



Middle School Student Sound Off

*Alan Sun, Grade 6
Dickerson Middle School*

The Braces Dilemma

The bright August sun shone warmly on me as I sat on the small black chair of Levin Orthodontist's building, the leathery surface rough against my skin. I was 12 years old, and 6th grade was almost over. My mind whirled and thoughts spun in my head. Which braces should I choose? Metal, Lightforce, or Invisalign? Thinking hard, I weighed out the advantages and disadvantages of each one. Metal and Lightforce both had cables connecting them. At school, the other kids would notice in a heartbeat. They would laugh and laugh, calling me Mr. Braces. I didn't want to be the odd one out, so there was no way I could pick Lightforce or metal braces.

"What braces do you want?" the doctor repeated impatiently, drumming his fingers on the hard, wooden table.

Taking a deep breath, I responded, "Invisalign."

"Good," the doctor replied, turning around to give me a small box.

I took it from him, smiling, but as I looked closer, my happiness turned to despair. In front of me, above my Invisalign case, was a box of rubber bands. "No, No, No!" I thought, clutching my head in my hands. If I wore rubber bands on my braces to school, the other students would surely find out. Trying not to shake, I took the rubber bands from him. Muttering goodbye, I hurried out of the building, worry clouding my gaze. That night, I stayed awake, staring at the blank, white ceiling. I couldn't stop thinking about what was waiting for me tomorrow. Everyone would find out I had braces and I would be humiliated. Fear wormed in my belly but, as time went on, I slowly drifted into a fitful sleep.

The next morning, I woke, everything from yesterday forgotten. Excitement bubbled up inside of me. Today was Field Day, and I was going to have so much fun! However, as I yawned, the pair of rubber bands on my braces snapped off, and all that had happened yesterday came rushing back to me. Suddenly, I wasn't excited for school anymore. Lazily, I made my way to the kitchen counter, trying to be as late as possible. I nibbled on each bite of my breakfast, chewing slowly like a sloth. When I was finally ready for school, I was already six minutes late. As I arrived at the entrance of the school, I stepped out of the car, careful not to open my mouth. My palms were sweating, and my heart pounded in my chest.

"Don't worry, it's going to be okay," I thought to myself. Breathing fast, I cautiously tiptoed into the school building. I crept towards my homeroom, aware of other people's gazes following me. Time seemed to slow, and it felt as if my shoes had turned into rocks, stuck to the ground. Suddenly, movement from behind me caught my eye. I turned to see my friend, Bob, strolling towards me. My eyes widened, and the color drained from my face. I had always envied Bob. He was one of the most popular kids, known by almost every sixth grader. He was the last person I wanted to see my teeth. I was doomed.

"It's good to see you!" Bob greeted me happily, "are you having a good day."

I tried to open my mouth to reply, but my lips were glued shut. A bead of sweat rolled down my neck. I felt embarrassed, and finally, not able to bear being watched by Bob any longer, I turned around to leave. Just then, a cough racked my body, flinging one of my rubber bands into the air. Bob stared at me, delight sparking in his eyes.

"You wear braces!" Bob exclaimed, "me too!"

I watched in amazement as he opened his mouth, revealing the same rubber bands and braces that I had. I smiled. Maybe I was wrong. Maybe it was okay to be different.