

THINK AND READ

Synthesizing As you read both texts, think about what the author wants you to understand about stuttering.

Talen's Got Talent

How one boy copes with stuttering—and steals the show

BY JANE BIANCHI

Ten-year-old Talen marches onto a stage. He smiles at the crowd. There are about 700 people. He's nervous, but you'd never know it. He dances. He slides back and forth. He spins around. He throws his arms into the air. He smiles at the crowd with a proud look on his face. Then he grabs the microphone and says, "Hi, I'm Talen."

Not long ago, if you had asked Talen to perform onstage, he couldn't have done it. In fact, it was hard for Talen to talk to just one person. That's because

he has a speech problem known as stuttering.

Stuttering makes it hard to say words out loud. People who stutter may repeat or stretch out words. They may get quiet in the middle of a sentence. The problem is common among kids ages 2 to 5. Most outgrow it. But some kids still stutter as they get older. About 3 million Americans stutter.

A Puzzling Problem

People aren't sure what causes this.



LOOK FOR
WORD NERD'S 3
WORDS IN **BOLD**



Many experts think some people are born more likely to stutter. The problem probably comes from the part of the brain that controls language.

Talen has been stuttering since he was 5. “When I was little, my cousin drew a picture of me and drew a word bubble next to my face. She wrote in the word bubble, ‘Hi, I’m, I’m, I’m Talen,’” he says. “It hurt my feelings.”

By first grade, he almost never spoke at school. He was too embarrassed. “I didn’t raise my hand a lot in class. If a teacher asked for a volunteer, I’d duck,” says Talen. It can be tough for him to make friends at school. Some kids find it easier to stay away from Talen than to talk to him.

A Big Change

But Talen’s life began to change when he joined SAY: The Stuttering Association for the Young. The group teaches kids who stutter how to perform and give speeches. The goal is to help kids feel better about themselves. “We have so much fun at SAY,” says Talen.

The man who created SAY, Taro Alexander, also started stuttering at age 5.

He became an actor at age 19. He was on TV shows and in plays. When he was



Talen gets advice from SAY founder Taro Alexander.

29, he started SAY. “I wanted to show kids that stuttering doesn’t have to hold them back from anything,” he says. Each spring, the kids in SAY perform in front of hundreds of people.

No Longer Alone

Talen goes to SAY for about two hours each week. “I like to dance,” says Talen. “It brings out the inner me.” Going to SAY hasn’t stopped Talen’s stuttering. But it has helped him feel happier. Plus, he’s made friends. And he’s met more than 170 people who stutter! He feels less alone.

The program has helped Talen at

The Best Way to Talk to Someone Who Stutters

- **DON'T SAY THINGS LIKE "SPIT IT OUT" OR "JUST SAY IT."** This only makes it harder on the person who's stuttering.
- **KEEP EYE CONTACT AND NOD AS THE PERSON IS SPEAKING.** This tells the person that you're paying attention.
- **DON'T FINISH THE PERSON'S SENTENCE OR FILL IN THEIR WORDS.** Kindly wait for him or her to finish.
- **WHEN YOU'RE SPEAKING, USE YOUR NATURAL VOICE.** People who stutter can understand everything you say, so you don't have to speak slowly or loudly.

CREDIT: THE STUTTERING FOUNDATION, STUTTERINGHELP.ORG

school too. Now that he can talk in front of hundreds of people, it's not so hard for him to speak in class. He's getting better grades. "I'm less afraid to raise

my hand in class now," says Talen. "Sometimes I stutter. Sometimes I don't. But I don't care anymore. I feel like a new person." ■

[Click here to read this article online!](#)

ENTER OUR CONTEST!



Everyone has a story about fitting in or being kind to someone who needs a friend. What's yours?

In a one-page essay, describe a time when you felt different from everyone, or were an especially good friend to someone who needed one. Be sure to include details about the situation, the people involved, and how you felt. Send it to "One of a KIND Contest" by December 17. Five winners will each receive the 6-book set *The Fix-It Friends* by Nicole C. Kear. They may also be featured on our website! See details on page 2, and check our site for more contest tips!

**FIND OUR
CONTEST
KIT
ONLINE!**