

NOVEMBER 2025

BREAK FREE

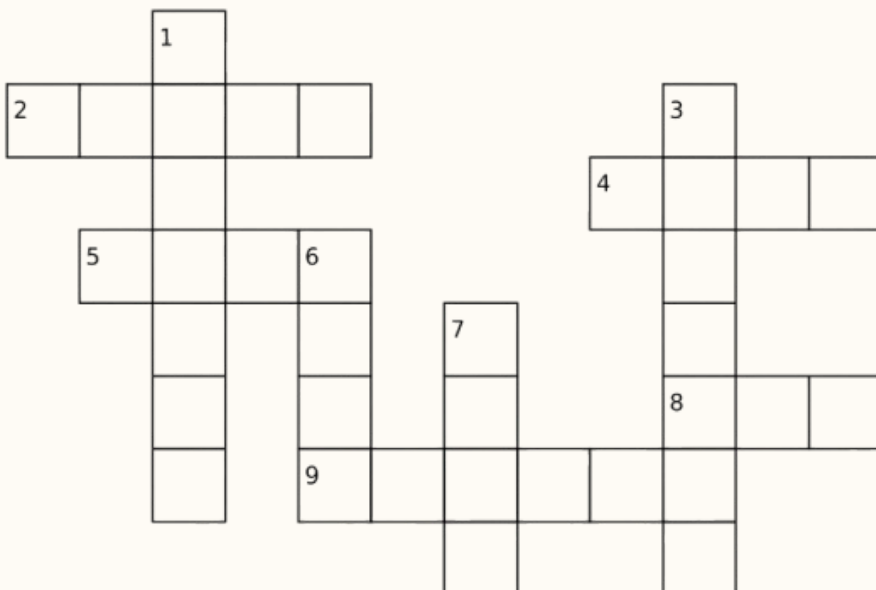
Made for your mind to move.

Issue Two:
Still Becoming

Quick Hits

DOWN:

1. A term for making big progress or achieving the next stage of skill.
3. A long trip or the process of getting from one place (or state) to another.
6. To go up or climb, like Katy Perry sang in her song about bouncing back after a fall
7. To get bigger or older, like when you level up in a video game or life

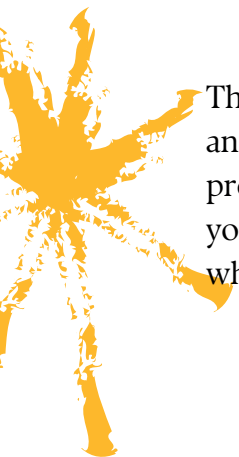


ACROSS:

2. To make a clean _____ from an old habit or routine
4. The command you give yourself when you are stuck and need to get going
5. The main feeling you need to overcome to make big changes
8. What Dua Lipa sings is needed when you start a “___ Rules” policy
9. What you do when you slowly change and improve over time, like Pokéman



Still Becoming



The journey of still becoming isn't about reaching the finish line; it's about the courage and commitment you show in the daily work of change. It's easy to dismiss your progress, but these prompts invite you to acknowledge and honor the complex person you are right now and the powerful, messy process you are currently navigating. This is where resilience is truly built. We honor this process through conciseness and honesty.

Reflection Prompts

SIX WORD MEMOIRS

Write a Six-Word Memoir that captures the current state or the change you are actively trying to achieve. Examples from students in Delaware.

"Grew up rough. It changed me." - **AC**

"A judge holds young black men." - **AL**

"Pain real. So take life different." - **AW**

ADVICE I WON'T FORGET

What is the most important piece of advice you have been given about managing change or failure, and why does it stick with you?

"One piece of advice that I received and that I will never forget was from my mom. She said, 'Treat life like a book. If you never turn the page, you'll never know what happens next.'"

- **CL from TX**

"Listen to your family when they tell you no or to stay away from drugs. Don't not listen and do you without listening or something bad might happen or get put you or go to jail, bad predicament."

- **Student from Summit County JDC in OH**

"I should have listened to what my mommy said. If I had I would not be here. I wanted to do bad things but it's not a joke. I thought it was cool but it's not."

- **Student from Summit County JDC in OH**

Letters to Myself

We often try to summarize the massive, ongoing process of growth in just a few words. But what if we took the time to talk directly to the person we are actively becoming? This activity challenges us to be radically honest about where we are right now—our current struggles, our small victories, and our wildest dreams—and send that message forward. Writing a Letter to My Future Self forces us to honor the difficult, beautiful process of change, documenting the starting line so we can celebrate the distance we cover.

Here is a list of “letters to myself” from students in the **Escambia County School District Jail Program in Florida.**

- It would be wise of you to slow down, and not live that fast life because let me tell ya.... We end up in adult jail at 15 if ya don't.
- Stay away from older adults...stay away from drugs...stay in school...
- Watch out for your younger brother...he looks up to you....set a better example
- Focus on basketball. Surround yourself with people who are on the right track.
- Listen to your family...mama always told you to be a leader.
- Stay in school, stupid! What did you think you'd learn out in the streets?
- Do something to make people proud of you....especially ME...make me proud of me!

Reflection Question: Before writing your letter, what is one hope or fear about your process of change that you need to tell your future self today, so they won't forget the courage it took to start?



YOUR LETTER:

DEAR SELF,

A large, stylized orange scribble or signature that appears to be written over the bottom of the page, partially overlapping the reflection question area.

HONORING THE PROCESS

BUILD A NEW MINDSET

MICRO-WINS



At the end of your day, identify one small positive action you completed that moves you toward your goal (example: starting a difficult task, choosing patience). Say it out loud and give yourself a silent acknowledgment.

THE REFRAME



When you notice a negative or limiting thought (like "I always fail at this"), catch the thought and immediately replace it with a reframed statement focused on the process ("I haven't mastered this yet," or "I am learning how to do this").

FUTURE-SELF



Close your eyes and visualize yourself six months from now, fully embodying the change you are working toward. Go through a full scenario where you encounter a current challenge and successfully use your new habit to overcome it.



From Pain to Purpose by SJ in Delaware

I was born on 02/29/2008 — the day my mother gave me life. I was her first son but her fourth child. I was born on a leap year, which was rare and annoying at the same time. My mom struggled to do the best she could for us. She worked until she couldn't anymore, and my grandmother and stepdad helped her a lot. My mom was sick often because she was diagnosed with heart disease. I was only nine years old the last time I saw her. I woke up for school one day and she was sleeping on the couch. I wanted to wake her so badly — it's like I knew it would be the last time. I left out the front door hoping I would get to see her again. When I got home, my stepfather told me and my siblings to sit close. I was young, so I didn't understand much of what he said. My older sisters cried while my younger siblings and I sat confused, until my stepfather told us my mother's heart had failed and she might not make it through the next seventy-two hours. My life felt like it just stopped at that moment. My heart and brain were torn in pieces.

Life after my mom's death was a blur of responsibilities and quiet moments that changed me. My stepfather didn't know how to grieve my mom's death, so he stayed strong for us. He still does the best he can, even for my older siblings who have kids now. I have a very big family, and yes, everyone in this family has a little bit of craziness in them — maybe a lot. It's hilarious sometimes, like we're in a comedy show. I love my family and would never take anything in my life for granted.

I've experienced death after death in my family, even with friends, but that's another story. I was raised in Wilmington, Delaware, the first state in America. People have it hard growing up here, especially people like me. Since my mother and grandmother passed, I haven't been the same. I think a lot about myself and ask questions like, "What is my future supposed to be like?" and "What is the purpose of my life?" Sometimes I feel bad because I'm not there for my younger siblings like I used to be. I've been locked up or running the streets instead.

Those moments of doubt and frustration come at night when everything is quiet. I think about the little things my mom used to do — how she would hum while making dinner, how she kept our clothes clean even when there wasn't much money, how she would squeeze my hand when I was down. I remember my grandmother's voice telling stories from when she was young, teaching us right from wrong. Those memories are heavy and warm at the same time. They push me and pull me, and sometimes they make me feel guilty for being a kid who didn't always do the right thing. But they also remind me where I come from and who I owe my loyalty to.


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family

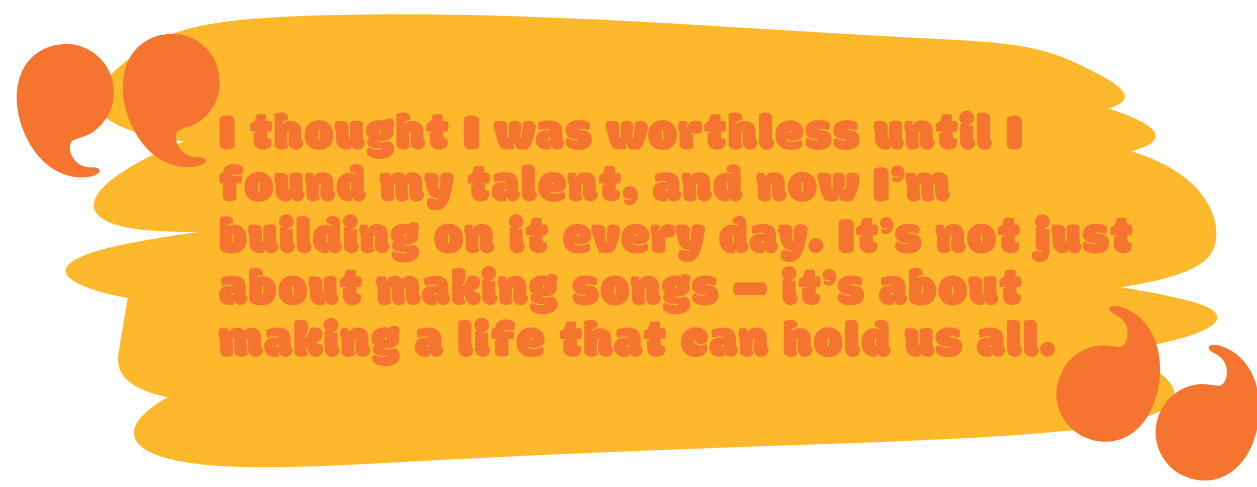


From Pain to Purpose continued by SJ in Deleware



Music became that place where I could be honest without having to explain myself. One night I stayed up in my room and made a beat on a cheap keyboard. I wrote lyrics from my heart — about my mom, my siblings, the street, and the feeling of having to grow up too fast. I made one song I didn't like at first, but my friends heard it and kept telling me to keep going. People in my neighborhood started playing it, and my family ran it on repeat. They told me the words hit home and that I had something real. That pushed me to make another song and then another. Each track felt like a small step away from hopelessness and a step toward something I could control. Half the city knows my songs now, and that's a start. I perform at small shows, in front of friends and neighbors, and every time I see someone nodding their head or mouthing the words, I feel like I've done something for my family. Music doesn't just mean fame to me — it means a chance to give my siblings a better life, a way to change the story we've been handed.

I still mess up. I still get angry and run when I should stay. But the more I create music, the more I find the parts of myself that matter. My siblings, grandmother, and mom give me motivation. They make me strong inside and push me to keep going. I thought I was worthless until I found my talent, and now I'm building on it every day. It's not just about making songs — it's about making a life that can hold us all. I have to do this for my family, especially my younger brothers and sisters who look up to me whether they know it or not. We've been through so much — it's a must that I make it out. I can't give up.



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THE TEXAS STATE FAIR

By KO
Academy for Academic Excellence, Texas

The reason the Texas State Fair is the biggest regional event Texas has is because the fair has so many activities from rides and haunted houses to things as simple as boardwalks around the small lake.

Yee-haw and yippee ki-yay, folks!

The rides are terrific! They are also available for kids as young as one. There are ten to fifteen buildings within the state fairgrounds, such as the rodeo arena where country folks, cowgirls, and cowboys participate in horse races and relays, pig races, bull riding, and other rodeo events. The bulls in the rodeo are baaaad—like goats, they're cute but mean. They have baby goats in their petting zoo, along with cows, emus, camels, and more.

Foodies need to come to the party, too! My favorite part is the food. They have a fried food contest every year and let me tell you... it gets weird—from fried Coca-Cola to fried butter (yuck)! Fried everything—and I mean everything. Things are always big in Texas! Their corn dogs and turkey legs are famous. The turkey legs are ten times better than the average turkey leg, and huge. Like Big Tex always says, their turkey legs are to die for.

Lastly, R.I.P. Big Tex... You're probably wondering, "What do you mean? He's just a statue." JUST A STATUE? No... In 2012, Big Tex tragically burned down. Almost all of Texas was in grief—so much so that they had a funeral later that year for "him." Honestly, I have never in my years of living seen a state have a funeral for a statue. It was reported nationwide.

They have since rebuilt Big Tex, and the fair is even bigger and better! There's no other place a Texan wants to be in the fall but the Texas State Fair.



STUDENT ARTWORK

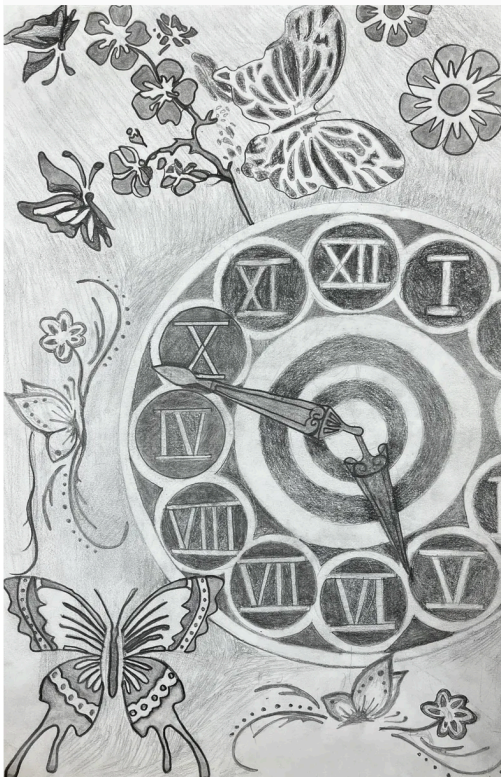
Students from Farmington
Bay Youth Center in Utah



ED from Ralph C. Starkey
High School in Ohio



Student from
Y.E.S.S (Granite
School District)
in Utah

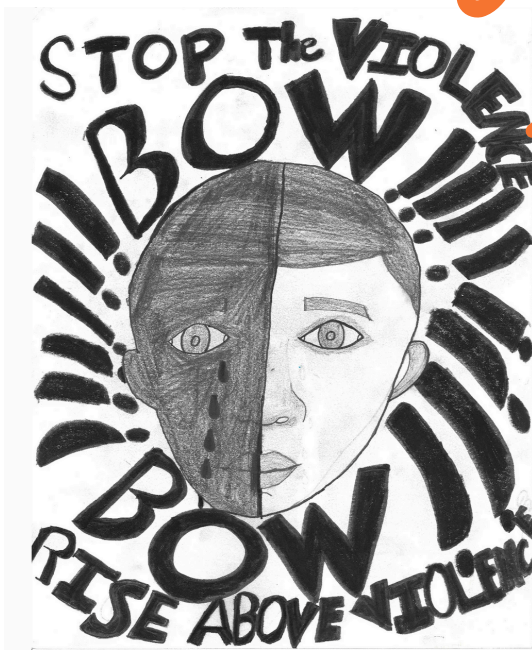


Student from Educational
Transition Center DJT in Georgia



STUDENT ARTWORK

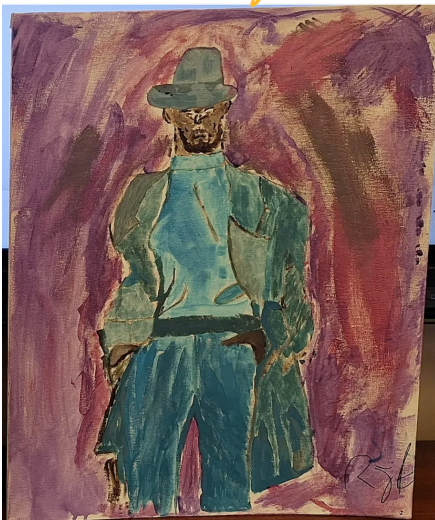
*SD from Maya
Angelou in DC*



*Student from Olomana School Youth
Correctional Facility in Hawaii*



*Student from Educational
Transition Center DJJ in Georgia*



*Student from Travis
Hill School in New
Orleans, Louisiana*





The Process is the Point!

Written by Kaylah, BreakFree Education

“The only constant in life is change.” — Heraclitus



There’s a silent pressure many people carry. It whispers, or sometimes shouts, from the moment you wake up. It says: You should be done by now. You should have learned this already. The challenge should be over. That pressure can become overwhelming—especially in environments that prioritize the final grade, the finished product, or the perfectly healed story. It can feel like your worth depends on being complete, stable, and static. But what if that feeling of being unfinished is actually where your greatest strength lies? What if the process itself is the point?

Why We Judge the Process

It’s human nature to seek stability. Our brains love efficiency, and change is messy, unpredictable, and takes energy. When we commit to still becoming, we sign up for moments of doubt, setbacks, and a lack of clear answers. We often try to speed through our personal growth, wanting the "after" picture without embracing the confusing "during."

If you’ve experienced instability or trauma, the need to achieve a fixed, safe end-state can be even more intense. This isn’t a flaw; it’s a profound yearning for certainty. But by only celebrating the destination, we often deny ourselves credit for the courage it takes just to keep moving. We need to recognize that every step of this ongoing journey—even the missteps—is full of possibility.

The Power of “Unfinished”

Some successes are loud, like a final performance. Others are quiet, like the effort that went into practice. And the quiet ones—the moments you choose to try again, the resilience built after a setback, the new idea you dared to share—are the foundation of sustained growth.

When you say, "I am still becoming," you are not admitting failure; you are declaring infinite potential. You are reserving the right to evolve, to change your mind, and to grow beyond the expectations others (or your past self) placed on you.

You don’t need to reach perfection to be worthy of credit. You don’t have to finish the book to honor the pages you’ve already written. Your journey is ongoing, and that is a powerful, hopeful truth.



Believing in Your Process is Commitment

Believing in your process doesn't mean being complacent; it means being committed. It means choosing to define yourself by your sustained effort rather than a single victory or failure. It means choosing not to define yourself by your worst moment, but by the fact that you got up the next day to begin the work again. The world may celebrate the finish line, but strength is forged in the preparation. You are not a static object; you are a dynamic force—changing, learning, and growing every day.

Practice Honoring Your Effort

Learning to honor the "during" phase of your journey takes deliberate practice. Here are a few small ways to start recognizing the power of your process:

- Ask yourself daily: What is one habit, skill, or belief I developed or practiced today that moves me toward my future self? Give yourself credit for the action, not the result.
- The Three-Part Thank You: Identify a recent moment of help or support you received during a difficult change. Write down three specific things you are grateful for related to that person or action.
- Acknowledge the Mess: When you face a setback, ask: What did this failure teach me about the process of change that success would have hidden?

Reflection Prompts:

- What is one small effort you made recently (a difficult conversation, starting a new routine, etc.) that you can truly honor today?
- If you could give your past self advice about how to manage a change they were facing, what would you say?
- What does the feeling of being 'unfinished' open up for you, rather than close off?
- What is the most important lesson you have learned from a mistake you made while trying to change?
- How does showing self-compassion when you mess up help you keep moving forward?
- What is the one word you would use to describe the energy of your current process of becoming?

YOUR PROCESS INVENTORY

Write down five elements of your current journey—things you're working on, small efforts you've made, or advice you need to hear—that honor the process of change. Big or small, they all count.

STUDENT POETRY

True Emotions by ET Watkins Mills Camp, MO

True emotions behind closed doors
What was all of it for?
My emotions are locked in a cage
I wish everybody would go away!
I'm locked in detention I'm depressed...
Might I mention I'm locked in a box.
I want you to take a key and unlock, my lock.
One day I'll finally show
Until then you'll never know.
I hide down below the ocean,
Am I ever gonna have emotions?

Stories on My Arm By JW Academy for Academic Excellence, TX

The stories written on my arms,
they are more detailed than the stories I write on fragile paper,
that I wear out with my yellow pencil.
My stories are written in ink,
spoken in French, English, and Spanish,
words in bold, italics, and cursive,
about pain, stress, and the past.
The genre is thriller, adventure, and romance.
The stories on my arms are vivid.
Each stroke of dark chocolate on my otherwise caramel skin
speaks louder than the words raised from my vocal cords.
They talk about my pain because they are made in a specific way
and it's quite sad,
that my arms that were written on by my past –
tell you who I am before I get to introduce myself.



MINDFUL DOODLING



(1) Begin your doodle by drawing a shape or a pattern that represents the most confusing, stuck, or unfinished part of your journey right now.

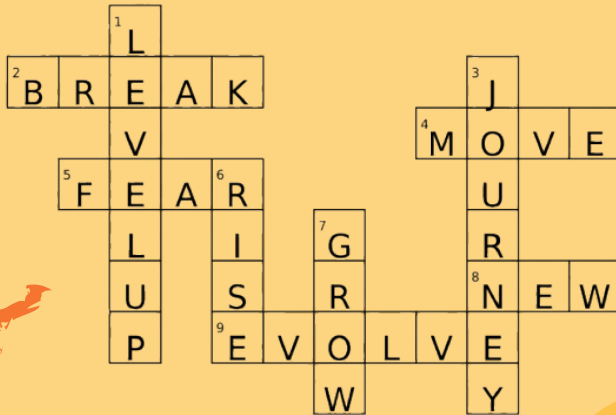
(2) Now, don't erase anything! From that first shape, start drawing lines, arrows, or winding paths that show the effort you are currently making to move forward. How does change feel? Use jagged lines for struggle, soft curves for flow, or overlapping shapes for complexity.

(3) Introduce a new color or pattern that represents your future potential—the person you are still becoming. Let this color start small and spread outward, interacting with the messy lines of the process.

Goal: Your finished doodle should look active and incomplete. The "mess" is the honesty of the process, and the spreading color is the hope of the future. Do not try to make it "good"; just make it true to the moment.



Quick Hits Answers



Shoutout!

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

Krystle Sanders, Maya Angelou in DC
Kimberly McKenzie, Cleveland White School DSCYF in Delaware
Denise Barnett, Escambia County School District Jail Program in Florida
Chryl Johnson, Educational Transition Center DJJ in Georgia
Doralyn Adams, Olomana School Youth Correctional Facility in Hawaii
Heidi Loening, Travis Hill School in New Orleans in Louisiana
Kelly Boley, Watkins Mills Camp in Missouri
Ashley Dowell, Ralph C. Starkey High School in Ohio
Ruth Edge, Summit County JDC in Ohio
Kimberly Molidor, Academy for Academic Excellence in Texas
Mollie Hosmer-Dillard, Farmington Bay Youth Center in Utah
Sue Hansen, Y.E.S.S (Granite School District) in Utah
Emily Wilkins, Schools of Diversion and Transition in West Virginia

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,
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