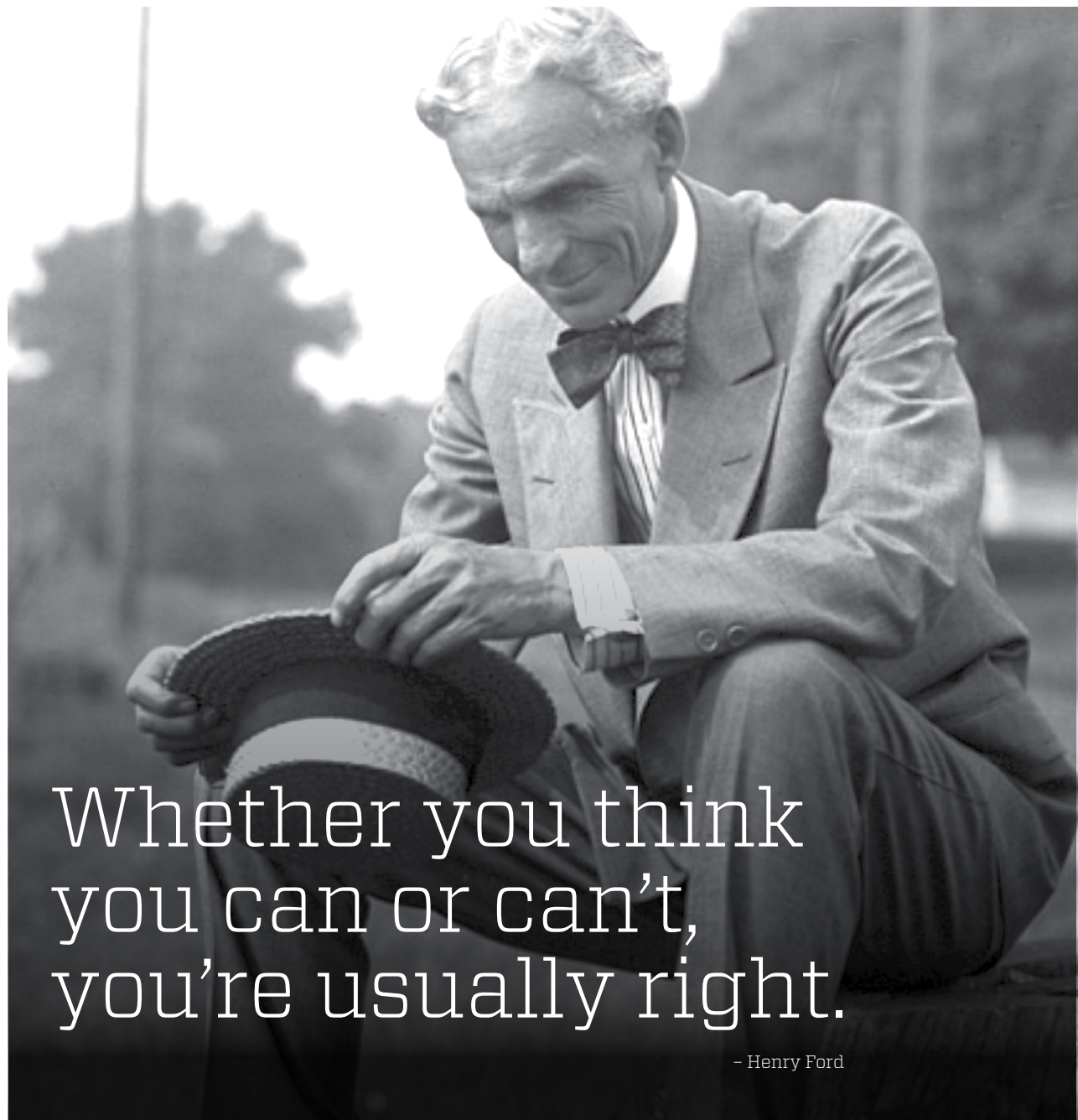




Building Stories

A creative writing contest
for students (grades 3-12)



Whether you think
you can or can't,
you're usually right.

- Henry Ford

By Maggie Torok, Shrine Catholic Grade School (Royal Oak, Michigan)

Co-Grand Prize Winner of The Henry Ford's
2013 Building Stories Creative Writing Contest



Scotch Settlement School, Original Site, Dearborn, Michigan, Circa 1926

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Story by Maggie Torok

I heard the rooster outside my window one fall morning, and the sun was just starting to come up. That was the sign for me to get up and do my farm chores before I went to school. I threw on my work clothes and headed to the barn to meet my dad and brother John. While working the field with my father that morning, we noticed a bird's nest under a fallen oak tree. My father turned the plow from the furrow to leave the bird's nest undisturbed. His example taught me to love the animals of the farm, but the boring duties of farming left me wanting to do something more when I grew up.

After an already busy morning, I quickly changed to my school clothes and began my mile and half walk to the Scotch Settlement School. I met up with my friend Edsel along the way and asked if he had studied for the spelling bee. I was nervous, because instead of studying last night, I worked on repairing a watch. Edsel tried to make me feel better, but the idea of standing up in front of the class reciting back words was not my idea of fun. The things I enjoyed were more mechanical like fixing watches and doing fun experiments. I loved the way a bunch of tiny parts work together to make something function.

As we started to walk into the small, brick schoolhouse, Mr. Chapman was at the front of the room ready to put us to work for the day. My friend Maggie said hi to me as I entered the schoolhouse. She sat across the aisle from me. I always wondered why they put the boys on one side of the classroom and the girls on the other.



Scotch Settlement School, Greenfield Village

"Today children, please pull out your McGuffey Reader," Mr. Chapman said. I didn't mind the reader. In fact, I had already read ahead of the rest of the class. It was the spelling bee I wished we could skip. Maybe we will get too busy with the rest of our work to actually have the spelling bee today, I thought.

I was jolted out of my daydream when Mr. Chapman asked me why I hadn't gotten my chores done for the day. At school, the kids all had jobs to do. Some gathered wood for the stove, some had to clean the blackboard and others had to fetch water. I had barely made it on time and forgotten to fetch the water that morning. I really admired Mr. Chapman and felt sad that I had disappointed him, so I walked quickly, because we were not allowed to run in the schoolhouse. But once outside, I ran to the well and filled the bucket of water for our classroom.



Henry Ford as a Small Child Being Shown a Bird's Nest by His Family; Painted by Irving R. Bacon, 1936



Interior of Scotch Settlement School, Greenfield Village



Henry Ford Circa 1876, Repairing Watches; Painted by Irving R. Bacon, 1935



Henry Ford With Quadricycle, 1933

Soon, it was time for recess which I think is the best part of the school day! When we were dismissed for lunch and recess, I was relieved but still nervous. I decided to start a game of Leap Frog to keep my mind on something other than the spelling bee that I still had to participate in later that day. Edsel and I each picked a team, and I was being overly confident and told Edsel my team would win. I like winning and the sense of accomplishment that it brings me. I especially felt that sense of accomplishment when I was working on fixing something like our farm equipment and other mechanical things.

Leap Frog was an interesting game where the last person in line "leap frogs" over the others who are bent down in front of them. Once they reach the front, they squat, and the last person in line begins moving up. The team that gets all of its players up the line the fastest is the winner. Maggie counted down from 10 to zero and yelled, "start." I was the first to start on my team and got off to a quick lead, but as I was near the end of the line, I caught my foot and fell right on top of my friend John. I guess that's what happens when you get a big head, and it served me right to fall while the whole class was watching. That put us behind right out of the gate, and we were losing to Edsel's team. He moved so quickly that he made up time for us, and we ended up winning!!!

As we went back to the classroom, I started to consider that maybe I needed to change my thinking about this spelling bee. Maybe if I really believe I can do well, like I did with the game, then I can do well. When the time came for the spelling bee to begin, I decided I

would do my best and believe in myself. No one was more surprised than me when the last round came and I was still at the front of the class with the rest of the good spellers. When my turn came around, the word I was asked to spell was "encyclopedia." I got a lump in my throat, because I wasn't sure if I was able to spell it. I thought for a moment and figured I could sound it out, so I started slowly: e-n-c-i-c-l-o-p-e-d-i-a. When I was done, I looked at Mr. Chapman wondering if I had it right. When he said, "I'm sorry Henry, but that is incorrect," my heart sank a little bit, and I took my seat. The next speller was Maggie. Her word was "acknowledgment," which she spelled correctly and won the spelling bee.

After school, Mr. Chapman came up to me and congratulated me on doing so well in the spelling bee. I thanked him and said that I must confess that I didn't really study for it. He was surprised and said, "Just think, if you had studied even a little, you might have won." He was right, of course. With a little extra effort and some confidence, people can do most anything. I began to realize then and there that whether you think you can do something or think you can't, you're usually right. 🏠

All images from the collections of The Henry Ford, except for the illustration of Scotch Settlement School by Maggie Torok.



Building Stories

A creative writing contest

Building Stories is a creative writing contest that is designed to inspire students in grades 3-12 to write original stories utilizing primary sources from The Henry Ford's collections. The contest provides a unique opportunity for students to apply and meet Common Core State Standards and other interdisciplinary curricular goals. See official rules, contest details and prize information at www.thehenryford.org/BuildingStories.



2013 Building Stories awards reception, The Henry Ford, June 20, 2013. Pictured (from left): Paula Gangopadhyay, chief learning officer, The Henry Ford; Jane Frechette, Teacher, Shrine Catholic Grade School, Royal Oak, Michigan; Maggie Torok, co-grand prize winner; Rachel Torok and Timothy Torok, parents of the winner.