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Teaching Materialism Through Storytelling: A Collection of Short Stories and Learning Materials

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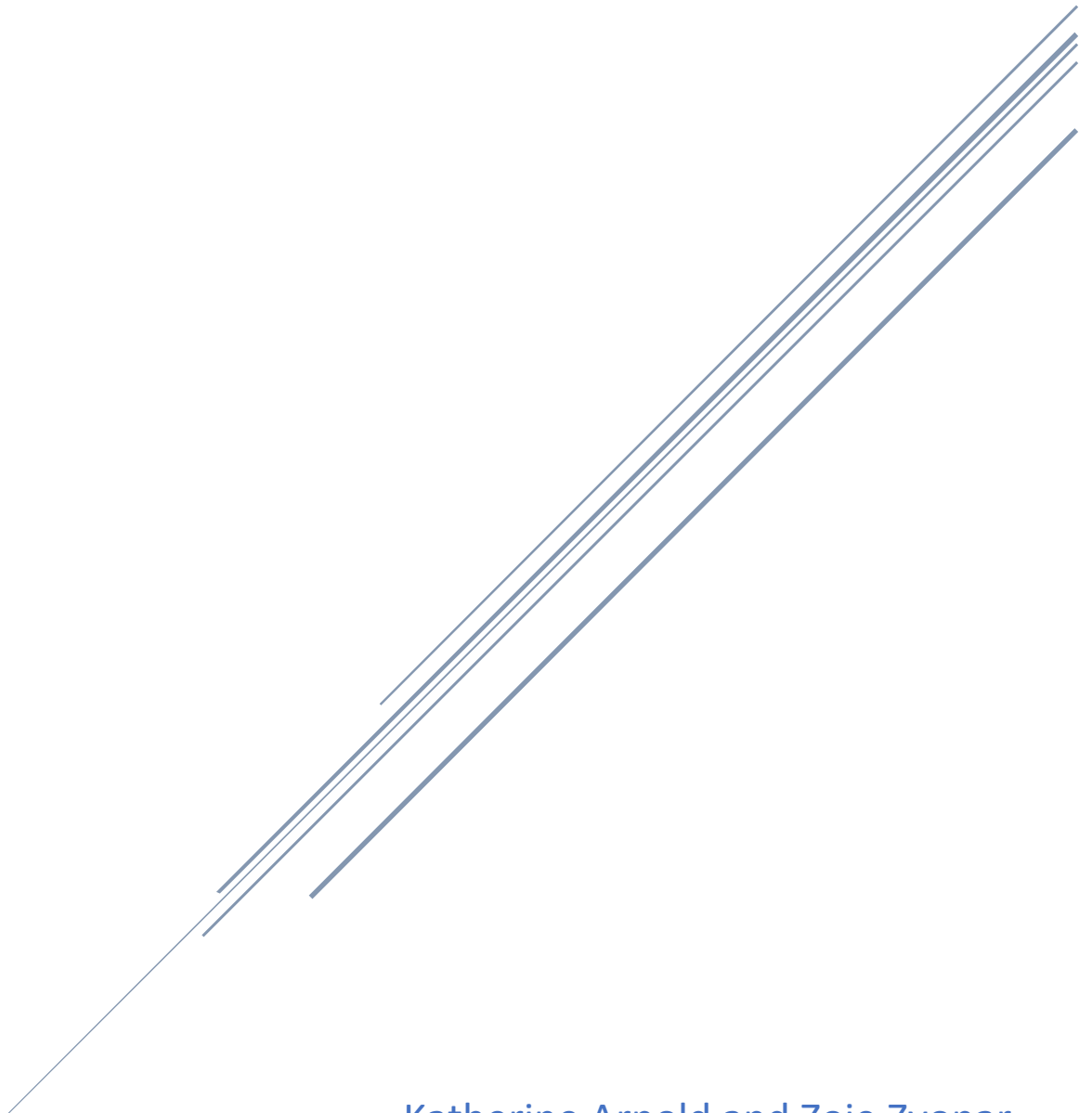
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TEACHING MATERIALISM THROUGH STORIES

A Collection of Short Stories and Learning Materials



Katherine Arnold and Zoie Zvonar
HNR 499

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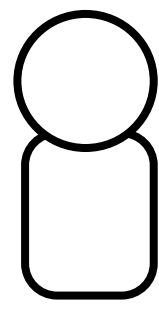
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Visual Aids

Materialism

Building Background

When we think about our happiness, it is important to realize how we interact with the material world. Focusing too much on the objects and things that we own and use can have a big influence on our lives, without us even realizing it. This influence is what we call materialism.



What is **materialism**?



Materialism is when someone places a lot of importance on obtaining material objects in order to meet a goal.



This means that someone who is highly materialistic will be more likely to turn to objects than family, friends, or even themselves to reach their goals. For example, if they wanted to become happy they might decide to buy new things rather than spend more time with their friends.

Low vs. High Materialism

Can we know how materialistic someone is? Many influences impact how materialistic we are and we all have materialistic tendencies. It is not because someone likes to buy new clothes or toys that they are highly materialistic. But what matters is the intention. For example, when buying a necklace as a gift your intention is to make someone else happy, but if you buy one for yourself your intentions are more self-centered. There are degrees of materialism, and someone can have low or high materialistic tendencies. What are some examples of low and high materialistic tendencies?

Low Materialism

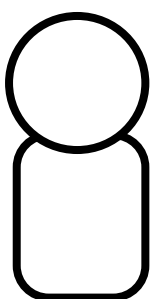
- Values experiences and people
- Relies on experiences, people, or themselves for happiness or success
- Buys objects for others or to suit a specific purpose (such as gifts or hobbies)

VS

High Materialism

- Values material goods
- Relies on objects for happiness or success
- Buys objects for the way it makes themselves appear to others

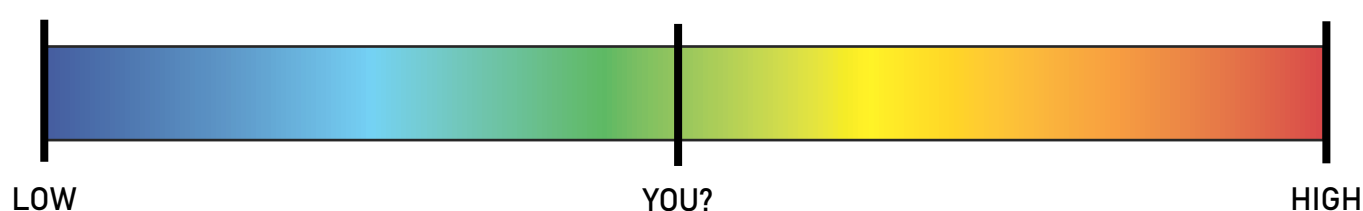
Materialism impacts everyone. Everyone is at least a little bit materialistic.



How is it possible that everyone can be materialistic to some extent?

The Spectrum of Materialism

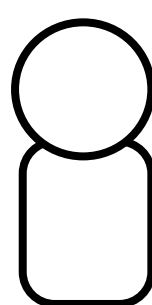
Materialism can be described as a **spectrum**, on which someone can be low, high, or somewhere in between. Just like the color spectrum, there is a gradual progression from low to high and it isn't always easy to tell exactly where the colors change.



Oftentimes, we become highly materialistic without fully realizing it, which is why it can be so difficult to understand. Materialism has consequences if we don't realize how it is impacting our lives.

Consequence of Materialism

What makes materialism dangerous if someone is highly materialistic?



Being materialistic isn't good for you over a long period of time. One consequence of materialism is that you are more likely to be unhappy, because it is impossible to ever have enough material goods to be happy. When someone relies on material goods for happiness, they may find themselves temporarily happy when they buy new things. However, the happiness typically doesn't last and soon they want to buy more things again. While it is good to make yourself happy there are better ways to do so.

There may not be a cure for materialism but there are ways to become less materialistic over time.

“Solving” Materialism

Is there anything one can do to become less materialistic? The short answer is yes but it is not easy. Here are three strategies that can help to decrease materialistic tendencies:

1

Gratitude

Take the time to be grateful for the things that you already have. Appreciate your toys and clothes, but also the people around you and the experiences you have. This strategy will allow you to focus on what you have rather than what you want.

2

Mindfulness

The next time you want a new object, think about why you want it. When you want food, why do you want it? When you want new toys, why do you want them? If you want a new puppy, why do you want it? Noticing why we want something is an important first step for limiting our desire for unnecessary objects.

3

Attention to Patterns

When you experience negative moods like sadness, you may want things more than you would if you were in a positive mood. Try to notice when and why you want certain things. Do you want new toys more when you are feeling sad? Do you still want them as much after you feel better? Understanding how your emotions impact your level of materialism helps you judge why you want objects.

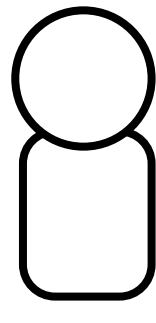
All of these strategies help us to think about why we want the things we do and appreciate the things that we already have. This helps us figure out what we don't need in our lives. Understanding materialism and how it can affect us is the first step to recognizing our habits and working to make ourselves less materialistic in the future.

How can you see materialism impacting you and your life?

Nicholas' Story

Building Background

Nicholas is a 5th grader who lives with his father and older sister. His story is about friendship and realizing who his true friends are.

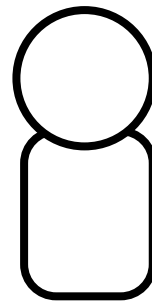


Can materialism impact our friendships?

When we think about our friends, we also need to think about the different kinds of friends we have. Everyone will have best friends that they have sleepovers with and friends that they only see at school. Let's think about how we make friends.

Making Friends

How do we make friends?



To make friends, people need to like us. We can rely on objects or our personalities to seem likable. Some people use their favorite toys or games to do this while other people rely on personality traits like kindness. Most friendships are based on more than one of these methods, but every friendship relies on at least one to start. It is also important to think about the kinds of people that we choose to make friends with.

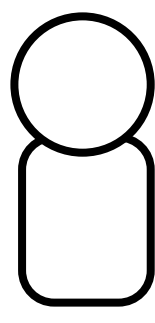
Friends: Good vs. Bad

A friend can be **good** when:

- They are nice to you
- They don't force you to be someone you aren't
- They support you
- They respect you

A friend can be **bad** when:

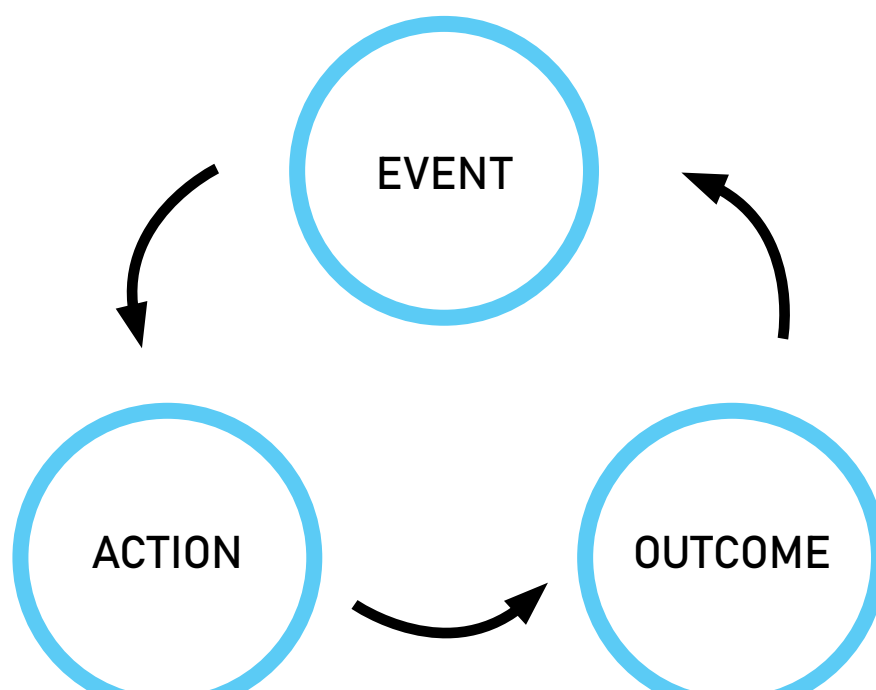
- They are only nice to you when they want something from you
- They force you to be someone you don't want to be
- They only care about your possessions and not you
- They take advantage of you



How is friendship impacted by materialism? Can the way we make friends influence how materialistic we are?

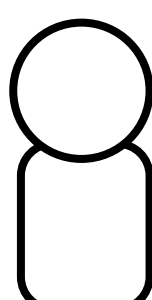
When you use materialistic methods to make friends, you could become friends with someone who only likes you because of your possessions. Highly materialistic people tend to be friends with others who are highly materialistic. The methods we use to make friends can impact how materialistic we become. This process is called the development of materialism.

The Development of Materialism



In most situations, people try to do things to meet a goal. For example, if someone wants to make a new friend, they might choose to use humor to meet their goal. If it works, they may want to use humor again to make more friends. But if they use toys to meet their goal, and it works, then they may want to use toys again to make more friends.

What we use to make friends matters.



Some things lead to stronger friendships than others.

Tangible and Intangible

Intangible methods create healthier and happier friendships, because they allow us to rely on something other than materialism. A friendship is stronger when it doesn't rely on only **tangible** objects.

?

Tangible is when something can be touched because it has a physical form.

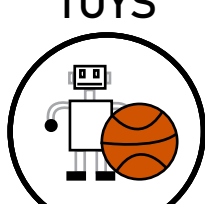
Intangible is when something can't be touched because it doesn't have a physical form.

?

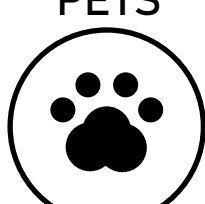
Below are a few examples of what we can use to make friends. Things like toys are tangible because you can touch them. Personality traits like humor are intangible because you cannot touch them.

TANGIBLE

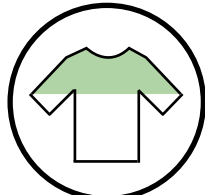
TOYS



PETS



CLOTHES



INTANGIBLE

RELATIONSHIPS



PERSONALITY



EXPERIENCES



Using intangible things to make friends often leads to stronger friendships. Why? Because this kind of friendship is based on something that is permanent. So if someone likes your sense of humor for example, you know they like you because of who you are not because of what you have.

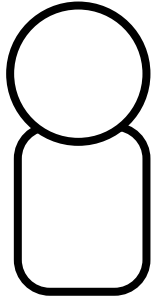
It isn't bad if your friends like the objects you have, but when they are only friends with you because of the objects, it can lead to a bad friendship. It could also make you focus more on the objects you have and puts you higher on the materialism spectrum.

Let's explore how Nicholas' friendships are affected by materialism.

Bailee's Story

Building Background

Bailee is a 5th grader who lives with her mother. Her story is about the struggle she experiences trying to adjust to her parent's divorce.



How does materialism relate to **divorce**?

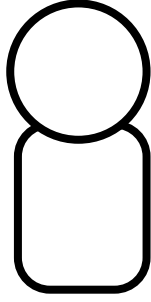
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Divorce is when two married people decide that they don't want to be married anymore.

?

Divorce and Materialism



Bailee is a member of a divorced household, in which she primarily lives with her mother.



She only lives with one parent and she has found herself in a situation where materialism is more likely to develop.

What does it mean for a child when two parents get divorced? This can mean:

Not being able to live in the same house as both parents

MOM'S HOUSE   DAD'S HOUSE



Not being able to spend as much time with each parent.



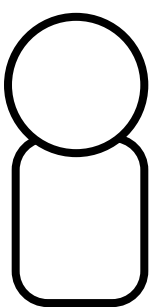
Switching schools and moving to a new neighborhood.

SCHOOL 

For any child, divorce is likely to create a situation where material objects are given because the parents feel guilty about disrupting their child's happiness. This can lead the child to rely on objects for happiness and become more materialistic. For many people, this can lead to unhappiness.

When we find ourselves in a situation where we suddenly have many new things, it can feel really nice at first. But after a while that nice feeling wears off. Remember that simply having objects doesn't make you highly materialistic. The way you think about the objects matters. It is important to be grateful for the things that you do have, rather than focusing on getting new things.

Gratitude and Materialism



How does **gratitude** impact materialism?

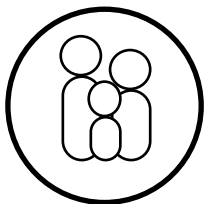
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Gratitude is being thankful for what you have.

?

There are different things that someone can feel grateful for, such as people, experiences, and objects.

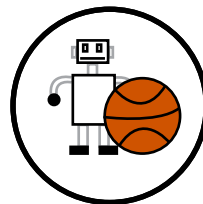
FAMILY



CAMPING



TOYS



It's important to be grateful for the objects that you have, but think also about why you have and want them. Do you want that new toy because you need it, or do you want to impress your friends? If you have over twenty shirts, do you really need more?

When we stop and think about the objects we have and why we have them, we can see where we might fall on the materialism spectrum. If you want a brand new phone to impress others, you may fall on the higher end of the spectrum and be less happy. But if you want a new phone because you want to be able to connect with your friends, then you may fall on the lower end and be more happy.

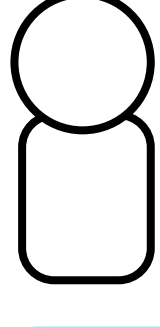
Now imagine a person who buys objects for experiences like sports or camping. They might feel happier because they get to experience something new with the people they love most. They don't base their happiness on the objects themselves, but on what the objects let them experience.

Let's explore how Bailee interacts with materialism.

Sam's Story

Building Background

Samantha is a 6th grader who lives with her father, mother, twin brother, and younger sister. Her story is about her struggle with self-esteem and materialism. *This story features soccer and discusses player positions. If you don't know what the different positions of soccer are, go to the bottom of this page.



How does materialism impact **self-esteem**?

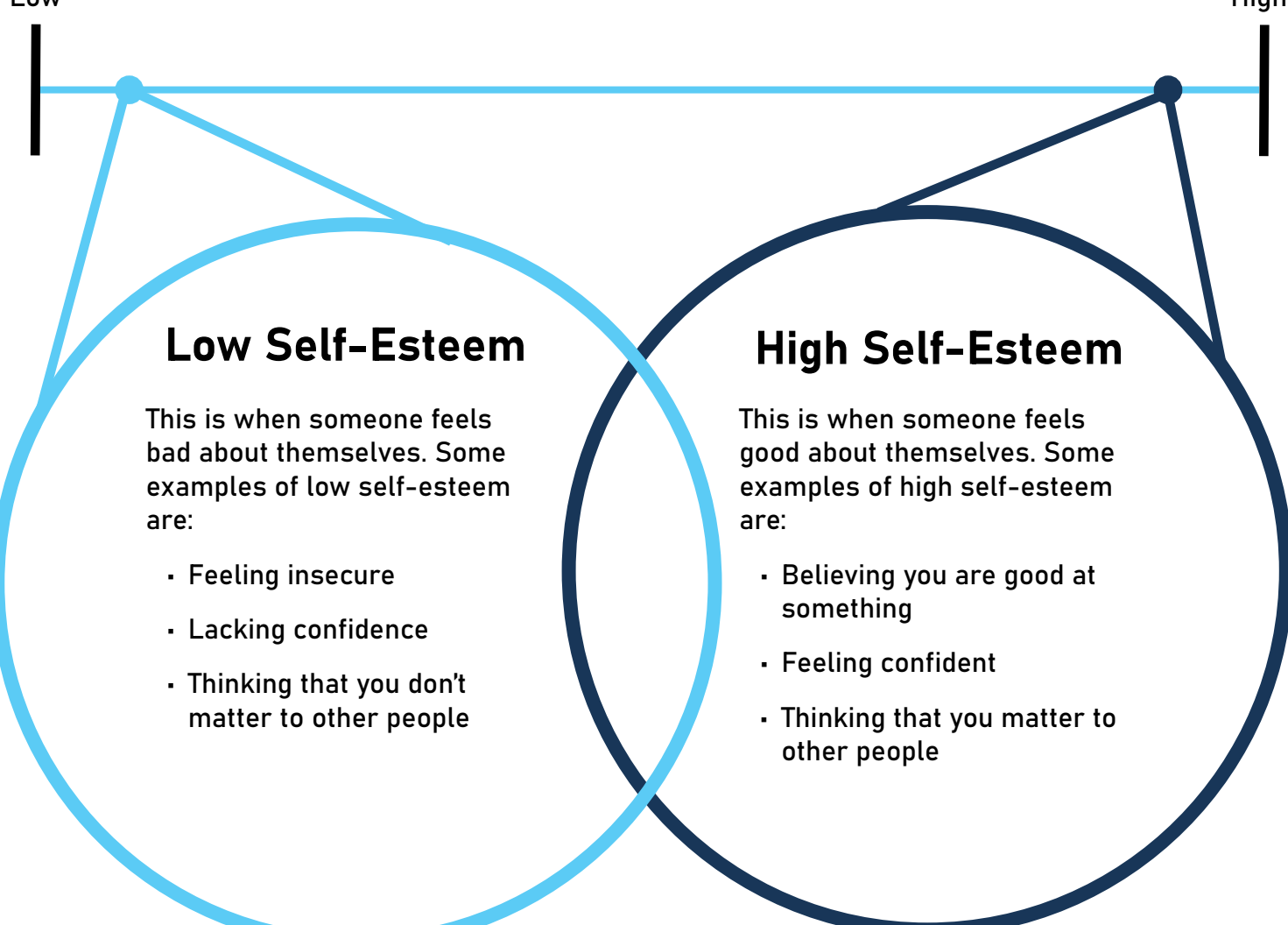
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Self-Esteem is someone's sense of their own value or self-worth.

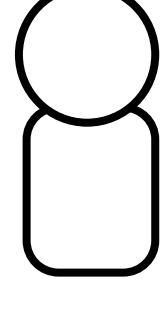
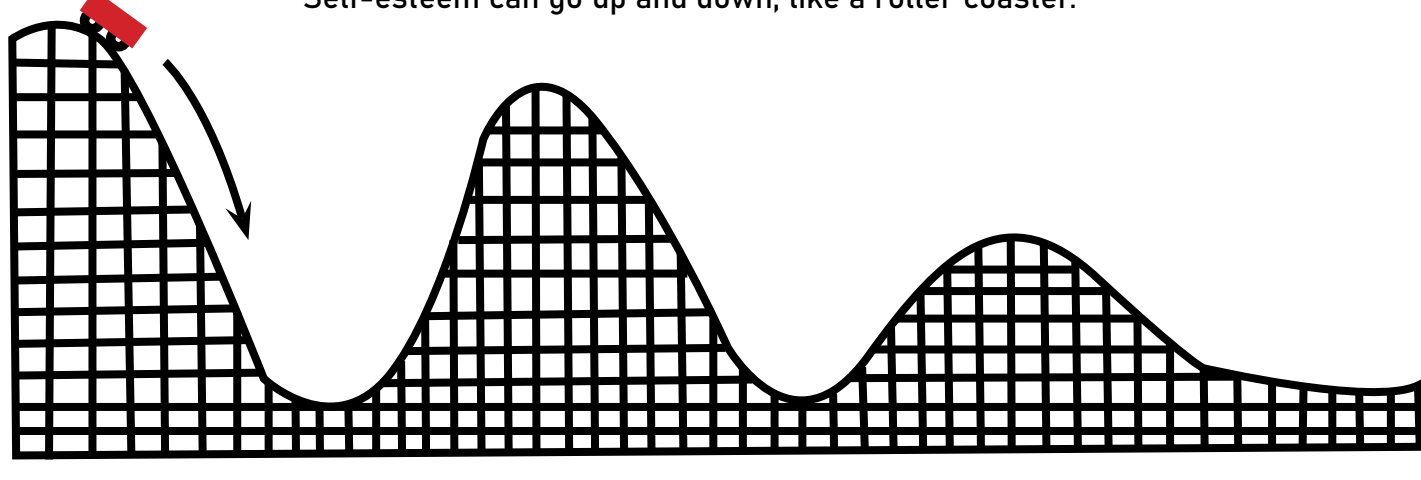
?

Low vs. High Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is different for everyone. People can have low or high self-esteem in different amounts, because it is a spectrum.



Self-esteem can go up and down, like a roller coaster.



What changes someone's self-esteem?

Influences on Self-Esteem

Friends Fame Popularity
Looks Intelligence
Ability Money Family
Toys

Self-esteem is contingent on outside influences. This means that self-esteem depends on different things for every individual person, such as the examples above. If your self-esteem is based on how well you do in school, then getting a good grade will raise your self-esteem. But if you receive a bad grade, then that will lower your self-esteem.

People who are highly materialistic tend to base their self-esteem on objects or on other people's opinions, which means that their self-esteem will go up and down a lot. Relying on objects or other's opinions creates fragile and temporary boosts in self-esteem that don't last very long. This means that people who are highly materialistic will constantly be trying to raise their self-esteem. Other people who are less materialistic might base their self-esteem on their own traits, which are less likely to change over time. They will have more stable self-esteem.

Self-esteem is also impacted by the values you have in your life. Because highly materialistic people depend on objects to feel good about themselves, they may start to value objects more than experiences for their self-esteem.

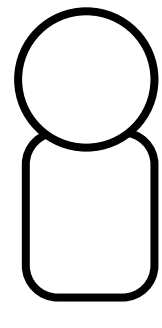
Valuing Experiences Over Objects

People who value objects over experiences are unhappier than people who value experiences over objects. Experiences usually involve other people and are more memorable. Objects can come and go from our lives, but we will always have memories of experiences. So it makes sense that people who value objects aren't as happy, because their self-esteem and happiness depends on things that change a lot.

Valuing experience also helps us to be more satisfied through **flow**.

Flow and Motivation

When you do an activity, such as painting or reading, and you don't notice time passing, you might be experiencing **flow**.



?

Flow is the satisfaction you feel when doing an activity for the activity itself.

?

Experiencing flow is a good sign that you are doing something for the right reason, because you are doing it for yourself and not to impress others. Highly materialistic people often can't experience flow because they participate in activities for how it makes them look to others. People who participate in an activity for a reward like praise or attention have **extrinsic motivations**, while people who participate in the activity for the activity itself have **intrinsic motivations**.

?

Intrinsic motivation is when you do something because you personally enjoy doing it.

?

?

Extrinsic motivation is when you do something because you want to earn a reward or avoid a punishment.

?

All of this is important to think about because we can start to recognize what kinds of motivation we have. People who have intrinsic motivation tend to be happier and less materialistic. Having intrinsic motivation allows you to focus on the experiences you do rather than the things you have. When we don't feel pressure to do something and do it for ourselves, we are able to enjoy it without worrying about what others might think about us. Flow and intrinsic motivation make us happier.

Let's see how Sam interacts with materialism.

*Player Positions in Soccer

In this story, Sam is a soccer player. Soccer is a game that has different player positions.



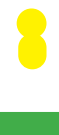
= Forward



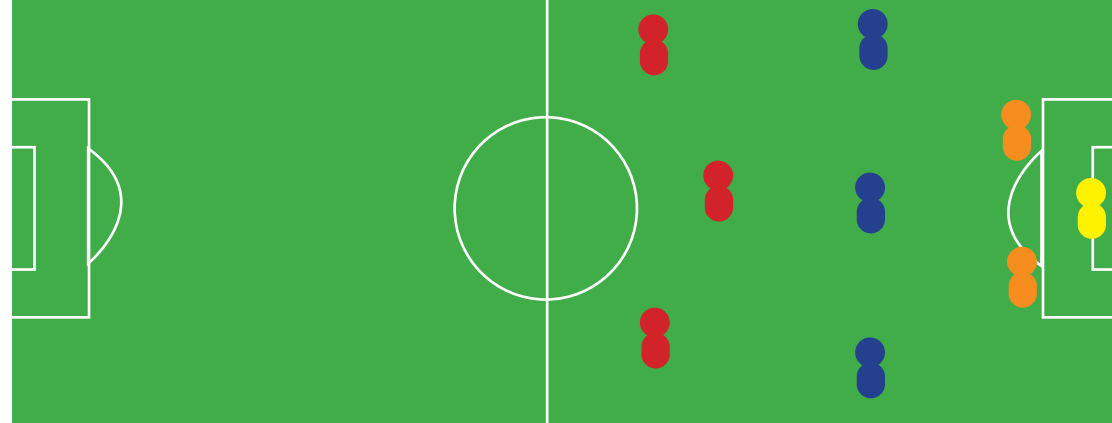
= Midfielder



= Defense



= Goalkeeper



Forward is the position that gets closest to the opponent's goal. They try to make as many goals as they can, while avoiding having the ball stolen from them.

Midfielder is the position that goes between the defense and forwards, by acting as a middle ground between the opposing team from getting too close to the defense and supporting the forwards as they try to make goals. They pass the ball safely, guard it against opposing players, and make goals when they can.

Defense are the players closest to the goalkeeper. Their job is to protect the goalkeeper, block shots, and stop the opposing team's forwards and midfielders from scoring.

Goalkeeper is the player that guards the goal and prevents the opposing team from making a goal.

Short Stories

Nicholas' Story

Bam! Pow! My fighter falls to the ground and lays in a cloud of dust, as Joey's fighter stands triumphantly over him. "Ha! Take that, Nicholas." Joey cheers, raising his controller into the air. I frown briefly but have to admit that Joey is better than me at this game.

"Yeah, yeah. You win." I gently set the controller down before letting someone else take my spot. Rules are rules, and whenever someone dies another player takes their place. Me and four of my friends sit clustered around a flat screen TV in the basement, flashing lights and complex attack moves lighting up the screen as the next fight begins. My friends start to yell at each other, jostling to vote on who they think will win as the first hit makes one character bend over backwards.

I sit back on the couch and stare up at the ceiling. The noise fades away and it becomes all too easy to feel like everyone else forgot that I am even there. The chill of the basement seeps into my body, and I shiver before grabbing a cushy blanket.

~

"Hey guys, wait up!" I shout as Joey and the others walk through the doors of St. Martin's Academy. The early morning light shines through the stained-glass windows of the academy's front hall, and all of the students stream through its doors to get to homeroom. The air is bright with the hustle and bustle of Friday morning, and every student seems to be talking to someone else about their weekend plans. The noise floats in the air above my head, and I give up trying to catch up to them. It's too busy and loud for them to hear me, and I can feel myself fade into the background as I silently move between students to get to the staircase to the second floor.

Homeroom is uneventful, and the day feels like it passes quickly. All anyone seems to talk about is Joey and his parents' lake house, which he has invited everyone to this weekend. Just a few days ago, all anyone talked about was my new game and we had spent most of the weekend playing it at my house.

I had wanted to bring them again this weekend, but everyone is interested in swimming and boating instead. I sigh as I think about the new racing game I won't be able to try until next weekend. At least, I know it will be fun no matter what we do, and I even bought new swimming trunks for the trip. In just a few short hours, we will be meeting at Joey's house before driving up to their lake house.

I wave goodbye to the guys and turn to walk towards the line for the bus. "Nicholas!" I stop abruptly and turn to see who called my name. The sun shines into my eyes and I lift my hand to shield the harsh light from my face. In front of the buses, a silver car is parked with the windows rolled down. Through the passenger side window, I see a girl with long brown hair put up her sunglasses. "Hey, get your butt in the car!" Christine, my older sister yells from the driver's seat.

I roll my eyes and climb into the passenger seat. "Why are you picking me up?" I ask. Normally, I ride the bus home and today doesn't seem like a day different than any other.

“Dad told me to bring you home. Apparently, we’re having a family discussion tonight that he didn’t want to wait for.” she replies, shrugging and chewing loudly. She makes a huge bubble with her gum, pops it, and turns out of the academy parking lot.

“But I have to go to Joey’s house in two hours. Do you think he remembers?” I ask in reply. Christine doesn’t say anything, shrugs, and continues chomping on her gum. I huff back. I lean my head against the window, and watch the scenery flash by. *It’s probably nothing important.* Pop!

~

“I’m no longer working at the company.” Dad sighs, and rubs his forehead with his hand. Christine and I look at each other before looking back at our father. He’s standing beside the bar, while we sit in the chairs across from him. His tie is undone, his suit jacket thrown onto the counter surface.

“What does that mean?” Christine asks, leaning forward in her chair. “Are you getting a job at a different company? I thought we weren’t going to move again!” We had just moved into this house and neighborhood three years ago, and even I was old enough to remember the weird transition between schools.

“No, honey, we’ll be staying here and it will be a little while before I get a new job. But that means finances will be a little tight until I do.” Dad replies, leaning against the counter.

I’m confused, what are finances? “What does finances mean, Dad?” I ask him.

He smiles at me briefly, saying, “That means we don’t have as much money anymore, so we won’t be able to take as many trips or buy new games. But we’ll be fine for a little while.”

No games? No trips? “What about the new Gamestation console that comes out in two weeks!” I say, remembering how much I had bragged to my friends about getting it as soon as it came out.

He sighs and scratches his head. “I don’t know about that one, Nicholas. We might need to wait before we get you any new games or consoles.” he says.

I jump to my feet, and lean forward, saying, “But I already told my friends that they can come over and play it with me!”

Dad sighs again, and looks me in the eye. “I’m sorry that you really wanted that new console. You and your friends will just need to play with your old games. And didn’t I just get you that new racing game last week?”

I huff, and sit back down. Christine starts asking about her homecoming plans, and her and Dad start talking back and forth. I can’t focus on their conversation at all, not when Dad refused to buy me the Gamestation. It had virtual reality features and a brand new addition to the Lord Death combat series, and Joey was already bragging to the other guys that he would beat us all. I slouch down further in my seat, and I can feel my back crumble against the rigid back of the stool. I stare down at the floor and snap back to reality when I hear Christine stomp up the stairs towards her room.

I peek up at Dad, and he has turned his back to me. His arms are crossed, and I can hear the tap-tap of his work shoes on the tile. *Why is this happening to me?*

“Hey sport.” I nearly jump out of my seat, and glance up to see Dad talking to me. “Let’s start putting your stuff in the car. We need to get you over to your friend’s house soon.” I begrudgingly jump off the stool and march upstairs. *I hate this.*

~

By Monday morning, I still haven’t had the heart to tell anyone about it. That my father lost his job. That I won’t be getting the new Gamestation. That I won’t be able to invite everyone over to play it. That I might not be able to get it for who knows how long.

The weekend passed in a blur of pancake breakfasts, water skiing, fighting-style games, and late nights. By the time we had left the lake house Sunday afternoon, I wasn’t sure how much longer I would be able to not tell anyone. It felt like something was rushing to get out of me, every single time I saw one of my friends look in my direction.

Fast forward to lunch time, when the cafeteria is so crowded that it can be hard to find an open table. Thankfully, Chris always seems to be one of the first kids in line, so he grabs the same table for us every week. I sit down in my usual spot, between Chris and one of our newer friends, Jamie.

“I can’t wait until this weekend! Nicholas said that he would be getting the new Lord Death game once it comes out on Friday.” Joey laughs, and the other 4 guys join in. Hesitantly, I chuckle, hoping that no one would notice my uneasiness. The table grew quiet, and Joey turned to me expectantly. “Well, Nicholas? Aren’t you going to tell us the plan for this weekend? Are we staying the whole weekend or just one night?” Joey asks, and all of them turn to look at me.

I freeze, and nervously stammer out, “Oh, I-I guess I don’t know yet. I think Dad has some work friends over this weekend so we might have to wait until next weekend...” I try not to wince at that weak excuse. Everyone starts groaning in protest, and they start mumbling amongst themselves. “Are you serious?” “What the heck, we have to wait?” “Well that sucks.” I look down at the table, and try not to make eye-contact.

“Wait, guys.” Joey exclaims, holding up his hands to get our attention. Everyone stops talking, but out of the corner of my eyes I can see them glancing at me. “What do you mean? Your house is so big, and we usually play in the basement anyway.” he asks me.

“I....I” I stutter, looking down at the table again. *What do I do!?* Should I tell them or not? Will they be mad if I do? “....my dad isn’t getting me the game.” I say, taking a deep breath.

“Why not!?” Jamie asks, pushing against my shoulder with his hand.

I tip into Chris a little bit, but straighten out and say back, “M-my dad told me he won’t be able to buy me stuff for awhile.” Jamie crosses his arms over his chest. “But I still have the new racing game! We can play that-”

“I’ve already played all of the levels in that one!” Lucas interrupts, sitting beside Joey.

“I’d rather play with my four wheelers than play that game.” Mark mutters from the other side of Joey, poking his mashed potatoes with his spoon.

Jamie jumps up again, “Why can’t we just-”

“Guys, stop!” Joey yells, smacking his hand onto the table enough to rattle all of the silverware and trays. We all freeze this time, and a few kids from other tables look over at us. Jamie sits down, Mark sets his spoon on the table, and I duck my head.

The table is silent for a moment, and we all seem to avoid looking at anyone other than Joey. He suddenly seems nervous, and he runs his hand through his hair. “Okay, so we’re cancelling this weekend’s plans then. That’s it and we don’t need to argue about it because Nicholas just said he won’t be getting the game.” Joey sighs, looking around at all of us. The other guys drop it just like that, and suddenly everyone is back to talking about other things.

Only Joey and I don’t start talking. He just stares into my eyes. One second, two. He raises an eyebrow at me, and mouths, “Loser.” I blink and I can’t tell if I imagined it or not. Joey smiles, and his smile is so wide that I can almost see all of his teeth. *No, I didn’t imagine that.*

It’s Friday night, and if it was a normal one I would have been at one of my friend’s houses or they would have been at mine. I can almost hear Joey saying, “Move over, stupid. It’s my turn to play.” I sit in front of a paused menu screen from *The Fleeting Finale*, a one to eight player adventure game, and I hold one of the controllers in my hands. I stare at the frozen screen that says Player 1, and even though the music from the game is still playing loudly I can hear the ticking of the clock hanging from the mantle over the fireplace.

Tick tick tock. The ticking of the clock echoes against the basement floor around me, and the room suddenly feels much too large for one person. It feels like the sound from the clock is invading all I can hear. I press the continue button and start playing the game again, but the feeling of weirdness doesn’t go away.

Dad said that he would be going to an event tonight, and Christine is staying over at a friends house. This is normal, which is why I usually invite Joey and the others over to break this weird silence. Cling crash. My character breaks open a treasure chest, and I bounce up in my seat. I quickly use the item to reach this level’s goal and save at a checkpoint. I laugh, and move onto the title screen for area 8, The Siren’s Lair.

Eerie music starts playing from the game, and from the room around me the ticking starts up again. Tick tock.

~

On Monday morning, the air is cold and I shiver in my thin coat. Dad had told me to wear something thicker but I hadn't listened to him. As the wind rushes through my hair, I shiver again and regret my decision. Thankfully, warmth isn't too far away.

I walk through the doors leading to the front hall, and quickly jog up the stairs towards homeroom. I drop off my coat and backpack at my cubby, before sitting down at my desk by the window. "Good morning, Lucas." I say, as Lucas drops down beside me. Chris, Lucas, and I sit over by the window, while Joey, Mark, and Jamie sit towards the front. It had never been this awkward talking to Lucas, before last week's cafeteria incident.

"Hey guys." I hear Chris say from across the room, and I sigh in relief.

"Hey Chris." I reply.

He walks over and dumps his books on his desk before falling onto his chair with a screech. He leans forwards, and asks, "So what do you think we're going to do this weekend?"

Since I hadn't seen anyone over the past few days, I have absolutely no idea. "Uh-"

"Well aren't we going to do the same thing as last Friday?" Lucas interrupts, leaning forward excitedly. *What same thing?*

"That's what I was thinking! This time we could go to Jamie's house, because his parents made him a tree house." replies Chris.

Lucas wasted no time in saying back, "Mark's four wheelers were cool, but it was too cold! I think I remember Jamie saying something about a heater-"

"What are you guys talking about?" I interrupt.

Chris and Lucas suddenly look at me, both going silent. A flush spreads across Chris' face and he refuses to look me in the eye, while Lucas just stares at me. Other students have started filtering into the classroom around us, and the noise is almost enough for me to drop it.

"Did you guys do something together last weekend?" I press the point. Chris still won't look at me, but Lucas just smirks at me before responding.

"Yeah, we all went over to Mark's house. We decided to go and ride his four wheeler since you didn't have the game yet." Lucas says, casually leaning back and balancing his chair on only two legs.

"We didn't mean to not invite you, Nicholas, I-I swear." Chris stammers. "Joey just thought it might be good to give you some space because you started that argument last week-"

All three of us jump when someone's hands slam onto Lucas' desk. We all turn to look at the intruder, and see Joey staring down at us. "I didn't think we should invite the guy who was such a downer last week. If you aren't going to contribute anything to our fun, then why should you get to be a part of it?" he spoke flatly, both quiet and loud at the same time.

“What-” I stammer, bothered that I can never seem to control the way words come out of my mouth. “We can play some of my other games or-”

“Nicholas stop it.” Joey says, glaring at me. As he says those words, I realize how full the classroom has gotten. I glance over at the clock to see 7:43. Homeroom is starting in two minutes. “Don’t make it worse.”

He walks back over to his seat, and starts talking with Jamie like nothing happened. Lucas ignores me and Chris sheepishly shrugs before turning to face the front. Mr. Calhoun strolls into the room and starts writing something on the white board. *What just happened?*

Three hours later, I put my books into my backpack before walking down to the cafeteria with the rest of my class. Without meaning to, I end up at the end of the lunch line but it doesn’t bother me right now. My mind keeps wandering back to this morning, and a sense of confusion has followed me ever since. I grab a tray and walk over to our usual table. *I just won’t mention anything until everyone forgets about it.*

As I get closer to the table, I can hear Jamie talking loudly. “I want to try skiing sometime! We should take a trip sometime to this awesome resort my family took me to.” I smile, and remember when my dad took Chris and I to a skiing resort in Colorado. That was before we had been friends with Mark, Joey, and Lucas, and before Jamie had arrived at school. It had been really fun just the two of us.

I walk up behind Jamie, but don’t see my seat open. I stop and try to see who is sitting next to him. “Adam?” I question aloud. Adam, one of the kids from Mrs. Wilfrey’s homeroom, turns around and smiles at me.

“Hey! Did you want to join us?” he asks.

The guys all turn to look at me, and I stare back in silence. My mouth drops open, and none of them say a word back for a minute. Finally, Joey speaks up. “Sorry Nicholas, Adam said he wanted to sit with us today. Some other time, yeah?”

I try to say something back but can’t. I look over at Mark, and when he doesn’t respond I look to Chris. Chris looks away and they all start talking again. Numbly, I try to find another seat with kids from my class but everything seems to be taken. I finally make my way over to the seats next to the trash cans, where only one girl that I don’t know is sitting in the corner. I sit as far away from her as possible, and try to eat my food. *I’m not hungry anymore.*

~

Five week days trying to figure out what went wrong, but nothing was working. At 4:30 that Friday, I sit in the kitchen at home waiting for Dad to get here so I can talk to him. It’s obvious that my friends aren’t going to talk to me until I have something for us to do. In order to be friends with them again, I need to either get that new game or at least something newer than what I already have.

I tap my foot on the kitchen tile, switching between leaning against the counter and sitting on the stools. I eventually give up sitting still and start to pace between the dining room, kitchen, and living room. *Would*

they be happy with the new Skyrunner game? It seems like a fun game, though not as cool as the Lord Death game. Plus, I wouldn't need the Gamestation console to play it.

Click. I hear the door unlock and rush back into the kitchen to sit down on one of the stools. Dad strolls into the kitchen looking at some piece of paper in his hand. "Hey Dad." I say, my foot tapping against the stool impatiently.

He looks up and smiles, "Hey Nicholas. How was school?"

"It was fine." I reply, fidgeting back and forth in my seat. "Could I talk to you about something?"

"Sure, what's up?" He looks back down at the piece of paper while taking off his coat.

"So I know you said that you can't get me the new Gamestation console and games, but what about Skyrunner?"

"Hmmm." he says.

"It's a game that I can use with one of the consoles I already have. Plus it's something my friends and I really want to play. We were hoping to have something to do next weekend." I explain, knowing that Dad will get me whatever I want as long as he knows what I want to do with it.

Silence. He makes a small noise but only flips over the piece of paper. I breath in and sit back until he's done reading that stupid page. If I try to interrupt him, I'm sure he wouldn't be able to hear me anyway. Eventually, he blinks and looks back up at me. "Sorry sport, I got distracted. Did you say you wanted something for dinner?"

I repeat again that I want a different game, but all he says back is, "I know you really want a new game but we need to put a pause on our spending until I can figure out what the next few months are going to look like. We can try to figure out something else for your friends to do--"

"Why can't I get one game!" I ask back, throwing my hands into the air.

Dad stands up straighter, saying, "Nicholas, just because you can't have one game--"

"You don't understand. I need that game for my friends!"

Dad raises his hands, saying, "Slow down, Nicholas. Take a breath. Why do you need it for your friends?"

My chest rises and falls quickly, my heart feels like it is about to burst out of my chest. I try taking a deep breath in and out before speaking. "If I don't get a new game, then my friends won't be my friends anymore!" I try to say calmly, but by the end of the sentence my voice is already louder again.

I stare Dad down, refusing to blink. He looks back at me, but his eyebrows only wrinkle in response. I snort loudly. "Dad, I need this game so bad! If you get me this one I won't ask you about the Gamestation console ever again!" I plead, hoping to convince him.

Dad sighs again, walks over, and puts his hand on my shoulder. “I’m not sure why you care about this so much, but I can’t Nicholas. If we make one exception then it will be too easy for us to fall back into our normal spending habits.” he explains. I look down at the ground, refusing to meet his eyes. “I hope you can see how important it is for us to not spend money right now. This affects your sister and me too.”

He stops speaking, but I don’t respond for a minute. While continuing to stare at the ground, I pick up my bag and stomp towards the door. Only then do I mutter, “I hate you.”

~

On Monday morning, I walk into school with my head down and my back hunched. *I failed.* My backpack bounces painfully against my lower back. I failed to convince Dad to get me the game. I failed to figure out a new plan. I failed to figure out why Joey and the others were being so mean to me.

I stop outside the door to homeroom, and debate not going inside. *I could just hide in the bathrooms all day if I wanted to.* While the stalls always stink, I wouldn’t have to face any of the people on the other side of the door if I didn’t open it. I sigh and open it anyway, walking over to my seat as quickly as possible. Everything had happened right before the day we were supposed to switch seats, and I wasn’t sure if I liked the way things had turned out.

I am in a similar spot by the window, but this time all of the other guys had managed to grab seats by the front of the room. They were all right next to each other, except for Chris who was two spots over and basically in between me and them. I place my things on the desk, and quietly sit down. I stare out the window as more students start filtering into the room.

I am able to ignore all the noise and commotion pretty well until Chloe starts talking to Marissa right next to me. Chloe and Marissa are nice and friendly, and we have been in the same class since 1st grade. Even though we aren’t best friends I like talking to them.

“Last weekend my brother finally got the *Series Royale* game, and it is so awesome!” Chloe says, as she sits at her desk.

“That’s so cool! I’ve watched people play it online and the whole game looks really fun. Who’s your favorite character?” Marissa exclaims back, standing up from her seat to get closer to Chloe. They dive into a conversation about the two arch-rivals in the game and then they start talking about my favorite character, Lexion.

“His theme song is really cool and his attacks are strong. My brother and I are constantly fighting over who gets to play him.” Chloe sighs, shaking her head in a sign of sibling sadness.

“Hey, are you guys talking about Lexion from *Series Royale*?” I ask, trying not to interrupt their conversation too much.

They both stop and look over at me. Marissa starts speaking first, “Oh, Nicholas! Yeah we think he’s one of the best characters in the game.”

“I do too! What do you guys think about Marquette?” I ask in return, happy to share the same love of Lexion with someone else. All of my friends think he’s too cliché, but I love him anyway.

Chloe says back, “He’s pretty cool too.” I nod in agreement, and wait for Marissa to chime in or for Chloe to say more. We keep talking, and it feels so nice to talk to other people. *Maybe I can make new friends instead.*

“Hey Nicholas!” Mark shouts from the front. We all stop talking, and turn to the front. “Why are you talking to the girls all of a sudden? Are we not good enough for you?”

“Wha-” I reply.

Lucas and Joey chuckle, and I’m so confused. Our teacher walks in and the moment ends just as quickly as it began.

I clear my throat, and Marissa smiles at me. Both Marissa and Chloe turn towards the front. My cheeks get hot and I shift my gaze back out the window. It might have been a little weird to suddenly talk to them out of nowhere, but it was fun. *I want to talk to them again soon.*

I think back on what just happened and our conversation. *It seems like I only ever talk about games.* It’s like I can’t stop what I think next. *Maybe people only care about my games.*

~

The first snow of the year crunches underneath my boots as I walk into the school. I push back my hood and stomp off my boots at the entrance to the front hall, taking care to step away from the rush of traffic behind me. Someone slams into my shoulder anyway, but I don’t say anything and keep walking. In the classroom, I gently hang up my coat and tuck away my bag in its cubby. I sit down and flip open my portable nitch to play a quick game before class.

I notice other students around me, as they talk to their friends and take off their thick winter coats. The whisper of jackets and stomping of shoes doesn’t bother me, and I don’t look up and see who has come in. Maybe if I ignore everything, I won’t be as sad.

Beep boop. Ching. I pass through a check-point and click over to the options screen. I need to save my game before homeroom starts. I hear steps next to me, and see two sets of feet standing to my right. I drop my nitch down to the desk and look up.

Mark and Lucas stand next to me, and suddenly crowd around my desk to watch. “Keep playing! What level are you at?” Mark says, dropping down into the seat beside me. The boy who usually sits in that chair isn’t here yet, but we don’t have much time before homeroom starts.

Why are they talking to me? I hesitate, but a few more minutes shouldn’t matter. I glance at the clock hanging on the classroom wall and see 7:30. We have 15 minutes left. “I-I’m almost at the boss for the knight’s route.” I say.

Lucas leans down, excitedly saying, “Well aren’t you going to fight him then!?” I didn’t plan on fighting him right now, because I wanted to prep more XP and healing items. From past experience, I’m sure they wouldn’t let this go if I tried to tell them that though.

I sigh, and unlock the door, the huge lock falling to the fictional floor that shakes the world my character is in. I enter the boss’s room and find myself sinking into sand unless my character keeps moving. *This might be hard.*

Two minutes later, my character lies dead on the floor, pieced by one of the huge beast’s claws. I knew I wouldn’t be able to win this battle. Lucas and Mark both groan as the option to start the battle over or go to the last checkpoint appears. “Oh! Let me try, I bet I can beat it.” Lucas exclaims, and I hesitate in response. A quick glance, the clock says 7:35. One more match shouldn’t hurt.

I hand it over, and let Lucas take a shot. A few minutes later he also dies, and frustratedly hands it over to Mark. I stand up to take the nitch back. “Hey guys, I think we should-” I begin to say.

Mark interrupts, already clicking the retry button. “Let me try real quick.”

I sit back down, and stare over at them. Before long Joey and Jamie come over and gather around the other boy’s desk. With a start, I realize that I can no longer see the game screen. I’m sitting right next to them but enough of the other guys have gathered in the space in-between to block my view.

“Hey guys, I can’t see!” No one moves to let me in. I stand up, feeling my heart start to beat faster.

To my right, I see Louis walk up to the guys and also try to get them to move away from his seat. They ignore him too, and just keep playing. No one seems to be sad that they aren’t winning. 7:43. Two more minutes until homeroom, and I hear Jamie start the battle over again. “Guys.” I say loudly. Chris looks up at me and glances quickly at the clock. He looks back sheepishly but doesn’t do anything.

That’s it! “Guys stop! Homeroom is about to start!” I yell, pushing past Mark and Lucas and reaching for the console.

Joey puts his leg in front of me, saying, “Back off, Nicholas! We just want to finish this round.” His hand slams into my chest and I feel myself fall backwards. I stumble back and slip against the linoleum tiling. Bang. Crash. My head hits something hard and I slip to the ground. *It hurts so much.* I wince and sit back up, but I’m having trouble seeing. I put my hand to my forehead and that’s when I realize that I can’t see because blood is running into my eyes.

I hear someone kneel beside me, and then Chris says, “Oh my gosh, Nicholas are you okay!?”

I try to wipe the blood off my face. *What do I do?!* There is so much red. I look behind Chris and see Mr. Calhoun talking with Joey as he glares back at me. Another teacher comes up to see if I am okay, and then I lose sight of Joey as he walks out of the classroom door.

An hour later, Chris and I sit outside the principal's office while she talks to Joey and his parents inside. Since Joey was the one who first shoved me, I was told that it wasn't my fault. And apparently I just had a small cut on my forehead, even though I thought that amount of blood meant I was definitely going to die.

Once my Dad gets here though I am sure that I will get a stern talking to about getting in a fight. I glance over at Chris, and am thankful that he stepped in. He told the teachers about the guys trying to keep my nitch, and that I was simply trying to get it back. It wasn't getting in trouble, but it still felt like I was.

"Hey Nicholas?" Chris asks, nudging me with his shoulder. I try to keep in mind that we aren't talking, but right now I don't care.

"Yeah?" I ask, turning slightly to face him.

"I-" he pauses, "I'm sorry." He speaks so quickly that I have a hard time hearing what he said.

"What?" I ask. He clasps both of his hands together in his lap, and he won't look me in the eye as usual. "Why don't you ever look at me?" At those words, he finally turns towards me, his eyes wide.

He stammers out, "I-I'm sorry! I get nervous about this kind of stuff." he pauses, and heaves a big sigh. "I'm sorry Joey and the other guys have been so mean to you." I open my mouth to speak and he holds up his hand. "You're my friend, and I don't like it when they pick on you." he pauses again, shifting until he is fully facing me. "Can you forgive me?"

I look into his eyes, and see a determination that I have never seen from him before. Before anyone else, Chris and I had been friends. We had loved talking about our favorite games and we would spend hours looking at gaming websites to see what was coming out next. I remember all of the times we spent nights over at each other's house planning for the next game's release and then staying up all night playing it even when we weren't supposed to.

I hesitate, but remember my resolution from earlier. I won't back down anymore, and I need to ask one important question. "Do you only play with me because I have a lot of games?"

Chris jumps in his seat, frantically saying, "Of course not! I don't care if you aren't getting the Gamestation. I-I just...want us to go back to before Joey became our friend." Chris smiles sheepishly and I smile back. *I do too.*

"I don't have any new games, but if you want we can play some of my older ones?" I ask.

"We should play *League of Villains*! None of the other guys ever want to play that one, but it's one of my favorites." he claps his hands, and he looks so happy. It feels like this is the first time that I have had a friend in a long time.

I can't stop myself from smiling even wider, and I laugh out loud remembering all of the times Chris and I used to play that game. I really want to play games with him like we used to. And maybe I can invite someone new this time, like Marissa and Chloe.

~

I look out the car's window and watch everything blur as we pick up speed. We pull out of the school's parking lot and I suddenly want to go back. The principal didn't send me back to class, but I almost wish she had. I guess I don't have to go to class after getting hurt enough to bleed.

We don't get very far down the road when we pull into the parking lot of a park. I look over at Dad, but he is just looking straight out at the road. I shift to looking back out the window as he parks the car. Then he says, "Why didn't you tell me that you were having trouble with your friends?"

I look back at him, but I really don't want to respond. I look down and mutter, "I don't know."

"Hey look at me, Nicholas," he says. I swallow. He is definitely going to yell at me for arguing with them. I look up but notice that his face isn't angry. His eyebrows should be really low, and his nose should be crinkled. Instead his eyebrows are droopy and he looks...sad? "I'm really sorry that I didn't notice this happening sooner. I should have known when you didn't go over to any of your friends' houses these past few weekends." *What?*

I am so shocked that I almost forget to speak. "Aren't you mad at me?" I ask.

Now his eyebrows crinkle, but not from anger. "Why would I be angry, Nicholas? You were just standing up for yourself," he asks back.

I heave a sigh of relief, and my worries about his anger fade away. He reaches over and tousles my hair with his hand. "Now if you had been the one to push Joey into a desk I might be mad. But you did a good job sport. It's better to use your words than your hands." He chuckles, and I smile back.

But then his smile fades again. "Nicholas, do you know what a good friend is?" he asks me.

I'm confused. "Can a friend be bad?" I ask back.

Dad shakes his head, saying, "Yeah, they can be sometimes. If you're friends with someone who only wants to be your friend because of your games then they probably aren't a good friend." I think back to how quickly it felt like they weren't my friends anymore.

"Chris doesn't care whether we play my new games or my old ones. Does that make him a good friend?" I ask.

Dad thinks for a moment, then asks, "Would he play with you if you didn't have games?" I think back to when we first started hanging out. I blink and realize that we used to ride our bikes together before I got my first video game. We both had bikes, and would ride around the park all the time.

"I don't think so," I say, smiling. Chris never forced me to play games when I didn't want to. And Marissa and Chloe seem just as nice. "Dad, can I invite some friends over this weekend?"

He chuckles, and pulls out of the parking lot. “You sure can. I’m not doing anything Saturday so we should all go to the park like we used to.” he replies, turning right towards home. I sit back in my seat, and grin so widely it feels like my face can’t contain my smile.

Bailee's Story

The sun shines through the window on an early Sunday morning, and forces me to shield my eyes from its light. I can hear the twinkling of windchimes in the distance, followed by my mother's laugh from the kitchen. "Mama!" I laugh and run to her open arms. A spoonful of cookie dough is placed in my hand, and I chomp down eagerly onto the gooey sweetness.

Papa smiles at me from across the kitchen counter. "What's happening, Bailee Bear?" he chuckles, as I smile a chocolatey grin back at him. "Someone likes chocolate chip cookies a little too much."

"They're the best-est in the whole world!" I shriek in reply, giggling as my words make them both smile.

Papa reaches over to pat me on the head, tugging gently on my ponytail. "In that case, I'll make you cookies every week."

~

Screech! "Ow!" I say as my knees bang into the seat in front of me. I rub my hands on the new ache, as the school bus rocks back with the force of the brakes. I peer out of the window towards the shaded windows of my house. The clouded sky contrasts sharply with the daydream I had been in moments before. I feel the corners of my lips pull down, and I try to fight the urge to stay in this seat forever. *I don't want to go.*

"Bailee Walsh, this is your stop! Get a move on!" the bus driver shouts at me from the front of the bus. Twenty eyes turn to look in my direction, and two boys snicker from behind me. I grip the straps of my backpack tightly and tilt my head down until hair slides down to cover my face.

As my feet hit the pavement of the driveway, the bus door slams shut and the put-put of the engine roars as the bus turns the corner. The red lights flash once before it disappears from my view completely. I turn to look at my house, and my chest rises and falls with my sigh. The windows gleam ominously from the lack of light outside. The door lies in shadows. The grass looks up at me and seems to wilt in response.

Clack clack. My new boots click against the concrete, and I wince at the noise. I don't want to, but eventually my feet bring me before the blue front door. Even though I have lived in this house for two months, it still seems like something foreign and unfamiliar. I gently turn the knob, and the door creaks open on its rusty hinges.

“Welcome home, Bailee.” says Mrs. Wilkins. I smile hesitantly at her but quickly turn to walk up the stairs. Mrs. Wilkins is someone who takes care of the house every day, and the food she makes for dinner is delicious. But whenever she welcomes me home, I can’t help but think about how my father used to greet me at home after school. It’s been such a long time since I have heard him say anything, since I last saw him in June. My heels click on the wooden floorboards as I reach my bedroom door, throw my bag next to my desk, and lay my coat and shoes in their proper places. I look back out the window and sigh as water begins to stream from the sky. Rain patters against the windowpanes as I sink onto the comforter on my bed.

~

Three hours later, I can hear a key unlocking the front door. *Isn’t she early today?* The clock on the bedside table reads 7:05, and I quickly toss my pencil and papers into my backpack again. I stand up to rush downstairs, and then stop, hesitating to rush downstairs immediately. Mama’s voice filters up through the floorboards, and I hear her greet Mrs. Wilkins. They both laugh about something. Her laugh sounds flimsy and breathless, and sounds different than it used to. I can remember her laugh being loud, so loud that it would bounce all over a room. I haven’t heard her laugh like that since before she and Papa divorced. I frown when I realize I can’t even remember the last time, and I stare down at my socked feet as they swing back and forth in front of me.

“Bailee? Where are you?” Mama calls from the bottom of the stairs.

“I’m coming!” I call back, and trudge down the stairs. “Aren’t you home early, mama?” She already put down her bag and her coat, and she stands at the bottom in her work clothes. She is a lawyer, and never seems to have a lack of pretty sweaters and black pants for her job. They’re nice, but remind me of how much I never see her once she puts them on.

“I was lucky enough to finish with a client ahead of schedule. Mrs. Wilkins has dinner ready, so wash up and join me in the dining room.” She explains hurriedly, smiling at me. I pass her and she gently pats me on the shoulder before walking away. After washing my hands, we sit down together and I dive into the pot roast Mrs. Wilkins made. The potatoes, carrots, and beef swim in mashed potatoes and it tastes horribly delicious.

“How’s your new school? Have you made any friends yet?” Mama asks, using a knife to slice up her meal into smaller bites.

“It’s really nice! I like talking to Marissa and Nicole in my class, because we like the same things.” I reply, shoving a carrot into my mouth.

“Oh that’s nice honey. What do you guys like to talk about?” she replies back, taking a sip of wine.

We talk about a ton of things while we continue to eat. Mama asks me about my friends from school, my homework, and my classes. I tell her about science class and the escaped frogs, about how my new friends and I like to talk about fashion, and how yummy the cafeteria lunches are. I don’t tell her how I hate wearing a uniform and how Marissa and Nicole always want to talk about the boys in our class.

St. Martin’s Private Academy is very different from my last school and the students and teachers behave differently than my old classmates and teachers. Rather than talking about video games and playing outside, the girls at this school prefer to sit inside and talk about girly things. Sometimes I think I would rather play hopscotch than talk about boys.

“I’m so proud of you honey. It’s tough to get used to a new school, and I’m sorry we had to move so suddenly.” Mama says, frowning slightly. Suddenly, her face brightens. “That reminds me! I’ll be right back.” She gets up from the table and walks toward her office. I turn and watch her as she comes back with a long and thin box. A silver bow is wrapped around it, and she places it in front of me.

The bow gently unravels, and the lid easily slides off in my hands. I peer down at a beautiful silver necklace, with a red stone hanging from a delicate silver chain. I smile, and can’t help but jump a little in my seat. “It’s so pretty!” I say.

“Isn’t it? I saw it when I was out last week, and I just knew you would love it.” Mama exclaims, smiling widely at me. “I wanted to save it for a special occasion, but I think that making new friends is plenty for a celebration. You can show it off to them tomorrow at school!” She keeps talking excitedly, while I stare down at the shiny stone. It’s red color gleams at me in the dining room lights, and it glints in different ways as I tilt it forward. A few weeks before it had been a bracelet with a pretty green stone called jade. Marissa and Nicole thought it was beautiful and very classy, and it was amazing to receive so many nice presents. *I can’t wait to show my friends!*

~

“Oh my gosh, that’s so pretty!” Marissa exclaims, staring at the red stone necklace.

“Wow, your mom always gets you the best presents.” Nicole murmurs with her eyes focused on it, seemingly fascinated by the way the light from the cafeteria reflects off of the necklace.

“Mama says it’s to celebrate making new friends! She has been getting me a ton of really cool stuff recently.” I reply, looking down at the jewel’s shiny surface. All three of us are sitting close together, but Marissa leans even closer to me.

“You think? Your mom must love you a lot! My mom wouldn’t get me this many new things.” Marissa exclaims as she leans into me. She smiles widely, but looks away quickly. Her back hunches as she glances down at the ground, and I notice her fists clench her skirt tightly in her lap. I lean back, and open my mouth to speak but Nicole interrupts.

“Why don’t you see your dad anymore? Is he dead?” Nicole asks, leaning across the table. Her eyes go wide, and she stares at me expectantly. I have the urge to lean away from her direct question, and nervously chuckle in response.

I open my mouth to reply, my mouth suddenly dry and my voice hoarse. I’m sure they can tell just how anxious that question makes me. “Oh no, papa isn’t dead. My parents got a divorce before the summer. That’s why I-”

“Oh, that doesn’t matter.” Marissa interjects, “What I want to know is if you guys can come to the resort with me next weekend. I’m allowed to invite two people, so both of you can come!” Nicole and I briefly look at each other, and the question about my parents dissipates into the noisy air of other kids talking and laughing around us.

“I’m sorry Marissa. That’s the weekend my mom will be home! We’re going to ride our bikes around the park and have a picnic lunch.” I say.

“Well, who else am I supposed to invite then! You can come can’t you Nicole?” Marissa leans back in her seat, huffing.

Nicole sheepishly shrugs back. “I don’t think so. That’s the weekend when my aunt gets married, and I’m the flower girl.”

Marissa groans loudly, and her hands cover her face. Through her fingers, I hear her mutter, “Well I’m going to be so bored.”

~

“I hope you won’t be too bored.” Mama’s voice comes from her office, as I sit at the kitchen counter on Saturday morning. The clock above the sink reads 9:24, and the click of Mama’s heels echo into the room before I can even see her. She sets her work bag on the counter, and I begin to swing my feet aimlessly. She rummages through her purse, murmuring a checklist to herself as I watch her from my bar stool.

“Okay I’ll only be gone for a few hours. Mrs. Wilkins has the day off, but you should be fine by yourself for that long. I have all of my binders, the press release, and the news reports. I have my cell and everything from breakfast has already been put in the dishwasher. I just need to grab my coat...” she

mumbles, talking for me to hear but not paying attention to whether I am actually listening. I prop my chin in my hand and observe Mama as she walks back and forth between the office and the kitchen.

If the day had been a normal one, I might have been with Marissa at a resort. Because Mama had just finished a case, she had wanted us to spend some time together by going to Lewis Park. I glare out through the kitchen window at the bright sunlight and faintly hear chirping birds through the porch's glass door. *And it's so pretty outside too.*

"Okay, if you need anything you can go to Mrs. Latke next door. And if you get hungry, I left out some snacks on the counter." Mama said, coming to stand beside me. Her work coat is shiny and clean, and her briefcase and purse lay over her shoulder.

"But Mama you promised we would go today!" I beg, tugging on her arm.

"Now Bailee, we've talked about this. I'm sorry, but I can't say no to work." she sternly says back, tugging her arm out of my grasp. "Okay?"

I nod at her silently, and she smiles back. "I'm sorry we won't be able to go to the park today. I promise I'll set aside some time for just the two of us next week." She leans in and kisses me on my forehead. I can't help but smile at the familiar gesture, and feel sudden warmth in my chest. The front door closes gently, and the quietness of an empty house sets in. The warmth fades.

I sit and look out the kitchen window for a moment, but eventually go back upstairs to my room. I take off the jade bracelet and set it on top of my dresser, next to some of the other gifts Mama has gotten me. I have necklaces and bracelets, fancy books with gold and silver covers, a tablet for games, and even a bike downstairs. We were supposed to take the new bike for our ride today, but it would have to wait until Mama had more time. I have so many new things, and I can't help but wonder what Mama will get me next. *Maybe she will finally get me a phone!* I pick up the tablet and walk towards my bed.

I sit down on the plush comforter on my bed, and nestle into the pillows and cushions thrown across the surface. I bury my face into one of my favorite pillows, and lay there for what feels like hours. *I want to see Papa.* I only see him every few months now, and since the divorce in April I have only seen him three times. *I want Mama to spend time with me.* Tears sting my eyes, and I gulp loudly. I refuse to cry, because it makes me feel really bad. When I was younger, I used to cry all the time but for some reason I can't right now. I blink my eyes rapidly and bury my face further into my pillows. *When will Mama be back?*

~

The following Thursday, Mama and I sit down for dinner; chicken alfredo made by Mrs. Wilkins. She asks me how school is going, and I tell her about Marissa, Nicole, and our new friend Jenna.

“Jenna really likes talking to us about clothes and jewelry. She always compliments me on my necklaces, and she likes to show me her cool bracelets. Her papa gives her new charms for them all the time.” I say, swinging my legs back and forth beneath the high dining room chair. The chairs at the dining table are ginormous, and my feet barely touch the floor when my back touches the chair’s back.

“That’s great, honey! I’m glad you guys have something in common to talk about.” she exclaims, smiling widely at me. I watch her take another bite as I talk about how Jenna invited me to her house for a playdate next week, and Mama quickly gives me permission to go. She talks about her plans for us to take a vacation around Christmas. I mention my new passion for literature class. We are reading “Where the Red Fern Grows” and the boy and his two dogs are fun to read about. I can’t wait to get to the ending. Dinner time passes in the blink of an eye, and then we start eating dessert: chocolate pudding.

“Oh wait!” Mama exclaims, and I pause with my first spoonful of pudding near my mouth.

“What is it, Mama?” I ask, lowering the spoon back towards my bowl.

“I have a new present for you! I’ll be right back.” she says excitedly, setting her napkin onto the table and rushing out of the room.

I bite my lip, and lean forward excitedly. Dessert is forgotten as I set my fork onto my plate, and turn to see what size the object is. Mama walks back into the room, and holds something behind her back. She bounces a little in place, and then places a silver square box in front of me before sitting back down. I open it, and squeal. A brand new phone lays inside the box, and I gasp aloud. I pull it out of its box, and bounce up and down in my seat. “Oh my gosh, thank you Mama!”

She laughs, and helps me plug it into an outlet near the table. “I figured you were plenty old enough to finally have your first phone, and I know some of your friends already do. And now you can text me while I’m at work.” she says.

“I can’t wait to show my friends!” I say back, so excited that I’m not hungry for dessert anymore. Mama laughs again and I join in. I can’t stop myself from talking about all of the cool things I’ve heard about phones, and I make a plan to get my friends’ phone numbers.

~

The ground has turned red and yellow with leaves, and almost all of the trees are naked. Mama drops me off in front of Papa’s house, and she waves goodbye. “I’ll be back to pick you up this evening, honey! See

you later!” she waves from her car, and I wave goodbye until I can’t see her anymore. I walk to the front door, and hesitate before knocking on the door. My hands feel itchy in my new gloves, and I huddle against the cold November wind. I haven’t seen Papa since summer, and it feels weird. *Will he be the same as I remember him?*

After a long time, the door swings open and Papa is there smiling at me. “Bailee! It’s been forever since we’ve seen each other.” he steps toward me, pulling me into a hug. I try to wrap my arms around his back, but as usual I can barely reach around his waist. He’s the same to hug at least, and I grip a little tighter than I probably should. *I’ve missed you so much.* Laughing, he says, “Quite the grip as always, Bailee Bear. Come on, let me show you the new house.”

I walk inside the door and can immediately see most of the house. The kitchen is wide-open, facing the living room, and I can see a hallway that probably leads to the bathroom and Papa’s bedroom. This house isn’t very big, not like our old house before the divorce. That house had been three stories, with several bedrooms we didn’t use and a kitchen that was bigger than any other I have ever seen. Mama’s and Papa’s houses are so different, but even more different when I compare them to our old one. Papa doesn’t live with anyone else, so I guess he doesn’t need as much space anymore.

“I’m sure it’s smaller than you are used to, but it’s nice and cozy. Especially with the cold nights we’ve been having.” he chuckles, ushering me over to the seats in the kitchen. The dining room table is in the kitchen, and it makes the tiny space seem even smaller. I don’t know why but it suddenly seems very...tight. *What’s the word for that?* “Bailee? Are you okay?” he asks, and I jerk a little in response. I totally wasn’t paying attention.

“I’m fine, Papa. It’s just weird seeing houses so different from our old one.” I reply, twisting my hands together in my lap.

He smiles gently, and looks very sad all of a sudden. “Oh, I know honey. That’s hard for me too.” He pauses for a moment. “But hey, tell me what you’ve been up to! I’ve heard you have new friends at your new school. Do you like your new teachers?”

“School’s been really fun, and all of my teachers are super nice. I have three new friends: Marissa, Nicole, and Jenna. We like to talk about clothes and jewelry, and I like to show them the presents Mama gets for me. Oh, and I’m wearing one now!” I pull it out from underneath my shirt, and show him it. Today, I’m wearing Mama’s newest present, an opal neckalce. “Mama said it’s an opal and that it’s translushent.”

“I think you mean translucent sweetie.” Papa corrects.

“Right translucent. And I have a bunch of really cool stuff now. I have a new bike, and new books. Oh, and I have a phone too!” I reach down and pull it out of my coat pocket. I turn on the screen and show him all of the games that I have on it. “See I have this one and this one. Oh and this one is-”

“Hey, hey honey slow down.” Papa says, grabbing my hand and lowering it to the table. I had been gesturing all over the place without even realizing it, and I sheepishly allow him to set my hands against the wooden surface of the table. “I’m glad you like your new things, but what else do you talk about with your friends? I remember how excited you were to start playing in an orchestra now that you’re in 5th grade. Do they also play instruments with you?”

I pause and sit back in my seat. I had completely forgotten that I had wanted to join orchestra. I have been playing the violin since I was very young, but so far I have been in private lessons because you had to be older to join the orchestra at my old school. I hadn’t had a single lesson since before the divorce. *When did I forget about that?* “My friends don’t like orchestra, Papa.” I reply uncertainly. Which is true, because I have heard Marissa and Jenna complain about how screechy the wind instruments can be. I don’t think any of them have ever thought about playing an instrument.

“Oh okay.” Papa pauses for a second. “But you still like the violin right?” he asks.

“I-” I pause again. *I don’t know.* “I’m not in the orchestra either.” I say instead.

“Why, Bailee Bear? You were so excited just a few months ago! Hey, you don’t always have to do what your friends like, and you can have your own likes and dislikes too. I remember-” Papa says, but I almost can’t hear him anymore. Papa isn’t the one who changed, and he still sounds like the same Papa I’ve always known. His house smells like freshly baked cookies, just like he used to make. And he still wears the clunky old sweaters that his papa gave him. *Maybe I’m the one who has changed.*

~

One early November morning two weeks later, I don’t want to say goodbye to Mama as she heads out for work. I stand in the foyer with Mrs. Wilkins and Mama as she finishes getting ready to go. We were supposed to watch movies together.

“Thank you for being willing to work on a Saturday, Mrs. Wilkins.” Mama says, buttoning up her black wool jacket and grabbing her work bag and folders.

“Oh it’s no trouble, sweetie. I’m sure Bailee and I can find something fun to do until this afternoon!” Mrs. Wilkins replies, and smiles down at me. I try to smile back, but for some reason I can’t.

“I’ll be back later this afternoon, Bailee. I’m sure you and Mrs. Wilkins can bake some cookies while I’m gone.” Mama smiles, patting me on my shoulder and pulling me in for a hug. Her long hair flows around me and I feel a snag in my throat. I step back and stare down at the ground rather than look at Mama.

“Hey sweetie, I promise I will only be gone a few hours this time. It’s just one meeting that I need to go to.” Mama says, keeping her arms on my shoulders. I still stare down at the ground as I feel moisture gather in the corners of my eyes. I clench my teeth. *I refuse to cry, I refuse.* One second passes and then another. Mama sighs, and her voice gets harsher. “Look at me Bailee.”

I gulp a little, and then look up at her. I clench my jaw tighter, but I feel something warm and wet slide down my cheek anyway. My chest jumps and I hiccup a little as I look over Mama’s shoulder. She gasps, covering her mouth with her hand. “Oh Bailee, what’s wrong honey!” she asks, rubbing her hands up and down my arms. “We can still watch a movie later tonight-”

“You promised!” I shout, tearing myself out of her grasp. I back up quickly, rubbing at my face as more tears start to fall. I hiccup loudly, and stomp my foot into the ground. “You promised that we would watch movies and make cookies today! You always go to work and leave me home.” I hiccup as I speak, my face getting warmer as I struggle to speak.

Mama sighs again, putting her hand against her forehead. “Bailee, I’m sorry that I can’t be home very much anymore, but I need to work too. I go to work so we can live in this nice house and so Mrs. Wilkins can take care of you when I’m not here.” says Mama.

“Why don’t you care about me anymore!” I scream and close my eyes tightly, turning to run up the stairs. Bam bam bang! My feet slam into the wooden steps and I slam my bedroom door behind me. I turn the lock, and throw myself onto the bed struggling to breathe. My chest rises and falls painfully fast, and I start to hiccup even more. My pillow becomes wet, and I grip the comforter tightly. I hear them talking downstairs, and their voices filter up through the floorboards.

“Are you okay, dear?” Mrs. Wilkins asks, and I hear Mama’s heels click on the tile.

“I’m fine, I’m fine. I think we just need to give her a moment to be by herself.” Mama sighs, loud enough for me to hear upstairs. “I have to go but I’ll-”

I lift the pink fluffy pillow and hold it over my head so I can’t hear anymore. *I hate her!*

I don’t hate her. How could I think that! Nothing makes sense any more.

I'm still lying down on my bed, and I can't stop thinking about what I said to Mama earlier. I stare at the top of my dresser, and see the jewelry, books, and tablet gleam back at me. I look away and hate them and everything around me. I have all of this really cool stuff, but I'm still not happy. In fact, I can still feel the residual stickiness from the tears across my cheeks and down my neck.

The first hour Mama was gone, I couldn't stop crying. Mrs. Wilkins even knocked on the door, but I pretended that I didn't hear her. The second hour I spent lying on the bed, looking between the window, the dresser, and the clock. The blue haze of the digital clock blinks at me out of the corner of my eye. 12:15 P.M. I look back at the dresser, and blink back more tears. I don't hate Mama, but I do hate what I'm feeling right now. Ever since the divorce, ever since Papa moved out, ever since I started at my new school, everything has felt wrong.

Why am I not happy? I still get to see Mama and Papa. I have friends at school. Mrs. Wilkins is really nice and makes us good food and delicious desserts. I have tons of new things, like the pretty necklaces Mama gets for me. I look across the room at my jewelry hanging on top of my dresser. There are so many necklaces and bracelets that I sometimes have a hard time separating them from each other. I've even started wearing two at once, because two different colors look really nice next to each other. My new phone has allowed me to text with my friends whenever I want, but even now I don't want to text. I look back over at the phone on my bedside table, and I sigh. *I just want to go back home.* To the old house that we used to live in. I was never sad in my bedroom back home.

I sit upright, and the blanket I had wrapped around me slips off the bed. *Why don't I just go back to our old house!* I jump off the bed and run over to my box of old letters. I pull out a birthday card from my Grandpa, and see our old house's address. 235 Blackburn Lane.

I grab my phone, and open this thing called a GPS. I heard Mama talk to Mrs. Wilkins once about using it to find a store she had never been to before. Soon a little blue zigzag fills the screen and the screen says that it will only take me 20 minutes to get there. *That's nothing!*

I quickly began to change into warmer clothes for the cold weather outside. The sun is out, but 20 minutes is a long time to walk. I throw gloves, the letter, and a blanket into a backpack, and sling it onto my back. *What if I get hungry?*

Oh no, Mrs. Wilkins! I can faintly hear her in the kitchen downstairs. Not only is she right next to the food, but she is also in full view of the front door and patio door. I won't be able to leave when she can see both exits. I walk in circles as I think about a new plan. I gently open my bedroom door, and jump

when I see a plate before me. On it are three chocolate chip cookies, and a small cup of applesauce. I bend down and put those into my backpack with the other things.

I softly close the door behind me, waiting until it is fully closed before I step towards the stairs. One step down. Pause. Second step. Pause. Thankfully, nothing creaks beneath my boots. Third step. Pause. Fourth step. Pause. I'm low enough to begin to see some of the foyer and living room, and I can hear Mrs. Wilkins humming from the kitchen. Fifth step. Creak. I freeze and grab the banister. Mrs. Wilkins pauses her humming, and then walks out of the kitchen.

I gulp and drop down quickly. I crouch on the fifth step and peer through the holes in the banister. She is looking at something on her phone, and she turns around the corner heading towards Mama's office. *She didn't hear me!* I hear a door close, and realize that she's in the bathroom.

I stand up quickly, walking down the rest of the steps. I unlock the front door, and push out into the cold air. I quietly close it behind me and turn to run down the driveway. But something pulls me back. *I can't leave the door unlocked.* I breath out shakily, and am glad that I always leave the silver key Mama gave me in my backpack. As fast as I physically can, I lock the door before walking around the corner. I breathe a sigh of relief, and look at the directions on the GPS. *I'm going home.*

~

After a long time, I decide to stop and eat my snack. After leaving the neighborhood, I walked a long distance down one road before I made it into town. In the bus that road didn't feel nearly as long. After walking by the post office and pizza restaurant, I see the park and the tables they have outside. I quickly take a seat and bring the cookies and applesauce out of my bag. *Oh no I forgot a spoon.* I shrug and peel off the top of the applesauce cup. I lick the applesauce out of it in between bites of cookie. I finish my snack, and toss the empty container into a trash can before heading on my way again.

~

I'm lost. I try not to panic too much, because I kind of recognize that store and I could've sworn I've seen that fountain before. But I don't recognize that restaurant at all, and the past few streets have been generally unfamiliar. *And the time on my phone says that I have been walking for a lot longer than 20 minutes.* I hadn't thought about it when I left, but I didn't think I would need to know what time it was since the GPS only said twenty minutes. I debate texting Mama, but quickly decide not to.

Clouds have covered the sun, and I can no longer tell what time of day it is just by looking. It keeps getting windier, and the coat I have chosen is beginning to feel thin compared to the cold weather. I shiver and stop to pull out my gloves. I pull one on and in the process drop the other.

I bend down to grab it and a gust of wind tears it past my reach. “Stop!” I call after it, and chase it down the sidewalk. Every time it feels like I am about to reach it, the wind pushes it just a little bit farther away. Tears prick my eyes, but I keep following it. *Why is nothing going right?*

Finally it gets caught in a bush, and I triumphantly grab it. “I got you!” I giggle and quickly slip it onto my hand. Then I frown. My stomach feels tight, and I realize with a sinking feeling that I need to go to the bathroom. I look around me, and see an amazing sight. The library. *I know where I am!* I run up to the doors, and pull on the handles to open them. Clang. They don’t open. *Why won’t they open?* I pull on the doors again and they rattle in response. I look closer at the door and see the library hours. Sunday: 11 am to 5 pm.

Is it past 5 pm?! I grab my phone in my pocket. My gloves get caught against the edge and I struggle for a moment before tearing it out from the darkness. It reads 5:30. I gasp and back away from the glass. I suddenly feel tears well up in my eyes and my chest starts heaving. I sit down on the steps and shakily take breaths in and out.

Don’t cry. I breathe in and out again. *I want to cry.* I wrap my arms around my knees and bury my face into them. I don’t know where I am. Mama is going to be so mad at me. I need to pee. It’s cold. I don’t know-

I jump and gasp when I hear the glass door open behind me. I turn around and see an old lady smile at me. “Hello there! I heard you pulling on the door all the way from the mystery section! I’m sorry but the library closed a half hour ago.” she said, smiling at me again. I sniff and wipe my eyes so that she can’t see that I was crying. Her smile vanishes and she looks left and right. “Where are your parents sweetie?” she asks.

I shake my head in response, afraid that if I speak nothing will come out. “Ah, I see.” she replies, opening the door wider. “Well, why don’t you come inside and we can call your mother okay?” That was all I needed to jump up and walk into a warm building.

~

A short while later, I am sitting on the couch in the foyer when I see the headlights of two cars pulling into the parking lot. The sun is almost completely over the horizon, and long shadows run through the library’s foyer. The old lady, Mrs. Carlyle, walks away from the desk and unlocks the glass doors for the two figures running up the steps. I slouch down in my seat, and try to avoid eye contact.

“Bailee Walsh, what were you thinking!” Mama yells, running towards me with Papa right behind her.

I quickly stand up and set my backpack down next to me. “Mama, I-” I begin, but the air is pushed from my lungs when Mama grabs me by my shoulders. I flinch, but all she does is pull me into a hug and laugh quietly.

“Thank you, God. She’s okay.” she whispers, wrapping her arms around my back. I grip her coat and bury my face into her shoulder. The tears flow without any warning, and I’m almost surprised that I can still cry after how much I have been crying today. I feel their wetness soaking into the wool of my Mama’s work coat. I feel a hand on my head and I look up into Papa’s face.

“You worried us so much, Bailee Bear. You know that?” he says, raising his eyebrows. “Promise me something. You’ll never do that again okay?”

“I promise.”

~

Later that evening, I sit down with Papa and Mama in the kitchen. All three of us sit at the counter, and I let my feet move back and forth in the air. Mama takes a long drink of her coffee, before setting it back onto the counter. “Okay, Bailee. We need to talk.” she sighs, and looks at me. “Why did you leave the house? Where were you trying to go?”

I look away, and kick my feet even harder. “I wanted to go home.” I whisper, twirling back and forth in my chair.

“What? You were already-” Mama waves her hand into the air, before Papa interrupts her.

“Why did you want to go to our old house, honey? Nothing is there anymore.” Papa asks, putting a hand on the back of my chair to stop my twirling.

I sigh, and stare down at my hands. “I really like our old house and wanted to see it again.” I clasp my hands tightly together. “I wanted to find my happy again.” Silence. I peek up at them and they are looking at each other.

“Look at us, Bailee.” Mama says, while Papa turns my chair towards them. I lift my head and notice Mama’s hands shaking on her coffee mug. “Are you sad, Bailee? Do you miss our old house?” she asks, setting down the mug on the counter again. Clink.

I don’t say anything, and look between her and Papa. “Is that why you’ve been so distant lately? And why you were so mad about me going to work?” Mama stands up, and walks toward the window.

“I’m sorry, Bailee Bear. It must be really tough not being able to spend time together as much as we used to.” Papa whispers, leaning back in his chair.

Mama walks back over to us, leaning down to hug me. “I’m sorry that I’m always at work, Bailee. I shouldn’t tell you that we can watch movies together and then go to work instead.” She pulls away, looking me in the eyes. “And I shouldn’t keep buying you all of that stuff, because it isn’t going to make any of us happier.”

Suddenly, Papa asks me a question. “Bailee, do you like those things that your mama buys for you?”

I pause, and think about the question. *Do I like them?* “Yes?” I say.

Papa chuckles, saying, “Wait, let me change that question. Would you rather spend time with your mama or me, or get those things?”

This time I don’t hesitate. “I want to play with Mama and Papa more.”

Both of them smile then, and Mama laughs as she sits down in the chair next to me.

“Bailee, I’m sorry. I forgot that those presents couldn’t replace the time I spend with you.” Mama whispered, pulling me into another hug. I wrap my arms around her and she places her chin on top of my head. It almost makes me want to start crying again.

“I miss you, Mama.” I say, burying my head into her shoulder instead of crying this time. All three of us sit in silence for a moment, and eventually I hear Papa getting up and walking out of the room. I peek my head up and see him digging in his bag by the front door. He walks back into the kitchen with a book in his hand and he sets it down on the counter between us.

“What’s that book Papa?” I ask.

“This was going to be a present later...” he says, “but this is a special case.”

“Oh.” I say, disappointed. *I already have a bunch of books already.*

“This isn’t just a book.” Papa sits down next to me again, placing it in front of me. He opens the book, and there are no words inside it. Just blank pages.

“Why is it empty?” I ask, flipping through page after empty page.

“It’s called a journal, and you write down your own thoughts and feelings in it. I wanted to show you something that always helps me.” Papa said, grabbing a pencil from the cup on the counter. He flips to the

first page and writes “Bailee's Gratitude Journal” in big letters. “What are you thankful for?” he asks, setting the pencil in my hand.

I look up at him and then back down at the page. “I...” I think aloud. “You and Mama?”

“Well, write that down!” Papa exclaims, pointing to the line underneath the big letters. I quickly scribble that into the journal.

“Now what, Papa?”

“Every morning I want you to write one thing that you are thankful for.” he explains, closing the journal and setting it on my lap. “It can be anything you want, but it’s extra special when you can write down the people you love and the things you really like doing.” he ponders, propping his chin in his hand.

“Journaling always helped me remember what is important to me, and not just the things I can buy. You’ll be surprised just how many things you can put into that journal.” Papa chuckles. “And the best part is that Mama can help you.”

Mama smiles, leaning her head against mine. “I can definitely do that, Bailee Bear.” she says.

I can already think of one more thing to add. “I want to add another one!” I say and start opening the journal again.

“Of course.” he laughs, and I quickly put it back onto the counter in front of me and flip the cover open. I grab the pencil again and etch in a second entry.

Family.

Sam's Story

I can see the goal getting closer and closer, as my feet pound the turf and propel the soccer ball in front of me. I see a defender on the opposing team swoop in from my right, but I quickly deflect and keep running. "Go, Sam! Position 5!" yells Coach Carter. I get further and further ahead of the players behind me, and the goalkeeper is nervously bouncing back and forth. *I got this.* I slide and aim high, dropping to the ground as I kick the ball into the air.

It soars over the goalie's head and crashes into the net. "Goal for St. Martin's!" The whistle blows, announcing the end of the game. I get up and raise my hands in the air as my teammates crowd around me. I vaguely hear the announcer above the noise shouting, "And this game goes to St. Martin's, with a score of 7 to 3-", but his voice quickly fades into the background as we all jump up and down. *We won!*

~

My bedroom door creaks open, and I hear my mother call, "Hey it's time to get up! Breakfast in fifteen minutes." I groan and roll over. Click. Flash. I shriek as the light comes on and the door closes once more. I rub my eyes against the harsh light from my ceiling light and consider pretending I fell back asleep. With a jolt, I open my eyes wide and sit up. *The positions for this season are going to be announced today!*

I fling the covers off and quickly get ready. I grab my cleats, jersey, and other equipment, throwing everything into my soccer bag.

I run downstairs and eat breakfast as fast as I can. My siblings stare at me from across the table, as I eat a pancake in three bites. "Hey, Sam... you don't need to rush. We don't need to leave for 20 minutes." says Simon, my twin brother.

"Yeah but I want to leave as soon as possible. They're announcing positions today!" I exclaim, reaching for a glass to pour myself some apple juice.

Simon rolls his eyes in return, pushing the bottle over to my side of the table. I quickly pour a glass and take a large gulp. "Yeah, yeah. They're announcing positions for my team too remember?" he says as he takes another bite off his plate.

~

Most Tuesday mornings begin with me heading straight to homeroom, but today is a special day. I head toward the gym, weaving my way between the hustle and bustle of students in the hallway. The bulletin board is posted right outside all of the coaches' offices, where every important message and announcement collects until the end of each semester. As I get closer, I can see other teammates and members of the boys' soccer team crowded around the board. The papers are almost falling off the board, but I can still immediately see the position announcements.

They stand out clearly, neon-green paper against a sea of white and black. From this far away, I can already see the titles of each section, and I try to force my eyes to show me the two names next to forward. I weave through the crowd, and peer over Christina and Marley. *Sam Reyes, let there be Sam Reyes.* Gradually, my eyes make out the small text. Grace Westbrooke and Lauren McKinney. I gasp out loud, frantically searching for my name until I finally spot it. Samantha Reyes, right next to defender.

I back up and let other students walk in front of me to view the lists. *Defender?* “Defender?” I whisper in confusion. I had always been forward, ever since I first started playing soccer.

“Hey, Sam!” I hear a voice say from behind me. I stop and see Lacie and Drew walking away from the board. While we aren’t in the same homeroom, all three of us have been friends for a long time. I stop to let them catch up to me, before we start walking towards the hallway for 5th graders.

“I saw that you got assigned to defense. Now we can be in the same position!” Drew exclaimed, bumping my shoulder with her own and laughing. The thought of being the same position as Drew makes me smile a little bit but doesn’t shake my unease. *I’ve never been anything other than forward before.*

“But I’ve never seen you play as a defender before...” Lacie ponders.

I quickly reply, “I know! I don’t think I’ve ever been anything other than a forward.”

“Well, maybe Coach will tell us why at practice today?” Drew asks, shrugging.

“Yeah, maybe.” I mumble. We get back to our classrooms and find our seats before the final bell rings. As Mr. Calhoun strolls in my mind isn’t on the morning announcements. Instead I can’t wait to get to practice.

~

The bell rings loudly and I jolt in response. *Finally!* Our science teacher does her best to tell us the assignment due tomorrow morning but gives up as everyone starts closing their textbooks and putting our papers in our binders. I quickly put my school stuff into my backpack and scoop up my soccer bag. I join Lacie, Drew, and some other teammates as we head over to the gym for our team meeting.

As soon as we enter the locker rooms, the noise is so loud that I can barely hear myself think. “Oh my gosh, did you see that I’m a midfielder?” “Yeah I’m a defender again.” “I think I’m going to be the second goalie.” I throw my school clothes into my bag and pull on my white undershirt and shorts. My jersey gets stuck in the laces of my cleats, and I bend down to untangle it when I hear Lauren from across the changing room.

“Yeah, I’m forward this season. I’ve wanted to play this position for so long!” she says, high fiving Marley and Christina. They laugh out loud and walk out of the locker room as I finally untangle my jersey. I slip it over my undershirt and grab my cleats before walking with Lacie and Drew to the gym. We sit down in the meeting circle, talking about our first game of the season, which will be against Kent Public School in three weeks.

“Alright team, quiet down!” Everyone quickly stops talking as Coach Carter walks into the center of the circle. A neon-green piece of paper rests in her hand. She smiles at all of us, saying, “I’m sure all of you have already seen the position chart for this season, but I’m going to read it out loud anyway.”

I sit up straighter. *Maybe there was a mistake on the paper!* Coach starts with the goalkeepers, slowly moving through the midfielders before finally making it to the defenders. “Okay, now for the defense.” She pauses briefly, before continuing. “Drew Lancaster, Samantha Reyes, Beverly...”

I hear Coach continue, but I slump back onto my hands. Everyone knows the role each position plays in a game, so I am familiar with what a defender does. *But why this sudden change?*

“Okay team! Today we’re going to have our first practice with our new positions. Do your best, and for those who are in the same position help your new position members. Let’s huddle up!” Coach shouts, moving aside to let all of us stack our hands one on top of another in the center of the circle.

We bounce our hands up with each count, “One! Two! Three! Go Mustangs!”

~

We split up into our stretch groups, and I quickly jog over to Coach before we start. “Hey Coach?” I ask, walking up to her and our assistant coach sitting on one of the benches.

They look up as I approach, and Coach Carter sets down the clipboard. “Yes, Sam? Did you have a question?”

I put my hands together, winding my fingers between one another. “I-I was wondering why I’m not forward this year...” I ask, looking down at the bright green turf below our feet.

“Ah, I see.” Coach replies, standing up. “We thought it would be best to give another player a chance to prove themselves in that position. As a defender you’ll be able to experience a different position and learn how to play as a support position.”

I nod, faintly smiling and say, “Okay, Coach.” She nods back at me before turning towards center field.

Fwee! “Time to start stretching! Let’s do twenty lunges!”

A short while later, we spread out over the field, splitting up into two teams of ten players. I crouch down as Grace and Lauren perform the kick off to start the scrimmage. With a blow from Coach’s whistle the game has begun, and the ball comes flying towards our goal. I quickly rush forward towards the direction of the ball. A midfielder from the opposing team tries to kick it to her forward, but I intercept the kick, shooting it off to one of my midfielders, Jenna.

Thirty minutes later, the game stands 3-5 with our team being down by two. As a defender I’m not supposed to make goals, and I stomp my cleats into the turf in frustration before getting into position again. I crouch down, the whistle blows, and I dive to the left. The ball is being passed between two opposing midfielders, and I try to steal the ball through interception. I slam into one girl’s shoulder instead and the ball goes racing by my right side. I turn around as fast as I can and chase after it.

The girl from the other team and I race head to head, but I burst ahead of her as I twist the ball away from her grasp. I cross over centerfield in the process, and find myself on the opposite side of the field.

I turn towards the opposing team's goal, sending the ball out in front of me with a hit from my ankle. I run forward, looking for Grace to pass it to her. *Wait, I can make a shot!* The path is literally open before me, and if I was just a little closer I would be able to make a direct shot into the goal. That's all I need to sprint towards the opponent's goal.

I twist to the side as a midfielder tries to block the ball, and slip around their forward, Lauren. I hear Grace shout to my right, "Pass!" But I keep going forward. The goalie runs over to my side of the field, bouncing up and down in anticipation of my shot. I am almost there-

Oof! Someone bumps into me, and I stumble, slipping from the force of it. My shoulder slams into the turf as the girl kicks the ball back towards midfield. Fweet! We all freeze when Coach blows her whistle, letting the ball roll to a stop. I sit up as Coach approaches me from the sidelines. "Watch it Sam! You went well over midfield into the opposing team's side." She yells, as I stand up and brush the dirt off of my jersey.

"Yes, Coach!" I shout back, moving back towards our side. I can hear several other players chuckle, and when I strain my ears I can hear them say, "Wow, she can't keep position." I grit my teeth and get into position once more.

~

Later that evening, I join my family at the kitchen table for dinner. Even though my parents are often away for their work, we always make sure to have meals together as a family each week. I grab my usual spot next to my brother, and start to spoon some mashed potatoes onto my plate.

"So how was everyone's day? I remember something about positions being announced?" Mom asks, winking at us.

Simon doesn't waste any time, and chimes in saying, "I'm forward again! I'm teamed up with Max as the second forward this season so we are totally going to win semi-finals this year." He bounces up and down as he speaks, and both Mom and Dad laugh.

"I'm sure your team will! Weren't you only one win away from semi-finals last season?" Dad chuckles, grabbing the peas to scoop some onto his plate.

"Yeah we were sooo close." Simon sighs, shoving food into his mouth almost as soon as it touches his plate.

"And what about you sweetie?" Mom interrupts.

I look down at my plate, and only answer when the silence becomes too much. "I was moved to defense." I mutter. The table goes silent, and I hear Mom sigh.

"Oh I'm so sorry honey." she says, her smile turning into something completely different from the one it was a few moments ago. Her teeth are hiding behind her lips, and a furrow appears between her

eyebrows. “Well, this season you can show them that you’re amazing in any position but that you were an even more amazing forward.”

“And maybe next season they will make you a forward again!” Dad speaks up, gesturing wildly with his fork. “I remember when my coach tried to put me on defense. Defense! I told him what for and then we reached an agreement for me to go back to center stage where I belonged.” He laughs, and everyone else joins in except for me.

I sit back as the conversation goes back to Simon’s team. Eventually the topic shifts to May, but even she has something great to talk about. She has been a ballerina since she was very young, and even though she is only 7 years old she was chosen to be the lead in their next performance. She was chosen out of everyone, even the ten year olds.

I lay my head onto one hand, slowly taking small bites of my chicken. The conversation continues around me, until it feels like I am no longer here. *No defender is better than a forward.*

~

Later that night, I run across a soccer field in a dream world. In the bleachers I can see international soccer team colors from around the world, and can hear a different language coming from the opposing team. I run across the field under the spotlights, no longer able to see any members of the crowd. The goal lies straight ahead, and I kick the ball towards it. No opposing players are fast enough to keep up with me. From the sidelines, I hear my coach shout, “Keep going, go for the straight shot!”

I smile widely, lining up for the shot. The goalie nervously jumps from side to side, and I can tell that they won’t be prepared for what comes next. I pull my leg back and gather all of my strength. My foot connects with the ball and it goes soaring into the air.

Knock knock. The ball and goalie vanish into the air as the ceiling of my bedroom comes into view. I jolt up in bed, the sudden transition from dream to reality shocking me. The door creaks open and my mother peeks her head in. “Time to get up! We’re having crepes for breakfast today.” she says, seeing that I am already sitting up in bed. Rather than turning on the light, she leaves the door open and I can hear her footsteps as she walks down the stairs.

I take a deep breath, and lean back onto my pillows as I stare up at the ceiling. I can still feel the warmth and happiness from the shot I was about to take in my dream. Even though I hadn’t seen it go into the goal, it felt like it would have. A warm feeling spreads through my chest, and I smile. *And I was a forward too!*

I can’t stop myself from laughing out loud and I leap out of bed so quickly that I almost fall onto the floor. *Today is going to be a good day.*

~

“Sam, you shouldn’t go over the center line too much!” Coach shouts across the field. I jolt in response, slipping against the ground that is still wet from the rain earlier, and fall onto my back. Oomph! *Today is not a good day.* My breath escapes me for a few moments, and I lean over onto my side gently. I slowly stand up, rubbing one hand against my back and trying to catch my breath.

Suddenly I notice that Coach is right beside me, helping me up by grabbing one of my elbows. She frowns gently, saying, "I'm sorry if I scared you, Sam. But as a defender, you need to pay attention to where you are on the playing field!" She shakes her head, and my shoulders drop. We get into position again, but I can't seem to stop messing things up. Sometimes I simply sprint right over the center line without even noticing it. Other times I pay attention to it, but I see a chance that is too good to ignore. Yet every time, I either miss the shot or end up allowing the opposing team to score instead.

As time goes on, my first mistake turns into two and then three. My cheeks start to flush and I *know* that they must be bright red. It feels like half of my hair is falling out of my ponytail. My legs keep getting muddier and muddier as I slip, fall, and splash through the mud and puddles. My knees start to look-

Coach blows her whistle and announces, "Okay Sam, take a break on the bench until you've calmed down a little. Lucy, you're up." I freeze, not believing that I heard her correctly. *She told me to sit on the bench?* I quietly walk over to the bench, stopping next to the other two players that usually sit on the bench during team practice. They look back at me and scooch to the opposite end of the bench away from me. I sigh, and collapse onto the uneven wood.

I watch as Grace leads our practice team to three goals in the next ten minutes. Lucy doesn't seem like she knows what she is doing, as she goes back and forth between midfield and our team's goal line without getting anywhere near the ball. But for some reason, our side does really well anyway. I stare at the field until my eyes go blurry. I blink rapidly to focus them again, and I see Grace score a fourth goal. I swallow roughly, my lips trembling a little. I take a deep breath and bite my lower lip, stopping myself from freaking out anymore.

It's okay. I just need to pay more attention to what I am doing on the field. I take a few more deep breaths, and after what seems like a year Coach calls for me to come back onto the field.

~

I walk a circle around the living room the next morning, and from the kitchen Dad calls out to me. "Hey honey, are you done walking a circle into the carpet?" I look down and notice that I have worn a subtle pathway into the carpet, and I feel my cheeks flush. I walk over to the couch and sit down, tapping my foot against the ground instead. I can't stop thinking about the scrimmages this week, and how Coach made me sit on the bench. I keep sighing over and over again, and I can't stop myself from tapping my foot still.

I scooch over when Dad walks into the living room and sits down next to me. He places a hand on my knee, stopping it from tapping anymore. I flush again and force myself to sit without moving. Dad chuckles, asking, "You really have some nervous energy today, don't you?"

I shrug, saying, "Kinda."

He sits back into the couch cushions, rubbing his chin with one hand in a thinking motion. "Hmmm... Weren't you going to meet your friends at the mall today?"

"Yeah, not until 1 though." I reply, looking over at the clock hanging on the wall. It reads 11:32.

I glance back at him, and he taps his foot against the ground for a moment. “I know that you received this month’s allowance only two weeks ago, but I also know how much you have been looking forward to doing something with your friends besides walking around...”

I sit up straight, and my worries from a moment ago fade to the back of my mind. We had just planned to walk around, but with money we could actually do something!

“Since you’re going shopping with your friends, I don’t see why I can’t give you a little spending money.” he says.

“Oh my gosh, seriously!” I ask excitedly, jumping off the couch.

Dad stands up too, walking back over to the kitchen. He reaches into his wallet and passes me some money. I look down and see three twenties staring back up at me. *Wow I have sixty dollars to spend today!* I gasp, smiling widely. He chuckles and walks towards our remaining breakfast dishes. “I’m going to go finish the dishes. You should probably start getting ready to go.” he says.

I give a cheer, pumping my fist into the air before jogging up the stairs to get changed. It feels like Dad takes an eternity, as he finishes cleaning up the kitchen. *Finally* we get into the car. We turn the car out of the neighborhood, and head over to the mall.

We park and start walking to where there are a bunch of chairs and seating areas. “Make sure you text me if you guys run into any trouble.” Dad says. “And call me if you get lost.”

“I knowwww, Dad.” I say, because this isn’t the first time that I’ve been to the mall. As we get closer, I can make out my friends standing around a table with their parents. I wave and run over to Drew, Lacie, and Mackenzie.

As soon as I get close enough, we start to talk, and I can hear Dad talk with the other parents. Every now and then we get together at the mall, and one of the parents always stays behind to watch over us. I can’t wait until we are old enough to stay by ourselves.

“What do you guys want to do today?” I ask, looking between them.

Lacie puts her chin into her hand, thinking, but Drew already has an idea. “Aren’t we going to see that new movie we talked about?” she asks, pulling her phone out of her pocket. “There’s one in twenty minutes!”

“Twenty minutes!?” Mackenzie says. “We need to get going then!”

“Alright girls, I’ll be staying here if you need me.” Dad announces, sinking down into one of the plushy chairs. “Enjoy your movie!”

“We will!” we say unanimously, giggling. The theater is on the other side of the mall and we start speed-walking and laughing when someone trips over their shoelaces. We round the corner and see the theater glisten in the distance. Without even thinking about it, all four of us pick up the pace.

We pass storefront after storefront, the bright lights blurring past us one after another. As we pass, I see a pair of cleats glisten under the lights, purple stripes running down the sides. My sneakers screech as I

abruptly stop, staring up at them. They sit on a little white pedestal, with a big sign next to them that says \$54.99. My fingers touch the 60 dollars lying in my pocket and I want them. *I want them so bad.*

Not only do they match our school colors, but I have been begging my parents for a new pair of cleats for forever. I tap my foot, bouncing up and down. I have been asking for new cleats for the past two months, and every time Mom and Dad have said to wait a little longer. *That's it, I'm going to buy them!*

"Sam, we need to go! We don't want to miss the movie!" Lacie calls, walking back towards me. *Wait. Oh no!* The movie ticket costs at least ten dollars, and I wouldn't have enough left over to buy the shoes and see the movie. *What do I do?*

"Oh, those are really sweet cleats!" Drew comments, coming up beside me. "Are you going to buy them after the movie?"

"I don't think I have enough to go to the movie and buy the cleats..." I murmur, turning to look at them. They stare back at me, and then look amongst each other.

Mackenzie shrugs, asking, "Could you ask your dad to buy them for you?"

"I've been asking for awhile and they keep telling me no." I respond. Everyone goes silent then.

"Well, I mean we don't have to see the movie if you don't want to..." Lacie says hesitantly.

"But I really wanted to today! Who knows when we're going to be able to next." Drew insists, crossing her arms over her chest.

"It just came out so we can see it later." I say. No one says anything. Drew frowns, and Mackenzie and Lacie just look at me. That settles it for me. I throw one hand up, saying, "Or you guys can go. I'll meet up with you later." I say, determined to buy these.

Drew and Mackenzie immediately nod, turning to walk towards the movie theater again, but Lacie grabs my arm instead. "Are you sure? We don't have to see the movie today." Lacie says, looking back at the other two.

"Yeah it's totally fine. Text me when you guys are done." She nods slowly, before turning around to catch up with the others.

I walk into the Nike store, and take my time trying on different sizes and even different colors. I know that I will end up picking the purple one regardless, because it matches our team's colors, but I suddenly have a lot of time on my hands.

Before too long, I have paid for them and walk back out into the mall. I find a spot to sit down, and I open the box to look at them again. It's like they are shining and I can already imagine wearing them to practice. I can show everyone how cool they are and it will be nice to have brand new cleats for the game. *Now I have something that will impress everyone.* I smile, and start playing a game on my phone. I have another hour until the movie is over.

The rest of the weekend passes slowly, and Monday's classes feel like they will never end. Finally, we all head over to the gym. The weather is still pretty warm at the beginning of September, and I can't wait to show everyone my new cleats. I quickly change and run into the gym. I spot Drew, Mackenzie, and Lacie on the other side of the gym and call out to them, "Hey guys, come check out my shoes!"

I pose one foot so that the purple gleams in the sunlight. "Oh my gosh, those colors match our team perfectly!" Mackenzie says.

"I wish I could buy Nike stuff." Lacie sighs, bending down to check them out.

Drew looks down at them, and half-smiles, but I'm not bothered. I am so proud that I can't stop myself from bragging about them, their color and their brand. A few other girls come up to compliment me and I just can't stop smiling. *I'm still a good player.*

After a brief announcement and our team cheer, we jog out to the field and complete our stretches. Before too long we are all getting into position on the field to start practice. This time Lauren is the main forward for my team, and I assume that together we will be way better than Grace and I were last week.

Twenty minutes later, I haven't slipped or fallen but I haven't significantly helped score any goals either. We pause to take a water break, and it feels like we have been playing for much longer than forty minutes. When I was younger, I would come home from soccer practice and start practicing by myself, playing for hours and hours. *When was the last time that I did that?*

Without thinking, I grip my water bottle so hard that it jerks out of my hand and dumps onto the ground. I quickly pick it back up, but most of the water has already escaped onto the dirt. I wipe clumps of dirt off the edge of the bottle, but give up after I realize that the dirt clumps are just turning into mud smears. *I have two weeks to become an amazing defender.*

~

Our team bus pulls up to a school that I haven't been to since last season. We slowly climb out of the bus onto the grass in front of Kent Public School, our main rival and our first game in this season. The game starts in one hour and it kind of feels like we are going to a battle. Drew and Lacie are talking about their cousins who go here, but I can't focus on the conversation. My palms are sweaty, and I almost drop my equipment bag several times on the way to the changing rooms. As we change into our jerseys, the purple and gold shine brightly against the harsh neon lights. I can see my special purple cleats sticking out of my bag, but even those aren't enough to help.

We make our way out to the field, and start doing our pre-game stretches. Even though we've only just started, I can already feel my heart trying to jump out of my chest. The back of my shirt is drenched and I can feel my socks rubbing painfully against my heel. *I don't think I'm ready for this.*

During the past two weeks, I was never called back to the bench again. But I also haven't been able to do as well as I want to. Simon has been bragging about his improvements, while I have nothing to show for the last three weeks of our team practices. As I look over to the bleachers I'm reminded that my parents and siblings aren't at the game today, because May had her ballet performance as the lead. I probably

won't be seeing any of them until I get home later tonight. I frown, and try not to focus on something else.

After warming up, we gather for our pep talk. The other team groups up on the opposite side, and the bleachers are full of parents, teachers, and other students. I feel myself start to look for my mom and dad and quickly turn back to my teammates. The air feels thick and heavy, as Coach starts speaking. "Alright team. We've been practicing really hard these last three weeks and we are more than ready to win this. Lauren, I want you to remember to pay extra attention to your left side. Marley, stick with Drew and you will be the perfect defense for our goal. And Sam..." she pauses.

I look up at her, waiting to see what final tip will be able to improve my work on the field. "Make sure that you watch field lines. Okay, huddle up!" We huddle as close as we can get to one another. One, two, three, Go Mustangs!

We all get into position, and it seems like every person on the opposite team is looking at me. I can't believe that our first game is against our rival. Last year, we lost against them by one goal and weren't able to make it to regionals because of that game. Not only do I want to win for myself, but also so our team can finally make it to regionals.

I bend down and pull my shoelaces tight one more time. I stare down at the purple stripes and without thinking run my fingers down its shiny surface. After a moment looking at them, I stand back up and feel so much better. At least I have these cleats on my side, which is better than being without. I build up my courage, and this time I don't back down from the stares of the opposing team.

After the coin toss, the Kent team kicks off the game and the ball goes soaring over our heads towards me and the other defenders. Drew head butts the ball back up towards the midfielders and everything bursts into motion.

I do my best to remember my position, and quickly move to block an opposing team member from stealing the ball. Drew skirts around us, moving into position and shoots it towards Lauren who sprints for the opposing goal. I watch her back, and she and Grace rapidly kick it back and forth between them. I lag back, they get closer and Lauren lines up for a shot.

Fweet! *Yes!* We all smile at the quick victory, since we made a goal in less than two minutes. With 33 minutes left to go for the first half, maybe this won't be too bad after all.

~

A whistle blow calls half-time and we all jog off the field to take a break. I scoop up my water bottle, careful not to spill it onto the ground this time. I take a large gulp, and then take a few deep breaths. I look up towards the score board, and feel a wave of frustration wash over me. We have 3 goals while Kent has 5, and neither team has been able to make a goal in the past ten minutes of game-play.

Across the field, Kent's coach is shouting to their players as they stretch, grab water, and cluster together. Our side looks strange in comparison, as everyone sits with slumped shoulders or whispers amongst each other. Coach claps her hands together, saying, "All right team, huddle up!"

We all put back down our things and get into a circle position around Coach Carter. “We are doing well going into the second half. We have over thirty minutes left to make at least two goals!” she exclaims, and I perk up.

“What’s the plan, Coach?” Drew asks, and we all nod and murmur in anticipation.

Coach Carter quickly lays out a strategy for our next move, and ends her speech by saying, “Even though it feels like Kent is winning right now, we still have half the game left. If we give up now then what would we have been practicing for all of these weeks!”

We all give a cheer, and it feels like our energy suddenly explodes into action. We rest our feet for a while and discuss our strategy for the second half. It’s not too much longer before the whistle announcing the second half can be heard echoing across the field. I jump up, shaking my hands as we walk into our positions. I kick each leg in front of me a few times and stretch both arms over my head. I can’t stop tapping my fingers against my thigh as I crouch in the ready position. *I want us to win this.*

A few minutes later, it feels like every time we are getting closer to the opposing goal, suddenly the ball ends up on our side of the field again. Our players battle right against theirs and neither side seems to be accomplishing anything. Once, twice, three times Grace has made a shot towards the goal but all three times their goalie has blocked it.

I try not to get in the way, blocking other players and passing the ball on almost as soon as I get it. I am able to steal it several times, but I let it go on to a midfielder or forward to make sure that I don’t do something that Coach wouldn’t want me to.

Halfway through the second-half, we all pause to let the referees argue about a potential penalty on the opposing side. The score is 4 to 5, and although we have succeeded in getting one goal the other team has gotten way too close to our goal multiple times. I start tapping my foot into the turf, looking out at the empty field next to us. The wind rushes over the grass in waves, and it tries to get under my skin. I turn and stare at the opposing goal, feeling my eyes focus so hard on the white strings and supports. My eyes lose focus but I keep staring, feeling the wind pushing against my back. I want to take a shot. I can imagine my heel drawing back as I line up the perfect shot-

“Players in position!” The referee shouts across the field, and it looks like no one is going to receive a penalty. Within a few moments, I intercept the ball as it is being passed by the opposing team. I twist and start kicking it in the opposite direction, looking around me to see who I can pass it to. Lauren runs to my left and I position to shoot the ball to her.

Suddenly another leg is in front of me, and I trip forward as one of Kent’s midfielder’s kicks the ball away from my control. The ball flies away and I try to keep track of it as I gather my footing again.

“Lauren!” I hear someone call from behind me. As I gain my footing, the ball slams into the netting of the opposing team goal. My jaw drops and I numbly give the team members near me high fives. All of that happened so fast that I wasn’t able to see any of it.

“Don’t worry about them tripping you up, Sam! We stole it back.” Drew laughs, bumping her shoulder against mine. I smile back, but really want to kick my cleats into the turf hard enough to rip some of it out. *I was useless.*

Instead, I take a deep breath and prepare for the game to start again. I intercept a pass and kick the ball towards Grace, who takes it all the way down to the opposing goal. I hold my breath, but the goalie sends it flying back into play. The score is 5 to 5, and neither side is able to score a shot for the next few minutes. We attempt a goal shot twice before Kent almost scores one. We all breathe a sigh of relief when Mackenzie, our goalie, blocks it.

I glance over at the scoreboard every few moments, watching the numbers counting closer and closer to zero. For the next eternity no one gets even close to the other's goal. The clock reads 4:54. We try to outmaneuver them without any success. 3:32.

My hands start to sweat when Kent gets too close to scoring. Mackenzie barely manages to stop the ball with her fingertips. 1:46. I steal the ball away from their forward, heading towards center-field. I look right, then left. And then I see it. There's no one in a straightaway directly towards Kent's goal. The only player in my way would be the shortest defense on the other side, and so far she hasn't been a threat during this game.

Out of the far corner of my eye, I can see Coach gesturing to pass it towards Grace, but all of the midfield players of the opposing team are around her. The wind seems to quiet and the hairs on my arms stand straight up. I can feel a single drop of sweat run down my back. 0:34. I'm half-way across the field before I think anymore about it.

"Pass the ball, Sam!" Coach yells at me, but I barely hear her over the rush in my ears. This time I'm not going to let anyone get in my way. I move past the midfielders and forwards, the space between us growing as I pick up speed. I twist around one defense member, and side swipe past another. I am only twenty feet away and it feels like I am flying.

Confused I realize that I really am flying, because my feet are no longer on the ground. It's only then that I feel someone's foot leaving my ankle. As I tip forward the ball is kicked halfway across the field to their forward. With all of the midfielders on our team rushing after me, only our defense is left on the opposing side as their forward lines up their next shot. My shoulder hits the ground first and I hear part of the ten second countdown from the bleachers, "Seven! Six!" as her foot hits the ball.

It goes soaring into the air, and I blankly stare as it arches. My ankle is already sore and I struggle to my knees in the dirt. "Three! Two!" The ball flies into Mackenzie's hand and bounces off her fingers. Directly into the netting behind her. "One!"

I slam into the locker room, trying not to cry. Everyone murmurs sadly around me, "If we had just done that" or "We should have done this". I dump my jersey and drenched undershirt into my bag. Then I finish putting on my clothes and move to tuck my cleats into the bag too.

I stare down at the purple stripes, but instead of shining happily in the light it looks like they are gleaming meanly at me. It's like they are telling me, *you'll never be good enough*. I zip up my bag, swing it over my shoulder, and grab the cleats with my other hand. I stomp out of the locker room and into the hallway, walking until I find a big trash can.

With a huff, I shove them as far down into the trash as I can and then make my way back to everyone else. We climb into the bus, each taking our own seats. For a moment, I debate running back in to grab them. I had waited so long to get them. But by the time I think about getting up, we are already pulling out of the parking lot.

~

The car ride home is dead silent. I lay my head against the coolness of the window's glass, and try to stop tears from gathering in my eyes. The last minute of the game keeps replaying in my head, and all I can think about is Mackenzie trying to block the ball but missing it by only a few inches. The bus is silent, and no one says a single word.

After the game ended, I expected Coach to yell at me. I expected everyone to stare at me, get mad at me for ruining our chances of winning. If I hadn't done anything we could have at least ended the game with a tie and gone into overtime. Because of me being stupid we didn't even get to try.

Instead of yelling at me, everyone had been quiet. Mackenzie kept saying that it was all her fault because she wasn't able to block their shot, but everyone knew that it was me. I ran off to try and make a goal on my own. I didn't listen to Coach telling me to pass and I didn't pay attention to my surroundings. A tear falls down my cheek and I close my eyes as tightly as I can.

Half an hour later we pull into St. Martin's parking lot and I see my father's car parked next to the other parent's cars. Before we exit the bus, Coach stands up and turns around to face all of us. Hesitantly, I pull away from the glass and look towards her. She doesn't say anything for a moment, and she looks at each of us in turn.

Finally, she takes a deep breath and says, "We can't be too sad, guys. While we didn't win today we made an amazing comeback in the second half. We have some improvements to make, but this is only our first game of the season. Don't let this bring down your spirit and energy. Dismissed!"

We filter out into the early evening light and I wave goodbye to Drew and Lacie before walking over to my Dad's car. I hear the doors unlock as I get closer and I glance through the windows to see where I should sit. I am surprised when I see that no one else is in the car, but then I remember that May's performance was probably still happening. The rest of my family had been attending her concert, which is why they hadn't come to the game. Everyone else is probably at her concert still.

I open the back seat door to put my equipment bag in the back. Dad turns and smiles. "So how was the game, sport?" he asks. In response I slam the car door and climb into the front passenger seat. His smile fades as I silently buckle myself in. "That bad, huh."

We pull out of the parking lot, and I lean my head onto the window again. The temperature outside is falling as the sun continues to set, and the glass feels pleasantly cold. It's cold enough to distract me from my thoughts, which can't seem to stop.

It's all your fault. "So what was the final score?" You ruined our chance to win against Kent. "Sam?" You should have just done nothing and passed the ball- "Samantha!"

I jerk, banging my head against the glass. “Ah!” I mutter, rubbing the spot where my head smacked into the window. I glance towards him. “What?”

“Are you okay?” Dad asks, peering at me as we stop at a red light. I shrug, and lean my head back against the seat. He continues to look at me until the light turns green. He turns to face the road again, saying, “Do you want to talk about it?”

“No.” I say back. Silence. My lip trembles. “...Y-yes!” I take a deep breath, my voice already starting to tremble.

“Go on.” he says in reply. I pause for a moment, but then it rushes out of me all at once.

“It was all my fault that we lost! I was stupid and tried to make a goal all by myself!” I yell, swallowing hard. I blink my eyes rapidly because I’m not going to start crying. I am just saying the truth. *Stop being a baby.*

“Ah I see.” Dad replies, settling back into his seat as we move onto the highway. He doesn’t look over at me when he asks next, “Do you like being a defender?” I grumble back. “Why do you hate it?” I pause, and straighten in my seat.

“I...I don’t *hate* it.” I reply, shaking my head back and forth. “I just...feel stupid.” I look down at my lap, intertwining my fingers together. “I’m just holding everyone back.”

“You’ve only been a defender for a few weeks! I’m sure you’ll become used to the position soon. I remember when I was-” Dad says.

“That’s not it, Dad!” I argue, swallowing again. “You were always a forward and you were always good at it! I don’t even remember the last time I’ve scored a goal as a forward, let alone helped as defense!” My voice breaks and I struggle to keep a straight face. I can feel moisture gathering in the corners of my eyes and my breath wavers as I breath in and out.

Dad doesn’t say anything. “You don’t care, because I’ll never be good as you or Simon!” I spit out, my bottom lip trembling so hard that I clamp my front teeth down onto it. I hiccup, my shoulders jerking up.

“Honey, that’s not true.” Dad says, and the tears just start pouring out of me. My eyes sting and I can’t stop hiccuping and blubbering.

“I-I” I struggle to speak properly and I try to take a deep breath. “I’m never going to be a star soccer player.” I cry, my face soaked with tears and snot from my nose dripping down my face. Silence. I try to muffle the noise I’m making, but it’s almost like I keep getting louder.

I swallow again, staring out the window at the blurry buildings. “Don’t you like soccer, Samantha?” I blink and turn to look back at my dad. He stares straight ahead, not taking his eyes off of the road.

“Of course I do.” I mutter.

“Why do you like it?”

I stare at him, but he doesn't look over. My brows wrinkle. I bite my bottom lip again and think. *Why do I like soccer?* "I like being a great player and scoring goals." I say back.

"Would you still like soccer if you never scored any goals yourself?" Dad asks, finally glancing at me.

"Why would you play soccer if you never scored any goals?" I ask, confused.

"Defenders usually don't score their own goals directly, but they still play soccer. Why do you think that is?"

I stop, the tears freezing in my eyes before they can continue to fall. "What?" I reply.

"Not everyone plays soccer because they make goals themselves. Why do you think goalies and defenders play soccer if they can't score goals by themselves?" I blink again. "Sam, you don't have to play soccer if you don't want to."

"But I want to play soccer!" *Why is he doing this to me!* "I'm not going to leave just because we lost against Kent!"

"There's my girl." Dad chuckles. I huff and cross my arms, staring him down because I am so frustrated and annoyed. "I know how much you like soccer, but I think you've been missing the point recently."

"What do you mean?"

"Even if you're a defender you can still be a great soccer player. And even if you aren't the main team member scoring goals you can still be an important player." Dad says, tapping the steering wheel. "And you know what else?"

"What?"

"You don't need a bunch of new equipment to be a good player either. If you aren't satisfied with how you are playing you need to work on your skills, not take the easy way out." he says.

I can't help but scoff. "I know that."

"Well all you've been asking for lately is new sportswear, cleats, and other sports-related things. And I know that you bought those cleats rather than hanging out with your friends." Dad shrugs. "I think we should take a break from buying more equipment and clothes."

"But--"

"You don't need those things to be a good player right?"

I frown, murmuring, "Yeah..."

"So instead I can coach you on the weekends." he says. I gasp, sitting forward.

"Really?!"

"I might have been a forward, but I'm sure I can teach you a trick or two." Dad says, winking at me. He turns off the car, and I jump when I realize we are already in our garage. "We'll take it slow. But I think it's time I showed you just how important it is to want to play soccer for the right reasons. It doesn't matter what you do, as long as you enjoy doing it." He steps out of the car, grabbing my bag from the backseat.

"I do like soccer though." I reply, jumping down from the passenger side.

"Then all we have to do is practice until you feel better about being a defender!" Dad exclaims, as we walk towards the door to the house. I wipe my face, and feel dampness still on my skin. Dad wraps an arm around my shoulders, pulling me against him in a hug. And I can't stop myself from smiling. *He didn't call me a failure.*

~

Monday afternoon, we all gather for practice. Everyone is back to talking again and it feels like we have almost gone back to normal. Coach makes a speech about our last game and the training that we will do to make up for the areas we are weakest in. I try not to feel bad, but I swear most of her lecture was directed towards me.

I sigh, but I already feel so much better after talking to my dad. *It's okay if I'm not a forward.* And it's okay that I'm not the best right now as long as I keep improving. We all get up to start walking outside when Coach calls out to me. "Sam! I need to talk to you."

I turn around, my breath catching in my chest. I slowly walk back towards her, as everyone else heads towards the field with the assistant coach. "Yes, Coach?"

"I wanted to talk with you about what happened at the game last Friday." she says, walking over to her office. I gulp loudly, and blush as I sit down.

She smiles, saying, "You're one of our best players, Sam." I blink, my mouth gaping open.

"Wha-"

"And I know it might not feel like it right now, but that's because you're still getting used to your new position" she continues, leaning her elbows onto her desk.

I sit back, my brow furrowing. "Aren't you mad about what I did during the game?"

She blinks, and then laughs. "Well I won't lie Sam, it wasn't good for you to keep going when I told you to pass." I blush, dropping my head down. "But you also got really close to making that goal, before you tripped. I can't fault you for doing your best under that much pressure." Coach says, sighing. "That's not to say that you should do that again in the future though."

I stare down at the carpeted floor. "Yes, Coach." Neither of us says anything for a moment.

"Let's work on improving your reactions during the game, and then we'll be getting somewhere." Coach stands up and we move to walk out of her office.

I begin to pass through the doorway, keeping my eyes on the ground. Coach puts her hand on my shoulder, and I stop walking to look back at her. “Hey look at me, kid.” I blink and peek up at her. She smiles, saying, “You’re not bad, okay? You are still an amazing player and I’m looking forward to seeing you be a great defender.”

I nervously laugh, and smile back at her. “Okay, Coach.” We start the trek out of the gym towards the field. Right before I leave to join Drew and Lacie for stretching, Coach says one more thing.

“Let’s do our best!”

I laugh this time, tying the laces of my old cleats. I stand up and put my hands onto my hips. “Yes, Coach!”

Companion Guide

Introduction to Materialism

This collection of stories and learning materials intends to educate children ages 10 to 12 on the causes and consequences of materialism, as well as potential methods of reducing one's materialistic beliefs. This companion guide is designed to accompany the short stories, providing a closer look into each theme present in each story. Some of these themes may be more difficult for children to independently recognize as they read each story so discussions with them are highly encouraged to fully explore each theme. The hope is that both the instructor/parent and students will learn together as they work through these stories.

What is Materialism?

Each story within this collection is based on different aspects of materialism. But what is materialism? Materialism is defined as “the importance a person places on possessions and their acquisition as a necessary or desirable form of conduct to reach desired end states” (Richins & Dawson, 1992, p. 307). In other words, a materialistic person will place significant importance on acquiring material goods when trying to meet a goal. For some, the goal is happiness or status in the eyes of others. Those with materialistic beliefs may use that value set to measure their own success as well as the success of others (e.g., the more possessions you have, the more successful you are; Richins, 2017). Therefore, it is argued that materialism guides one's every day interactions and activities and is *not* simply the behavior of purchasing goods (Richins, 2017). There are, after all, some purchases that are necessary to live (e.g., food, shelter, clothing) and are not materialistic in nature. It is in the privately held beliefs behind those purchases that materialism may be found.

It may also be helpful to visualize materialism as a spectrum ranging from low to high. There are not necessarily two distinct categories of true materialists and non-materialists, but rather a range between the two where every individual falls (Richins, 2017). This materialism spectrum would also suggest that materialism as a belief system is fluid and an individual may slide up and down the scale throughout their life.

Why Does Materialism Matter?

There are unfortunately several consequences associated with being highly materialistic. Kasser (2002) discusses two specific consequences to living a life where one's personal worth is judged based on how much they have compared to how kind or compassionate one is. First, this outlook means that a materialistic person will constantly be seeking more and more, never satisfied with what they have. Second, funneling so much energy and time into acquiring goods to impress others or to appear successful to others makes it much more difficult to put energy and time into generating healthy, meaningful, and positive relationships with others. This partially explains why materialism is associated with lower life satisfaction and well-being, as well as higher rates of depression, difficulty adjusting to adult life, increased anxiety, and feelings of social isolation (Kasser, 2002).

This issue is complicated by the overwhelming pressure to conform to a materialistic lifestyle in American society (Kasser, 2002). People are constantly receiving messages in advertisements, TV shows and movies, and on social media promising that buying certain goods will significantly improve their lives. Oftentimes this improvement comes in the form of impressing others rather than improving oneself or creating close, meaningful relationships with others. The extensive body of research supporting the relationship between materialism and each

consequence listed above as well as the pervasive presence of materialism in American society highlights the importance of educating the youth on the dangers of having highly materialistic beliefs. While children may not be able to individually decrease the materialistic pressures in the world, they may be able to navigate through them more successfully with the help and guidance of more information.

“Nicholas’ Story”

Developmental Model of Materialism

Children learn everyday through events that help them form the skills that will allow them to successfully navigate through life. These skills are formed through the completion of various developmental tasks (Havighurst, 1972). Of interest here are two specific developmental tasks: creating a stable personal identity and developing satisfactory peer relationships. How does someone figure out who they are? How do they make satisfactory, long-lasting friendships? Perhaps more importantly, how can adults help children successfully accomplish these two tasks? The intention of these stories is to open a dialogue and provide some basic tools to start children on a path to being more aware of their choices with the help of better-equipped adults.

While the development of materialism is influenced by many factors, the developmental model of materialism offers one viewpoint of its formation. Consider a child attending an average day at school. Between formal instruction in subjects like science and math, children are learning about themselves and life in a series of everyday interactions and situations throughout their day (e.g., lunch in the cafeteria, playing at recess, walking with friends to class, etc.). When entering into a situation, children have a set of resources available to them that helps them determine their approach and behaviors (Richins, 2017). These resources can be things like having strong social skills, athletic ability, wit, or intelligence. It may be helpful to consider two different types of resources: intangible resources (e.g., intelligence or wit) and tangible resources (e.g., toys or money) (Richins, 2017). Often, when deciding how to act in a situation, children will choose the resources that are most easily available to them and that they are the most confident in. Over time, these choices and their outcomes help form children’s sense of identity

(Richins, 2017). For example, if a child tries to make jokes to connect with their peers and they receive positive attention, they will likely return to that method of making friends in future social situations. If this is repeatedly successful, they will likely come to view humor as a piece of their identity. However, if using humor was unsuccessful in making friends, they would likely turn to other aspects of their personality or perhaps their possessions.

Nicholas finds himself facing this issue towards the end of this story. After losing access to new material things and consequently also losing all of his “friends”, Nicholas overhears two girls in his class discussing one of his favorite video games. Seeing an opportunity to make new friends, he tries to reach out to the girls by mentioning their shared interest, but the girls remain uninterested. Despite his efforts, this first attempt at making friends without relying on his possessions fails. This reinforces in his mind that people must only be interested in him for his material things and not for who he is.

Unstable Sense of Self

It is important to keep in mind that every child has different resources available to them. Some are more likely to turn to tangible resources than others and vice versa. Tangible resources may be easier to turn to than intangible resources, however such a reliance makes formulating a stable sense of self difficult. As previously discussed, the resources children use to handle a situation help them form their sense of identity. It is more likely that children will create a stable sense of self if they choose stable, intangible resources as there is a strong link between one’s identity and one’s internal qualities (Richins, 2017). Tangible resources, however, have a much weaker link to one’s self and are subject to significantly more change (Richins, 2017). Trends change quickly; what is “cool” today may not be “cool” tomorrow. If one’s entire understanding of their identity is based on their possession of the latest and greatest items that are

everchanging, it would logically follow that their sense of identity would be unstable as well. Overall, the reliance on tangible resources requires significant mental and financial efforts for what often turns out to be unpredictable and unreliable outcomes (Richins, 2017).

Peer Relationships

How do children make friends? Although some receive formal instruction in social skills, this is not necessarily a process that most children are taught. They may be encouraged to interact with other children and receive some pointers along the way with the hope that friendships will develop. Some research has suggested the existence of a checklist that gives a broad overview of developing peer relationships (Richins, 2017). First, a child seeking peer relationships has to somehow get the attention of other children and keep it. Second, they have to figure out how to present themselves in an appealing way. Lastly, they have to (or hope to) gain the approval of their peers. This checklist is run through several times a day in the daily events children encounter. The resources discussed above come into play here significantly. What resources do children have available to them to help them seem appealing to other children? If they're confident in using their sense of humor or athletic ability to attract positive attention, they may turn to that. But what happens if a child lacks confidence in their abilities or is uncertain of who they are, as many young children tend to be (Richins, 2017)? Such a child may be more inclined to turn to material things to complete this relationship checklist if their financial situation allows it. For example, bringing a new game into school one day for positive attention is easier and offers more immediate rewards than advancing one's soccer skills.

This is an example of how children learn that possessions can be effective in generating friendships (Richins, 2017). Reliance on material goods in this way, though, greatly increases the likelihood that they will also be more materialistic for a variety of reasons. One reason has to do

with transformation expectations, or the belief that acquiring a specific item will change one's life in a drastic and meaningful way. An example of such a belief can be seen within the story when Nicholas becomes obsessed with obtaining a new gaming system because, in his view, if he can just get his hands on it, the threat of his friends leaving him will disappear and everything will be as it was. When Nicholas is denied the gaming system and his transformation expectations remain unsatisfied, he becomes enraged at his father, desperate to keep his friends in the only way he knows how. This scene highlights a negative consequence of being highly materialistic: objectifying others. Prioritizing the acquisition of material things can lead an individual to view others as means to an end rather than as people with their own thoughts, feelings, and desires (Kasser, 2002). In Nicholas' case, he comes to view his father as a way to get more things rather than as another person. Viewing others in this way limits one's ability to make strong connections with them. The focus on materials as a means of navigating through social situations also takes focus away from developing alternative, more long-lasting methods of making friends. This means that a child who relies on material goods may not develop other resources to rely on, only increasing the existing reliance on possessions.

Another reason a reliance on material goods may increase materialistic tendencies is because materialistic children often have materialistic friends (Chaplin & John, 2010). This is because children often have an easier time bonding with children with whom they have something in common (Richins, 2017). In fact, research has found that materialistic adolescents and their friends talk about consumption more than less materialistic adolescents do (Weaver, Moschis & Davis, 2011). These interactions with other materialistic people may create a cycle of materialism that is difficult to escape.

One final influential factor of peer relationships on materialism has to do with peer pressure and peer rejection. Research has found that adolescents often enforce material conformity among their peers (Wooten, 2006), encouraging the development of materialistic tendencies. Beyond that, just generally being rejected by one's peers can have a significant effect on one's self-esteem (Banerjee & Dittmar, 2008). This drop in self-esteem consequently increases a need for peer approval, which may be found through the use of possessions, once again playing into the cycle of materialism.

What exactly can be done about all of this? While it may seem a daunting task, teaching children how to make friends and encouraging them to maintain friendships with people who like them for who they are rather than for their material items may be an effective strategy for decreasing materialism in children. Research has found that peer support can increase self-esteem, therefore reducing the likelihood that a child will search for approval through material means (Chaplin & John, 2010). To accomplish this, it is necessary to open a conversation with children about the nature of their friendships. They may have a hard time recognizing a good friend from a bad friend, but with some adult guidance they may more easily learn how to seek out and maintain healthy relationships with their friends.

“Bailee’s Story”

Divorce/Family Stress

Divorce is known to lead to self-doubt in children (Roberts & Tanner, 2005). Particularly for young children, divorce leads to feelings of uncertainty, both in the self and in relationships, and lack of control (Chang & Arkin, 2002). Materialistic beliefs often serve as a coping mechanism for these feelings of instability (Roberts & Tanner, 2005). When a family experiences divorce, parents may find it difficult to keep up with quality parenting practices they may have implemented when they were married. Suddenly one parent is responsible for twice the amount of work and there may not be enough time in the day to do everything on their own. As a result, children may unfortunately and inadvertently receive less attention and warmth from their parents (Dreman, 2000). It is this lack of interpersonal connection and interaction that may turn children of divorce towards material things in order to feel connected and secure in their lives (Kasser, 2002). To try to address this issue, some parents may turn to buying presents for their child, intending to compensate for disrupting their life and potentially their happiness. While this is done with positive intentions, material parenting can increase materialism in children (Richins & Chaplin, 2015). Material parenting involves a variety of behaviors, but the most important one is the use of material goods to show love or as a reward or punishment for certain behavior (Richins & Chaplin, 2015). In “Bailee’s Story”, Bailee’s Mom struggles to maintain a successful work-life balance after divorcing Bailee’s Dad. This leads her to spend less quality time with Bailee, even canceling plans at times for work obligations. Eager to make her daughter happy, she frequently buys Bailee presents to try to make up for her physical absence

and show Bailee that she loves her. This leads Bailee to develop materialistic tendencies over time.

Unfortunately, many children are unable to address issues caused by material parenting and divorce on their own. Why then would the focus of this story fall on divorce and materialism if the goal is to encourage change? While children cannot undo a divorce to avoid the development of materialistic tendencies, they can, with some guidance, reduce some of the negative effects by fostering gratitude. The solution to Bailee's predicament will hopefully remind children that they can take some control over their own lives, no matter how little control that may be. For Bailee, taking back control means realizing that she is the only person who can alter her perspective on life, specifically when it comes to being appreciative and grateful for the things she has.

Gratitude

Gratitude is a fairly complex concept with a variety of definitions; however, researchers agree that gratitude promotes social connection and is linked with higher rates of life satisfaction (Lambert et. al., 2009). The main focus here when it comes to gratitude is the recognition and appreciation of what you have. Higher levels of gratitude have been found to be linked to lower levels of materialism, therefore if one could encourage gratitude in young children, one may be able to discourage materialism as well (Chaplin & Rindfleisch, 2017). It is important to note here that materialism is *not* just the tendency to purchase material goods. It is necessary to take the intention behind the purchases into account as well (Kiang et. al., 2016). An example of a materialistic purchase would be if you spent money on an item for yourself to look good or to make yourself feel good. Your motivation for making the purchase is extrinsic in nature and your

focus is very much on the item itself. However, if you bought the same item as a gift for your best friend, your motivation would shift. You would no longer be focusing on yourself, but on the feelings and desires of someone else, rendering this a nonmaterialistic purchase. Similarly, it is possible to receive material gifts without becoming a materialistic person; it all has to do with what you value in the item (i.e. your perspective). Materialistic tendencies would likely lead you to value a gift by how it makes you appear to others while nonmaterialistic tendencies would likely lead you to appreciate the thought and intentions of the person who gave you the present. This is where gratitude comes in.

One method that has been effective in fostering gratitude is gratitude journaling, as demonstrated by Bailee in the latter half of this story. Children who participated in a gratitude journaling activity for only two weeks experienced a significant drop in materialism compared to other children who journaled about standard, everyday experiences (Chaplin & Rindfleisch, 2017). The idea behind gratitude journaling is to bring the things you are grateful for to the forefront of your mind by specifically listing them on a regular basis (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). This does not have to be an extensive description. It can be as simple as listing five things that you are grateful for before you go to bed each night. This is an activity that is easily incorporated into an everyday routine that can make a significant difference in one's materialistic values and consequently one's life satisfaction and happiness.

“Sam’s Story”

Materialism and Self-Esteem

Despite their best efforts to provide for their children, parents sometimes make mistakes or may not realize how their actions affect their children. Materialistic people are often raised in environments where some psychological needs are not adequately met (Kasser, 2002). These environments also tend to have negative effects on self-esteem, explaining why low self-esteem is often linked with materialism. The lower one’s self-esteem, the more likely it is that they will be materialistic (Chaplin & John, 2007). This is because materialistic people often feel insecure in themselves or their environment, and they attempt to solve that issue by acquiring possessions or money.

The idea of contingent self-esteem is related to this issue. Contingent self-esteem does not necessarily refer to high or low self-esteem, but to self-esteem that is fragile and unstable. Similar to a rollercoaster, it goes up and down often (Kasser, 2002). These changes in self-esteem may occur because their self-esteem is based on meeting certain standards that, when met, are quickly threatened, and need to be met again. For example, consider someone whose sense of self-worth is based on their physical appearance. If someone compliments their appearance one day, their self-esteem will likely get a temporary boost. However, that will eventually fade until they receive another compliment. The opposite is also true; if someone insults their appearance, their self-esteem will likely fall. The result is a constantly changing sense of self-worth and a constant search for self-esteem boosts that will inevitably be temporary. Highly materialistic people tend to have self-esteem that is based on other people’s opinions or receiving some type of object (e.g., money; Kasser, 2002). With self-worth based on

status or possessions, materialistic people are in a constant, never-ending battle to acquire more and more things to temporarily boost their self-esteem.

In Sam's case, her self-esteem is largely based on her soccer abilities and her sense of belonging on her soccer team. In other words, her identity as a soccer player on her school team is important to her. When she is moved to an unfamiliar position, she struggles to play as well as she has in the past, leading her to feel excluded by her coach and her teammates. These feelings threaten her identity and therefore threaten her self-esteem. To make herself feel better, she chooses to purchase new soccer cleats that match her school colors. This is because people tend to buy things that will make them appear a certain way to others (Richins, 2017). Sam purchases the cleats thinking that others will see them and think that she is a skilled soccer player. As the cleats match her school colors, they also signify her identity as a member of her school's soccer team. This increases her self-esteem briefly however it does not last, and her self-esteem quickly falls once again when she fails to play well.

Valuing Experiences Over Possessions

It would be overly simplistic to claim that all purchases are indicative of a materialistic value system. After all, money is necessary to satisfy basic human needs (e.g., food and shelter), but the type of purchase matters. Those who spend money on life experiences tend to be happier than those who spend it on possessions, suggesting that experiential purchases are not linked to materialism in the same way as material purchases (Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003). This is likely the case for several reasons. First, experiences tend to include other people. People tend to prefer social experiences over solitary experiences and possessions (Caprariello & Reis, 2013). That is, people spend on experiences with the intention of spending time with other people, not for status

or appearances. People also tend to look more fondly back on experiences than on material purchases (Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003). Lastly, experiences help to shape identities, as one's life is essentially a collection of events and experiences (Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003).

Parental Rejection

As previously mentioned in “Nicholas’ Story” and “Bailee’s Story”, family plays a huge role in a child’s socialization and development (Richins, 2017). Here, the focus falls on parental rejection. Parental rejection can take many forms such as expressing disappointment or not prioritizing spending time with the child and may not always be consciously shown by parents (Richins, 2017). As mentioned earlier, parents can and do make mistakes. Unfortunately, even if unintentional, children who experience parental rejection are more likely to be materialistic (Fu, Kou, & Yang, 2015). This may be partly because they are more likely to view the world as an unreliable and hostile place as a consequence of lacking support and positive attention (Rohner, 2004). These feelings may lead them to isolate themselves and avoid social interactions, further leaving their need for connection unsatisfied.

Parental rejection also influences the way children think about themselves. For example, children who feel rejected are more likely to have low self-esteem (Rohner, 2004). This is because children tend to think about themselves in the ways they believe significant figures in their lives view them (Rohner, 2004). For many children, parents are significant figures and therefore have the ability to influence the way children feel about themselves (Peterson et al., 1986). To compensate for their psychological needs not being met, children who feel rejected may turn to materialistic methods of fulfilling their needs such as finding wealth, status, and fame (Kasser, 2002).

Flow

Similar to how types of purchases matter, intentions behind behavior matter as well. Have you ever been doing something for pure enjoyment, such as doing a puzzle or painting a picture, and looked up to suddenly realize four hours have passed by without you noticing? You were likely in a state of flow. “Flow” is described as the ultimate form of self-expression that people tend to experience when they participate in an activity for the sake of doing the activity, rather than participating in the activity for a reward or praise (Kasser, 2002). Materialistic individuals tend to act on *extrinsic* motivations rather than *intrinsic* motivations (Kasser, 2002). They are likely not motivated by their own interests or desires (i.e., intrinsic) but by how an activity makes them look to others or the rewards they get from the activity (i.e., extrinsic). Therefore, it is difficult for them to reach a desired state of flow, even when doing something that they enjoy.

Why is flow important? Flow has been described as being an experience where people feel the most connected to themselves and free (Kasser, 2002). When in a state of flow, people feel in control and fully immersed in a satisfying experience. This means that experiencing flow frequently is an effective way of ensuring that one’s psychological needs for authenticity and autonomy are met (Kasser, 2002). This explains why adolescents who reported more frequent experiences of flow also reported higher life satisfaction and psychological well-being (Bassi et al., 2014).

In “Sam’s Story”, Sam is motivated to become the best soccer player on her team by her desire to gain favorable attention from her parents and peers. This motivation is strongest when she finds herself at the higher end of the materialism spectrum. However, as she reevaluates her

value systems, she begins to rediscover her own interests within the sport that fuel her efforts to improve and her materialistic tendencies consequently decrease. She experiences a shift from extrinsic motivation to intrinsic motivation, allowing her to have a flow experience while playing soccer. This sets Sam up at the end of the story to continue on to find higher life satisfaction and psychological well-being.

Student Learning Activities

“Nicholas’ Story”

What Makes A Good Friend?

Directions: Some friends are closer than others, but it can be difficult to recognize a “bad” friend. List 6 qualities you think you would find in a “good” friend and in a “bad” friend.

Good Friend

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

Bad Friend

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

Anticipation Guide

Directions: Indicate whether you agree or disagree with each statement.

	Agree	Disagree
1. It is good to be friends with someone if they have cool things.		
2. It is easiest to make new friends by being yourself.		
3. It is okay to keep friends who don't like you as long as they are nice to you.		
4. It is good to use possessions like toys and video games to make friends.		

Write 1-2 sentences explaining why you agreed or disagreed with each statement listed above.

1.

2.

3.

4.

Taking Perspective

Directions: Choose and circle a character from the list below and respond to the following prompts from the point of view of your chosen character.

Characters:

Nicholas

Nicholas' Dad

Chris

Joey

Jamie

Lucas

Example:

1. I am thinking about Nicholas' situation from the point of view of Christine.
2. I think... *it's unfair that Nicholas' friends are turning on him. Sure, he doesn't have a new game console, but who cares?*
3. A question I have is... *why does Nicholas want to be friends with Joey so badly?*

Prompts:

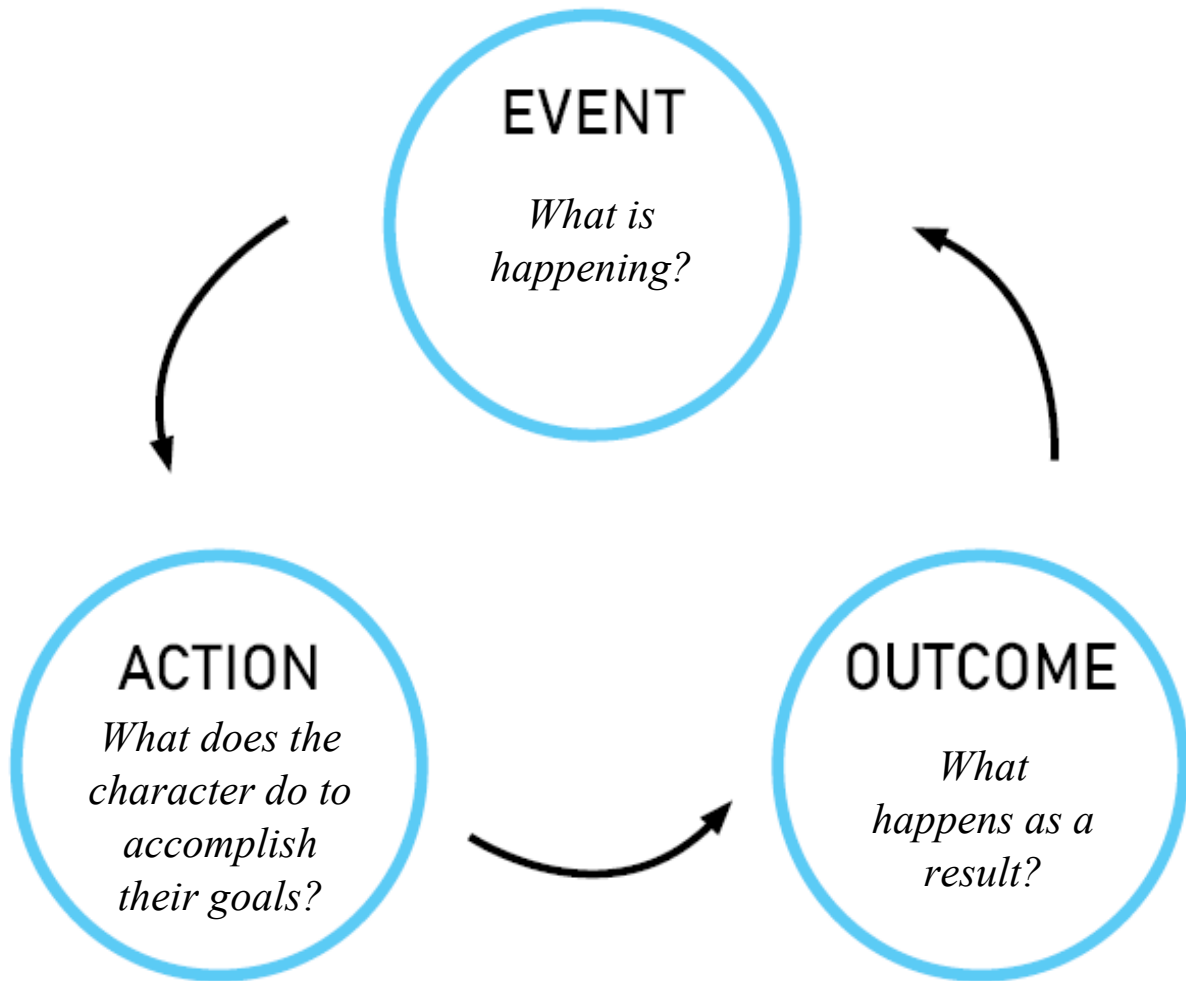
1. I am thinking about Nicholas' situation from the point of view of _____.
2. I think...
3. A question I have is...?

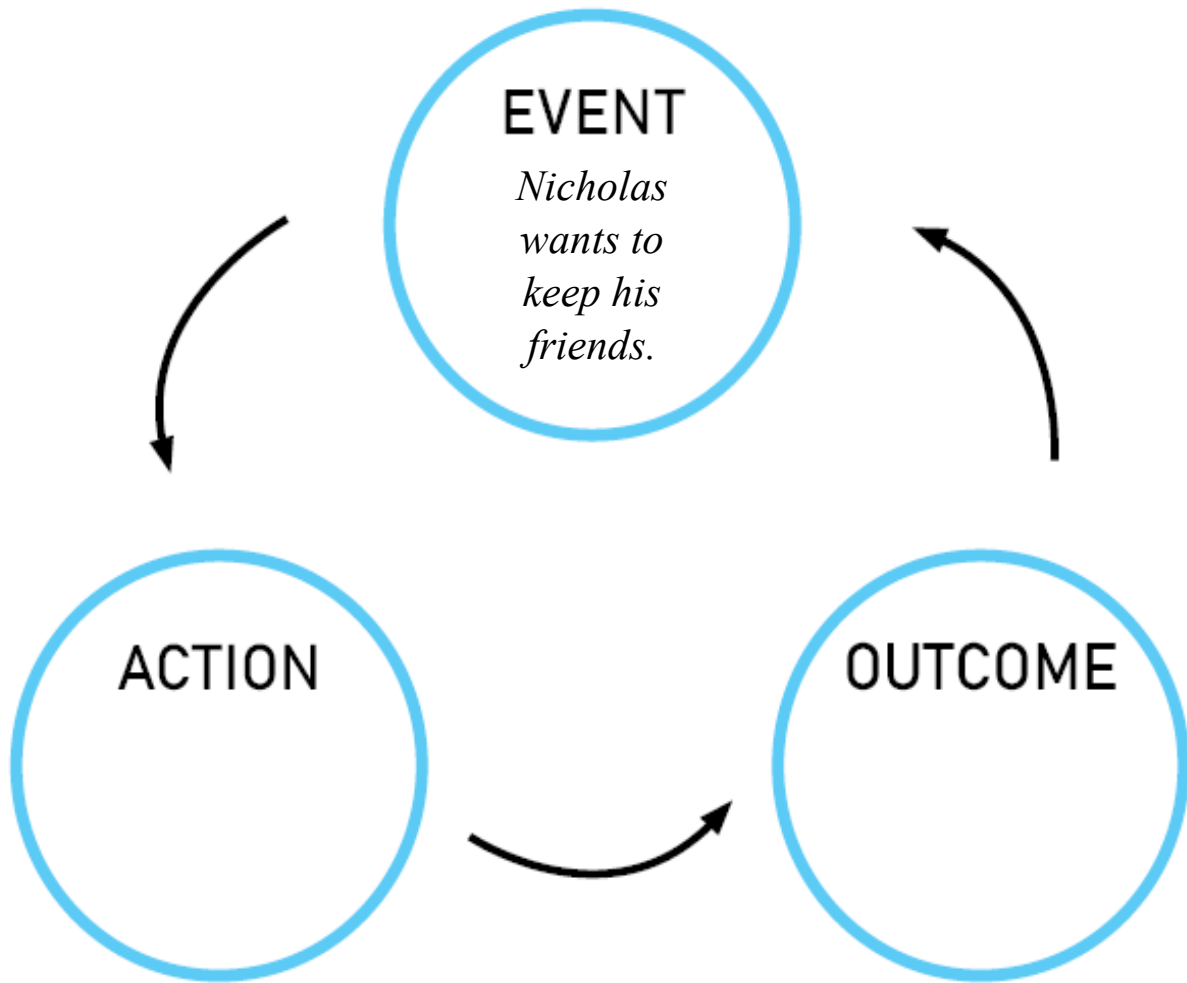
Writing Response

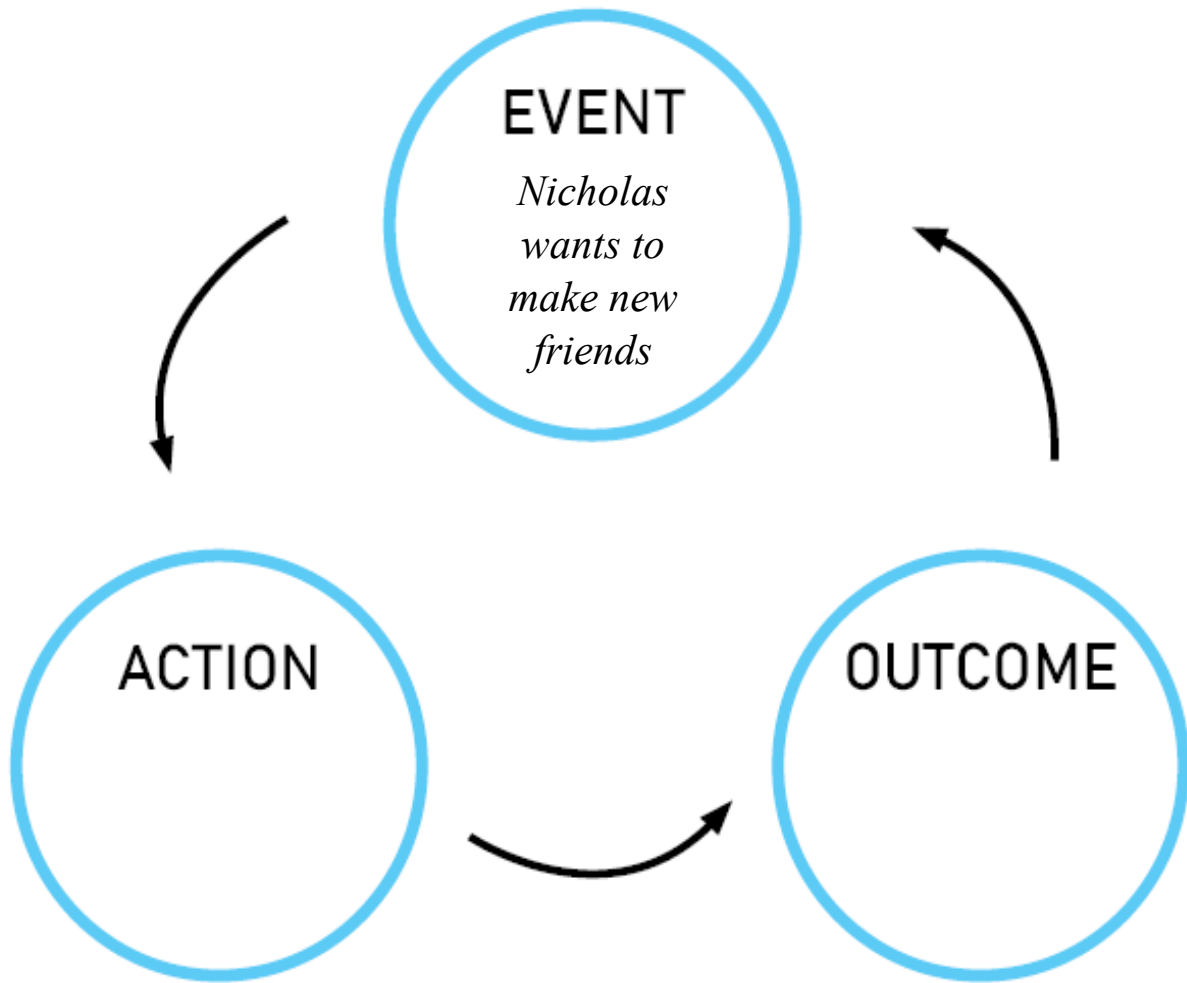
Nicholas has just found out that his “friends” were only interested in being his friend because they wanted to play his new video games. Imagine you were in a similar situation. How would you react when you found out? What would you do after finding out? Explain your answer in 4-5 sentences.

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Applying the Developmental Model of Materialism







Feelings Chart

Directions: List at least 3 emotions you think each character felt during each event.

<i>Events</i>	<i>Characters</i>			
	Nicholas	Joey	Chris	Nicholas' Dad
Nicholas' dad tells his kids he lost his job.				
Nicholas' friends are upset when he tells them he can't get the new console.				
Nicholas finds out his friends didn't invite him to hang out over the weekend.				
Nicholas and Joey get into a fight in the classroom.				
Nicholas and Chris finish their conversation outside the principal's office.				
Nicholas, Chris, Marissa, and Chloe play games together.				

Reaction Guide

Directions: Indicate whether you agree or disagree with each statement.

	Agree	Disagree
1. It is good to be friends with someone if they have cool things.		
2. It is easiest to make new friends by being yourself.		
3. It is okay to keep friends who don't like you as long as they are nice to you.		
4. It is good to use possessions like toys and video games to make friends.		

If your responses are different from the Anticipation Guide, write 1-2 sentences explaining why they changed. If they have not changed, write 1-2 sentences explaining what happened in the story that supported your initial responses.

1.

2.

3.

4.

Placing Characters on the Materialism Spectrum

Directions: Everyone falls in a different spot on the materialism spectrum and will move across the spectrum throughout their lives. For this activity, think about where you think each listed character would fall on the materialism spectrum at the given moment in the story. Make sure you go back and reread the appropriate sections. Then, using what you've learned about materialism, place each character's shape where you think they belong on the spectrum.

Event: Nicholas' friends are upset when he tells them he can't get the new video game console.

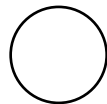
Low
Materialism

High
Materialism

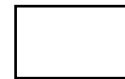
Characters



Nicholas



Joey



Chris



Nicholas' Dad

Placing Characters on the Materialism Spectrum

Directions: Everyone falls in a different spot on the materialism spectrum and will move across the spectrum throughout their lives. For this activity, think about where you think each listed character would fall on the materialism spectrum at the given moment in the story. Make sure you go back and reread the appropriate sections. Then, using what you've learned about materialism, place each character's shape where you think they belong on the spectrum.

Event: Nicholas and his dad have a conversation about friendship after Nicholas gets pushed by Joey.

Low
Materialism

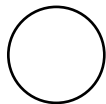
High
Materialism



Characters



Nicholas



Joey



Chris



Nicholas' Dad

Student Learning Activities

“Bailee’s Story”

Happiness Collage

Directions: Using magazines or the Internet, find at least 10 pictures that represent things that make you happy. Cut out each picture and glue them to a piece of construction paper with your name to make your own Happiness Collage before continuing on.

Now that you have at least 10 pictures on your collage, it is time to narrow it down. Take some time to think about what makes you the happiest out of the images that you have chosen and list them below.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Reflection

How many objects do you have on your list compared to non-objects? Where do you think you would fall on the materialism spectrum based on the list above?

Opinionnaire

Directions: Put the items listed below in order of how happy they make you from 1 to 10. Each number should be used once.

Family/Pets _____

Friends _____

Toys/Video Games _____

Clothes/Accessories _____

Money _____

Presents _____

Phones/Computers _____

Food _____

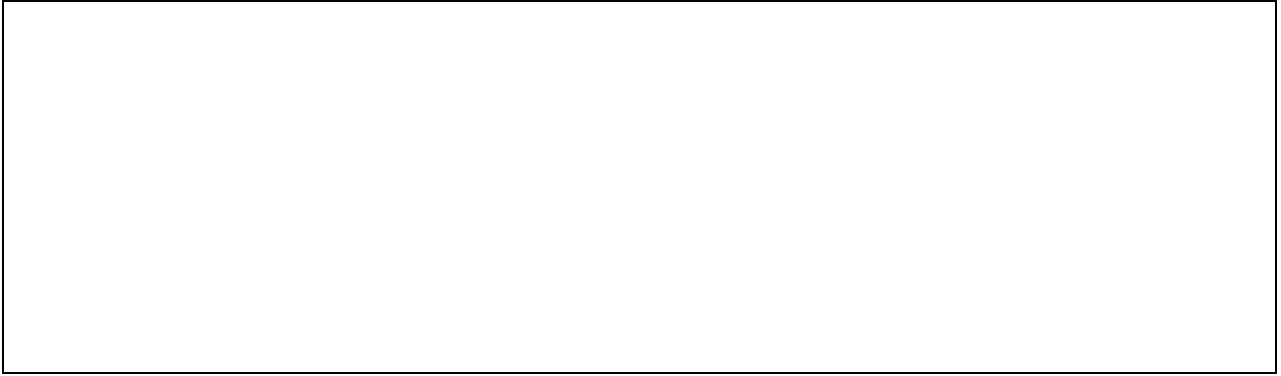
Shopping _____

Vacations _____

Literature Map

Directions: As you read “Bailee’s Story”, take notes of any key characteristics you notice in each character and the major events that occur.

Bailee	Bailee’s Mom
Bailee’s Dad	Marissa and Nicole
Mrs. Wilkins	Questions/Predictions
Major Events	



Taking Perspective

Character: <i>Bailee</i>	Character: <i>Bailee's Mom</i>
Problem: What is Bailee's problem?	Problem: What is Bailee's Mom's problem?
Goal: What is Bailee's goal? What does Bailee want?	Goal: What is Bailee's Mom's goal? What does Bailee's Mom want?
Attempt: What does Bailee do to solve her problem or get her goal?	Goal: What does Bailee's Mom do to solve her problem or get her goal?
Outcome: What happens as a result of the attempt?	Outcome: What happens as a result of the attempt?

Reaction: How does Bailee feel about the outcome?	Reaction: How does Bailee’s Mom feel about the outcome?
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Gratitude Journaling

[illegible]

[illegible]

Quick Writes

Directions: Take 5-7 minutes to respond to the following prompts after completing the story.

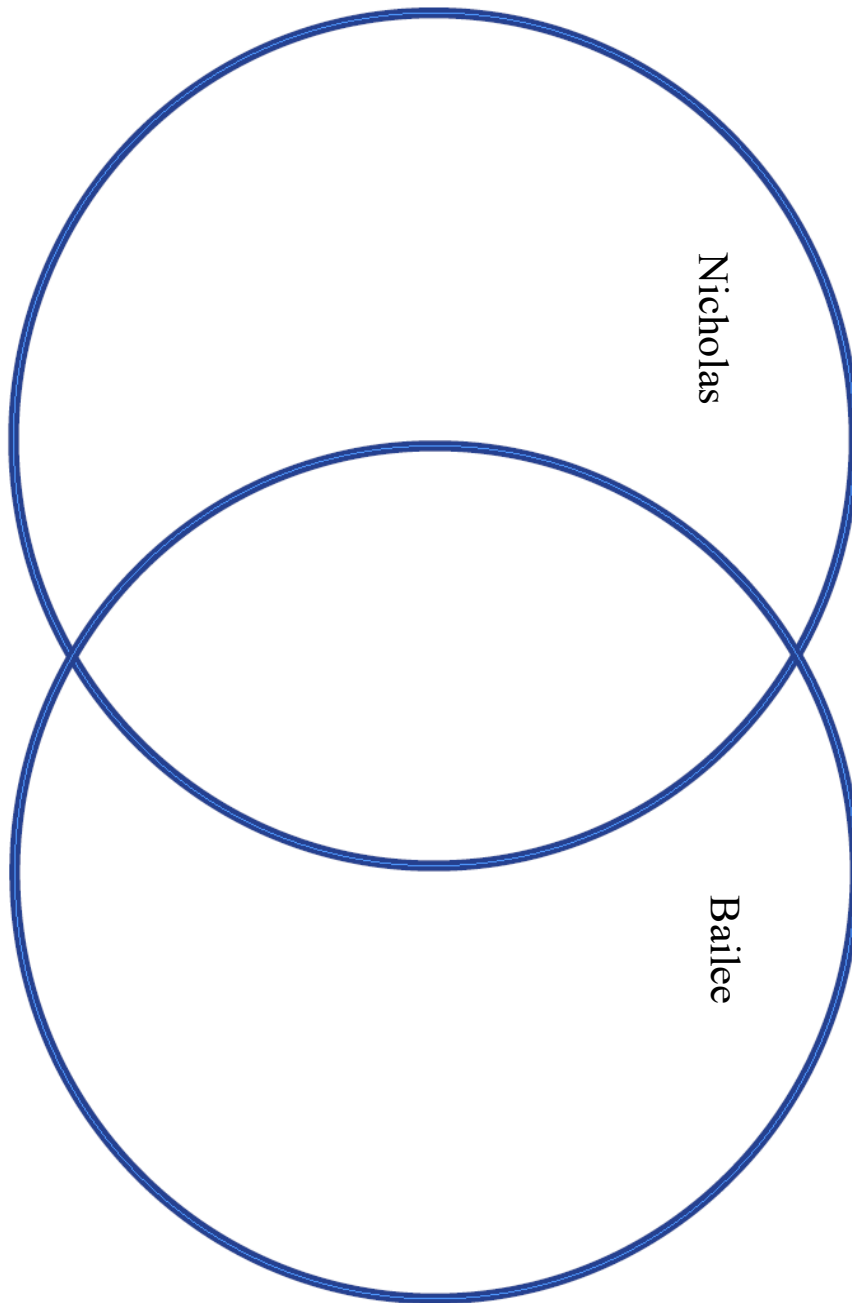
Prompt 1: Multiple characters change over the course of this story. Take a few minutes to write about who you think changes the most. In what ways do they change? What motivates these changes?

Prompt 2: Do you think the presents from her mom made Bailee happy? If yes, explain why you think so. If no, why do you think her mom continued to buy her presents?

Prompt 3: Why do you think Bailee’s Dad seems content with his life even though he has a small house and few expensive things?

Character Comparison

Directions: Think back to “Nicholas’ Story”. Bailee and Nicholas have a lot in common, but also have many differences. Think about their characteristics and their situations. What is similar? What is different? Place your thoughts in the Venn diagram below.



Student Learning Activities

“Sam’s Story”

Raising and Lowering Self-Esteem

Directions: Take a few minutes to review the introduction section of the visual guide to self-esteem. Everyone has different things that make them feel better and worse about themselves. What kinds of things might raise someone's self-esteem? What kinds of things might lower someone's self-esteem?

Raise Self-Esteem

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Lower Self-Esteem

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Anticipation Guide

Directions: Indicate whether you agree or disagree with each statement.

	Agree	Disagree
1. Some things are only worth doing if you are good at them.		
2. Having new and expensive equipment is important if you want to be the best at a sport.		
3. It is more worthwhile to spend money on new possessions than on experiences.		
4. It is good to get better at something so that other people will be impressed.		

Write 1-2 sentences explaining why you agreed or disagreed with each statement listed above.

1.

2.

3.

4.

Self-Esteem Evaluation

Directions: Determine if the following events had a positive effect or a negative effect on Sam's self-esteem.

<i>Events</i>	+	-
Sam finds out that she has a new position on her team.		
Sam's parents react to Sam announcing her new position at dinner.		
Sam is benched at practice.		
Sam buys new high-quality soccer cleats.		

<i>Events</i>	+	-
Sam's teammates praise her new cleats.		
Sam's parents do not come to the game against Kent.		
Sam stays in her position and her team does well in the beginning of the game.		
Sam breaks position and her team loses the game.		

<i>Events</i>	+	-
Sam has a conversation with her Dad about why she plays soccer.		
Sam has a conversation with her Coach about losing the game.		

Writing Response 1

After performing poorly at practice, Sam decides to go to the mall with her friends to cheer herself up. While they are there, Sam chooses to spend her money on new cleats instead of going to a movie with her friends because they make her feel like a better soccer player and increase her self-esteem.

Do you think she will be a better player because of the cleats? Do you think her self-esteem will be higher permanently because of the cleats? Explain why or why not for each question.

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Writing Response 2

At the end of the story, it is revealed that playing soccer was a flow activity for Sam until she became focused on impressing others. Try to remember a time that you experienced flow while participating in an activity. What activity were you doing? How did you feel? What about that experience makes you think you were experiencing flow?

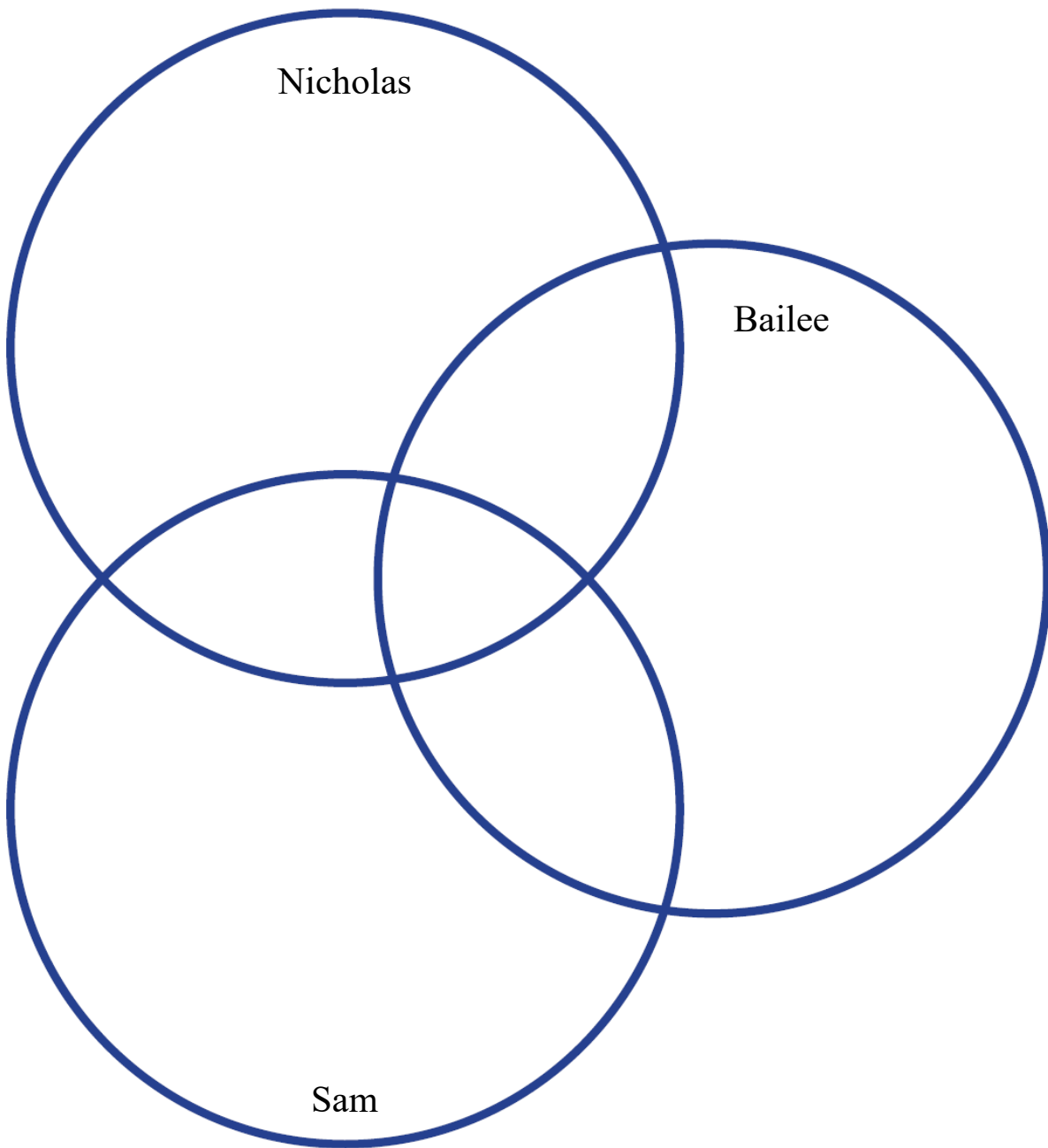
If you cannot think of a time that you experienced flow, write about why that might be. What activities do you like doing? Why do you like doing them? Is it because you enjoy them or because it makes you look good to others? What do you think you could do differently to experience flow?

[illegible]

[illegible]

Character Comparisons

Directions: Think back to “Nicholas’ Story” and “Bailee’s Story”. Bailee, Nicholas, and Sam have a lot in common, but they also have many differences. Think about their characteristics and their situations. What is similar? What is different? Place your thoughts in the Venn diagram below.



Self-Esteem Rollercoaster

Directions: Each event listed below has an effect on Sam's self-esteem. You determined the type of effect (positive or negative) when you completed Sam's Self-Esteem Evaluation. Your challenge is to draw a rollercoaster that illustrates how Sam's self-esteem changes over the course of the story. An increase in self-esteem should be represented with an incline. A decrease in self-esteem should be represented with a decline.

Once your drawing is complete, label each section of the rollercoaster with the letter of the corresponding event.

Hint: Think about how big/small each drop and boost to Sam's self-esteem was. Each event had a differently sized impact.

- A. Sam finds out that she has a new position on her team.
- B. Sam's parents react to Sam announcing her new position at dinner.
- C. Sam is benched at practice.
- D. Sam buys new high-quality soccer cleats.
- E. Sam's teammates praise her new cleats.
- F. Sam's parents do not come to the game against Kent.
- G. Sam stays in her position and her team does well in the beginning of the game.
- H. Sam breaks position and her team loses the game.
- I. Sam has a conversation with her Dad about feeling like a failure.
- J. Sam has a conversation with her Coach about losing the game.

Rollercoaster Follow-Up Questions

1. Which events in the story made Sam's self-esteem go up?
2. Which event(s) had small effects? Which event(s) had large effects?
3. What do the small event(s) have in common?
4. What is different about the big event(s)?
5. At what point in the story do you think Sam was highest on the materialism spectrum? At what point was she the lowest?

Reaction Guide

Directions: Indicate whether you agree or disagree with each statement.

	Agree	Disagree
1. Some things are only worth doing if you are good at them.		
2. Having new and expensive equipment is important if you want to be the best at a sport.		
3. It is more worthwhile to spend money on new possessions than on experiences.		
4. It is good to get better at something so that other people will be impressed.		

If your responses are different from the Anticipation Guide, write 1-2 sentences explaining why they changed. If they have not changed, write 1-2 sentences explaining what happened in the story that supported your initial responses.

1.

2.

3.

4.

Instructor Version of Student Learning Activities

“Nicholas’ Story”

Pre-Reading Activities

What Makes a Good Friend? - Contrast Chart (Yopp & Yopp, 2013)

*Have students complete each list individually or in small groups. This should be done **before** viewing this story's "Building Background " section. Discuss as a full group.*

Directions: Some friends are closer than others, but it can be difficult to recognize a "bad" friend. List 6 qualities you think you would find in a "good" friend and in a "bad" friend.

Good Friend

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

Bad Friend

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

Anticipation Guide (Yopp & Yopp, 2013)

Have students complete this sheet individually before reading the story. Discuss in small groups or as a full group.

Directions: Indicate whether you agree or disagree with each statement.

	Agree	Disagree
1. It is good to be friends with someone if they have cool things.		
2. It is easiest to make new friends by being yourself.		
3. It is okay to keep friends who don't like you as long as they are nice to you.		
4. It is good to use possessions like toys and video games to make friends.		

Write 1-2 sentences explaining why you agreed or disagreed with each statement listed above.

1.

2.

3.

4.

During Reading Activities

Taking Perspective - Circle of Viewpoints (Yopp & Yopp, 2013)

Have students stop reading at the red line and complete this sheet individually. Discuss in small groups or as a full group before reading on.

Directions: Choose and circle a character from the list below and respond to the following prompts from the point of view of your chosen character.

Characters:

Nicholas

Nicholas' Dad

Chris

Joey

Jamie

Lucas

Example:

1. I am thinking about Nicholas' situation from the point of view of Christine.
2. I think... *it's unfair that Nicholas' friends are turning on him. Sure, he doesn't have a new game console, but who cares?*
3. A question I have is... *why does Nicholas want to be friends with Joey so badly?*

Prompts:

1. I am thinking about Nicholas' situation from the point of view of _____.
2. I think...
3. A question I have is...?

Writing Response

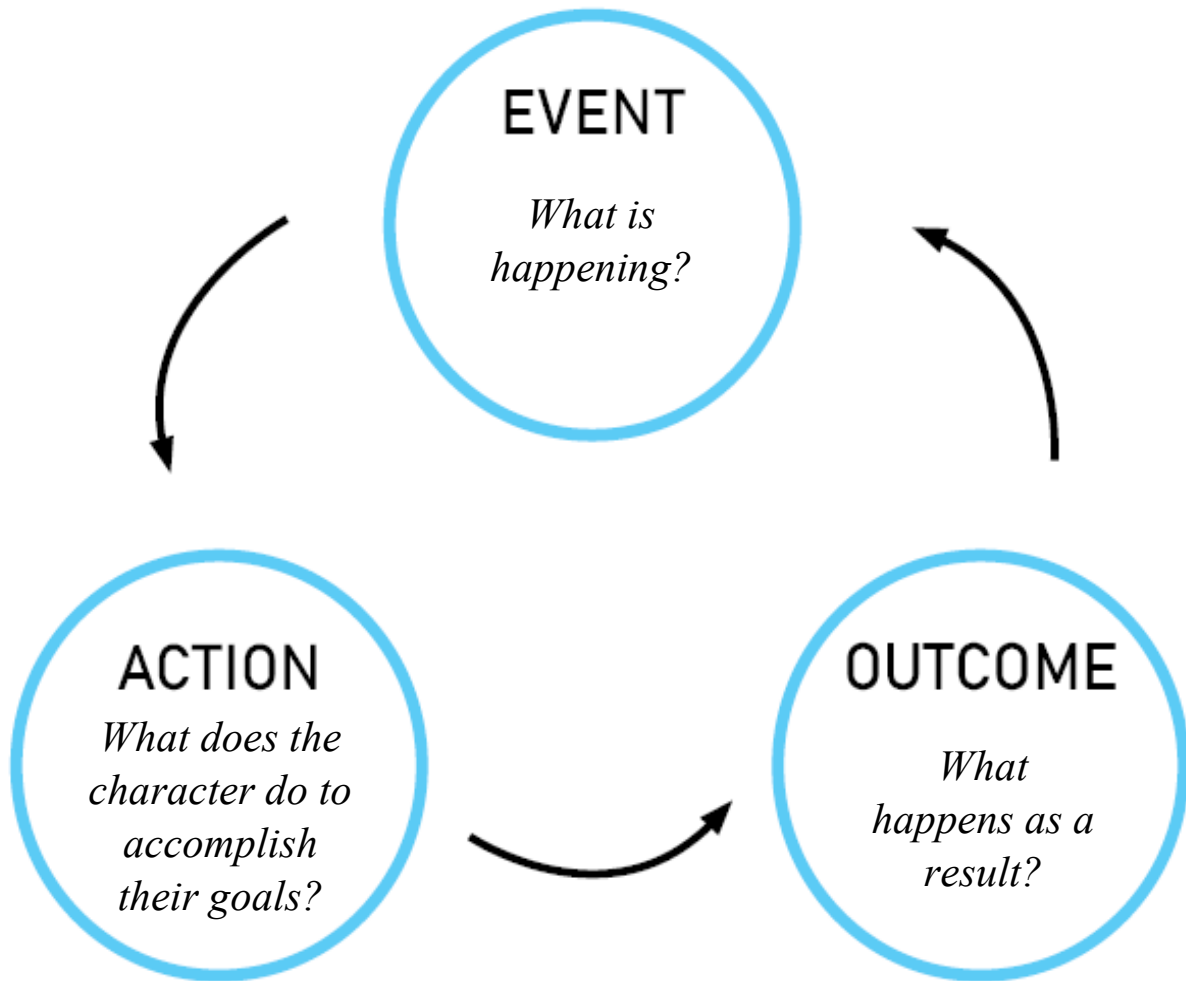
Have students stop reading at the red line and respond individually. Discuss in small groups or as a full group before reading on.

Nicholas has just found out that his “friends” were only interested in being his friend because they wanted to play his new video games. Imagine you were in a similar situation. How would you react when you found out? What would you do after finding out? Explain your answer in 4-5 sentences.

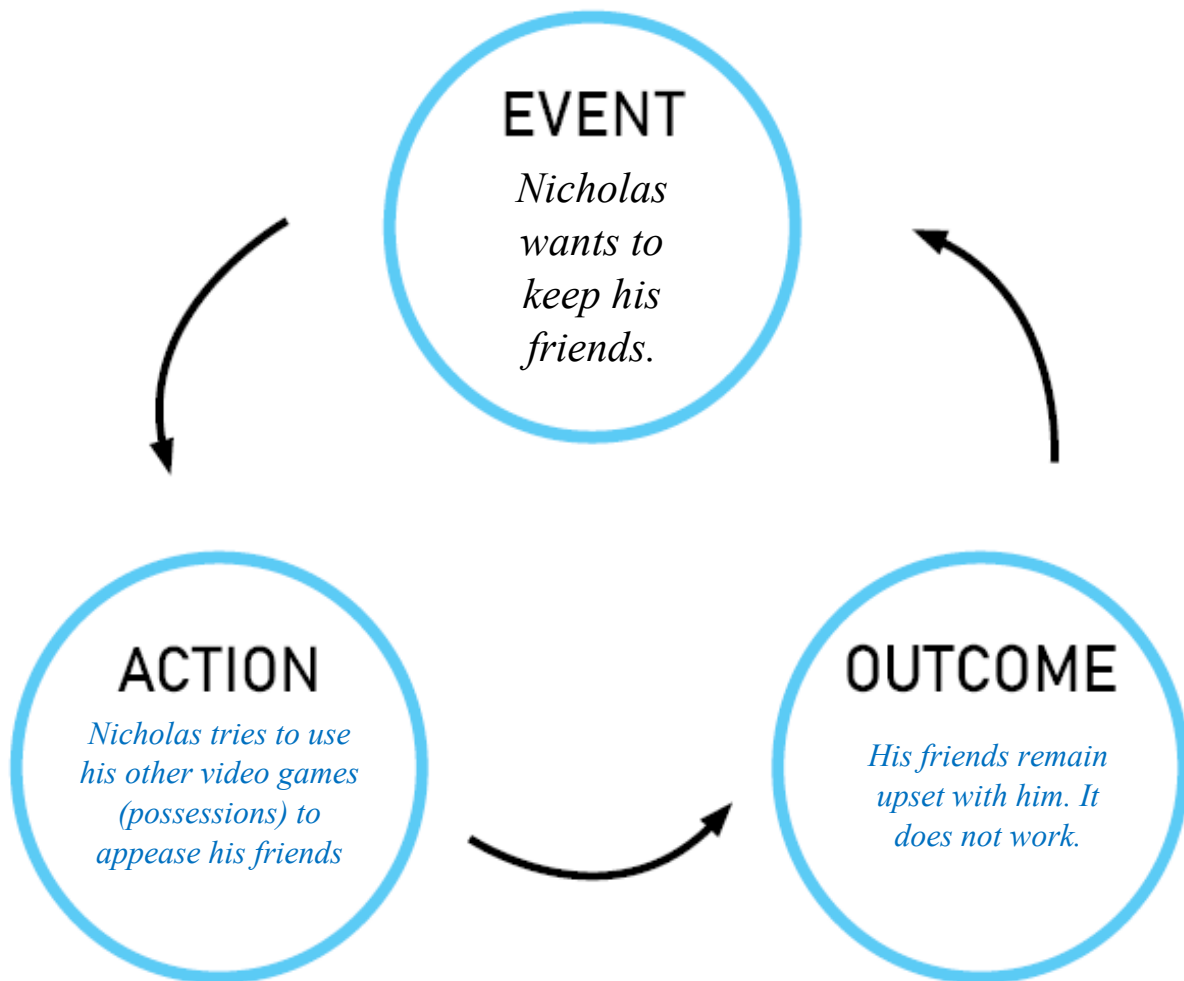
[illegible]

Applying the Developmental Model of Materialism (Richins, 2017)

Below is a simple version of the Developmental Model of Materialism. Students will fill out the blank templates after reading certain sections of the story. Each response should answer the question in each circle. After completing each sheet individually or in pairs, discuss their answers as a full group. Discuss how the outcome may affect how Nicholas acts in the future.



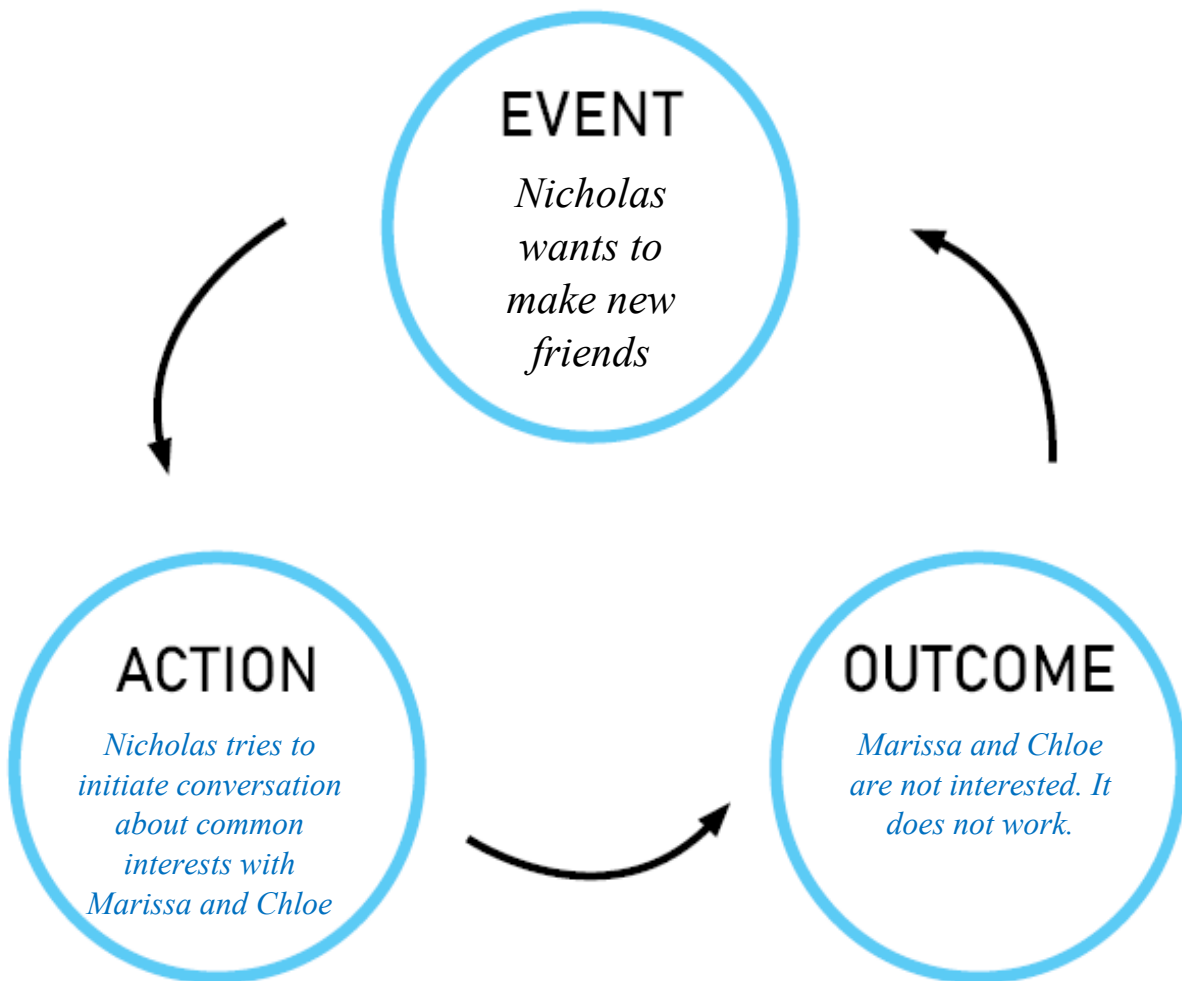
Have students stop reading at the red line and complete the graphic. The event is in reference to the final scene before the red line in the cafeteria. Below are examples of accurate answers.



How will this impact Nicholas' future behaviors?

Nicholas tried to use a new resource (older possessions) to appear likeable to others. It did not work, reaffirming in his mind that he needs new possessions in order for others to like him. This will likely lead him to continue seeking out more new possessions (materialism) rather than turning to other resources as new resources did not work out for him this time.

Have students stop reading at the green line and complete the graphic. The event is in reference the conversation Nicholas has with two girls in his class, Marissa and Nicole. Below are examples of accurate answers.



How will this impact Nicholas' future behaviors?

Nicholas once again tried a new resource to make friends – his interests and personality. However, it was a failed attempt that Nicholas attributes to his lack of new video games and his recent loss of friends. This again reaffirms in Nicholas' mind that people will only be interested in him for his possessions, encouraging his materialistic mindset.

Post-Reading Activities

Feelings Chart (Yopp & Yopp, 2013)

After completing the story, have students fill out the chart individually. Discuss in small groups.

Directions: List at least 3 emotions you think each character felt during each event.

<i>Events</i>	<i>Characters</i>			
	Nicholas	Joey	Chris	Nicholas' Dad
Nicholas' dad tells his kids he lost his job.				
Nicholas' friends are upset when he tells them he can't get the new console.				
Nicholas finds out his friends didn't invite him to hang out over the weekend.				
Nicholas and Joey get into a fight in the classroom.				
Nicholas and Chris finish their conversation outside the principal's office.				

Nicholas, Chris, Marissa, and Chloe play games together.				
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Reaction Guide (Yopp & Yopp, 2013)

After completing the story, have students complete the chart and compare to the Anticipation Guide they completed prior to reading the story. Discuss any changes that occurred as a full group.

Directions: Indicate whether you agree or disagree with each statement.

	Agree	Disagree
1. It is good to be friends with someone if they have cool things.		
2. It is easiest to make new friends by being yourself.		
3. It is okay to keep friends who don't like you as long as they are nice to you.		
4. It is good to use possessions like toys and video games to make friends.		

If your responses are different from the Anticipation Guide, write 1-2 sentences explaining why they changed. If they have not changed, write 1-2 sentences explaining what happened in the story that supported your initial responses.

1.

2.

3.

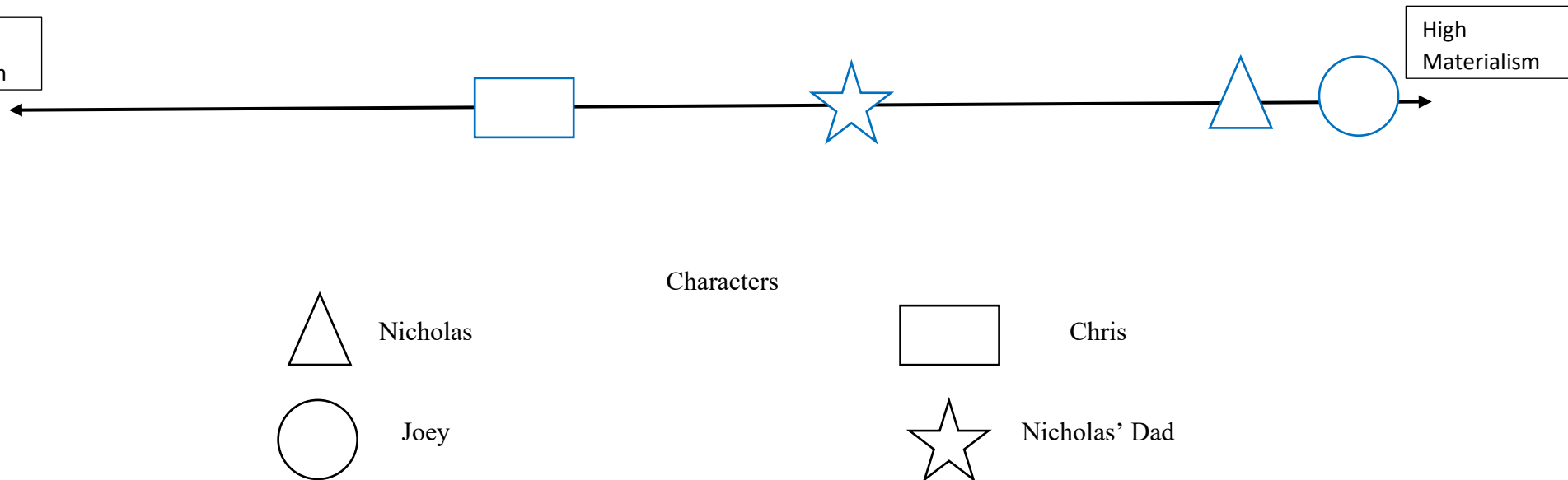
4.

Placing Characters on the Materialism Spectrum

Directions: Everyone falls in a different spot on the materialism spectrum and will move across the spectrum throughout their lives. For this activity, think about where you think each listed character would fall on the materialism spectrum at the given moment in the story. Make sure you go back and reread the appropriate sections. Then, using what you've learned about materialism, place each character's shape where you think they belong on the spectrum.

Event: Nicholas' friends are upset when he tells them he can't get the new video game console.

After completing the story, have students complete this sheet. Discuss placements as a full group. Below are examples of possible answers.

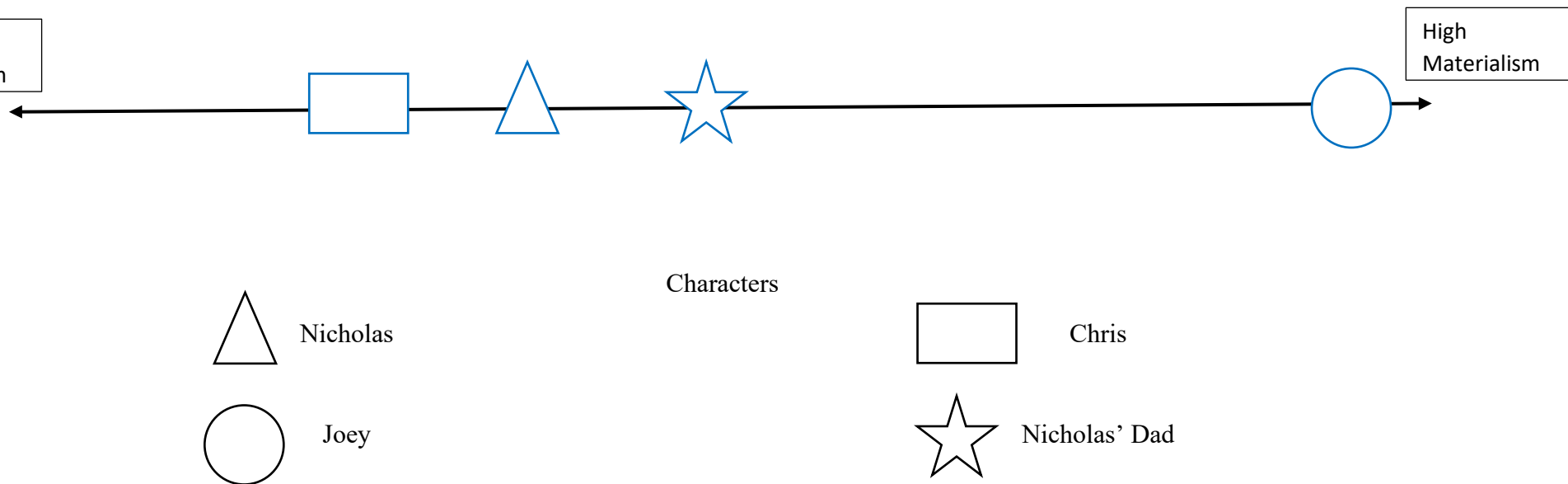


Placing Characters on the Materialism Spectrum

Directions: Everyone falls in a different spot on the materialism spectrum and will move across the spectrum throughout their lives. For this activity, think about where you think each listed character would fall on the materialism spectrum at the given moment in the story. Make sure you go back and reread the appropriate sections. Then, using what you've learned about materialism, place each character's shape where you think they belong on the spectrum.

Event: Nicholas and his dad have a conversation about friendship after Nicholas gets pushed by Joey.

After completing the story, have students complete this sheet. Discuss placements as a full group. Below are examples of possible answers.



Instructor Version of Student Learning Activities

“Bailee’s Story”

Pre-Reading Activities

Happiness Collage

*Have students complete this activity in class or at home before reading the story. Have students present their collages in small groups **before** narrowing down to the list below. After narrowing it down, have students discuss why they chose these 5 items in small groups.*

Directions: Using magazines or the Internet, find at least 10 pictures that represent things that make you happy. Cut out each picture and glue them to a piece of construction paper with your name to make your own Happiness Collage before continuing on.

Now that you have at least 10 pictures on your collage, it is time to narrow it down. Take some time to think about what makes you the happiest out of the images that you have chosen and list them below.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Reflection

How many objects do you have on your list compared to non-objects? Where do you think you would fall on the materialism spectrum based on the list above?

Opinionnaire (Yopp & Yopp, 2013)

Have students complete this sheet individually before reading the story and discuss in small groups.

Directions: Put the items listed below in order of how happy they make you from 1 to 10. Each number should be used once.

Family/Pets	_____
Friends	_____
Toys/Video Games	_____
Clothes/Accessories	_____
Money	_____
Presents	_____
Phones/Computers	_____
Food	_____
Shopping	_____
Vacations	_____

During Reading Activities

Literature Map (Yopp & Yopp, 2013)

Have students update the chart below as they read the story. This could happen at the red line and the end of the story or students can take notes as they read. Some example answers have been provided below, but answers will vary.

Directions: As you read “Bailee’s Story”, take notes of any key characteristics you notice in each character and the major events that occur.

Bailee <i>Unhappy</i> <i>Confused</i> <i>Lonely</i>	Bailee’s Mom <i>Busy</i> <i>Workaholic</i> <i>Uncertain</i> <i>Overwhelmed</i>
Bailee’s Dad	Marissa and Nicole
Mrs. Wilkins	Questions/Predictions

Major Events

Taking Perspective - Character Perspective Chart (Yopp & Yopp, 2013)

Have students stop reading at the red line and complete this sheet in pairs or small groups.

Character: <i>Bailee</i>	Character: <i>Bailee's Mom</i>
Problem: What is Bailee's problem? <i>She is unhappy and tries and fails to get her Mom's undivided attention.</i>	Problem: What is Bailee's Mom's problem? <i>She is struggling to balance work and parenting. She feels guilty for not being able to make time for her daughter.</i>
Goal: What is Bailee's goal? What does Bailee want? <i>She wants to be happy again and to spend more quality time with her Mom.</i>	Goal: What is Bailee's Mom's goal? What does Bailee's Mom want? <i>She wants to be able to spend more time with Bailee, but she ultimately just wants to make her daughter happy.</i>
Attempt: What does Bailee do to solve her problem or get her goal? <i>She tries to spend more time with her Mom. She tries to be positive and understanding towards her Mom.</i>	Goal: What does Bailee's Mom do to solve her problem or get her goal? <i>Work gets in the way of spending more time with Bailee, so Bailee's Mom makes up for it by frequently buying Bailee new things.</i>
Outcome: What happens as a result of the attempt? <i>It doesn't work. Her Mom continues to be too busy with work and Bailee struggles to remain positive and understanding because she feels as though she is being ignored.</i>	Outcome: What happens as a result of the attempt? <i>While the presents make Bailee happy initially, they cannot replace the quality time she is missing with her Mom and they ultimately do not make her happy.</i>

<p>Reaction: How does Bailee feel about the outcome?</p> <p><i>Bailee feels abandoned emotionally by her Mom most of the time, and physically abandoned when her Mom is constantly at work.</i></p>	<p>Reaction: How does Bailee's Mom feel about the outcome?</p> <p><i>Disappointed, but hopeful that it will eventually work so she continues to buy her presents.</i></p>
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Post-Reading Activities

Gratitude Journaling

After completing the story, have students begin this activity. It is meant to take place over the course of one week and can be an in-class writing activity or a take-home activity. Provide additional paper as needed. Refer to the Companion Guide section on gratitude for more information.

Directions: Bailee learns to combat her materialistic beliefs by gratitude journaling. Your task for the next week is to start your own gratitude journal. This can be done in a notebook or in the space provided below. Each day you will spend 10 minutes writing about the things that you are grateful for. Make sure you take a few minutes before you write to think deeply about the things in your life that are most important to you that you are grateful for.

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

[illegible]

Quick Writes (Yopp & Yopp, 2013)

After completing the story, give students 5-7 minutes to respond to each prompt. Discuss answers in small groups or in a full group.

Directions: Take 5-7 minutes to respond to each prompt after completing the story.

Prompt 1: Multiple characters change over the course of this story. Take a few minutes to write about who you think changes the most. In what ways do they change? What motivates these changes?

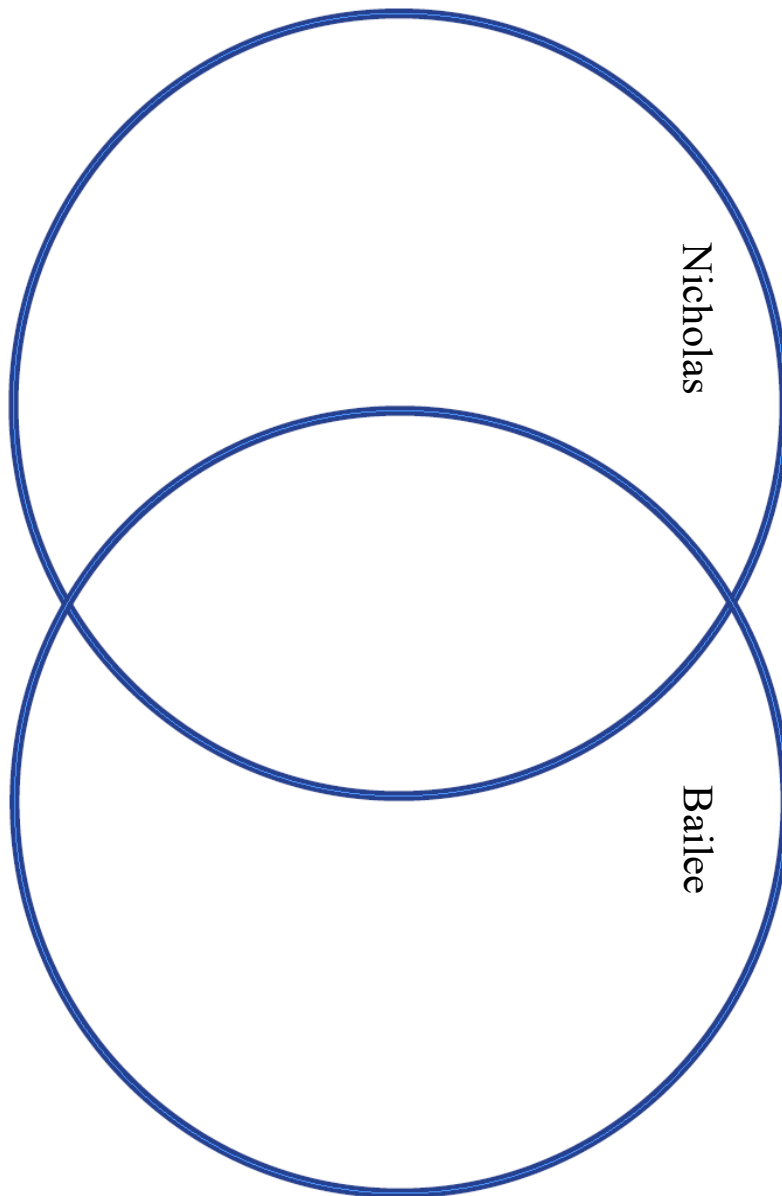
Prompt 2: Do you think the presents from her mom made Bailee happy? If yes, explain why you think so. If no, why do you think her mom continued to buy her presents?

Prompt 3: Why do you think Bailee's Dad seems content with his life even though he has a small house and few expensive things?

Character Comparison

After completing the story, have students fill out the Venn diagram in small groups. Discuss as a full group. It may be helpful to briefly discuss “Nicholas’ Story” as a group before beginning.

Directions: Think back to “Nicholas’ Story”. Bailee and Nicholas have a lot in common, but also have many differences. Think about their characteristics and their situations. What is similar? What is different? Place your thoughts in the Venn diagram below.



Instructor Version of Student Learning Activities

“Sam’s Story”

Pre-Reading Activities

Raising and Lowering Self-Esteem - Contrast Chart (Yopp & Yopp, 2013)

*Have students complete this sheet individually **before** viewing the “Building Background” section for “Sam’s Story”. Discuss as a full group.*

Directions: Take a few minutes to review the introduction section of the visual guide to self-esteem. Everyone has different things that make them feel better and worse about themselves. What kinds of things might raise someone’s self-esteem? What kinds of things might lower someone’s self-esteem?

Raise Self-Esteem

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Lower Self-Esteem

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Anticipation Guide (Yopp & Yopp, 2013)

Have students complete this sheet individually before reading the story. Discuss in small groups or as a full group.

Directions: Indicate whether you agree or disagree with each statement.

	Agree	Disagree
1. Some things are only worth doing if you are good at them.		
2. Having new and expensive equipment is important if you want to be the best at a sport.		
3. It is more worthwhile to spend money on new possessions than on experiences.		
4. It is good to get better at something so that other people will be impressed.		

Write 1-2 sentences explaining why you agreed or disagreed with each statement listed above.

1.

2.

3.

4.

During Reading Activities

Self-Esteem Evaluation

Have students stop reading at the indicated section and complete the corresponding chart. Check answers as a group. The correct answers have been provided below.

Directions: Determine if the following events had a positive effect or a negative effect on Sam's self-esteem.

To be completed when students reach the red line

<i>Events</i>	+	-
Sam finds out that she has a new position on her team.		X
Sam's parents react to Sam announcing her new position at dinner.		X
Sam is benched at practice.		X
Sam buys new high-quality soccer cleats.	X	

To be completed when students reach the green line

<i>Events</i>	+	-
Sam's teammates praise her new cleats.	X	
Sam's parents do not come to the game against Kent.		X
Sam stays in her position and her team does well in the beginning of the game.	X	
Sam breaks position and her team loses the game.		X

To be completed after completing the story

<i>Events</i>	+	-

Sam has a conversation with her Dad about why she plays soccer.	X	
Sam has a conversation with her Coach about losing the game.	X	

Writing Response

Have students stop reading at the red line and respond individually. Discuss in small groups or as a full group before reading on.

After performing poorly at practice, Sam decides to go to the mall with her friends to cheer herself up. While they are there, Sam chooses to spend her money on new cleats instead of going to a movie with her friends because they make her feel like a better soccer player and increase her self-esteem.

Do you think she will be a better player because of the cleats? Do you think her self-esteem will be higher permanently because of the cleats? Explain why or why not for each question.

[illegible]

[illegible]

Post-Reading Activities

Writing Response 2

After completing the story, give students 8-10 minutes to respond to the prompt individually. Discuss in small groups or as a full group. It may be helpful to review the idea of flow in this story's "Building Background" section before students respond.

At the end of the story, it is revealed that playing soccer was a flow activity for Sam until she became focused on impressing others. Try to remember a time that you experienced flow while participating in an activity. What activity were you doing? How did you feel? What about that experience makes you think you were experiencing flow?

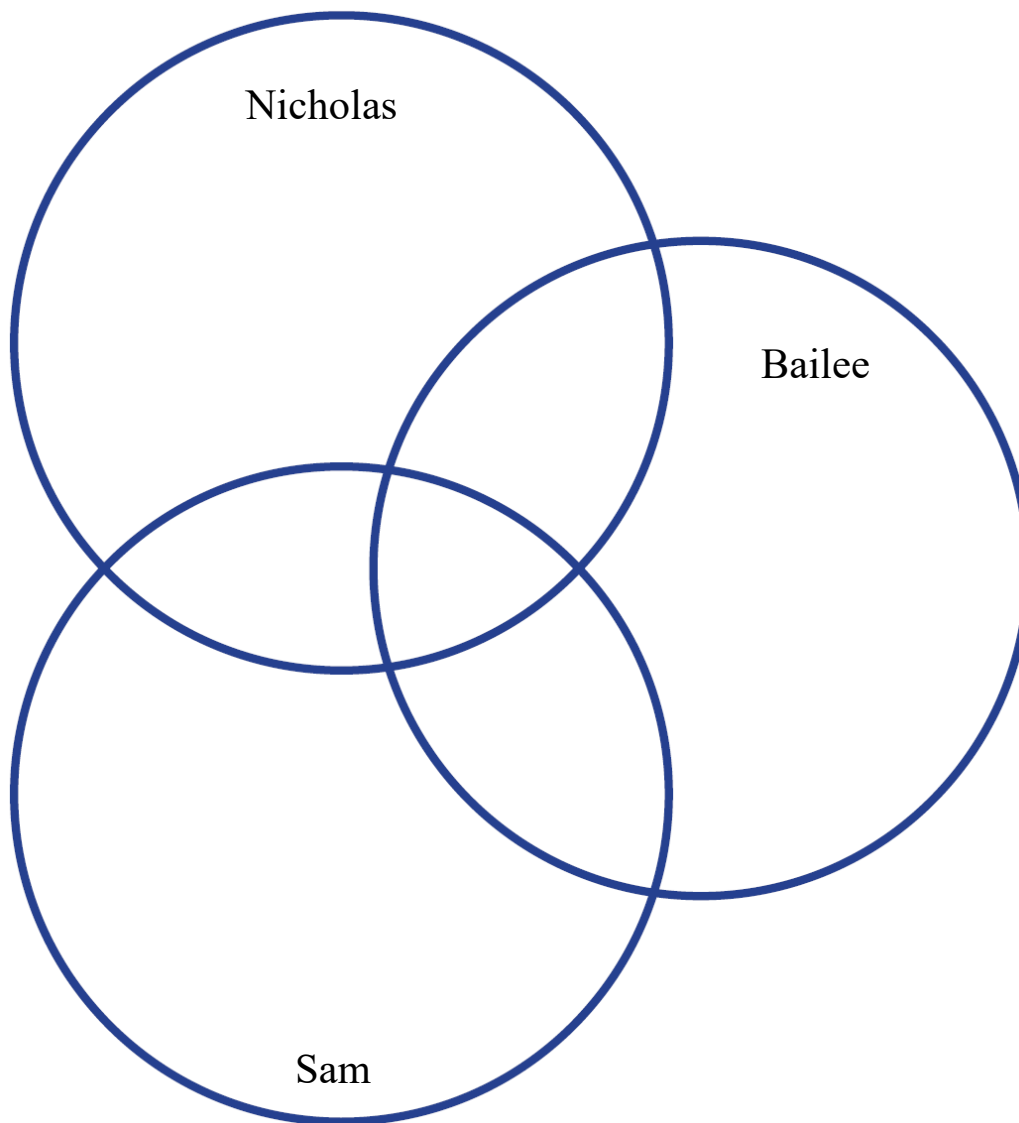
If you cannot think of a time that you experienced flow, write about why that might be. What activities do you like doing? Why do you like doing them? Is it because you enjoy them or because it makes you look good to others? What do you think you could do differently to experience flow?

[illegible]

Character Comparison

After completing the story, have students fill out the Venn diagram in small groups. Discuss as a full group. It may be helpful to look back at the Character Comparison previously completed for Nicholas and Bailee.

Directions: Think back to “Nicholas’ Story” and “Bailee’s Story”. Bailee, Nicholas, and Sam have a lot in common, but they also have many differences. Think about their characteristics and their situations. What is similar? What is different? Place your thoughts in the Venn diagram below.



Self-Esteem Rollercoaster

This may be a challenging activity for some students, and it may be necessary to adjust to student needs. This activity should be completed after completing the story AND the Self-Esteem Evaluation to be used as a guide. After students complete their drawings, the instructor should lead the creation of a group rollercoaster to be used as the basis for the following discussion.

If students should struggle, a pre-drawn rollercoaster may be provided with the expectation that students label it with the corresponding events.

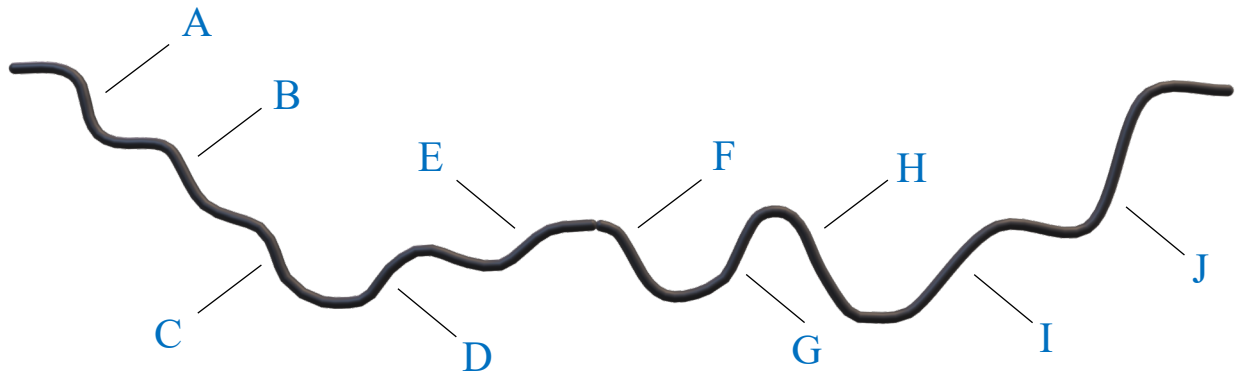
An example of a labeled rollercoaster has been provided below.

Directions: Each event listed below has an effect on Sam's self-esteem. You determined the type of effect (positive or negative) when you completed Sam's Self-Esteem Evaluation. Your challenge is to draw a rollercoaster that illustrates how Sam's self-esteem changes over the course of the story. An increase in self-esteem should be represented with an incline. A decrease in self-esteem should be represented with a decline.

Once your drawing is complete, label each section of the rollercoaster with the letter of the corresponding event.

Hint: Think about how big/small each drop and boost to Sam's self-esteem was. Each event had a differently sized impact.

- K. Sam finds out that she has a new position on her team.
- L. Sam's parents react to Sam announcing her new position at dinner.
- M. Sam is benched at practice.
- N. Sam buys new high-quality soccer cleats.
- O. Sam's teammates praise her new cleats.
- P. Sam's parents do not come to the game against Kent.
- Q. Sam stays in her position and her team does well in the beginning of the game.
- R. Sam breaks position and her team loses the game.
- S. Sam has a conversation with her Dad about feeling like a failure.
- T. Sam has a conversation with her Coach about losing the game.



Rollercoaster Follow-Up Questions

After completing the class drawing of the self-esteem rollercoaster, have students answer the following questions independently. Check and discuss answers as a group. Correct sample answers have been provided below.

1. Which events in the story made Sam's self-esteem go up?

Five events made Sam's self-esteem go up. First, when she bought her new cleats. Second, when her teammates praised her new cleats. Third, when she did well at the beginning of the game against Kent. Fourth, when Sam and her Dad talked about how she felt less appreciated than her siblings. Fifth, when Sam and her Coach talked about how losing the game does not make Sam a bad player.

2. Which event(s) had small effects? Which event(s) had large effects?

Purchasing the cleats and the subsequent praise had the smallest effects on Sam's self-esteem.

3. What do the small event(s) have in common?

These two events both involved acquiring a new material good which, as discussed in this story's "Building Background" leads to smaller and temporary boosts to self-esteem.

4. What is different about the big event(s)?

The big events that boost Sam's self-esteem involve the resolution of a conflict in Sam's life that threatened her sense of identity. She valued her identity as a skilled soccer player, and she felt as though her parents and her Coach no longer considered her to be one. After rediscovering her genuine love for the game and being reassured that no one thought any less of her, her self-esteem received more significant, longer lasting boosts.

5. At what point in the story do you think Sam is highest on the materialism spectrum? At what point is she the lowest?

Sam was probably highest on the materialism spectrum when she chooses to purchase the new cleats rather than spend time with her friends on their outing. She is probably lowest on the materialism spectrum at the very end of the story after she throws away her cleats and speaks with her Dad and her Coach.

Reaction Guide (Yopp & Yopp, 2013)

After completing the story, have students complete the chart and compare to the Anticipation Guide they completed prior to reading the story. Discuss any changes that occurred as a full group.

Directions: Indicate whether you agree or disagree with each statement.

	Agree	Disagree
1. Some things are only worth doing if you are good at them.		
2. Having new and expensive equipment is important if you want to be the best at a sport.		
3. It is more worthwhile to spend money on new possessions than on experiences.		
4. It is good to get better at something so that other people will be impressed.		

If your responses are different from the Anticipation Guide, write 1-2 sentences explaining why they changed. If they have not changed, write 1-2 sentences explaining what happened in the story that supported your initial responses.

1.

2.

3.

4.

Additional Resources

You may have realized as you have read this guide that materialism is a complex issue. These stories and learning materials offer a brief introduction to causes of and solutions to this issue, however there is definitely room for further investigation. If you have found yourself intrigued by these conversations, you may be interested in checking out some of these additional resources about more ways to prevent materialism and more ways that materialism is caused.

More Causes of Materialism

American Psychological Association. *What psychology says about materialism and the holidays*. Retrieved 12/11/2020 from <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2014/12/materialism-holidays>

Tim Kasser, an expert in materialism, answers six commonly asked questions about the nature and causes of materialism.

Islam, T., Sheikh, Z., Hameed, Z., Khan, I. U., & Azam, R. I. (2018). Social comparison, materialism, and compulsive buying based on stimulus-response-model: A comparative study among adolescents and young adults. *Young Consumers*, 19(1), 19-37. doi:10.1108/YC-07-2017-00713

This article investigates the effects of social comparison on the development of materialism in adolescents.

Story of Stuff Project. (2019, April 25). *How advertising rewires kids' brains* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hGN1ZEABk_Y

This 4 minute video offers a brief, yet detailed overview of how advertisement exposure increases a child's likelihood of being materialistic and offers resources on reducing ad exposure to decrease that likelihood.

Reducing Materialism

Borba, M. (n.d.). How to deprogram a materialistic kid. Retrieved December 11, 2020, from <https://micheleborba.com/how-to-deprogram-a-materialistic-kid/>

Dr. Michele Borba offers advice to parents struggling with a materialistic child.

Bright Horizons Education Team. (n.d.). How to Help School Age Children Navigate Friendships. Retrieved December 11, 2020, from <https://www.brighthouse.com/family-resources/school-age-children-and-friendships>

This website provides resources on teaching children how to maintain healthy friendships.

Engage Educate Equip. (n.d.). Retrieved December 11, 2020, from <http://sharesavespend.com/>

This website offers a variety of products intended to teach children about spending money, including videos and activities. There are also various blog posts about having conversations about money with children, as well as advice on healthy spending habits for adults.

Greater Good Science Center. (n.d.). Gratitude journal (greater good in action). Retrieved December 11, 2020, from https://ggia.berkeley.edu/practice/gratitude_journal

This website provides tips on how to successfully participate in gratitude journaling for adults and children.

Kasser, T. (2002). *The high price of materialism*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

This book offers a detailed overview of current materialism literature, including in-depth discussions of the dangers of being highly materialistic. Kasser also discusses possible courses of action for adults to prevent materialism within themselves, within their family, and within society.

Lieber, R. (2016). *The opposite of spoiled: Raising kids who are grounded, generous, and smart about money*. New York, New York: Harper.

Lieber offers an accessible discussion about the basic ways parents can help their children become financially wise and mindful, such as having open, honest conversations with children about money and the reasons behind their desire for new things.

Lyness, D. (Ed.). (2015, January). Helping your child through a divorce (for parents) - Nemours KidsHealth. Retrieved December 11, 2020, from <https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/help-child-divorce.html>

This website offers advice for parents trying to figure out how to support their children through a divorce. These resources include healthy coping mechanisms for children that, if employed, may reduce reliance on materialism as a coping mechanism.

Seltzer, L. (2016, August 10). How to raise your kids with high - and healthy – self-esteem. Retrieved December 11, 2020, from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/evolution-the-self/201608/how-raise-your-kids-high-and-healthy-self-esteem>

Dr. Leon Seltzer explains how parents can impact the formation of high and healthy self-esteem in their children.

Reflection

Teaching Materialism Through Stories: A Reflection

Research has shown that storytelling is a strong pedagogical technique, one that uses strong prose, an interesting plot line, and the power of emotion to teach children in an effective and fun way (Klein, pp. xii). To explore its pedagogical applications, this project combines storytelling with the teaching of materialism. Through the collaboration of Zoie Zvonar and myself, we wrote, designed, and created a set of learning materials to approach the topic of materialism in a child-friendly manner. What arose out of this project is three short stories, each one focusing on one specific aspect of materialism. Each story entails research about materialism, education, and the role stories play in a classroom setting.

My Role in Collaboration

My role in this collaborative project consisted of writing and creating three short stories and the visual aids that accompany them. For our purposes, we focused on creating content for students between the ages of 10 and 12. We believed that this age group would be the most receptive to the psychological ideas and complex analyses of the self in relation to materialism.

Stories

The three short stories, each between 6500 and 9000 words, feature their own characters and aspects of materialism. Nicholas' story displays materialism as it relates to friendship and the developmental model of materialism. Bailee's story discusses how materialism plays a role in processing divorce and how gratitude is an essential part of avoiding high materialistic tendencies. Sam's story explores the connections between self-esteem and materialism, in addition to more complex ideas like intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, flow, and the importance of valuing experiences over objects. There are many ways that we can think about materialism but these three were most suited to the story format and to the young ages of the intended audience. To suit the short story genre and also the age-range, each story focuses on one main character and explores specific moments in their lives where they progressed from a lack of knowledge to better understanding and comprehension of materialism and its influences in their personal situations.

Visual Aids

In addition to the story, I also decided to design four visual aids, one for each story and one describing the concept of materialism in general. These aids are meant to work as supplements to the stories. They follow an infographic style and define the complex ideas featured in each story. By offering a baseline of information for the students, they are better preparing them to progress into the application of materialism theories. Each visual aid was labeled individually as the title of the story they are associated with, alongside the sub-title "Building Background" to represent their purpose in the greater set of learning materials.

Combining Research about Materialism, Storytelling, and Visual Learning

Materialism

We chose the psychological concept materialism because of its importance in the modern world. Materialism plays a significant role in our understanding of well-being and psychological health. In *The High Price of Materialism*, Tim Kasser states: “People who are highly focused on materialistic values have lower personal well-being and psychological health than those who believe that materialistic pursuits are relatively unimportant” (22). The idea of materialism isn’t a new one but it has become increasingly important in the era of capitalism and commercialization. Not only is the topic significant in our exploration of general happiness and life satisfaction, but it is a complex and multi-faceted ideology that spans our entire lives. There are many aspects of life that can influence one’s materialistic tendencies and be influenced by them in return, such as relationships, self-esteem, self-worth, financial security, and many more (Kasser). This research further emphasizes the importance of possessing general knowledge and understanding of materialism in order to work towards creating a society with lower materialistic tendencies. The first step in this process is to educate younger audiences about what materialism is, how they can notice it in their own lives, and to suggest potential “solutions” to the problem of materialism. While materialism is a spectrum, and everyone has some form of materialistic tendencies, there are strategies that combat unhealthy levels of materialism from negatively impacting individuals.

Storytelling

As a teaching technique, storytelling uses elements of creative writing to create an increased level of engagement and interest as opposed to regular textbooks. With this in mind, our project was designed to bridge the gap between the abstract dimension of materialism and its impact in specific areas of our daily lives such as self-esteem, friendship, and general happiness to name a few. The article “Your Brain on Fiction” explores the research behind humanity’s interest in narrative and storytelling. Our brain’s reactions to stimulating metaphors and phrases demonstrate that our relationship to the elements of storytelling is truly one of greater engagement at least physically. It isn’t too hard to imagine why we, as a collective of human beings, are interested in fictional worlds. They offer insight that we might not be able to experience ourselves (Klein, pp. xi), explore complex ideology in an easily digestible format, and perhaps most important of all, they are fun to experience.

Visual Learning

Learning through visuals is another pedagogical technique that makes complex ideas more tangible. As noted in *With Great Power Comes Great Pedagogy*, “It is clear that our students are increasingly immersed in an image-based culture, and visual literacy is key to communicating in contemporary society” (6). With that idea in mind, this project also explores the concept of visual learning in combination with storytelling, both as ways of increasing engagement and addressing different kinds of student learners through visual and linguistic modes of communication. Combining visual and linguistic together encourages understanding through not

only the theoretical knowledge itself but through our understanding of what the material world looks like in correlation with complex psychological theories.

The Creation Process

Throughout the creation of this project, many important elements related to student learning and storytelling emerged. This section explores those elements and highlights how they impacted the creation process. A variety of sources impacted the following discussion, which is reflected in the references section. Every source that was used throughout this project is included to demonstrate the areas of study that contributed to my overall understanding.

Active Learning

An integral component of this project is active learning. Many textbooks in a child's educational experience are situationally written to be within a student's vocabulary and understanding of language, yet they often contain an overwhelming amount of information. Furthermore, a student's engagement is likely to fall when they are presented with information that is formatted to relay the main concepts and ideas without the opportunity for active learning and participation. Rather than overloading the student with countless definitions and applications, the visuals and stories seek to create an opportunity for active learning and thus greater understanding. The visual aids play an important part by offering distinct questions for students to consider. The stories themselves also use active learning because they contain materialistic situations that may be more relatable than a typical textbook lesson. By using the visual aids and stories together, this project combines definition, application, and self-reflection to expand on the way students are able to learn.

Creation as Translation

The stories and visuals act as an intermediate interface between materialism and the students, where the main task is to translate materialism into a format students can understand. This translation involved taking a complicated concept like materialism, breaking it down into key learning elements, and then displaying those elements in a format that students will be able to truly learn from. The ultimate goal behind this process is that students will learn that materialism exists and that it is important to think about and recognize it in their own lives. It was important to choose words that the students would be able to understand and use situations and activities that were relatable but also useful for keeping the momentum of each story in place. Similarly, the work of designing a visual aid also had the challenge of vocabulary and language in addition to creating icons that children could recognize and visual designs that displayed the information in an effective way.

One key distinction between the story and visual aids were how the translation of materialism was manifested: with plot and character development in the stories and the progression of information and imagery in the visual aids. Not only must the stories demonstrate how materialism can have an impact on our lives, but they must also generate and maintain interest in the events and ideas being displayed with a good plot and interesting characters. The visual aids

must be aesthetically pleasing, present information in a logical way, and also translate complex ideology into simple explanations and real-world applications. The problem and opportunity translation affords is an in-depth look at how we can understand materialism and how we can convey that information to an audience that is different from ourselves. The work of translating to younger audiences is further accentuated by the fact that conveying difficult concepts is inherently one of simplification. In what way can the concept of materialism be simplified without disrupting its definition or greater meaning? That is no simple task.

Open vs. Closed Endings

Another significant element was considering the best methods for using storytelling effectively. The stories had to encourage critical thinking but also avoid constricting the information that a student would be able to take away from the message of each story and visual. In other words, I had to design materials that focus on open-ended ideas and thoughts without restricting the potential for self-reflection and critical thinking by supplying all of the answers.

Klein discusses the importance of telling a story that uses activities and events that children can relate to or at least understand emotionally (25). At the same time, it is important to consider what they might be taking away from the story's events and to create a space for the individual to have their own unique experience with the text. Considering each story's ending, and what conclusions a student would make in the final moment, was essential to design a space for critical thinking that is more inclusive than simply understanding what the character is thinking and feeling. How does the student reader feel about the situation? Would they have done the same as the main character if they were within that situation? The language should create the opportunity for the reader to come up with answers to these questions independently.

Thinking Back on A Semester Long Project

This section could address the difficulties of writing stories within the confines of a single university-level semester, but instead I wish to discuss how the flow of a project has the potential to shift dramatically during the process of creating it. What started at the beginning was an idea for three to four short stories focusing on teaching one or more psychological theories to a younger audience. What it transformed into was an exploration of multiliteracy in the classroom. The greatest change over the course of this project has been what the visual element should look like. Ideas about comics, illustrations, and other visual ideas were considered, but I lacked familiarity and understanding of many of these visual formats. Ultimately, we settled on the idea of a visual aid in the style of an infographic not only because I had prior experience working with that genre but also because it suited the purpose of this project well. While the stories focus on telling the story of materialism through plot lines, the visual presented a baseline of information hence the reason they were titled, "Building Background". While students would still be able to learn from the stories themselves, the visual aids highlight the most important concepts and ideas first to allow students to consider what they might mean throughout the stories. After learning how materialism interacts with the main themes in each story, the student could move on to explore those definitions and concepts in a realistic manner.

What has stood out to me the most throughout this project is the importance we must place on storytelling in the classroom. I have had the privilege to explore storytelling in classroom settings but not every student will have that same experience. When I have encountered the visual mode in classroom settings, it is usually accompanied with a greater appreciation for the topic at hand and an interesting opportunity to experience theory in physicality. The same can be said for the way I have experienced storytelling as a writing major, in that everything we create whether it be report, story, or design has a story to tell to someone else. Just like this project translated materialism for a younger audience using the pedagogical techniques of storytelling and visual learning, so too does other content also contain the possibility to utilize several modes and methods of teaching to accentuate its lessons. I am glad that I was able to explore these ideas within this project and hope to expand on them even more should I take this project further. May this project add to the discussion of how storytelling and visual learning can contribute to our understanding of the educational experience.

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