



**HARD AT WORK**

Jaylen listens to an audiobook and reads along at the same time. He can rewind the audiobook if he needs to hear something again.

# “I Struggled to Read”

For years, Jaylen, 17, couldn't make sense of the words on a page. Then he learned special skills to help him overcome his challenges. BY JAYLEN WORTHY, AS TOLD TO JESSICA PRESS

**W**hen I was little, I looked forward to going to school. I loved dinosaurs, building, and my friends. School felt **carefree**.

But by fourth grade, I felt nervous in class. Sometimes I'd pretend I had to use the bathroom just so that my teacher couldn't call on me.

Everyone else seemed to know how to read. But I

couldn't **get the hang of it**. I knew my letters. But my brain couldn't make sense of them when they were put into words.

My parents arranged for a special teacher to read to me and write for me. My school gave me extra time for tests and assignments. That helped.

But I still had a hard time explaining what I'd read. I felt confused and **frustrated**.

anxious about keeping up with my schoolwork.

**Getting Help**

When I was in seventh grade, my mom found a school called Jemicy near my house in Maryland. It's for kids who struggle with reading and writing. I took a test and found out that I have a learning difference called **dyslexia**.

I didn't know anyone else who had dyslexia. I felt **alienated**. I thought something was wrong with me. But then I learned that 1 in 10 people are affected by dyslexia.

Some people think dyslexia means you see letters upside down or backward. But that's not true. For me, dyslexia means that my brain has a hard time **processing** words.

**VOCABULARY**

**overwhelming:** so strong that it's hard to fight against

**dyslexia:** a condition that makes it hard for a person to read and write

**alienated:** alone, separate from others

**processing:** taking in and understanding information

**strategies:** planned ways to reach a goal

**Missing Out**

When I got to middle school, my struggle with reading and writing was **overwhelming**. Other kids spent 30 minutes on their homework. But it took me three or four hours.

My friends didn't tease me. But they stopped asking me to hang out or play sports after school. They knew I'd be working. I felt left out—and





1



2



3



4

I also have a hard time putting my thoughts down in writing.

I now understand that dyslexia has nothing to do with how smart I am or what I can achieve. I just have to work harder, because I learn differently.

I have friends with dyslexia who are amazing athletes, artists, and musicians. Others are great at science and math. Even some of my teachers have dyslexia.

### Tools to Help

Now I have strategies to help me learn. Instead of writing notes, I record myself talking into my phone. I play it back to study.

I also use audiobooks. We're reading *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in school. I listen to it, then go back and listen to parts of it again if I need to. And I have computer programs that read to me and type for me as I speak.

### CAREFREE AGAIN

1. Jaylen records notes on his phone.
2. Jaylen, left, poses with his parents and two younger brothers.
3. Jaylen plays video games with his brothers.
4. Jaylen takes a break from shooting hoops.

I've also learned it's important to communicate with my teachers. I ask them to repeat things or look over a paper before I turn it in. Sometimes I need more time for an assignment. My teachers always want to help.

### Big Changes

I've had to work hard. But I'm a junior now, with a 4.0 GPA. And since I'm not struggling with my homework anymore, I even have time to be on the basketball team.

In April, I gave a speech I wrote at my school's public speaking event. I used to hide so I wouldn't get called on in class. But there I was, proudly speaking to 300 parents, teachers, and students!

I have always had good friends. But my Jemicy friends understand my challenges. One friend and I recently spent our lunchtime helping each other revise a paper. Feeling understood has given me a lot of confidence.

I'll always have dyslexia. But now I have ways to deal with it. I've learned that when you have a challenge, you have to reach out to parents, teachers, or friends for help.

And no matter what your struggle may be, always work your hardest. Never, ever give up. You have to keep going!

## Action Activity

# You've just read

"I Struggled to Read." Now it's time to do this activity!

**WHAT TO DO:** In this story, you learned that Jaylen had a problem, but he found a solution to it. In the chart below, fill in the blanks. First, identify the story's problem. Then, write in the details from the story that help you understand both the problem and its solution.



**NO MORE HIDING**  
Last April, Jaylen delivered a speech he wrote to 300 Jemicy students and parents.

### The Problem:

#### Detail 1:

Jaylen knew his letters but couldn't make sense of words.

#### Detail 2:

**Hint:** What made Jaylen confused and frustrated?

#### Detail 3:

**Hint:** How much time did Jaylen spend on his homework?

### The Solution: Jaylen found new strategies to help him study and learn.

#### Detail 1:

Instead of taking notes, Jaylen records himself talking into his phone.

#### Detail 2:

**Hint:** How does Jaylen read books?

#### Detail 3:

**Hint:** What does Jaylen ask his teachers?



COURTESY CONOR PATRO, CLASS OF 2019, JEMICY SCHOOL

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Answers are in the Teacher's Guide.