

Norvell Speaks Out Against Gangs

Gangs were a big problem on the south side of Chicago where Norvell Smith lived. Two gangs battled for control of the streets, and one of the hottest corners was right in front of Norvell's house. Gunshots were common, and every year since Norvell had been in first grade, at least one child from her school had been killed by stray bullets.

The gangs recruited kids in the neighborhood. Each gang promised to protect its members. Kids joined because they thought being a gang member made them seem tough. They could also make money from controlling their "turf" and peddling drugs.

One day, in sixth grade, Norvell missed the bus and had to walk home through a park. Five high-school-age girls tried to get her to join their gang. Norvell was scared, but she said no.

Two years later, a gang bullet killed another of her good friends. Not long after that, her school announced a speech contest. Students could write about drugs, violence, guns, or gangs. Norvell decided to write a speech warning kids about gangs. She knew she could get in trouble with the gangs, but she had stood up to them before, and she decided to do it again.

Norvell's written speech won first place, and she was scheduled to give it in front of the entire school. She was terrified. She arranged with a teacher to get a ride home after school if anyone threatened her. As she spoke, she looked into the faces of the students, many of whom were gang members. She was amazed to see that they were all listening. When she was done, even the gang members joined in a five-minute standing ovation.

Norvell's speech was entered in a citywide competition, and she won again. Soon she was getting attention in the Chicago media, and she gave her speech at other schools. That was too much for the gangs. She started getting threatening notes. Rumors circulated that she would be beaten up. School security guards walked her to her bus.

Threats didn't stop Norvell. She got other kids to speak out against gangs and violence as well. Together they knew they could make a difference in the lives of kids in Chicago.



Reading Comprehension

1. Based on this story, check the words that describe Norvell.

- A. ___ coward
- B. ___ organized
- C. ___ intelligent
- D. ___ optimistic

2. Based on this story, check the words that describe gangs.

- A. ___ violent
- B. ___ controlling
- C. ___ criminal
- D. ___ safe

3. Think like a reporter. Fill in the blanks with the correct details from the story.

_____ (who) grew up in a neighborhood on the _____ (where). She was _____ (why) that so many kids in her school wanted to join _____ (what). She decided to _____ (how) warning kids about gangs. _____ (when), she looked into the faces of the students. They were listening. She knew she was making a difference.

4. Norvell needed courage to stand up to the gangs. How does a person develop courage? _____

