!”

I screamed too. “You can talk!”

She looked just about ready to swim away, but she looked somewhat miffed with what I just said and stayed.

“Duh. Of course, I can talk! All creatures can! Although we don’t bother talking to humans.”

I was about to reply when I realized the water had flooded into my mouth. I attempted to swim up to the surface but the fish pulled me down. She was incredibly strong.

“Hey, tough shot. Here’s something for ya,” she slapped me right on the cheek with her little fishy fin.

“Hey! What was that for?” I yelled. Suddenly I realized that I was breathing. Underwater.

“Yeah, I’m powerful. There’s magic in me! I can help you breathe underwater!” She did a loop-the-loop, then turned serious. “Listen, kid. No one can ever know animals talk. Kapeesh?”

“You’re...” I stuttered, “You’re a magic fish,”

“Urgh,” she slapped her fin on her...whatever fishes have for a forehead. “Right. Introductions first. I am Stella, the world’s magical fish! Now, I know people say that I can bring happiness to them, blah, blah, blah. And sure. With my... advice! So, you wanna be happy? Be more enthusiastic about stuff, okay, kid? It helps.”

“Wait, wait, wait, back up,” I said, “So... you don't give us happiness? Can't you just slap me again and inject some happiness like you did with the breathing?”

She swam up to me and slapped me again.

“Ow!” I rubbed my cheek. She was freakishly strong.

“I can slap you if that’s what you want! But no, kid. I can’t give ya happiness.” she giggled at the pained expression on my face.

Then she turned serious again. “Look, kid.” she sighed. “I’m three thousand four hundred and twenty-one. In all my years, I’ve learned that being enthusiastic about things leads to happiness. So try it, kid. It works. Plus, I’ll give you another mighty slap if I find out you ain’t being enthusiastic. Oh, and for exposing the fact that animals talk.” she flexed her fishy muscles.

I laughed. “Okay, your highness,”

“Good,” she started to swim away but I stopped her.

“Just one quick question. Is your singing voice really the most beautiful thing anyone has ever heard of?”

She sighed. “I guess so,”

“My mother used to say it is ‘as sweet as honey, straight from the hive.’”

“Ah, that’s because a bee friend gives me honey. Mmm, honey is so good!” She exclaimed, clapping her fins together.

“How do they ship it?” I asked.

“They ship it through Fish-Ex,” she said like it was obvious.

“Fish-Ex?” I asked incredulously.

She raised her fin to slap me.

“Right. Leaving now. Hasta la vista!” I swam away before she could get those slimy fins on my face.

I broke the surface and stepped out of the water. I’m guessing the magic wore off because I was able to breathe normally again. I ran to my mom, who was sitting underneath our umbrella, reading a book.

“Hi, Mom!” I exclaimed.

She put her book down warily. “Why do you seem so cheerful?”

“You know me! The most enthusiastic guy you’ve ever met!”

“I feel like I don’t,” she muttered and picked up the book again. At the moment, I hardly knew it, but that fish had changed my life.

At school, I tried my best to be more enthusiastic. No more sulking in chairs and tossing my pencil from one hand to another. No, I was so enthusiastic, I had my hand up every time the teacher asked a question. They started to grow fond of me. In P.E. I displayed my skills vigorously, so much so that I was picked first. I was starting to notice a big difference. Being more enthusiastic made me happier. I was always eager to do something. The feeling was great.

So that’s my story. If Stella the magic fish comes to your place, asking for a Maxwell Octavian, please don’t give me away for accidentally exposing the fact that all animals talk. I don’t wanna feel another one of her slaps. I’m gonna go undercover. My new name is Bob McBobby. Do NOT tell Stella. But do ask her about Fish-Ex and annoy her. Have a hearty slap– I mean, uh, Saturday! (If it is not Saturday at your place . . . just deal with it.)

Oh! And make sure you guys are enthusiastic about nearly everything!

Peace from California,

Bob McBobby

Short Story Submission Challenge

4/21/2023

Brought to you by Harshika G and Priya A

A quick word: You must write a short story on OPM - Identifying and appreciating the good in others. It can be any genre you like including fiction, mystery, realistic fiction, etc. Your story will be judged by Harshika, Priya and Aly on creativity, grammar, and your overall writing! The winner's story will be displayed on the Personalizing P2 area and get a surprise baggie with a gift. This is entirely your story. You can make up anything you like! Now good luck and use those amazing writing skills!

Due Date: May 3rd

Perspective

3/24/2023

By: Harshika Gidwani

The sky was a gloomy sort of gray and fog lingered like a thick cloud over the quiet neighborhood. Nonetheless, Luna walked toward her car with delight, mentally reviewing the subjects she had studied. Today was a momentous day for Luna. Today would be the day she earned glory and fame. She hopped into the car and pulled out her flashcards. She couldn't afford to lose this chance.

"Luna, we're here," Luna's mother called.

"Goodbye, mother," Luna said, getting out of the car. She smiled and quickly made her way to her class. As she took her seat, her friend Hazel smiled and whispered to her, "You'll be brilliant!"

Luna smiled to herself. As she looked around the classroom, she noticed Lyla, a girl from her class writing furiously on her paper. Luna never liked Lyla. She thought of her as a cheater. She had to push all these thoughts aside though as their teacher, Ms. Davis stepped in front of them. She smiled at her students before saying, "Welcome, all of you! Today is a very special day! Today is our Talented Trivia!" Ms. Davis exclaimed. "So first of all, who here is going to participate?"

Luna's hand shot up. She glanced around the class and saw that no one else had raised their hand. Luna grinned widely.

"Ah, good. So Luna and Lyla will be competing! Make us proud, girls," Ms. Davis announced. What?

Luna immediately spun around in her seat. She scowled at the sight of Lyla tentatively raising her hand.

"Ahem,"

Luna reluctantly turned back to face Ms. Davis.

"As I was saying, good luck, girls, you may leave now." Ms. Davis finished. Luna grabbed her things and stored them safely in her locker. With a confident smile on her face, she marched toward the Talented Trivia. She was going to beat Lyla and win the trophy.

"Alright, girls, we are going to begin in a moment, but first the rules," Mr. Brown brandished a few papers. Luna nodded. She, Lyla, and a few other kids were sitting at the back of the stage. The Talented Trivia would begin in a few moments and everyone was getting anxious. "Rule number one, no cheating. No flashcards or cheat sheets or anything like that. It's just you and your brain." He tapped his head to emphasize the point. Luna looked pointedly at Lyla, who didn't seem to notice. After a few boring minutes, Mr. Brown finished explaining all the rules, and thus began the Talented Trivia!

Luna underestimated Lyla. Many rounds had passed, and the competitors who had lost were sitting on the stage, watching Luna and Lyla answer questions back and forth. How is she doing this? Luna thought furiously. She glanced at Lyla who had just answered a question. Lyla was fidgeting around with something in her hand. Was it--a piece of paper? Luna snapped her fingers delightfully. She finally figured out how Lyla was cheating! She had probably written something on the paper to help her answer the questions! Cautiously, Luna waited for the announcer to give her a trivia question. After answering it, she raised her hand.

"Yes?" The announcer, Mrs. Smith, asked.

"May I know what rule number one was again?" Luna asked.

Mrs. Smith frowned, "It was no cheating. No cheat sheets or anything to help you."

"Well, miss, I'm afraid we have a cheater in our midst." Luna declared.

The audience gasped. Lyla looked uncomfortable.

"What are you talking about?" Mrs. Smith questioned angrily.

"What I'm talking about is that Lyla is holding a cheat sheet!" Luna announced triumphantly.

"Is this true, Lyla?" Mrs. Smith asked crossly.

“What-! No!” Lyla said, looking panicked.

“What’s in your hand?” Luna demanded.

“I found a paper of the rule book! I wanted to give it back but the trivia had started so I thought I would give it back later!” Lyla blurted.

Luna’s ears felt hot. What? No! She’s lying! But somewhere inside her, she knew that Lyla was telling the truth. A lump of embarrassment welled up in her throat.

Mrs. Smith broke the silence. “Um, we’ll just finish up with the Trivia. Next question, Lyla . . .”

After a couple of hours, the Trivia was over and Luna had won! She was so thrilled she had beaten everyone! Just as she was pondering her victory again, she noticed Lyla getting things from her locker. Luna felt a tickle of guilt and shamefulness as her cheeks flushed red. Luna realized that whatever bad thoughts she had about others were just her thoughts. Her perspective shaped how she looked at people. Her perception of people shouldn’t be negative without reason. Her perspective needed to be good. She should first understand the situation before judging it. She took a deep breath and walked up to Lyla to apologize sincerely.

Love of Learning

3/3/2023

By: Harshika Gidwani

Look, I didn't want to be a goddess.

Now I know what you are thinking. You are a goddess? You have supernatural powers! That is so cool! How can you not like it? Blah blah blah. Trust me. It is not what you expect. My name is Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom and battle strategy. But even though I am the goddess of wisdom, I hated learning at first. The way I was born is not the way you expect, either. It's because I burst out of my father Zeus's head in full battle armor. It was impressive, but after that event, all the other gods seemed timid in front of me, and I didn't like that.

I thought, Hey, I'll learn to be a goddess and then everyone will see me as a member of the Olympians. Easy.

For some time, it seemed to be working. The other gods were getting used to me being an Olympian (except my stepmother, Hera. She didn't like me very much). It was okay . . . Until I had a clash with Poseidon, the god of the sea. See, back in the day, Gods and Goddesses liked being patrons of a city. The more people that prayed to you, the more power you got. Some popular ones are Thebes, Troy, and Sparta. Anyway, the capital of Attica is on the Greek mainland which is one of the biggest and most important cities in Greece. Poseidon and I wanted to be patrons of it. It went like this. I showed up in the city and said, "Greetings, people of this city! I am Athena, goddess of wisdom and warfare! I am here to be your patron!"

The city elders seemed perfectly happy to accept me as their patron, and we just started talking when Poseidon came into the show. He appeared in a swirling column of saltwater, striking his trident on a large rock, creating a fountain of salt water.

“I am Poseidon, here to be the patron of your city!” he yelled.

Party pooper, I thought.

When he noticed me, his expression changed into confusion then anger.

The city elders paled. You’d never want to be forced to choose between gods. The other would just zap you.

“I know how we can settle this peacefully!” I yelled. The elders seemed to be relieved when they heard the word peacefully.

Poseidon grunted.”How?”

“A competition! We will each give the city a gift, and whoever brings a better gift will get to be their patron.”

Poseidon looked slightly disgruntled, but he couldn’t back out. “Me first,” he said.

He thought momentarily, then swung his trident and created a four-legged creature.

“Behold! I call it a horse!”

The villagers clapped politely, then turned to me. I was nervous. I didn’t look like it on the outside, but I was as worried as a goddess could be. I stepped forward and raised my hand. A sickly-looking plant burst through the ground. It had nobby black fruits the size of grapes.

Poseidon burst out laughing.”What in the name of Olympus is that?”

“It’s an olive tree,” I said, the confidence inside me as bright as a flame on a cold winter night. “Olives will be the most important food in Greece. You can make tons of money by selling them!”

I had no idea that they’d accept me as their patron but they did. Maybe they wanted me to be their patron. Maybe they just wanted the olives to be on their pizzas. Either way was fine. But after that event, all the gods seemed oddly distant from me. I was so angry that I decided to spend my time in the city that I had won, which I called Athens. I didn’t want to be a goddess. I didn’t even want to learn how to become one. My insecurities blinded me so much that I didn’t even try to learn. One day, I was strolling in my city, when I spotted an owl. It hooted at me and started to fly away. Curious, I followed it. We flew up above the clouds, and it took me straight to Olympus. It hooted at me and I realized what it was trying to say.

“You’re right.” I murmured, “Olympus is my home.”

I flew straight up and walked through the double doors. I was Athena, not just the goddess of warfare and wisdom, but an Olympian too.

I did my best to be a goddess. I tried to fit in with the others, and live a goddess's life. Correction, I learned to live a goddess's life. Surprisingly, it worked. I chose to learn how to work with others.

Maybe being a goddess isn't that bad after all.

OPM - Cheering Other's Success

2/10/2023

By: Harshika Gidwani

"Come on, Abigail! We don't want to be late!" Annabel called, sprinting down the sidewalk. Abigail grinned and ran after her friend. They both screeched to a halt as they stood in front of the high school door. Annabel opened the door as they both bolted inside. They quickly made their way to the school's gym and took their seats in the bleachers. Annabel shivered with excitement as the basketball teams started their exhilarating game. To Annabel it ended too soon, and she complained about it later on. Abigail just smiled and imagined her friend becoming a great basketball player, as it was Annabel's dream to become one.

Years later, when they were in high school, Annabel was at her first match against the rival high school. So was Jasmine, a newer player on the same team. Abigail sat on the bleachers, just like when she was younger, waved flags, and cheered for her friends. It was meant to be a great match filled with excitement. And it was, but the outcome was shocking. Once the game had started, Annabel immediately appeared as the star player. She could shoot three-pointers from afar, racking up points, which was great for the whole team... except for Jasmine. She couldn't help but feel a little bit jealous as she watched Coach Fred clap Annabel on the shoulder, praising her for her incredible skill. She told herself, Coach will be proud of me too if I shoot a three-pointer. I will try.

Even though she knew she was not the best at shooting, she needed to get Coach's attention. She did, but not how she expected to. As she aimed and shot her three-pointer, it ended up barely skimming the net. Still, she didn't accept the fact that she couldn't do it. After several failed attempts, the coach took her out and someone else sub for her.

Later when the match ended, and Annabel's team won, Annabel ran up to Abigail and brandished her trophy. Abigail was happy, watching her friend's eyes light up with excitement, but she was also concerned about Jasmine.

“Hey, did you see Jasmine anywhere?” Abigail questioned.

“No,” Annabel replied, “She was acting weird on the court though. She nearly cost us the game. Thankfully Narissica shot that two-pointer...” She continued on about the game, and Abigail listened with delight, until out of the corner of her eye, she saw Jasmine, red-faced, storming out of the locker room with her bag.

“Uh huh, excuse me for a minute, Annabel,” Abigail quickly ran after Jasmine, and finally found her outside, waiting for someone to pick her up.

“Hey girl, what happened there?” Abigail asked.

“Why do you care!” Jasmine shouted.

“I spy the green-eyed monster of jealousy,” Abigail said. At that, Jasmine just blinked, then sighed.

“Look, I’m sorry. I just... I just want to be appreciated.” Jasmine said.

“And you will be when you deserve it,” Abigail said quietly. “You need to cheer for others’ successes for them to cheer for yours.”

Abigail waited for those words to sink in. Jasmine finally seemed to nod.

“What would I have done without you? I will go and congratulate Annabel now. Thank you.” And as she walked off, her friend’s words rang in her head as she discovered another significant step toward her triumph.

Social Intelligence

1/27/2023

By: Harshika Gidwani

Abigail leaned on the bus window, gazing down at the slushy roads. Geez, it was cold outside. Her stomach was knotted at the thought of needing to make friends at her new school. She was never very good at making friends, and the thought of starting fresh constantly itched at her. She bit her lip as the bus parked. The doors swung open and the kids stampeded out, but Abigail was the last to leave. She barely took a step forward when a girl halted right in front of her. She had blue eyes and blonde hair in pigtails. She gave Abigail a toothy smile and gave her a map of the school.

“You must be the new girl! Here is a map of the school. It's easy to get lost, so I have marked the bathrooms and water fountains for you!” Her pigtails bobbed in excitement. “If you want, I could give you a quick tour of the school. My class doesn't start for another thirty minutes. I’m Annabel, by the way.”

“Um, sure. I’d love that.” Abigail murmured, peering down at the map.

“Okay, then!” Annabel seized Abigail’s hand, and they went on the tour. As Abigail got to know the school and Annabel more, the more comfortable she felt.

“So! That's all!” Annabel smiled.

“Wow! The school is amazing! You are really good with people!”

“Thanks!” Annabel said.

“I’m not very good at making friends. Could you teach me how to be good with people?”

“Sure!” Annabel responded. “Social Intelligence is key.”

“What’s Social Intelligence?” Abigail questioned, tilting her head.

“Social intelligence is the ability to communicate and form relationships. Like how I communicated with you, and then we formed our relationship as friends!”

“Ah,” Abigail nodded.

“Well, then, try it in your first class,” Annabel advised.

“Alright,” Abigail said.

A few minutes later, Abigail was in her class, piling books on her desk. She noticed a girl sitting in the far corner, who seemed to be looking for something. Oh! Abigail thought. She doesn’t have a pencil! Collecting herself, she walked up to the girl, whispering Social Intelligence, Social Intelligence.

“Um, do you need a pencil?” Abigail asked.

“Oh! Yes! Thank you. I didn’t want to seem unprepared, but now I don’t need to ask for help!”

“You're welcome,” Abigail said. “Do you want to sit next to me?”

“Sure!” The girl picked up her stuff and sat down.

“I’m Jasmine, by the way. What’s your name?”

“Abigail,” she said, shaking hands with Jasmine.

Look for Part 2 in the next paper!

Prudence

1/13/2023

By: Harshika Gidwani

There once were two angels, Prudence, and Good Luck. They could both take and give smart judgment to the townsfolk. After an exhausting day, the angels were chatting away in the lounge. They got into a heavy dispute about who was more important.

“I’m more important because I give good luck to people! That is how they get their wealth and health!” Good Luck ranted.

“That is incorrect,” Prudence seethed, “The real reason they get their health and wealth is because of me!”

They continued to yell and argue with each other, until finally, their master, the head angel, came down to calm the ruckus.

“Good heavens! What, may I ask, is going on here!” he said.

“She is bragging about how important she is!” both angels screamed in unison.

The head angel, Jafar, sighed. “Dear Good Luck. I’m afraid Prudence is right–”

“No! You favor her more! I demand–!” Good Luck started.

“FINE!” Jafar bellowed! “We’ll have a test.”

Before either angel could speak he grabbed hold of them and flew them to a small farm. They quickly turned invisible and watched as the poor farmer tended to his crops.

“Prudence,” Jafar whispered, “Now”

Prudence quietly sneaked behind the farmer. She placed her hands over his head and whispered an incantation. Doing this, Prudence had completely deserted his brain. Prudence flew back to Jafar, and he then sent Good Luck to do her thing.

Good Luck scattered gems and jewels all over the crops, but the farmer didn’t notice. Soon enough, Good Luck returned to stand by Jafar, and all three angels watched as two men approached the field. Their eyes grew wide as they saw all the jewels, then snapped onto the farmer, who still hadn’t noticed the wealth.

“Good evening, sir!” They said to the farmer, “There are so many stones in your field. It is our duty as good citizens to help you.”

The farmer agreed as Prudence had left him. The two greedy men snatched each and every one of the gems except for one embedded in the dirt halfway.

Prudence slithered back to the farmer and restored it in his brain again. Immediately, the farmer noticed the gem and picked it up. His eyes grew wide, and he left as soon as possible to sell it. He received a large amount of money in exchange for it and he and his family were able to live comfortably for years.

It is very important to have prudence. Thorough and smart judgment is a very important characteristic, which everyone should have.

Self-control

12/21/2022

By: Harshika Gidwani

“Tom! Come on!” Nathan called. Tom quickly scampered after his friend, but before he could set foot outside of his house, his father caught him.

“Make sure you work hard in school. I don’t want another note saying you did not do your homework.”

“Okay,” Tom said in a drawling voice and ran after Nathan.

As they sank into their seats on the bus, Nathan asked, “Did you do the homework?”

Tom gritted his teeth, “No. I was playing video games with John.”

“Dude, you have to do your homework. How will your dad react when Ms. Paulk sends him another note?”

“Maybe I can copy yours!” Tom asked.

“No,” Nathan refused flatly. “You gotta do your own work,” Tom grumbled but did not protest.

Later in school, after Ms. Paulk had sent another email to the principal and Tom’s father, she announced that they would have a test the very next day.

“This assignment sums up your grade,” she said, “Study hard for it,” she looked at Tom sharply and raised her eyebrows. Tom rolled his eyes, but he had to do what he was told. When he got home, Tom’s dad was waiting for him at the door.

“Another email.” he said crossly, “GO TO YOUR ROOM!”

“Wait,” Tom said, “I have a test tomorrow, I will make up for all the missing assignments by studying for it and getting a good grade.”

“Humph. You better.” his dad stormed off.

That night, as Tom sat down to study, he suddenly got a text from his friend John, inviting him to a crazy party.

DUDE, GET OVER HERE! It read, WE GOT A PINATA!

Exhilarated, Tom quickly texted his friend, be right there, but as his fingers hovered over the send button, he glanced down at his work. He knew if he did not study, he would fail the test, but then he thought, this party is way cooler than this boring work. It's fine if I skip studying.

So, he left.

The next day, as Ms. Paulk collected the study guides and handed out the tests, Tom wished he had stayed at home and studied. He barely knew what any of the questions were asking. When he gave back the test, Ms. Paulk glanced down at the paper.

“Tom, please stay after class,” she said.

A while later, when everyone left, she sat down on her seat and peered at him. Finally, she said, “It takes self-control to study for a test and skip a party. Indeed, you have none, but that can be improved. You are probably wishing you studied, aren't you?”

Tom gaped at her, flabbergasted, then slowly nodded.

“Well then, what would you like to say?”

Tom cleared his throat. “I’m sorry. I realize now that if I had self-control, it would have benefited me more. At the time, I just did not realize it.”

Ms. Paulk nodded. “Very good. You may go,”

As Tom left, he thought to himself, From now on, I will study hard. I will try my best to see what will benefit me in the future, if not now. From now on, I will have self-control.

Kindness

12/2/2022

By: Harshika Gidwani

In the outskirts of a kingdom, there lived a girl named Sophia. She lived with her evil mother and her step sister, Claire, in a small cottage near a forest. Sophia had to do all the household chores and care, as neither her mother nor Claire were of any help on this front. She would cook food, and then get only the leftover scraps. Her mother pampered Claire with beautiful dresses and jewelry while Sophia received worn out hand-me-downs. In fact, Claire had a plethora of dresses and shoes. Even though she had to endure horrible treatment, Sophia still managed to keep a smile on her face, and tried her best to help everyone. One day, Sophia's mother decided someone should get a job and bring home some money. Claire immediately refused, saying she'd help around the house instead of getting a job (which she never did). Sophia then volunteered and set out to find a job.

She strolled through the woods, looking for a workplace where she could get employed. The woods seemed to end quickly, and before she knew it, she was walking in the knee-length grass, no trees nearby... except for one. It had absolutely no leaves, and its vines were shriveled up and dry.

Suddenly, it opened his big, yellow eyes, coughed, and looked directly at Sophia.

"Dear girl, my vines are dry and I cannot bear any fruit because of it. Can you please clear out the vines?"

Sophia was unsettled, as she had never seen a talking tree, but she still wanted to help the tree. "Of course!" She started working and spent a long time carefully cleaning out the tree. Slowly, a big pile of rotten vines lay on the ground.

"Thank you!" The tree yelled, waving one of his vineless branches.

Sophia waved back and continued her journey.

Soon, she came upon an old well with cracks and holes in the stones.

"Oh, thank goodness!" The well cried, seeing Sophia. "Can you help me?"

Sophia nodded, anticipating her next job.

"Thank you! My cracks and holes are really bothering me. My water is poisoned too. Can you please clean my water and patch my cracks?"

Sophia could not bear to see this poor well suffering. She agreed, and first patched up the holes with mud, using it like clay. As she worked, her hands got very dirty and tired. However, she

still wanted to help the well. After the mud dried, she washed her hands in a nearby pond, then used a bucket to gather some clean water, and dumped it into the well.

Exhausted, she bid him farewell, and continued her long journey.

Fortunately, Sophia found a big palace and immediately rushed to the door. When she knocked, a few fairies opened the door, and saw Sophia's state.

“Oh! You poor girl! Come in!” One of them said,

“Actually,” Sophia said, steadying herself at the door, “I just need a little rest. I have come to work for you.”

The fairies glanced at each other, then accepted Sophia as their new maid.

“We have only one rule,” said the fairies, “Never, EVER open the seventh door.”

“Okay,” Sophia said, “I won’t.”

Years passed by, and Sophia grew homesick. She told the fairies that she had to leave.

“Okay dear, but before you go, we would like to give you a gift.” The fairies said.

They took her to the seventh door and opened it. Inside was a huge room filled to the roof with jewels and coins. Sophia gasped and stared at the fairies, who nodded at her. “Your honesty and kindness has proven that you are truly worthy of this.”

Sophia rushed in and gathered everything she could carry, and then went home.

One her way home, she felt parched. She saw the well she had helped a long time ago, who offered her some fresh clear water. She drank it, thanked the well, then continued on her way.

A while later, her stomach rumbled and growled like a lion. She clutched it, her eyes darting around for any sign of food. Fortunately, the tree she had helped years before who now bore fresh fruit. He offered her the fruit, which was very sweet.

Half an hour later, she saw her little cottage and ran towards it, happy tears flooding her eyes. She burst in and her mother and step sister were shell shocked to see her there, even more when they saw all the jewels she was carrying (Claire dropped the new necklace she got which shattered on the floor.)

“How did you . . .?” Her mother pointed at the jewels while Claire gaped open - mouthed at the scene,

“It takes a kind heart to be truly rewarded.” Sophia replied, smiling.

Gratitude

11/18/2022

By: Harshika Gidwani

“Linda! Come over here, please!”

“Coming!” Linda put down her book and bounded towards her mother.

“Hi, dear. I am going to Mr. Jones’s house to work; I will see you later,” Linda’s mother said.

Linda pursed her lips, but then smiled and cheerfully nodded. “I will see you later, then!”

Her mother ruffled Linda’s hair and left.

Mr. Jones was a businessman, a rich one. However, he did not let his money go to his head and was usually considerate of others. He had offered Linda’s mother a job as a maid and her mother had accepted, as they were poor and had little money to get by. As soon as Mr. Jones saw their predicament, he had given them a small cottage right beside his mansion. His wife, on the other hand, was crueler than a crocodile. With a super-rich husband, she could get fancy perfumes and dresses and always mocked Linda’s mother and treated her poorly. John, her son, was just as bad as her, if not worse. He always got fancy toys, and no one was strict with him. If he broke a glass sculpture, he would receive no repercussions. The world was his playground!

Linda was eight years old with blond hair and emerald eyes. She was sitting in her room, painting a lovely picture of a bird, when she heard a crash! Her window instantly broke into pieces. She jumped up and scrambled onto her chair, careful not to touch the glass shards. Suddenly, a boy jumped through the broken window. He scrambled inside and seemed to notice Linda standing fearfully.

“What are you doing here?” He screeched.

“I live here,” Linda said indignantly, “Who are you?”

“John,” he huffed, “Wait . . . you’re that girl who is always so happy!” His expression changed as he asked quietly, “How are you happy? You live in this . . . what is this? Anyway, tell me,”

“I am thankful for what I have,” Linda said simply

John scoffed and left.

In school, Linda was the happiest and sweetest girl around. Many students asked her for her secret to happiness, and she used to smile and say ‘gratitude’. No one really understood, but, in time, Linda knew they would.

As the days passed, Linda would get happier, and John would get grumpier. He would completely ignore his mother, father, and butler. With no gratitude, he couldn't see the joy in what he had. Then his mother fell sick and was locked in her room so that she wouldn't spread the disease. John finally realized how much he loved his mother when she wasn't around.

One day, he was walking on the sidewalk, thinking about his mother, and heard someone running behind him. He turned to see Linda carrying a box of cookies.

"Hi," she said, stopping in front of him. "I heard about what happened to your mother. I am so sorry." She handed him the box, "These are for you."

At that moment, John saw the kindness in the girl before him. He suddenly felt very happy. He suddenly felt a feeling that was... kind of different. He'd never felt it before. Then he remembered Linda's words and realized that this was gratitude.

"Thank you." The words left his mouth for the first time, and he felt a warmth fill his heart.

Linda smiled and left.

Thinking about her behavior, he immediately went home. First, he made cards for everyone in his class and bought them as presents. When his mother was well again, he spent more time with her. He became grateful. For everything. As this continued, he became even more grateful, and soon, everyone saw a new boy in his place. All because of gratitude.

Bravery

10/28/2022

By: Harshika Gidwani

I walked on the beach, my flip-flops clacking pleasantly on my heels with every step. I stopped and lifted my head to breathe in the salty ocean air, my cinnamon-brown curls swirling vigorously around my head. My name is Athena Draycott. I have eyes grayer than stone, and arms so strong some are afraid to go near me. I went back inside our vacation beach house and into my room. Immediately, I knew something was wrong. I looked outside the window and saw that the beautiful, clear sky had changed to an angry gray with clouds dotted everywhere. The ocean started to churn, faster and faster until I could not see anything. The ground started shaking and I had to hold onto my desk so that I wouldn't be flattened against my bed. Then it stopped. Everything stopped.

I got up and walked to the front door. There, I pressed my nose against the window just in time to see a lightning bolt crash down on the welcome mat, leaving it in flames. A tsunami roared toward the house and put out the fire. Then the ground split open and a hooded figure crawled out sinisterly. I stumbled back just in time before the door burst clean off its hinges. Three people walked in. The one on the left was wrapped in a billowing black cloak embroidered with grinning white skulls. His eyes were deathly black with a crazed look of anger and misery. The one on the right wore leather sandals. He had green eyes and his eyebrows were furrowed in fury. The one in the middle had a gray beard, sparking with electricity. He wore a stormy gray suit and a navy blue tie.

"Greetings, daughter of Athena. We need you to find my Master Bolt, Poseidon's Trident, and Hades's Helm of Darkness." Zeus said.

A few hours later, I was crawling through a jungle of weeds, stopping to slap bloodthirsty mosquitoes every few seconds. I had the strength to stay awake long enough to let Zeus explain her quest to me, but passed out as soon as the strange men left. Now I was on their quest. I gripped my sword tight, fearing the worst.

Medusa, a vile creature whose eyes can turn you to stone if you looked directly, had summoned these powerful weapons with dark magic. No one knew exactly what her next step was with the weapons, but it couldn't be good. I hadn't seen my mother in years, and she was Athena? How could I not know this? I ducked underneath a large tree branch with thorns, catching at my clothes. My "mother" was testing me for some reason. Why couldn't I be left alone? Why did we have the same names? These thoughts swirled around my head.

As I pushed away one last branch, I saw a magnificent world behind this dreaded forest. There were meadows greener than limes and the trees and bushes swept their leaves lazily in the wind. There was a crystal-clear pond shimmering in the distance. But one part ruined the whole view. There was a cave. It was a large one, as far as I could tell. The mouth was wide open and I could see some light inside. There were tiny words scratched above the mouth. When I drew closer, I could see it read, here lives Medusa. Enter at your own risk! I swallowed but stepped in. As I went in, I saw that the cave had been transferred into a home. The light at the end of the tunnel grew bigger, and then she saw it. Each weapon was shiny and beautiful, more pretty than I had ever seen. There was Hades's helmet, emitting a black aura of death floating around it. Poseidon's trident smelled of the sea, but at the same time, its points glimmered powerfully. Zeus's lightning bolt was the best yet. It smelled of ozone, and it seemed to be powering the whole room so that I could see. Wait. It should not have been that easy. I swung my sword behind me and shut my eyes, just in time to hear snarls.

"So, you are finally here," Medusa whispered. "Great job. But, of course, it was easy. Oh, silly! You can open your eyes! I am wearing a veil. I don't want you to freeze just yet." I almost glanced up, but I knew better than to be so gullible. "The gods do nothing for you. Why get the weapons when you could let me rule? I'd give you a better life."

"No!" I cried. Medusa realized my intelligence too late. I swung my sword, and her snake head fell off to the ground. I couldn't trust her, I needed to save my family, the immortal one.

I grabbed the weapons and headed to the dungeons. As I was about to leave the cave, suddenly, a huge boulder of evil power crashed down on me... almost. A huge shield, Aegis, was standing over me, blocking the power.

Later, I thought I should have at least stopped to say thank you, or something, but I was too scared to do anything. Instead, when the shield hovered over me, I ran. Far, far away. I ran all the way home, and when I got there, I saw my dad and sister were there. We hugged in a tight knot, then I threw the weapons to their rightful places. The lightning bolt to the sky, trident to the sea, and helm to the underworld.

"Well done my daughter," a voice echoed from the heavens.

"Thank you, Athena." I said back.

Athena really shows her bravery when there is danger or potential opposition and she chooses to push through her challenges!

For the next article, YOU get to choose the character! Send me your ideas to harshika.gidwani@avondaleschools.org--I will do a lucky draw and maybe your character will appear in the next edition!

Other People Mindset

10/14/2022

By: Harshika Gidwani

In a land far away, there lived a thirteen-year-old thief called Axel. He was not a thief stealing with bad intentions. He would rather starve than steal, however, with his mother ill, he had no choice but to “borrow” little amounts of food for her. Then, after making sure she ate, he would go walk to a small forest where he would wrestle monkeys for bananas. That is how he made his living.

One day, after stealing some food from a wealthy house and giving it to his mother, he was strolling at the market, when he bumped into a girl whose face was concealed under a veil.

“Oh!” She helped him up and opened her mouth to say something. Suddenly, a few guards shouted and started barreling toward them.

“What?!” Axel whimpered, as the guards screeched to halt. A tall, thin man walked menacingly toward them.

“Recognize me?” He towered over Axel, his eyes glinting maliciously. “If not, I shall refresh your memory. Didn’t you just sneak into my kitchen to steal food?” he said.

“What are you talking about?” The girl asked.

“Sir, I don’t know what you are referring to,” Axel blubbered.

“Oh? Weren’t you the one who just stole my lunch from my kitchen?”

The color drained from Axel’s face.

“You are coming with me,” the man said and seized the collar of Axel’s shirt.

A few days later, chained to a fence, Axel sat, exasperated, on the steaming hot grass, underneath the wretched sun in a backyard that traveled as far as the eye could see. He could not

remember how long he was there. It seemed like an eternity. This was the day he would be sent to an orphanage, where he would just sit, sulking and eating gruel for the rest of his life. He let his head fall into dreams where monsters made of gruel chased him, laughing menacingly.

“AXEL!”

“Huh?” Axel awoke to the sound of palace guards smashing down the fence. They rammed in like bulls and charged at Axel. He struggled to release his hands but had no such luck. What is happening? He wondered.

Surprisingly, the guards changed course for the manor, and the porch was nothing but a pile of rubble in a matter of seconds. The guards smashed down the door and ran inside.

Stunned, Axel tilted his head to get a better view of what may be happening inside. Then, the same girl he met at the market approached arm in arm with a frail woman.

Axel swallowed. “Mother?”

“Oh, Axel!” She embraced her son and broke into tears.

The girl stood quietly to the side and waited for everything to calm down. Then she pulled off her veil and smiled. She whistled for a guard who arrived with a sword, and sliced the chains so Axel could break free.

“I am Princess Aurelia, Axel. I trust you know me?”

Axel gasped. “Your majesty!” He did a clumsy bow.

Princess Aurelia laughed. “I see you still need to be educated in bowing.”

Axel quickly stood up. “But how did you--”

Princess Aurelia’s smile disappeared. “You see, to escape the crowd of people always trying to follow me in the palace, I live in a small cottage nearby here instead. There, my cook makes delicious food, and I don’t have to worry about a thing. But one day, I saw you sneaking into the kitchen. You grabbed some bread and escaped. However, I stayed quiet. I believe there is good in everyone. So, I put on my veil, and I subtly followed you. I saw you giving the bread to your mother, and I immediately understood. When you left the house, I saw my chance and sneaked in. I gave your mother quite a scare, but she was so frail she could not move, let alone walk! I immediately brought my doctor and he treated your mother. I know you were only stealing for unselfish reasons, and for that I forgive you.”

Axel just stood with his mouth open, stunned by all he was hearing. His mother quickly closed his mouth.

“Oh! And to make sure you never have to steal again, I shall give you ten thousand gold coins.” A guard handed the princess a sack, and she dropped it in Axel’s hands. He could hear the jingle of the coins inside.

“Start a business. Get a better life.” She said.

“Thank you, Princess,” Axel bowed again, though he was still in shock. “You don’t know how much this means to me.”

The princess smiled, and whistled for her horse. Moments later, Axel and his mother were standing alone. But Axel was not left the same poor boy. He was left with a good life—better than the one he had before—and wisdom. Every single person matters, he thought, and everyone should know that.

This story is an example of the Other People Mindset because Princess Aurelia thought of Axel, stepped into his shoes, and knew that he mattered. That’s why she helped him. On the other hand, the rich guy did not think about Axel, or even try to consider the fact that he may be forced to do what he does. In his perspective, Axel did not matter. It did not end well for the unthoughtful man. So in your own story, try to be Princess Aurelia, and not Rich Guy.

Honesty and Forgiveness

9/30/2022

By: Harshika Gidwani

“You,” Toby breathed. He understood it all, but this was not the best time for a realization since he was pinned to the floor by his so-called ‘friend.’ He tried not to breathe in the dust from the musty floor of the ruined shack. It was absolutely gross, with all its mold and bugs inside.

“So you finally figured it out,” Hugh smiled evilly.

“But why? Why would you steal gold bars? Why would you pose as a detective? Why would you pretend to be my friend and come on this false case with me?” Toby squeaked.

“Hmph. No time for monologuing.” Hugh grinned evilly. “However, I will say something. I have this brilliant plan for these gold bars, so would you like to join me?”

Toby stared in complete silence, utterly stunned, then made up his mind.

“Instead of giving me an opportunity for crime, why don’t you give me a phone instead? I’ll call the police on you,” he remarked. Hugh sighed as though he was genuinely hoping Toby would help him.

“I gave you a chance,” Hugh said disappointedly.

Before he could execute his next step, a few wailing sirens approached outside the shack. Hugh muttered something bitterly and whisked himself into hiding.

Suddenly, a boy burst into the shack. He took off his cloak and revealed himself as none other than his frenemy, Todd.

“When I said go solve a detective case, I didn’t mean for real!” Todd laughed.

“I’m so sorry I fought with you,” Toby said, getting up.

“Yeah, me too,” Todd said. “Now come on! Let’s get you home.”

Question

Hey guys. Have you ever argued with your best friend, and they somehow ended up saving you from a disaster? Think about it.

Quick word

This story is a great example of honesty and watching who you trust, but also about forgiving your friends since they can really pull through in the end.