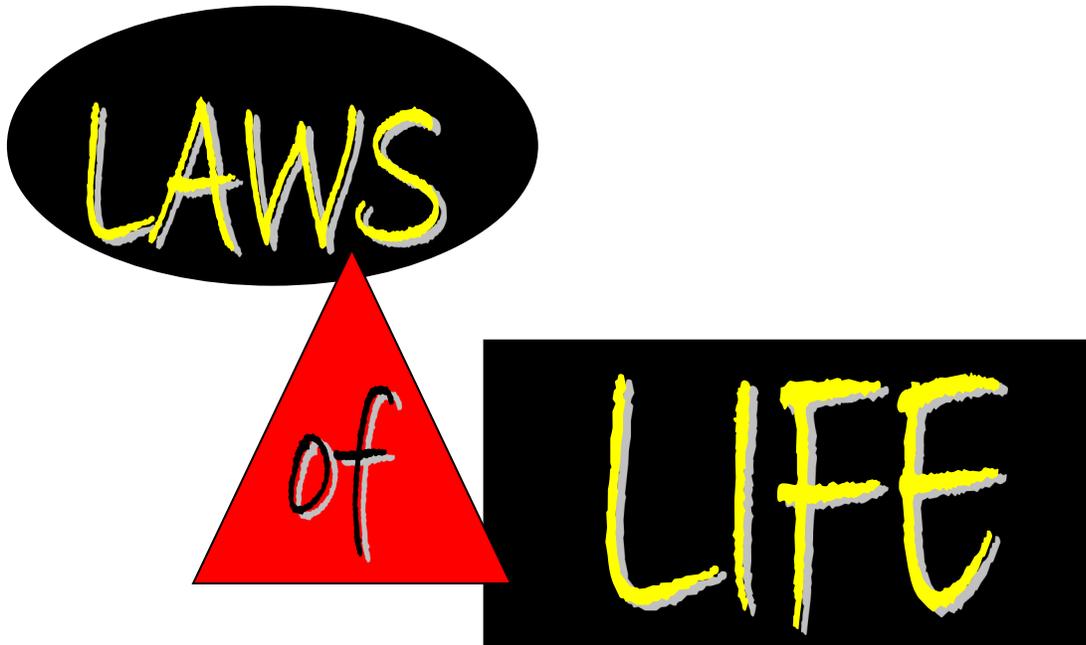


AWARDS PRESENTATION BANQUET



Citizenship Cooperation Courage Fairness
Honesty Kindness Patriotism Perseverance
Respect Responsibility Self-Control Tolerance

Thursday, February 21, 2019



2018 - 2019

23rd Annual *Laws of Life*

Essay / Speech Contest

Sponsored by:

City of Naples
Collier County Sheriff's Office
Southwest Florida 49'ers
Rotary Club of Naples
Collier County Public Schools

LAWS OF LIFE

CHARACTER EDUCATION PROGRAM

The *Laws of Life* Program is a character building activity that helps young people focus on and develop positive character traits that lead to successful citizenship and a successful life. The 2018- 2019 *Laws of Life* Program was offered to students in grades 4 through 12 throughout Collier County. More than 5,000 students contributed essays for judging. Forty semi-finalists presented their papers orally in front of the Blue Ribbon Panel of judges. From these, our four finalists in each division (4 - 5th, 6 - 8th, 9 - 10th and 11 - 12th grades) were selected.

The *Laws of Life* focus on twelve basic character traits:

CITIZENSHIP
COOPERATION
COURAGE
FAIRNESS
HONESTY
KINDNESS
PATRIOTISM
PERSEVERANCE
RESPECT
RESPONSIBILITY
SELF-CONTROL
TOLERANCE

WE THANK OUR DISTINGUISHED BLUE RIBBON PANEL OF SPEECH JUDGING



Cornelius Cacho

Linda Condon

Joanne Fowler

Walter Grote

Linda Greenwald

Harriet Heithaus

Hazel Horsfield

Eve May

Dianne Mayberry-Hatt

Brenda O'Connor

Lois Selfon

Mitch Sill

Sally Tiffany

Ted Tobye

*We extend a special Thank You to
the members of the Woman's Club of Naples
for their part in judging the essays.*

THE SOUTHWEST FLORIDA 49'ERS

The Southwest Florida 49'ers is an organization of business leaders. Members are all former members of the Young Presidents' Organization. Their purpose is to establish a forum for idea exchange, education, and fellowship in order that members may continue to enrich their lives, expand their horizons, and provide leadership in their family, business, civic, and cultural life.

The YPO, Young Presidents' Organization, is a forum for education and idea exchange for 7700 Corporate Presidents in roughly 75 countries. YPO members meet certain minimum qualitative criteria, and must exhibit leadership qualities with a high degree of integrity in both personal and business affairs. The most important qualification of membership includes reaching an approved title (President; Chairman; CEO; Managing Director; Publisher; Head Partner) prior to his/her 40th birthday. Other qualifications are that the business must report \$6,000,000 in annual sales/turnover; \$120,000,000 in assets for financial institutions or \$4,000,000 in fees for agency-type businesses, and at least 50 full-time employees. All members graduate from YPO after their 50th birthday. The 49'ers is composed of these graduate members, who must be at least 49 years of age.

YPO VISION STATEMENT clarifies their mission:

YPO is committed to the development of "Better Presidents through Education and Idea Exchange" by providing a challenging environment, which promotes the exchange of ideas and shared experiences, facilitates the acquisition of knowledge, the development of wisdom and inspires and stimulates continual improvement of the individual.

YPO fosters continual improvement of members' business enterprises, in their personal and family lives, and in their community responsibilities.

YPO prepares members to lead and manage change in a multi-value, multi-cultural global environment, while integrating the strengths and traditions of the past with the challenges and opportunities of the future.

Elementary School Division

Essays are displayed in alphabetical order by last name.
The order in no way reflects what place each student
has finished.

Kindness

There have been many great American presidents, but only one whose kindness inspired the name "Teddy Bear." Theodore "Teddy" Roosevelt is considered one of the greatest presidents of all time. One trait that set him apart was his kindness. Teddy Roosevelt said, "Do what you can, with what you have, where you are." This is the advice he followed to bring kindness to the continent. Roosevelt's kindness showed through his conservation efforts, his work to make America fairer, and his mission for peace and equality.

Teddy was the first president to turn conservation into an issue addressed at a national level. Teddy cared about plants and animals, not only himself and people. He showed this by creating five new national parks; which helped people protect and share the environment. He also created the Wildlife Refuge System which helped protect more than 230 million acres.

Roosevelt's kindness was also connected to his sense of fairness. Teddy's fairness was known so well, it inspired a political cartoon of him refusing to shoot a chained-up bear. This is how teddy bears got their names. Teddy Roosevelt became president after President McKinley got shot. Instead of abusing this sudden extraordinary amount of power, President Roosevelt used it to achieve his goals of fair policies. Roosevelt's Square Deal promoted protection of the consumer, control of large corporations, and conservation of natural resources.

Teddy Roosevelt's achievements, like fighting for peace and equality, also show his kindness. He was the first American president to win the Nobel Peace Prize. He received this award for negotiating peace to end war between Russia and Japan. He also fought for racial peace and equality. He was the first president to host a black man at the White House and appoint a Jewish cabinet member.

Roosevelt's kindness has been shown in many ways throughout his life. Roosevelt has also inspired me to protect animals by collecting trash as a hobby. This prevents the animals from getting poisoned and possibly dying. This reminds me of Roosevelt protecting the environment. Teddy Roosevelt is one of the kindest presidents and Americans of all time.



Kindness

What does kindness mean? It can mean showing empathy for someone. To show empathy means to know what other people are feeling. But, it normally means that you do something you believe is right and expect nothing in return. And that is the ultimate kindness. Mary Nelson, the Turtle Lady of Marco Island, is a woman I met, who I feel emulates the definition of kindness.

Mary Nelson helps out baby sea turtles. When people ask her why she helps the baby turtles, she says, "From the moment I saw a nest of baby turtles hatch, I fell in love". After she saw the baby turtles hatch in 1991, Mary called Collier County to ask if she could volunteer to help the turtles. You could only monitor the nests if you were a volunteer. In 1995, the County realized that they needed to monitor the turtle nests more. So, they gave Mary an ATV, asked her if she would like to become a permanent part of their staff, and Collier County let her monitor the sea turtle nests. So, from May to October, through the week and weekends, day and night, Mary Nelson goes out on her ATV finding and marking the turtle nests. She is dedicated to her job and she always has a smile on her face, even when she is stuck in the sweltering heat and relentless mosquitoes.

As you can see, people like Mary care for the environment and what happens to our wildlife. She is compassionate, considerate, unselfish, friendly, and helpful. Mary Nelson wakes up at 6:00 a.m. and drive 9 miles in her ATV, which on a busy day will normally take more than 3 hours. And, she helped the turtle population go up when it was low. Mary Nelson has thoroughly demonstrated the ultimate kindness.



A Treehouse Full of Kindness

Kindness is defined as the quality or state of being kind. The word kindness is extremely rare in our society, mostly because many people are self-absorbed. Meet Reece King - kind, compassionate and caring.

Born in Louisville, Kentucky, Reece was a normal child, joyful as could be. No one knew that when Reece turned twelve, everything would change. There were three words for this drastic change: Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia. Reece's family's hearts sank. In Reece's mind though, he was the same old kid. Reece started chemotherapy, which meant that he was forced to shave his head. Shortly after Reece was taken to the hospital, he developed a dream. He wanted the two-story Harry Potter treehouse that "Treehouse Builders" was giving away. After agonizing for months, a little spark of hope sprouted inside of Reece. Reece developed a saying, "Until the battle is won!"

Later, Reece was on a Disney Cruise with his family when he found out that five other sick kids wanted the treehouse too! As a result, Reece's dad exclaimed, "Reece, we're on a Disney Cruise! Do you really need this?" After long thought, Reece decided to give the treehouse to one of the other kids in line who were "more deserving" than him. On March 12, 2012, Reece made a new wish - to raise one million dollars for kids just like him through the Make-A-Wish Foundation. Reece chose to write a letter to the foundation about his wish. Luckily, they wrote back to him about how inspired they were and that they would pursue his dream! Reece started researching on the things he wanted to improve, such as patient rooms, hospital locations, and so much more! One year later, Reece's foundation grew so big that members of the University of Kentucky Football Team came to his school to meet him. Even Scott Lagasse, Jr. made a video about how he looked up to Reece!

Reece continues to inspire others through his journey. Reece King once told me, "No matter how rich, talented, or cool you believe you are, how you treat people ultimately tells all." Kindness wins!



"Love and compassion are not luxuries, they are necessities." wisely stated the Dalai Lama. Kindness means to exhibit hospitality, generosity, or affection. Although kindness can be minute, some people show extraordinary acts of kindness. One such person is Mother Teresa.

Mother Teresa was an Albanian girl with origins in India and Macedonia. Little did anybody know, this girl would demonstrate one of the greatest acts of kindness. At a time when there were thousands of homeless people fighting for food and clothes on the streets in Central and Western Asia, Mother Teresa opened the Missionaries of Charity. People on the streets were begging like savages to get any shelter they could find. The Missionaries of Charity assisted those who needed those necessities for survival, transforming thousands of lives.

Two years later, Mother Teresa continued her mission to help those in need by opening homes for the dying. It was there, she would sit next to people as they took their last breaths and comforted them from the uneasy feeling of dying alone. She even missed her own birthday to aid others in need. Mother Teresa certainly exemplified a true act of compassion for others.

Throughout her life, Mother Teresa traveled the globe spreading happiness and joy. She became a world-renowned icon for sympathy and care, yet remained humble. She encountered people from various religions in her travels. Although a Christian nun, she did not try to convert people of other faiths or religions. She embraced their culture and celebrated their religion wholeheartedly. She and her values of living, by the policy of kindness, unknowingly inspired many people.

Mother Teresa started off like the rest of us, but she was one of the few that pushed the limit to make a difference in the world. Her mission was not for personal gain; it was for the greater good of humanity. Kindness is an essential component in life, and it can be as brief as flashing a warm smile. Mother Teresa took the necessities of love and compassion and used them to change the world we live in today for the better.



Middle School Division

Essays are displayed in alphabetical order by last name.
The order in no way reflects what place each student
has finished.

The Kind World of Mollie Tibbetts

Imagine finding out that someone you love had been killed. How would you respond? With anger? With fury? This is a story about how Rob Tibbetts and his wife turned their sorrow into kindness, inspiring their community to do the same, after their beloved daughter Mollie Tibbetts was murdered.

Mollie Tibbetts was a rising sophomore at the University of Iowa. She was staying with her boyfriend, Dalton Jack, for the summer in a farming community of about 1,500 people. On July 18th, Mollie went out for an evening jog. Sadly, the last time she was seen was that night while running along the streets of Brooklyn, Iowa. On July 19th, Mollie was reported missing by her family.

Her community in Iowa responded with an outpouring of kindness. Hundreds of volunteers searched for Mollie for days and the authorities kept on searching until they found her body.

Mollie's heartbroken parents urged hundreds of people to attend their daughter's funeral after she was found in a cornfield. At the funeral, rather than responding with rage, they encouraged everyone to share one random act of kindness. Celebrating this random act of kindness, Rob Tibbetts (Mollie's father) recognized a couple who had just gotten married at the high school Mollie graduated from, in honor of her.

Meantime, a group of people decided to start an organization called *The Mollie Movement* in honor of Mollie and her family for portraying kindness, courage, and love to everyone around them. *The Mollie Movement* encourages people to print out a kindness card and share it with random people they meet as an act of kindness. People all over the country are now performing these random acts of kindness in Mollie's name by leaving nice notes in mailboxes, putting gift cards in people's windshield wipers on their car, or just simply going up to someone and asking them how their day is going.

No matter how sad and heartbroken Mollie's family was after the accident, they put kindness out into the world instead of hatred. Imagine how hard it must be to be kind after something so horrible happened. The Tibbetts family decided to continue life by portraying kindness and creating more community, just the way Mollie would have liked. Kindness is a small act, with a big impact. Person to person, neighborhood to neighborhood, city to city. But it all leads back to you, and how *you* decide to be kind today. Share your act of kindness today and make a difference along the way.

That's how kindness is passed along.



The Kindness of a Woman

Proverbs 19:22 quotes, "What is desired in a man is kindness." One of history's best humanitarians achieved this virtue with the most excellence possible. Her heart was filled with the most compassion and dedication to the poor, the disadvantaged, and the sick and she still remains an icon because of her devotion to service. Anyone who came in contact with Mother Teresa always left feeling different and joyful because of her kindness which she showed others.

To begin with, kindness is a virtue that allows one's heart to become tender enough to serve others wholeheartedly. Martin Luther King Jr. said that life's biggest question is "What are you doing to help others?". In particular, Mother Teresa was so passionate about serving those who dwelled in deep pain, loss, and despair and took the initiative to making a difference in their lives. She served people who were suffering with famine and disease in the streets of Calcutta, India in 1946. She also opened homes for the dying and showed how much she cared for a person who was looked down upon and who others had no form of respect for. AP News released an article called, "Mother Teresa Opens AIDS Hospice" and quotes, "Urging mercy and support for AIDS sufferers, Mother Teresa has opened a hospice in New York City to care for terminally ill victims of the disease..."

Furthermore, her kindness led to the fruit of generosity, "It is always better to give than to receive." Mother Teresa received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979 because she gave herself to the poor in the most loving way possible. However, Mother Teresa cancelled the banquet that was prepared in her honor to give the money used for the banquet to the poor in the streets of Calcutta. Certainly, the Nobel Peace Prize is given to those who demonstrate tremendous efforts to spreading peace in this world. All Teresa desired for the poor was peace. Nevertheless, Mother Teresa was a peaceful old woman who gave the peace she experienced from deep within her heart to those who did not experience this internal restfulness.

All in all, kindness is a life-long character trait that is one of life's most demanding laws. Without this law, service cannot be done out of love. Kindness is always the beginning of

peace and service. Mother Teresa's words sum up the effects of kindness, "Let no one ever come to you without leaving better and happier. Be the living expression of God's kindness; kindness in your face, kindness in your eyes, kindness in your smile."



Kindness

First, imagine a big white room. Now, you can only bring one thing into the room with you. The first is a ball of kindness and laughter. Corny, but wait. The other is a ball of hate and sadness. Which one are going to pick? The ball of kindness, right? The white room represents a vacant world and the balls of kindness and hate represent the two options we get to bring in the world. If we choose to live in frustration, fear, and hate, nothing good will advance for our actions, but kindness can help our world grow and thrive.

We all get the same 24 hours in a day, and the amazing thing is that we get to choose how we want to spend them. The incredible thing about kindness is that it is free and it can be a tiny notion. Let's say you have had the worst morning. You woke up late, and you got into an argument with your family. On the drive to work, you remember you were supposed to get to work early to talk to your boss. You finally arrive at work, and rush in to get to your desk. All of a sudden, someone stops you and gives you a really nice compliment, telling you how much you mean to them. Simple, but effective.

My parents, Sandee and Tom Kozlow, consistently show me kindness. My parents adopted me from Nepal when I was about 18 months old. They embrace me with unconditional love every day and help me become the wise, young lady that I am today. My mom and I call my dad MacGyver, because he can fix anything and everything. He specializes in mechanical engineering and builds race cars. Any time I need something fixed, he does it enthusiastically. My mom, an artist, shows me how to look at situations positively. Both my parents are incredible people who continue to feed me with kindness.

Humans tend to judge people by default. It's how our brains are trained. Society acts like starved lions faced with prey. We judge the prey by size, appearance, and behavior. We forget the fact that everyone is a human and their flaws make them unique. You see, every tree has at least one scratch in the bark and branches growing in all different directions. However, it is the tree's imperfections that make up a beautiful forest. Kindness is not always doing for others, but also, humbling yourself and understanding people's situations. Society jumps to scrutinize people by snapshots of their lives. What

you look like one day does not define who you are. You are you. You are not your hair, skin, or clothes. Choose to be kind today, for we do not live in the past, but we take new steps, each day to create our future.



Secret Mission: Kindness Needed

The dictionary defines kindness as “the quality of being friendly, generous, and considerate,” but this is quite a vague understatement as kindness should be the foundation of a well-functioning society. Kindness creates a path that allows and inspires one to successfully attain the rest of life's laws.

“Don't be content in your life just to do no wrong, be prepared every day to try and do some good.” These words were wisely stated by Sir Nicholas Winton, who exemplified kindness during the Holocaust by establishing an organization called *Czech Kindertransport*. This organization allowed the rescue of children whose lives were in grave risk in Czechoslovakia during the invasions of the Nazis. While rescuing children, Mr. Winton was acutely mindful that this daring act could possibly lead to his death. Yet, because of his genuine altruism, he decided that saving children's lives was worth the risk.

It all began when Nicholas Winton, a twenty-nine-year-old at the time, visited refugee camps in western Czechoslovakia. He was horrified at the tragic sight of children suffering in harsh and dreadful conditions who were on the verge of death. Mr. Winton knew that he had to do something to help them. His sincere kindness and genuine compassion inspired the courage that led him to organize what was known as *Kindertransport*. He then began a well-planned operation to save the lives of innocent children. While working a regular job during the day, he spent long, tiring nights coordinating and strategizing rescue plans. He did not aim to save just a few lives, but was ambitious enough to save hundreds, even thousands of lives. One goal of this secret operation included securing a home for every child, as well as, raising money in order to pay for transportation and other fees. His kindness did not stop at the organizing part of this operation but extended to financing it. If the money raised was not sufficient to cover the cost for the children leaving Czechoslovakia, he paid with his own money.

The train with the first group of rescued children left in March of 1939 and seven trains successfully followed after the first. In September 1939 Winton's last group of children did not depart because sadly, their train was invaded by the Nazis. After this invasion,

World War II began, and unfortunately, Nicholas Winton's work came to an end. Mr. Winton rescued a total of six hundred sixty-nine children.

Acts of kindness are not always the easiest to execute since they include risks and uncertainty. Often times this is even harder in a society that values convenience. Whether the actions are big or small, they unleash the doors to the other laws of life including fairness, perseverance, respect and responsibility. Nicholas Winton was the embodiment of benevolence. His actions helped shape today's society and serve as an example for others to follow. Kindness wasn't convenient for Nicholas Winton, yet he demonstrated this anyway. If more people took on this inconvenience, our society would prosper.



High School

9-10

Grade Division

Essays are displayed in alphabetical order by last name.
The order in no way reflects what place each student
has finished.

Rose Colored Glasses

Childhood comes with the most beautiful gift life can provide; innocence. Every one of us peers into a strange world with fragile, rose colored glasses. I will never forget the day that those rose colored glasses shattered in my hands, forcing me to realize that the world is not all beautiful. Kindness has made me the person who I am today, and affects the choices I make; large and small.

As far as I can remember, winter break was my favorite time of the year. It was a time of exhilaration and joy, with Christmas, New Year, my birthday, and family all shoved together. My family would fly over to Bolivia, where my dad grew up, and spend the days in breathtaking resorts, quaint towns, and stunning structures built by missionaries hundreds of years before. The year I turned 8, I started to notice things that I had never cared to see before. I began to ask my mom why there were entire families on the streets, sitting under the fierce sun, faces streaked with dust. I asked why I hadn't noticed them before, and why they didn't just go home, and take a bath. My mom explained to me that there were some people in the world that didn't have food on their plates, or a bed to sleep at the end of the day.

I couldn't understand. I had never spent a night with an empty stomach, or worried about lacking anything. I couldn't fathom worrying about how you would make it from one day to another; that not everyone in life was as fortunate as me, and I had so much to be grateful for. I had said to my parents "I need it!" hundreds of times, but had I ever truly needed anything in life? The next day, I asked my mom if we could help. My mom's eyes sparkled with happiness, and she rushed me to the supermarket. We picked out ham, cheese, bread, juice bags, and fruit. We spent the afternoon making bags with food, and talking. My cousin and aunt joined us, and we carried a few hundred bags to the car, drove to a street nearby, and opened the trunk.

I will never forget the sight of dozens of people rising from their tattered blankets, and running with their arms outstretched. Mothers carrying babies, little children smaller than me, elderly hobbling as fast as they're bruised and bare feet could take. As they neared, we began to hand out bags as fast as we could. People kept coming, and as one left three more appeared. Hands beseeched imploringly, desperately grabbing at the food. The hunger was painted on their faces, telling a story of suffering and pain. It

broke my heart to see all the people running towards us, needing help and food.

I will never forget what I saw that day, but one moment was seared into my mind with a shocking clarity. A young girl my age rushed forward, and looked straight into my eyes. The moment didn't last for more than a second, but it seemed eternal. We were both so similar, so human, yet so different. We led such divergent lives, but both deserved to be treated with the same humanity, the same basic kindness everyone is entitled to. In that moment she shattered my rose colored glasses. My one small act of kindness not only changed her life, giving her a small bag full of food, hope and comfort, but mine, teaching me how important kindness can be. I realized that I was lucky to have all that I would ever need, but not everyone did. That every single person on Earth owes kindness not only to others, but themselves. I reached a happiness that no material possession can bring, only coming with kindness. Kindness is showing that we can treat everyone with decency, and look away from our own wants for a moment to see others around us.



One Person Can Make A Difference

One person can make a difference, even if it's completely unintentional. But that seems to be the case for most role models. We confuse them to always be people of high status, with qualities that most of us aspire to obtain. They're the fashion models that women dream of being, and the actors' men use as a reference for their swagger; but not my role model. No. He is of simple nature. No special hair do's, he's not famous, he's not a millionaire, and he has no extraordinary accomplishments. I'll clue you in on the fact that he is merely a high school student. How could an ordinary, simple, and typical human being teach me how to be my best self?

Our story begins at the end of my eighth-grade year. I was your typical middle school trouble maker. I had grades that put the phrase "did you even try" into new light. If I am to be completely honest, I was so afraid of failure that I began doing it deliberately, leaving my GPA to suffer. I thought school events were pointless, I didn't care about joining any clubs, I never applied my true potential as a student, and above all I carried a fixed mindset: believing if I wasn't good naturally, then it wasn't meant to be, so, I never tried. This attitude got me into trouble frequently.

My dynamic with my family was stressed. They wanted me to be great, because they knew I could, but I didn't try. I was constantly in a counselor's office, or with the principal. They prodded me to try and figure out what they could do to change me, to all of a sudden bring forth this perfect student, despite my reluctance. Soon after, when it got old, they ignored me. I was a bad seed...unable to grow, and blossom. I didn't care about school, or being social. I didn't even care about not caring, but you see, this all changed upon meeting one ordinary boy.

Now we are at freshman year. Nothing had changed for me, it was just another year to fail. I met this boy somewhere at the beginning of freshman year. I was drawn to his weird humor and quirky personality. Soon, we became good friends. It wasn't until later that I learned just how unique he was. Teachers and his peers told me how exemplary he was. He carried straight A's, a 4.0 GPA, was active in school clubs, volunteered for school projects, and was a favorite among many - not to mention his social skills were

mature and engaging. He shined a light, and drew me to his flame. I saw that if I were to also put my best foot forward, it would lead me away from the job waiting for me at McDonald's.

I used him as an example and adopted a growth mindset...putting my first foot forward as a student, I raised my grades until they were all A's. When I struggled, I told myself that even though I wasn't successful yet, that I'd do better next time. I got involved with the school and social events by joining clubs, dancing in neutron, and volunteering. Like him, I expanded my friend group with people that were not only good to me, but good for me. I had fun getting involved. In the end, I walked away with a 4.0 GPA, became an active member of my school, and a respectful student.

I will always strive to be my greatest, and I owe it all to who I would boldly call "my hero". You see, he took the me I was in the past, and rather than dismissing her, he showed her what she needed to look like. Much like the Alpha in a wolf pack, never forcing anyone to the front lines, but rather being the strong example, showing his fellow members what should be done. This boy hasn't cured cancer, or invented any state of the art technology, yet he has touched my life in a way no one has before, and like a proper role model, never expecting anything in return. I am a better me because of him. I owe my hero my success. Without him being such a genuine example for others to follow, I'd still be a damsel in distress.



Tolerance and Kindness

"It's not enough to be friendly. You have to be a friend." -R.J. Palacio in Wonder.

In sixth grade, moving my way into Junior High, I met my Literature teacher, Mrs. Lewis. She's a tiny woman with bright cherry colored hair to match her smile. To this day, she is the wisest person I've ever met and holds the top of my list with book recommendations. She was my literature teacher throughout my time in Junior High and was, what I would like to consider, a good friend of mine, helping me through some of the hardest times of my life. In my time in her class, she taught me about the importance of tolerance and kindness, starting with her first book recommendation for me: Wonder by R.J. Palacio, my all-time favorite book.

Wonder follows the life of a 5th grader, Auggie Pullman, who has a severe facial abnormality, changing his outward appearance but keeping him the same strong kid inside. Auggie had been homeschooled until he reached fifth grade and wanted to be treated like a normal kid. Throughout the book, I saw many examples of tolerance in the community that welcomed him. I saw, too, examples of Auggie's own tolerance of those who misjudged him based on his outward appearance. He had to face problems with people who didn't understand him because they looked at his exterior rather than seeing the person within. The people that saw him only as he was skin deep were later able to see what an amazing kid he was. His friends supported him with kindness and made sure to help him when he needed them the most. At the time I was reading that book, I could relate to Auggie in the struggles of fitting into a tightly knit community when you didn't look the same as everyone else. I went to my old school from Kindergarten until eighth grade and always struggled to find my place there. Being the only person of color at that school, I always looked different from most of the people around me. I saw mistreatment there, from exclusion to bullying about my outward appearance, but because I was taught kindness and tolerance from a young age, I never retaliated. Auggie's story helped continue my journey into learning about the right way to treat others and how other people should always treat me. I learned that I don't need to put up with people's rude ways, but I do need to tolerate their humanity while staying true to

myself and helping them to learn. Tolerance, as seen in Wonder, can take on two different meanings: tolerating other's mistreatment but also tolerating each other's differences. We don't have to tolerate meanness and injustice, but we do have to tolerate others' humanity by not stooping to their level; we can react to them in a way that helps them to learn to better become part of the community. Auggie's outlook on life and his story brought to light true compassion, acceptance, empathy, and friendship, but above everything else, true kindness and tolerance in everything I do. Mrs. Lewis knew that at that time Auggie's story was the exact one I needed to read.

Throughout my time in Mrs. Lewis's class, she made it very clear that tolerance and kindness would be the major themes in her classroom. She taught us everything she could from textbook definitions of tolerance and kindness to her experiences with intolerance and segregation surrounding World War II and the Civil Rights Movement. Mrs. Lewis taught me so much about the importance of tolerance, particularly around those times. Had the people of the War Times in the forties and the close-minded Segregated South seen their ways of intolerance and changed, so much of what we learn about those times would never have happened.

Though my lessons with Mrs. Lewis may have ended, I know I will never stop learning about kindness and tolerance. In reading Wonder I found my favorite quote, which I try to live by every day: "It's not enough to be friendly. You have to be a friend." I believe if we all tried our hand at living by that idea, our communities could benefit from it and our whole world could be a better place. When I think of the Laws of Life, I personally think of kindness and tolerance holding hands because they truly go together to create a world that I would like to live in .



Responsibility

"I'll be honest. I don't have any good news for you." Those were the frank words of the doctor as he shared with my family that my grandmother had stage four liver and lung cancer. I was in denial. I was racking my brain for how my grandmother - my active, organic-eating, consumes fifty different vitamins-a-day grandmother - could possibly be diagnosed with this insidious beast called cancer. It seemed so unfair and so surreal. I had countless questions to ask, but all seemed so selfish to bring to the table when, evidently, there were larger concerns. My mind began to cloud with thought of what the future held. Of the toll this would take on my grandmother's mind and body. What impact it would have on my family. And frankly, how I, the one holding the most special bond with my grandmother, would accept this devastating news and step up to the plate to lend a helping hand throughout these next few months. Or so I thought that's what we had.

Responsibility is defined as the state or fact of having a duty to deal with something. It's a moral obligation to act in a way one knows is right. I had a duty to deal with something, even though it felt impossible, and I had to quickly summon the strength to act the right way: for my family, and for my grandmother.

Before I knew it, herds of hospice workers were swarming my house, briefing my family on grievance counseling, giving us lessons on medicine distribution and operating the many machines, and handing us books titled "When The Time Comes". They came bearing a hospital bed, three different oxygen tanks, walkers, shower seats, wheelchairs, and package after package of medicine. They set all of the equipment up in the room across from mine. I had no idea what was about to hit me. In the blink of an eye, I found myself doing and witnessing things that most children are sheltered from.

That night was like a shock to the system. Involuntarily, I was up what felt like every minute, hearing my grandmother exert sounds of distress as she tried to get up out bed just to use the bathroom. I was worried to fall asleep, thinking she might need me and I wouldn't be able to hear her. I showed up to school the next day trying hard to hide my exhaustion and sadness. My intentions failed me, however, and I broke down in tears. My

mother sent me home to get some rest and renew myself, but when I got there, it became clear to me that sleep was not on my agenda for the day. I was greeted with requests of my grandmother's for a "domino-size" piece of watermelon, a third of a teacup-full of raspberry tea, and her morning doses of medication. No one else was home, so it was up to me to help her. I simply rubbed my groggy eyes and got to work. Twenty minutes later, she needed help to the bathroom - something that she was capable of doing on her own just twelve hours earlier. Yet again, my mind got the best of me, and this sudden decline in her health overtook my every thought. As the days passed, the list of things she was capable of doing grew meager, while the list of things to do grew immensely. All too soon, my grandmother became sedentary and decided to take her first dose of morphine, feeling as if there was no quality to her beautiful life anymore. I stood in her room, holding back tears, as I helped my mother and aunt fill tiny syringes with crushed up pills and water. When I woke up the next morning, my grandmother was unresponsive. I traded cooking and errand-running for sitting at her bedside, holding her limp hand up until the very last second.

Eleven days. That's 264 hours. 15,840 minutes. 950,400 seconds of my life that taught me endless lessons in responsibility that I will forever live my life by. The realization of a loved one dying can stop you in your tracks and leave you feeling hopeless. I felt all those emotions, and more, but chose to be a responsible young-adult when it was needed most. Without a doubt, conquering those eleven days felt like a battle that no fifteen-year-old should have to go through, but I will always look back on the role I played in my grandmother's last days and feel proud of the strength and responsibility I displayed.



High School

11-12

Grade Division

Essays are displayed in alphabetical order by last name.
The order in no way reflects what place each student
has finished.

Perseverance

In one of the earliest days of my senior year, we reflected on the role in which “the coming of age” is translated in many African cultures for both men and women.

Dr. Brooks, my English teacher, asked, “In what ways do you see a coming of age, or personal development from childhood to adulthood, in American society?”

The smart girl in the corner answered, “the SAT!”

My friend behind me answered, “A father teaching his son how to shave?”

I laughed while pondering my own personal development into the person I am today. I’m a firm believer in that everything happens for a reason; cliché, but I know that the experiences I face and those that I rose through, cried through, and prayed through, were a foundation for the upcoming of the best version of myself and how I value perseverance as a true measure of character.

My parents worked endlessly to provide for our family, making sacrifice after sacrifice along the way. I remember translating my father’s broken English so his clients could understand him. I remember shoving foam into the furniture my mom so intricately sewed with our home’s garage functioning as her upholstery shop. Growing up in a family of immigrants—even at a young age, I had to contribute to our effort to live in America. Where my American-born peers would learn about the American dream, I lived it. Despite the difficulty of being immigrants and the drastic change in our lives—a move over mountains, seas, and cultures that I only have trace memories of—I had hope and courage. Being immigrants lead to prove how my parents instilled the idea in my siblings and I that success is achieved through hard work. They were always there; supportive of the accomplishments my siblings and I sought.

As Dr. Brooks said, “Having a support system in a tribal community was essential to developing a mindset in the growth of a man.”

As thankful as I am to live in America and have the access to a stellar education, the

burden of providing for a family was exhausting for my parents. I started realizing they were more stressed than they used to be, especially my dad. In the sixth grade, my dad was diagnosed with stage IV stomach cancer. In the midst of what would typically be the "coming of age" for a young man at the time, I could have never expected to see my dad become so fragile when I needed him the most. With him not having health insurance, a source of income, or an opportunity to get the best medical care, I felt helpless as I watched the cancer dehumanize his loving, teaching, and sacrificing personality.

Over the course of eight months, my father battled and lost to cancer; but in a sense, my entire family did. My mother—who was then our only source of income—stopped working; she stayed in the hospital with my dad. My brother rose to the occasion, getting a job at a restaurant, and I was left to take care of my sister and learn a lifetime of lessons shared between a father and son in a matter of weeks. Alone. Not knowing how to use the washing machine, having to walk a mile or two to the grocery store, and figuring out how to feed a hungry seven-year-old were tough, but I managed. I resolved that I was going to be like my dad. He passed away and my brother left for college, driven to keep fighting for the dream my father had. At the age of thirteen, I became the head of the household. Without a father figure, I became my own teacher. I learned how to fix my sister's bike, how to swim, and even how to talk to girls! Over time, I grew determined to improve the quality of life for my family and myself.

Now, I'm just another kid in a classroom living a life with dreams and aspirations like everyone else, but, I like to live my life with optimism, responsibility, and a sense of urgency. An urgency that lies somewhere between having to pee really badly and that feeling you get when your mom leaves you to hold her spot in the grocery store line at checkout. An urgency to get things done, or my coming of age story.

I laughed that day in class because my coming of age wasn't based on tradition or societal expectations as we discussed, but rather in the context of my situation. Experiencing hardship at a young age may diminish any sense of optimism for an individual; for me, it did the opposite. As unfortunate as it sounds, I wouldn't be the person I am today without my father passing away, without having to rise to the occasion and helping with responsibilities at home. Being an immigrant has allowed me to embrace the struggle of

pursuing my dreams, have the perseverance to take on new challenges, and have a dedication to enact change for all of those who are following my similar footsteps. I learned what it meant to be a leader and I understood what it meant to be human, to make mistakes. I want to advocate for the rights of others and I want to dedicate my life to caring for those who are silenced. I see the future as a sea of optimism, and I'm urgent to work hard for the endless possibilities.



Teagan Havemeier
Marco Island Academy
Mr. Keith Scalia

Laws of Life: Self-Control

My physics teacher stands at the front of the classroom, a wooden frame with metal spheres suspended by thin strings clutched in his hands. Newton's cradle, he calls it. He lifts the sphere on the end slowly, and releases it so that it arcs downwards towards the middle spheres. The impact causes the sphere at the opposite end to lift upwards in a motion equivalent to the first downwards arc. The motion repeats in the other direction.

My eyes swivel back and forth, and all of a sudden, I am no longer in the science classroom. I am thirteen years old, standing on the glass scale in my bathroom, staring at the numbers that seemed to suck me in and spit me out on the cold tile every time.

I can still remember the sickening whispers the voice inside my head used to caress my mind, luring me down a blind path of false promises and desire. When I stood in front of the mirror in my favorite pair of jeans, it told me they were too tight on my thighs. It told me that the coppery taste of vomit was what pretty tasted like-that it was normal to wake up in the middle of the night, crying and gasping for air because I ate too much the day before. Several months later, my jeans packed away because they no longer fit my ghostly figure, the same voice told me we still had work to do. This is what pretty looks like, it would say.

Even as angles jutted out of my body where rounded curves should have been, it was as if my eyes had a film over them that could only see "imperfections." Standing in front of a mirror was like putting up a microphone to the voice that continuously whispered self-destructive thoughts to me. Your arms aren't thin enough, it would say. You shouldn't have eaten so much at dinner.

The hardest part was that although my physical deterioration was evident, no one else could hear the whispers. No one understood that you could be hungry and hate food at the same time-that you could want to be healthy but lack the control to attain your antidote. I still remember sitting down at an assembly in eighth grade and listening to the boys next to me whisper. When one noticed me staring, he ended up scoffing and pointing at me up and down. "Eat a burger," he said. "It's not that hard."

In theory, it shouldn't have been. Food in, voice out; this was the equation my parents, friends, and therapist repeated to me over and over with varying syntax. No matter how hard I tried, though, I couldn't find the right answer. Logic was failing me when it never had before, and for that reason I felt simply lost.

After two months of trying to follow the equation and the numbers still reflecting my failure, I snapped. My mother came home to me cleaning cuts on my hands from shards of glass from the scale I had smashed. I sat on my bedroom floor with her arms around me for a long time before I mustered up enough self-control to get up and keep pushing.

The mind is no light switch; it cannot turn on and off on a dime. Those who speak about a moment where it just "clicked" with them to stop being self-destructive are speaking of a watered-down truth. The truth is, it requires self-control for me to not look at the back of a wrapper to see the nutrition label. It's a matter of self-control for me to live in the moment, enjoy an ice cream cone with my friends, and know my limits when I am pushing too hard in a sport.

The pendulum swings so that it may remain in balance with itself. One downward swing of the pendulum initiates motion in the opposite direction, and the force of which it swings dictates how much the opposite end deviates from a balanced center. Self-control became my tool to minimize this deviation so I could maintain equilibrium with myself. Newton's Cradle is not just a model of a law of physics, it is a law of life. I had spent so long swinging wildly out of control that I could not focus on the world or people around me. When we gain control of ourselves, we gain not only the ability to help ourselves, but the opportunities to focus on others.



Faith Hundley
Gulf Coast High School
Ms. Sherrie Miller

"Any last words?" We've heard this phrase a million times, but like most things on the screen, it's not reality. Real life often ends in the middle of a sentence; there are no warnings or last chances to say what needs to be said.

In the early afternoon of June 25th, my cousin Afton left my grandparents' house, promising to drive safely. Less than an hour later, Afton Nicole Staton left this world. An SUV traveling 55 miles per hour had T-boned her side of the car and she died instantly.

When I heard the news, I felt as if the wind had been knocked out of me. I stood in shock, struggling to breathe. After a few minutes of silence, the tears finally came. To this day, I can't remember the last thing I said to her. For all I know, it was "pass the peas" at a family dinner. It never entered either of our minds that we might not see each other again. We were both seventeen and had our whole lives ahead of us. I simply couldn't comprehend that someone so full of life, so vibrant, and so loving could just cease to exist. A bright light in this dark world was extinguished that day.

As teenagers, we delude ourselves into thinking we are invincible. My cousin's tragic death and the realization of my own vulnerability shook me to the core and reminded me that every word I speak and every move I make could be my last. I understand now that treating others how I would want to be treated is no longer sufficient; I have to live and love like it's my last day because tomorrow isn't promised.

As I was scrolling through my newsfeed a couple of years ago, I was sucker-punched by this quote by Auliq Ice: "If the words you spoke appeared on your skin would still be beautiful?" I read that quote less than an hour after having ugly words with my brother. OUCH! If my words had been written on my skin that day, I would have certainly been hideous. Haven't we all met someone who was physically gorgeous, but after speaking to them they were no longer attractive? It was the opposite with Afton. Her radiant personality and infectious smile made her even MORE beautiful—and it wasn't because her life was picture-perfect. She wasn't kind and happy all the time BECAUSE of her

circumstances—but in *SPI*TE of them. She chose to treat the world better than it treated her. Her joy was defiant “nevertheless.”

Ever since I was little my parents have told me, “The kind of person you grow up to be is much more important to us than your grades or your achievements. Your character *alone* is the measure of who you are.” The older I get, the more those words resonate. I have witnessed the smallest acts of kindness change the course of someone’s life. Stories abound online of people who decided not to commit suicide because of a random act of kindness from a stranger, and I have experience first-hand the life altering effects of empathy and compassion. Whether we realize it or not, every interaction that we have holds great power.

We all have an intrinsic need to be loved and to feel valued. Maya Angelou once said, “I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.” Our goal should be to make everybody feel like “a somebody.” That’s what Afton did, and it’s what I intend to do as well. As I begin my life as an adult, I intend to live big and love big—because after all, life can end in the middle of a -



Learning by Example

Many things have influenced my life; from growing up to ADHD to important interactions, so many of my important choices have been influenced by my teachers. They have taught me so much more than how to diagram a sentence or balance a chemical equation.

Teachers have given me the tools to sculpt myself into the person I am today by teaching me respect and instilling in me a deep sense of responsibility. I have also found one of the ideals that I hold dear embodied in George Washington, whose responsibility to America as its president was monumental. From a national to personal scale, respect and responsibility have proven to be the *Laws of Life* that guide my actions the most.

On a personal scale, my relationships with my teachers have been far and away one of the most important factors in my character development. Children learn about the world through their teachers, and not just book wise: students learn how to behave, get along with others, and in general, how to be good people. Come to think of it, all of the *Laws of Life* were taught to me in some way by my teachers—whether I knew I was learning them at the time or not. I've had many teachers, but three have changed my life and my character: my voice instructor and two of my English teachers. Each of them reached me when I really needed a role model, and each of them held me to a standard that helped me grow as both a student and a person. They also taught me very important lessons in respect and responsibility, which influenced my character immensely.

One significant lesson in respect I learned from my vocal instructor. Miss Robin insisted that I was ready to perform a solo that I was apprehensive about, in pushing me to do my best, she taught me to respect the process behind performance. She reminded me that I had practiced and worked hard, and her insistence that I could do it showed me that I needed to trust and respect the work I had done. In eighth grade, when my ADHD had gotten so bad that many teachers had given up on me, my English teacher taught me about responsibility. Mrs. Beagle held me to a high standard all year because she knew that I was more capable than I was demonstrating. She made me responsible for my actions, giving me important tools for making my own decisions: a sense of responsibility and a grasp on consequences. My sophomore year, I learned another important lesson in respect from Mr. Schumacher, my English teacher. When he believed he had upset me in class, he went out of his way to seek me out and apologize. At a time when I was

struggling with self-image, he showed me that I was worthy of respect—even from people that I looked up to.

I learned more about responsibility when I read about George Washington this year. Arguably his most important choice as President was to step down after eight years, setting a precedent for future leaders. He could have ruled for the rest of his life, and in doing so, destroy the newborn democratic government in one fell swoop by becoming what America had fought so hard against: a monarch. Instead, he chose to give up his power in favor of strengthening the government. Washington had such a deep, profound sense of duty to his country that he willingly gave up power to ensure that America's fledgling democracy would survive. His love for his country led him to choose posterity over power, and the gravity of that decision spoke volumes to me about what it means to be responsible.

I was raised on the principle that everything you do, as well as who you are, is a choice. Happiness, success, destiny—every aspect of life is a conscious decision that we make. With that in mind, I recognize that who I am today was greatly influenced by my teachers; each of their actions had an effect on me, providing me the tools to make important decisions. My character development, my self-image, and even the way I view the world, has been impacted by my teachers. George Washington's decision to give up his power also taught me about the meaning of responsibility. Armed with these teachings, I can take my life in any direction I care to. As Washington himself said, "Human happiness and moral duty are inseparably connected."



