2nd Place Winner Middle School

Annie Matusiak

Elgin Academy

Elgin, IL

Grade: 7

Freedom’s Freedom

There once was a girl who went by the name of Freedom. Freedom was just like any girl. The truth was, though, she was not as free as her name sounded. She was pushed and bullied by other children in her class, and sometimes she felt so chained that she forgot what her name really meant.

She never raised her hand in class, fearing she would answer a question wrong and be laughed at by other students. Some days, she never even spoke at all. She felt trapped inside herself; never able to speak what she believed in or even defend herself in any way.

When there was a writing project assigned at school, Freedom had a different opinion than the other kids, but again, she was scared of what might happen if her classmates disagreed with her. Freedom decided to go with the rest of the kids and wished with all her heart that she had the courage to stand up to them.

In the beginning of the school year, Freedom would say a small prayer to herself before lunch. One kid saw her and laughed. Freedom was really embarrassed and the next day she decided not to pray. It was not that she didn’t want to, but to save herself from a group of bullies, an extra prayer at night was fine.

Some of Freedom’s classmates had been walking around the halls one morning to petition a school rule. They were looking for signatures and approached her. She was surprised anyone came to see her, but then realized they were petitioning against something she really liked. Freedom wanted to say no, but with one glance she knew what the consequences were. She was aware that what the children did was not right, but she was just too scared.

When the school changed a rule, many kids protested against it. Freedom walked past the kids one day, feeling the need to help protest the cause, but the kids against the protesters wouldn’t let her. She walked away, feeling imaginary shackles weighing down on her as she passed.

Freedom wished she had the freedom her name gave her, the right to speak what she wanted, to write what she wanted, to petition, to protest, and to pray. She wished she didn’t let others enclose her and stop her from doing what she thought was right.

The next day, someone gave her just what she needed. Freedom was eating her lunch alone that afternoon, as usual. She watched with curiosity as a boy walked over to her table.

“You’re Freedom, right?” asked the boy. Freedom slowly nodded, wondering why he had come to talk to her, of all people.

“Don’t let the bullies scare you,” the boy said. “You don’t have to listen to them, you know. You are free.” Freedom began to understand what he was saying. She has always been scared of the thought of rebelling against the bullies, but really, the boy was right. She *was* free. She could write whatever she wanted, say whatever she thought, and fight for her opinions to be heard.

There once was a girl named Freedom. She loved the United States. She knew because of the First Amendment, she had the freedom to speak, write, pray, petition, and protest whatever she wanted. She loved her freedom, and was so glad she had the opportunity to live in a place where everyone had the chance to be free. She once knew what it was like to feel chained, enclosed by her own classmates, but the most important thing in her life was freedom. Her freedom was what gave her the ability to dream, and what gave her the name Freedom.