

Kids quiz mayor on gunshots

The SHOT

Heard Around the Town:

A Story About How One Boy Can Change the World

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Kindergartners
ask for meeting
to seek answers

The Star Press

“BANG!”

Jermaine scared me when he shouted this. Me and my friends were sitting in the hall like we always do everyday after school.

I didn't know why he said it at first. I scratched my head and said, “Man, why would you scare me like that? What's your problem today?”



We have to wait for our teachers, because they pick us up and we make the long walk to Huffer daycare. Sometimes we might be close to the street but we be real careful.

Jermaine said he heard some shots by his apartment last night and was feelin' a little scared. This made me a little scared, because usually my community is so safe. I love my home, and I don't want my friends to get hurt or be scared...





“BOYS LINE UP, AND GIRLS LINE UP!”

Miss Renee shouted, which snapped me awake from my thinking.

I wondered if Jermaine was going to tell Miss Renee and Miss Brittany, because they are pretty good at talkin’ things out with us.

I walk in the back of the line with Miss Brittany.
She said, “Terry, how was your day today?”
and I give her my daily hug.

I know she loves my hugs the best!

We make the
 long,
 long
walk over to Huffer, so we can have our after
school time.

Usually, when we get to Huffer we have our
start of the afternoon meeting, go outside,
have snack, groups, and then free time before
we go home.

But...
Today ended up being a little different.



“Terry, how was your day today?”

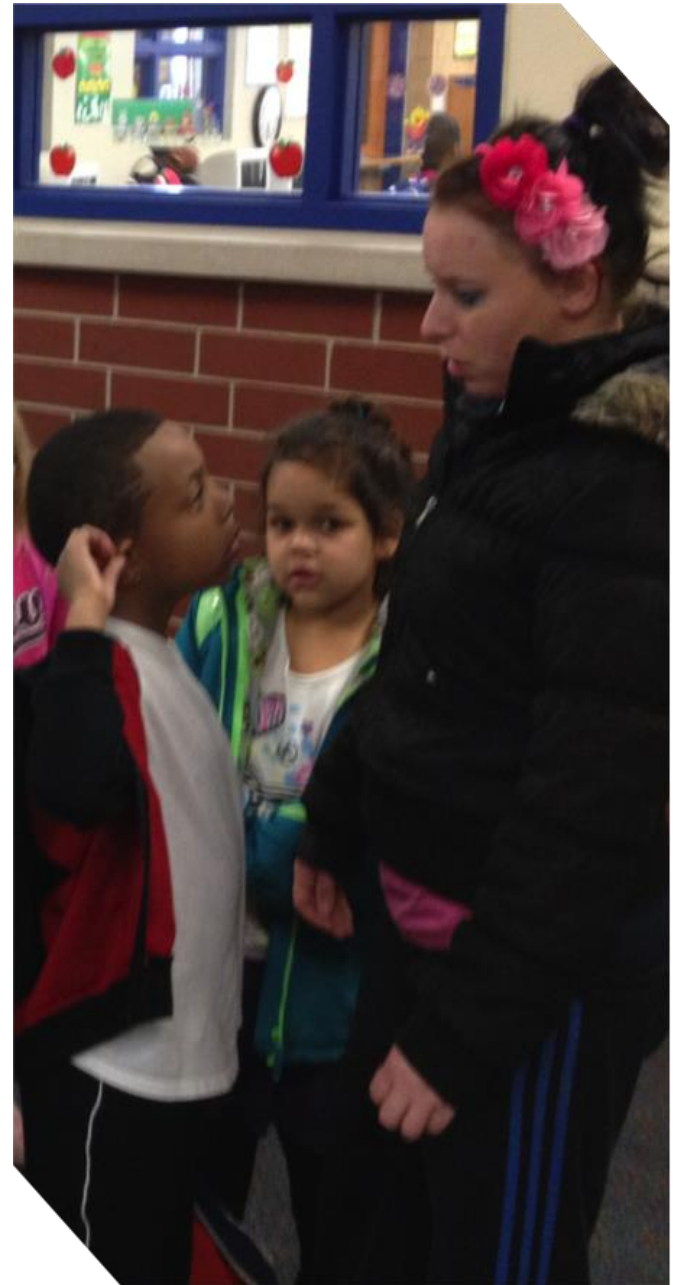
“I been hearing SHOTS!”

Jermaine said it so fast. I was proud he said something, because I couldn't stop my mind

from thinking about his

“BANG”

from earlier.



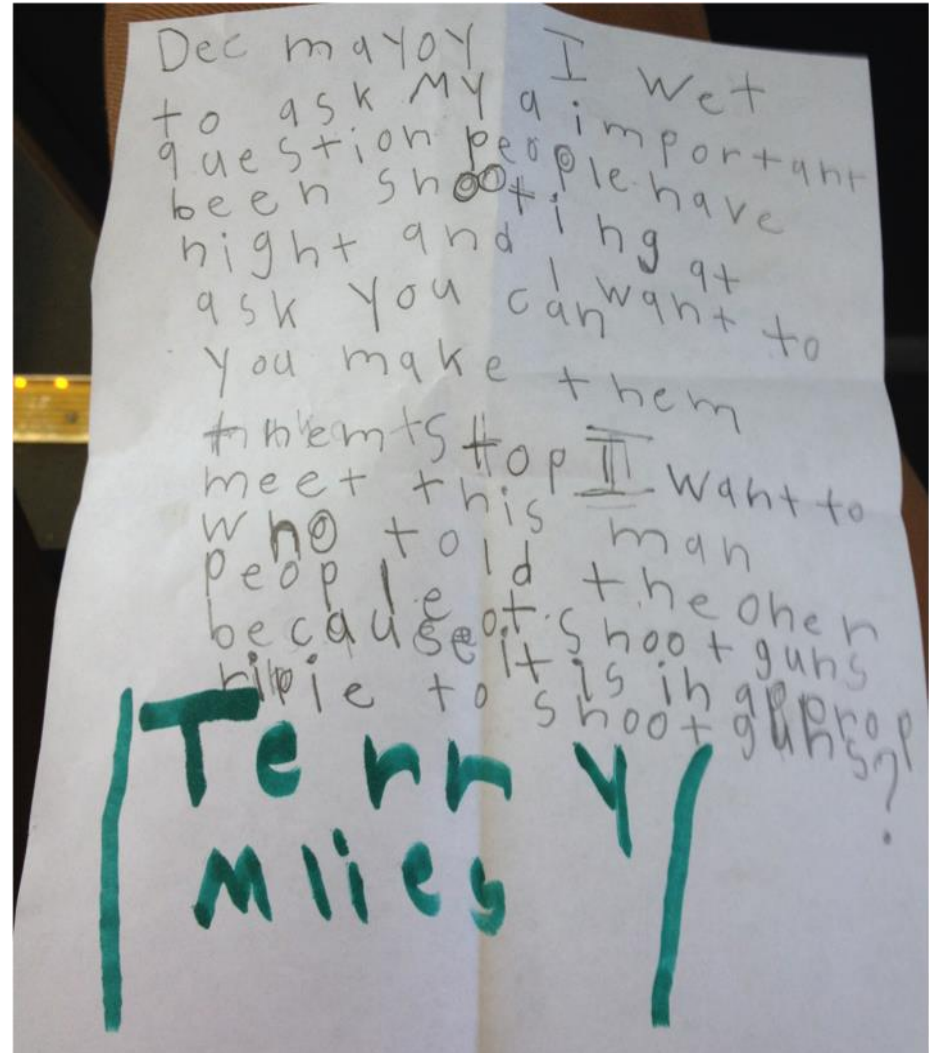
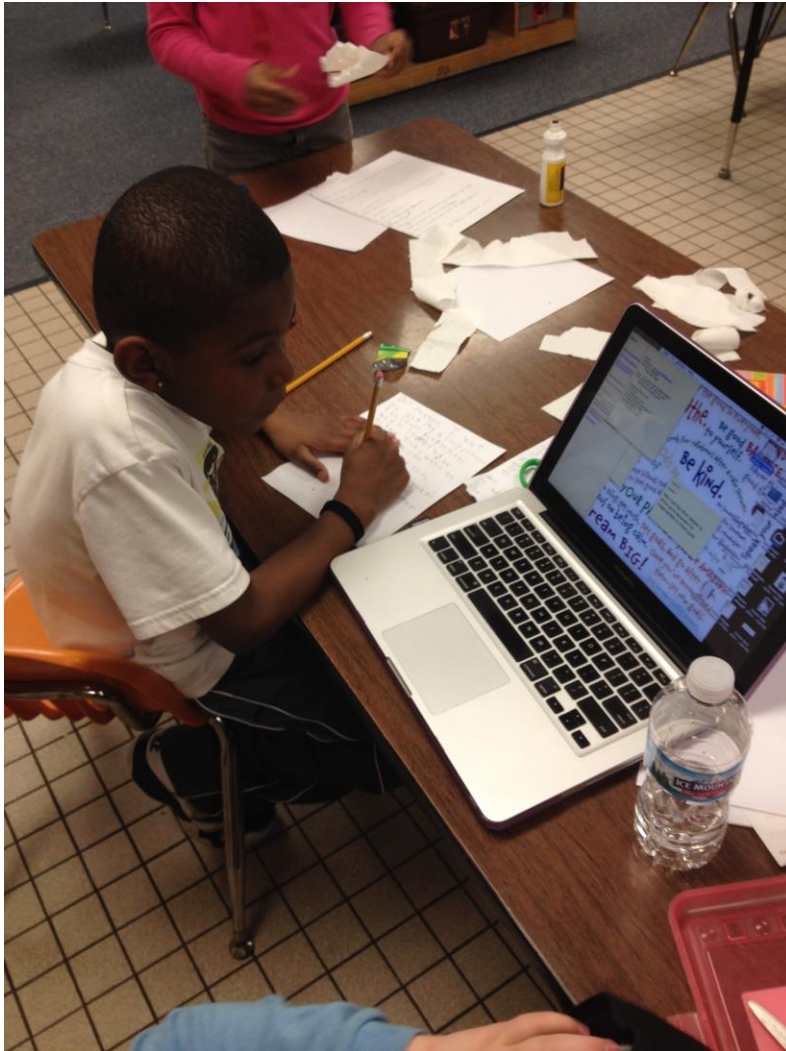
Miss Renee asked where he heard the shots and when. He said they were around his apartment building at night when it was dark out. Miss Renee asked what we thought we should do about this problem.

Then I finally spoke up and said, “I have been hearing them too. I got an idea! Let’s go talk to the mayor!”

I don’t think Miss Renee and Miss Brittany knew what to do at first. I was the only kid in the class who knew who the mayor was, so Miss Renee and Miss Brittany had to explain that the mayor is kind of like the president of our city. I hope they find out who they need to call to get us to the mayor’s office.



I figured while I still had all my ideas and questions I wanted to ask the mayor in my head, I might as well write them down. I had Miss Brittany help me with my spelling, because if you are going to see the mayor, then all of your words have to be spelled **JUST RIGHT**.





Today when we got picked up, Miss Brittany told me that they had a huge surprise for us.

When we got to the room, Miss Renee wanted to know if we remembered what we talked about yesterday. Lewis said he remembered us talking about some shootings, because he had heard shots awhile back in his apartment too. He felt bad when he heard them. There was a phone sitting on the computer desk...I wonder if we are really calling the mayor? I asked, "So are we going to talk to the mayor? When is he coming here to see us?"

Miss Brittany dialed a number, and Miss Renee told us to be really quiet and listen for a minute.

Then we heard it...

“Hello, Mayor Tyler’s Office. How may I help you?”

Miss Brittany began explaining why we wanted to come see the mayor, and then she asked me if I wanted to talk the lady on the phone.

I was a little scared this time and too nervous to talk, but when we see the mayor I’ll be talking.

**This
is
serious...**



Before I knew it, we were on a bus headed to the mayor's office. Our Detective was there, and the Deputy Chief of Police was there. I can't believe how many important people are going to be there to hear us talk and answer our questions. When we walk in, I'm going to give the mayor my letter, then he can read it, then we can talk about it, then he can tell me what he's going to do about it.



We had to wait

FOREVER

for someone to come down to pick us up to take us to the third floor
where the mayor's office is.

I got to help make sure the kids were sitting quietly while we waited.





The mayor read my letter and get this...the NEWSPAPER was there. I'm going to be famous, and people are going to know why shooting guns is wrong and inappropriate! I mean, come on, people could get hurt! The mayor, by the way, read my letter out loud. After he read my letter, we got to ask him important questions.

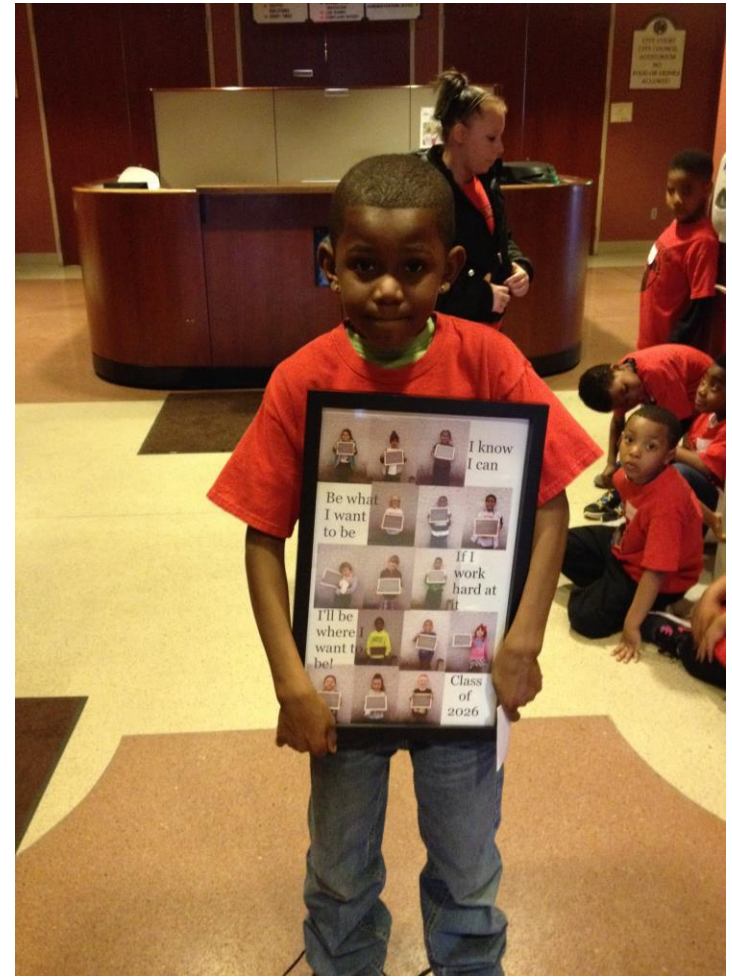
I asked, "why people be shooting and who told these people it was alright to shoot guns?" My friend Lauren said, "What can we do about the people who are shooting?" Detective Scaife told us how to protect ourselves by hiding behind furniture, telling our parents, and making sure they call 911. He said the more often we call 911 with information, then the more likely they are to catch the bad people.

It's so great to have our own class Detective.

And we have our own Mayor!

And we have our own Deputy Chief of Police.





We brought the mayor a picture with all the things we want to be on it. He said it could hang in the Hall of Hope, so other kids can see it and remember to keep dreaming too!

I didn't know that so many people would want to hear what 5, 6, and 7 year olds had to say, but they really did.

It made me feel like I could make a difference.

Actually,

It made me **KNOW** I could make a difference.



I may be young.

But...

I am a **WRITER**.

I am a **SPEAKER**.

I have a **VOICE**
and it **WILL** be **HEARD**.



AFTERWORD

My name is Brittany Cain, and I am currently a student at Ball State University studying Early Childhood Education and Psychology. I have been working at Huffer Memorial Children's Center since January 2012 and have been a part of the Muncie P3 after school program since August 2012. I have loved every minute of my time working in the Whitely Community. This community, which is located in the mid-sized Midwestern city of Muncie, Indiana, has become my home over the past two years.

This whole journey started very suddenly and, looking back, we had no idea what the end result would be. Our students are kindergarteners that come to Huffer Memorial Children's Center everyday after they leave Longfellow Elementary School. We are a part of the Muncie Power Promise and Partnership (MP3) enrichment program. This program has been servicing students (K-3) for the past four years. Our promise is to have students reading at or above grade level by third grade. Our partnership is between teachers at Huffer and Longfellow and a truly amazing community and group of families. Our power lies in the support, trust, and opportunities we get from teaching and learning in this community. With this being said, the partnership with this community and these families, has built a relationship that has nurtured and encouraged these wonderful students to speak up when they heard something that they knew was not right.

We have been focusing on a unit of dreams after reading *Uncle Jed's Barbershop* by Margaree King Mitchell. This book is a part of a canon of literature that has been specially designed to be culturally relevant for the children in our community. In the book, Uncle Jed states, "People didn't have dreams like that in those days (pg. 10)." In a community where dreams and education are incredibly important, our students could not imagine not having a dream. They were naming their dreams, before they even realized a dream was not just something you have inside your head when you sleep at night! This unit on reaching our dreams has involved heavy discussion as well as working on asking questions. This all ended up being critical in our trip to the mayor's office. Little did we know at this time, that we were setting our students up to ask some tough questions.

Our day really started like any other day. We picked the children up at Longfellow and made the walk over to Huffer, which is right next-door. The children, upon entering our room, put their bags and coats up like any other day and sat down at our reading area for our afternoon meeting time before we began our afternoon. We followed our normal schedule through snack and came together to read a story before we broke up for group time. We were getting ready to start our story when Jermaine said, "People have been shooting."

It felt like everything stood still in our classroom for a second as Renee (my fellow classroom teacher) and I thought about what to say next. Renee asked Jermaine where he was when he heard the shots, what time of day it was, and how he felt when he heard them. He said that he was in his apartment and heard them outside, that it was dark, and that it made him feel sad and scared. Other students came out during this time about shots that they had heard in neighboring apartment complexes. This turned into a conversation about what we can do to solve the problem.

The students were posing great questions about why we have guns, why people shoot, and whether or not we could ask these people to move out of our community. Suddenly, Terry had a thought, which focused what we were going to do with our questions. He said, "Why don't we talk to the mayor?" The other students asked who the mayor was, so Renee and I spent some time explaining that the mayor is kind of like the President of our town. The students were fired up, and there was nothing stopping them! While Terry had all of his thoughts on the topic rushing through his mind, he decided to write them down. He composed a thoughtful and mature letter to our mayor.

Renee and I went to the director of Huffer, Paula Gruwell, to find out the best way to contact the mayor to which she responded, "Call him today, and make sure you talk to him directly!" We waited to pick up the students, so they could be present when we called his office. We did our class meeting a little different that day. Instead of going through our normal routine, we made our important call to the mayor's office. We were all so nervous listening to the phone ring on speaker. A voice connected on the other line, which was the mayor's secretary. She was so sweet to our students and us and took our issue seriously.

She immediately set up an appointment for us with the mayor and suggested that either the chief of police or deputy chief of police be present as well. The student's eyes got wide, and they smiled from ear to ear hearing that we had a date and a time to go to the mayor's office to discuss this important issue.

We had several days of conversations about being a positive leader before our meeting with the mayor. We wanted to be well prepared before we went. Everyday, we talked about what questions we needed to ask the mayor, and we thought about possible solutions to our problem. We hoped that from this, our community would become an even safer place. The students were so excited to speak out and be heard. This experience was going to be so significant to them.

They day before we went we had a conversation about whether or not we wanted to ask the newspaper to come and do an article on our visit with the mayor. The idea had been proposed to me by one of my professors at Ball State, Dr. Eva Zygmunt. She is a grant writer for the program, and has had such a special and important role in our classroom as well as the other classrooms. She thought it might be a good way to get the word out about what was going on. As I thought about it, I was worried that the newspaper being present might make some students afraid to talk, so Renee and I decided to have a discussion with the students about the pros and cons of having the newspaper present. At first, students were apprehensive about the idea, but then Terry made a statement that changed the tide of the conversation. He said, "It is important that they come, because more people will know why shooting is wrong." After this, the students realized that their impact could be heard in a greater way if we partnered with *The Star Press*. We contacted our incredible Director Wilisha Scaife, and she immediately contacted *The Star Press*. With her encouraging words, we were ready to go to the mayor's office and make this issue known to the city.

The day to go to the mayor's office finally came. Terry had his letter signed and sealed, ready to go and be presented to the mayor. We had scheduled for a special MITS (Muncie Indiana Transit System) bus to pick us up at Huffer and take us to our destination – the mayor's office. Our bus arrived early, so we hurried to get the students ready to leave.

We were all wearing our matching red MP3 shirts, so we looked like a team, united on this tough topic. We walked out to the bus stop and saw our favorite bus driver was waiting to pick us up, which made the students excited and a little more at ease. She greeted everyone with a big smile and seemed as excited as we were to go to the mayor's office!

As we drove, the students were silent, and you could feel the excitement and anticipation from so many days of preparation. Terry sat in the front with me and held a framed picture that we had made for the mayor. The picture had each student holding a chalkboard with his or her dream written in colored chalk. Across the picture were the words of Nasir Jones song *I Can*, "I know I can be what I want to be, if I work hard at it, I'll be where I want to be." It also said "Class of 2026" across the bottom. Terry was going to give the mayor this picture, his letter, and a thank you note from all the students. He was our class representative. We sat on the steps to the entrance of the City Hall building and took a class picture to commemorate our trip, and then we quietly walked inside. Terry stood up with us teachers as the rest of the class sat and waited for someone to come down from the third floor to bring us to the mayor. Finally, after what felt like forever, the Deputy Chief of Police came to deliver us to the mayor. Terry and I led the boys on the first elevator and Renee followed behind on the second elevator with the girls. We had a special stop to make on the second floor to pick up Detective Scaife. The boys could not believe their eyes when he got on the elevator! He is special to our classroom, program, and community, so his being there made them feel a little more at ease.

The students exited the elevator, finally, at the third floor and took their place at the mayor's giant meeting table. They had some fun spinning around in the huge chair and got their jitters out before Mayor Tyler entered the room. Terry had a place at the head of the table with his good friend MarQuis. Together, they sat between Detective Scaife and Deputy Chief Vollmar. When Mayor Tyler came in, the students were so excited. He took a place at the table across from Terry and welcomed them to his office. Terry walked over to him with a sense of pride and respect and waited for him to finish his introduction.

When the mayor was done talking, Terry handed him his letter and asked him to read it. They mayor read his letter out loud for all to hear. Terry's letter read: "Dear Mayor, I want to ask an important question. People have been shooting at night and I want to ask you 'Can you make them stop?' I want to meet this man who told the other people to shoot guns because it is inappropriate to shoot guns." These mighty words spoken from some so young surprised many in the room, I think. The mayor took Terry's hand and told him, "We have a lot to talk about. I'm so glad you are here." With that, the mayor asked the students to discuss a little more about what they had been hearing and what questions they had. Detective Scaife and Deputy Chief Vollmar then explained to the students that if they are hearing these shots, they need to get down behind furniture to protect themselves. "Bullets do not have eyes," said Detective Scaife. "They go wherever they are pointed." Detective Scaife explained that the children should not be going to the window to look and see who are doing these shootings, because that could put them in danger, but they should tell an adult and encourage an adult to call 911. He told the students that the more calls they get telling them where and when these events are happening, the more likely they are to be able to catch the people who are doing the shooting. We all have to work together to alleviate this problem.

After almost forty minutes of talking, Terry once again walked over to the mayor, but this time with our picture and letter. There was so much pride in his eyes and in the eyes of his classmates when they presented him with this. They could not wait to tell him what they were going to be when they grew up. They may be little now, but their dreams are huge! The mayor looked at each picture with so much care, and told the students their picture would go in his Hall of Hope (the Hall of Hope is an area of the mayor's office dedicated to artwork done by children, predominantly children with disabilities), so other children will get to enjoy it and be reminded to never quit dreaming. At this point, each student received a pin with the logo for the mayor's office and a flashlight. They gave him a big group thank you and we began to line up to make our way back to the bus and then Huffer. Before we left though, Terry got to sit with the mayor one last time and read his story for Michelle Kinsey from *The Star Press*.

He also was asked why he wrote the letter to which he responded, “Because we can figure out the problem and tell them to stop.” He also said that he wanted to come to the mayor’s office, because “I want to make the mayor know people been shooting. That’s why. I don’t like people shooting because they could get hurt or die.” This compassion for others that has been cultivated throughout his short life fueled this trip and his letter.

From Terry’s big heart, many people are now aware of what is going on, and actions are being taken. The newspaper first put a video out about the meeting with the mayor, which made our class feel famous! Next, we had a front-page article in the Saturday Star Press. From there, our students have been tweeted and linked on Facebooks from people all over the nation. When we began this project, we had no idea how many lives our students would touch. A nation organization “Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America,” which is a bi-partisan group formed after the events at Sandy Hook posted our news article on their Facebook page. From there over eight-hundred people have shared the article, more than two thousand have read and liked the article, and several have sent comments of support to our children. *The Star Press* has included us in another of their cover page videos and promised the Muncie Police are further investigating the issue, follow up article will be written about their findings and the next steps to making our town safer.

You are truly never too young, or too old, to stand up for what you believe in. After doing this lesson, our group of young social activists have been working to solve other problems they see like bullying and community beautification. This is where their stories begin, and as they grow up, the effects of their passion for their community, as well as their love for each other will grow into making our world a safer, better place to live. Here come tomorrow’s leaders!