

SPRING 2012

THE

COURAGE PROJECT



Meetings Schedule:

Introduction
January 2012

Temple Beth El

Essay Sharing
February 2012

The Islamic Center
of Madison

Presentations
March-April 2012

Westminster
Presbyterian Church
Shorewood Hills Elem.
School, Madison, WI



Lubar Institute
for the Study of the Abrahamic Religions
University of Wisconsin–Madison



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“The opinions advanced in these essays are the responsibility of the individual students alone
and do not necessarily represent those of the Lubar Institute.”



Welcome to Courage Project

Charles L. Cohen,
Director of LISAR



On the Sunday before Memorial Day, Rohany Nayan, the Lubar Institute's Graduate Fellow and the genius behind the Courage Project, sent me a draft of these essays. Upon opening the file, the very first words I read sprang from Zeynab Ahmed's opening quotation from Ambrose Redmoon (James Neil Hollingworth): "Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the judgment that something else is more important than fear." Few sentiments, I think, could better serve as this volume's portal.

The Courage Project aims to expose Jewish, Christian, and Muslim students to each other and, in the process, encourage them to share their religious beliefs. Given teenagers' normal skittishness about being judged for any reason, not to mention our culture's default discomfort with even whispering words about faith around strange people, merely joining the project took nerve. In signing on—and then finishing up—each participant had to affirm a personal judgment that the benefits of devoting four months to talking candidly with members of different faiths and revealing the results of those conversations in both a public performance and this book of reflections were worth the potential risks of being embarrassed, misunderstood, or possibly humiliated.

Not all of the essays deal with specifically religious issues, but each was composed as part of what we at the Institute like to call "Abrahamic conversations—the mingling of Christian, Muslim, and Jewish perspectives. For these young people, embracing each other became the "something else" that they accounted "more important than fear."

The depth of their courage should be self-evident from the pieces that follow.

Charles L. Cohen
Professor of History and Religious Studies
Director, Lubar Institute for the Study of the Abrahamic Religions



Introduction to The Courage Project 2012

Rohany Nayan,
Graduate Fellow of LISAR



The Courage Project 2012 almost did not happen. Due to some hiccups in the recruitment process at the beginning, the program was almost canceled. However, persistent requests from some of the teenage participants, along with their, and my commitment to LISAR's mission to create opportunities for dialogue, made the project a reality.

I myself learned a lot from the Courage Project. I learned that we need courage to overcome hiccups, which are a constant part of our lives. We can see all kinds of hiccups, and how they are resolved in the essays written by the participants in this project. Hiccups should not stop us from doing what is more important than the hiccups themselves. Experiencing the hiccups makes us stronger. I learned that friends are always around to pat you on your back or give you a glass of water or to just say, "Boo!" to get rid of the hiccups. I also noticed that when we have hiccups, everyone has suggestions, and is ready to share their stories about how they got rid of their hiccups. Hiccups give people opportunities to extend each other a helping hand. The Courage Project this year definitely had a lot of helping hands from the teenagers, their families and the following adults: Cantor Deborah Martin, Rabbi Laurie Zimmerman, Peggy Kent, Rabbi Bonnie Margulis, Reverend Kathleen Owens, Zaid Sohail and Katrina Liu.

Thank you very much to all of you for making this project a reality this year! Your COURAGE is... "*Hiccups*".... "*Excuse me!*"..... precious!





Meeting #1

At *Temple Beth El* - Participants toured the center and participated in icebreaker activities to find specific information about each other.





Meeting #2

At the *Islamic Center* – Participants toured the center and discussed the essays that they wrote on the theme of “courage”.





Meeting #3

At the *Westminster Presbyterian Church* – Participants toured the church, discussed their essays on “courage” and prepared for their presentations.





Courage

Zeynab Ahmed

“Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the judgment that something else is more important than fear.” -- Ambrose Redmoon

On February 15, 2011, my parents gave my siblings and me the most devastating news of our lives. We were moving away from Africa. Africa—the place I was born in, the place where I was raised, the place I made friends, the place where my whole life was. I was going to move away from life as I knew it and go a foreign land, a place I had no clue about. I couldn't believe my ears. It's not that I didn't want to come to America, but the fact that I had to start all over again really scared me, because I hated change more than anything in the world. Thus, I never told my friends in school. I acted as if everything was fine, but eventually the truth was going to come out. My friends noticed that something was really bothering me. I finally gave in and told them about it.

The last couple of weeks were very weird to me. That's what everyone ever talked about. They used to say things like “there's a lot of racism there, the white people hate black people,” just some negative things that I might endure in America because of my color and my religion. I would be lying if I said I didn't think that it was a possibility. I was leaving a place where everyone was one race, there's no such thing as racism, and coming to a place where everything was diverse. I thought about that every single day. The last day in school was pretty sorrowful, I will never forget that day. Luckily, there is Facebook and email through which I can communicate with them, even though it's not the same as being with them.

On March 1, 2011, on the way to the airport, I could feel tears trying to escape my eyes as I saw for the last time what my home was like. Who knows? by the time I go back, it might be a different place. Inside my head I kept hoping that something might go wrong so we wouldn't have to leave. Maybe the plane would be cancelled, or something like that. That might have been selfish of me, but I couldn't help it. Unfortunately for me, nothing happened, and we were good to go. The fact that nothing was going to stop us finally adjusted into my head. On the plane, I was thinking, “maybe it isn't as bad as they make it sound, maybe the whole racist issue doesn't go on, maybe people there are nice and won't judge me for my race and religion, maybe moving away is a good thing for my future, maybe I will have better life than when I stayed in Africa.” I told myself those things to calm myself down.

We arrived at Chicago airport, the buildings looked so huge. I felt like I was in a dream but reality caught up with me. I couldn't help, but smile, I AM IN AMERICA. On the way to Wisconsin, I was looking out of the window; I was so amazed by everything I felt like I was in a whole different world.

On the way, I kept making resolutions, I wanted to be successful and, thanks to Allah, I have achieved some of my goals. For example, the same summer I got here, I was accepted into a summer program at University of Wisconsin–Madison. During my stay there, I learned so much about life, about college, things I could never have found out if I stayed in Africa. I am grateful to my parents for making the right decision for us. I put my fears aside, because I knew there were more important things than fear. That's my story.



COURAGE

Ahmed Ahmed

Courage is resistance to fear and believing in yourself. My story is about what I had to endure because of my religion. I am from a family that strictly follows the rules and regulations of being a good Muslim. My parents taught me how to pray, read the Qur'an and be a good Muslim. At the time, we lived in Nairobi, Kenya; it was part of the school system for one to go to the school in their area, and ours happened to be Catholic school.

Being a good Muslim I am expected to pray five times every single day at different intervals. At home that was never a problem for me, but, at school, that was a different story. First, I didn't have the time to pray, since it was in the middle of my classes at the prayer time and I didn't have a place to pray. Therefore, I used to skip the afternoon prayers every single day. My parents noticed this and they told me the importance of being a good Muslim.

I didn't think I could pray at school, but I overcame my fears and I decided to pray in an empty classroom right before class every day. This went on for a while, and I was proud of myself. One day, however, I was caught praying by my teacher and I was asked what I was doing. I explained to her what prayer in Islam is and how to do it. She was fascinated and admired my courage in doing whatever it takes to fulfill my obligations in my religion. She told me that, although she didn't want to prevent me from praying, I had to find another place to pray. The teacher said she didn't know how to deal with the matter because such a scenario had never occurred in the history of the school. As a result, many discussions were held. Finally, I was given permission to pray at the mosque every day before class. I was relieved that my fear of my teachers and the school board didn't stop me from praying. I think that takes a lot of courage.



COURAGE

Mara Bakken

Meeting and talking with strangers has never been a difficult thing for me to do. I find it fascinating to gradually discover who this new person is while they are discovering the same about me. I've always thought of myself as someone who is good with people, who can relate and connect to anyone, even people I'd never met before. However, I do think there are times and people who come along with something that makes meeting them not just a regular conversation of getting to know the other. Two summers ago my family and I ventured across the ocean to my birth country, from where I was adopted. We were on a homeland tour with other adoptive families, traveling for two glorious weeks around the beautiful, fast-growing country of China. Submerged in a completely new world and culture, the entire two weeks were a thrill rush, and an adventure I will never forget. We were always on the go to a new city, be it large like Beijing or small like Xi'an (although the "small" cities have over a million people). I believe that, in the span of fourteen days, not counting the thirteen-hour flights to and from China, we had seven in-country flights. One of the flights was to the city near where I was born, Nanning, in the south near the Vietnam border. The families had split up to visit each child's hometown in China and the possibility of meeting their birth family or foster family or visiting the orphanage that cared for them. So we were in Nanning, a hot, subtropical city, and on the way to the countryside to visit the orphanage where I had spent a couple of months as a sick infant and on the way to possibly meeting my foster family. Going there was a contemplative time for me. I was realizing that I was perhaps going to meet people from the world in which I could have grown up, people who had known me before I entered this life. My birth family's identity is unknown, so we wouldn't be meeting them. But I had spent a significant amount of time with the foster family with whom, as evident from pictures my parents took when they brought me home, I had formed a close bond as a baby. The possibility of my meeting these people today made me nervous. I had no expectations built around the possibility. I had no idea what to expect, if I they would be welcoming and recognize me, or not recognize or remember me, if I would feel any connection to them or if I wouldn't, and what if they got emotional, or I did? Yet I had trust in the knowledge that whatever happened, things would work out.

When we arrived at the orphanage, we were told that my foster family had not been located and thus were not here to meet us. I don't remember how I felt at that moment. Looking back, I think it would have been a meaningful meeting for my family and theirs. We also were told that the orphanage was now specifically for children with AIDS or other chronic diseases. We met with the director of the orphanage, who let us see my files and pictures of me from when I was at the orphanage, and who showed us around the building and grounds. We got to meet some of the children and say hello. It was something I'd never done experienced before, the visible poverty and being surrounded by such sick children. When I think of courage, I think of it as persevering outside your comfort zone. And sometimes your comfort zone changes shape and size. The possibility of meeting my foster family was a crazy, nervous thought, something which was out of my control. Being surrounded by children in poverty who were afflicted with AIDS and other diseases was something I'd never had to do before. The experience was touching. Living in these moments of what I consider to be small, personally courageous acts, I learned a lot about myself and what I believe courage is.



Courage

Farhat Bhuiyan

“There are all kinds of courage,” said Dumbledore, smiling. “It takes a great deal of bravery to stand up to our enemies, but just as much to stand up to our friends...” (*Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*). When I was in 2nd grade, I stood up to all of my friends for a girl, Heather, in my class. I thought it was wrong to treat her like she was invisible. Even though my friends didn't like her, I still played with her at recess a few times. Honestly I didn't really like her that much, but she was so sad and lonely all the time that it didn't seem fair to be happy when she wasn't. Everybody was either mean to her or ignored her. It was because her mom drank a lot of alcohol and her family was kind of poor. Most of my friends just avoided her, but I felt that was wrong too.

So one day when she was standing in her corner all alone by the swings I went up to her and asked if we could push each other on the swings. I remember sitting and pumping with my legs because she wasn't that strong. After my turn was up, I turned to her and said something along the lines of, “That was fun! It's your turn now.” She seemed surprised, as if she expected me to run off. We talked and played until recess was over and class started again. She looked happier than ever. I was happy too, but then I noticed some of my other friends repeatedly glancing at me, and others not even meeting my eyes. At that time I decided to ignore it. But later, as the school day ended, I went up to my group of friends and tried to talk to them. They went silent when I approached, and I asked what was wrong. Finally, Elissa said Heather was weird and smelled, and she asked why I had played with her. I told them that everyone is weird sometimes and that no one is perfect. I said that it was mean and cruel of them to be excluding her from their fun. And then I left.

The next day I sat with Heather at lunch and half of my usual table sat down with me. I was really happy because everyone started talking to her. She was really shy at first, but then she warmed up and soon everyone at our table was laughing. From our group Heather especially liked two girls more than to the rest; they became a trio, never separating.

My act of courage helped Heather live her life. Courage doesn't have to be someone putting their life in danger to save another; it can be a simple action to enforce right and wrong. So yes, Dumbledore is very much correct when he speaks his wise words. 10 points to Gryffindor!



Muslim-American

Iffat Bhuiyan

Courage, what does it really mean? I have never pulled someone out of a burning building or leaped into a river to save a child, but I still believe I have courage. I face people everyday knowing I'm different and that we will never be the same. Why am I so different? it's because I am a Muslim-American, and proud to be one. Over years of teasing and bullying, I have become a stronger and more self-confident person.

The teasing started ever since I could remember. At first, it wasn't even because I was a Muslim; it was because I was different. I had a different name, different skin color; everything about me was different. I remember in elementary school, I would walk home crying because of my second grade bully, Darris. I didn't know why he was so mean to me; he had no reason to be. I was always friendly and nice to him, but he always called me names and laughed at me. So I learned to deal with it, I tried to ignore him, but some days I couldn't because it was so hurtful. So I would wipe all my tears before I got home, because I knew that I shouldn't let things like that get to me. Life wasn't so bad, I still had lots of friends, despite what Darris told them about me, and was generally happy in school.

But everything changed at 9/11. America was traumatized by the terror attack, and life for Muslims became ever so different. I started to feel targeted when I went to school; the teasing and bullying got worse. My friends started to keep their distance from me, acting like I had some kind of disease! Darris started to call me horrible names like terrorist; he would pull my hair and push me. I felt terrible inside, I wanted to stand up to him, tell him he was wrong, but I couldn't.

I thought I would let him say what he wanted and soon it he would just stop. But I was wrong; he didn't stop, so I knew I had to stand up for myself. It was recess time and we were all playing outside. I was waiting in line for the big slide when some one pushed me forward. I fell to my hands and knees, and heard all the kids laughing. I turned around as saw Darris standing there. I will never forget the next words that came out of his mouth, "We don't let terrorists play on this playground." I felt my face get hot and tears coming, but I couldn't let him do that, see how he had all the power. I got up and shouted at him, "I'm NOT a terrorist! I'm a MUSLIM, not a terrorist! What, you think you're better than me? Because you say things behind my back, and get people to laugh? I'm always going to be better than you, I accept people the way they are. Something you should try once in a while, you might make some REAL friends that way." Now that I think about it, those weren't the best words to yell at someone, because the next thing he did was run the other way crying. I know it wasn't right, but I had to find a way to stand up for my self. The next day at school, I apologized to him, and he never picked on me again. He has apologized to me many times for everything he has done, and now Darris and I are friends.

From this experience, I have learned how to stick up for myself, and not be afraid of being a Muslim. So no, I still have not pulled someone out of a burning building or leaped into a river to save a child, but I do have courage. I am proud to be a Muslim-American.



The Most Courageous Thing I Have Ever Done

Rosa Kalish

I don't speak Spanish. I can mumble a few words about how I feel great, and the teacher is very intelligent, but other than that I don't speak Spanish. So during my times in Chiapas this last summer, I relied mainly on my mom's Spanish, and resorting to smiles and nods when they were required of me. Then, on our third night there, my mom abandoned me, leaving me with our Mexican relatives for the night while she went to dinner with an old friend. "Mom, I don't understand, I don't speak Spanish." But she left me anyway, assuring me that I wouldn't need to speak much since it would just be me and Graciella, the woman with whom we'd been staying.

But my mom was absolutely wrong. Graciella had invited other family over, her niece and her grandnephew, Pedro. Pedro was just a year older than me, and spoke English the same way I spoke Spanish. Initially I wanted to hide. How was I possibly going to continue a dinner table proficient conversation, if I could only talk about the weather and types of transportation. But I convinced myself that it would be fine, and that, moreover, staying in my room watching *Sixteen Candles* would be just too rude.

Greeting everyone was fine. My pitiful "Estoy bien gracias y usted" was all I needed, and I knew enough to nod and say "que rico" after starting my food. But as real conversation started, I realized that I really, really didn't speak Spanish, and that there was no way for me to respond to "Dime de tu vida" ("Tell me about your life") without making a total fool of myself. "Todo esta bien" ("Everything's fine"), I offered, hoping that my substance-free response would suffice. It didn't. Everyone was looking at me, waiting for me to offer a pithier description of my life. I started talking, thinking that maybe by some miracle, if I started to speak, fluent Spanish would just come out naturally. Of course I was wrong, and I could tell by everyone's faces that "Me gusta mucho mis clases, especialmente dad los de historio y escribo" did not actually mean, well, anything.

I started to get flustered and decided I would just resort to trying to act things out with my hands. Just as I was nonsensically flapping my hands, trying to simulate photography, Pedro said in English "do... you listen to... Katy Perry." My relief that finally someone was speaking to me in English overshadowed the randomness of his question. Pedro and I continued talking, me in my "Spanish" and him in "English." Many times Pedro would say something, and I would smile encouragingly, wondering what the heck he meant to say, and a few times my attempts to formulate a sentence was met with blank stares. But, for the most part, we understood each other.

After they left, I thought about how ridiculous I must have sounded, and how embarrassing my attempt to use the past tense was. But I realized, my Spanish was no worse than Pedro's English, and moreover, even if not all of my attempts at Spanish were perfectly understood, had I kept my mouth shut, nothing would have been communicated. Having the chance to speak Spanish on my own was a valuable experience. It made me realize that, no matter how bad you think you are at something, at least attempting to do it is worlds better than resorting to silence. I now am able to enjoy speaking in my "Spanish," remembering always that whether or not I speak perfectly is irrelevant; it's the fact that I'm trying which really matters.



Courage

Ali Khan

The question popped up. My teacher began to tear up. Everybody stared at the librarian. Nobody knew whether to laugh or to cry. But, most of all, they didn't know even why, why a school librarian would even think of making a racial comment towards a student's background. In the big moment it hit me, I kept calm. I did not dare to back down nor rise above. I was not ignorant or insecure. I did not start a fight or try to run away from one. I was courageous.

Courage in my mind is the feeling one gets when they feel the need to stand up or stand down from what is right and wrong in a peaceful matter. In my mind the difference between being courageous and honorable is that, while honor sometimes comes from violence or revenge, courage does not. The story I was mentioning happened at my old middle school, Badger. Back in the old days, I remember my great friends, the fun classes, and all nice teachers. The 8th grade was new for everything; we got new students, new classes and new teachers.

One of the new teachers was a new librarian. She was one of the craziest yet coolest librarians a student could ever have. She was always (for some reason) very hyper throughout the day. She would always make finding a good book like finding a lost civilization full of gold. She was always fascinated about learning new languages, exploring exotic cultures, and visiting foreign countries. She told me she spoke four languages. One Monday, the whole school had been talking about the death of Osama Bin Laden. My English class and I were taking our usual Monday library visit when, after we checked out all of our books, something strange occurred. My librarian was asking me peculiar questions. She was asking, "Which country are you from again? Do you know what happened yesterday?" These were normal questions, but I figured out that they were linked together after she asked me her third question, "Were you related to Osama Bin Laden?" The question slapped me in the face before I could say a word. I didn't know what to say, but, before I could say anything, I turned around to see everyone else's reaction. Their smiles vanished. Their early morning tiredness woke up. Especially my teacher's, she was tearing up. "What should I do?" I thought. Then it hit me: I now knew the reasons why we had a school guidance counselor, all those cheesy speeches about walking away, all those videos we watched about bullying, and all those lectures we went through about courage. I knew I had to bark up some courage and not walk away. I had to speak. It was hard at first, but it went a little like this, "Why would you even think about asking that question? Is it just because of my family's ethnicity that you would accuse my family of being terrorists?" But, before I said something I would regret, I had to be courageous enough to let it go. It took not only courage to bring the words, but also to withdraw them. You need to do both in order to become successful for something you believe in.

Later that day, I spent the whole day in the principal's office while I was getting interviewed by many teachers. The librarian wrote me an apology note on a card. I still went to that same library for the rest of the year, and we both acted as if it had never happened. I didn't believe someone so international could think something so secular. At least I know two things about her: she doesn't have the courage to learn about new people, and she sends very cheap apology cards.



Courage Essay

Emily Kuhn

It was 5:30am, June 12, 2011. I got up and walked downstairs.

“Today’s the day!” my dad said. He was talking about my trip. I was leaving to go to Nicaragua for one month. I was really excited and, at the same time, scared out of my mind. I had never been to another country by myself, let alone a country where they didn’t speak English. I had taken Spanish for four years, but I hadn’t ever actually used it as my main language. Even though I was terrified, I knew I would have fun. It was very hard for me to say goodbye to my family and friends for a month after seeing them every day at home and at school. This took a lot of courage. My parents kept assuring me that I was going to be too busy to miss them and that I was going to have the time of my life.

I got on the plane with other kids who were going with me. Before I knew it, we landed in Managua, Nicaragua, the capital. We got off the plane and when all I heard was Spanish, my brain started freaking out. I had no clue what anyone was saying so I stayed close to my American friends. The next day we drove to where we would be living, Granada. We were introduced to our host families and were taken to our new homes. I was so scared but I knew it was going to be a lot of fun.

I remember as I walked with my host grandmother, Amparo, to our house, she kept asking me questions. I could understand some of the words, but all I could think about was how fast she was speaking. I later figured out that she was asking if I wanted to sleep alone or share a room. Apparently, I answered that I was fine by myself, because she showed me a small room that wasn’t big enough for two. I had a very large extended family, and I was introduced to everyone immediately. It was overwhelming, but I was excited. I met my great-grandmother, who was quickly asking me questions about my family and life in the U.S. I tried my best to listen as carefully as I could to what she was saying and then respond in my slow, broken Spanish. Everyone was sitting around me listening quietly to what I had to say. It obviously made sense because they kept nodding and asking more questions. I was so proud of myself. I didn’t really know that I was capable of communicating in another language.

This is just one of the instances in my life where I have felt very courageous. I didn’t think I could do it, but I’m so glad I did. It was one of the best experiences I’ve had in my life, and it definitely changed me as a person.



Courage

Hamdi Nur

It all started in the summer of 2009, when my dad was watching a basketball game between the Orlando Magic and the Los Angeles Lakers. My dad had the idea of my becoming a basketball player. He loved to watch basketball. Especially late at night, when all is quiet, except for the sound of TV.

My father tried to push me into joining the girls' basketball team in my school. He said that by joining the basketball team, I could get a good scholarship to great colleges, I would get exercise, and I could become the first WNBA Muslim player someday. He also said that I was the perfect girl for it, compared to my sisters. But, I never listened to him. Whenever he talked about it, all I heard was blah, blah, blah. I hated basketball, because I thought it was a waste of my time, especially since I never really understood basketball. Whenever I watched a basketball game, all I saw was two teams playing against each other, aggressively trying to get the ball into the other team's hoop. I never thought there were rules to playing basketball. Anyway, I wasn't the athletic type, either. I wanted to focus more on my learning. Getting a scholarship for being smart was better to me than getting a scholarship for basketball. But people always said that being an active person meant your brain will function much better. That's when I told myself, "It's not going to be that bad...I'll just try it for a little while and if I don't like it, I'll just quit it."

The next day, the morning announcement talked about basketball, "If you are planning on joining girls' basketball this season, you will need to go to the meeting today at 2:15pm." Even though the emotions inside me were fuddled, I went to the meeting and got all the papers that were required to join basketball. After school that day, I told my dad that I was actually considering joining girls' basketball this season. With a surprised look, he congratulated me, along with a comment about how strong I would be if I kept playing basketball. I showed him the papers and told him that I was going to need to buy basketball shoes and other stuff. So the next weekend, we were off to the mall and into Dick's Sporting Goods. After a long search for the perfect basketball shoes, I found them. Even though I didn't want a basketball at the time, my dad requested to buy a basketball.

Finally, the day I had been dreading all week came, Monday. After school I went to the gym along with many other girls who were thrilled to finally bounce the ball. I, on the other hand, was nervous because I was the only girl who was a Muslim and had her headscarf on. I was beginning to have butterflies in my stomach. I felt like staying in the locker room and never coming out. But with all the anxiety inside me, I still told myself, "you're strong, you can do this." After I changed clothes, I went out to the court and warmed up with all the other girls. After some rest, we did more warm ups, and that day was basically a warm-up day. The first week or so was like going through hell. Every time I came home from practice, I always complained about how much my whole body hurt, especially my legs. Every day after practice I would go straight to bed and wake up the next day because of how much work I was putting in to it. I actually thought about quitting at one point, but that thought didn't stay in my head for long. As the season went on, and our very first game got closer, I began to feel the anxiety and got frightened again. I started to wonder, "I bet I will be the only girl in all of those schools that we go to who will have a head scarf." I didn't want to go to our first game because I thought that people would be staring at me in wonder or maybe give me a dirty look because of my head scarf. As our first game came closer and closer, I was feeling more and more nervous. I tried not to go to our first game, but I couldn't. I started to like the game. I wanted to play basketball every day until I died.

I love my religion, and now I love basketball. So why can't I do both, play basketball and still be that wonderful Muslim girl? I decided to not let my fear get in the way of what I liked to do best. I decided to go to our first game, and it felt good being out there playing. That was the courageousness of it. Whenever I was out there playing, it was as if the whole crowd disappeared. It felt like it was just me, my teammates, and the opponents. I felt proud that I pushed myself out there and ignored all the negatives in my head. I began to think about the positives. As the season went on and we had more and more games, I was actually kind of relieved that I was different from all those other girls out there and, at the same time, I was of one them by being an athlete who plays basketball.



Courage is the Synonym of “Bravery”

Mulki Nur

It took me days upon days and some soul-searching to come up with what to put on this paper. When Rohany first give me the assignment, I thought, “piece of cake! I’ve written a five hundred-word essay more than once before.” However, almost a month later, I still had nothing to write about. When I thought of courage and courageous deeds, my thoughts always went straight to famous people like Rosa Parks, MLK, firefighters, police, or even Gandhi. It didn’t once occur to me that I had done any courageous thing. In my mind, to be courageous or do a courageous deed involves standing up for your freedom, risking your life to save others, or helping kids in Africa, etc. Anything I ever did didn’t seem brave to me, compared to what those kinds of people had done I even gave up and thought, “yeah, screw this; I haven’t done anything courageous.” But as it turned out, that wasn’t true either.

So the night before this paper was due, I mustered up some courage, got my little Dell laptop out, and opened to Microsoft Word. I stared at the white milky paper, glaring back at me, daring me to write something courageous. So I asked myself, what is courage? And what really qualifies, for someone to be called courageous? So, I clicked on Google Chrome and searched “definition of courage.” At first, I felt dumb for doing that. I’m a junior in high school, who doesn’t even know the definition of courage, even though I used it a gazillion times. But I wonder how many of us really know the real meaning of courage, trust, love, or even self-esteem words, which we use all the time.

Anyway, I found a definition of the word on Oxford Dictionary.com; courage is “the ability to do something that frightens one; bravery.” I felt relieved that courage didn’t mean all that I described above. Besides, if courage meant bravery, then I’d been brave before. Just the previous night, I had overcome a fear of mine by speaking in front of 1500 students in my high school and their parents about something I believe in. Since I’m the kind of girl who gets stomach aches at the thought of speaking in front of lots of people, who removes her glasses just so she doesn’t see the crowd, who stutters and stumbles over words, gets dry-mouthed, and sometimes even forgets to breathe—that night had been an immense step for me in overcoming my fear.

If it weren’t for my high school counselor, Ms. Hale, starting the Multicultural Leadership Council (MCLC) to promote acceptance, diversity and togetherness in our high school and community, I would probably never have gotten that opportunity. In addition, through MCLC came the MCLC showcase, where students from different backgrounds got to express their culture. Students did traditional dances, spoke their native languages put on a traditional clothing fashion show, etc. The showcase first, started out as something that happened once a year after school and that students paid to get into, but eventually it came to be mandatory and a school tradition.

After I attended the showcase my freshman and sophomore years, I was amazed by the showcase and all the work MCLC did, so I vowed to be on the council on my junior year. I went to Ms. Hale and asked her about it, and she was willing to give me the details about what I needed to do. I signed up for MCLC and, I’m glad to say, I did get accepted. The minute to get ready for the showcase finally came, I signed up to MC in English as well as in Somali. Before long, we were recruiting the performers and practicing for that day, so that nothing would wrong. When the day finally came, I remember standing on our school stage: heart racing, eyes glued on a ginormous crowd of students, and stomach churning. As I waited for everyone to quiet down, I battled with my body and mind to keep me going and not wind down, since there was no going back.

When everyone was finally serene, I remember seeing the anticipation in their eyes as they waited for me to say something. I started to read a paragraph, which introduced our school dance team. With each word, I started to get comfortable and calm on that stage. Once the time to introduce a tango knocked on my door, I was exhilarated enough to make that crowd cheer and enjoy themselves as much I did. Ultimately, I was brave enough to take them on and not make a fool out of myself.



Courage Essay

Kate Martin

When I was in seventh grade, my mother took a semester-long sabbatical job in Warwick, England, and brought along my father and me. Having never moved before, this was the first time I ever truly encountered being completely alone in an entirely foreign place. As a self-conscious and shy twelve-year old, just the thought of leaving my home, friends and pets behind, even if it was for only six months, was completely terrifying. Even more formidable was the process of adjusting to the new life I would have for the following months. I clearly remember my first day at Trinity Catholic School, the school that I would attend. I was awkward and uncomfortable in my new school uniform, complete with blazer and purple and gold striped tie; I was so nervous and sick to my stomach that I was incredibly pale and actually shaking. I was so nervous about how I would appear to the other students. The walk with my parents up the big brown stone steps and to the counselor's office was one of the longest of my life. Once all the forms were filled out and it was time for class to start, they finally left and I felt more alone than I'd previously ever been in my life. Without brothers or sisters or knowing anyone at that school, I had to step out by myself into the unknown. The rest of those few days were a blur of twisting hallways and new, unfamiliar names and faces.

Eventually, however, life did get easier. People were helpful and friendly, and all these things that were at first foreign and unfamiliar to me became much more comfortable. I think that being forced out of my comfort zone that year made me much more independent and outgoing. I also learned not to care about appearances or being judged so much because these fears will actually inhibit you from being who you really are and make you less happy in the long run.



Courage

Sarah Mondschein

As much as I wish I could tell about some incredible voyage or adventure in which I dodged bullets and fought in the name of good with the courageous heart of a lion, I cannot. In my meager 16 years of life, the necessity for courage has, in my opinion, been scarce. All of my courageous acts seem petty on a life-size scale of events. I've been lucky enough that, in my sheltered corner of the world, Madison, there has been little need for bravery. For me, courage encompasses not the ability to look death in the eye and triumph, but to not fear enough to be humiliated. I am able to appreciate my life, especially in contrast to a significant portion of our war-ravaged world; courage is in far higher demand.

Courage for typical teens is the capability to stand strong and not have your individuality smothered by the fear of being embarrassed. In order to learn courage, I have stretched my comfort zones to the extremes. I've sung *Fly Me to the Moon* in front of 500 people, I've played the lead in a musical in a part meant for a man, I've flown alone on a plane, and I gave a speech for my 8th grade graduation in front of hundreds of people. However, none of these things in my opinion took courage. All I did was leave my fears behind and worried less about how others might think of me

I did have to demonstrate courage when my brother, David, had to have three very difficult surgeries. The first happened when I was in 6th grade. David was born with a congenital defect in his chest wall that had to be repaired through a painful orthopedic surgery. Even though the doctors had explained the procedure and recovery carefully to my parents, our whole family was unprepared for the trauma. My parents were literally completely focused on David and rarely were even home. At 11 years old, I had to be responsible for myself for days while they were in the hospital, and then for most of that fall as the initial surgery failed and had to be repeated. I knew that not only did I have to take care of my own needs, but I also needed to avoid being an additional burden on my already stressed out family. I was shipped around from friends to grandparents to extended family, and I just had to adjust.

Now, fortunately, David has fully recovered. And through this courage I learned resilience, strength and independence. With fewer reservations, I feel more comfortable with who I am, and I will continue to reach beyond where I am comfortable. These events made me work harder for what I wanted to achieve. They helped me realize that I have the ability to take on difficult challenges and prevail.



Courage

Ola Mujanni

Looking back, it seems there aren't many courageous things I have done. Having "courage" seems like a broad topic. Everyone has their own idea of it. For me, it doesn't necessarily have to mean risking your life for someone or something. But it could be just as simple as standing up for what's right and wrong. For me, it was standing up for my little sister.

A while ago, my mom had a little get-together with two of her close friends and their kids. A ten year-old kid whom I have known for a long time was there. This kid is your main average bully. He will do just about anything in his power to get you in trouble. Whether you're younger or older than he, he will prove you wrong, even if you know you're right. And his mom plays right along with his game.

That night, everyone was having a good time until my sister came running up the stairs crying. At first, I didn't think much of it. Kids are always getting emotional and into fights. But coming right up the stairs behind her was the boy throwing things at her and laughing. I was enraged. "What are you doing?!" I screamed. "What??" He asked defensively. "She was making fun of me." See, I know my sister, and we taught her better than that. I knew he was lying. His mom, knowing just as much as I did, came to his rescue. "Sana! How could you?" She yelled. My sister, Sana, stood there helpless and scared. But I wasn't going to let this happen. See, I don't care if you're younger or older than me, you cannot mess with my sister. "Excuse me!" I said to her. "Are you serious right now? You're going to tell me that you don't know sure and well that your son is lying right now? You're going to have the audacity of standing there, yelling at a seven year-old girl who has toys being thrown at her when you KNOW that your son is lying! Listen, I don't care that he is your son, I don't care that you are older than me, but have some respect and responsibility to admit up to your son's mistake, because this is not the first time he has done this to her, me and other kids. So how about you stop defending him when we all know that that is not the truth. Because you're not only blaming the innocent one, but you are also teaching your son that it's okay to lie because he can get away with it. Because it's kind of getting really pathetic." She didn't have much to say after that, and she did apologize. And so did I.

There is a certain level of having respect. I didn't mean to say harsh words, but sometimes you really have to lay it out straight forward. I'm not the type to ever be mean or rude, but even though it may not have been the nicest thing to do, I felt proud and courageous to stand up for my sister to someone bigger than me.



Student Courage in the Wisconsin Uprising

Simon Rosenblum-Larson

We needed a leader, someone to step up and lead us with a booming voice and good command. I had been organizing this, but didn't really expect to take a vital role. We as students were leaving school—going on strike—smack in the middle of third hour to walk seven miles to the Capitol Square. It was a cold winter day during the Wisconsin Uprising. The scene looked like this: all hundred-and-some of us, sixth, seventh and eighth graders, meeting at once at Hamilton Middle School, disorganized and confused. I noticed myself speaking some directions, quietly at first. This is where something new in me began to flow. As we spilled outside into the parking lot, filled with song and spirit, I began to drift to the front. Once I reached this place of command, the shouting began.

“Where are we going?”

“Which way should we go?”

I felt it was my place and my time. I started calling for organization and quiet. Somehow a group of 100 teenagers went silent as I stood at the head of the pack. The respect I felt was mind-blowing, and the inspiration I felt in that moment has stuck with me since. The march began again after I gave some directions, the air filled with loud voices chanting to protect our teachers' and other public workers' labor rights. There were about 90 kids on the move. We had to stop traffic at one busy intersection, and we all became crossing guards.

Together, we arrived at the Capitol, where thousands of people were gathered inside and outside. Vocal chords beginning to give, about 25 of us set up camp in the center of the marble floor, using our backpacks as pillows. We asked a few people to help us create a circle. Some students filled in the outside of the circle, and some created lines inside the circle, until we had it—an enormous peace sign on the rotunda floor! This act of solidarity led to many onlookers including newspapers such as the *Wall Street Journal* to write about us students expressing ourselves at the protests.

I look back to that day when I needed courage to stand up for something I believe in, and I look at the reward that leadership brought to me. Many times, the first thought in my head would be, “I wonder what he/she thinks of me” or “what about my social standing?” With courage flowing through my veins, the thoughts changed to, “What can I do to better the group?” and “How can I change the world?” When looking to make a dent in the harsh outer layer of the world, I hope the feeling of courage will always be there. I think that there is a reserve of courage, deep inside every one of us, waiting to be called upon when needed most.



Project Courage Essay

Martin Schreiberman

A few years ago, I was a very timid person. The only activities that I really did were school-related and karate. I did really enjoy karate, and I had even achieved the rank of second-degree black belt. I developed a close bond with a few of the people there, and I really enjoyed the time that we spent together. However, outside of my own little group, I was really shy around people whom I didn't know, and I would always get nervous whenever I had to talk in front of a group of people. Then, when I reached 4th grade, all of that changed.

In the summer after 3rd grade, I was invited to attend an away camp called the National Young Scholar's Program (NYSP). I don't consider attending this camp the most courageous thing that I have ever done, but it was the first time that I was away from anyone I knew for an extended period. What's important is that this was the first time that I really reached out to "random" people, got to know them, and got to a point to where I would consider them friends. Unfortunately, I was only just out of 3rd grade at the time and knew nothing about social networking sites, and thus I don't really remember anyone from this camp. Anyway, another thing that I discovered at this camp was that I actually did like presenting. I had to present a piece on Greek mythology, and I actually really enjoyed it.

Before I continue, I would like to give a bit of a flashback. My parents have always taken me to plays at the Overture Center for the Arts, particularly those put on by the Children's Theatre of Madison (CTM), such as *A Christmas Carol*. I really enjoyed them, but I never considered the fact that I might be able to be involved in a theatre production. Coincidentally, the only reason that I found out about the opportunity to be in a production is that I saw one of my friends from karate in a major role in a CTM play. I was very surprised by this, and so I decided to take a risk, try something new, and give the theatre thing a try.

The first real play that I ever auditioned for was the 2007 production of CTM's *A Christmas Carol*. I walked into the audition studio having no idea what to expect, and feeling very nervous. There were several other people there who all seemed to know each other and have heavy theatre experience, which didn't help. I remember one of the first things we had to do was each sing "happy birthday" individually, and I had to go first. I have always liked to sing, but, as with public speaking, I had never really done it before, and I remember feeling a bolt of ice slide through me as I tried to squeeze out the words of happy birthday without breaking down in front of these people whom I didn't know. I left the studio feeling a little shaken at the experience, not expecting to hear anything back from CTM after what I considered my pitiful performance.

I was very surprised when I saw that I was actually on the cast list of *A Christmas Carol 2007* as a beggar boy/school boy. Although I went into this experience feeling very shy and uncertain, I came out knowing everyone in the cast, and making friends with them, including the adults. Since this first small step into theatre, I have leapt at every opportunity that has come my way. I have been in about 15 major productions since then; from coming back to *A Christmas Carol* to play young Ebenezer Scrooge, to the Cat in the Hat in *Seussical*, to Bilbo Baggins in *The Hobbit*, and many other roles, I have enjoyed every moment of theatre. In conclusion, I went from being a very shy and timid person, to a very confident person who loves to meet new people, and speak publicly. I love performing, improvising, and even just talking to people. I have only my willingness to take a chance to thank for my current state of being, and I am grateful that I pushed myself into it. It was probably the hardest things that I have done in my life, but was also the most enjoyable, and had the best outcome.



Courage

Evangeline Smith

I do not think of myself as a courageous person. I have yet to heroically save someone from a burning building or help a cat down from a tall tree. To me, courage means taking a risk, pushing one's self outside of their comfort zone. I did that this past summer, when I went to Pittsburgh alone for Summer Youth Institute (SYI), not knowing what to expect in the least.

One day my dad got a small flyer in the mail from SYI inviting me to apply for the program. SYI is a two-week program at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary for upcoming seniors in high school. The program is designed to help nurture youth in the church to ask big questions, and figure out what God is calling us to be. I had read a short description of the program before deciding to apply for it but still wasn't sure about what I would be doing with a group of strangers in a strange city for two weeks. I told myself, "It's only two weeks, if you hate it, it will be over before you know it." Little did I know, SYI would be one of the best experiences of my life.

The morning I left for SYI, I had to wake up extremely early to catch my flight. My mom drove me to the airport, and I was on my own from there. I boarded my plane, took a few naps next to strangers, and, before I knew it, I was in Pittsburgh. There were people waiting for me with signs that read, "Welcome SYIers!" SYI was officially underway.

The next few days were spent getting to know each other, playing name games, and worshipping together. Going into SYI, I expected to make friends, but I didn't expect to meet people who would change how I think and truly shape me as a person.

Every night, we would break off from the large groups and meet as small groups. My small group was made up of seven scholars (me being one of them) and two small-group leaders. In small group we would discuss our day, share ups and downs, ask big questions and simply be there to support one another. Small groups were my favorite part of SYI, because, during our discussions, I got to ask questions I had always been afraid of asking. I asked questions that I had always had in the back of my head, but had no real outlet for. I guess some might say that boarding a plane and entering a strange city with a group of strangers takes courage, but for me my courage was activated when I thought, explored and examined my faith.

We asked huge questions during small group like, "Why do you believe in God?" "What has God done in your life?" "Is heaven real?" "Who goes to heaven?" "Does God really have a plan for you?" "Why do Christians hate so much, when we claim to love like Jesus?" "Is hell real?" "Why do people pray?" "Why do you pray?" "What role does God have in your future?" and so many more. Most nights I would journal past midnight. I spent my free time talking about these questions and about my life with people whose names I had just learned. I did not sleep much, but I thought more in those two weeks than I ever had before. It was like someone jump-started my brain, and, suddenly, I couldn't put on the brakes.

I came home and had to figure out how I would continue asking questions. I had to figure out how to be an active thinker in a community that tends to not ask the big questions.

For me, courage means pushing yourself outside of your comfort zone, and asking the big questions.



How I Learned to Dominate My Fear

Huzaiifa Sohail

Have you ever wanted to do something really challenging in your life but felt unsure if you could do it or not? This fear always stops you from showing your hidden talent, and it keeps you under a shield of panic. That was the case with me when I wanted to join the Sun Prairie High School soccer team. One fine day I heard about the following Hadith about our beloved prophet, Mohammad (PBUH), which helped me overcome my fright. Our Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (saw) said, “Courage is not the absence of fear, but the conquest of it.”

I can still see myself, finding out about the Sun Prairie Soccer team tryout being held a month from the official start day of school. I quickly went over to my parents and shared with them what I wanted to do. I was so excited when they told me that they were totally up for it. Now it was all on me. I would have to work really hard to get on the team, and at the same time keep my grades up. I would have to bear the burden of this double load, completing my homework assignments on time after coming late from the soccer practice. I thought twice before signing up for soccer and then finally made a decision that I have to take this as a challenge as “No gain without pain”.

So, a week later my dad and I went to register for soccer, just a week before the tryouts. I woke up a little early on tryout day to get ready and be on time. While preparing myself I started thinking about who else might be there and how good the other players would be. What will happen if I don't get selected? Once again my inner fear was slowly overcoming me by putting negative thoughts in my mind about probably not being able to make the team. I got scared and didn't feel like going for tryout any more. At this time my parents came to me and asked about my situation. I told them once again about my fear. They told me in some encouraging words that I have to give it a try with the best of my abilities and then leave the rest to Allah (SWT). They also helped me in thinking of that, if I missed this chance, then it would become very difficult in the future to make such decisions. Finally, they told me that I have to brush off the nervousness and go for it.

The tryouts were held for three days; I did play on first two days and put out my best effort, keeping in mind that I had to do it and nobody else could do it for me. It was the do-or-die situation for me. Unfortunately, I couldn't make the third day because I was not feeling well. Then a couple of days after the tryout, the day came when I got a call from the varsity coach. I was really tense while talking to the coach on phone. The moment I heard that I made it the team was best in my life. I was so happy and excited and told my parents about my selection, and they were also very happy. Finally I made it with help of Allah (SWT), the prayers of my parents and my effort. My parents told me what Allah (SWT) said in the Qur'an: “He will not change the conditions of the people who are not willing to change themselves first” (Qur'an, Ar-Ra'd, 13:11). I overcame my fear!

At the end I will use a quotation from Ambrose Redmoon, “Courage is not the absence of fear, but the realization that there is something greater than fear.”



ACT OF COURAGE...FORGIVENESS

Talha Sohail

What is “Courage?” This question often comes to mind. By definition, courage is the “quality of mind or spirit that enables a person to face difficulty, danger, pain, etc., without fear.”

Since forgiveness is also an act of bravery and valor, I will share one of my experiences about forgiving people, since forgiving is a really important factor not just in Islam but in all of the other religions in the world.

I went to the Elver’s Park because my friends and I were all going to hang out and play some basketball. We met up with our friends and started to play soccer, even though it was cold. Then when we all got bored with playing soccer, we went to play basketball. There were about 10 of us. We were playing for about 2 hours, and then the game got heated up. We all started to play more aggressively, and some of us, including me, started swearing at each other. This went on for about another half an hour, when this guy and I got into an argument. He swore at me, and I swore at him. We started to argue about a foul. I gave him the ball, but he kept on talking, so I walked over to him and knocked the ball out of his hands, and that’s when all this drama started. He threw the first punch at me, which was a surprise. I thought for a second, and then I did the same thing to him. People started to hold us back, but we still kept talking, and then my brother got into it, and slapped the other boy. After that, he hit me again, so I hit him again. Finally, the people who we were playing basketball with separated the three of us. I started to walk back to where our whole group was, and everyone else came after me. When we got there, people asked me what had happened, and I told them the story from my side. Then they went to the other guy and listened to his story. After that they said that we should just forget this by forgiving each other. I was like, “whatever.”

After that incident, I was sitting with my family one day, and we were listening to a lecture about forgiveness. That’s where I found the power of forgiveness. Allah says in the Qur’an, “They should rather pardon and overlook. Would you not love Allah to forgive you? Allah is Ever-Forgiving, Most Merciful” (The Quran, 24:22).

I also read an article called “Forgiveness,” published in the September-October, 1996, edition of *Healing Currents* magazine, which stated that anger towards an individual or an event leads to negative emotions in people, harming their emotional balance and even their physical health. The article also states that people realize after a while that the anger is a nuisance to them and wish to repair the damage to the relationship. So, they take steps to forgive. It is also stated that, despite all they endure, people do not want to waste the precious moments of their life in anger and anxiety, and prefer to forgive themselves and others.

I was very angry and the other boy, but, after listening to this lecture and when things had slowed down, I thought of forgiving him. I did so, and, since then, whenever we face each other, I have always tried to keep up my forgiveness and overcome my anger by remembering the Hadith about our beloved prophet, Mohammad (PBUH), which states that, “A wrestler is not a strong person but one who overcomes his anger.”

At the end I would say:

“The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong.” (Mahatma Gandhi)



Courage

Maya Webne-Behrman

“Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the judgment that something else is more important than fear.” - Ambrose Redmoon

Throughout middle school and high school, I have been plagued by voices that whisper to me when I am alone at night. My most courageous moments have been when I run away from the incessant voices in my head fast enough for them to cease for the time being. I realize that this sounds wimpy, but I believe this is courageous because I am coping with something frightening. Often, the voices pounce during my nightly shower. They usually whisper my name, “Mayaaaaaaaaaaaaa.” I am consumed by the thought that someone else is there. I jump out of the shower, dry myself, brush my teeth, condition and brush my hair, put on my pants and night-shirt, wash my face, take a deep breath, and sprint down the wooden steps to my bedroom, shut the door, and dive into my bed, panting harder than ever. The hardest part then is speaking and letting myself know that I am stronger than my fears. I tell myself that, often, when one has been awake for as long as I have, one is not in their right mind. I sing the *shema* out loud (it has to be out loud for my fear to be resolved, or else the silence will consume me and my mind and I won't be able to fall asleep as easily; breaking the silence is key): *shema yisra'el adonai eloheynu adonai echad*. I say what I am thankful for and then I shut my eyes and allow myself to doze off.

I don't really know what this essay is about, only that it is allowing me to reflect on past experiences with fear and on my style of not eliminating them, but tolerating them. I believe strongly that one cannot be courageous without fear, and one cannot live without being courageous, therefore, one cannot live without fear. I know that I will never stop being afraid; I try to embrace it as best I can because, if I didn't, I would end up being afraid of fear. That is an unhealthy, ever-revolving wheel.



Meeting #4

Presentations
at Shorewood
Elementary
School







Courage Project T-shirt

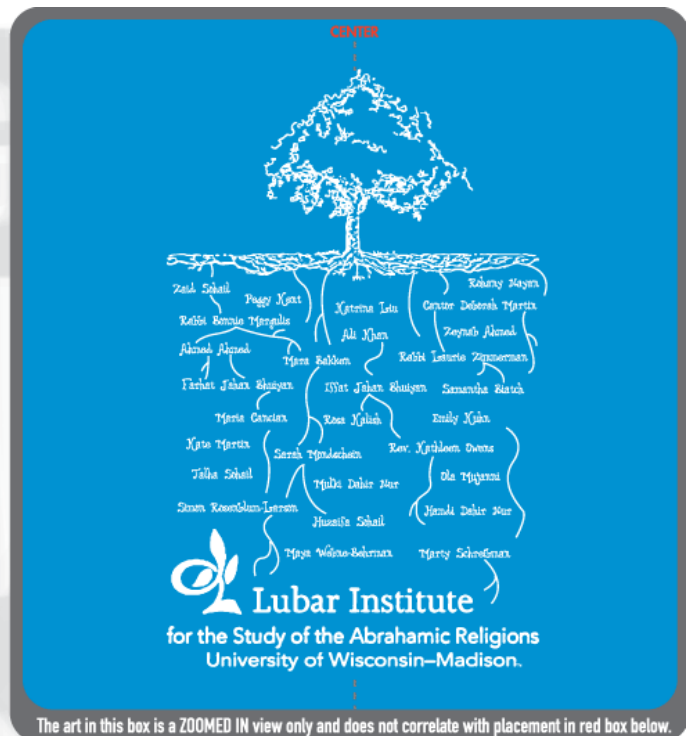
Front Design:



Final Design:



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The art in this box is a ZOOMED IN view only and does not correlate with placement in red box below.



What does “Abrahamic faiths” mean?

The term “Abrahamic” refers to the family of religious traditions that hold Abraham in special regard. Using this term emphasizes their affinities rather than their differences.

(Right) Sculpture: "The Children of Abraham" by Phillip Ratner (2007)

Adorned with renderings of "Abraham" lettered in the scriptural languages of Hebrew, Greek, and Arabic, as well as Latin, the "Children of Abraham" evokes the historic, theological, and even consanguineous connections between Jews, Christians and Muslims. The sculpture was dedicated on November 8, 2007, at the Chazen Museum of Art and permanently installed in the courtyard of the Mosse Humanities Building, UW-Madison campus.

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