

**NARRATIVE
NONFICTION**
nonfiction that uses
literary techniques

A photograph of two runners on a paved trail. The runner in the foreground is a young man wearing a black long-sleeved shirt with a Superman logo, black shorts with white stripes, and blue Asics running shoes. He is wearing sunglasses and has a joyful expression. The runner behind him is an older man wearing a black long-sleeved shirt, a bright orange safety vest, black leggings, and blue Asics running shoes. He is also wearing sunglasses and looking forward. The background consists of trees with yellowing leaves, suggesting an autumn setting. The title 'Nothing Holds Me Back' is overlaid in large white text on the left side of the image.

Nothing Holds Me Back

Noah Carver, 15, has been blind since birth. This is the story of how he navigates the sighted world.

By Kristin Lewis, with reporting by Jessica Press

SIGHTED GUIDE

Noah runs with a sighted guide, often his dad Buzz (shown here). Noah and Buzz are tethered at the hands, and Buzz calls out cues as they run.

As You Read

Think about Noah's character traits.

Noah's muscles strained and ached as he pushed himself through the muggy air. The sun blazed overhead. Sweat poured down his back.

It was a hot day in Maine in June 2016. Noah Carver, 13, was attempting his first 10K—a 6.2-mile race across rugged, hilly terrain. He'd been training for months. Now he was in the homestretch.

"Finish line coming up in 100 yards. Give it all you've got!"

The sound of his coach's voice spurred Noah on.

And then—

WHOOSH!

Noah sailed through the finish line as the crowd cheered. A surge of emotions washed over him. "It would have been thrilling for anyone," Noah says. "But it was that much more exciting for me because I'm blind."

A World Without Sight

About 253 million people around the world are visually impaired, and 36 million of them are completely blind like Noah, according to the World Health Organization. Some people become visually impaired because of an illness, an accident, or an age-related disorder. Others are born that way. Noah has a rare condition called Leber congenital amaurosis [am-aw-ROH-sis]. The condition caused him to lose his vision at birth. He can detect only extreme light changes, such as when stepping out of a dark movie theater into bright sunlight.

Being blind in a sighted world has its challenges. Just think: How would you get through your day without being able to see? How would you find a seat on the bus? How would you text your friends? How would you know when you've poured enough milk on your Cheerios? How would you enjoy the lightsaber battle between Luke Skywalker and Kylo Ren in *Star Wars: The Last Jedi*?

For Noah, none of these things is very **daunting**. He is quick to point out that a blind person can do all the things a sighted person can—they may just need a little help sometimes.



When Noah walks around, he uses a cane to feel in front of him in case there's something in his way—a chair, a corner, debris on the ground. He uses apps on his phone that utilize GPS to guide him down streets. For movies, he listens to something called audio description (AD): As a movie plays, a narrator describes the action in detail so Noah can imagine it in his mind.

Noah also memorizes the layouts of the places where he spends time. Before he

started high school this year, he explored the campus. He counted the number of steps between classrooms. He learned where the bathrooms and water fountains are. He also used a **tactile** map that his dad made for him. It has raised surfaces that Noah can feel with his fingers. Noah now goes through his school day independently.

“Just because I’m blind doesn’t mean I’m different from any sighted person,” Noah says. Then he adds, “There is just one

thing that’s different about us in the physical sense—can’t see a thing!”

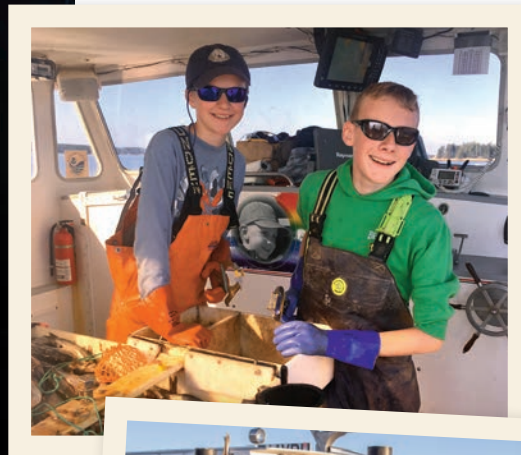
A Regular Kid

From a young age, Noah was determined to be a regular kid. His parents encouraged him. Noah has been running cross-country since before kindergarten. He sings in a choir; rides horses; goes lobstering (fishing for lobsters); and plays the guitar, piano, and drums. He is a gifted boat racer and took third place last year in his division at the World’s Fastest Lobster Boat Races in Moosabec Reach, Maine.

Sometimes he relies on help from his family and friends. When he skis, he wears a small radio in his ear so his dad can call out directions. “Veer left,” his dad will say. Or “person in



Noah drives his boat, *Noah's Ark*, with his dad. Top right: Noah shows his friend Mia how to lobster. Bottom right: Noah with his parents



front, veer right.”

When Noah is up at bat during a baseball game, his dad will stand behind him, letting him know when the ball is heading his way and when to swing.

Noah makes it all look easy. But he’s faced many challenges. The Carvers live in Beals, Maine, a rural area. Getting resources can be tough there. When Noah was young, his school couldn’t always offer the level of support he needed. So his mom, Suzanne, became his full-time **paraeducator**. She wanted to make sure Noah had the same chances as sighted kids. When Noah was younger, she went with him to school to make sure he had the materials he needed.

Suzanne also translates Noah’s schoolwork into Braille. Braille is a system of writing that uses raised dots that a blind person feels with his or her fingertips. Reading Braille has been key for Noah—and for his parents, who learned Braille as well.

In spite of his family’s efforts, though, Noah has often been left out of activities or not given the chance to try something because someone assumed he wouldn’t

be able to do it. It took years to find a piano teacher willing to teach him. And though he has hosted many sleepovers, he has never been invited to stay over at someone else’s house.

Often one of the hardest parts of being blind is dealing with what sighted people assume about blind people.

So Noah and his parents have learned to help people understand.

For instance, when Noah was in middle school, he was cast in a role in a school musical that involved dancing. But Noah wasn’t included in the dance number.

Suzanne explained to the musical director that Noah was perfectly able to learn the steps. Not surprisingly, he nailed them.

For Noah, one tough thing is that classmates haven’t always been kind. In middle school, when Noah tried to sit down on the bus, kids would sometimes tell him to go sit somewhere else, away from them. And then there were moments like the start of recess, when everyone would just run out the door.

“It takes a good friend to remember to stop and walk out with me,” he says.

Even now, sometimes when Noah walks into the lunchroom, no one calls out to him. So he walks around listening for a familiar voice and then asks if he can join the group.

“One thing that has been hardest for Noah is connecting,” says Suzanne. “So many of our



What Is Braille?

Braille is a written language for blind people. Letters, numbers, and other characters are represented by raised dots that can be read by sliding your fingers across them.

Braille was developed in 1824 by a blind teenage student named Louis Braille at the Royal Institute for Blind Youth in Paris. He got the idea from a sighted French military officer who had invented a raised-dot system of code so his officers could communicate with each other in the dark.

Before the development of Braille, books for the blind used regular letters that were raised off the page. But reading this way was incredibly tedious. Braille revolutionized education for the blind.

interactions are visual. If he just has one or two people who reach out and say ‘Good morning’ or ‘Come sit with me,’ it is a game changer.”

Sometimes kids’ hurtful



behavior is unintentional. Kids may not realize they're being thoughtless. Other times, kids bully and exclude Noah on purpose, just because he's blind.

Powerful Advocate

Still, Noah is brave and determined. He has learned not to **dwell** on the cruelty. Instead he focuses on using his powers for good. He has become a strong **advocate** for the blind community.

His most recent mission has been **petitioning** movie studios to create audio descriptions for every movie they produce and movie theaters to have the proper AD technology for the visually impaired. At press time, Noah's petition had more than 5,000 signatures. (Noah has already succeeded in getting every local TV station in his community to provide AD access, a process that took him six years.)

Today, Noah is a freshman in high school. He has **forged** close friendships with his fellow cross-country runners. He no longer gets on the bus and wonders if anyone will invite him to sit; his teammates always save him a seat and call out to him. And when he isn't training for a race or performing on stage or



What Noah Wants You to Know

1 Don't Pity Me

"Don't feel sorry for someone who is blind or for anyone with a disability, because we are as capable as you are."

2 I'm Just Like You

"Blind people are just like you. We have insecurities, friends, family. There's just one thing that's different about us, in the physical sense."

3 Ask Me Questions

"It's OK to ask questions about how I live life. Ask me, 'Noah, how are you able to find your chair right there with no one giving you cues?' Ask away. You will be a better person for it, and quite frankly, I love it when people want to ask questions and understand about blindness."

4 Introduce Yourself

"People put me in an awkward position by approaching me and asking 'Guess who?' I don't think they are trying to be unkind, but I wish they would introduce themselves—say, 'Hi, Noah, it's me, so-and-so.' That's a little step that would go far toward including a blind person in the conversation."

lobstering, he's talking with his friends.

"I don't do things just to prove myself to others," Noah says. "I'm trying to live life to the fullest. The only limit that you have is in

your mind. If you say, 'I can't do this, I can't do that,' well, no you can't. But if you say, 'I can try,' then you've opened up a door, and you can keep opening doors rather than shutting them." ●

Writing Contest

Choose two character traits that Noah possesses. In a well-organized essay, explain how Noah demonstrates those traits. Support your ideas with text evidence. Send your work to **Noah Contest**. Five winners will each get *Lu* by Jason Reynolds. See page 2 for details.

Get this activity online.

