

*The Writers' Slate*, published by The Writing Conference, Inc., features some of our nation's top quality writing by students, kindergarten through 12th grade. The national journal is published three times a year, including one issue filled with award-winning prose and poetry.

The publication is available online.

The editor of *The Writers' Slate* invites original, creative and expository writing by students in kindergarten through 12th grade. The editor also invites submissions of book reviews of children's or young adult literature written by students. Educators are also encouraged to submit article ideas for feature article consideration.

The deadline for the fall issue each year is June 15. The deadline for the spring issue is December 15.

Send submissions (via a simple Word document) electronically to:  
Kristen Worthington, Editor, *The Writers' Slate*  
[kristenworthington@writingconference.com](mailto:kristenworthington@writingconference.com)

Submissions should clearly indicate the writer's:

- Name
- School
- Grade level
- State and city

The editor reserves the right to edit manuscripts for clarity, style, and according to space limitations. Submissions will not be returned. Please note that only those students whose work is selected for publication will be notified.

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Kristen Worthington, Editor

*Letter from the Director*

It is, indeed, a pleasure to present this special issue of *The Writers' Slate* because it contains the winning entries of those young people who entered the 2009-2010 writing contest. This is one way that teachers can support writing in the schools by encouraging students to enter contests. We at The Writing Conference, Inc., hope that we can contribute to that effort by publishing the winning entries.

These winners were chosen from a total of 283 entries -- 52 elementary school students, 144 junior high/middle school students, and 87 high school students. The elementary school entries included the following categories: 16 poetry, 21 narration, and 15 exposition; at the middle level we had 29 in poetry, 42 in narration and 73 in exposition; at the high school level we had 35 in poetry, 12 in narration, and 40 in exposition. We had entries from across the United States.

The Writing Conference, Inc. is very proud of those students who write and of those teachers who encourage their students to write.

Congratulations to the winners and to all who entered. May you continue to have success in writing!

We also want to thank the judges who gave of their time and talent to assess these entries: Judy Bakalar, Mission Valley Middle School, Shawnee Mission, Kansas; Megan Gearhart, Overland Park, Kansas; Becky Hart, Tomahawk Elementary, Shawnee Mission, Kansas; April Hawkins, Wheatridge Middle School, Gardner, Kansas; Bob Sailler, Eudora Middle School, Eudora, Kansas; Erin Foley, Basehor – Linwood Middle School, Bonner Springs, Kansas; Laura Restivo, Blue Valley High School, Kansas; Shelly Todd, Olathe, Kansas; Angie Flax, Ottawa High School, Kansas; and Sharon Denton, Ottawa High School, Kansas.

John H Bushman, Director, The Writing Conference, Inc.

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*Emma Larson  
Bellevue, NE*



*Poetry - Elementary  
1<sup>st</sup> Place*

## Competition

Competition of all kinds:  
 A broad topic undefined,  
 A mystery that may boggle the mind,  
 Competition of all kinds.  
 The school bell rings; learn something.  
 All of the tension class may bring.  
 The smart child is the king,  
 The school bell rings; learn something.  
 Hear the whistle blow, it's time to play,  
 The other team stares, watching their prey.  
 Stomachs churn, nervous today,  
 Hear the whistle blow, it's time to play.  
 Come to the fair, success slim,  
 Toss the ball, chills strike the skin.  
 Give more cash, live to win,  
 Come to the fair, success slim.  
 A Broadway show, auditions now,  
 Getting anxious, wipe the brow.  
 Script memorized, confident, somehow,  
 A Broadway show, auditions now.  
 My fingers fly across the page,  
 Wonder of wonders, I am a sage.  
 Almost done, I am engaged,  
 My fingers fly across the page.  
 Guns fire, soldiers fall,  
 The survivors must keep standing tall.  
 Hoping your family does not receive a call,  
 Guns fire, soldiers fall.  
 Competition of all kinds,  
 A broad topic undefined.  
 A mystery that may boggle the mind,  
 Competition of all kinds.

*Jenna Swaney  
Bellevue, NE*



*Poetry - Elementary  
2<sup>nd</sup> Place*

## Competition

Competition is like a basketball game;

You're up five points with two minutes left in the game.

It's the other team's ball;

I'm guarding a five-foot seven-inch girl while I'm five three.

The point guard dribbles the ball down the court;

*Dribble, dribble, dribble.*

Anxiety flows over me like I'm jumping into a pool of water.

Sweat trickles down my neck.

The point guard passes;

Passes to the player I'm guarding.

Well tries to pass to the player I'm guarding.

But when she tries to pass it to my player,

I am already there.

In less than a second, I'm down the court;

The sound of my feet tapping on the floor;

*Tap, tap, tap.*

I go inward for a lay up,  
Feeling the air brush against my face as I run down the court.

I'm just inside the three-point line,  
Being chased down by the other players.  
Now, a half-second later I'm two feet from the basket;  
The ball in my left hand ready to be put in the basket.

The ball goes up and through the net;

**SCORE!**

Pain shoots through my arm like a bullet.  
The referee called foul as I drop to my knees;  
Doubling over in pain.  
I shoot my free throw.  
The ball rolls over the rim and into the hands of the opposing team.  
I look at the score board;  
There is ten seconds left of the game;  
That is plenty of time to score a basket.  
I am full of determination,

And I can tell my teammates are too.

We race down the court,

Praying silently in hopes that they don't score.

The point guard passes the ball long.

The right wing guard catches the ball and dribbles five feet from the hoop.

*Five. Four. Three....*

Even though little time remains no one's lost hope.

A skinny almost meatless girl on my team blocks the girl's path.

The girl on the opposite team shoots a jump shot;

'The Walking Toothpick' swats the ball;

The buzzard sounds.

We had won the game!

That is competition:

Two teams,

Effort,

And sweat.

*Noah Jenson  
Highlands Ranch, CO*



*Poetry - Elementary  
3<sup>rd</sup> Place*

## Competition

Sweaty palms and bitten off nails,  
Which answer, heads or tails?  
So many questions, my head starts to spin!  
Run faster, jump higher, and maybe you'll win.

Jump the hurdles and run that track,  
Throw the ball and watch your back,  
A big, huge trophy made of gold, not tin,  
Run faster, jump higher, and maybe you'll win.

Make the grades, get the job,  
I've lost it all; I think I'll sob,  
Life is the challenge so don't spread yourself thin,  
Run faster, jump higher, and maybe you'll win.

*Jadyn Atteberry  
Overland Park, KS*



*Poetry - Middle  
1<sup>st</sup> Place*

## Competition

Tick tock,  
Seconds go by,  
Drumming slower than anticipation can  
expect,  
Pounding feet,  
Sweating hands,  
Pumping fists,  
The will to win.  
Cunning exhilaration wraps around,  
Like a tight blanket on a frosting night,  
Heat builds up inside,  
Unlike any other feeling,  
Heart races,  
Until it feels like it'll stop at any moment,  
Breathing,  
Impossible,  
Concentrating,  
Necessary,  
Go faster,  
Think harder  
Be better,  
All is lost, or made.  
In an instant  
Impossible to describe,  
What's at stake?  
How will it end?  
Who will conquer?  
Competition

*McKenna Gibson  
Carmel, CA*



*Poetry - Middle  
2nd Place*

### Ski Race

Competition when the dwindling line grows ever shorter,  
each racer crawling, dragging, inching to the starting gate.

Concentration with every frigid gulp of icy air nipping my lungs, billowing steam out my  
mouth in pearly puffs like dragon breath.

Consideration to lunge or to jump, to fly or to soar, to tuck or to glide,  
how to be a dove, a hawk, a jet-blue jay.

Control when my skies arc and dive, over the snow caps,  
around the frost kissed flags, pole touch, lunge,  
pole touch, lunge, tuck and twist.

Confidence is the hero of the races, freedom comes with a price.  
Without this hero, every bump is a saw tooth mountain,  
every turn, a dangerous mudslide, baiting you to skid out of control,  
the race forever lost.

Competition is my game, it drives my blood, my body, my electric charged heart when I  
race.

The jubilation of crisp, misty snow, the soul of the mountain, fill me with the urge to  
strive, to glorify,

to quench the fiery need for speed.

*Abigail Reichman  
Glen Ellyn, IL*



*Poetry - Middle  
3<sup>rd</sup> Place*

### Competition

Competition is everywhere:  
The daily tests of life,  
Struggling to do your best,  
Overcoming strife.

You're a loyal soldier,  
No insults you heed.  
When the battle rages,  
You take your turn to lead.

Everyone wants to win,  
For that reward is our goal.  
Losing has its own reward;  
It inspires desire in your soul.

Competition engages mind and body;  
*Competition is life.*

*Julia Tom  
Honolulu, HI*



*Poetry - Senior  
1<sup>st</sup> Place*

## Competition

Competition lurks in every street corner,  
waiting to charge out,  
and unleash his power.  
The sheer magnanimity emanates  
from every sweaty pore,  
to conquer and defeat  
any obstacle in his path.  
He doesn't care to stop  
for the weak and helpless  
who tread in his shadows--  
Or for the passive  
who don't dare to crush  
the dreams of others.  
His eyes sparkle with arrogance  
and confidence,  
as every emotion crumbles  
beneath his footsteps.  
It is competition who wins the race,  
and stands above all others,  
as we look up to him,  
we are cast in the shadows of defeat.

*Justin Dobson  
Worcester, MA*



*Poetry - Senior  
2<sup>nd</sup> Place*

## The Conundrum of Competition

Competition is an interaction that can be positive,  
 However, it can also be negative.  
 But one truth about competition is that it is causative.

Competition is the basis of our society;  
 It teaches our children to grasp rivalry.  
 It teaches our children,  
 To be driven  
 By ideas such as excellence,  
 Which eventually instill pride and self-confidence.

Competition has become such a fundamental idea in society  
 That it affects all parts entirely,  
 From the moral, academic, philosophical, and even to the political structure of our lives.  
 It inspires our children to strive,  
 To be the best in class,  
 Or even on a team.  
 It even goes as far as generating controversy  
 Between people in differing political parties,  
 It causes them to clash on power journeys.

Competition, however, can instill arrogance, and negativity  
 Through ideas that lower our sense of morality.  
 It teaches us to insult, taunt, and even to hate our opponent, or enemy,  
 The strong urge to win  
 Eventually leads to losing goodness and positivity within.

Competition teaches our children  
 To be driven,  
 By the thought that failure isn't an option,  
 And with loss and failure being so common,  
 It leaves our children left in shame,  
 Feeling like they are the only ones to blame.

So, instead of an idea full of negativity,  
 There can be a new idea for our society.  
 This new idea can become our policy,  
 One that dismisses arrogance, and rivalry,

But promotes excellence and positivity.

This idea was spoken by a man long ago:

“Do your work with your whole heart and you will succeed  
—there’s so little competition.” (Elbert Hubbard)

*Alexandra Clement  
Jamesville, MD*



*Poetry - Senior  
3<sup>rd</sup> Place*

## To Fight for a Shared Spaced

It happened once, a long time ago;

A whisper fell where things used to grow.

And in came wispy, leafy things,

Which only an idea can bring.

But these leafy things were rid throughout

By tiny flowers, who thrived about.

Then came the Oak, and no more sun

Could stretch to reach the smaller ones.

In succession, the next would follow

To beat the first and leave it hollow.

So up the trunk an intruder climbed

Wrapped around, as if twine,

What a monster, disguised benign.

And the Oak was consumed by the creeping vine.

One by one, they came and went

Until the room to grow was spent.

'Til up above, one kind rose

Against which none other could oppose.

All other things failed to compete

and fell to rest in their defeat.

So trees grow old, and some must pass,

But it's no mind if they weren't the last.

Brother's died, quickly forgotten,

And were left as corpses, limbs gone rotten,

To spite the smaller, weaker breeds

Then envious of wicked weeds.

Finally, the day came

When all the folks lived the same.

That is to say, not at all;

For every single one did fall.

Skeletons sunk, buried in soil;

Petals gone, roots recoiled.

An ashen, barren, landscape lay

Life crumpled into sad decay

Overlooked; again; another day

Until a whisper... comes that way.

*Funmi Solano  
Arlington, TX*



*Narration - Elementary  
1<sup>st</sup> Place*

## The Baking Competition

“Hurry up, Marie!” yelled Mom from the family SUV.

I quickly dressed in a white, long-sleeved, buttoned shirt, black pants, chef hat, and black shoes. I stuffed my recipes and apron in my bag. I hurried downstairs and entered the car, sitting down next to my friends, Berry and George. We drove to Parsley’s Annual Junior Bakers’ Challenge, a competition I entered. I hastily left the car and scrambled through a certain doorway.

“We’ll be in the audience!” shouted Dad from the car window.

“Break a leg, Marie!” yelled Berry encouragingly.

I went to my reserved chair on a stage with other sitting children. A counter stood before me with shelves under the surface filled with cooking supplies and electronics. Behind me were an oven for baking and a pantry and refrigerator holding the ingredients I requested to use with my entry form. An audience was beginning to form in the chairs facing the stage. As I donned my apron and took out my recipes from my bag, Tiffany, a girl in the competition and from my school, strolled to my spot.

“Looks like you’re a mess, as usual,” she hissed.

“Go away. I’m preparing,” I replied.

“Well, you should just quit now. I mean, what judge would pick *you* out of *all* these other *talented* people?” she said with a scowl, and left me frozen in anxiety and worry.

Soon, the chairs were filled, with Mom, Dad, Berry, and George seated in some, and a woman called, “The first round is appetizers! Bring out your appetizer recipes!”

Recipes were displayed on stands, and then, a bell rang and a timer started. I was making French bread and began to gather ingredients. As I kneaded the dough, I glanced at the judges and the other competitors’ appetizers, which looked very good, and began to get nervous. Then I looked at my fragrant dough and my delicious bread and decided to not listen to snobby Tiffany. I swept away my worries and just had fun.

Just after I cut the bread into three parts—one for each judge—alongside their creamy butter slices on fancy plates, the time ran out. The judges ate the food and scribbled on a paper.

The woman explained, “The judges are rating your food from zero to ten, and the person with the highest score on all three judges’ papers wins.”

The same happened for the main course and drink round and dessert round. I made Fettuccine Alfredo with shrimp, ice cream float milkshakes, and stacked, frosted strawberry cake squares. At the end, the judges whispered to the woman.

She called, “The winner of the 2010 Junior Bakers’ Challenge is...Marie Hatchet!”

I proudly grinned. The audience, especially Mom, Dad, Berry, and George, made

loud applause. Tiffany folded her arms in defeat. I went to collect the grand prizes: a big, gold trophy, a bouquet, \$150, and an exclusive cookbook. I waved merrily at the audience.

We soon left the building with my rewards. As I chatted with George and Berry, I realized, from the competition, to not worry about how well you do in a game.

You should just have fun during it, and just maybe, you might be a winner.

*She called, “The winner of the 2010 Junior Bakers’ Challenge is...”*

*Morgan Gallagher  
Bellevue, NE*



*Narration - Elementary  
2<sup>nd</sup> Place*

## The Sprinter

As Mackenzie ran her mind was blank, there was no time for thoughts. All she knew is that she had to be the first to cross the finish line, and that was what she was going to do. Mackenzie Moore loved the feeling of the wind whipping around her, the sounds of onlookers screaming her name. This is why she became a sprinter.

As she crossed the finish line she felt the same rush she had felt a million other times, but each time was just as great if not more wonderful than the last. Mackenzie had thrived in racing, she was a natural. She was better than any other girl in her school, Even Flora (Flash) Harlby. Before Mackenzie had moved here a year ago Flora had been the best in the school maybe even in town. Nobody had even tried to beat her until Mackenzie came. Mackenzie had always felt like Flora was just looking for ways to embarrass her. ‘Perhaps she’s just jealous,’ Mackenzie thought, but she quickly pushed the thought away. Maybe she was so shocked she, the queen, had been beaten she would do anything to get her throne back. ‘Well she’ll just have to accept the fact that I’m a better sprinter,’ thought Mackenzie. As she walked to the locker room she was barricaded by Flora and she guessed she wasn’t there for idle chit-chat.

“Up for a little race?” Flora sneered, “Bet you don’t get halfway before I win.”

“I already beat you once Flora,” Mackenzie tried to sound confident, “Do you really think I couldn’t do it again?”

But Flora wasn’t going to give up, “Oh this isn’t any ordinary race,” and she could tell Flora meant it.

The next day Mackenzie woke up feeling like her head had been pounded with fiery coconuts. She thought back to the day before... Mackenzie had tried to get past Flora but she got right into her face and sneered,” Meet me tomorrow after school at the track, unless you’re too scared. Oh, and prepare for a marathon.”

Oh, what was she going to do? Mackenzie was a sprinter not a marathoner! But she got ready and went to school anyway. You know when you're going to Disney World after school and the clocks seem frozen but when you're going to the dentist the hours tick away like seconds? For Mackenzie today was a dentist day. All too soon the final bell rang and Mackenzie headed for the track. Even though she didn't have high hopes of winning, it wasn't in Mackenzie's nature to back down from a challenge. Once Mackenzie reached the track, the first person she saw was Flora.

*Then I guess you'll have to suffer, she spat.*

"Don't worry," Flora smiled, "I'll make it quick."

"It's a marathon," Mackenzie retorted, "If it was going to be fast I would win—I'm the sprinter."

"Then I guess you'll have to suffer," she spat.

As they approached the starting line Mackenzie thought up a plan. It was pretty simple. Basically she would keep up with Flora then race ahead at the last lap. It was supposed to be a 10 mile race, and if four laps equaled 1 mile, they would have to run 40 laps!

Flora shouted, "Ready.....Set.....Go!" and they were off. Mackenzie's plan worked well at the beginning, but after ten laps, it was clear Mackenzie was not built for long distance running. Flora would get ahead a little, but just as quick Mackenzie would use a burst of speed to catch up. By the thirtieth lap Flora started to get ahead and Mackenzie couldn't catch up. There were five laps left. Mackenzie had to make her move now! At four laps, Mackenzie let out a burst of speed; three laps, she was gaining on Flora; two laps, only a few feet left; one lap, Mackenzie shot past Flora and steamed across the finish line. She had won...SHE WON! Mackenzie was about to rub it into Flora's face, but when she turned around, different words shot out.

"That was a great race; I didn't think there was any way I could win, you're an amazing marathoner."

Then Flora smiled back "Yeah, you are too."

Maybe things wouldn't be so bad between them after all.

*Ruchita  
Balasubramanian  
East Brunswick, NJ*



*Narration – Middle  
1<sup>st</sup> Place*

## My Reflection

I sat, paralyzed by the millions of eyes staring back at me. Blank, expressionless faces. They were quiet, not one mouth moved, not one nostril flared. Their pale, vacant faces covered the turmoil within themselves. But I could see it, I could see the anxiety ripping them apart. Their hopes, what they yearned for- it was all the same, and it was all too familiar to me. All of them, friends and family of the competitors who sat on stage beside me, longed for one thing- to win.

We sat upon the stage facing the audience, our voices sore from a day of singing. We heard footsteps coming from the opposite end. I barely managed to turn my head to face the figure climbing up the stair case.

The announcer gradually made his way to the podium, my eyes widening with every step. His face was relaxed, not a single muscle was tense, his eyes sweeping the fretful audience before him, a smile tugging at his lips. I envied him, his tranquil mind. It was all I could do to restrain myself from reaching out to him, in hopes of possessing peace that resonated through his body. But all I felt was anger and nervousness burning a hole through my heart. My eyes wandered away from his face, as if blinded by the dazzling rays that were his serenity.

He began to speak; his voice was strong, dripping with nonchalance.

"First I would like to begin by congratulating all the contestants for their outstanding performances this afternoon..." the announcer began. But I was no longer

paying attention. I closed my eyes, seeking an escape from this place that I was ensnared in. I allowed my mind to wander freely, twisting and turning in a dizzying splendor so that I could no longer see the back of my eyelids. The darkness began to melt away, swallowed up by a new scene that danced before me.

It was a warm summer's day, the wind gently blowing past me, beckoning me to follow. I did so, listening to the quiet hum of the birds, and the playful rustling of the few leaves that lay on the lush ground. I continued to walk, the dew covered grass tickling my bare feet, until I stopped at a large house covered with wooden panels and fresh off-white paint. All of a sudden, I felt my lips tugging into a smile.

I was drawn to a voice, a most beautiful voice that seemed to be emanating from an open window. The shrill sounds of the day seemed to cease as if listening in intently just as I was. I made my way to the window, and silently peered in so as not to disturb the flow of music, but the girl in the room did not seem to notice my presence. Instead she continued to sing, her voice was pleasant and light, her mouth curved into a smile. The music came out without restraint, with ease, like a stream flowing freely down its path. The girl, as if in a trance, didn't lift her head at the slightest groan of a tree, or even the tapping of my feet along with the rhythm of her song. She enjoyed what she was doing, and I simply watched, mesmerized.

Finally, when her lips began to join together once more, I realized her song was over. The air seemed eerily quiet, as if begging for more. Instead the girl looked up. Her eyes locked with mine, playfulness and humor danced across her pupils. Swiftly, she turned around and with a quick smile over her shoulder, she had vanished.

Just as the apparition disappeared, I was sucked back into reality, and with a jolt, the uneasiness returned to me once more. I reluctantly opened my eyes, desperately hoping to be back in my little wonderland. But I was sadly mistaken. There I was once again, a tense face amongst an ocean of discomfort. But something else had joined us. The trophies had arrived.

I gazed at the gleaming pieces of metal upon high pedestals. My eyes widened and I stared at my distorted reflection. I saw a face staring back, wearing the same expression as I did but suddenly, it began to morph. A jeering face sneered back at my baffled expression, taunting me silently.

"You think you are going to win?" said a disembodied voice that rang throughout the auditorium though unheard by the others. "What have you done? What are you compared to the rest of them?" The taunting figure inside the trophy continued to smile maliciously, its eyes mere slits that pierced my heart.

"You are a failure!" the voice spat mercilessly. "You call that shrieking music? You think you possess any talent?" My eyes watered, on the verge of tears. But the voice ranted on, dripping with malevolence. I tried to block out the terrible noise and turned my head to face the trophies in my proximity. It was so close, I could simply reach out and grasp it, and it would all be mine.

"No!" the voice screamed, cackling madly at my nerve. "Now, now, mustn't take what isn't yours," the voice snickered wickedly. My head began to spin and I desperately squeezed my eyes shut, seeking an escape, a haven, anything.

But the acerbic voice suddenly ceased. Was it gone? Was it over? Then above it all, I heard a whisper, a small quiet hiss that stung more than anything else.

"You will never win."

The audience was still, all eyes filled with apprehension. Had they heard the voice as well? But they all faced the announcer who had finished his lengthy speech. He held in his hand a white envelope that contained the winners of this competition. He held in his hand the key that could possibly unlock all my fears, and set them free. Slowly, he slit open the envelope, taking care not to completely mangle the envelope itself. The audience groaned with silent impatience.

From within the envelope he extracted a small golden slip. He glanced at the piece of paper smiling, and scanned the contestants sitting upon the stage. I searched his face for a hint, a clue as to who had one, but his eyes betrayed nothing. Desperate, I looked at the slip of paper, wishing at the moment I had some sort of super power that would allow me to read the paper. But no such sensation was bestowed upon me and I reluctantly gave up, waiting for the announcer to read the names himself.

He cleared his throat, and the audience clutched their chairs eagerly in response. The announcer, obviously unused to so much attention decided to savor every moment, much to my dislike. I saw his lips move, about to form the words I was dying to hear, and my eyes widened with anticipation.

But my heart sank, as I saw a girl rush up to claim third prize. The audience erupted with cheers and claps, but I couldn't hear it. The voice had returned, booming over the shouts and cheers and I grasped the edge of my seat, my teeth chattering with terror. I had to win.

But my heart sank lower as another girl dashed up to the table of trophies and claimed the second prize. The mockery and the taunting grew louder and louder. I gripped my seat harder until the whites of my knuckles shone.

Then suddenly, I was filled with a sudden burst of rage. My eyes danced like flames and I clenched my teeth together. I had to win. I had to. Only then could I prove the voice wrong. Only then could it all be over. But the mere thought of winning seemed to plague my soul. It was too much of a burden, a burden I could no longer carry. My eyes fluttered and my chest rose and fell in irregular patterns. I couldn't take it. It was too much.

But then I heard it: the melodious voice in my vision. It was soft at first, but it then slowly grew louder and stronger until I was captivated by the music. The feeling of pleasure engulfed my body and I felt my lips smiling. It felt so strange to smile, but I enjoyed it. The evil voice had been droned out and thoughts of winning melted away. I realized that it no longer mattered, it had never mattered. It was all part of my imagination.

I indolently glanced out of the corner of my eye to see an excited girl rush up and grab the first prize trophy. But I no longer cared. I sat, still mesmerized by the song when a thought struck me. The voice was quite familiar, just as the girl in my vision. Was she an old friend I had known? I mulled over this as the rest of the participants were escorted off the stage. I looked to see the rest of the girls' faces were covered in tears, their shoulders sagged in defeat. But my eyes were glazed over in deep thought. Who was she?

I walked out of the building with my family at my side. It had been raining recently, and the side walk was drenched and slippery. I lost my footing and tripped,

sending my bracelet into a nearby puddle. As I bent down to retrieve it, I saw my reflection, wavering only slightly by the rippling water. I smiled down at it and the girl in the pool of water smiled back. Only then did realization hit me. The girl in my vision was me.

*Eliana Yi  
Austin, TX*



*Narration – Middle  
2<sup>nd</sup> Place*

In the month of May, I bumped up my practice time to an hour instead of thirty minutes. *An hour gets me closer.* I would think in my head as my hands flew over the piano keys. *An hour gets me closer to winning.* For every week: seven hours. This year, I wanted to receive a higher rank than I had years past. This year, I wanted to win.

Throughout the year, in preparing for the competition, I went through a lot of trial and error. At every lesson, the weeks counted down, and at each year, the pieces got harder and harder. I've proved to be one of my piano teacher's top students, but the other competitive all-city pianists outmatch me. But, I shook all those negative thoughts out of my head. With all the effort I've given, I didn't deserve to lose.

The clock numbered one-thirty when I ran up the stairs and was ushered through the doors into the competition hall. I was late. The announcer half-led, half-dragged me to the piano bench where she sat me down and repeated in her fine-tuned voice my name and the pieces I would perform off her clipboard. A long, uncomfortable silence settled as the judge wrote critiques and evaluations from the last performance onto a sheet of yellow paper. I took that moment to observe the room.

The room was full of pending and anticipating emotions like what you would find in a doctor's waiting room. The authoritative, wintry blast of the AC stretched out the tension of the room to an unbearable point. I shivered in the pale, yellow dress I wore. The judge sat at a desk in a cramped position in the middle of the enormous concert hall. Behind him, the vigilant eyes of the audience sat like owls eyeing prey. These were parents of the contestants; they were more aggressive and competitive than their children.

I wiped my shaking, sweaty hands on the skirt of my dress. The judge gave me a short nod and I played.

A time ago, my piano teacher found that I had a natural knack for Debussy. She chose a sweet and fickle piece; speedy and impatient. I could not help but sound choppy and hesitant at first. I tried to add more emotion and elegance to my music and leaned into the piano. I closed my eyes –by then, I had the piece memorized- and envisioned myself back at home. Advice from my teacher floated behind my eyes: sharp here, softer there, G Major chord, A Major, D Major seven... All three pedals were used to help me make my melody float and fill the room. The audience behind me had blurred into the faded carpets on the wall. I hadn't forgotten about them, but they just didn't matter anymore. Before I knew it, I neared the end. Like an empty boat drifting off to sea, my song suddenly faded. My fingers landed splayed across the piano on my last note, and I inwardly congratulated myself for achieving the difficult chord. I finished. Then, it was silent.

The adrenaline that sat tight in my stomach escaped and my mind snapped back to reality. My brain buzzed as if insects flew around in it and I dazedly looked at the audience. I felt as if the universe was staring at me as I bowed, and hated the feeling of being so exposed. The “owls” clapped neutrally from their perches as I walked on wobbly legs to my seat. I could just sense the smugness and triumph in their claps because I didn't play as well as they thought I would. My father rubbed my shoulder. “Good job.” He whispered. My sister gave me a thumbs-up. In the nine minutes I preformed, the judge had filled the critique sheet with notes and it overflowed onto the

next page. I wondered, is he giving me compliments or critiques? Do everybody's sheets look like mine? It was an ugly yellow color and I feared to know what was on it.

In summary, the contestants that played after me portrayed their skills to the ultimate level. All the contestants played beautifully, gracefully, and seamlessly. They filled all expectations like the perfect musicians they were bred to be: their music; twice as hard, their playing; twice as good. It wasn't that I played badly, they played so well.

I came in last place. As we exited the competition hall, I joked with my father and sister and pretended that the loss meant nothing to me. But a wave of disappointment welled up in me with each step I took. It was a warm sunny day and the glare off of cars in the parking lot hurt my eyes. My dress felt itchy and hot and my high-heels pinched my feet. Our car had been parked in the very back.

Sometimes I win. Sometimes I lose, and today, it was my turn to. Even though I may not have played well enough for the judge, the audience, or my instructor, I played well enough for me. As long as I am satisfied of the way I played, my opinion is the only thing that matters.

*Maggy Liu*  
*Saratoga, CA*



*Narration - Senior*  
*1<sup>st</sup> Place*

## Sixth Period Rivalry

Hazy heat waves rose off the pavement on my first day of high school. The afternoon sun roasted my back mercilessly. Strands of my hair stuck to my face, glued there by sweat and tears (I had cried a little in the library during lunch, before I was kicked out by the librarian for not studying). Though it was already September, summer refused to leave; its characteristic clear sky and hot weather made school even harder to endure.

I felt pathetic as I stood before a dark green door labeled ROOM 180. Five periods had passed, five periods of sweaty palms, shaky breathing, and quiet, crushing loneliness. No one had talked to me. No one had even addressed me personally, except for an impatient lunch lady ("Are you buying food or not?"). And now, I had to face math class, my most feared and hated subject. I breathed in deeply and pushed the heavy door open, chanting, "Only one more period, only one more period" over and over in my head.

Harsh fluorescent lights lit the room and reflected off the linoleum tiles, giving them a greasy sheen. The air held the odor of dry-erase markers, mixed in with the pungent scent of Chinese take-out. Sure enough, my teacher greeted her new class while snacking on a piece of sweet-and-sour pork, held tightly by two wooden chopsticks.

"Welcome to Algebra II," she said. Her voice was peculiar; it sounded as if someone had twisted her vocal cords and pinched her nose permanently, forcing her to adopt a strange nasal, high-pitched tone. "Please sit wherever you want, for today."

Friends smiled and sat with each other, forming the same social bubbles they had made at lunch. The computer nerds, who passed notes written in binary, sat up front, while the tennis players, easily identifiable with their wristbands, lurked in the back corner. I quickly slipped myself into a seat next to a girl with green hair, eager to avoid being the last person standing, alone.

"My name is Ms. Bird," the teacher told us, the unflattering lights deepening her wrinkles and glinting off her glasses. "I'll address what you guys care about the most first," her thin lips stretched into a toothy grin, "your grades." Intrigued murmurs fluttered across the room.

"You will be seated according to your grade in this class," she said. "This way, for partner quizzes, where you will work with the person next to you on a quiz, you'll be matched with someone of similar level to you. The people with the highest grades will sit to the right of the class, lowest on the left."

"For identification," she continued, "after last year's fiasco with using people's names, I've decided to use your student I.D. numbers. Number 1 on the list will be the student with the highest grade."

Confused, I looked around the room. My old school emphasized good grades, but never to this extent. I was a complete alien to this system of extreme academic rivalry.

Everyone else listened calmly, their bland expressions showing their familiarity with such blatant academic competition. Though Ms. Bird offered no prize for being Number 1, they all desired that coveted spot. I noted the way they leaned in when she gestured to the desks on the right, as if they were dogs and she had the ball. *Go fetch*, I

imagined her saying, tossing the first rank out as the ball. In my mind, the students followed, running and barking.

I giggled. The green-haired girl looked at me, and to my complete surprise, introduced herself. "I'm Melanie," she said.

"Hi," I replied, scrambling to appear cool and confident. "I'm Charlotte."

The next day, I ate lunch with Melanie and her friends. They were friendly, I suppose, even if they did look at me as if they were sizing me up, as if they were trying to figure out if I posed a threat to their own ranks.

I walked through the halls with my new group. At lunch, students naturally formed circles of friends, dotting the quad like herds of wild animals on the savannah. But there were a few lone kids sitting alone, eating their food silently.

One of Melanie's friends smirked and turned to me. "That's Haley," she said, pointing to one of the loners. "She's a freak."

"Oh." I didn't really know how to respond to that.

"Oh yeah," Melanie joined in, "she was the one who had that weird outburst in sixth grade. Something about how grades don't mean anything, how it won't really matter when we're grown up. That the ranking system is stupid." Melanie's laugh punctuated her sentence. Everyone started laughing too, at poor, silly Haley, who didn't understand.

I joined in and religiously adopted this new mindset: competition mattered. Sadly, I didn't realize just how much it mattered until later.

Knowing that my new classmates were total nerds eased me into my new school's culture. I was lucky enough to have Melanie and her group of friends; being included was

worth the price of studying. If I had to work, I would at least work with friends, and not alone. We spent afternoons in the local library, pouring over our textbooks, the air buzzing with, “Can I borrow your calculator?”

Along with a community dedicated to studying, the addictive taste of success helped me compete. I felt fireworks of pleasure and pride whenever I saw my grade climb another rank or two. I felt even more satisfaction when I discovered that I had bested Melanie for several weeks.

I stayed up late almost every night, studying furiously for that fearful class. Even when I finally flopped into bed, I went over formulas in my head instead of counting sheep. I passed lunchtime wolfing down cardboard-like pizza, then dashing to the library to study, sometimes alone, sometimes with Melanie. Some days, I would be poring over a history book while eating illicit chips behind the librarian's back. Mostly, though, I was slaving over algebra, discovering the value of the mysterious letter "x" and graphing squiggly lines.

Every Monday, I rushed to my fifth period class, eager to see my grade before anyone else. Made of cork and showing decades of wear from pushpins and clips, the bulletin board was as standard as those in any other classroom in the country. But it wielded an unspoken power over us students, taking our dreams and hopes and exposing them for all to see. I.D. numbers did nothing to conceal our identities; everyone knew that Mark, seated in the leftmost corner seat, was number one, and that Jenny, who sat at his right, was number two.

One Thursday afternoon, we stayed in the library as usual, doing homework and studying for an upcoming quiz.

"How do you do number five?" I asked Melanie, after struggling with it for at least fifteen minutes.

A few seconds passed while Melanie thought. "Like this," she finally replied, taking my pencil and scribbling a formula on my paper. "Find the square root of that, then divide by two."

One of Melanie's friends interrupted, "Aren't you supposed to square it first, then—" She stopped suddenly. I looked up from my homework and saw a strange look pass between the two girls. With more important things to ponder over, I dismissed it quickly. After all, I had a quiz to ace.

The next Monday, after a particularly tricky quiz on system equations, I sprinted down the halls to Room 108. I saw the other, faster children, already at the bulletin board and chattering about the results. "Excuse me!" I cried. They ignored me.

*Screw etiquette*, I thought, and elbowed my way past them. I found my number, and involuntarily gasped aloud.

One quiz caused me to drop nearly ten ranks. The sight of my number so low on the list shattered me, and I slunk back to my seat, crushed. Ms. Bird walked by and dropped my quiz on my desk.

"How did you do?" Melanie looked concerned. I knew her compassion was insincere. She wanted to beat me as badly as I wanted to beat her. Melanie knew my I.D. number and undoubtedly had already checked my grade. I would have.

"Mrmph," I replied. "You?"

"Rose another two ranks." Her tone was nonchalant, but I detected the poorly hidden pride, the self-satisfaction of finally beating me, an upstart newcomer. I forced my lips into a smile, and looked at my test.

I missed four points on number seven, a problem nearly identical to one that Melanie had helped me on just last week. Ms. Bird had circled the formula that Melanie suggested to me, with a scrawled note, *Why are you using this? Wrong one.*

I looked at Melanie again, at her smug smile, and realized that Melanie had never really been my friend.

Fortunately, the bell rang before I started yelling foul insults. We parted; Ms. Bird gave us our new seats based on our rank. I stood up to let Melanie take my seat, fighting the strong urge to slam *Algebra II: The Textbook, Course 2* onto her head.

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I trudged to the library alone after class, leaving the school before Melanie could find me. I didn't trust myself to act civil around her, at that point. My animosity, a furious maelstrom of hate, swirled towards her.

Her betrayal hurt. For some reason, I kept the fact that she was my competition in the background until it had to be brought up, unpleasantly, every Monday. Most of the time, I deluded myself with the thought that if she were my friend, she would work towards a common goal with me: my grade.

I had worked so hard for that test, stayed up till the sky bled pink and orange, studying for that test. Recalling those days where I entered first period resembling a panda with my dark eye-circles, I felt indignation rise up in my throat; *I* deserved that

rank more than Melanie; *I* had worked harder; *I* was smarter. *I* hadn't tricked anyone for my rank.

I stomped through the automatic glass doors, stalking past the children's section to the study area. Unfortunately, there were no empty tables. I scanned the room for someone I knew.

"Mind if I sit here?" I asked Jenny Turner, who was both revered and hated for her elite position as number two in Ms. Bird's sixth period class.

"Sure." Her neon blue braces glinted when she spoke, clashing horrendously with her orange shirt. I sat down and continued to sulk about Melanie while reading formulas and postulates.

After a few minutes, her chirpy voice interrupted my stormy thoughts.

"Hey," Jenny said, "Could you help me with number twelve? I don't get it."

I was surprised that Jenny, a complete math-whiz, was asking me for help. I read number twelve. It was surprisingly simple and could be solved by using the main formula we learned for our current chapter.

Then I realized how powerful my current position was.

"I think you have to use some stuff we learned way back in chapter three," I explained, flipping back through the textbook. "You know, the stuff about cubic graphs."

"Oh," she looked at her problem, brow furrowed. "All right. Thanks!"

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A week later, I stared the size 11 Arial font and found my number at rank two, the highest that I've ever managed to climb to.

Everything was righted again. Melanie was below me, as she should be, at rank ten. Jenny, formerly rank two, had slid down to rank four. I knew why, of course. Ms. Bird was not the most imaginative of teachers, and often reused homework problems for test questions by simply changing the numbers around.

Jenny walked over, her neon blue braces hidden by a twisted frown. “Did you get number four right?” she asked, eyebrows furrowed.

“Of course,” I turned around, flourishing my test with its “100%!” scribble in red pen. “It was the same as one of our homework problems.”

Jenny’s confused frown deepened into a shocked look of understanding, the same expression that I had worn a few weeks back, when Melanie sprung that trick on me.

“Thanks,” she said, her normally bright voice suddenly stilted, as if she were forcing every syllable out from the back of her throat. “It was really nice of you to help me with that one problem at the library.”

The bell rang, signaling the beginning of class. Jenny gave me one last look, not of hatred, but disgust, like I was below her, even if my number was two places higher than hers.

I caught Melanie’s eye. She looked at me with understanding, and strangely, also sympathy. *We’re the same, you and I*, her stare said. Then she looked down at her paper, her hand idly brushing a lock of poison-green hair away from her face. Green, the color of envy.

Ms. Bird started the class. Thanks to my high rank, I sat in the front-most row of the room and was blessed with a nice view of the grade ranking sheet. I looked at the little characters, spelling out our places in life, or at least, in this class. From a few feet

away, the letters and numbers blurred into each other, until they were a meaningless jumble of black on white.

I felt as I did on the first day of school, watching my classmates unconsciously lean towards Ms. Bird as she explained the ranking system, like planets to the sun. How ridiculous it seemed then, these kids placing so much feeling and time into those abstract numbers.

But I understood now. I knew why they clambered over each other for higher ranks, clawing and biting all the way. The insatiable urge of competition compelled them.

I leaned back in my seat, just another robot—albeit a slightly enlightened one—in some strange dystopia, listening to Ms. Bird lecture, in that strange, broken voice of hers, “School is practice for future life, children, don’t you ever forget that.”

I stood up suddenly, interrupting Ms. Bird’s talk, and walked towards Jenny’s desk, my apology struggling to free itself from my throat.

“I’m sorry,” I blurted out. Her eyes widened with surprise behind her glasses.

“Charlotte, sit down!” Ms. Bird snapped, “Detention today, after school!”

Now, I knew why Haley and all those other loners chose their fate. They had realized that Ms. Bird’s idea of competition had a high price, a price they did not want to pay. And now, neither did I. The sweet taste of winning isn’t worth selling your soul.

Cheryl Chang  
San Jose, CA



Narration - Senior  
2<sup>nd</sup> Place

## Do It for Love

*“Don’t do it simply to win. Do it because you enjoy it, because it brings you joy.”* The man who spoke these words has since long gone, but his words have been imprinted in my heart for a lifetime.

Looking back at our musical career, it seems as if our whole life has been a constant competition. As beginning cellists, it was all about who was able to play the higher notes perfectly in tune. Later on, it was who had the higher seating. And now, it is who could bask in the glory of being a soloist.

“Guys, can you please shut up. I have a quick announcement to make.” The conductor stood and tapped his baton on his stand. “As you all know, the young artist’s competition will be taking place in a few months. The audition tapes are due by the end of February. That gives you a good month and a half to practice. I’m expecting tapes from all of you.” He paused for a moment, turning his head slightly towards his right, staring straight at us. Then he continued, “There will be a maximum of one performer, minimum of zero.” Nervous titters came from around the room at the conductor’s sarcastic remark. But I hadn’t spoken a word. Neither had he.

“Right. Let’s begin with Tchaikovsky.” We waltzed through the first half of rehearsal. Being co-principals, we were expected to switch seats the second half, so we each had an equal turn at leading the section. Up until today, we had always welcomed this exchange, often adding along a burst of sarcasm such as, “Your turn to be tortured.”

But today, the switch was silent. As I took my seat into first chair, I felt his stare on my back, but I ignored it, thinking that he would get over it like he always did. Little did I know.

I had quickly decided on which piece I would be competing with. Of course, he did too. And as fate had it, it was the exact same piece. Of course he would pick this, I thought to myself as I heard the somber melody drifting out the window as I walked by his house. We had met at one of Yo Yo Ma's concert, where this magnificent piece of art was on the concert program.

In the short month and a half that ensued, I ate, slept, and dreamt my piece, and his piece, with no doubt that he was doing the same. When I got tired after practicing for three hours straight, I would occasionally take a walk down his block and see how he was doing. The advantages greatly outweighed the disadvantages of playing the exact same piece. As I sat on his lawn, with my legs crossed, staring at the peeling paint on his garage door, the melody that had only moments ago drifted beautifully out the open window became strained, as if it was now being forced out. Then it stopped. A quick movement at the window, then it banged shut and I could hear no more.

The audition tapes had been mailed in. All we could do now was pray and wait, wait and pray. Orchestra rehearsals were now filled with tension. Conversation rarely exchanged between us, and the ones that did were terse and quick. To what extent would this competition test our already strained friendship?

"Guys, can you please shut up. I have a quick announcement to make." The conductor stood and tapped his baton on his stand. Anxiety filled the room. "In my hand is a piece of paper, on which is written the names of sixteen musicians. To those whose

names are not called out, better luck next time. To those who hear your names, your pain and misery has only just begun.” He began reading off names, like a teacher reads off roll-call: a few unfamiliar names, and then, “Jonathan Meyers.” A sigh of relief came from besides me, while I drew a sharp breath and held it. A few more names, then finally, the sixteenth and final name, “Nicole Brookshier.” I released the breath I had been holding and my head spun. I turned slightly to my left and quickly glanced at him, but he was looking out the window, staring at the deep blue sky. He was in. And so was I. The conductor couldn’t have been more accurate. Our journey had only just begun.

Fast forward to the day of the final competition. I was to perform right after him. Of course they would put us right next to each other. We were playing the same piece, after all. I sat in one of the chairs placed backstage, cradling my cello, watching him from afar. I could tell he was nervous, which wasn’t very often seen in him. Then his name was called. Stiffly, he stood up, picked up his cello, and slowly walked towards the stage entrance, which I happened to be sitting next to. I watched as he got closer and closer. Each step he took seemed to get heavier, until he was almost dragging his feet along. Then he passed right by me, his eyes set on the stage. I gave a deep sigh and sent out silent prayer that things would go back to normal once this was over, things like our broken friendship.

I quietly walked into the audience and took a seat in the front row, at the very end as to not distract him with the sight of me. We had always been there to cheer each other on from backstage, but I sensed that he didn’t want me there today, and it seemed that I was right. He took a deep breath, and I took one with him. Then he began to play.

As the piece progressed, he began sweeping his eyes across the audience, an automatic reaction when one opens their eyes onstage. But then his eyes found mine, causing his hand to falter and slip. Somewhere, a train began barreling down a track.

The chord came out completely wrong, distorted. Startled, the judges looked up from the music and glanced at him, eyebrows raised. Silently, he placed his bow on the ground and stood up. Time seemed to slow as he raised his cello far above his head, offering it to the heavens. What goes up must come down. But it didn't drift down lightly like a feather. It came crashing down, with an ear-splitting bang at the end. Then he turned once more to look at me. The train rammed into me at full-speed, crushing me completely as realization finally hit me. All these months, his playing and our friendship had been ruined by this competition. And now, he himself had been ruined, too.

I walked backstage, mentally prepping myself for my own audition, and at the same time, trying to make more sense of what just occurred. Someone grabbed my arm, and I turned around, and looked right into his face. For the first time in months, he spoke to me without any of the tension and strain there previously was. "Don't make the same mistake I did. Don't do it simply to win. Do it because you enjoy it, because it brings you joy." I tilted my head, confused. Then my name was called. "Good luck," he whispered, and slowly retreated into the darkness. Boldly, I walked onto stage.

Taking a seat at center stage, his words replayed in my head as the judges looked over my music. They nodded at me, and I positioned my bow. His words finally sank into me. *Do it for love.* I closed my eyes and began to play.

*Stephanie Guo  
San Diego, CA*



*Narration - Senior  
3<sup>rd</sup> Place*

## Queendom

Reyna's hand leapt to her mouth as she regarded me from her throne. "Kathryn?"

*Leave it to Reyna to make a yawn out of my name. Worst of all, it isn't even the right one.* I turned towards her, my backpack suddenly feeling as if it had been filled with lodestones. *Kathleen, tell her your name. Kathleen -* My hands clutched the insides of my pockets with a new urgency. *Tell her, tell her.*

"Hi," I managed, thankful my voice stammered only slightly.

Today was my seventh day at Mistyfront. Of course, being new didn't matter. At any rate, it wasn't as if this was the first time. The reality remained: Reyna was *the* Queen of Mistyfront High. Even her name added a new dimension to the fact.

As I watched, Reyna pursed her lips in a crude effigy of a smile. "I haven't seen you 'round much."

Outside, lightning crackled. It had been raining since the first day of school. Seven straight days of slick sidewalks and muddy bathrooms.... Rain was bad news. Face-to-face confrontations with Reyna Min were, if possible, even worse. Anyone with half a cerebellum knew Reyna. Even when I went to Findworth I knew her name. We shared a piano teacher, an art studio, not to mention a surname. As a matter of fact, if I picked up *The Mistyfront Daily* today, at this very moment, it was likely I'd find a mention of her somewhere within its pages, if not on the cover.

I looked around the cafeteria, hoping we didn't have any speculators. Alas, no such luck.

We now had the attention of the whole Court. This included King Amad and the *Notables*: Kyle "Straddy" Yi, the concertmaster of our chamber orchestra, and Sofia Prose, the editor of our yearbook (*Delusion*). The *Notables* were usually in charge of direct dealings with the "lessers"—that is to say, more mundane nerds such as myself—which is why this encounter with Reyna was more than a little out of the ordinary. Queen Reyna never spoke to a lesser, although I could be considered a special case. I mean, we shared a last name. *Min*. It was just one tiny syllable. And in the big scheme of things, I wasn't sure if it made a difference. As far as Reyna was concerned, we weren't related.

Almost absentmindedly, she began playing a game of tug-of-war with her own two thumbs. She made the right one win, then lose, then draw; and repeat, this time with the left thumb as the predetermined victor. After a few moments, she let her hands drop to her knees and turned that familiar sepia gaze back on me.

Now she raised one delicate hand to adjust the frame of her glasses. They were the blocky, eggplant-thick type no one else wore at Mistyfront – and for good reason. I'd seen Reyna royally pissed before. It wasn't a pretty sight.

As I watched, her gray eyes moved to the window. Outside, the cumulonimbus clouds were coalescing. Reyna crossed her arms. "You're competing in the Chamber Music Festival. You and Amad." Her creamy white turtleneck seemed tighter around her neck than ever. "Against me." A pause. "Isn't that nice?"

By now we had the attention of most of the Lessers, too. Chem nerds, band geeks, Mathletes, and Pulitzer Prize hopefuls alike were gathered around The Round Table,

watching the two of us. I swallowed hard, listening to my teeth as they chattered amongst themselves.

I wanted to shake my head no, but only managed a little nod in Reyna's direction. Technically, I was competing against both Reyna and Kyle. *Kyle*, who was the best violinist in the whole state. But looking over at him - he was swallowing carrot stick after carrot stick, never stopping for a moment—Kyle didn't mind. (Either that, or he simply wasn't listening. Highly likely, you know.) He couldn't afford to mind.

The only reason why Reyna allowed Kyle at The Table of the Academically Elite, otherwise known as The Round Table With a Few Modifications, was because - as I'd heard - last year, Kyle beat Reyna in the citywide Concerto Competition. Reyna, who had won national awards for her pedagogical talent! Everyone had been afraid that Kyle would be found dead the next day with a forged suicide note, but the following Monday Kyle was still sitting at Reyna's Court... only this time at her right. Considering Amad sat directly to her left... well, it caused quite an uproar.

I turned to Amad now. Maybe he would help me. Amad had been the one to invite me to The Table, after all. The "King of Mistyfront" met my eyes for a split second - licked his lips - then dropped his gaze. I bit my lips to suppress a sigh. Queendom, indeed.

"A little quiet, aren't you?" Reyna's lips curved with a smile that didn't quite meet her eyes. "What are you doing here, anyways? Gloating over a victory you haven't yet won?"

Besides her, Amad was silently shaking his head at me. Back away now, he said, or you'll have to switch high schools again. The coward.

Suddenly, Sofia stood up, pale green eyes expressionless. I figured she was probably off to buy some mineral water or something. But then I realized with a start that she was heading right for Reyna's throne.

And *me*.

Oh, that was it. I was going to get slapped... by Sofia, no less. I looked down at my feet. The safe, reliable Kathleen told me to leave, to give up on The Round Table. Let things return to the Status Quo, she whispered.

But all those hours spent practicing piano, pounding out measure after measure of ringing chords, delicate cadences, and mechanical scales... Being chosen to accompany Amad, first chair flute... the thrill jumping up and down in my toes at the prospect of the first good showing at a festival competition in years.

I breathed in deeply, and, leaning over the cafeteria table, set down my half-eaten bowl of rice and teriyaki chicken. Then I placed my hands at my sides, pleased they didn't quake, and turned to face Sofia.

After a moment, though, I realized she wasn't speaking to me. "Rey," she said, "Rey, she is your cousin, after all."

I took a step towards Sofia, torn between folding my arms around her as tight as humanly possible and slapping her face. Nevertheless, I wound up doing neither. Instead, I watched as my hand curled over the edge of the table. It wasn't cold. It wasn't clammy.

In the end Rey was only two days older than me. In the end she was just a nerd, like the rest of us. King. *Notable*. Lesser nerd. Queendom, Queen dumb. In the end we were all made of the same stuff. In the end we – the self-proclaimed lessers – were responsible for creating all the titles, the hierarchy, even naming The Round Table.

Whether it was in the spirit of competition, the passion, the adrenaline, I don't know. Rey didn't need to lift a finger - we "lessers" were already creating a full-fledged delusion well enough on our own.

One thing was for sure: competition was immortal, undying. It would be impossible to exterminate the spark so inextricable tied with survival: history was an indicator of that.

The humdrum of the cafeteria tapered to silence as my gaze met Reyna's. Slowly, without hesitation – as if she'd been planning to the whole time - my cousin lifted one hand and gestured at the empty seat besides Kyle. "Kathleen." Her voice lowered a pitch. "Sit."

*Kahealani Chai  
Bellevue, NE*



*Exposition - Elementary  
1st Place*

## Compete?

Competition can be seen in sports, games, contests and even in school. It has a great deal of value and you can learn lessons from it. In fact I believe competition teaches lessons on sportsmanship everyone should learn at one time or another. Competition can bring out good sportsmanship or bad. The things you learn from people and their actions when competing can make an impact in your life.

A good thing you learn from competition is better sportsmanship and to accept things that a referee or umpire may call for certain sports like soccer, football, and baseball. Usually when you compete you have to learn some sort of team work. That helps with great life experience along with sports. You can also learn to considerately accept wins and losses because most things like board games are just for fun. When you compete with good sportsmanship, it is to have fun not to belittle opponents.

You can also learn poor sportsmanship from people that take competition to extreme levels that aren't quite necessary. Like some people that have poor sportsmanship think they have to win every game to be able to have a good time at what you're involved in. They believe usually that if you want to win it's necessary to belittle other opponents. They also cheat as needed to win every game possible. It is very simple to have bad sportsmanship if you aren't taught properly. For example if a coach tells you to do something against the rules or always blames an unfortunate failure on one of their players you learn this is okay. This is teaching bad sportsmanship to players and younger

spectators.

I play in four sports that are high levels of competition. I have experienced playing teams with good sportsmanship and bad sportsmanship. I don't at all like playing teams with coaches that teach their team's terrible sportsmanship. It makes playing any sport against that team less fun. Would you like playing only to be pushed or shoved? I don't one bit. It is very irritating, but as a player in competition I learn to deal with these things as they come. I do wish there was only an upside to competition but, unfortunately, there is a downside too. It would be wonderful if the downside could be changed, but it is difficult to change others' attitudes. All I can do is compete with integrity.

Competition can bring out the best and the worst. Competing can be a great experience or make you feel bad if the other team does not show sportsmanship. That is the fortunate and unfortunate truth about competition.

*Jonathan Vasquez  
Englewood, NJ*



*Exposition - Elementary  
2<sup>nd</sup> Place*

***“If you’re able to be yourself, then you have no competition. All you have to do is get closer and closer to that essence”***

When I was asked to search for an inspirational quote that dealt with the word competition, and after reading God knows how many quotes, there was one that drew me from the rest. The quote was written by Barbara Cook a 50’s American singer and Tony Award winning actress, and it states, “If you’re able to be yourself, then you have no competition. All you have to do is get closer and closer to that essence.” This quote is the epitome of all of the teachings my parents have passed down to me in order to achieve goals in my life. In other words it does not matter how many times you fall, just as long as you get right back up and keep trying your best to excel and succeed.

Competition is a goal that a person or a team sets for themselves in order to accomplish it in a way that is beneficial not only to them, but also to others. Sometimes, people do not understand this concept, and the competition becomes “toxic”. It is my belief that there are three main types of competition, which are self competition, healthy competition and as I stated earlier, toxic or aggressive competition. There are seven main values that can never be broken when competing, which are trustworthiness, honesty, self confidence, respect, loyalty, responsibility for ones actions and perseverance.

Self competition is the strive to constantly better ourselves and opening our minds to new knowledge and use that information in a positive and constructive form to growth in all aspects in our life; such as our school, community, workplace, home and personal

growth. For example, the way that I compete with myself is by maintaining my performance level, constantly improving my weak areas, and creating my own trademark. That means that I will always go that extra mile or put that extra “sauce” in my performance, to make me and my work unique. Consequently, I raise the bar not only for other people but for myself, so the next time I will advance to another or the next level. Like my mom says, “There are people in this world who are born to be nails and others are born to be hammers, and you want to be a hammer”. I will take this a little further than that; I not only want to be a hammer, but a unique hammer. There is no room for mediocrity in my life. If my call in life is to become a basket weaver, as God is my witness, I will be the best and most unique basket weaver that ever existed.

A healthy competition between peers is when a group of people come together to accomplish a goal, by organizing the work, having in mind each individual’s strengths and weaknesses to assign responsibilities. This will in turn strengthen the group as a whole; but what never should be done is use those people’s skills or lack of against them, in order to either work less or point fingers when things do not go well. Working in a group or team has not been an easy experience for me, since I usually seem to be stuck doing most of the work; I think the solution to my problem, is to instead of doing all the work, I have to let go of my control freakiness and become a balance leader. The same can be applied for people working in the same type of businesses; let actions and work performance dictate the success or failure of the rival company, and not empowered ourselves by exploiting our competitor’s weaknesses to bring their destruction.

A “toxic,” or aggressive, competition is when a person will do anything including selling his/her own mother and children in order to win and always come first. I have

heard of cases in where a manager or supervisor has abused their power, and have exploited, mistreated their employees in order to get their way. In my aunt's case her manager stole her ideas and passed them off as his own in order to get a promotion. What he did not count on was that my aunt found out and left his department leaving him in a lurch, because he did not have the sufficient knowledge and enough of an attention span in how to integrate her ideas. As a result 1 year down the road he was FIRED. In conclusion, nothing is hidden between heaven and earth, and the truth sooner or later will come to light. A toxic or aggressive competitions always, always ends in a disaster.

A good example of aggressive competition is Marion Jones a United States athlete that took the hardest fall of all. She had a blossoming and successful carrier until she was stripped of her medals at the 2000 Summer Olympics in Sydney, Australia for doping. She lost a total of 6 medals and had to give up all of her earned titles and promotional deals from the 2000 Olympics and on. After the doping scandal, she was found to be involved in even more crime, including check fraud and perjury. In 2008 she was sentenced to 6 months in jail for her activities. Today, Jones has not returned to the field.

Parents around the world should commit to this quote and my seven values, by learning and applying them first and then teaching them to their children. Parents will not only build a better future for their children; but a new society era will develop full of trustworthy, honest, self confident, respectful, loyal, responsible and perseverant individuals.

*Jessica Nodarse  
Davenport, FL*



*Exposition - Elementary  
3<sup>rd</sup> Place*

## The Reason for Competition

Hello, have you ever competed in a competition? I am competing in one right now! This one is so important I cannot drop out. The reason why competition is so important in school is due to the fact that it can build your confidence, help you to make new friends, and boost your I.Q.

To start with, you will be confident about the competition. Now you can move away from “Doubt Land.” When you win a competition, you will soon see your posture grow taller by the second. Pretty soon we shall all be confidence carpenters. One time, when I was in a beauty pageant, I was a sweaty pig. But when the judges called the winner, it was me! My mom looked at me and said “You’re glowing!”

Equally important, you will always be able to meet new friends while competing. Did you know that 34% of children meet new friends during competitions than does the average child? Since kids compete in competitions, they won’t be lonely at school any more. Then, they would have someone to push them on the swing at the playground. It would be amazing to have someone to tell how you felt while you were there.

Furthermore, you will boost your intelligence! For example, spelling bees—they help you gain better vocabulary. You won’t need to ask about spelling. Also, you can outsmart people. It is my favorite activity.

Now does this change your mind about competitions? Remember the reasons: you will gain confidence, meet new people, and build intelligence. Oops! Got to go. The three-legged race is going to begin. See you real soon.

*Priyadharshini  
Rathakrishnan  
Johns Creek, GA*



*Exposition - Middle  
1<sup>st</sup> Place*

## Competition

I can feel the sweat forming on the top of my forehead. Little by little, it spreads to all the parts of my face. I am so nervous I refuse to eat lunch, for my stomach is already filled with butterflies. My heart is beating extra fast and extra hard; I feel as if my heart might beat out of my chest. I walk out onto the stage, onto that wooden platform. The light shining on me is as bright as the sun could possibly be. Three adults are sitting behind a table in a formal manner. A glass of water is present in front of them, a pen in their hand ready to judge me, and a firm expression set on their faces. I look out into the audience to see if anyone is there to support me. I see my parents and my little brother smiling with a come-on-I-know-you-can-do-this look on their faces. I take a deep breath knowing that I am capable of doing this and that no matter what happens, it would all be for the best. This is just one of the many excellent settings that competitions can be fit into. Competitions have a very positive influence on all perspectives of our society. We should not try to prevent competitions from taking place for the society can benefit from it in numerous ways.

Academics are a very important part of our society. Studies show that participating in competition improves test scores and other aspects of education. Researchers have conducted 25 separate studies in the past. The evidence from over 200 tests has shown that test scores are increased when there is more competition. Another 47 studies conducted showed that competition was beneficial in other educational aspects as

well. There are many examples of the success in academics from competition. The “Space Race” is an excellent example. Research shows that in 1961, President Kennedy gave all educational systems of the world the challenge of increasing their collective efforts. The number of students graduating from colleges and universities had increased by 37 % and the number of students that were becoming math or science majors had almost doubled. Competition can be a motivation to do better in academics for students. Children can acquire much more knowledge and can learn from all the other participants in the competition. The judges’ comments can help them learn from their mistakes; it can show them what areas they need to work on. History shows how our society’s education was improved with global competition. Academics can be taken to a higher level with healthy competition.

Many people are lacking behind in the moral works of our society. Healthy competition can help the society gain confidence and learn many things about how important the moral works of our society are. According to Harvey Howard, a certified teacher, guidance counselor, and student assistance professional in New Jersey, competition can teach children about discipline. He says that the children’s self-confidence can be boosted up. They can accomplish things they had never thought of. The accomplishment could allow them to feel more confident. Harvey Howard also states that when children watch other children their own age participating in a competition and accomplishing something, they may get motivated to do the same thing. According to Harvey Howard, with the right encouragement from the family, children can learn to accept losing the same way they accept winning. Children can be proud of themselves and what they accomplished. When the children gain their self-confidence, it will not be

limited to the competition. It will carry on throughout everyday life activities. The society can soon improve its moral works with the help of some competition.

The philosophical works of our society are not as high as they should be nowadays. Competition encourages creativity and lets children use their imagination. They can think outside of the box, experiment with so many new ideas. Their creativity will increase in the process, thus increasing the levels of the society's philosophical works. Another important aspect of the society is the political works. Many people don't realize that we are witnessing competition regularly. When voting, we are choosing between candidates. Those candidates are running against each other, therefore participating in a competition. These periodic election campaigns help the society choose who or what to vote for. It helps us make the best choice and gives a better perspective of issues facing the society. In the process, candidates will do their best to help the society. The results will be something that the society can benefit from. Without these general types of competitions, our society would not be where it is today. These political competitions help us choose the best leader and help us choose how we want our society to be governed. Competition helps improve our society in several ways.

Although many teachers and parents say that participating in a competition can cause pressure and tension for the children, there are ways to control them. Levels of pressure and tension vary between children, but research shows that children are able to overcome their stress. According to research, certain exercises involving meditation and certain breathing exercises can help many children overcome their stress. Many teachers and parents also state that children can become depressed when they lose in a competition. This is very true, but a loss can lead to success. Many people question that,

but it is actually a very simple concept. Mistakes are the cause of the loss in a competition. Children can learn from their mistakes and correct it the next time. This allows children to practice more and to learn more. It allows them to have an open mind. Another big issue is the fact of jealousy. Children sometimes do get jealous of other children participating in a competition. There is a very simple solution to this. The family needs to support and encourage their children. They need to allow them to believe that each child is special and unique in their own way. Children need to be proud of what they can do. Instead of becoming jealous, they can learn from people. There is always room for more learning and improvement.

I look at the judges to see if they are ready for me to start. My heart seems to be calmer now and the butterflies are gone, leaving a content stomach. I take a deep breath and start singing. After I am done with my song I listen to the judges' comments. They seem to be happy with my performance and I feel like I have done a great job. I am proud of myself and so is my family. I go back to my seat and enjoy the rest of the competition as I see many people come up to the stage and sing. I learn a lot from the others and my self-confidence is increasing. This setting shows that competitions can be very beneficial. Competitions are very valuable to the society. We should encourage more people to participate in competitions and let our society benefit from it in as many ways as possible. Healthy competition is necessary for our society to reach high levels.

*Anjali Shah  
Paramus, NJ*



*Exposition - Middle  
2<sup>nd</sup> Place*

## Competition

What does the word competition mean? The dictionary definition of the word competition is “the act of striving to outdo another.”

We live in a world where competition is inevitable; it’s a natural part of life. Since early times, people have been participating in competitions. The most famous competition is the Olympics in which early Greek and Roman people participated in and were considered the world's largest pageant of athletic skill and competitive spirit. The Olympics were held at a special time every number of years and this competition was conducted not only for entertainment but also for political and religious reasons. A person who won the competition in ancient times put their home town on the map and became very wealthy and powerful. Not much has changed as we compare this to the modern times. Famous basketball players, football players, etc are household names and everyone talks about them like they are talking about a member of their family.

The games that are played in modern times may be different, but the reasons why people compete and what they gain from it are similar. People competed during the Greek Olympics in order to attain permanent glory and fame. Those who failed to measure up and were defeated feared public shame and disgrace. As a result of this reward and punishment, cheating to win occurred frequently in the ancient times as it is also common in modern times. Some recent examples of people going too far in the name of competition include Marc McGwire who admitted to using steroids while

playing professional baseball, the attack on Nancy Kerrigan from Tonya Harding's husband, a fellow competitor, as well as the unaccounted soccer players who have mysteriously died after their teams have lost national games.

Yes, as with everything, there is a Yin and Yang, or dark and bright side, to any competition. When competition is healthy, it provides qualities such as learning of new skills, dedication, and social aspects such as teamwork. Unfortunately, society has glorified competition and celebrated winning to the point where people have a difficult time competing in a healthy way. Too much emphasis and reward is placed on winning and not enough encouragement has been placed on losing and the lessons that can be learned from losing.

Competition can also be viewed not just as rivalry but also the act of pursuing personal success as the end result. If one views competition as an attempt by oneself to advance onwards toward a specific goal, this can have positive impact. For example, if you have a goal of getting straight A's on your report card, you cannot just wake up one morning and do well in school. You have to work hard, put in a lot of effort and go for extra help, if necessary. Competition is directly related to amount of effort provided. The more the effort exhibited to a task the more it pays off in the end.

In any competition, knowing your strengths and developing your weakness into strengths is the fundamental principle. Academic competition is very common among school age children. If your goal is to become one of the brightest kids in the class, you can try to find an academically gifted student. You can speak to them about their study habits and try to compete with them, without being so obvious. If you work harder than you normally do, then you may get a better grade than that person. However, even if you

do not get a better grade than that person, you should still be proud of yourself because of the hard work paid off and you are one step closer to accomplishing your goal of doing better academically than previously.

Additionally, another factor that is important is competing with your own self. The key is to challenge and compete against yourself because if you always try to do better each time, eventually you will become the best. You are your best competitor because you can compete with yourself anytime, anywhere, and for anything. You can even challenge yourself without even knowing. For example, anytime you try to do better than past times, then you are competing with yourself. When one competes with themselves, it makes them a better person. I strive with myself whenever I am doing the mile run in school. I admit that running is not something that I am good at. However, when I do better than the year before, I feel very proud of myself. I get a boost of self esteem which is very important. At the same time, I am becoming a better runner.

So as you can see the difference between the dictionary definition of competition and my definition is that the dictionary states that competition is only when you compete with only somebody else. However, the dictionary definition leaves out a very important aspect of competition and that is self competition for personal success. To me competition is when you compete with yourself or with somebody else to accomplish a goal that is important to you.

I would like to end by quoting Al Unser Jr., a race car driver who said, “Besides winning, the most fun thing is getting out there and mixing it up with friends; it’s the competition.”

*Marisa Garcia  
San Bernardino, CA*



*Exposition - Middle  
3<sup>rd</sup> Place*

## Competition

As I watched people enter and compete in competitions, I was repulsed by their actions. I've seen their behavior and attitude change right before my eyes. I know competitions have been around forever, but really, what games do to individuals is not right. I believe competition is bad; it makes people exhausted, it makes people do things they shouldn't, and most importantly, it brings out the worst in you.

To begin with, people try their best to win competitions no matter if it's sports, dancing, singing, or even writing, they push themselves to the limit. Eventually they get overwhelmed and feel awful. Some may argue that competition gets you active and it makes you feel great. You are doing more and not just lying on your butt. However, it's better to get some rest than no rest at all. Some people don't know how to stop in their determination of winning.

Next, people get so determined to win they'll do anything. Most sports stars turn to drugs. Some people may also choose body suffering. Some people take on more than they can handle. People should not have to turn to these things. Some may argue that people just try to stay fit and healthy and certain things do help. However, most things out in the world are bad for you. Many people don't know how dangerous and what affects there are.

Finally, I've seen people who are so focused on the important things in life, go nuts when in a competition. They begin to stress and become someone they're not. I

believe competition brings out the worst in people. Some may argue it brings out the best and that it gives you a chance to show your true colors. However, not all people are good inside and competition does the work of showing the bad.

In conclusion, competition is bad. It makes people exhausted, it makes people turn to stuff they don't need, and it transforms people into a competitive psycho. We are better than this. We shouldn't let anything come in our way and push us into being monsters.

*Kyung Hwan Chang  
Worcester, MA*



*Exposition - Senior  
1<sup>st</sup> Place*

## The Sweet-Candy System

Competition is a simple reward earning system. One is given more rewards as he or she is more qualified than others. Because of its specialized use to measure an individual objectively, competition has become the most overused tool in our society. Some of the results are discouraged students and demoralized professionals. Moreover, we humans were originally intended to cooperate. Collaboration of efforts is how we have evolved. Currently we are going backward against our true nature. Even though competition is intended to accommodate a good intention which is to reward individuals by awarding them prizes, it is ironic that the system is turning back to attack us.

Competition starts when the young enter a school. They soon realize that the only thing that matters are their grades. Their academic interests, attitudes, and passions are never scored. They try hard to get good grades in order to receive a treat. However, schools' ranking systems sort out the better and the poorer performing students. Fortunately the United States' students ranking system is not as intense as those of other countries. For instance, Korea's school system has seventeen different subjects and six school days a week. Some students even attempt suicide in despair of failure in their academics. These young scholars who grow up with the law of the jungle lack a sympathy and ability to cooperate with one another.

Moreover, this award system demoralizes those who are truly interested in the common good of our society. The competition process requires an instruction in order to compare each other and award them according to their progress. Teachers and judges are given all kinds of rules to follow. Rules are intended to serve the common good of our society by awarding the public workers. For instance, teachers get a bonus if their students get higher grades. In order to get the maximized bonus they have to leave the students who are going to do well by themselves and those students who are never going to do well, but only focus on those in the bubble. Nowadays teachers struggle to keep their bonus and their interest in the welfare of all students.

Our world is far more complicated than those rules in the instructions. There are countless cases that cannot be comprehended. Our society needs bending rules. Bending rules that leave us capable of making a right choice. Fortunately, there are many daily heroes in every corner. A lot of educators spend extra time in order to help those who need help. Judges try to bend the rules in order to serve justice. Police officers devote themselves for the good of all. There is still hope for the future but that hinges upon stopping those who exploit the system by promoting self serving “treat addicts” who only work for the extrinsic good and the tangible prize.

*Cara Palmer  
Commack, NY*



*Exposition - Senior  
2<sup>nd</sup> Place*

## Competition

Competition is something that everyone has encountered at least once in their lives. When we are young, we compete to see who can climb the farthest on the monkey bars or who will stay the longest in an intense game of “Simon Says”. These innocent competitions were an outlet for childhood energy and a test to see who the bravest kid on the playground was. But as we get older, these competitions start to change.

As a high school student, I am faced with competition every day. Competition to see who will get the highest grade in the class is just one of the many challenges an average ninth grader may face. But I also experience materialistic competition. The average fourteen year old girl is pressured into looking a certain way. Teenage girls are often judged on their height, weight, skin color, and hair styles. Being tall, thin and tan with straight hair seems to be the most desirable, sought after “look”. Walking down the halls of my high school, everyone looks like clones of each other. Almost every girl is in a name brand sweat suit or t-shirt, paired with Ugg boots and Coach bags. They have thick eyeliner and their lips are glossed over. It disappoints me to see the lack of uniqueness in everyone, and I’m nostalgic for the days when everyone looked stylish in overalls and sneakers. But this is what teenagers expect from each other; to be just like everyone else.

The most upsetting part is that this is what it takes to be “popular”. The high school has its own social classifications. This is often based on basic things, like your

appearance, personality and friends. I always try to look at this with an open mind, because I can't help but feeling sympathetic for the kid trying to find a table where they would fit in at the cafeteria. The students known as "nerds" or "outcastes" are constantly being made fun of for being socially awkward or shy, personality traits they can't really help having. We're all in competition for these things, and not all adults see that. The popular kids aren't necessarily the ones everyone looks up to. These students usually build themselves up and make themselves appear as something superior to the rest. The athletes are usually always at the top of the social triangle. They're the superstars, the ones who score all the points and get respect from all students for being so talented and brave. The competition athletes face to earn this respect is effortless for them, as they are natural leaders. But for someone like me, a well-known, but not too popular student, the climb from the middle of the social scale to the top can be quite difficult and enduring.

But personally, I do not care to be the next big athlete or just another girl dressed head to toe in name brand clothing. I am still in competition for this, but the game is set. They say in high school, you find who you truly are. It's surprising that most students would rather be like everyone else than show their true talents and grow into successful young adults. I'm the kind of student who takes pride in myself whether it's the 'cool' thing to do, or not. No, I may not wear shirts with "ABERCROMBIE" stamped across my chest. And no, I'm not exactly sitting all alone at an empty lunch table or being bullied. But I consider myself somewhere in the middle. I consider myself a survivor of the most dangerous competition. The competition of finding yourself.

*Kayli Hall  
Paradise, TX*



*Exposition - Senior  
3<sup>rd</sup> Place*

In competition, people usually have a goal. These goals determine whether they believe they have succeeded or failed. What goals should we have in competition to compete successfully? In this essay, I will examine what goals that are the keys to success.

First, many people compete because they want to win. I believe that winning can be a valid goal that enables you to compete successfully because it provides an incentive to work harder. As the Missouri State Activities Association correctly stated, "The desire to win supplies a strong incentive to achieve and improve." I have seen how true this is through my experiences with competition. The desire to become better motivates me to do a better job and to work harder.

However, it is important to remember that having winning as your only goal has severe negative effects of destroying relationships and inevitable failure, and therefore is undesirable. First, it means that your relationships with other people suffer. For example, in speech and debate, if my only goal were to win, then it would be best to fabricate evidence and lie to the judge because it would give my team a competitive advantage. This goes beyond ethics and into relationships, because the team I would have cheated will inevitably find out what I did and I would have lost an opportunity for friendship. Friendships are essential to succeeding in life. This applies to all areas of competition. Finally, if your only goal is to win, then you will find yourself very

disappointed because you cannot always win. Has one football team won every Super bowl? No, and because of this, failure is inevitable when your only goal is to win.

Now that we have seen that one reason people compete is to win, let us examine another reason why people compete, which is to learn. Learning is an important goal. It allows you to get further in life and succeed in competition. However, learning should not be your only goal because when people only learn and do not pause to have fun, they get will not get very far. For example, a few years ago when I competed in the Private School Interscholastic Association I decided to compete in vocabulary. I spent months of studying the three-hundred-word vocabulary list. Even though I got first place at the regional meet, I disliked the vocabulary competition because it had become all about learning and never again entered that event. This experience is not uniquely mine.

In 2008, the New York Times told the story of Ms. Skau, a girl who had just graduated from high school. Ms. Skau spent all her time learning as much as she could. For example; even in after school hours she had hours of oboe practice and band competitions to fit in with hours of volunteer work. In an email message, Ms. Skau said that over her senior year she became burned out. This shows that when learning is all that you do, you become burned out, disappointed and tired. As a result, you are less likely to compete again, you lose a chance to obtain knowledge, and you are hindered from successfully competing.

Having already considered competing to win or to learn let us move on to the last reason to compete, which is to have fun. Having fun is important because it encourages you to continue, something that is essential for success. One example of having fun in competition is my brother John. Now John's main goal in competition is to have fun. He

enjoys meeting new people, making new friends, and cheering for people. If competition weren't fun, he wouldn't compete. But, because it is fun he is able to learn more and gain experience competing. This example demonstrates how having fun can encourage you to compete.

Although it is important to have fun, this must not be your only reason for competing. If your only goal is to have fun then you will not work hard, because working hard isn't always fun. Many things about competing are not fun. For example: it is not fun to get comments about things you need to work on and neither is it always fun to stand in front of a room full of people you don't know and give a speech. When people only do something because it is fun, they will usually end up quitting when they find out that it is not as enjoyable as they hoped it would be. Also, people who compete only to have fun never have the incentive to improve. Thus, only having fun prevents you from being successful in competition.

I believe that to compete successfully, we should have a combination of the goals of winning, learning, and having fun. I ask you to set these goals whenever you are competing. These three goals will enable you to be successful, to improve your skills, and to create new friendships.