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"Speaking Up"

Society and ideas are constantly changing and evolving as we continue to embark into the 21st century. Although most of these transformations has been put to good use, many detrimental aspects of our communities are also becoming stronger. One such area that can no longer be ignored is bullying. The bullied of today are no longer just the big, intimidating kids who demand our lunch money or throw us into trash cans. Instead, bullies can build their daunting profiles without having to ever meet or speak to the individual being victimized. Texting, the internet, and social networking sites such as "MySpace.com" and "Facebook" have become unhealthy tools for bullies. According to the Cyberbullying Research Center, bullying via the internet plagues half of all American teenagers and remains responsible for 19,000 attempted suicides by teenagers a year. Bullying stories seem much more common in the news, with most of them ending in tragedy. Phoebe Prince, a young high school girl who moved to the United States from Ireland, was bullied in person and online relentlessly by people from her school which eventually drove her to take her own life. She was fifteen years old, the same age as myself. Phoebe, countless other victims like her, lacked first, the support of adults and more importantly, the assistance of her peers. As a student, I am constantly told that when we are being bullied we should run to an adult. The task is much harder than it sounds. Not only do we fear the revenge of our persecutors, but also the ridicule of others when the story ultimately leaks out into the school's mainstream. It is much easier to keep our bullying episodes to ourselves than expose our personal issues. But victims of bullying fail to realize that they can still turn to their friends and ultimately themselves. The youth wield significant power when it comes to the fight against bullying. Sometimes our friends are the ones who confide in adults when we are too afraid, or they defend us when we are tyrannized. When youth defy bullies not only does it strike a flame of retaliation in the student body but it can teach victims of bullying that the ending of their torment begins within themselves. And it is this confidence and power that exists in all of us which remains the best and sometimes the only weapon to overcome bullies.