

BREAK FREE

Made for your mind to move.

Issue five:
To Let Go

Quick Hits

THE HOT AIR BALLOON CHALLENGE

Your balloon is getting too heavy!
You can only keep 3 items and must throw the
rest overboard.

Circle the 3 items you want to keep:

Regret
Confidence
Anger
Hope
Fear
Humor
Self-doubt
Courage
A grudge
Curiosity
Shame
Determination

Reflection:

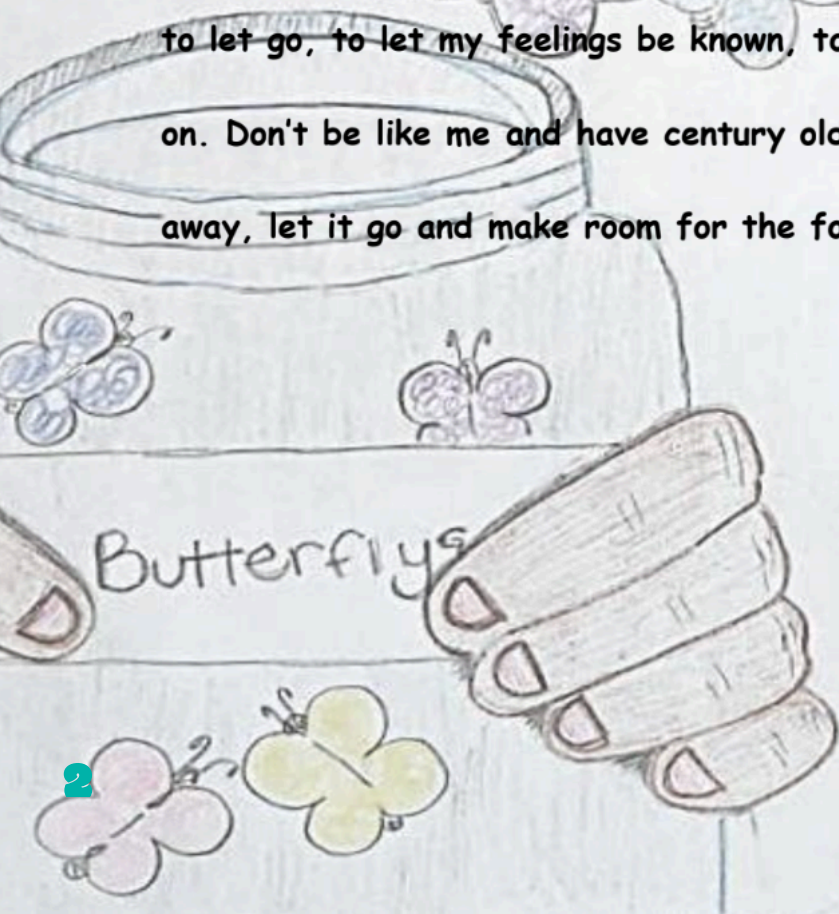
What did you throw out first?



Butterfield

SB, a student in North Carolina

Growing up I kept a lot of things sealed away tight. I never wanted anything to get in, nor did I want anything to get out. I would just keep all my feelings, grudges, and thoughts to myself afraid to have them made invalid or like I had no reason to feel the way I did because of my age. As I got older, the jar filled to the brim, now including regrets and wishes that never occurred. The jar eventually started to overflow letting the butterflies (my feelings) escape and get caught in other's hands. When in other's hands, my feelings were thrown around and made fun of, like I knew they would be. From there on, the jar remained sealed tight never opening except to put in more feelings. Eventually, the jar starts to crack, meaning it was finally time to let go, to let my feelings be known, to let those grudges go, and to move on. Don't be like me and have century old jar with your butterflies just wilting away, let it go and make room for the for the better things in life.





BUILD YOUR “LET GO” MUSCLE

THE RELEASE LIST

Write down one thing you're carrying.

Ask:

- Can I control it?
- Is it helping me?
- Do I want to keep carrying it?

If the answer is no, draw a line through it.

THE REPLACE

When you let go of something, replace it with something helpful.

Instead of:

"I'll never change."

Try: "I'm still becoming."

Instead of:

"I can't move past this."

Try: "I can carry the lesson without carrying the weight."

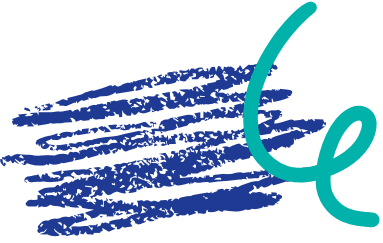
MICRO-RELEASE

At the end of today, finish each sentence:

Today I let go of:

Tomorrow I want to make room for:

Every release is a step toward freedom.



Poems



I come from Washington, DC.
From a hellhole that's always getting shot up.
People see anger but they don't always see me.
They don't see where I come from
I learned early that life is not easy
Some days I carry a burden
I remember when I lost my grandmother and dad.
It's not always easy when it comes to death, but just
remember it always gets worse before it gets better
The hardest thing about me to explain is I'm not an
easy person to deal with or be around

But even then I still I rise
I am not just a criminal I'm also a kind genuine
person
I am also a comedian
I survive by my lonely
Healing for me looks like alot
One thing I want people to understand is
where I come from ain't easy
I am learning to keep out the way and progress
I still dream about being a travel nurse
And even after everything, I still overcame
where I come from
I keep going because I know I have purpose

Poem by DS, a student in DC

I wish I never got into the system
It doesn't reflect my wisdom

Now I'm locked away from the people I love
The homesick feelings I want to get rid of

I'm locked in with others who have made mistakes
Forced to deal with our heartaches

Our short lives that we have to watch pass by
Having to watch the days, weeks, months, and years fly by

Shaking my head to clear my thunderous thoughts
I stare at my reflection in the mirror

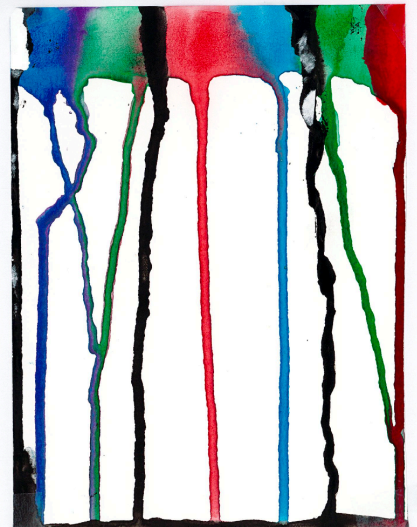
Ready to let go of this environment
And start fresh.

Poem by OB, a student in New York

STUDENT ARTWORK



JFV, a student from New Jersey



FS, a student from New York



EP, a student from Missouri



Winner of the
BreakFree Words
Unlocked contest

HEAR ME



By MH, a student in MO



Death in my ears,
Deafened my ears
The pain defining my tears
Walking alone on a fatherless road
Mother nature still calming my fears
Death in my ears,
Deafening fears
But to think life could've been worse
The way I was raised
Never count your days
And thank God that's not you in the hearse
Death in my ears,
Deafening cheers
For life is to celebrate
Death in my ears,
Death in my ears,
Death in my ears

**DEATH IN MY EARS,
DEAFENED MY EARS
THE PAIN DEFINING MY
TEARS**



What if letting go is the real strength?

by the BreakFree team



We spend a lot of time holding on. Holding on to mistakes. Holding on to anger. Holding on to what someone said about us. Holding on to the idea that we should have done better, known better, or been better. Sometimes we carry these things for so long that they start to feel like part of who we are.

But what if they aren't?

What if some of the heaviest things you're carrying were never meant to stay with you forever? Letting go doesn't mean pretending something never happened. It doesn't mean forgetting your story or excusing the people who hurt you. It simply means deciding that a painful thought, memory, mistake, or belief doesn't get to control your future anymore.

The truth is, letting go is uncomfortable. When you've carried something for years, it can feel safer to keep holding it than to put it down. Even if it's hurting you.

Maybe it's guilt.

Maybe it's a grudge.

Maybe it's the belief that you'll never change.

Maybe it's the version of yourself everyone expects you to be.

Whatever it is, letting go creates space.

Space for peace.

Space for growth.

Space for new possibilities.

Imagine trying to fill a backpack with supplies for a journey while it's already packed with rocks. At some point, the weight becomes too much. Before you can add something helpful, you have to decide what no longer belongs there. Your mind works the same way. Every time you release one thing that no longer serves you, you make room for something new:

Confidence instead of shame.

Hope instead of resentment.

Curiosity instead of fear.

You don't have to let go of everything at once. Maybe today you let go of one thought that keeps putting you down. Maybe tomorrow you let go of a comparison. Maybe next week you let go of the idea that your worst day defines you. Small releases become big freedom.

Reflection Questions

What is one thing I've been carrying that no longer helps me?

What would become possible if I loosened my grip on it?

What is one belief about myself I'm ready to question?

What do I want to make room for instead?



SM, a student in New York





Poems

My past is like a nightmare,
I'm afraid that people will judge,
But that's just a part of life though,

Growing up people picked on me through school,
My anger would take over and control,
Eventually getting me kicked out of school,

I had to embrace my problems,
Know that there is a tomorrow,
And accept that we all make mistakes,

Being put on probation was next,
My mom was very distressed,
I didn't know what was next,

I had to repair those bridges,
Strengthen them so they're locked in place,
And restore a peaceful place,

Being put into a correctional facility was hard,
I was afraid and didn't want to be scarred,
I knew I had to fix my life and it would be hard,

There are opportunities that await,
I got to accept them,
And know that my life's going to be great,

I participated in treatment,
Learned new coping skills,
And saw that there is light,

Growing up happens to all of us,
I can learn from my mistakes,
And be successful in life.

Poem by MP, a student in Oregon

Sometimes I hold emotions in that need to be let out;
Trauma that is too difficult to face
Not putting words to it makes it easier to block it out
But it doesn't make the trauma go away.

Sharing my thoughts is scary-
Who am I going to trust in here?
Thoughts that I'd like to bury
When expressed, will bring out tears

Letting things out allows me to grow and change;
Be a better version of myself
But I'm afraid my emotions might get the best of me
I really need some help

Being in here causes more stress
My insecurities are a lot
Talking with my clinician
Helps organize my thoughts

I'm encouraged to share
A little at a time
Letting go of fear
Allows me to begin the climb

My trauma has all the power
Right now it controls my life
With help I'm growing stronger
I refuse to accept the strife

I'm learning ways to cope
With the actions that brought me here
By letting go of my past
My future can appear

Poem by LH, a student in New York

Student Artwork



Artwork and statement by SJ, a student in Florida
I came a long way from the hate and the pain
Now I express myself with art from my brain.
Hatred and Stigma put on me by those who hate
They now watch me THRIVE, expressing my bright
& spectacular fate!

Table built by BM, a student in Oregon



MT, a student from New Jersey



POWER OF SILENCE

By ZW, a student in Texas

I was once a silent person
trying to protect myself.
I didn't have the strength to let people hear my voice
as the victim that I was,
so I kept quiet.

I thought I was doing the right thing
to protect myself,
going to a mental hospital.
A couple of months later,
I went to jail.

Then I found myself opening up about my silence.

"No more silence," I said.
I wondered why I was silent for so long.
I figured it out.
I had fear.
I was scared of what would happen to me if I told,
or if they thought I would tell.

But then I said,
"Let them."

I will let people hear my voice
about my problems
for my protection.
I need to break the silence
so I can protect my voice,
and you all should do the same.

"No more silence."

There is no shame
because no one is perfect.
Let people hear your voice
for the strength that you have
and the protection that you need.



Poems

I need to let go
Of the things that are holding me back-
My non-present mother,
My abusive drunk of a father,
All of the poisonous relationships
That hinder my progress.
I feel like I'm trapped
And I can't move on.

I constantly give people chance after chance
Hoping for a different outcome,
But I'm always disappointed.
Why can't I move forward?
Why do I let others walk all over me?
How do I break that habit?
How do I stop the cycle?
What needs to change?

I need to change.
Put my foot down and stand on what I say.
Stop feeling guilty for wanting something good.
Stop trying to repair relationships that aren't
worth repairing
Move on by myself

For the first time ever
I will move on
And better myself
By letting go.

Poem by MS, a student in New York

I need to let go to become
Free, not just from incarceration
But mentally, mentally free from
The fear of letting down the
People I love.

I will let go of biting my tongue,
I will say no even if that means,
They will leave. I will let go
Of the weight that holds me down.

I am going to break free and
Leave these gates, I am releasing
Myself from the voices in my
Head, telling me I need to
Hold on to be loved.

I am letting go.

Poem by DM, a student in New York



Know Your Peace



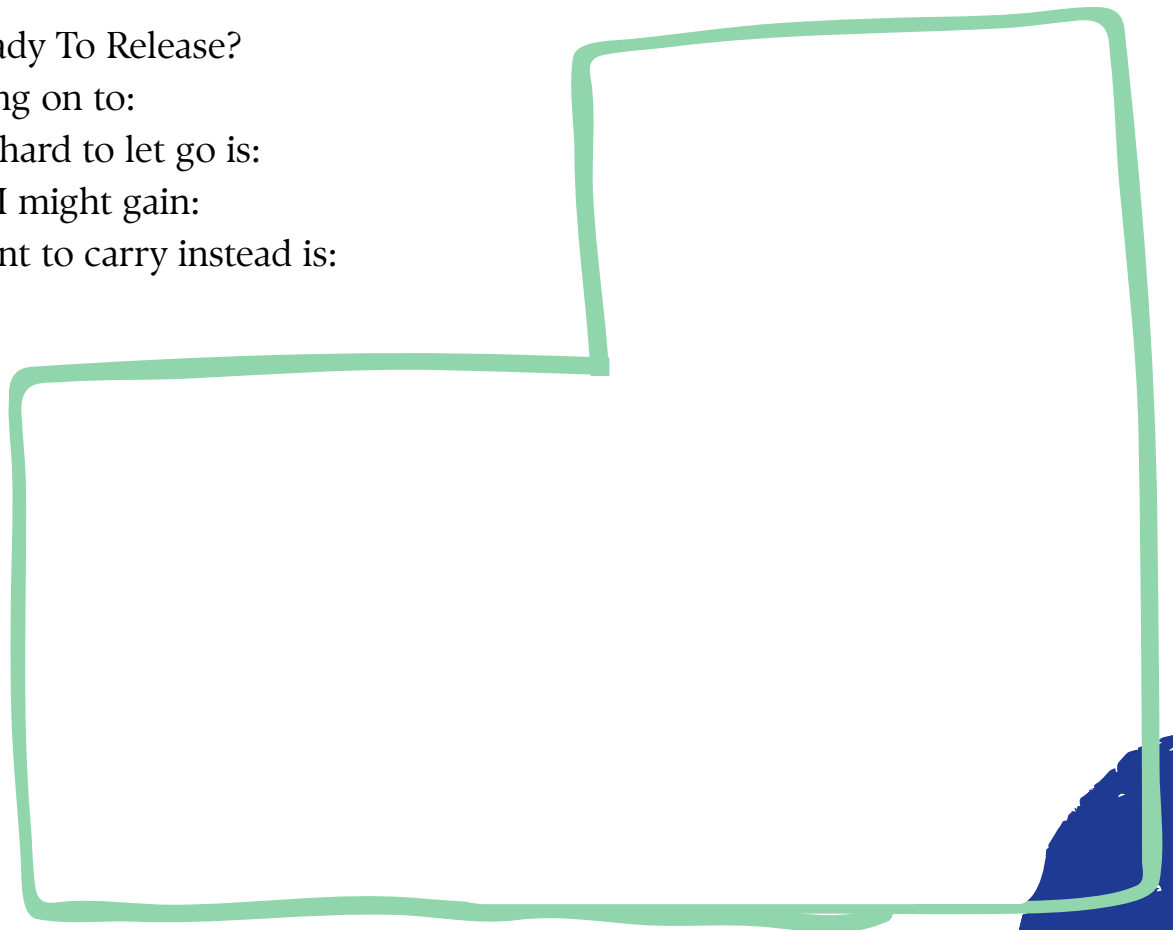
Your peace shapes how you experience and move through the world. Sometimes the hardest part of finding peace isn't adding something new—it's letting go of something you've been carrying for too long. That might be a mistake, a grudge, a fear, an expectation, or a belief about yourself that no longer serves you.

These prompts are an opportunity to slow down, check in with yourself, and reflect on what you're ready to release. Letting go isn't about forgetting what happened or pretending something didn't matter. It's about making room for healing, growth, and what comes next.

Peace isn't the absence of challenges. It's learning what deserves your energy—and what you're ready to put down.

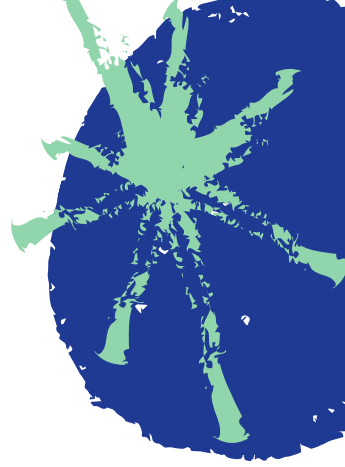
Choose the prompts that speak to you and complete them in the space to the right.

- What Am I Ready To Release?
- I've been holding on to:
- The reason it's hard to let go is:
- If I let this go, I might gain:
- One thing I want to carry instead is:





MINDFUL DOODLING



Sometimes thoughts get stuck because we keep circling them.
This doodle invites you to practice release.

1. Draw a large river flowing across the page.
2. Along the riverbank, write things you want to let go of:
 - worries
 - regrets
 - anger
 - fear
 - pressure
 - anything else
3. Turn each word into part of the landscape:
 - rocks
 - leaves
 - clouds
 - waves
 - floating paper boats
4. Fill the river with patterns:
 - swirls
 - loops
 - zig-zags
 - dots
 - repeating shapes
5. At the end of the river, write: "I release what I no longer need."

Quick Hits Answers

The hot balloon release answer is personal to each of you so answers will vary.

Shoutout!

Special shoutout to the students and teachers whose work is featured in this issue!

Allison Forger, Maya Angelou Academy (YSC), DC
Denise Barnett Escambia County School District Jail Program in Florida
Srinath Vadapalli, Turning Point Academy in New Jersey
Lisa McGetrick Harriet Tubman Residential Center in New York
LeeAnn O'Neal Eckerd Connects - Kerr Lake Girls Academy in North Carolina
Lisa McCready, Trask River in Oregon
Rhonda Drake WE Sears Youth Center in Missouri
Stephanie Geohagan Sierra Osage Treatment Center in Missouri
Kimberly Molidor, Academy for Academic Excellence in Texas

Get Ready for Our Next Issue! Submit Your Work!

Have something to share?

We want to hear from you!

The next issue of Break Free is coming soon, and we're looking for your stories, art, and ideas. This is your space to celebrate your journey, creativity, and voice.

To submit your work,
head to our website:
www.breakfree-ed.org/magazine.



BreakFree
EDUCATION