

6th Annual STUDENT VOICES PROJECT

Our sixth annual Student Voices Project brought in writing from 237 middle and high school students representing 10 U.S. Friends schools and 11 monthly meetings. We selected 22 honorees whose submissions are featured here. However, due to space limitations in our print issue, we're unable to showcase all honoree submissions in their entirety. Some have been excerpted on pages 17–19 with the rest of each piece appearing in our online edition available at *Friendsjournal.org*, where we've also posted a full list of all 237 participants.

PROMPT

Write about the role of competition in your life and how Quaker values influence your approach to it.

Photos courtesy of the students



A Homeschooler's Point of View on Competition

Finn Rae Kyrie
Grade 6/7, Homeschool in Driftless Area, Wis., attender of Madison (Wis.) Meeting

My whole life I have been raised as a Quaker homeschooler, so I have not been placed into different classes or grades. Every year I have to guess what grade I'm in. Right now it's between sixth or seventh. For the last two years my mom and I have been debating this, but that sort of age or ability separation is not important in the homeschool world. Nor does it matter where people live. I'm friends with people from many different towns. I don't feel competitive just because someone lives in a different town and attends a different school.

My noncompetitive homeschooling background has formed my opinion about competition. I don't believe competition should put people against one another, but instead be for the good of the community.

I don't understand the people who are fanatical about competitive sports like football, softball, and basketball. Whenever I am asked what my favorite sport is, I say my favorite "sport" is riding horses, which is technically a sport but their idea of a sport is different from my idea of a sport. I don't ride for medals or trophies; I ride because I love horses—their sounds, smells, and movements, and of course, it doesn't hurt that they look as gorgeous as they do!

I feel that competition (like games and sports and such) depends on the eye of the beholder. It is like beauty; you might not think that your aunt is beautiful, but her husband (or wife) definitely thinks so. Games like capture the flag and everybody's it (or banana tag) really do depend on the community. I think it's okay to play cooperative games like these with other people, as long as you are doing it in the right mind. For example, at Camp Woodbrooke (a Quaker

camp in Wisconsin that I've attended for the last five years), whenever we play one of those games, it leaves me and the other campers sweaty, happy, laughing, and ready to go sing songs together. Not once have I felt bitter because my group of friends or teammates lost the game. Even though winning definitely feels good, that sort of joy is fleeting. I prefer to be full of ecstasy because I played the game, not because I won it.

There are lots of different types of competition. There's competition with friends, sibling competition (I run into that one a lot with my very own two younger siblings), sports, board games, and more. Sometimes competition can be good. Since my parents had my younger brother and sister, I have become more independent and more responsible. My siblings compete for my mom's attention, and I used to join in on that. Now I am more mellow and patient.

I wonder if my schooling has given me a different point of view about competition. Competition should never be about *us* versus *them*; it should be about hanging out with friends and family and having a good time. It should be about finding your limits, and supporting others to find theirs. ▣

The Quaker approach to competition has influenced my life greatly. From my experiences, I've learned that competition can be utilized to motivate, making it a tool, but if it is not done in the correct mindset, it can become a weapon.

Competition is much different in Quaker schools, at least this is true at Greene Street Friends School (GSFS). One example is during gym class, we never really keep score for any game of soccer or street hockey that we play, and on our annual Color Day, we all try our hardest, but we all end up getting popsicles at the end. Everyone is celebrated for just trying, even if they didn't win. In this way, equality is a very important part of the Quaker way of competition. I like to call this philosophy PC for "popsicle competition."

There aren't technically winners and losers, but everyone gets praise, or a popsicle, at the end. This philosophy isn't awful, but it has its pros and cons.

Some pros are that nobody ends up upset over losing, and it's much less cutthroat; this usually leads to less grudges. On the other hand, you have the cons, one of which is if all you know is PC, once you experience real competition, you won't be used to it and this might hinder your performance.

Another kind of competition is the election of a student government, or even a real government. In this case, I'm going to discuss the process at GSFS for electing middle school students for our student government called TORCH (Togetherness, Open-mindedness, Respect, Compassion, and Heart). Instead of a traditional structure where people cast votes and the person with the most votes wins, we use the good old Quaker decision-making process of consensus. This process entails people "lifting up" others that they believe to be a good fit for representing their class (or other jobs) in TORCH. This process is not exactly a competition because everyone has to agree and there is no voting.

The selection process goes like this: The people who are running go out of the room, and the people deciding aren't allowed to "put anyone down," meaning you can only say positive things. In many ways, this is a good thing, because otherwise someone whom you might not get along with could put you down



A Tool or a Weapon

Hazel Mariani

*Grade 6, Greene Street Friends
School in Philadelphia, Pa.*

with only negative statements because they only see your flaws. On the flip side, your friends might only see your positive traits and think you're perfect. At least this year, many people who didn't get picked claimed that the whole process was just a popularity contest. These statements made me feel slightly guilty because I was the one elected to be the representative for our class and I am not particularly eager to consider myself as popular. The more I thought about it, people were saying that because they were going into the experience with a mindset that was overly competitive. They wanted to know why they weren't picked, chalking it up to bias instead of just accepting that they weren't picked. I understand their disappointment, just not their reasons for why they weren't chosen. If they had had the mindset of being happy for whoever won (reflecting the Quaker principle of community), then everyone would be satisfied with the results, even if they did not triumph.

This competitive mindset doesn't mean, however, that competition is always harmful. Competition can also be a motivational tool. Posing a prize will motivate people to try their hardest to win that prize. I saw an example of this recently during our annual Winter Concert. Fifth and sixth grade was having a bit of trouble being enthusiastic while singing, so this year our music teacher proposed to us that the five students who were most enthusiastic in the concert would win an all-expenses-paid trip to a particular fast food establishment right near our school. Because everybody wanted this trip, we were even more enthusiastic than we might've been without that competition in place.

The last example I'll share takes place outside of school. When I first went to Miquon Day Camp in the summer of 2014, I was surprised to learn that they operated under a similar principle to GSFS. I thought before then that only Friends schools used it, but it turns out I was wrong. For others at the camp, not keeping score in sports and always shaking hands after every game was alien to them (though our hands were often muddy, discouraging contact), like another world that they were visiting for one to eight weeks. Fellow Greene Streeters who went to the camp with me were very used to the competition structure, and this might be why I'm slightly frightened of going to a new school in the future (that might not be a Quaker school), because I won't be used to a typical competition structure and will be at a disadvantage. □



One Big Problem

Casey Smothers
*Grade 6, Greene Street Friends
School in Philadelphia, Pa.*

There's one big problem I notice that relates to competition, and it is caused by masculinity. It's a problem not just in sports, but everywhere: men and boys trying to prove that they are strong or in charge. This behavior is passed on from generation to generation, with the reinforcement of stereotypes that men need to be strong and not feel emotions. People yell horrible homophobic, sexist, antisemitic, Islamophobic, and racist things at each other, and for what? To prove their superiority over their peers. This is a horrible problem in competition. Sometimes people will say things they never meant to say.

I have one specific example that may sound quite surprising if, like me, you live a bubble void of anything politically incorrect. I was very surprised when my friend, who is one of the kindest people I have met, yelled a homophobic term at hockey practice that should never be uttered. I proceeded to tell him that what he said was not okay, and he apologized.

So why do I still play hockey after all of this? I play because I enjoy some of the competition, not the masculinity factor, but the thrill and excitement of gliding on three-millimeter-wide blades. I enjoy the feeling that I can compete with others, and also just the fact that hockey is fun.

As a Quaker myself, I would say there can be a Quakerly approach to anything, be it competition or even things like how you live your day-to-day life. I think it would look a little like this: It would mean that people would interact with kindness and respect, no matter if they win or lose, and this approach would be based on the Quaker testimonies of equality and peace. Equality because even when people lose they should be treated with equal respect and kindness. Peace because it means not doing harm to others physically or emotionally. I do not know how realistic that is now, but I think it would be great if we as a society worked to transform competition into a more peaceful and caring experience. I think it would prevent people from speaking as they do on my hockey team and would make things a whole lot more fun for everyone, not just the winners. □

Although I have never been someone who loves sports or competition very much, this year my parents encouraged me to try a sport, so I picked cross country. Art and music have always interested me more than sports, even though I do enjoy hiking, bike riding, and swimming with my friends and family. Sometimes I fear getting beat by someone and the resulting feelings of rejection and embarrassment. When that does happen though, I shrug my shoulders and shake it off. I try to have good sportsmanship and be mature; I rarely get jealous when it comes to competition.

We had practice three times a week after school, and I was never really excited to go. It wasn't very fun for me. It felt like I was wasting my time, and I was just thinking about all of the other things I could be doing. My first meet arrived, and I could feel my nerves and anxiety building; I felt stupid and unprepared. Everyone was trying to talk me through it before I started, but I couldn't tell if it was even helping. Our warm-up stretches did not help me, and I could not seem to relax. I took a few deep breaths, and we were off. I tried to pace myself: one two, one two, one two, right left, right left. With every step, I could feel my breath getting heavier. I could hear my teammates and my coaches cheering for me from the sidelines. The thoughts in my head were telling me that I could do it, that I am strong and thoughtful. I wanted to be proud of myself. I believe these things helped me to keep going and finish strong.

Community plays a big role in competition and in this story for me. The people around me really helped coach me as I ran, and I realized that being encouraged, hearing them yell my name, made me want to win. Others around me encouraged me to step out of my comfort zone and try something new. I love the feeling of being supported by others, and it reminds me to return the favor and do the same for them. □

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I Can Do It

Marin Shankin

*Grade 8, Buckingham Friends
School in Lahaska, Pa.,
attender of Solebury Meeting in
New Hope, Pa.*



Competing as a Quaker

James Bradley
*Grade 9, Westtown School in
West Chester, Pa., member of
West Chester Meeting*

Competition requires a great deal of hard work and effort. When you begin to compete at a higher level it also takes desire and passion to be a winner at whatever you set your mind to do. Some may argue that competition conflicts with Quaker beliefs, like the testimony of equality, because for every winner there must be at least one loser. However I believe that the concept of equality in a competition is not about the end result and instead about the way in which you carry yourself while you compete.

My personal experience with competition has ranged from athletic competitions to academic debates and elections. As someone who loves competition, both friendly and serious, I have been competing my whole life. In my mind there are two types of competition: friendly competitions, and serious “play to win” competitions. There are many differences between them, but I believe there is one thing that brings them together. This point of connection represents what all competition should be about.

A lot of Quakers would argue that the necessity of having a winner, and thus a loser, is in direct conflict with the testimony of equality. They may think that having a winner means that the loser is not equal and that having no winner at all would solve this problem. I believe that this is simply not what the testimony of equality means in a competition. I believe that as a Quaker it is my responsibility to represent my beliefs in my actions *during* games or debates, not in the results alone. As an athlete I feel obligated to treat my opponents with respect and to carry myself with integrity before, during, and after games. I cannot control the inevitability of a winner, but I can control my own actions and choices; those are my responsibilities not only as an athlete, but as a member of the Religious Society of Friends.

This year during a close soccer game I had an experience that challenged my ability to represent the Quaker testimonies. Late in the second half, we were down by a goal and a player on the opposing team began to trash talk and tried to push me around. In that moment I wanted nothing more than to push him back, but I didn't; instead I stayed calm and chose to focus on winning the game. In the end we lost, but I was satisfied with how I had reacted to the situation. I'd rather lose with dignity than win with arrogance.

In life, you will win and you will lose. No one can stop this, and no one can control this whether they like it or not. While I may sound pessimistic, I'm not saying you should just accept this fact. Rather, you should embrace it. Competition has taught me much about myself and my identity. It has shown me where I can grow as a teammate, an athlete, and a Quaker. Competing to win and yet still representing Quaker values is a fine line to walk, but it is a line that becomes easier to walk over time. It is also an especially important line to walk as a young person. Developing the skills to walk this fine line is what I believe Quakerism is about: shining your Light wherever you go. It gives me pride to be able to represent my faith community wherever I go and in all my efforts. Even when George School wins. ■

I am not a perfect Quaker. My family discovered Quakerism when I was two years old. I grew up with Quaker values, went to meeting for worship every Sunday, and have gone to a Friends school for quite a while. One of my passions, though, is wrestling. A naturally competitive combat sport, wrestling seems to be the opposite of the amicable motivations of Quakerism. People frequently ask me why I wrestle when Quakers are supposed to be peaceful and nonviolent. To be frank, this question has rattled in my brain for years because I have never had a perfect answer to it. Wrestling is a sport where two people fight to see who has the most physical, mental, and technical prowess. At the end of a wrestling match, one person is inherently less equal in a wrestling context than the other. So how can this sport acknowledge both people's strengths?

At first, I could find little overlap between Quaker values and wrestling values, but as I began to hone my wrestling skills and learn more about the sport, it struck me that when applied correctly wrestling can bring people closer than other more team-oriented sports can. If you speak to any wrestler, the first thing they are likely to tell you is how physically demanding the sport is. It originated over 15,000 years ago in Ancient Greece and Egypt as one of the world's first forms of combat. Now, it is recognized as such an arduous sport that it is often used as an effective way to train the military. Becoming a great wrestler requires brutal workouts every day, and despite the conflicts that can arise during a match, every wrestler will acknowledge and respect the effort it takes to go out on the mat. This respect creates a community where even if someone loses a match, everyone recognizes that both wrestlers worked doggedly to get to where they are.

When I first started wrestling, I knew I was horrible at the sport. I lost every match by quite a lot, and I would have easily gotten discouraged if after every match the coach from the other team hadn't come up to me and said, "You did a great job. I can't wait to see what you can do." These coaches showed me that I didn't need to defeat every opponent to be worthy of recognition. That kind of equality guides my actions on a daily basis. I am now able to recognize the energy that people put into their work. Any good wrestler must also accept defeat. We learn to take both victory and loss respectfully; in wrestling, winning dishonorably is worse than losing graciously.

I may not be a perfect Quaker. I trip, tackle, and slam people to the ground in order to win a match, but wrestling is also about how you present yourself outside of the sport. It's about encouraging your teammates whether they win or lose. It's about helping someone get up after a workout because they have no strength left, and most importantly, it's about seeing the best in anyone and everyone. When I think about how wrestling has made me a better person, I'm glad to be both a Quaker and a wrestler. □



Wrestling with Defeat

Clay Lewis

Grade 9, Abington Friends School, member of Abington Meeting, both in Jenkintown, Pa.



Transitioning from Public to Private School

Namiyah Nole

*Grade 6, Greene Street Friends
School in Philadelphia, Pa.*

I remember the day my teachers from Wister Elementary School announced to me and two other students that we were selected for a scholarship. I was overjoyed until they continued to say that all of us wouldn't be going. We were all selected, but only one of us would be chosen. At that point I knew I was facing a competition. As quickly as I got excited, I also felt scared and not very confident, not only because I was competing against my peers, but because of the "transition from public to private school." I have always been a hard worker, but from that day on I knew I would have to work harder, and so I did. I used to think to myself, "Do my peers want this as bad as I do?" I wanted to feel like I earned something. I wanted to make my mom proud.

As a Key student (a student who wears a yellow key to show that they have received an award and would get more opportunities), I was always dedicated, known to be honest and hard working. Maintaining good grades and showing up to school and completing tasks on time were the easy parts. The hardest part was knowing that everything was being judged or looked at. I

knew how badly I wanted the scholarship so I had to think, "Were my peers working as hard as me, or harder than me?" Even if I was not chosen for the scholarship, this opportunity and competition pushed me to be a better student. I showed myself that I could rise to any challenge as long as I was focused and determined. After what felt like the longest six months ever, the day of announcing the selected student came. I was nervous and excited, and I knew I had gained confidence. After all, I committed myself to my full potential.

I was selected. They called my name to receive the full scholarship to Greene Street Friends School. As the feelings of excitement washed over me, I began to realize my peers who also worked hard were not selected. Instead of showing off and bragging about my win, I quickly humbled myself and silently accepted my scholarship. I congratulated my peers on a job well done.

Approaching the first day at Greene Street Friends, I was excited to meet new people but fearful of what to expect. Making friends, being in a new environment, and learning the curriculum felt like a fresh start for me. I didn't know how hard it would be, but I knew I wanted badly to succeed. In the beginning things were rough; adapting to change wasn't easy. I was so unsure of how people would view me knowing that I did not pay for school but had gotten a free scholarship. I didn't want to feel like "the poor kid from public school" so I rarely talked about it.

Over the next few weeks I made some friends. They helped me feel comfortable and at ease enough for me to tell them about how I felt, and about my transition from public school. They accepted me. I would say that this school has a strict rule about equality. The Quaker SPICES played a part in everybody treating me equally. My experience at Greene Street Friends has made me look at competition differently because there isn't really much competition here since everybody is treated equally. This makes me feel comfortable that I can be myself and that I don't have to try to stand out in any way.


It has been a long journey, but I am learning and understanding more. I appreciate the opportunity, and I'll always be grateful that I was selected. 

I cried yesterday. I was sobbing: red, wet, puffy, and gross because of the academic competition I face in school every day. I don't mean to do it, compare myself to other students, but it's inevitable when we're all "graded" and forced onto a scale of intelligence. Though the hierarchy is meant to be kept secret, the reality is that as a student it is actually quite clear, and no one wants to be at the bottom. That's a dilemma within itself, but the other issue is the fact that I attend a Quaker school.

Being in a Quaker environment—although I do not necessarily identify as a Quaker—has caused me to adopt some of the Quaker values. One of those is the Quaker testimony of equality. According to this testimony, "We believe there is that of God in every person, and thus we believe in human equality before God." Following those guidelines, what my grades are compared to the grades of other students doesn't matter because we are all different and therefore have different strengths and weaknesses. What someone else is skilled at may not be what I'm skilled at, but both are equal and valid. Therefore any competition in just one particular area does not define who we are as people.

It is very easy to lose sight of that when engaging in competition. Although I'm aware my grades do not define me, it is very easy to start believing they do. I am a dedicated student and really care about my academic performance, almost more than I should. Even when I get a B I'm disappointed in myself, although I know that is not necessarily a bad grade. In a Quaker school the system is designed to make grades seem as insignificant as possible. We are constantly told that the grades on our report card do not define us as people or even as students. Not only that, but we are encouraged to support our peers and help them instead of dragging them down, with things like peer tutoring programs and study groups. The environment is much different than that of a public school, which is more competitive in all aspects.

I feel as though comparing myself academically to other students can be unhealthy competition, but it also drives me to be better and to work harder. Attending a Quaker school has made me question the belief that people who have higher grades are "better" than those with lower grades. Your report card is not everything. There are plenty of successful artists, musicians, athletes, and influencers who did not have the best grades in high school or even did not attend college. We all have something unique and special inside of us, and what makes me an individual is not what makes someone else an individual, hence the word "individual." There is a specifically Quaker way of looking at competition. Quakers are less concerned about who is better and who is worse, but instead engage in competition to see where their skills currently fall in a specific field. One area does not define who you are. If you have not found your strength, keep searching and keep working. Eventually you will discover that passion and run with it.

So yes, I cried yesterday. I cried for a good hour or so and spoke with some amazing teachers who gave me calming advice and helped the tears dry. And only after they dried was I able to think, process, and look inside myself to discover exactly who I am in this great game of life. The answer I came to was simple: I am not sure yet, and that's okay. I made peace with that because I still have time to figure it out and try new things until I finally find what really sticks with me. For now I will continue to work, improve, and keep positive for both myself and the people around me. As long as I have my family, friends, and everyone else who cares for me and helps me during this journey, things can never be too bad. 



High School Hierarchy

Felicity Medina

*Grade 9, Abington Friends School
in Jenkintown, Pa.*



Loosening Our Blindfolds

Tara Prakash

*Grade 6, Sidwell Friends School
in Washington, D.C.*

The main point of a competition is to see who is better in a certain arena. Equality is emphasizing and enforcing the importance of all of us as equals, and competition is the exact opposite. It darkens the line even more between best and worst and that's not necessarily healthy. However, the broad scope of competition is great because in life not everything is equal: not everything is just handed to me, and sometimes I have to compete for what I want. So competition is appropriate when used with responsibility, and of the Quaker testimonies, equality stands out to me. I want to remember the importance of equality above competition.

It's funny how much I can learn about myself and others when engaging in a competition. I learn how competitive other people get and whether they manage to stay calm and be kind to other people. Competition can act as a blindfold sometimes. Sometimes I get so caught up in trying to win that I forget about what's right in front of me, and I do things that I regret because I'm blinded by the image of the trophy before my eyes or the satisfaction of winning or the praise I will receive, and I can't see the most important things, such as the people who care about me most. It blinds my sense of equality, and I get caught up in waterfall of winning. And often, people pretend to have blinders on. They pretend they can't see what's right before their eyes, just to avoid the hardship of facing it. Sometimes the hardest part about a competition is the stress people can put on being number one. People—teammates, coaches, parents, teachers, siblings—say to try your best and give it your all, but those are hollow words, empty of meaning, when they over-celebrate the winner and forget about all the people that did try their best, did give their all, but just didn't win. The blindfolds become tighter around our heads, increasing our desire to bask in the glory everyone is giving the winner.


There are many ways of interpreting a win or a loss. To some people, a win may be winning the championships in their baseball league, to others it may be getting first place in a science fair. A win is a mental place in my mind where I feel great, like the world is holding me up. A win doesn't necessarily mean a physical first-place trophy or medal; it's just a part of me that is so happy. I can feel like a winner when I get second place in a debate meet because I know I tried my best and I feel great about myself. My thoughts and attitude control whether I feel I have actually won or lost.

I could win the soccer championships and still feel like I lost because somehow my dad is still mad with the way I played. I could get first place in a wrestling tournament, but actually feel worse than the kid who got fifth because, unlike his coach, mine is screaming at me about why I could have played better. There is more to a win or a loss than getting handed a trophy or having a medal slung over my neck; I need to actually feel that win to be happy, let it resonate all over my body, not just stare at a golden award with the words "First Place" engraved onto it, when in my heart, I feel that I got lost.

Equality is more than just a testimony. It's more than words on a page and teachers lecturing right against wrong. Inequality is a white cop shooting a black man when he isn't even armed; it's the difference between the paycheck a woman receives and the one a man receives; it's the racial disparities occurring in healthcare when a black woman gets treated hours after she should have been, and because of that, her life is so wrongly taken. So much in the world is unequal. It's wrong, and it doesn't match the words people tell me every day. We can talk all about the importance of equality, but in the real world, there are hundreds of situations where there is injustice, where lives are taken when they could have been saved,

because of skin color, gender, or other factors. It's wrong, and we can talk ourselves out of it as much as we want, but when I look at the real world, I know that these are empty words when our society isn't reflecting them.

We are always competing for something in this world, whether it is someone's love, an academic award, or a sports trophy. There will never be a world with no competition, but that's okay because competition can be great, and I have learned a lot of lessons from competition. We just need to remember to treat people equally, because right now, at 12 years old, I might have lost a soccer game. It certainly doesn't feel great, but at the end of the day, it's just a game. But when we grow up, there are bigger losses than a game. I read an article recently about a man who lost his wife because of racial disparities in healthcare. That's so much worse than a soccer game; that's his entire world shattering when it could have been spared, she could have been spared. She was in hands that could save her, but because of the color of her skin, she died. She didn't need to die; it was just inequality, the horrible injustice of inequality. But competition and inequality can be totally different things, and while inequality is just wrong, competition is a more complicated concept.

Competition has helped me grow because I have changed from my previous mistakes. Competition is all about how I look at something. When my travel soccer team qualified for regionals, I was psyched. We lost the championship game by one goal, and my team was bummed, but I learned that the whole experience—all the pockets of beautiful moments that my team created together, all the times I got closer to my friends—was so much stronger. I created such a strong bond with the other girls just by making it to the finals. My favorite part wasn't the game itself; it was actually the car ride there and spending time with my teammates in the hotel room. Getting closer with them was so much more valuable than winning the championships. It's times like these that remind me of what really matters, and sometimes when I get caught up in the aftermath of losing something, when I am in the wake of not getting first place, I reminisce about those times and tell myself there are so many parts of competition that aren't about winning. We need to learn to loosen our blindfolds, discover the many other positive aspects of competition, and remember that we all have the potential to truly see. 





Losing

Davis Lensch

*Grade 7, Carolina Friends School
in Durham, N.C.*

No one likes it,
The thing most fear,
Unpredictable,
We work hard to run away,
Hidden lessons weaved in,
Forced,
People get emotional
Some don't even care,
Reminds us how much
We like winning,
Blaming, cheating,
Turning against one another,
Pressure,
People screaming at you: Do better! Work harder!
Feeling the fire burning in your chest,
It changes you,
Control your feelings,
Releasing an aggressive, furious dragon
Be kind, never lie, or cheat
Feeling like it's not that easy,
Respecting them,
So much in common
Wanting the same thing,
Except they won,
Frustration rising within,
Blaming other people,
You really blame yourself,
Feeling like you failed,
They did better than you,
Crying when you feel like you deserve more
No longer angry
Feeling disappointment
With every breath you take in,
Wind blowing across your face,
Thinking about what you have learned
At least you had fun
The next day no one cares,
Forgotten,
Blown away like dust
United.

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More SVP Honorees



“My teacher slowly walked around handing them out. Lick finger, hand out a test, lick finger, hand out a test. He looked like a cat about to pounce on the whole class. All of his power, at that moment, came from one sheet of paper. Fold them, face down on the desks. Tests are private; that’s why they matter. He came to me. I looked up; had he always been this tall? Lick, take, fold, face down on my desk. If I looked at it long enough would it vanish? I took one deep breath and turned it face up. . . .”

—“Ego or Integrity”

*by Kosette Koons-Perdikis,
Grade 6, Sidwell Friends School in
Washington, D.C.*



“I had no idea what went on in the book because I was just focused on finishing the book. During the school day on Wednesday my fifth-grade teacher announced to the class that there would be a test on Friday. I didn’t think much of it, but once I got home it really started to sink in that I made a huge mistake. . . . I always knew I was not doing the right thing, but at the time the right thing was not the most important thing. The important thing was winning.”

—“What Page Are You On?”

*by Nicole Sosnik, Grade 6, Sidwell
Friends School in Washington, D.C.*



“A few minutes later, a couple of girls from another school joined us at the table. As soon as they sat down, one of them asked if I had ever been to a math meet before. I replied, ‘No, this is my first time.’ She sneered, and in a derogatory voice replied, ‘Well, the problems are really hard. Trust me, you won’t be able to solve any, especially if this is your first time!’ My heart started racing even more than before because I thought that an ‘expert’ like her must know what she was talking about.”

—“Community of Numeric Competitors”

*by Ilaria Luna, Grade 6, Sidwell
Friends School in Washington, D.C.*



“Quakerism has taught me, and continues to teach me, the values of living a whole life, so hopefully, I can be one of the people who will lift others up in my community and family. I remember one of the most influential moments of my understanding of peace and community. Ironically, it was at a competition—the type where you shiver with nerves as you warm up, your muscles freezing up with fear—where I learned the full relation of life and the Quaker testimonies.”

—“Truly Winning at Life”

*by Sophia Stylianios, Grade 6, Sidwell
Friends School in Washington, D.C.*



“My first exposure to competitive club travel sports was a difficult one, primarily because of the attitude and actions of one team member. She was quick to say how certain team members didn’t deserve play time because they weren’t as good as she was. Or she would talk behind my back and belittle me. She could do no wrong, and was the strongest on the team, she claimed. Every time we lost, she would pout and get mad at all her teammates. Was winning that important to her that she was willing to hurt her teammates in the process?”

—**“From Competition to Coopertition”**
by *Lila Safavi, Grade 6,*
Sidwell Friends School in
Washington, D.C.



“On Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays after school she went to track practice, and every other Saturday she had a track meet. All of the track meets in which she competed, she won. There was a meet that she was really feeling confident about. When she heard who she was competing against she thought it sounded familiar but could not think of why. When she went to the meet on Saturday, she got there early so she could do drills and stretch. Soon her track team showed up, and right behind them her competitors: her old team and her best friend.”

—**“Competition Who?”**
by *Taleah Dixon, Grade 6,*
Greene Street Friends School in
Philadelphia, Pa.



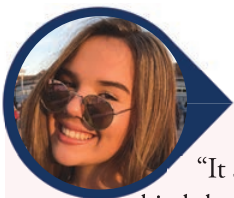
“I used to wrestle. One time, after losing a match, I sat back down on the bench, changing my shoes and getting a drink of water. I heard a parent yelling at their son for losing his last match. They never told him what to do better, they just yelled, but the coaches helped him by telling him his mistakes. . . . Competition is about more than just winning and losing.”

—**“Growth and Learning”**
by *Wielond Kirby, Grade 8,*
Medford Memorial Middle School,
member of Medford Meeting, both in
Medford, N.J.



“Initially, I felt the urge to compete against other students to complete levels quickly, even though my teacher discouraged us from doing so. While I progressed as a violinist partly due to competition, I have come to recognize that the true measure of mastering the piece is how my playing touches the hearts of my audience. I relate this to the Quaker principle of letting my Inner Light shine through my instrument for the whole community. We can use competition to grow and become the best of ourselves, instead of merely beating someone else.”

—**“Competing Against Myself”**
by *Ankita Achanta, Grade 8,*
Newtown Friends School in
Newtown, Pa.



"It started on my tenth birthday. Butterflies in my stomach as I rip open the colorful, balloon wrapping paper and tear apart the medium-sized brown box. I have waited for this gift for my entire life, but reflecting back, it only damaged who I am. A beautiful, crisp, matte black iPhone 4 was now mine. I couldn't believe my eyes, and the first thing I downloaded was a popular social app that all my friends already had: Instagram."

—**"Journey of Self Acceptance"**
by *Grace Sousa, Grade 9,*
Abington Friends School in
Jenkintown, Pa.



"I used to despise competition. Growing up with siblings, our lives were devoted to one-upping each other and proving who had done something better than the other. I often found myself doing crazy things solely for the purpose of proving that I had done something my siblings had not. This was quite unhealthy in the development of my idea of what it meant to compete. Competition to me was a ruthless way for people to show who was better than the other."

—**"My Revelation with Quaker Competition"**
by *Carluccio Horton, Grade 9,*
Westtown School in West
Chester, Pa.



"This view on competition does not seem very Quakerly, for it does not seem to promote equality and celebrate the great things found on both teams. However, through my time competing in athletics, I have found that within this desire for inequality lies the most egalitarian aspect of competition: a common desire to see the other fail, and through this desire, players can cultivate relationships based off equality and respect."

—**"The Value of Intense Competition"**
by *Jack Davis, Grade 11,*
Friends Academy in Locust
Valley, N.Y.



"Even though it is a competition, there is so much to learn from it. One is learning to work with a team. When competing on a team, you have other people to rely on and support you. If you are trying to explain an ethical theory and how it should be applied, a good teammate will have your back if you leave out a detail, helping you develop a strong case on why you have the best solution to the dilemma. With support you can help lessen others' mistakes and create a higher level of competitiveness."

—**"Competitive Ethics?"**
by *Nafisa Rashid, Grade 12,*
Oakwood Friends School in
Poughkeepsie, N.Y.