Joelle Audrey Yemo

Topic Chosen: What has running taught you about yourself?

Everything I Need Is Within Me

Running has taught me that I am stronger than the voice in my head that tells me to stop. When I began running as a freshman, I thought my limits were purely physical—exhaustion, burning muscles, and shortness of breath marked the boundaries of my potential. Every race felt like a trial of pain tolerance, and I often surrendered to the voice urging me to give in, relinquishing my position and walking away frustrated. Yet my coach saw a strength I couldn't recognize in myself. After nearly every race, he would look me in the eyes and say, "Embrace the suck." At first, I didn't understand how to accept what I wanted to escape, but as the season unfolded—through grueling workouts, disappointing results, and moments of profound self-doubt—I gradually grasped the meaning of those three words.

The lesson crystallized during the final stretch of an 800-meter race at regionals on our home track during my junior year. The 800 meters demand everything from the start, but in the last 100, they ask for more than you think you have. Lactic acid flooded my legs; each stride grew heavier. My arms pumped as my form faltered, my lungs begged for air, and my mind pleaded for relief, whispering that it was okay to stop. But somewhere deep inside, I held onto quiet faith. In that moment, I learned what it truly meant to embrace the struggle—not just enduring hardship, but meeting it head-on. It means leaning into discomfort, finding inner strength, and discovering pride in the challenge. I accepted the pain instead of fighting it, drove my knees higher, pushed forward, and refused to let that voice win. Crossing the finish line, I realized that I do not have to break when things get hard—I can choose to grow. Every struggle added a new layer of resilience.

Running has transformed the way I face every challenge. As the eldest daughter in my Cameroonian immigrant family of seven, my high school journey has been defined not only by growing responsibilities but by the resilience I built learning to carry them. Freshman year, I navigated the uncertainty of being the new kid, searching for belonging after moving in the middle of the school year. Sophomore year, I challenged myself academically with AP and dual enrollment courses while quietly battling low self-esteem. Junior year, I faced relentless pressure, fixated on my grades as I juggled multiple AP and dual enrollment classes to strengthen my GPA, knowing how much it would shape my future. Senior year demanded everything at once—college applications, scholarships, track and cross country, earning my Certified Nursing Assistant license, and the expectations I placed on myself to succeed. Through every stage, running has reminded me that I am more than I think, and that true growth is revealed in the moments I feel most overwhelmed.

Being uncomfortable is not a sign of failure—it is proof that I am challenging myself. I have learned that struggle and growth are inextricably linked, and perseverance is forged in the moments when quitting would be the easy option. Most important of all, running has taught me to live in the present. For a long time, I measured my worth by times, replaying bad races and wishing I had done better. But over time, I realized that what mattered most was not the clock, but the people and memories I gathered along the way. My teammates—Catherine, Alexis, Christabel, Leah, Caelyn, and so many others—have become family. We have cried together after tough losses, celebrated each other's victories, pushed each other to our limits, and lifted one another through every trial. When I look back, I won’t remember every race time or relay split–I will remember the people who carried through every mile on our six-mile runs. I will remember the early mornings and exhausting work where we pushed each other to be better,

even when it hurt. I will remember cheering until my voice gave out as we shattered personal records, standing in awe as Quincy Willson competed in the 4x4 at Penn Relays against the Jamaicans, wandering the streets of New York City during Nike Indoor Nationals, and laughing until we cried in hotel rooms the night before meets. That being said, running hasn't only taught me how to compete-it taught me what true friendship looks like: showing up, pushing each other, growing together, and never letting one another face challenges alone. True success is not measured by medals or placements, but by community, by memories, and by the joy found in the journey.

Running is no longer just a sport to me. As I write this on my final senior night as a runner for Tuscarora High School, I am overwhelmed with gratitude and disbelief that this chapter of my life is coming to a close. I cannot imagine who I would be without these past four years. Running has shaped me into someone I am proud to be—someone who no longer questions her worth, but knows it. I now know that everything I need to be successful is already within me. Running gave me the confidence to pursue my dreams of becoming a Nurse Practitioner specializing in pediatrics, to launch an entrepreneurial venture serving the Black hair care community, to become fluent in American Sign Language, and to participate in mission trips supporting marginalized populations in developing countries. However, my journey with running is far from over. I plan to continue, embracing longer distances like the 10k and marathon. I hope one day to stand at the start line of the Boston Marathon—not just as a runner, but as someone who understands what it truly means to endure. Someone who knows that the hardest miles are not meant to break you, but to reveal you.