*This I Believe* –

Summer work for the class of 2018

June 2017

As rising Eighth graders, you have been asked to arrive back at GSFS with a first draft of your *This I Believe* personal essay.

I. You will be asked to read at least **10** *This I Believe* essays to serve as models for your own ideas. You will have a hand-out of 5 required essays and you should find at least 5 others on [www.thisibelieve.org](http://www.thisibelieve.org).

II. You should also go to the *This I Believe* web site to listen to the streaming audio versions of at least **5** essays. www.thisibelieve.org Listen for intonation, pace, accent, emphasis, passion.

III. You will find guidance for this project in this packet that you’ve received; you will also have access to an electronic version of this packet.

IV. Next fall, we will set a schedule for reading our essays. Readings will likely take place during MS assembly. In addition, each of you will meet with me a few days ahead of time to practice public speaking and record your essay.

V. By September 5, 2017, please share a Google doc draft of your essay with me. rkimmet@greenestreetfriends.org

VI. You will be graded on this essay as part of your fall LA/English grade. If you make your revisions by the set revision date, you will receive an A.

**Please read on below for ideas on possible topics, ways to grab your readers’ (listeners’) attention, and other ideas. Enjoy your summers, and remember that every experience will teach you something about yourself and human nature.**

**Possible topics:**

1. Most of us have been in a situation where we made a promise that for one reason or another we were unable to keep. When were you disappointed because someone made you a promise that they failed to keep? Or when did you break a promise that you made to someone else?

2. All of us are works in progress with a long way to go before we reach our full potential.

What skill or area are you working on to make progress?

3. Our society used the word hero in many different ways.

How do you define *hero*, and who is a hero in your life?

4. We all tend to judge people by their appearance, even though looks can be deceiving.

Have you ever prejudged someone incorrectly, based on their appearance, or has someone ever prejudged you unfairly based on how you look?

5. Everyone has problems or challenges to overcome.

What obstacles are you proud to have faced and conquered?

**How to start?**

You will need a powerful hook to get any reader’s attention.

The lead is the doorway through which a writer welcomes and orients readers to the idea.

Avoid beginning an essay with the statement “This I Believe.” Try instead to use at least two of the following strategies as more effective leads. Present two leads in your first draft; see which direction each takes you.

Below are some strategies for beginning your essay:

**Question:** “When was the last time you went without a meal?”

**Quotation:** (from someone famous or from someone significant in your life)

“*Be careful* were the last words my father said to me each time I left the house.”

**Strong statement** (that your essay will either support or dispute)

“If you eat enough cabbage, you’ll never get cancer.”

**Metaphor**: “The starlings in my back garden are the small boys in the playground, impressing each other with their new-found swear words. The crows all belong to the same biker gang. You need to know their secret sign to join their club.”

**Description** (of a person or setting): “Michael once mowed the lawns around Municipal

Hall wearing a frilly apron, high heels, and nylons, with a pillow stuffed under his sweater so he looked pregnant. And it wasn’t even Halloween.”

**Tips To Add Audience Appeal To Personal Essays**

1. Be sure your essay is about something you care strongly enough about to fully elaborate. Readers want to know what you know, feel what you feel, and understand exactly where you’re coming from.
2. While the idea for the essay must be personal, make the frame big enough to allow your reader to find parallels between your experience and theirs. Give readers the opportunity to say, “Ah! Yes, I’ve never been there or done that, but I can relate to what the author is talking about.” The effective writer must draw in an audience to show a more universal implication of a very personal experience or belief.
3. If you are writing about a small personal occurrence, put your idea in a context that gives the reader insight to both the small moment and the wider perspective. Think of your essay as a camera lens. You might start by describing a fine detail (a specific moment in the narrative), then zoom out to take in the wide view (the general/global backdrop), then close the piece by narrowing back to the fine detail.
4. Use details to draw the reader in. Be specific and avoid using abstract expressions and phrases such as “the best day of my life” or “I’d never known greater grief” to describe emotions of love or loss. Make the emotions real and immediate by noting specifics and details that draw the reader into your experience.
5. Employ all the senses to convey your ideas to the reader: sight, sound, taste, touch, and hearing.
6. Make sure that beyond all the idea development, your readers can summarize the MAIN IDEA that you BELIEVE. You should not have to hit the readers over the head with a summary statement such as “What I am trying to say…” or “What I really mean is…” You must aim to leave the readers clear and satisfied—whether they agree with what you believe or not. Sometimes a brief echo of the opening is the most satisfying clincher to bring a personal essay full circle.