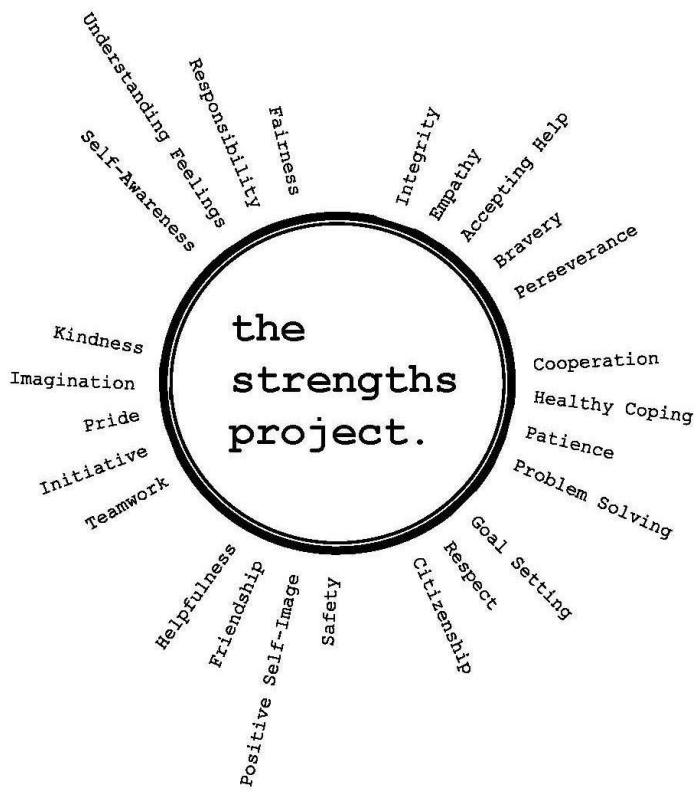




STRONG CHARACTER

STRONG KIDS

Jen Benner, LMSW





STRONG CHARACTER STRONG KIDS

Written by Jen Benner, LMSW

Illustrated by

Eliza, age 12

Ella, age 8

Jack, age 8

Jonah, age 14

Kate, age 6

Levi, age 5

Myla, age 9

Neyla, age 4



What is character?

Character is how you feel, think, and act. It is the way you treat yourself and others. It shows up in the choices you make. When you make good choices, you show your good character to those around you.

Having good character creates happiness, but it is hard work and takes practice. Watch others and when you notice someone's good choices, try it yourself. Pay attention to how it makes you feel.

All people make mistakes or hurtful choices, but you can learn from your mistakes too. Taking responsibility for your mistakes and working to make better choices in the future is another important part of building good character.

This book tells true stories of kids building good character. Hear and learn from their stories to build your own character.

Character traits in this book include:

Accepting Help: listening to the advice of others and allowing them to assist with things you are learning or cannot do on your own

Bravery: showing strength when you are scared or facing a difficult situation

Empathy: understanding the feelings of others and viewing an experience from their perspective

Friendship: caring for another person with an attitude of kindness and receiving care and kindness in return

Helpfulness: understanding and meeting the needs of others with service and assistance

Imagination: forming pictures in your mind and thinking of a situation that is not presently happening

Kindness: showing gentle care and love for others

Patience: calmly waiting for something

Perseverance: sticking with something until it is complete

Positive Self-Image: feeling good about yourself

Pride: feeling pleased with your accomplishments

Responsibility: (1) doing what is expected of you; (2) having a job to care for someone or something

Safety: being protected from risk or harm

Self-Awareness: understanding your own thoughts and feelings

Understanding Feelings: knowing words to describe your different emotions and being aware of how your body feels when you experience different emotions

ELIZA

Kindness, Patience, Responsibility

Eliza has a passion: dogs. She loves dogs. She reads books about dogs, visits dogs at pet stores, draws pictures of dogs, and enjoys playing with stuffed toy dogs. Eliza and her siblings act out dog stories such as dog walker, pet shop, veterinarian, and dog family. Dogs make Eliza smile.

When Eliza was 6 years old, she and her family got a real dog and named her Grace. Eliza was delighted! She loves to pet Grace's soft fur. Grace is her friend and always there for her to snuggle on the couch. Eliza is a good friend to Grace too. Grace needs food, exercise, cleaning, and love. Eliza takes care of Grace's needs by feeding her, taking her on walks, helping with baths, and petting Grace. Eliza feels good that she knows what Grace needs and enjoys being helpful. Eliza is a responsible caregiver.

Eliza enjoys caring for people younger than her too. Eliza learns the interests and needs of her younger siblings and cousins by being patient and calm and letting them be themselves. She pays attention to what they like to do and then plays with them. She realizes that people always need love and she meets that need by showing kindness.

Eliza's younger brother has unique needs and she knows she can help meet them. He needs help learning English since he was born in China and grew up speaking Mandarin. Eliza spends time playing with him and reading him books. He also needs help walking as he was born with cerebral palsy which affected the muscles in his legs. Sometimes she carries him or holds his hand to encourage him to walk.

By helping care for her younger brother, her dog Grace, and others, Eliza gives the gift of happiness to others and to herself. Seeing that her care giving and responsible choices makes others feel loved, Eliza feels joy in return.



ELLA

Helpfulness, Responsibility

In an elementary school in Kansas, there is a helpful girl named Ella. This second grade student listens to her teacher's directions, paying close attention to what needs to be done. She tries to do what is asked of her the first time it is asked. Ella likes schoolwork and is eager to complete her assignments. It also makes Ella feel good to please her teacher.

Ella and her classmates have special helping jobs assigned to them. Ella is responsible for cleaning the white board and reading to her class. Ella is a good reader and likes reading out loud to her friends. Having her own jobs makes Ella feel special and she knows she is an important part of the class.

Ella likes to help even when it isn't asked of her. She listens to her classmates and knows when they need help. Often the teacher responds to Ella's classmates, but sometimes Ella helps. Ella assists her friends who have trouble reading. She teaches them new words and helps them understand stories. She also helps kids solve hard math problems or come up with ideas for their writing projects. Even on the playground, Ella is alert and gets help for friends who are hurt or sad.

While Ella doesn't always feel like helping, she enjoys being helpful and tries to do it often. She even helps at home. Just like at school, Ella has special helping jobs that make her feel needed in her family. She is responsible and shows this by helping sort and fold laundry, clean her room, and wash the dishes.

Ella likes to share her knowledge and skills with others by helping. In return, helping teaches Ella the importance of doing her part to keep a family or classroom working well. Ella is learning that every person in a group needs to contribute and she is glad to do her part.



JACK

Bravery, Perseverance, Safety

Jack is a brave boy whose safety and health depend on his courage. Jack was born severely allergic to milk and eggs. Touching or eating these foods puts Jack at risk of anaphylaxis, a life-threatening allergic reaction causing hives, swelling, and trouble breathing. Jack gained his bravery avoiding these foods.

Most kids drink milk and eat eggs as they are nutritious. While these foods are dangerous for Jack, they are healthy for other kids and are found on lunch trays at school. Jack knows how to stay safe around his classmates and their food. Jack only eats safe foods he brings from home and eats at a clean desk a short distance away from his classmates to avoid milk spills. While these are good and safe choices, sometimes Jack feels different and sad. Jack wishes he could eat the same foods as his friends. It takes courage to be different, but he knows safety is important.

Sometimes friends or teachers forget about Jack's allergies and offer him unsafe foods. Jack tells them no and reminds them of his allergies. Jack even wears a bracelet that explains his allergies which he can show to others. Jack's confidence grows each time he stands up for himself by saying no.

Several times when Jack visited coffee shops with his family, his throat felt itchy and it was hard to breathe. This scared Jack, but he knew to get help from his parents. Jack courageously explained his symptoms to his parents and got the medicine his body needed. Jack knows that if he feels these symptoms at school, he needs to be brave and ask for help from his teachers or the school nurse.

Jack hopes to outgrow his food allergies. He wants to be the same as his friends, drinking milk and eating eggs. He does not want to worry about avoiding these foods, but knows staying healthy is more important. Jack perseveres, bravely making safe choices.



JONAH

Patience, Perseverance

Jonah knows how to wait well. He has patience and works to avoid the frustration and anger that can come with waiting. Jonah understands that there are things in life he can not speed up, like waiting for a scheduled trip. He also understands that there are things in life that are worth the wait, like a finished art project.

Growing up in both America and China, Jonah has had many opportunities to practice his patience. At first while living in China, Jonah did not understand Mandarin, the language spoken by the people of China. He had to wait for explanations of what was being said and then he had to wait years while he learned to understand, speak, read, and write the language himself.

Making friends in China also requires patience as Chinese kids his age are busy with long school days and after school activities, rarely having time to play. Jonah cannot change or speed up learning a new language, travel schedules, or friends' schedules and realizes that he simply has to wait.

Jonah continues to practice patience with his many creative projects. Jonah loves to draw, build elaborate LEGO vehicles and buildings, and whittle wood carvings. These projects require patience. Jonah tries and tries again as he redesigns his projects, sometimes taking four or more tries to get his creations right. This is frustrating at times, but Jonah perseveres and is pleased with his finished projects.

Waiting for a finished project takes more than waiting, it takes action. Jonah imagines what he wants his finished project to look like and patiently works through the process: actively building and rebuilding or drawing, erasing, and drawing again. This type of active waiting takes perseverance. By not giving up and waiting well, Jonah perseveres, creating many fun and original projects.



KATE

Self-Awareness, Understanding Feelings

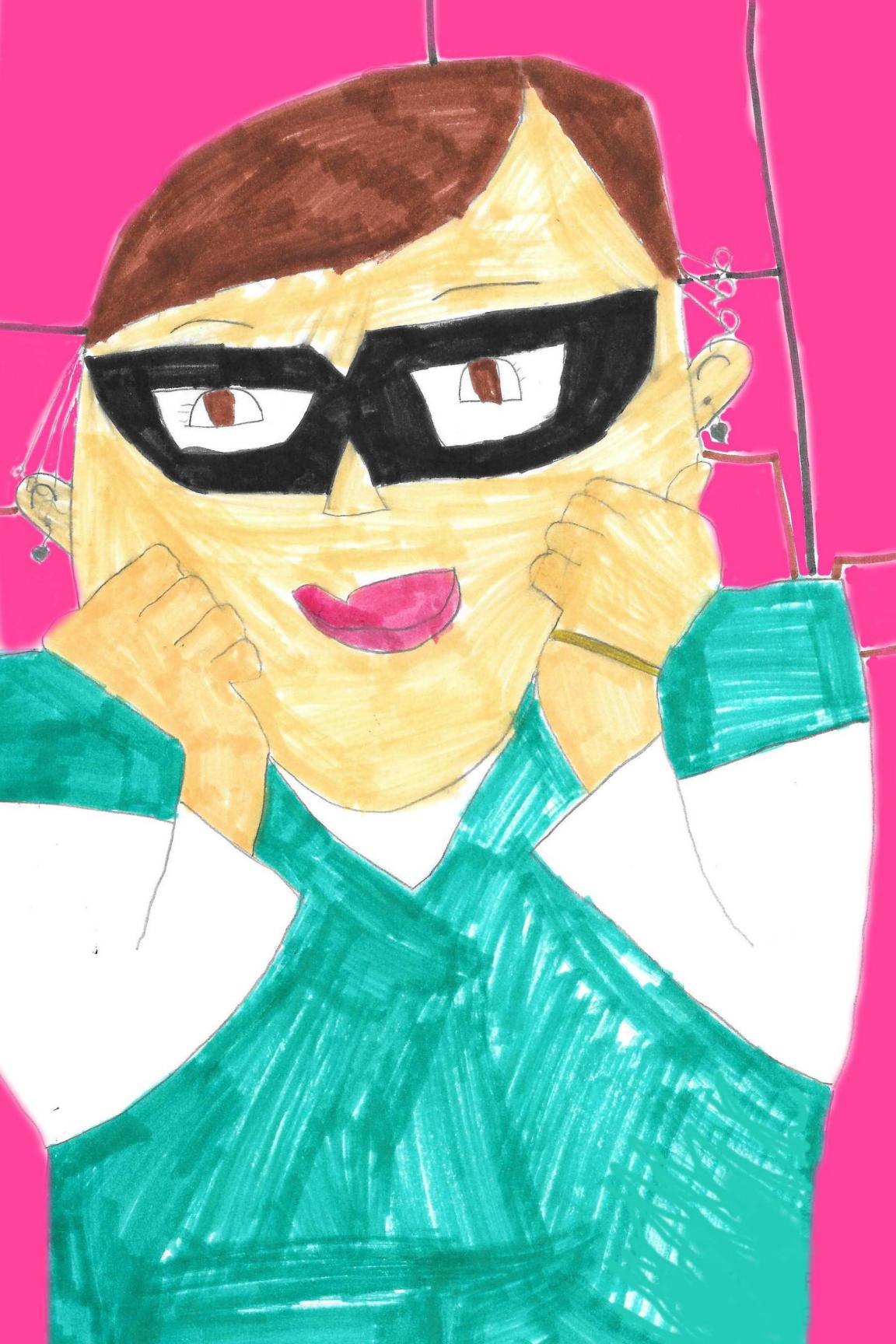
There is a spirited young girl named Kate. Like all kids, Kate has big feelings. Sometimes Kate is bursting with energy and full of happiness. Other times, Kate feels sad and alone or scared and worried about something new. Sometimes Kate feels brave and outgoing, wanting to play with new friends. At other times, Kate's mind is filled with new ideas and she feels creative.

Kate knows she can feel many things. One time she even made a list of all the feelings she thought she had experienced: happy, sad, mad, scared, worried, lonely, excited, distracted, surprised, and brave. It feels good to have a word or a name for all the different ways she feels.

Kate's feelings are normal and usually bubble along like a small stream of water. However, sometimes her feelings grow big to the size of a river or even a waterfall. When Kate's feelings grow so big, she isn't always sure what to do with them. Kate uses her creative mind to manage her big feelings and knows some tricks to deal with her feelings that she learned from her parents, sister, and others.

Kate has a special arm squeeze with clenched fists on her cheeks to wiggle and shake her excitement through her body when she feels super happy. Kate deals with sadness or frustration by finding a quiet space to sit on her own and think. Kate also knows she can talk to a grown-up and ask questions if she is feeling worried about something new, like starting Kindergarten.

Once, Kate's older sister taught her how to feel safe and muster bravery when she was scared by pretending to be a strong rock under a blanket before tackling her fear of the dark. Another time, her parents encouraged her to stay committed to practicing her violin and overcome her distracted feelings by earning a reward. Kate is proud that she knows how to enjoy and manage her many feelings.



LEVI

Accepting Help, Perseverance

Levi is a strong young boy. He is brave and faces hard things. When Levi feels scared or sad, he looks for helpers. He is good at finding helpers and knows how to accept their support. Helpers teach him new things and give him guidance and love when he needs it.

When Levi was three years old he went to live at an orphanage in China. Levi made friends with the children and grownups in this new home. They were his helpers. The children helped Levi know that he wasn't alone and gave him joy by playing with him. The grownups at the orphanage helped care for Levi by providing him with meals to eat and a place to sleep. They also taught him important skills like writing and counting.

Levi lived in the orphanage for two years until he was adopted. Levi's new parents and siblings are now his helpers. Levi's new mom, dad, brother, and two sisters let him know he is loved and that they are his family for life. Levi joyfully accepts his new family and welcomes the love and teaching they give him.

Levi has a condition called cerebral palsy which affects the muscles in his legs and makes it difficult to walk. Levi's family and other helpers, such as physical therapists and doctors, show Levi exercises to do to strengthen and train his legs for walking. This is hard work for his body and at times Levi doesn't feel like exercising. However, Levi has perseverance and sticks with it. With Levi's determination and continued hard work, his coordination has improved and he can now walk with a walker and even short distances without assistance.

Whether adjusting to life in the orphanage or learning how to walk, Levi uses his strength of mind and the helpers he meets to overcome hard things. Levi knows that even when life is hard, helpers can be found and they can make the journey easier.



MYLA

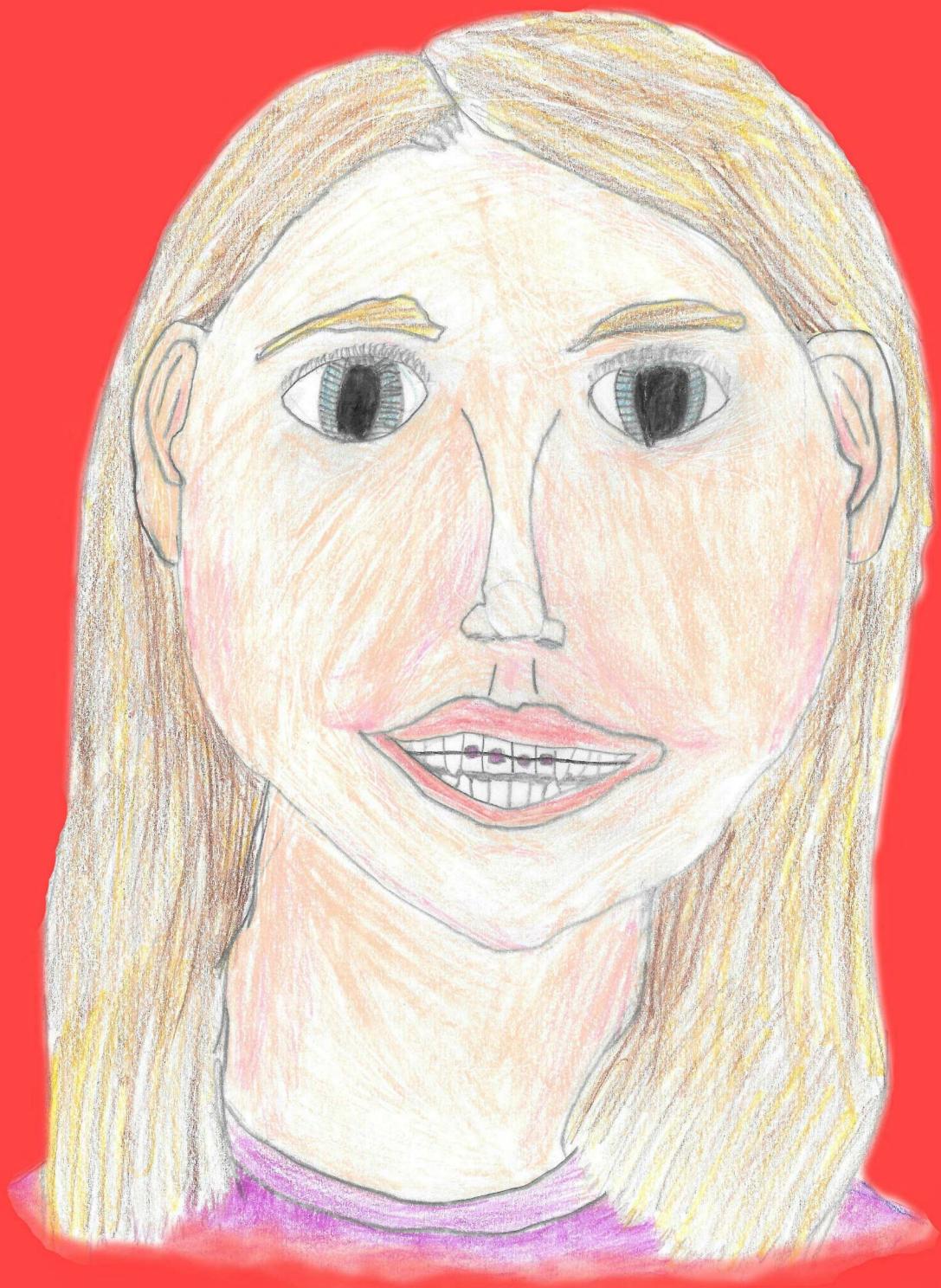
Positive Self-Image, Pride

“I really like myself!” Myla said these words with bright eyes and a big smile across her face when she was 9 years old. She meant these words with her whole heart. Myla is good at loving herself. She knows she is important and special. She knows this because of her feelings. She feels happy and curious and has lots of ideas about how to use her brain and her hands to create things. Myla loves to create and likes this about herself.

After an idea comes to Myla, she creates it with her hands. Sometimes Myla draws her ideas, sometimes she builds her ideas out of cardboard, and other times she uses LEGOs or her stuffed animals to act out her ideas. Once, after seeing her parents and other adults use their phones, Myla built herself a phone out of paper and tape. Another time, she created her own chapter book with pictures. Myla even created a city out of cardboard, complete with tall buildings, roads, trees, and a lake. Myla is pleased that she can create things and is proud of her accomplishments.

Myla likes the feeling of pride that her creations give her, but she also creates things as a way to spend time with family. Myla likes to create with her family and for her family. Sometimes she asks her siblings or her parents to help her design and build. Other times she creates on her own and then gives her creations to others. She did this when she built a cardboard computer for her younger brother. It made him smile and she enjoyed using it to play with him. Myla also built a Lego table out of cardboard, hoping her sister liked the fun space and would play LEGOs with her more often.

Myla is a proud creator who uses her projects to show love to her family. This gives Myla a warm feeling of pride. She likes this feeling and she likes herself. By feeling happy about who she is and what she does, Myla is able to love her family deeply.



NEYLA

Empathy, Friendship, Imagination

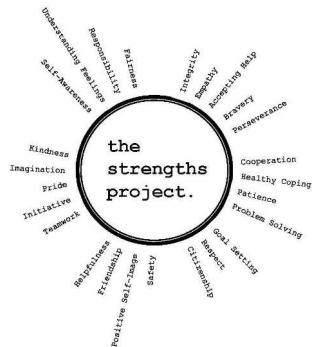
Neyla loves to imagine. She imagines many things. Once, she pretended she was a kitten who needed the love and care of an owner. Another time, she imagined she was a chef preparing delicious food for a restaurant full of people. Neyla even imagines silly things like being a walking talking plant or a night light hopping bear. She loves how silly she can be when she imagines things.

Neyla is so good at imagining that when she hears stories, she imagines she is feeling what the characters are feeling. She felt lucky and thankful like Charlie Bucket winning a golden ticket in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* when reading this book with her family. When *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane* was read to her, Neyla felt lost and loved like the china rabbit doll separated from his girl. Neyla felt these feelings deeply, even crying or laughing along with the characters. Neyla is learning empathy, the ability to understand what someone else is feeling.

When Neyla was four years old she noticed a boy in her preschool class spending most of his time alone. While other children built block towers or drew pictures together, he walked around the room alone. He sat by himself too. Neyla imagined this boy felt lonely and sad and then imagined what it would feel like to be lonely and sad herself. This is empathy.

Neyla's imagination allowed her to experience this boy's feelings and it gave her the desire to help. Neyla's empathy encouraged her to invite him to build towers, play sand cakes at recess, and drive toy cars. He eagerly joined in and the two became friends. By imagining the feelings of someone else, Neyla helped a boy feel happy and included.





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