

Play the Pause

By Christina Hunt

Published May 2012

The following is the theme copy I wrote for J.W. Mitchell High School's yearbook, The Stampede. I was editor-in-chief of the book, named Play the Pause, which won an All-American and a Silver Crown from the Columbia Scholastic Press Association. The theme copy presides at the beginning and end of the book, as well as the division pages of each section and explains the theme of the book as it relates to that particular school year and the particular section it is introducing.

First Opening

"Did you know he was building an airplane? How cool is that? There are not many kids who can say their dad was building an airplane," Glenn Gallagher ('12) said.

A father's death. **(Stop)**

"Instead of just withdrawing and giving up, I just fought through it. I chose to improve myself and keep moving because that is what my dad would have wanted me to do and because I have a loving family that wants me to be successful," Gallagher said.

"It was hard to study for tests because I had no notes whatsoever. I didn't have any of my homework pages so I had to redo it all," Jordan Salzer ('15) said.

Missing backpack. **(Give Up)**

"Since I had to do it twice, my mind saw it twice and my grades got a little better," Salzer said.

"The class size amendment calls for the maximum of 25 students in each class. In order to meet class size, schools need to make the commitment to balance classes and offer alternatives to students once the max is reached because the district is fined based on not meeting the terms of the amendment," Principal Jim Michaels (FAC) said.

New legislation. **(Freeze Up)**

Let's be frank. Our country's economy is in shambles. Symptomatic budget cuts are trickling down to businesses, schools, and individuals.

Subsequent faculty lay-offs shake the morale of both students and staff. Scarce employment options make it hard to earn extra spending money, and increasing competition for college acceptance adds stress to our lives.

All of this tempts us to **hunker down** and ride out the storm, to succumb to the pressure. We're trapped in a limbo that is hard to shake, a limbo known to cause setbacks rather than progress.

(Pause)

And then it hits us. We can be different.

Second Opening

We can swim upstream, against the current, because we have vitality—the capacity to survive, to live, to grow. Out of the loss of a newspaper adviser, we form a united journalism department.

Like that Great Glass Elevator, we're **breaking through the ceiling**—the obstacles—instead of treading water. Because what we accomplish in the down time defines us just as much as our actions during periods of prosperity.

While we wait for those college decisions, we **devise** new ways to share limited textbooks, to entertain ourselves for free, and to escape from daily struggles.

In a world where unsinkable ships sink, we're showing off our **resilience**. Improvising if we forget a line. Refusing to remain as we are, to settle for a shut down, to just...exist.

We realize that there's a difference between standing still and doing nothing. There's a difference between maintaining the status quo and exceeding it. We choose to exceed it, to do more, to **redefine the pause**.

NHS and SNHS collaborate in the name of improvement, and drama students receive rave reviews despite a last minute change in play. This is all possible because we're resolved to

stand up straight, square our shoulders, and **march on**.

We may be experiencing a pause in our journey, but we sure are running around within it. Founding new clubs. Installing a new track. Renovating old tennis courts.

We're not afraid to **bust a move** in that awkward silence. The sprinkler. The robot. It doesn't make a difference. Either way, we're that reckless oddball that refuses to be satisfied with standing still.

Textbook shortages and cafeteria fires pause us for a moment, but we've decided to play through, and we will. We adopted that can-do spirit and created a new mantra: **PLAY THE PAUSE**.

Break the Tempo (Student Life)

"It's hard having to pack your stuff up, move to a new house and then do it all over again," Alexia Lamb ('13) said.

Nine moves. Sixteen years. **(Detach)**

"I just look for the positives. I like things to change. I don't like things staying the same. I enjoy getting a new room and the new scenery," Lamb said.

"Me and my friends were bored one day and we wanted to go to the movies, but we didn't have any money, so we decided to go do something random," Jonathan Lawrence ('14) said.

Bored and penniless. **(Standstill)**

"Planking was a stupid way that me and my friends could pass time," Lawrence said.

"I found myself liking certain things such as different hairstyles, artwork, or concepts that most of my friends though were strange and didn't understand," Kristina League ('14) said.

Nonconformist style. **(Misunderstood)**

"After I found Tumblr, I realized there were so many people out there that enjoyed those things as much as I did. It opened a whole new community of people to me with my same interests, which made me feel more comfortable with my little quirks," League said.

Foreclosures line the streets of out neighborhoods, our favorite restaurants and stores lay empty, and we can't afford that traditional spring break cruise anymore.

We could just hang out on the couch, wasting away our free time in front of the television. But these are our lives we're talking about, our youth. Forget our empty pockets, boredom and fears.

We're **going out there** and raising money for those less fortunate than us, shopping at thrift stores, renting movies from boxes. Heck, maybe we will even plank a few times, or owl,

or cone...All in the name of **action**, of course.

That little voice in one ear telling us to give up: it's going down. Our actions are silencing it. We're not bowing down to the instinctual rhythm, the one that tells us to play it safe and wait for trouble to pass before we come out of hiding. We're making the most of this time by choosing to **BREAK THE TEMPO**.

Surpass the Strain (Academics)

"We'll never know what Mr. Sall was going to say to us at the end of the year," Colin Brosnan ('12) said.

New band director. **(Gasp)**

"While Mr. Sall left the program with big shoes to fill, Mr. Quina, in different ways, easily filled them and more," Brosnan said.

"Most of the time the people don't bring them back, so sometimes there is not enough class textbooks, so we all have to share," Regan Marler ('13) said.

Textbook shortage. **(Halt)**

"We share books with our friends and our teacher is more lenient about us working together. I've found that I learn better in groups anyway," Marler said.

"Getting into college is harder now. If I tried to get into the same college my parents went to, I'd have to do more," Colin Gaynor ('14) said.

Low college acceptance rates.

(Hesitate)

"I'm taking AP classes to prepare for college level classes and not I would study in that environment," Gaynor said.

As the national deficit rises and the number of jobs fall, competition is increasing. First reaction: Hold on. Stay upright. Get out alive.

And then we **rebel**—we choose to thrive and play on.

To sponsor an author's visit for the junior class and to host a math and science oriented field trip to Busch Gardens.

We're improving our Advanced Placement program—offering new classes, training students over the summer at "AP Bootcamp", and **continuing** that skill development during after school seminars.

Our graduation standards are rising. We're adding end-of-course exams and an online class requirement.

We're doing those things no one expects during challenging times. We're **raising the curtain**. Expecting more from ourselves and following through. We're moving within the pauses, not one step at a time, but one bound at a time. We're surpassing everything that comes our way. We're **SURPASSING THE STRAIN**.

Engage to Create (Organizations)

"I've witnessed and experienced it; and watching someone close to me go through that was very hard," Sherron Fontes ('13) said.

Physical and emotional abuse. (Shut down)

"T.A.R.A. (Teens Against Relationship Abuse) is like a safe place. It makes you feel like you're not alone and realize you're not the only one going through something so terrible," Fontes said.

"A lot of them have speech impediments or they can't talk at all," Gina Polly ('13) said.

Communicating with special needs students. (Confound)

"I ask them to repeat themselves, or I know what they said because I have a lot of practice with it," Polly said.

"I was really happy to get the part of Frederick in The Sound of Music. When I heard the news that we couldn't do the show, I felt disappointed," Evan Gambill ('14) said.

Rights revoked. (Disappointed)

"I realized it's not really about what part you get, it's about improving the J.W. Mitchell High School name. The vision of being on stage and performing is what I care about most. Drama is my home, so no matter

what happens title-wise, they're still my family," Gambill said.

Get up and hour early for an Interact meeting? Sure. Go home right after school? Not us. We're filling every spare hour with meaningful action.

ROTC builds an obstacle course to **practice** on in between competitions. Student Council hosts an ice cream social to welcome new students. Our drama department saw their lack of an auditorium as a chance to create a black box theater.

We're getting those wheels turning, engaging them in **constant motion**, committing to tasks between the pauses of classes and **giving it our all**.

By creating a safe-haven, forming a line of communication, and easily adapting to hurdles thrown our way, we're proactively engaging ourselves in a constant fight—we **ENGAGE TO CREATE**.

Impulse to Move (Sports)

"I have to wear a back brace, and I had to stop cheerleading and weightlifting because if I didn't, I could injure my spine and lose feeling in my legs," Jessica Chaltry ('12) said.

Spinal disorder. (**Brace Yourself**)

"I tried out for JV soccer. Cutting down on sports helped me focus more on school, and I ended up liking soccer better. Because of that, I received an academic scholarship

instead of a sports scholarship," Chaltry said.

"I'm not able to play in the middle of the year. I could've been the first person in Pasco County to score 2,000 points," Jake Driscoll ('12) said.

Broken arm. (**Take a Seat**)

"I still go to all of the games and to most of the practices. I try to help coach and be there for my team. I learned to never take things for granted," Driscoll said.

"JV girls' basketball only had six players to begin with and later just five," Michelle Ordax ('15) said.

Less than half of a team. (**Forfeit**)

"We all learned that we had to pull some weight and play with intensity and passion. This worked all season, especially because of our amazing and supportive coaches," Ordax said.

Injuries, revolving coaches, and merciless pressure burden our athletes while they fight for points—for the win. They struggle against the pressure to give up—to cheat, to quit.

But we **play** through.

We claw our way **forward**, one motion at a time. Our athletes continue to sign contracts with universities—allowing them to further their education while pursuing a pastime they love.

Our cheerleading team displays **initiative** while hosting Cheer for a Cure and selling spirit cups o construct a mustang's head on the stadium fence in order to fund their program.

Even under that merciless pressure, we're got a cause—an impulse. An impulse that keeps us from standing still during the pauses. An **IMPULSE TO MOVE**.

Dare to React (People)

"I missed seeing my brother because when he lived at home we started getting close and then he had to go," Kyle Reid ('13) said.

Brother in jail. **(Family collapse)**

"I was able to write him and visit him once a week, and I've learned that actions always have consequences," Reid said.

"AP and honors, while both economics, are very different. It tend to be a topic most teachers shy away from—just learning the content was a challenge," Ms. Jamie Orrego (FAC) said.

Challenging classes. **(Take a Breath)**

"I chose AP Micro because I felt it would enrich me and make me more valuable as a professional. But I think the best part was the students. They were just so incredibly smart and fun. I'm hooked on teaching AP," Orrego said.

"It's hard to keep in touch with my family when they are so far away," Kelly Van ('12) said.

Family 9,000-Miles Apart.

(Withdraw)

"We buy a card that lets us talk to our family so we can stay connected and see if they need any help," Van said.

The strain of long-distance relationships, the taunt of peer pressure, and the discouraging news of a college rejection letter weigh down on our daily lives.

While others may feel the urge to crumble—to pause—under those paralyzing circumstances we move **forward**. We're working through the intermission: perfecting our lines, tweaking our movements, and continuing to **play**. We're submerging ourselves in that character—doing anything and everything we can on our quest to make the most of our environment.

We shirk the yearning to throw in the towel, and instead, opt to **respond** in a daring manner. We take it upon ourselves to go beyond the status quo. We **DARE TO REACT**.

Dare to React (People—Seniors)

"I went through a stage where I felt like I needed a father figure in my life, but I had no one to look to," Bradley Gonzalez ('12) said.

Divorce. **(Take a Moment)**

"I got through it by setting goals in school, playing sports, and joining clubs to get my mind off of it," Gonzalez said.

"I've had to give up huge amounts of time that I could devote to a social life and I have to sacrifice sleep in order to finish what needs to be completed," Allison Goldston ('12) said.

Bills. **(Struggle)**

"It's difficult have to give things up to keep two jobs, but I need money to get by...It's honestly really hard, but you have to plan ahead and budget time wisely," Goldston said.

We're on the edge of adulthood, thrust onto the stage. The stage where skyrocketing college costs, political upheavals, and family members dispersed across the globe are the norm.

Just because the circumstances are the same, does not mean we're responding like everyone else.

We let the stressors roll off our backs, shaking out the kinks in our lives and moving **forward**. Colleges accepted us, we're earning scholarships, and **juggling** multiple jobs, all while making the most out of our fleeting childhood days—enjoying the water, dancing like there's no tomorrow, and embracing our unique talents.

We never give up, never fail to carry on. We're taking chances and exposing ourselves to adversity,

daring to believe in our abilities. We **DARE TO REACT**.

Dare to React (People—Faculty)

"After my first year teaching, it was disheartening to be let go. I've been teaching for two school years, and this is my third temporary contract," Ms. Katie McCarthy (FAC) said.

Teacher cuts. **(Cease)**

"But because this is my passion, I'm trying to stick it out in hopes that things get better soon," McCarthy said.

"Increasing focus from the state on testing and the move away from actual education, as well as the corresponding paperwork, are causing me to consider all of my options," Mr. Chris Gamel (FAC) said.

Rising tension. **(Stress)**

"I'm going back to get my master's because I have a personal desire to improve myself, and so that I can explore all of my opportunities in the education field," Gamel said.

Jobs threatened. Stagnant salary. Unrelenting circumstances surround school faculty—overwhelming them, dazing them, pausing them.

But our staff **defies** natural instincts.

Casting the theme for the year as **We Make Excellence Happen**—the faculty fights through boundaries while others struggle to stay upright.

They're taking on the task of teaching more AP classes, returning to school in order to reach their fullest potential, and embracing new technology in an effort to enrich their student's educations.

Our teachers, administrators, and staff choose to stay active, to respond, to react. They're answering the challenge, taking on a bet—a dare. A dare to make excellence happen. A dare to break the mold. They **DARE TO REACT**.

Dare to React (People— Underclassmen)

"I just didn't care. My grades were constantly getting worse. I would do the assignments, but I didn't care enough to give 100 percent," James Bandini ('13) said.

Failing grades. (**Drop Out**)

"When Cierra Mammonoff passed away, it hit me really hard. I found the motivation to give 100 percent to my education, started talking to my teachers to find out how I could finish the semester with better grades and then made up credits online," Bandini said.

"Being away from him is quite lonely. It's hard to grasp at first because you've had this person your whole life and then they're not there," Keysha Pagan ('13) said.

Father overseas. (**Worry**)

"I look at the bright side. He's doing this for our country. Knowing that I'll eventually see him and it's not a forever thing makes it easier," Pagan said.

The stress of changing high schools, not once, but four times, being too young to drive or to get a job, and communicating with a father overseas: it's all **weighing us down**, making everyday life a challenge.

But we're crawling—**kicking and screaming**—out of that three-dimensional pause. We're thinking outside of the box and utilizing every last resource we've got to pull through and further our cause, our future, our lives.

When circumstances require us to muddle through, our actions go against the grain: chasing musical aspirations, founding web-based businesses, earning a pilot's license. While everyone expects us to remain idle, we **DARE TO REACT**.

Beyond the Framework (Community)

"At the Salvation Army, I saw lots of families come up to the trucks that had food and they were very appreciative and looked very hungry," Tori Peterman ('12) said.

Empty back accounts. (Go hungry)

"I started couponing because I thought it would be a fun hobby. Then I realized how easy it was to purchase free products by using a certain combination of coupons and

donate to the less fortunate,” Peterman said.

“It was like a death. We almost went through a grieving process. It was so unexpected,” Ms. Deborah Shauan (FAC) said.

Laid-off. **(Panic)**

“I got a job at Sunlake as a media assistant, but I kept in touch with people here to see if new positions opened. I was so thrilled when this position at the front desk opened up,” Shauan said.

“My work closed down without notice due to the bank pulling the lease from our owners. I was worried about being able to find something new due to the recession,” Sarah Lupa-Walton ('12) said.

Unemployed. **(Lapse)**

“I actually already got another job. You have to be persistent and make sure you follow up with the managers after turning in an application,” Lupa-Walton said.

As the seconds pass, the U.S. Debt Clock grows larger and businesses are shutting down, making it harder for anyone and everyone to find a job. Our community was hit just like everywhere else. Businesses close. Unemployment rises.

And then the ingenuity of our local population kicks in. They're opening businesses. TCBY. Havanna Dreamers Café. Toast.

The willingness of our town to fight for prosperity allows us to invest in the world outside of campus, to partner with our community and move forward as a united front, to move **BEYOND THE FRAMEWORK.**

Closing

“It took a really big toll on us. My dad's construction business got hit really bad. On top of financial issues, my grandma passed away from a long battle against lung cancer. I've never been good with accepting death. Especially when I had to watch it tear my mom apart; and my mom has her own cancer to try to fight,” Katy Fernandez ('12) said.

Personal Problems. **(Wither)**

“Just sit back and watch life try to kick me in the butt? No, that has never been me. I'm fighting to get through this with my family. Times like these, with all the economic and personal struggles, they are times to shine and show what you're made of, not sit back and hide,” Fernandez said.

“It sucks being forced to stand outside in the field, even when it's really hot outside,” John Schwindt ('14) said.

Fire Drill. **(Interruption)**

“I use the drill to hang out with friends for a brief time and be obnoxious like I know I can't be in the classroom,” Schwindt said.

"I'm pretty bad at improvisation, so I was worried and had to think up some super-quick lines," Alyssa Goldman ('12) said.

Missed cue. **(Silence)**

"They managed to pick up on the cue, so everything turned out alright. Just goes to show you have to be ready to overcome anything," Goldman said.

There are three actors on stage. Two are conversing while the other sits in a chair reading a newspaper. Although the script calls for a pause in dialogue, the third actor must remain in character—must act through the silence and **continue** to communicate his or her persona to the audience.

Just like that actor without any lines, we're still in character. We choose to accomplish something in that silence, to **plow through** it and do what everyone else never dares to try.

We're **building** an apartment simulation to teach ESE students the skills necessary to live on their own, adding a horse show to the Homecoming festivities, and **hosting** AP study sessions during lunch.

This is our stance. Our prerogative. We choose action. Insert a verb here. Go out and break the mold. Challenge the norm. Move forward in the interlude. **PLAY THE PAUSE.**