

2014 - 5th Annual Six-Pillar Essay Contest
Award Winning Essays
Public and Private Schools

Elementary Schools – Why I Like Character Counts!

2nd Grade – 1st Place

Everything I do in school and at home relates to one of the Six Pillars of Character Counts - even when I play team sports. Trustworthiness, Respect, Fairness, Caring and Citizenship are all very important. I feel that the most important Pillar is Responsibility. Being responsible allows kids to be Trustworthy, Respectful, Fair, Caring, and a good citizen.

Having perfect attendance in school is important to me. It shows responsibility. Since I started at Worton Elementary School in Pre-K, I have only been absent a few times. I take pride in never missing school and being on time. My teachers and principal have given me Perfect Attendance Awards. These awards make me proud and happy. Good attendance is important for all students. It makes you learn more and understand things better. Having perfect Attendance is being Responsible!

Doing homework and cleaning up is important to me. It shows responsibility. Every day when I come home from school and get off the bus, I do my homework with my mom. It makes me a better student. I also clean up around the house and my room. I do these chores to help my family. I also lead by example by helping my little sister. Doing Homework and cleaning up is being Responsible!

Playing sports and being on a team is important to me. It shows responsibility. I really enjoy playing soccer and baseball. My dad is also my coach. I like soccer and baseball because I get to play with other kids on my team. We always try our best, but it is most important to help each other improve and learn. I also help call parents with updates and organize the snack schedule. Playing sports and being on a team is being Responsible!

Perfect attendance, doing homework, cleaning up, and playing team sports are only a few things that make me responsible. I chose these activities because I thought of them as soon as I read the Character Counts essay instructions with my parents. Every Pillar is important, but taking responsibility is important for everyone to do.

2nd Grade – 2nd Place

I feel that fairness should impact most in people's lives. Fairness means to share and have equality. Fairness means to me that you should not be jealous of what others have. Mrs. Farhman taught me that you will not always get what you want. I have learned not be jealous of my big sister when she gets more time on the computer, ipod and reading books. When I get older, I will get those privileges because that would be fair! Fairness is why I like Character Counts!

2nd Grade – 3rd Place

My Character Counts Coach is Mrs. Gray and she teaches us about the six pillars of Character Counts. One day, Mrs. Gray shared a story about when she was a little girl and she shared some of her toys with a child who did not have anything to play with. That made me sad that there were children in our community that did not have toys and it made me happy that Mrs. Gray was fair and shared her toys with the child.

This story made me think about how important it is to share with others and to be fair to those less fortunate. I am proud that my family helps the less fortunate. We give the less fortunate our old clothes. Our clothing helps to keep them warm and happy.

My family also gives them leftover wood to make fires so they are warm. My dad is a carpenter and he helps repair houses that need some work too. We are fair to the less fortunate and help them be warm and safe.

We also help those less fortunate to learn. We give them books, paper and pencils so that they are prepared for school. This is important because if they are not prepared, they may not listen well in class and learn with the other children.

My family also gives canned goods during food drives so they are not hungry. Without good food to eat, people could starve. People need food and water to grow and be healthy.

In conclusion, this is how we help the less fortunate. It is important that we help the less fortunate because they're in our community and we should help our community. Helping others is fair because we should share with others so that everyone is happy.

3rd Grade – 1st Place

I think people should use the Character Counts pillars because it will help them. I like Character Counts because it teaches people how to treat others the way that they want to be treated. My Character Counts coaches are Mr. Hollingsworth and Mr. Goodall. Every week they come to my class and teach us about the six pillars.

One of the pillars is respect. When you respect someone, you must be nice to him or her. Mr. Hollingsworth and Mr. Goodall show respect because they are nice to everyone in the third grade. They take the time from their busy schedule to be with us and help us be the best we can be.

At school, you show respect by being nice to your classmates and by following the teacher's directions. I am quiet in the hallways and I always try to do what I am told to do by my teacher. I think the classroom is a nicer place when we all show respect to each other.

At home you show respect by listening to your parents and being nice to your brothers and sisters. For example, I play cards with my little brother and I help him when he needs a helping hand. I say nice things to my mom and dad. I also show respect by cleaning my room and doing my chores.

In conclusion, I think respect is a very important pillar to use because it will help you to treat others the way they want to be treated and it will make our community a better place to live.

3rd Grade – 2nd Place

I love Character Counts! My character counts coach has taught me about the pillars. I use them in karate and at home.

When I go to karate, I use responsibility and respect a lot. Responsibility means I need to do what I am supposed to do. I have to always do my best. Sometimes I do not know what to do. I have to keep trying until I learn my new moves. I need to practice at home. The more I practice the better I get. Respect means I need to be kind to others all the time. In karate, sometimes my friends need help. I cheer them on to learn new moves or say good job when they are getting better. I do not want to hurt their feelings if they are working hard to get it right. I

just started leadership in karate. I will use respect when I work with other people to learn their moves. I want to help them learn how to do their form.

I have lots of pets at home. I use trustworthiness and caring for my pets. For Christmas I got two kittens. Last week two of my dogs had puppies. We have seven new puppies. I use the pillar of Trustworthiness. I am reliable. I do what I say I will do. I feed the kittens every day. If mommy asks me if I fed them, I will tell her the truth. If I did not feed them, I go feed them. I also use the pillar of Caring quite a bit. I am very kind to my animals. They are little and I have to help them a lot. I help feed my kittens. I also cuddle with them. I love to cuddle with my babies. My mom gets to clean the cat litter box. My puppies live outside. I help dad take care of all the puppies. They have barrels to sleep in with lots of bedding. There are tarps around the kennel to keep them warm. The puppies just turned a week old. Now I can hold them and cuddle with them and kiss them. I am keeping them warm and friendly. I love my kittens and puppies.

Character Counts has taught me how to be nice, be loyal and help others. I hope when I get my black belt, I can teach other karate kids about responsibility and respect. I hope when my kittens and puppies grow up they are kind to me and love me. I hope they trust me and still care about me. I hope they still cuddle with me too.

3rd Grade – 3rd Place

Citizenship teaches us how to be fair and be good citizens. It also teaches us to help our community in many different ways. I learned and practice how to be a good citizen in school, church, and with the girl scouts. I love character counts because it taught me how to help people. At school, I helped my community by participating in jump rope for heart and making packages for U.S. soldiers overseas. Sometimes you get rewarded for citizenship, like getting to silly string your principal, but I just do it to be nice.

While at church, we made cookies for the nursing home and get-well cards for sick people. We also, bought clothes and toys for kids who did not have them for Christmas. I love citizenship because I like to be a good citizen and help my community. It makes me feel good. I loved to see all of those people being happy.

In Girl Scouts, we went to the beach and cleaned up all of the trash that we could find. It felt good to know that the beach was clean and the animals were safe from pollution. In addition, we went to the animal shelter for the whole day, and helped the workers take care of the animals. We made animal treats for them and

bought them toys. Later that year, we filled shoe boxes of goodies for children of all ages in other countries as Christmas gifts.

I love citizenship so much that I did all of these deeds for the community. Doing good things can also encourage others to do the same. If you do it once, you cannot stop. I showed my friends how to do some of these things and they showed me different ways to help in return. I am really glad that my character counts coach taught me the six pillars and especially, citizenship!

4th Grade – 1st Place

Character Counts is a program that will teach kids the importance of having a good reputation. It teaches us that if we are kind to others and make good choices, we will get a good job and have a nice family. There are six very important pillars of character - Caring, Citizenship, Fairness, Trustworthiness, Respect, and Responsibility.

One pillar that is very important to me is Caring. One time there was a girl that was getting picked on. Everyone was laughing and no one helped her. So, I spoke up. I told the bully to leave her alone. After I did that, I felt proud of myself. The girl was probably glad that I did that too. Others definitely were thinking about how Caring I am.

Another pillar that is very important to me is Responsibility. School teaches me to be responsible. Every night I have homework that I need to complete and turn in the next day. At home I am responsible for cleaning my room. Learning responsibility now will help me in the future when I get a job. Being responsible will show the boss I'm a good worker. This will make me more successful.

One person in my life that is a role model for me is my older cousin, Celia. I know I can count on her to defend me from others, especially my cousins. On Christmas Eve all of my cousins and I gather at my grandparents house. Immediately my cousins start teasing me, but not Celia. She gives me strategies to deal with them like walk away and ignore them. She says to not let them bother me because I am a great guy! She tells me to stay strong at all times!!

Character Counts has changed me. The program touches my heart. With this program, kids will grow up having a good job and a good family. When that happens to me, I will silently thank my coaches for the lessons they taught me about life.

4th Grade – 2nd Place

I love character counts because everyone is happy. Every Monday I learn about character from our coach, Dr. Bellows. He is very nice. He has taught me that there are six pillars of good character; caring, responsibility, fairness, citizenship, respect, and trustworthiness. We learn about having good manners and the importance of making good decisions. Character Counts is important because people who learn about character seem to be happier and prouder.

I show character by being responsible. I understand the importance of homework and getting good grades. When I get home from school I start my homework without being told. My mom likes it when I do my homework right away because she can cook dinner and help my little brother. After I finish my homework, I start preparing for the next day. That way mom doesn't have to wait around for me getting ready in the morning and she is on time for work. I know she appreciates that.

Respect is also important to me. It is important to me that people think kindly of me. It is important to show self-control when I am in school. It is also important to use my manners like “please” and “thank you” when I’m at my friend’s house. I want to make sure that I’m invited again. I know that I make mistakes, I just hope they’re not big ones.

I’m very lucky. I have a friend that I think is a good role model for me and for others. My friend's name is Trista. She teaches me all about being a good person because she is one herself. She will tell me if I am doing the wrong thing or the right thing. In school, Trista looks out for me. When someone is being a bully she stops them. She even takes the blame when I'm in trouble. Trista always puts others before herself. One time she gave everyone a treat before she got one. That shows good character. Trista is a really good friend to me.

Character Counts has changed my life. Character Counts makes us feel good about ourselves. I hope one day I can make a difference in someone’s life by being their role model. Maybe one day I can even change the world!

4th Grade – 3rd Place

Mr. Conard has been a powerful demonstrator of respect! For example, when I read with him, he doesn’t interrupt me and he doesn’t criticize my choice of books. I like to read fantasy books such as Ever After High. They are complicated

to read and use funny words. He helps me to better understand them and I help him to understand some of the funny words such as “hexcellent” I really enjoy reading with him.

My coach also respects my feelings. For instance, when my grandfather "Granddy" died, I was really heartbroken. He respected how I felt. When I told him about it, he encouraged me to stay strong and even offered to attend my grandfather's services. He wasn't able to attend because of his travel plans, but I really appreciated his offer.

Because of what he demonstrates every time he visits us, I have learned not threaten anyone. I will use good manners and make positive choices. I will do my best to model respect - just like he does everyday.

In conclusion, I hope that one day I can volunteer my time at H.H.G.E.S., just as my character coach does this year and hopefully next year too. I will let my community know that I care. His respect is inspiring and contagious.

5th Grade – 1st Place

Do you know why I like Character Counts? I like it because I know someone who is a “T.R.R.F.C.C.” role model, my Pop-Pop.

He is trustworthy. I can always count on him to tell the truth. One time on the way to school he let me know that my outfit did not match. I laughed and said, “Pop-Pop, it is Mismatch Day at our school today.” We both laughed then.

A few years ago my parents were unable to pick me up from school at the end of each day. However, they did not have to worry because my Pop-pop is someone we can all count on. He is very responsible. He not only picked me up, but also arrived early each day.

My Pop-pop and his girlfriend Sydney are both respectful people. They love to feed the birds and one time noticed a sick, homeless kitten. It was almost all skin and bones. They could have just ignored it but did not. They bought it food and welcomed it in their home. From showing a little respect, they now have a lifelong friend in their little kitten.

In an effort to be fair, My Pop-pop finds time to keep in touch with every one of his 11 grandchildren. For Christmas this year, he gave every one of us a gift certificate to McDonalds just to be fair.

Even though my grandfather is over 80 years old he really knows what it means to show good citizenship. He volunteers at Kent County High School every week. He works with Dr. Wharton to teach the band students music lessons. He also loves to perform with them too. This really inspires everyone and lets him show his passion for music. He is also teaching me to play the flute. One day I hope to follow my passion for music just like my grandfather.

As you can see, my Pop-pop is the first person my family calls on when help is needed. He is a great guy and really cares about people, animals, and the world. He a T.R.R.F.C.C role model and I love him very much.

5th Grade – 2nd Place

I was living in an abandoned car with some homeless people. I was very hungry and cold so I decided to follow some teenagers to a house in my neighborhood. They fed me some food and some cooked fish that they had for dinner. I saw that a nice family lived there and they were really nice to me and it was warm and friendly there. I was really happy and I was hoping that they would let me stay but soon they had to take me back to the homeless people because I belonged to them and the family thought it was best to return me. But then the people in the car just put me back outside and back into the cold. So then the man from the family noticed that I was following him and he took me back to the warm house and it became my new home. I was feeling really bad and had a terrible hacking cough and my poor tail was hurt and was hanging to one side. Everyone was helping me and it was decided that I needed to see the vet. Whatever that meant, but I was still hurting but very happy. The boy called Ryan was my favorite and I started to curl up and sleep with him. At last I felt safe. But that was only the beginning...

I am getting cozy in my new home but I my tail still hurts and I can't stop itching and scratching. I was a real mess and dirty too. They take me to the vet and we find out that I have a broken tail and I am infested with fleas. They fix my tail even though it is still a little sore and they give me a pill that makes the fleas jump off of me so they have to take me outside. The vet, who I was not so crazy about at first gave them medicine and day by day I started to feel better. The vet said that the nice family should name me Lucky as he said I was very close to dying from something called pneumonia. Now that those problems are solved it's time to go on with my new life.

I'm getting used to living in my new home and I'm getting pretty fat too but I start having trouble breathing again so they take me to the vet for the second time. We find out that I still have pneumonia. They spent a lot of money on the medication to treat the pneumonia and finally the pneumonia goes away and my life becomes very, very good, healthy and happy.

The character in my new family compared to the character in my old family is a million times better. For example, my new family shows the pillar of caring but my old family didn't because they left me out in the cold when my new family fed me food when they didn't even know my name. My new family also has the pillar of responsibility when my old family didn't because my old family was not responsible enough to feed me and take care of me when my new family is always there to feed and be there for me. And I am alive today because of them.

This story was written from the eyes and perspective of my cat Mittens and this is our story because as a family we decided to take responsibility and show much caring and love to a kitten who was left for dead. The love and caring and the great responsibility my family has put into my cat is a large amount and to be totally honest Mittens has come into my life when I had needed a friend the most. I have learned from this experience that character is what makes us as human beings humane. I learned these pillars from my awesome character counts teachers Mr. Hazel Arnold and Ms. Lauren Kemp. I believe that caring and responsibility are the most important character counts pillars and I think that everyone should have good character because if everyone had good character then the world would be a better place.

When you have good character it tells people that you are a good person and people will like to be around you and it can show others the right way to act or to do things in the right manner possibly even learn from you. The only reason that we even kept my cat mitten's was that my family felt responsible for him and the condition that he was in. We showed responsibility and caring and from now on nobody will ever treat my cat Mittens without caring or responsibility ever again, or any other living creatures for that matter. In conclusion I would just like to thank my character coaches and all character coaches for taking time out of their day to come in and help us learn. People helping people and animals for that matter, is what makes for good character... And that is what I have learned, thanks again for reading my family's story of how we helped a kitten and gained a best friend.

5th Grade – 3rd Place

Character Counts is a program that teaches you how to be a good person. We have a coach that comes in once a week and teaches us about the important pillars of character by using life lessons. The six pillars are caring, respect, responsibility, fairness, trustworthiness and citizenship.

Two pillars that are important to me are citizenship and caring. Helping in the community benefits everyone in the community. I help in the community by recycling in my school. I take the recycling from each of the classrooms in the school. The county takes it to the factory where it will be turned into something useful like benches, toys, and clothes. Recycling helps the earth stay clean. It also saves trees. Citizenship is important because if people help the community, the community will be clean and people will be happier.

Another way I show citizenship is by cleaning and protecting oysters in the bay. Helping the oysters helps the bay. Oysters filter the bay and without them the bay would be dirty. Animals could not live near the bay. People would not have jobs near or on the bay.

Caring is another important pillar. I show caring by donating clothes to people in need. People sometimes can't get clothes, so by donating mine I help them. It is a good feeling to know that somebody is warm in the winter because of a coat I donated.

A lot of people in my community show good character. For example, a doctor. They help people by making them healthier. Doctors are caring. Another person who shows good character is a teacher. They care about our success. Teachers are good role models. Teachers help you with your problems in school. They make sure your doing your best so that you can grow up and be successful.

Character Counts changes people into positive role models. It's changed me into a better person.

Middle Schools – *How Character Counts Has Impacted My Life* 6th Grade – 1st Place

The pillar that has affected my life the most is responsibility. Every day I must be responsible at home, at school, and even during my recreation time.

Learning to be responsible is making me a better person. My parents, teachers, and friends know they can rely on me to do whatever is expected of me.

At home I am learning responsibility through my daily chores and caring for my animals. Each day I must feed my cattle and chickens and make sure they have fresh water. I also have to check on their health and see if they have a dry place to lie in the barn. I am also responsible for filling out big outdoor wood furnace that must be filled every night and not forgotten because it provides heat for our house. In the summer I have to help mow the grass whenever necessary. These are some of the things that teach me responsibility at home.

At school I am taught responsibility by doing my homework and keeping up with my class-work. During the school days I must do the assignments that are assigned every day. I like to do extra credit if I can. Also, if I there is extra time in class I will read a book instead of talk to friends, They are some of the ways that I am learning responsibility in school.

Each time I go hunting I learn and show responsibility. Every time we go I must be responsible with the weapon I carry by keeping it pointed in a safe direction. I also have to be responsible by not breaking the rules or laws. That is how I am responsible during recreation.

Responsibility is a very important pillar in everybody's character. It's good to know you can be counted on in any situation. As I grow older responsibility will help determine what job I have. Responsibility will continue to shape me as I grow up.

6th Grade – 2nd Place

When you live life in the fast track of middle school, it can be hard to remember to be caring and responsible. Character really does count! First impressions, reputations, trust, and how others treat you all depends upon how you act. When you are a happy, caring person, good people are drawn to you. Being responsible and caring is a very big part of that.

Some days it feels like you blink and the day has gone by, so it's important to do the next best thing and to make good choices. Being responsible is part of your daily life and life is full of choices. You can choose to be responsible by following rules, keeping a good schedule, and making sure you live your life with good morals. It's important to take responsibility now, because as we get older, our duties

and schedules only get more complicated. Life doesn't last forever, so make it count!

It's really important to be responsible to make and keep good friends. When you are responsible, people will trust you and want to be around you. On the flip side, if you are not responsible, you can get into a lot of trouble by making poor choices. It's hard to keep friends or even like yourself much if you constantly lie or get into trouble because you make irresponsible decisions.

When you are caring, other people will care about you. Take the time to smile at other people wherever you are to let them know you care. Reach out to a lonely person or pet, by offering your time to see if you can help or even listen to them when things aren't so great. In turn, when you are lonely, they will care about you. Being a caring person is a key part of friendships, too! It is extremely important to care about each other and just be a good person with a giving heart. I've been living on this planet for about 12 years now and I have found that if you are kind to others, they will be kind to you.

Treat others as you would wish to be treated. Don't get me wrong, that might not always be the case with some people. For example, some people can just be mean for no reason. But when you are mean, that comes back to you. In the end, why would you want to be mean and tear another person down when it's just plain easier to be nice? Kindness matters.

So, in my opinion, character really does count! It's important to be responsible and caring. I know I want to live my life to the fullest and have a lot of friends and people to care about. I feel like making good choices, being happy, reaching out to help others and taking the time to care matters. Love other people and they will love you back. It's that simple.

6th Grade – 3rd Place

Every once- in- awhile my neighbors ask me to take care of their pets while they are gone. Even though I am young, they trust me to do a good job. However, I am not going to lie, I sometimes forget and my dad has to remind me to head next door to feed and play with the animals. Whenever I have the chance to do something good, I think about what pillars of character apply. In this case I am showing (or at least trying to show) trustworthiness.

On the other hand whenever I see someone else behave in a way I think is admirable, I find myself thinking about what pillar of character they are showing.

Every good deed, every act of kindness, every thoughtful word, all show character. Last weekend, our cat was unfortunately struck and killed by a car. This happened in the middle of the night while we were all sleeping. A college student happened to see the accident. After calling the police, he removed the collar and called our house. My dad was able to bring home Chewbacca and we buried him the next day. That college student had no reason to help us. He could have walked on by. In the morning we might have found Chewbacca on the way to church. That would have been horrific for my little brothers. That would have been horrific for me.

When my parents told me what happened and about the college student, I thought about how caring his actions were. He showed the pillar of caring by going out of his way to help my family. He's probably never even heard of Character Counts!, and yet he was still a perfect representative. Character Counts has impacted my life because whenever I see a good role model I try to match their actions with a pillar of character. When that happens it reminds me of what a good person I should be.

7th Grade – 1st Place

Caring is defined as being nice and doing things to help someone or something. Life is hard, there are many things I could do to be a better person. For example, being caring. To me, caring means if something bad is happening you should put yourself in their place, and do what you would want someone to do for you. I know I'm not the most caring person but I'm willing to learn and change.

There are some things I would like to have changed or do differently. But since I can't change what happened in the past I'm going to make now, perfect. Here is why I see that I need to change. Last year, a girl I didn't know very well, was getting bullied. I tried to stop it but they just laughed. I guess I wasn't ready to be bullied to help someone else out. So, I just went along with it. I knew that every time one of the bullies laughed at her she was more embarrassed than I would ever be. I know it was wrong of me to ignore it, but I was just so scared of being bullied. I never bullied or laughed at her but I still should have told a teacher. If I could fix it now I would have done something. I would have put myself in her place and done what was right. But now I have learned to understand the Character Counts Pillars and that they actually mean something.

The bullying incident has really affected me more than people realize. Now that I understand the pillars, I see I should have done something. I should have cared more. I am ready to be a better person and to do that, I need to use the pillars of character. It is unfortunate that something that terrible had to happen for me to

realize it. The Character Counts Pillars are very important. It took me a while to realize it but now that I have, I wish I learned before.

7th Grade – 2nd Place

Fairness. A pillar of character. It can dictate certain aspects of our life in different ways. Without fairness, our lives would be miserable. Fairness is one of the key parts of our community. When you are fair to someone, they should be fair to you. This also ties in with citizenship, another pillar of character. To have citizenship is to be an active member of your community, and to respect your peers and friends.

You may want to know, “How does citizenship and fairness actually affect us?” Well, I’ll tell you. An example of citizenship can be something big, like volunteering for the fire department, or something small, like participating in a town parade. Some examples of fairness are when people are treated equally, no matter their race or skin color. Another example is when your classmate brings in a snack and shares it with everybody, not just their friends.

Citizenship and fairness also affects my life in different ways. For example, I can show citizenship by watching the news to see what is going on inside my country. I can also show citizenship by thanking veterans in my community. Another thing I can do is be fair. To show fairness, I can play by the rules in games, and let everyone state their opinion.

People also have bad character. An example of lack of citizenship is defacing public buildings with graffiti and other examples of rude vandalism. An example of unfairness is when you let someone cut in front of you. Another example is racism against African-American or Chinese people.

Good character is important. It is nearly essential to almost every facet of our life and community. Having good character means more people will like you, and that you will have a better chance of getting a job. So try to have good character, because character counts!

7th Grade – 3rd Place

Have you ever walked in the street of a city and seen an old man or woman sitting in the street asking for money? I am sure you have. Most people just keep on walking along thinking they only want that money for drugs. Sometimes this is true, but often this is not the case. Put yourself in those people’s shoes and think, “How

would I feel if people thought I wanted drugs but all I really wanted was a warm place to sleep, not just a corner on the old and empty streets of the city?”

At times I have been unfortunate but people still helped me out. How bad can it be to throw some money in that plastic cup you see. Even better, you could find them a homeless shelter. My school does community projects just like this. This year my homeroom helped clean the road that our school is on. I am fortunate enough to go to school and have such great friends, but I wish this was the same for others and sadly, sometimes it is not.

Next time you come across someone in need, take a look at them and think, “That young man was right, everyone deserves a second chance at being successful, even in the smallest ways.” If I was not given a second chance by my wonderful school, Radcliffe Creek School and its amazing teachers, I would be digging an even deeper hole than I had already dug for myself. I was having a hard time socially and academically at my old school. This is why I think people should get second chances. Now I am doing great socially and academically in my new school.

It is not hard to be a kind person, and trust me, if you do good things, it will come back to you. Sometimes I help out my sisters and they are nice back to me. If you help these unfortunate people, it will get you a good reputation of showing responsibility by taking action and helping these people, respect from the less fortunate, fairness by giving them a chance, and lastly, people will think of you as a caring person to not only some, but all.

8th Grade – 1st Place

Whenever we take a test or are assigned an assignment in class, we are given a rubric to help guide us in achieving the highest level required. For example, when we are to write a BCR, we are told that answering the question will get you a score of 1. If you follow the answer to the prompt with supporting details, it will get you a score of 2. Furthermore, if you go beyond and include an extension or inference, that will yield you a top score of 3. This is the same mentality in which I view Character Counts.

The lessons we have been learning every week through our Character Counts coaches serve as a rubric for making people behave the best way they can. Character Counts greatly impacts citizens’ lives daily. Character Counts serves a purpose in generating improvement in people’s lives. Character Counts is essential in education and goal setting and achievement.

What impact does Character Counts have on my preparations towards my current education and my approach to further develop my skill levels and efforts to achieve my goals? Well, I have daily functions in school such as completing class work, homework, and studying for quizzes and exams. Character Counts teaches me that all of these functions require serious responsibility. I cannot depend on my friends and family to perform those functions for me. It is up to me to be responsible for my well-being and future. I want to accomplish many goals in life and in order for me to do so, I must first set my mind to the goal and react in a responsible manner and execute all aspects of the goal.

Each day, it is mandatory that students report to school. Living in the U.S. we are required to follow the laws under which compulsory education falls. Truancy is not an option. Since it is mandatory, we have to treat our teachers and peers with much respect and care. This opens the door to help us succeed in school. No one wants to go to school in an environment that is not safe and caring. Learning cannot be done in such an environment. Therefore, we might as well respect others' perspectives and be open-minded. This way, we will feel safe and be able to express ourselves openly and freely without criticism. This will enable us to set and meet our goals without being scared. Overall, Character Counts has had an enormous impact on my education and my plans for achieving my goals through further education. To sum it up, Character Counts guides me to becoming the best I can be. It gives me the steps, resources, mindset, and examples to becoming the BEST ME possible. I never want to be labeled basic or proficient. I want to be labeled advanced in whatever endeavor I tackle in my life. I believe that practicing the six pillars (respect, caring, responsibility, fairness, trustworthiness, and citizenship) will help me reach that status.

8th Grade – 2nd Place

Anxious and Unaware. Anxiety is defined as the body's natural response to danger, an automatic alarm that goes off when you feel threatened, under pressure, or are facing a stressful situation.

The responses can come in either emotional symptoms or physical symptoms. Some examples of the emotional symptoms are feelings of apprehension or dread, trouble concentrating, feeling tense and jumpy, irritability, restlessness, watching for signs of danger, and feeling like your mind is gone. The physical symptoms present themselves in the forms of excessive pounding of the heart, sweating, stomach upset or dizziness, shortness of breath, frequent urination, muscle tension, headaches, and fatigue. That's just to name a few. Well, I guess by

now you are wondering why I'm discussing the symptoms of anxiety when this is a Character Counts Essay.

Last November, I started experiencing many of the symptoms listed above. I, like most anxiety sufferers mistook my disorder for a medical illness. I spent lots of days out of school feeling sick and just could not figure out what it was. It wasn't until the past December that I was actually diagnosed with anxiety. The doctors told my parents and me that in my case the disorder came about because I had low chemicals in my brain. Once again, this might seem strange to relate to Character Counts, but during that time the pillar of *caring* truly came to light for me. It was the biggest and most important pillar in my life at that time.

Because I was diagnosed with this during the main part of school, I was very upset. I had to be out of school for weeks at a time, but I soon found out that with this "anxiety" I could go to school. My parents were there to help me through this tough period and they did everything they could to get me through this tough period because they *cared* enough to see that I would get better. During this time, I had a hard time understanding if or how my peers would react or if/how my grades would suffer with me missing so many school days and so much valuable instruction. Actually there was nothing to worry about (I later found out). My parents took the time to talk to my principal and she relayed the message to my teachers.

My teachers showed they *cared* about me after hearing what I was going through. They promised to work with me and help me recoup all of my missing work to help me bring my grades up when I would be able to come back to school. They even agreed to let me mainstream back into the classroom gradually so that I would not be subject to an anxiety attack in the classroom. When I returned, it was as if nothing had happened at all. The *caring* environment really helped me because I knew that school would not be an issue and I would be taken *care* of and I would no longer have to worry about my grades. My teachers even offered their own time to help me with my work so I could get caught up. This helped lessen some of the emotional and physical symptoms of my disorder. I no longer felt tense, worried, fatigued, jumpy or irritable. I didn't have to ask to use the bathroom as much or go to the nurse because my head was pounding, I was dizzy, or my stomach was upset. I felt *cared* for and protected.

If my parents and teachers had not shown that they *cared*, I might still be sick and probably would have to be home-schooled. Even more, I would probably be failing school and have to miss out on all the fun that comes with my last year of middle school. With so many *caring* people in my corner, I have learned to be more *caring* myself. I also learned that everyone has had their own struggles, but if we

show them a little bit of *care*, they can make it through. I am living evidence of that.

8th Grade – 3rd Place

Amazing Grace US Food Rescue, Feed the Children, Action Against Hunger, Feeding America, and Bread for the World Institute. I can go on and on with the list of charity organizations to help hunger. With so many charities in place, how can anyone not feel responsible to help those who are less fortunate? I know that even in my young teenage years, I do feel responsible to help those who are less fortunate. Everywhere you go, you can hear at least one complaint about something “bad” happening in the world. Most of us have no idea how it feels to be in that position. The less fortunate may not have anyone to care for them, to love them, to feed them, to give them shelter, or even to just listen to them. People are suffering and dying all around the world. What are we doing about it? Well, the founders of the charities I mentioned above have started to do something about it. They are making a difference in the lives of the less fortunate and one day when I am able, I will be more involved.

It is my dream to get a well-paying job so that I can travel around the world and help those in need. I would like to be part of a caring charitable organization designed to help those in need. I want to be able to help supply people with fresh food, water, and most importantly love. I want the less fortunate to know there is someone looking out for them. I want to let them know that they are not alone.

Being part of Character Counts every Wednesday has changed my views from when I was a little girl. Back then when I saw the commercials asking to help and donate for people who were suffering, I would think that they were in that position because they were lazy and did not care about themselves. As I grew older and wiser, I realized that “little me” was wrong. People suffer not always because of their own selfish motives but because they have fallen on hard times for any of the following reasons: poverty, drug addiction, mental disorders, lack of education, etc.... It is not always their fault.

Being that I have not walked in their shoes (and hope I never have to), I have realized that I need to be more compassionate and more grateful for the things I have. I have opportunities that many of the less fortunate don't have. These opportunities come through getting a good education. My education will solidify my future and I plan to have a future that is as solid as a rock. This way I will have the means and the ability to help those who are less fortunate in life. No one should

ever have to know what suffering feels like, but I do believe that if we all step up and practice the pillar of *Citizenship*, we will be able to accomplish one of my mother's famous sayings. She always say, "Through the darkness, there is a light." I believe I can be that light.

High Schools – *How Character Counts! Prepares You To Be A Winner In Life*

9th Grade – 1st Place

August 24th, 2013, my life changed forever. The person I admired most passed away. My grandmother lost her short, but heroic battle with Lung Cancer. Not only did I lose my idol, but also I lost the women who taught me to believe in myself. My grandmother and I spoke everyday. I shared my life with her. She impacted everyone she knew, and sometimes, even strangers.

Throughout my life I have had many obstacles to overcome. I was born two months early and was given only a 1% chance to live. I have had 3 open-heart surgeries and I have under-developed lungs and asthma. These challenges have been a struggle to deal with at times. Without the care provided from my parents and grandmother I never would have survived. Not a day goes by where I do not appreciate those who saved my life. My grandmother was always by my side supporting me and caring for me. As I got older, I would talk to her about everything. She gave me the confidence to be who I am, and always helped me find the good in everything. I never knew how much I would need those skills in order to stay positive through life.

My grandmother always went out of her way to do things for other people, regardless of their circumstances in life. She has truly shown me what it is like to be a person with great character. Growing up, I can remember even the simple things, like running errands with her. I remember one day, we were grocery shopping and she gave a complete stranger a compliment. It was a really nice feeling watching the person's face light up with happiness.

This past year in May 2013, she was diagnosed with cancer. It was very hard for her and the rest of my family. We struggled on how to cope with this news. When things started to fail, and doctors were not very optimistic, she remained positive. She was never doubtful and told us everyday she will beat cancer. She was always so brave even when others were not. I remember sitting with her one day when she was not feeling very well, and she told me how much she loved me. My grandmother gave me the best advice that I will always remember when things get tough. "It is not what happens in your life, it is how you handle it." She has taught

me to love life and everyone in it -- no matter their circumstances or yours. Everyday we should go out of our way to show the six pillars of character. Showing respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, trustworthiness, and citizenship will make a difference in everyone's lives. My grandmother was proof that all of these pillars add up to make an inspiring person that can never be forgotten. I will never forget that she is my role model, and the reason I am the person who I am today.

9th Grade – 2nd Place

The person that I admire is my dad. His name is Kirk Helfenbein. Many people have heard of him because he is a local Funeral Director. He is a very important person considering that he helps families in their most desperate time in need, the death of a loved one. My dad tries to make people feel better in their time of grief.

He demonstrates some of the pillars because he is caring, trustworthy, respect, and citizenship. My dad is caring because he helps give back to the community in any way possible. He volunteers for Rotary, Elks Club, Masons, KCHS PTSA. He gave his time to help coach recreation soccer from the time I was 7 years old until last year. Two years ago my dad was asked to participate in the Dancing With The Stars benefit for Horizons. He hates to dance, he says he can't dance, but he agreed and worked extremely hard for weeks with his dance partner. On the night of the benefit he danced in front of over 300 people and raised thousands of dollars for scholarships for less fortunate kids to attend the school. He has never asked for any kind of recognition in return.

He portrays citizenship when he goes out of his way to help those that are less fortunate than him. If a family loses a loved one and cannot afford a funeral service, my dad works with them to make sure that their relative is remembered in the most beautiful and respectful way. He shows respect for people's personal lives, when they have to tell him how their relative died. He does not share information with anyone not related to the family, because in some cases that could be very private, or important for the police.

His work life consists of meeting with families, going to pick up their loved one from either the hospital or their home, and then coming home to us. Even though his work may mean that he is away from home during the day and some nights and weekends he still makes time for us. He plays soccer and lacrosse with us, and he takes us fishing and boating.

Because of his job, he values the time he does have with us as time to be kind to others. One time we were in the grocery store and this old lady was in front of us and he offered to pay for her groceries. She said it was fine that he really did not need to but he insisted.

My dad came home from work one day and he was telling us about a person he had to pick up from their house. He described the situation and as he was telling me about it. I was so impressed with how well he had taken it. He never complains about what he sees and experiences. The families never know how bad the situation might have been.

He knows a lot of people in the community, that mainly means that he always has someone watching out for me even though I really do not need it, he is always worrying about the things that could happen because of what he has seen. He is honestly the greatest dad that has one of the hardest jobs to have but he really likes it and makes people he barely knows feel better.

9th Grade – 3rd Place

A bright smile and raspy voice greeted us at the door every time. Just inside perched upon the old, faded, plaid couch, sat the tan skinned, blue eyed, brown haired, woman whom I had the privilege of calling “Mom Mom.” It seems almost impossible to me, that a woman of such sincerity, could even exist. Selfless, caring, polite, trustworthy, respectful, fair, responsible, and beautiful are only a few ways to describe her. Throughout her later years, any question she was asked about her life, she would refer back to her grandchildren. I know there is no one else on this earth she loved more than me, my brother, and my cousin.

My grandmother and I have always had a close relationship. From the moment I was born, she put down everything to take care of me. The same with Peyton and Brooke, my brother and cousin. Anything we ever wanted or needed was there for us. Whenever we had to go somewhere for the day, “Mom Mom’s” would be the first place we requested. She spoiled each and every one of us and we loved it, but if there is one thing I miss the most about her, it would definitely be hearing her say, “Mom mom loves you.” Everyone has their simple pleasures, something that makes them grin from ear to ear every time they see, smell, touch, or hear it. Mine was hearing her say those four words every time we said goodbye, hung up the phone, or left her apartment.

October twenty seventh, two thousand thirteen, Brooke, her boyfriend Trevor, and I went over to Washington Memorial hospital to visit my Mom Mom

who had been residing there for the past month. Typical Mom Mom, when we arrived to her room she immediately lit up and the questions began to flow from her mouth. Even when we came to visit HER she still found a way to make her moment about everyone else in the room. I asked what the difference was between the floor she was on now, and the floor she was being moved to the following day, when all of a sudden, mid-sentence, she stopped talking, her eyes rolled to the back of her head, and her chest began to rise up and down rapidly, as alarms all around the room went off...

When people say they have their heart sink to the bottom of them or feel their stomach twist into knots, they probably don't know what that feels like. It took all of two seconds for me to realize what was happening and go into an extreme break down. Was I really witnessing my grandmother die right in front of my eyes? Was my hero actually leaving me? Screaming her name at the top of my lungs, I was carried out of the room by Trevor. Did a delightful visit to my amazing grandmother just turn into my biggest nightmare? As the rest of my family rushed two hours over to the hospital, all the three of us could do was sit, silently, replying the most tragic thing any of us have ever seen. Three doctors and a nurse approach us in the family waiting room and inform us on some unreal information. They told us that when the alarms began to go off, she was dying, and a few minutes later all her vitals were gone and she was officially dead. But about 10-15 minutes later, she had a normal blood pressure, her heart was beating, and she was basically alive again. Brooke and I couldn't take much more and, it seemed God was playing with us. When we ran into her room, she was laying there with her eyes open, breathing deep breaths. They told us her brain was not functioning, and she didn't know anything that was going on, she most likely couldn't hear us either. Brooke and I talked to her as though she could though. The doctors told us they had never seen anything like this. People don't just come back after they are completely gone.

The way I look at it is, that she had to prove to everyone in that hospital that night that she was a fighter, and just when they think they can take her out, she holds on even stronger. She remained this way until the rest of our family arrived. They all got to say their goodbyes, and when we decided it wasn't worth staying through the night waiting for her to go again, we all went home. The next day I woke for school to find out she officially passed away. How much proof can we need to realize how strong this woman was? Nobody would come back to life but my grandmother; that's how amazing she was.

The weeks and months following that night have been difficult, but in a sense she has, again, made me a stronger person. I never imagined my life without her around, but as always, you have to live with what you get, and sometimes you lose. Minus all the things she taught me when she was walking the earth, as she floats

around and guides me in the right direction, I know she is still teaching me. Some days are harder than others, but I hope she knows I stay strong for her, and because she was so caring, I know the last thing she would want is for me to cry over her.

My Mom Mom has influenced my life immensely, simply by her presence. Watching her be the person she was, is all the inspiration I need to be that much better of a person myself. It's a proven fact that she accommodated all the pillars of character in her. Her legacy lives on in our small town. It brings me immense pride to hear local people say, "Your grandmother was such a great woman." Times like this inspire me to be the respected person she was.

10th Grade – 1st Place

Many times in my life I have been asked the question, "Do you have any siblings?" I freeze, and in my despair, I never know how to answer. If I say, "No," I feel guilt. If I say, "Yes," I am forced to go down a heart-wrenching path that I have tried to put in the back of my mind. One's past can mold an individual to be a sound pillar of character. I have learned to let go of trials and tribulations which could hinder finding peace and enjoying the subtleties life can bring. I have learned that life can be so short-lived, that each of us must live life to its fullest, and I have learned to make each day a memorable day. Ultimately, I have learned that being a caring individual is one of the most important qualities in life.

We all know that life has to change and evolve; meaning, life has to begin and it has to end. Life and death is a process which has to be endured because it is a part of nature, but this does not mean death is an easy concept to accept. Change is inevitable, and life persists whether we like it or not. It was a Tuesday evening, after softball practice- an ending to a warm April day, when you could feel Spring coming to life. Everything seemed perfect. Of course nothing was- it was the day my whole life changed. It changed how I viewed life, how I felt. It felt as if everything was gone; I lost it all in a second. I couldn't move past "that" day for the longest time. No matter how hard I tried to bury the past, it kept creeping back into my life. It still sneaks up on me from time to time and I have learned there is nothing I can do about that - | have to live with it.

Through the heartbreaking times in my past the community that surrounded my family got us through our sorrow. Without the acts of caring I do not believe my family would have coped the way that we did. The community took care of us in our time of grief. For about two weeks the PTA members at my school all took turns making, and delivering a fully cooked meal to our house. I find it astonishing that the community bonded together and cared for my family when we struggled to

deal with the shocking facts. It was hard for my family and me to continue with our every day routines because of the tragedy and the drastic changes in our lives.

I have heard some people say that when a young child experiences tragic events, they do not have such a hard time moving on from this event. I do not fully agree with this. Yes, children are more likely to think this is a part of nature, this is how the world works. I learned last week that when a child is unsure how to react to a situation, they look to an adult and mimic his/her reaction. I was surrounded by mourning, despair, confusion – all of which I felt and still feel today. I do not agree when people say tragic events do not affect children as much as adults, those moments do not stick with them forever. If anything, not understanding what is going on is worse. I was not sure how to react to the tragedy. I had never experienced something of this event before. The pillar of caring instilled profoundly by the surrounding community showed me how to cope. I was surrounded by caring families who did everything in their power to help my family cope. As I got older I witnessed my mother acting the same way towards others when a tragic event happened. I know now that even a small act such as a dinner, a phone call, a card, flowers – can change a persons mood, and I have experienced small acts others have done for my family during our time of crisis.

Over the years I have learned that no one can live in isolation. One needs the care and love of others to get through life. I am so grateful to everyone who cared, and still cares to this day. My family still receives phone calls, texts and emails from old friends just checking in and making sure we are still doing well even all these years later. Needing a helping hand early in life has taught me how to care for another and just how much a simple act can change another's day. With the help of the caring community I have learned how to cope with the fact that almost nine years ago, I lost my best friend, my rock, the person I trusted more than anyone in the whole world - my brother.

10th Grade – 2nd Place

“It is so important to get respect for what you do and at the same time give it” (Estelle Parsons). I have been exposed to the actions of a humble heart throughout my life. This has changed my view on giving respect as well as citizenship. My father, Kevin L. Nelson, has been an impeccable example of a humble heart and respectable man. He has dedicated his time and money to the Fire Company in our home town, Rock Hall, Maryland, which is a volunteer program. My father is also, a school teacher as well as the varsity softball coach at Kent County High School. I have learned from him how to respect myself as well as others.

In 2006 my father made the decision to join the Rock Hall Volunteer Fire Company to help give back to his community. Since then my father has also committed to being an EMT (emergency medical technician), and also apart of the Kent County dive team, all of which are volunteer services. I have always been taught to give back to your community, for the past seven years of my life I have watched my father save many buildings and lives. As I watch him display excellent citizenship, it has inspired me to also become involved with my community. I am currently upholding the position of “Miss Fire Prevention” for Rock Hall Volunteer Fire Company, I first ran for this position several years ago and have continued to hold it because of re-running unopposed. I found this a way to interact with my local fire company as well as the community due to being to young to be an active member of the fire company. I owe the citizenship I have instilled in me to my father.

I have always been told that respect is earned, not given. As a sophomore in high school, I see my father regularly in the hallway. My father is an automotive technology teacher at Kent County High School. As a teacher it can be difficult to handle the many students, but my father is able to control his temper even in the toughest situations, this has earned my father respect from many students. I can see the respect students have for my father only by hearing the conversations they have. My father has not always been a teacher, he used to work in an automotive shop which is where he gained his experience. When the opportunity arose to become a teacher, my father could not turn down the chance to complete his career dreams. My father knew this would be a challenge, but accepted happily. He immediately began building the respect from his students. My father has always taught me to respect others and myself, and respect will come back to me from others.

As I have grown my father has always shown me to give back to those who can't give to themselves. This lesson has shown me to get involved in my community as much as I can. Also, I have learned from him how to respect myself as well as others. This has helped me become a better overall person, I can not explain the difference my father has made in my life. I can only continue to prove to him as well as myself that having respect is a priority as well as having excellent citizenship is not an option.

10th Grade – 3rd Place

We never know what situations we will face in life as we grow into mature adults. I feel that every day there are lessons to be learned based on mistakes and decisions we make and things we see our friends go through. We have to choose

who we are going to be and how we want to be viewed by others. Life is full of important choices.

The most important lesson I have experienced so far in my short 15+ years is based on the pillars of fairness and caring. My best friend's mother was involved in a horrific car accident that would forever change his life and in time, it would change mine too. We were 12 years old and scared to death. The injuries she suffered in the accident involved a traumatic brain injury. This would forever change his life, his family's life and my family's life. I knew she would require rehabilitation and we had no idea when he would ever get to see her again or what condition she would be in when he finally did. I already had a sister, one that I had to share everything in my life with and in the blink of an eye, I gained a brother for life. No matter where life takes me, the bond we now share through that time will forever change us.

During his mother's rehabilitation, we tried to make sure his life would stay as normal as possible, but knowing there was nothing normal about his life. I had to share my family with him, my home with him and most of my time with him. I had to do this all and try to be a great friend he could trust without feeling a little jealous or slighted in my life. When my family got involved in her recovery, it just became normal for us to take him with us wherever we went, transported him home or wherever he needed to go, attend all his sporting events and treat him like one of us.

I learned a great lesson of caring. I would have wanted him to do the same for me if this had happened to my mother. Life isn't always fair but you have to have people you can count on in sad times as well as good times. All at the time we did all that we could for him, we did the same for his younger sister who was 9 at the time of the accident. She was just another person I had to share all aspects of my life and time with. We really had a mutual respect. I saw and knew things that were confidential to the family and I knew I had to be a loyal and respectful friend that understood at my young age that he needed me and my family, and our discretion, at a very critical time in his life.

Time has passed and after a few years of recovery, things have gone back close to the way they were before her accident on that terrible day, but that life experience and our friendship will be forever. Through this experience, being fair and caring for him and his family made me more aware of what is really important in life. Putting others before ourselves sometimes. Everything happens for a reason and I'm convinced we were friends first, so we could help him through some terrible times. Life will never be the same for him and you can't put a value on our lives but our memories of making good times out of bad situations are priceless. It's a bond our families will always have.

11th Grade – 1st Place

Character Counts prepares one to be a winner in many ways. All six character traits teach you important lessons one needs in order to be a winner in life, but there are three character traits I feel prepare you in the best way. The first trait that prepares you to be a winner in life is Responsibility. Responsibility is defined as one being personally liable to give account for something they have been left in charge over. Being responsible lets others know you are prepared and ready to get the job done. You can learn to be responsible, but responsibility is something you choose to take charge of. A huge part of winning in life is making decisions and responsibility enables you for your future of decision-making. Responsibility can be difficult, but if you have the determination to get the task done responsibility will come easy.

Your responsibility shows others that you can be trusted, which leads us to the next trait that prepares you to be a winner in life, Trustworthiness. Trustworthiness is defined as one being able to be relied on as honest and truthful. To gain trust in someone one must be a well- rounded person possessing the remaining character traits, Respect, Fairness, Caring, and Citizenship, as well as the traits already discussed. Trustworthiness takes a simple friendship to a relationship by creating expectations in one another. When you gain someone's trust you then become responsible to keep your moral integrity. Trustworthiness is a hard thing to gain, but with the right attitude anything is possible.

Both Responsibility and Trustworthiness are important traits, which lead to one gaining respect from others. Respect is defined as a feeling of deep admiration for someone or something elicited by their abilities, qualities, or achievements. Respect is not given respect is gained over time. Respect is not only something one receives, but also something one must give out in order to be respected in that same manner. The saying is to treat others in the same way you would want to be treated. Respect can be a challenge to some who do not put others before themselves.

These three Character traits help prepare one to be a winner in life. Being a winner in life means three things, you are social, you are secure, and you are successful. You are social, meaning that you have developed the correct traits to be able to properly interact with others around you. The second, to be secure, means that you are happy with where you are at in life and the decisions you made to get there. And being successful means that one has achieved the goals for which they set for themselves earlier in life. All three of these can be used to set your goals on a

daily bases. Ask yourself if what you are accomplishing in your day will get you to the end result of being social, secure, and successful.

Having character is extremely important in life. How you show your character is how you obtain your reputation. A lot of times having a good reputation is looked at as ones main focus in winning in life, but it's really your character that is shining through. Abraham Lincoln illustrated this beautifully when he said, "Character is like a tree and reputation is its shadow. The shadow is what we think of it; the tree is the real thing." So instead of first focusing on how one looks (reputation), one should be more concerned with what's on the inside (character). Character is gained by experience, so the more practice using the six pillars of character counts the better one will be on their journey to winning in life.

11th Grade – 2nd Place

Throughout my life, I have learned the concept of respect from my parents and school. From the time I was a child to the present, my parents have always taught me to respect people and treat them as I would want them to treat me. School has also taught me respect with its Character Counts program. I remember in 7th and 8th grade, volunteers from the Character Counts program would donate their precious time to come visit our classrooms and show us the fundamentals of the six pillars through fun games and educational seminars. I will always retain those gratifying memories that I got to experience with my peers, which taught me to be a winner in life.

Character Counts has improved my life in many ways. For example, before 7th grade and before the Character Counts program, to some extent, I was a bad student. I never really paid any mind to the teachers, my grades, or my education in general. I was in trouble almost every day of the week. The teachers thought that I was hopeless, being in detention all the time. Then at the start of 7th grade, we had Character Counts classes. That's when I first saw the light at the end of the tunnel: I learned the importance of the six pillars and especially the one pillar of respect. I then realized that all this time I had been so disrespectful and hadn't been showing any examples of the six pillars. That day my life changed for the better.

I started showing all six pillars to everyone, especially to my teachers, who had respected me even though I had disrespected them in the past. That was my inspiration to listen to everything the teachers said and to accomplish all of my work. My grades went from low C's to honor roll. Now, I am an excellent high school student, and I don't know where the detention room is. I don't need to know where it is because I don't plan on going back. With respect, I stay out of trouble.

Now when I see my teachers from sixth grade and back, they are all shocked at how great I have turned out. I saw one of my teachers from 5th and 6th grade at the library. Her name is Mrs. Wickes. She came up to me and said, “Boy, do you remember me?” I said, “Yes.” She said, “I saw your name in the newspaper under the honor roll section.” She couldn’t believe how much I have grown up and how much better I am doing in school. I told her about the Character Counts program in 7th grade and how it changed my life for the better.

In life, you need respect for anything and everything you do. This past summer, I was talking to an individual who owns a business. I have known him for a long time and I respected him like my parents and school taught me to. The respect I showed towards him showed him how hard of a worker I could become. That’s how I got my first job and I know how respect can get you places in life. I was helping out on the job one day and I showed respect even when I was faced with a disrespectful customer who was in a disgruntled mood. I would always be respectful and that’s how you get to be a winner in life: hard work, dedication, and an abundance of respect.

The overall message is when the Character Counts program taught me to have respect within myself, that’s when I learned to have respect for others. This, in turn, was how I was presented with an opportunity to change my life for the better and become a winner in life, all thanks to the illustrious Character Counts program. The smallest change makes the biggest difference.

11th Grade – 3rd Place

Preparation is vital in every individual’s life. Every pillar to character can be seen in every successful persons life. To me personally, trustworthiness is the most important pillar in becoming successful in life. When becoming successful in life, you won’t be able to do it by yourself and you can’t expect every door to be opened for you. You have to work your way up the ladder and push hard. Becoming successful would require you to put your trust in others and for others to be able to trust you. I have strived to incorporate this pillar into my every day life. No matter the place or people, I always try to show off my testimony and character.

In 9th grade I came to Chestertown Christian Academy and I didn’t know what to expect. I was the new kid and I didn’t know what the other students would be like or what the teachers would be like. I had to earn my friendships from the bottom, so I tried to show off great character. I tried to earn students respect and trust. Through the years, I have built lasting friendships. The second most important pillar in my eyes is respect. Many key characteristics to life can come through this

one pillar. Respect can be seen anywhere you go in life, whether it's a restaurant, or a friend's house, its still seen.

As a teenager I realized that respect starts in the home. If a kid learns to respect authority in the home, it will become a habit later in life. Obedience is key in respecting authority. If you incorporate it in your everyday life then it will pay off when it comes to school, work, and relationships. Obeying your teachers will show respect and it will let your teachers know how serious you are. They won't mind staying after school to help you or writing a college recommendation letter. In the work life, if you obey your boss and show you are serious, you may get a raise or you might get a promotion.

The six pillars can be incorporated in our everyday lives. Each pillar has its own purpose and everybody should try to incorporate them in our everyday lives. They can change you as a person and people all around you will see the difference. Every pillar ties into each other. Being responsible will help you move up in school and get better grades, and hopefully help you land a great job in the work force. Caring will show people how much you value your character and what your moral standards are. Being fair and living by the rules in life will only make you a better person in life. Lastly, citizenship, it shows in your life every single day. Being a great citizen to your community and family is enough to call you a winner. Point being, character does count. If you live by all six pillars, there is no doubt you will be the best you can be.

12th Grade – 1st Place

Responsibility comes with age. It has taken me 17 years to get the full concept of responsibility. When I was in fourth grade and again in sixth grade, I was retained. When I entered ninth grade, I had to be responsible for all my own actions. Learning to be responsible is the way to a productive future.

In fourth and sixth grade, I was not the person to be called responsible. It was not that I was incapable of doing the work; I was very smart. I never wanted to do any of the work or attend school. When I did choose to attend school, I would play and talk to all my "friends." Being retained twice gave me a signal that it was time to step up and become responsible during my final years of middle school.

When I first entered the ninth grade, I realized how much my future meant to me. I started having regular meetings with my Guidance Counselor about what I could do to graduate on time. Unfortunately, I was not allowed to graduate with my class from two years prior. However, I was offered to put in an Early Graduation

Waiver. My guidance counselor enrolled me into a science class after school, and sadly, full responsibility still did not take place. My mind was still not set on doing what I had to do, to get where I wanted to be.

Tenth grade year slowly approached and I finally pushed the games and friends aside to focus on my goals: my future. By the time second semester of my tenth grade year, I was enrolled in four different evening classes. I buckled down and finished all of my classes two months before school was over. I earned a total of eleven credits my sophomore year of high school. I finally learned the true meaning of being responsible – by doing everything I am required to with no one asking me to do it.

A lot of my goals have been accomplished after learning what it meant to be responsible. I created my early graduation portfolio and sent it off to the Board of Education. I have been recognized by all the work I have achieved in my previous year in high school. As it stands, I am at a senior status with all my credits and thanks to all the hard work I have done. I have been doing everything I am required to do; passing all of my classes, and listening to my teachers, instead of my teachers and peers listening to me.

Being responsible helped me in my future. I bought my cap and gown, and I am looking forward to graduation in the Spring. All my goals are met and I feel accomplished and proud of myself for everything I have done up until this moment. I can honestly say, learning to be responsible was a great experience and a lifelong lesson. A wise man once said *“Success on any major scale requires you to accept responsibility..... In the final analysis, the one quality that all successful people have is the ability to take on responsibility.”* – Michael Korda

12th Grade – 2nd Place

Character is what you are made up of, how you act when no one else is looking. Character and who you are, become important in the first moments of life. You may not believe it but reading this essay right now may have some effect on your character. Kent County labels character counts as six pillars: Trustworthiness, Caring, Respect, Responsibility, Citizenship, and Fairness. Out of these the most important pillar would have to be citizenship.

Citizenship defined is the quality of an individual’s response to membership in a community. So what does it mean to you? It may mean nothing to you although you may demonstrate citizenship in your daily. To me citizenship is what you do for

your community, not just the environment but also the people. How you treat people in the community around you is citizenship.

There is a story that I would like to tell which applies very solidly to citizenship. In middle school I had the ability to walk and/or bike to and from school. Leaving school everyday I noticed a very nice old lady who always helped the walkers across the street. As I started to pay more attention to this woman, I realized how under-appreciated her tasks really were. As a volunteer she contributed tons of time to the children of her community and as I later found out to her society. One day I was walking home after school and witnessed this elderly lady stopped on the side of the road. I continued to watch as she got out of her vehicle with flamboyantly bright orange reflective jacket and immediately was curious. She proceeded to the back of her vehicle where she grabbed a bag and a trash pick up stick then started walking the road picking up trash. Seeing this I felt compelled to assist this lady with the trash pick up. Since that day she has been forever grateful for my continued help in aiding her with not only trash pick up but her day to day tasks during school as well. This may not have made me popular among peers but it did teach me the valued pillar citizenship.

Citizenship defined is the quality of an individual's response to membership in a community. Although this is a somewhat confusing definition, it has such a simplistic meaning. One person doing his or her part to enrich not only his or her community but the people in it.

12th Grade – 3rd Place

They say cancer sucks. I do not know who “they” are but what they say is an understatement. In reality, cancer sucks you in, chews you up, spits you back out, and then proceeds to ask you how you are feeling. I do not have cancer, but my mom did, so it really seems like I had it too. When I found out about her diagnosis, I cried for two days. I am the kind of person who will go two months without so much as frowning, but eventually the feelings have to come out. The cancer was early stage, the surgeries were successful, the radiation went beautifully, and the road to recovery was paved with gold. For the first time in my life, I was terrified. I could not get it all together because everything was out of my control. No matter what, the cancer would not disappear. I had to grow up. Before cancer, my mom held me while I cried, but afterwards I had to be there to do the same for her. The pillar of caring took new meaning as I cared for my mother before, during, and after treatment. My mother needed me to consistently support her with compassion and care as she embarked on the frightening journey of cancer.

Cancer taught me that life is unpredictable. I did not know the course my mom's disease would take, but it helped me see her in a new light. For the first time, I saw just how truly human she was. Of course what she needed was medicine and radiation therapy, but she also needed compassion. The healing power of love and caring is immeasurable. That is basically the point of moral education through programs such as Character Counts! I have learned in the classroom about what it means to be caring. This formal education prepared me to handle the tough situations that cancer brought. I needed to have compassion and understanding towards my mom every step of the way. I had to understand that when my mom screamed at me for leaving a dirty dish in the wrong side of the sink, she was really saying that the medicine was making her extremely emotional and she did not know how to handle it. Luckily, Character Counts! prepared me to handle it. I apologized, asked her what was really on her mind, and held her while she cried shortly thereafter.

Cancer taught me that love and caring are the basic ingredients for a happier world. There is worth in every smile, value in every hug, and medicine in every compliment. Similarly to the way author John Green stated in The Fault in Our Stars, life is a side effect of dying. The only cure for this is love, and not just the sappy, Hollywood, Nicholas Sparks kind of love. The cure is in the way that I tried each and every day to brighten my mother's mood. When cancer struck, I grew up. I let go and let God in. I learned to love life and care for my family. The cancer is gone today, but its impact lingers. It changes people, families, communities, and it changed me. It gave me the opportunity to put into practice the exact lessons that I learned through *Character Counts!*