

**SAY WHAT?** LEARNING  
FROM GREAT SPEECHES

**“IF YOU WANT TO  
CHANGE  
THE WORLD...  
MAKE YOUR BED!”**



**ADVICE FOR STARTING MIDDLE SCHOOL**

## *Unit Introduction*

*“If you want to change the world, make your bed.”*

At the University of Texas commencement in 2014, UT alumnus Admiral William H. McRaven gave an incredible speech to the graduates. In it, he used his Navy SEAL training and experience to help prepare the outgoing students for their next step.

The admiral’s easy style and down-to-earth advice are easily connected to incoming middle schoolers, high schoolers or anyone starting a new adventure.

I’ve included excerpted and abridged text of the admiral’s speech to allow students to practice highlighting, annotation or to simply use as reference while responding to the thought-provoking questions that follow. It is in the questions that students will make the connection to their own new situations. Students will see how the simplest things have the greatest impact.

This is a great speech to use to start a year off right, or for any time you want to revisit goals and responsibility to self, school or world.

I hope you enjoy this activity! And don’t forget.... make your bed!

*\*\*There are a number of videos of Admiral McRaven’s “Make your Bed” speech on Youtube, some with the full remarks, some edited down for time. He is a wonderful speaker, and I recommend viewing all or part of the speech. Please review them prior to showing your students to judge suitability. In the video, there is a reference to part of Navy Seal training being called ‘Hell Week.’ That reference has been edited out of the text excerpted for this unit.*

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

*LEARNING FROM FAMOUS SPEECHES: ADVICE FOR STARTING MIDDLE SCHOOL*

**If You Want to Change the World... Make your Bed!**

*Read the following excerpts of a graduation speech made by Naval Adm. William H. McRaven at the University of Texas in 2014. Answer the questions that follow. Can you connect the admiral's words to college graduates to students starting life in middle school?*

**Admiral McRaven:**

[This university's] slogan is, "What starts here changes the world." I have to admit — I kinda like it. "What starts here changes the world."



The average American will meet 10,000 people in their lifetime. That's a lot of folks. But, if every one of you changed the lives of just 10 people — and each one of those folks changed the lives of another 10 people — just 10 — then in five generations — 125 years — [you] will have changed the lives of 800 million people.

If you think it's hard to change the lives of 10 people — change their lives forever — you're wrong. ... Changing the world can happen anywhere and anyone can do it. So, what starts here can indeed change the world, but the question is — what will the world look like after you change it?

Well, I am confident that it will look much, much better. I have a few suggestions that may help you on your way to a better a world.

Our struggles in this world are similar, and the lessons to overcome those struggles and to move forward — changing ourselves and the world around us — will apply equally to all.

I have been a Navy SEAL for 36 years. But it all began when I left UT for Basic SEAL training in Coronado, California. Basic SEAL training is six months of long torturous runs in the soft sand, midnight swims in the cold water off San Diego, obstacles courses, unending calisthenics, days without sleep and always being cold, wet and miserable. It is six months of being constantly harassed by professionally trained warriors who seek to find the weak of mind and body and eliminate them from ever becoming a Navy SEAL.

But, the training also seeks to find those students who can lead in an environment of constant stress, chaos, failure and hardships. To me basic SEAL training was a lifetime of challenges crammed into six months.

## LIFE LESSONS

So, here are the lessons I learned from basic SEAL training that hopefully will be of value to you as you move forward in life.



If you make your bed every morning you will have accomplished the first task of the day. It will give you a small sense of pride, and it will encourage you to do another task and another and another. By the end of the day, that one task completed will have turned into many tasks completed. Making your bed will also reinforce the fact that little things in life matter. If you can't do the little things right, you will never do the big things right.

And, if by chance you have a miserable day, you will come home to a bed that is made — that you made — and a made bed gives you encouragement that tomorrow will be better.

### **If you want to change the world, start off by making your bed.**

Over a few weeks of difficult training my SEAL class, which started with 150 men, was down to just 35. There were now six boat crews of seven men each. I was in the boat with the tall guys, but the best boat crew we had was made up of the little guys — the munchkin crew we called them — no one was over about five-foot-five.

The munchkin boat crew had one American Indian, one African American, one Polish American, one Greek American, one Italian American, and two tough kids from the mid-west. They out-paddled, out-ran and out-swam all the other boat crews. The big men in the other boat crews would always make good-natured fun of the *tiny little flippers* the munchkins put on their *tiny little feet* prior to every swim. But somehow these little guys, from every corner of the nation and the world, always had the last laugh — swimming faster than everyone and reaching the shore long before the rest of us.

SEAL training was a great equalizer. Nothing mattered but your will to succeed.

### **If you want to change the world, measure a person by the size of their heart, not the size of their flippers.**



Several times a week, the instructors would line up the class and do a uniform inspection. It was exceptionally thorough. Your hat had to be perfectly starched, your uniform immaculately pressed and your belt buckle shiny and void of any smudges. But it seemed that no matter how much effort you put into starching your hat, or pressing your uniform or polishing your belt buckle — it just wasn't good enough. The instructors would find "something" wrong.

For failing the uniform inspection, the student had to run, fully clothed into the ocean water and then, wet from head to toe, roll around on the beach until every part of your body was covered with sand. The effect was known as a "sugar cookie." You stayed in that uniform the rest of the day — cold, wet and sandy.

There were many a student who just couldn't accept the fact that all their effort was in vain. That no matter how hard they tried to get the uniform right, it was unappreciated. Those students didn't make it

through training. Those students didn't understand the purpose of the drill. You were never going to succeed. You were never going to have a perfect uniform.



Sometimes no matter how well you prepare or how well you perform you still end up as a sugar cookie. It's just the way life is sometimes.

**If you want to change the world get over being a sugar cookie and keep moving forward.**

To pass SEAL training there are a series of long swims that must be completed. One is the night swim.

Before the swim the instructors joyfully brief the trainees on all the species of sharks that inhabit the waters off San Clemente. They assure you, however, that no student has ever been eaten by a shark — at least not recently. But, you are also taught that if a shark begins to circle your position — stand your ground. Do not swim away. Do not act afraid. And if the shark, hungry for a midnight snack, darts towards you — then summon up all your strength and punch him in the snout, and he will turn and swim away.

There are a lot of sharks in the world. If you hope to complete the swim you will have to deal with them.



**So, if you want to change the world, don't back down from the sharks.**

The ninth week of training is six days of no sleep, constant physical and mental harassment, and one special day at the Mud Flats. The Mud Flats are area between San Diego and Tijuana where the water runs off and creates the Tijuana slues, a swampy patch of terrain where the mud will engulf you.

It is on Wednesday of that week that you paddle down to the mud flats and spend the next 15 hours trying to survive the freezing cold mud, the howling wind and the [constant] pressure to quit from the instructors. As the sun began to set that Wednesday evening, my training class was ordered into the mud.

The mud consumed each man till there was nothing visible but our heads. The instructors told us we could leave the mud if only five men would quit — just five men — and we could get out of the oppressive cold. Looking around the mud flat it was apparent that some students were about to give up. It was still over eight hours till the sun came up — eight more hours of bone-chilling cold.

The chattering teeth and shivering moans of the trainees were so loud it was hard to hear anything. And then, one voice began to echo through the night, one voice raised in song. The song was terribly out of tune, but sung with great enthusiasm. One voice became two and two became three and before long everyone in the class was singing. We knew that if one man could rise above the misery then others could as well.



The instructors threatened us with more time in the mud if we kept up the singing, but the singing persisted. And somehow the mud seemed a little warmer, the wind a little tamer and the dawn not so far away.

If I have learned anything in my time traveling the world, it is the power of hope. The power of one person — Washington, Lincoln, King, Mandela and even a young girl from Pakistan, Malala — one person can change the world by giving people hope.

**So, if you want to change the world, start singing when you're up to your neck in mud.**

Finally, in SEAL training there is a bell. A brass bell that hangs in the center of the compound for all the students to see. All you have to do to quit is ring the bell.



Ring the bell and you no longer have to wake up at 5 o'clock. Ring the bell and you no longer have to do the freezing cold swims. Ring the bell and you no longer have to do the runs, the obstacle course, the PT — and you no longer have to endure the hardships of training. Just ring the bell.

**If you want to change the world don't ever, ever ring the bell.**

You are moments away ... from beginning your journey through life. Moments away from starting to change the world — for the better. It will not be easy.

But, YOU are ... the class that can affect the lives of 800 million people in the next century.

Start each day with a task completed. Find someone to help you through life. Respect everyone.

Know that life is not fair and that you will fail often. But if take you take some risks, step up when the times are toughest, face down the bullies, lift up the downtrodden and never, ever give up — if you do these things, then the next generation and the generations that follow will live in a world far better than the one we have today.

And what started here will indeed have changed the world — for the better.

*Excepts taken from 2014 University of Texas commencement speech made by Naval Adm. William H. McRaven, ninth commander of U.S. Special Operations Command, and UT alumnus.*

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

SAY WHAT? LEARNING FROM FAMOUS SPEECHES: ADVICE FOR STARTING MIDDLE SCHOOL

*If You Want to Change the World...Make Your Bed*

RESPOND:

1. Think about the slogan Admiral McRaven quotes in the first line of his speech. 'What starts here changes the world.' Why might this slogan be a good one for a middle school?

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2. Admiral McRaven says you meet over 10, 000 people in your lifetime, and you should try to make a positive change for just ten of those people. Can you think of a positive impact you've had on the lives of any people you've already met? Remember, even a small moment makes a difference.

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3. There are many teachers, students and staff in this school. Give three examples of a positive impact can you have on the people you will meet here. (Don't just say you'll be nice or give someone a million dollars. Be specific—and realistic, and give examples of what you can do to make a difference.)

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4. Admiral McRaven says making your bed makes a difference in your own day and life. Explain.

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5. The admiral recalls the smallest boat crew, the 'munchkin boat,' was the most successful during his difficult Navy SEAL training period. How does Admiral McRaven say we should judge people? In what ways are the munchkin boat crew and sixth graders similar?

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6. "If you want to change the world, don't back down from the sharks." Why is this good advice for sixth graders?

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7. The admiral recalls a miserable night sitting in freezing mud. Just when people wanted to quit, someone started singing. Why did this one voice make a difference? How can one voice make a difference in middle school?

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8. "If you want to change the world, don't ever, ever ring the bell." What did he mean? How might this connect to middle school kids?

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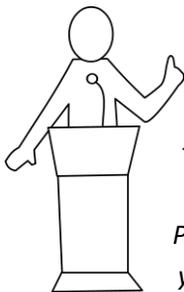
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**NOW YOU TRY! WRITE YOUR OWN GREAT SPEECH**



You've conquered the lower grades! Using Admiral McRaven's remarks as inspiration, write a speech to students who are just entering elementary school. Use your own experiences to give advice for success in class, on the bus, with teachers and with friends. Have fun with it!

*Practice your speech aloud until you can read it smoothly and with feeling. Present your speech to the class.*

## ANSWER KEY

1. Accept reasonable responses. Middle schools are the place where students form identities away from parents, make independent decisions, and begin to take interest in academic subjects and the world around them.
2. Accept reasonable responses. Reluctant students can be encouraged by reminding them that they changed their parents' and family members' lives, and they may have stood up for a friend, or complimented someone, and those actions can make lasting changes.
3. Accept reasonable responses. Answers may include: helping a new student, standing up for someone being bullied, inviting someone to sit in the cafeteria, obeying school rules, modeling positive hallway behavior, complimenting someone, etc.
4. Making your bed gives you one accomplishment to start the day, and makes it easier to add tasks to already completed ones. It also gives you a positive place to return to after a bad day.
5. Admiral McRaven says we should judge people on the size of their hearts, not their physical size. This connects to sixth graders because they may be smaller than students in higher grades, but are still capable of accomplishing great things for themselves, the school and the community.
6. Sixth graders are often intimidated by other students, especially bigger or older ones. Just as Navy SEALs shouldn't back down from the sharks, kids should stand up for themselves and not let fear change their behavior or belief in themselves.
7. One voice makes a difference because sometimes all you need is one person to stand up or speak up and many others will follow. This is helpful in dealing with bullies or students who may be behaving disrespectfully to staff or other kids. One voice can change the situation for the better.
8. Ringing the bell means quitting. Admiral McRaven says 'never ever, ever quit.' School can be hard for middle schoolers. Life with friends and parents can also get tough. Persevering through tough times will prepare students for any obstacles in life. You'll never know what would have been if you quit.

Writing Task: Accept reasonable responses.