



The Personal Philosophies  
of Remarkable Men and Women

**MIDDLE SCHOOL CURRICULUM**

(downloaded at [www.thisibelieve.org](http://www.thisibelieve.org))

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction and Background of This I Believe	3
Author's Note and Information	3
Background on the Relevance of This I Believe for Middle School Students	4
Teacher Materials:	
Day 1 – Who Are You? Finding Out What Is Important	6
Day 2 – Important Moments	7
Day 3 – Outlining	8
Day 4 – Telling My Story	10
Day 5 – Putting It All Together	11
Activity Sheets/Student materials	
Values Activity Sheet	13
Important Moments	14
My Story Memory Chart	15
Writing Workshops	
Creating Paragraphs	16
Writing the Paragraph, A Basic Model	17
Introductions	18
Juicy Details	19
Conclusions	20
<i>This I Believe</i> Minor Submission Agreement/Parental Permission	21

## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THIS I BELIEVE

Thank you for your interest in the This I Believe (TIB) middle school curriculum. This I Believe holds a special place in the hallways of modern broadcasting, and now we are happy to offer a chance for a younger audience to join in sharing their personal stories, beliefs, and thoughts.

Based on a 1950s radio series of the same name, TIB is an international project engaging people from all walks of life in writing, sharing, and discussing the core values that guide our daily lives. Featured on public radio in the United States and Canada, these 500-word essays get to the core of one's personal philosophy of life.

As original host Edward R. Murrow once said, the goal of the program is, "To point to the common meeting grounds of beliefs, which is the essence of brotherhood and the floor of our civilization." It is with this attitude that TIB engages a new audience—one that increasingly must deal with issues that until this day and age were reserved for their elders. Such is the way of the world.

This curriculum was designed with the middle school student in mind. Certainly, high school and college students have much to say, but our younger scholars should also be allowed their moment in the sun. The following pages are but one take on this idea. For, it was stated succinctly so long ago that, "out of the mouths of babes" come the most relevant and astounding thoughts.

### AUTHOR'S NOTE AND INFORMATION

Amanda Cadran is the author of this curriculum. She is currently a middle-school writing and grammar teacher at St. Mary Magdalene School in Apex, NC. Prior to becoming a teacher, Amanda worked as an assistant for former Secretary of State Dr. Henry Kissinger and in public relations for the national touring act Railroad Earth. She graduated from Lehigh University in Bethlehem, PA with degrees in English and journalism and a Master's degree in political science. She has over 10 years' experience in writing and editing for newspapers, magazines, and radio, including NPR affiliate WDIY in eastern Pennsylvania.

Amanda also owns her own business, Fit to Print, LLC, which provides editorial services such as advocacy communications, resume building, and manuscript advising. She can be reached at [amanda@fit2print.us](mailto:amanda@fit2print.us).

## BACKGROUND ON THE RELEVANCE OF THIS I BELIEVE FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

It has been said that middle school teachers are born, not made. Indeed, teaching at the middle school level is quite unique. Our students are emotionally aware beyond the elementary years, yet are not ready for the rigors of high school. They are constantly changing, growing, thinking, and questioning. As their teachers, we have the awe-inspiring ability to help them know themselves at a time when it is still “OK” to talk to teachers, ask questions, and share feelings. What is successful in the classroom one week may not work the next, as our students change with the winds. Yet, our ability to get them thinking critically and abstractly is a fundamental challenge and reward—as the human brain continues to grow throughout these years we can have a truly life-altering effect on how our students think. This I Believe is the kind of activity that will engage and confront your students with questions about how they perceive themselves in their increasingly growing world.

Middle school students fall into two developmental stages: pre-adolescence and adolescence. Webster’s Medical Dictionary defines pre-adolescence as “the period of human development just preceding adolescence; *specifically* : the period between the approximate ages of 9 and 12.” Adolescence then, would begin somewhere around the age of 12, although defining this stage in life is not an easy task. What most researchers agree on is that adolescence, and to a lesser degree, pre-adolescence includes (but is not limited to):

- An increased level of adult hormones
- Thoughts about dating
- Thoughts about independence from parents
- The change when friends’ opinions begin to matter just as much or more than the opinions of adults
- First thoughts on an individual self-concept

Just what these two stages represent for our students cannot be overstated in terms of importance. An activity inclined toward introspective thinking, such as TIB is perfectly suited for these age groups who, according to many psychologists, are just beginning to develop a solid personal identity.

According to developmental psychologist Erik Erikson, “the main task of adolescence is to achieve a state of identity.” His theory stresses adolescence as a “time-out period” when youth in democratic societies “try on” various identities before eventually deciding which is best. In this time frame, Erikson stresses the importance of idealism in developing a strong identity, as it aids in the search for people, values, and ideas that can serve as aids.

Erikson’s ideas have spurred many other researchers on the topic of identity. Most agree that it is through “crisis” periods, or periods of challenges, that identity is formed. Using this period in their lives as a backdrop to developing a personal philosophy can aid in this process, so crucial to future successes. In an age of ever-increasing social and familial stresses, with constant intrusions from television, music, and the movies, some say it is harder than ever for today’s youth to steer clear of pressures to become independent thinkers.

When we understand how important and trying this time period can be for our students, the question becomes, how do we manage to help our students figure out who they are and what they want to become?

The following pages contain a 5+ day lesson plan for incorporating TIB into your classroom. This curriculum aims to serve as a guide, but is by no means all-inclusive. Use the plans in correlation with thematic units on character or friendship, or in conjunction with a writing unit on the narrative style. The curriculum begins with a look at values and how they shape our lives. It continues by bringing personal experience into the picture, and linking the two lessons together with a writing project. Resources on paragraph writing are also included.

**Student Activity: Who Are You? Finding Out What is Important**

Materials: Values Activity Sheet (page 13 of this curriculum)  
Dictionary – class set

Overview: Today you will introduce the project. You can use the following text or change it to suit your needs.

“What is an identity? Who here feels like they have a strong personal identity? What does it mean to have a strong identity?” (Accept all answers.)

“Could we say that forming an identity is difficult? How could this be true?” (Steer conversation toward discussion of peer pressures, etc.)

“Today we are going to begin a project aimed at helping you discover a little bit more about yourself and what is important to you. What is important to you today may change over time, so we are going to focus on your feelings and thoughts right now. This is part of a radio project called *This I Believe*, and for over 50 years, people all over America have written their thoughts on things that are important to them. By the end of the project you will have a written reminder for years to come about how you felt at this time in your life. Some of you may even have the chance to read them on the radio!”

Instructions: *Class discussion:* Begin by talking about some of life’s important moments—birthdays, religious events, holidays, etc. Talk about why each is important to us, and why we remember those times.

Explain that the “This I Believe” project is not an autobiography—it is a personal narrative, a story that focuses on a small piece of your students’ lives. TIB is about values we hold dear; the moments that teach us who we are. It is not a factual retelling or a timeline. Spend as much time as necessary to make this distinction – it will be important for the remainder of this project.

“First we will spend some time talking about values that are important to us. What is a value?”

Explain and reinforce that a value is a characteristic that is important to leading a fulfilling life. Brainstorm a list of words students think of when you mention values, and focus on those that have a connection with the words they are about to encounter.

Have students look at the Values Activity Sheet. They are to work on this for the remainder of class and finish for homework.

**Student Activity:     **Important Moments****

Materials:               Values Activity Sheet from yesterday  
                              Important Moments activity sheet (page 14 of this curriculum)  
                              Dictionary – class set

Overview:               Today you will take the project a step further by adding personal experience into the discussion about values. Students will now begin to think of their own stories in the context of important values as they focus on memories of learning and growing.

Instructions:            Go over the Values Activity Sheet from yesterday’s class. Make sure to highlight differences in some of the terms (knowledge/wisdom, etc.).

When ready: “Now that we are familiar with some of life’s important values, it is time to think of situations when you have experienced them in your own life. Answer the questions on the Important Moments sheet to the best of your ability. The important thing is to think of times when you experienced some of the values we just talked about.”

Have each student work for 15 to 25 minutes. Be prepared to help students who need help remembering these experiences. It is not often we are asked to think of these kinds of experiences, so this activity may take longer than expected. The answers from these questions will provide the basis for the TIB essay; therefore, it is important that a lot of thought goes into this particular activity.

**Student Activity:     **Outlining****

Materials:           Values Activity Sheet  
                  Important Moments activity sheet with answers  
                  Dictionary – class set

Objective:           Today students will share some of the experiences they brainstormed yesterday and choose a smaller list to work with. This list will eventually be narrowed down to one moment, which will be the focus of the final project.

To begin: “Yesterday you were asked to think about some of the more challenging, and to be sure, interesting moments in your life. I want to talk to you about some of these moments, and what you learned.”

Take the first half of this class period to talk and have students share their thoughts, going through each question. Creating a word web on the board is a good way to keep track of the students’ thoughts, and where the conversation is headed. As you go through each question, make sure to ask for words that denote emotions surrounding these events and the values they associated with each event. Explain that the finished project will be a narrative essay, in first-person, that will be rich with details and imagery. More than anything, it should be honest.

As the discussion winds down, ask students to take another look at their answers from yesterday and highlight three that the student would be comfortable discussing with others.

For the remainder of class and for homework tonight, they are to create an outline for each event, as follows. Specific words and details will help make the next step easier.

- I. Brief description of event
  - a. What lesson and/or value did I learn?\*
  - b. How did it make me feel about it then?
  - c. How have I used this lesson since, when I make decisions?
  - d. How do I feel about it now?

\*A-D should be answered in complete sentences

*Example*

- I. Not being allowed to go to a concert with friends last summer
  - a. I learned that I can’t always get what I want, even if I don’t understand why. I learned about respect and self-control.
  - b. At the time, I was upset, mad, jealous, and didn’t agree with my mom’s decision.

- c. After that day, I know I might not be able to do everything I want to do.
- d. I am still sad I missed it, but starting to understand why I couldn't go. Some of my friends got in trouble for trying to stay out too late and maybe that is why my mom didn't want me to go.

The thing to remember is that not every story will have a positive ending. Sometimes beliefs are formed during difficult circumstances.

Feel free to have some students work together in pairs or small groups. For the remainder of the project, put students in situations that work best for them—some students need to work independently to avoid distractions; others work well with input from their peers.

Mention that each student will want to begin thinking of which moment was easiest to write about. This will be important for tomorrow.

**Student Activity: Telling My Story**

Materials: My Story Memory Chart (page 15 of this curriculum)  
Values Activity Sheet  
Important Moments activity sheet with answers  
Dictionary – class set

Objective: Take the outlines from last night and begin to focus on just one moment for the final project. By the end of Day 4, each student should have a good idea of what he or she will be writing about for the final assignment.

Teacher Instructions: Begin by asking your class about last night’s homework. Steer the conversation into any challenges/difficulties they may have had. You may want to share that it is one thing to think about or remember a childhood memory, but another to share that story in words.

Next, students will gather into pairs or small groups and spend a few minutes sharing their outlines with a classmate. After a few minutes ask them to stop and put a star next to the outline they feel they have the most to talk about. This will most likely end up being the basis for their personal narrative essay.

Next, each student will fill out the “My Story Memory Chart” for the outline they just starred. This will be a good test to see if they have enough material for the essay.

Finish the chart and have ready for tomorrow, when writing will begin.

**Student Activity: Putting It All Together**

Materials: My Story Memory Chart with answers  
Projector screen with computer hookup, if available

Objective: Today students will read examples of TIB essays to get experience reading personal narratives. Remember, the style is different from that of an autobiography or persuasive essay. Depending on the grade level of your students, and their writing experience in different genres, your students may need to be guided through the differences.

The following are links to several TIB essays, all of which are appropriate and accessible for the middle school student. As you read through these essays, make note of the tone and style of each. You may want to point out various writing techniques, such as repetition, symbolism, and imagery. If you have a projector hookup available, you can listen to most of these essays being read by their authors.

[A Drive to Achieve the Extraordinary](http://www.thisibelieve.org/dsp_ShowEssay.php?uid=34055)—The *Guinness World Records* book fascinated Juliet Frerking when she was a child. Beyond the oddball accomplishments it listed, the book inspired Frerking to attempt feats in her own life that people told her were impossible.

[http://www.thisibelieve.org/dsp\\_ShowEssay.php?uid=34055](http://www.thisibelieve.org/dsp_ShowEssay.php?uid=34055)

[Free Hearts and Minds at Work](http://www.thisibelieve.org/dsp_ShowEssay.php?uid=16931)—In 1947, Jackie Robinson pioneered the integration of American professional athletics by becoming the first black player in Major League Baseball. From an essay recorded in 1952, he discusses his fight against prejudice.

[http://www.thisibelieve.org/dsp\\_ShowEssay.php?uid=16931](http://www.thisibelieve.org/dsp_ShowEssay.php?uid=16931)

[The Bird Who Broke Through the Window](http://www.thisibelieve.org/dsp_ShowEssay.php?uid=15913)—Dylan always viewed himself as a spectator in life, until a surprising experience taught him that anyone, and everyone, can make a difference.

[http://www.thisibelieve.org/dsp\\_ShowEssay.php?uid=15913](http://www.thisibelieve.org/dsp_ShowEssay.php?uid=15913)

[Living My Prayer](http://www.thisibelieve.org/dsp_ShowEssay.php?uid=38707)—*Dead Man Walking* author Sister Helen Prejean says being a good Christian means taking action. So to learn what Prejean believes, she says to watch what she does. For her, that means her work with death row prisoners and with victims' families.

[http://www.thisibelieve.org/dsp\\_ShowEssay.php?uid=38707](http://www.thisibelieve.org/dsp_ShowEssay.php?uid=38707)

*Student directive:* It is now time to begin the writing process. Your finished product will be between 350 and 500 words, which is about four to six paragraphs.

Here are some guidelines to remember when you begin writing your essay. These may be different than what you usually are asked to do in writing class, but this is a different kind of essay.

1. **It's all about you** – Write about you and your thoughts. Tell us your story in the first person, and try to avoid sentences like “We feel this way.”
2. **Keep it personal** – Don't try to use words or phrases you wouldn't normally say. Remember, if you wouldn't be comfortable saying the words out loud, it is probably too formal.
3. **Timing is everything** – Make sure that you read your finished essay out loud. It shouldn't be more than three minutes long when read at a normal speaking rate.
4. **Say what you *do* believe**, not what you *don't* – Write about what you think, but not at the expense of others. Keep the focus on you, and what you believe, not what you disagree with.
5. **Have fun!** How many times are you allowed to be 100% free with your choice of topic, and what you want to say about it? This is your chance to write about your personal philosophy of life, so don't be shy—let it out!

The next few pages will delve into four important topics for writing: creating paragraphs, introductions, juicy details, and convincing conclusions. At this point, it is time for students to begin constructing drafts of their essays. This curriculum highly recommends following the five-step method of writing: pre-writing\*, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. Your classroom may utilize these steps in the way you best see fit. The following instructions have been written with traditional paragraph construction in mind.

\*All of the previous work for this project can be considered pre-writing. It may be a good idea to have students bring all of their activity sheets and notes with them when they begin their drafts.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### VALUES ACTIVITY SHEET

Below is a list of some of the values that may be important to you. First, define the value in a few words (use a dictionary if you need to). Then, put a star next to the five values that are the most important to you. Be prepared to explain why you feel this way!

Honesty: \_\_\_\_\_

Cooperation: \_\_\_\_\_

Integrity: \_\_\_\_\_

Enthusiasm: \_\_\_\_\_

Compassion: \_\_\_\_\_

Self-Control: \_\_\_\_\_

Love: \_\_\_\_\_

Leadership: \_\_\_\_\_

Empathy: \_\_\_\_\_

Confidence: \_\_\_\_\_

Respect: \_\_\_\_\_

Skill: \_\_\_\_\_

Faith: \_\_\_\_\_

Sincerity: \_\_\_\_\_

Knowledge: \_\_\_\_\_

Reliability: \_\_\_\_\_

Wisdom: \_\_\_\_\_

Patience: \_\_\_\_\_

Freedom: \_\_\_\_\_

Flexibility: \_\_\_\_\_

Creativity: \_\_\_\_\_

Responsibility: \_\_\_\_\_

Dedication: \_\_\_\_\_

Hope: \_\_\_\_\_

Loyalty: \_\_\_\_\_

Charity: \_\_\_\_\_

Success: \_\_\_\_\_

Prudence: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## IMPORTANT MOMENTS

Answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper. For each question, identify at least one value from yesterday's activity that played a role in this event.

- When did you first realize your family loves you?
- When did you learn that it is better to tell the truth?
- Who was the first person to make you feel invincible?
- When did you realize you could be anything you want to be?
- When did you learn that life isn't always fair?
- Who taught you that sometimes things don't work out the way you want them to?
- When did you learn that you can't always get what you want?
- How did you learn about the Tooth Fairy, or other characters?
- Has anyone ever tested your faith?
- Have you ever done something that you regret? What did you learn from that moment?

These questions are not always easy to answer. Take enough time to think. If you are stuck, ask your teacher, a friend, or someone at home to help you "unglue" your memories!

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### MY STORY – MEMORY CHART

Fill in the questions with information about the event you have picked.

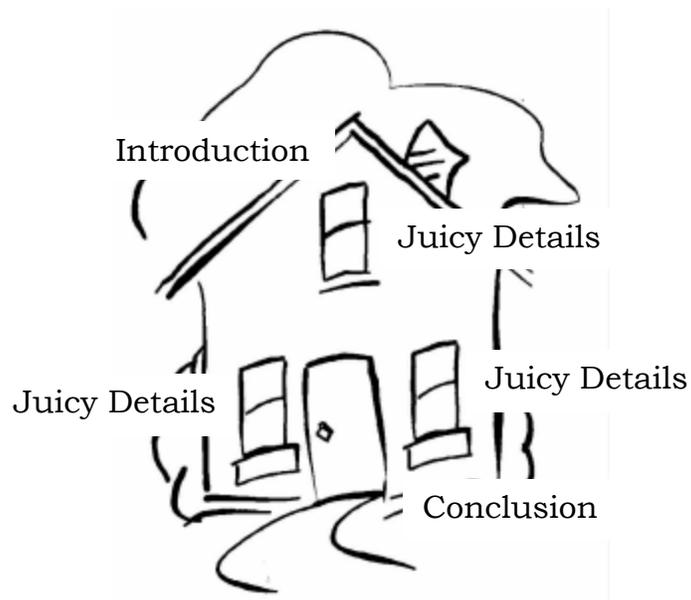
1. \_\_\_\_\_ is the event I am describing.
2. It happened when I was \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Where did it happen? Describe the place \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_ were the people involved.
5. Close your eyes and picture yourself on that day. List five adjectives that come to mind.  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. When I think back on this day, it makes me feel \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ inside.
7. I would want to tell people that before this event I thought that  
\_\_\_\_\_.
8. Now, I know that \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.
9. Some values that were important to me back then were \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.
10. Some values that are important to me now are  
\_\_\_\_\_

## WRITING WORKSHOP – CREATING PARAGRAPHS

One way to think about writing paragraphs is to envision a house. A house cannot exist without a foundation and a roof—regardless of what is inside the house, those two features are all-important. What exists inside the house, on the other hand, is what makes it unique.

Likewise, paragraphs need an introduction and conclusion sentence to anchor them together. The details in the middle make the paragraph special.

We can picture it like this:\*



In terms of the three parts of the paragraph (introduction, juicy details, and conclusion), the introduction and conclusion have a lot in common.

The introduction is like a sneak preview of a movie. It gives the reader an idea of what to expect in the paragraph, but doesn't reveal everything. The introduction must mention the main idea of the paragraph, or the "Big Picture" and engage the reader in some way.

Juicy details provide the most interest for your paragraph. They explain and "prove" the statements made in your introduction.

The conclusion comes back to the main idea, but says it in a different way than the introduction. Conclusions aim to wrap up the paragraph, but try to avoid saying, "This is why..." or "That is why..."

\* This visual can be made into a transparency to show students how the introduction and conclusion "support" the juicy details.

## WRITER'S WORKSHOP – WRITING THE PARAGRAPH, A BASIC MODEL

After reviewing basic grammar rules and the parts of a paragraph, the house transparency is placed on the overhead. At this point the outline is introduced as a method for pre-writing. The outline format is as follows:

- I. (Topic)
  - a. (Detail 1)
  - b. (Detail 2)
  - c. (Detail 3) and so on...

After discussing this, a sample paragraph is written on the overhead with the students' help. This paragraph, while extremely basic, shows how an outline organizes thoughts. The prompt is "I love pizza because..." An example follows:

- I. Pizza is my favorite food
  - a. Toppings
  - b. Gooney cheese
  - c. Juicy and hot

At this point, the paragraph is written. Each of the topic points under Topic "I" become a full sentence. The concluding sentence is made by going back to the beginning and wrapping up the paragraph. Using the transparency, each sentence fits into one part of the pizza.

An example follows:

Pizza is my very favorite food. I really love all of the toppings I can put on it, like pepperoni and mushrooms. Also, I love it when the cheese is really warm and gooney. My favorite part of a pizza is when it is juicy and hot. I could eat pizza every day.

The rationale for this model is to show how paragraph writing is not a mystery, but rather like a recipe for baking. By following the "recipe" (the outline) students get their ideas on paper and it is less likely they will get stuck when trying to write the paragraph itself. This model also prevents a lot of overlapping details.

## WRITER'S WORKSHOP – INTRODUCTIONS

The introduction may just be the most important part of a paragraph or an essay. It is the first thing your reader sees and can interest a potential reader to continue on in your work.

First, we'll focus on introductory sentences.

Introductory sentences set up the rest of your paragraph. They introduce the main idea, without getting too specific. There are several ways you can choose to begin a paragraph, but make sure there is no question as to what the rest of the paragraph will discuss.

Techniques for your introductory sentence:

- Ask a question that gets to the point of your paragraph: “When was the last time you saw someone do the right thing?”
- Make a list: “The next time you go to a museum, make sure you have the right clothes, supplies, and fellow travelers with you!” In this case, each of these list items would be turned into a separate detail sentence.
- Share a story: “I will never forget the last time I had to make a difficult choice.” You would then go on to explain what happened.
- Use a quote related to your topic. There are wonderful websites online that provide thousands of quotes for you to use. Make sure you credit the original author!

Techniques and tips for introductory paragraphs:

- Don't wait too long to get into the actual story. If you set up your essay with a quote or unusual fact, make sure you quickly get to the main idea.
- Rhetorical questions are questions that don't really have answers. They are posed in an essay, often in the beginning, to get the reader thinking of a certain topic. Rhetorical questions can be quite effective, but be careful not to overuse them. One or two rhetorical questions can go a long way in terms of effectiveness, but more than that will be overkill. Example: “Have you ever had to trust someone with a secret?”
- Don't worry so much about length here. Sometimes a good two- to three-sentence introduction can say all you need to say.
- Use action: An active voice with strong verbs will grab your reader's attention. Instead of starting out explaining what your essay will be about, tell the reader.

*Example:* Instead of “This is my story about the day I learned my parents loved me unconditionally,” say “My heart soared as I came to a conclusion about the most important value of all: love.”

## WRITER'S WORKSHOP – JUICY DETAILS

Even though the introduction and conclusion of your essay hold it together (kind of like bookends), it is the juicy details that give your essay personality. There are a few things to keep in mind when working on your detail sentences.

Tips for creating juicy detail sentences that work:

- Stay on track: Don't let your enthusiasm become a runaway train! Keep your details moving in a progressive order, and re-read all work to check for details that are out of place.
- Keep your transitions smooth: Use transition words to keep your paragraph flowing well. Transitions are useful for many purposes, such as adding thoughts (also, as well as), showing consequences (as a result, therefore), showing similarity and contrast (likewise, instead, but, however), and sequence (first of all, soon, earlier, later on).
- The long and short of it: A nice mix of simple, compound, and complex sentences keeps your writing fresh. Double check your work to make sure that you're using a good amount of each!
- Same old, same old: Check to see that you aren't starting too many sentences with the same word. This doesn't mean that repetition of a phrase can't be powerful.
- He said, she said: When telling a story to a friend, we usually use the word "said" quite a bit. That is okay, but when we are reading, it helps to vary your writing with other words that may be more specific. Did he "speak," "mumble," or "shriek?" The differences can be quite big!
- Spice it up with describing words: Adjectives and adverbs are modifying words that tell things like how many, what kind, when, and how. Below is a starter list of adjectives and adverbs you can use.
- Adjectives (words that modify nouns or pronouns): adorable, adventurous, beautiful, best, brave, crowded, dangerous, dark, distinct, delightful, elated, frightening, graceful, glorious, healthy, horrible, important, incredible, joyous, kind, large, light, lucky, marvelous, massive, mysterious, nimble, ordinary, outgoing, perfect, pleasant, powerful, precious, quick, quiet, rare, robust, rough, safe, silent, soaring, tense, tremendous, useful, vivacious, vast, witty, zany
- Adverbs (words that usually tell how, when, and where an action takes place): almost, always, anxiously, boldly, briefly, calmly, defiantly, even, far, fast, fondly, gently, gracefully, hastily, justly, less, more, mysteriously, never, often, only, perfectly, politely, rapidly, really, reluctantly, safely, soon, successfully, suddenly, tomorrow, too, truthfully, very, warmly, well, wildly, yearly, yesterday

## WRITER'S WORKSHOP – CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions, whether in sentence or paragraph form, have the ability to leave your reader with a lasting feeling after they have finished reading your words. A good conclusion doesn't have to wrap up all loose ends; many wonderful conclusions leave the reader thinking long after the story has concluded.

Depending on the mood of your essay, and what choices you make as the author, there are several tips and techniques you can use when writing your own conclusions. They apply for both conclusion sentences and paragraphs.

- Summaries are for book jackets only: Try not to summarize in your conclusion. Repeating thoughts and information previously stated will force your reader to hurry through the end of your essay, and will make it more difficult for the reader to remember what you said.
- Say “bye-bye” to “This is why”: It is easy to end your paragraph with “This is why...” but a much more effective option is to restate your main idea (from the introduction) in a different way.
- Your conclusion can have several different goals. It can:
  - Challenge the reader to think: Depending on your subject, you may want the reader to walk away from your essay thinking about his or her own life. For example, if you are writing about a time when you questioned your faith, you might want to end your essay by giving your reader a challenge to test his or her own spirituality. Example: “I know I am not the only person who has ever had to fight to keep my faith alive. But I know I am stronger for having done so – hopefully I am not alone.”
  - Put your story in a bigger context: Most likely, there are people out there who can relate to your story. Sometimes it is effective to put your personal story in perspective of a bigger world. For example, “As a middle school student, I know I am not able to drive a car, vote for our president, or see an R-rated movie. Yet. These are my frustrations, but I know eventually, as with everyone who came before me, and everyone who will come after me, I will grow up.”
  - Ask the reader to do something: If you are writing about a cause that is important to you, or a situation that has possible solutions, you can gently urge your reader to act on your message. This puts the reader in a position of power. Example: “The next time you are about to head to the grocery store, try to remember all of the plastic bags you see flying around your neighborhood. Grab a canvas bag instead and make a stylish statement.” Just remember, you aren't here to ridicule, or chastise your reader!



## THIS I BELIEVE MINOR SUBMISSION AGREEMENT/PARENTAL PERMISSION

We are delighted that you are interested in submitting your work for consideration to be part of the national essay-writing project, This I Believe.

**By signing this document, you affirm that you are at least 18 years of age and possess the legal right and ability to enter into this agreement, or that you are the parent or legal guardian of the minor who is submitting the essay.**

As you will see, you will retain ownership of your work. However, you are granting This I Believe, Inc. the license to duplicate, display, transmit, etc. your work in all media. We are requesting these rights so that your thoughtful words can inspire as many people as possible for generations to come. Any profits from this project will be used to fund the radio series, the archive, and other means of engaging people around America, and eventually the world, in this important project. This I Believe, Inc. is a not-for-profit organization established to promote the free and respectful exchange of ideas through media, outreach, and educational activities.

By signing this document, you affirm that this work is original to you and that you own all necessary rights to this work. The work does not defame or otherwise violate the rights, copyrights, trademarks, privacy, or reputation of any third party. You agree to give This I Believe, Inc. (a not-for-profit organization working with National Public Radio to produce *This I Believe*) a non-exclusive, assignable, royalty free, perpetual world-wide permanent license to duplicate, display, distribute, excerpt, or transmit the work in any format or media known or hereafter known. This I Believe, Inc. shall have the right to own or register copyrights to any works or compilations created by This I Believe, Inc. that contain the work in whole or in part.

You agree to indemnify and hold This I Believe, Inc. and National Public Radio harmless against any claims asserted by any third parties that allege the work violates their rights, or from any breach by you of your promises in this agreement. You shall be responsible for any costs incurred by This I Believe, Inc. for defense or settlement of third-party claims, including but not limited to This I Believe, Inc.'s reasonable attorneys' fees. Furthermore, parents or legal guardians signing this document in support of an essay submitted by a minor agree to indemnify and hold This I Believe, Inc. and National Public Radio harmless against any claims asserted by the minor, including any and all costs incurred by This I Believe, Inc. for defense or settlement of such claims, including but not limited to This I Believe, Inc.'s reasonable attorneys' fees.

You understand that submitting an essay does not guarantee that your work will be used, displayed, or otherwise reproduced. Essays may be archived for public use, reproduced in audio form, published in print or on-line, or used in any other way. The decision of which essays and how they will be used will be at the sole discretion of This I Believe, Inc. If the essay is accepted by National

Public Radio for recording and broadcast, you shall in a timely manner read your essay aloud, which This I Believe, Inc. or its assignee shall record. You will be compensated in the amount of \$200.00 (United States Dollars), which will be sent to you within 30 days after the date your essay is recorded by This I Believe, Inc., and this shall constitute your sole and complete compensation for all rights granted hereunder.

Name of Essayist \_\_\_\_\_  
(please print)

Signature of Essayist \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Parent/Guardian \_\_\_\_\_  
(please print)

Signature of Parent/Guardian \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

Other Contact \_\_\_\_\_

To submit your essay:

**Persons aged 13 or older** may submit essays electronically or via U.S. mail. This submission agreement form may be attached to the essay and mailed via U.S. mail, or the essay can be submitted on-line with the form being mailed separately.

**Persons under the age of 13** may submit essays via U.S. mail only, as it is the policy of This I Believe to comply with the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA), which is aimed at strengthening protection for minors on the Internet.

Our mailing address is:

This I Believe, Inc.  
2424 Frankfort Avenue  
Louisville, KY 40206

Our web address is [www.thisibelieve.org](http://www.thisibelieve.org)

To submit an essay, click on the link “Contribute an Essay”