



## best of both worlds

Gabrielle Walker

8th



Gabrielle (Gabby) Walker is currently a 7th grader and has participated in GEMS Camp for two summers already. Her mother found out about the GEMS Camp from a flier at their local library. Gabby's mother, a one-time math teacher and now counselor, encourages Gabby and her older sister, Trinity, to take advantage of opportunities to learn. Gabby was interested in STEM activities in elementary school but didn't have the opportunity to explore her interests in the summer until she was old enough to attend GEMS Camp. Gabby's sister had already been going to the camp for a few years when she started.

The first summer Gabby attended GEMS Camp, it was on a college campus. She enjoyed meeting and living with new friends and getting to better know some girls she was already acquainted with. Although the second summer was virtual, rather than on the campus, Gabby enjoyed the activities and was able to benefit from all the things that make GEMS Camp special. The online camp moved at a comfortable pace with small breaks and smooth transitions between activities. Gabby admitted some things were a little less fun. She had appreciated when they were on the campus that they could travel to the different spaces and go outside for soccer or volleyball in between scheduled activities. One advantage to the online camp was that she was at home for her birthday and was able to celebrate with her family. Her GEMS camp friends celebrated with her on Zoom so she had the best of both worlds.

Gabby appreciates that there is time and space for creative activities at the GEMS Camp. In addition to being passionate about STEM, she is artistic. She was able to do some cool paintings at GEMS. Gabby likes the different holiday activities they do during the year, like the science behind carving a pumpkin or the experiment with pepper and soap that showed how soap cleans the dirt off our hands. The winter retreat, a mini-hike, was fun to see nature and spend more time with camp friends to get to know them better. She is looking forward to doing more experiments and making new things.



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Gabby has always liked science more than math, but she learned new ways to approach math at GEMS and the more she works on them, the easier it gets. She also learned that math is an important component to many science fields.

Gabby would like to emulate famous scientists she has seen in autobiographical movies who were active experimenters as young people. She would like to be a neurosurgeon one day. She met a neurosurgeon through GEMS and has also been influenced by a family member who is a neurosurgeon. Gabby is interested in the brain, how it works, and how it interacts with other parts of the body.

Being able to transfer learning and skills to regular school is a big benefit of attending the GEMS Camp. It is easier to learn some things at GEMS because there is not high pressure to perform. You are just there to learn how to improve. Even though there is homework, it doesn't go anywhere else.

Gabby has just recently started working in groups in school. GEMS Camp has helped her to be able to talk to her team members about what tasks need to be done and how to get them done in an efficient way. She and her team were able to get a week-long project done in one day because of how focused they were on the task and helping each other.

One of the women who spoke to us was a neurosurgeon. She said that "At first, it will be hard because it is a very competitive field. But you just need to keep working at it and practicing it, and you will make it more of a priority."

One of our family members is a neurosurgeon. During our family reunions on Zoom, he would talk about what we should be doing during COVID times. He talks about the nerve damage that COVID can do. The way he was explaining it was really interesting. I really do want to learn about the brain and how it works and how we think about things and how we see things from different points of view.



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One friend, I am really close with her. She was helping guide me to be in the right direction. Sometimes, I would get off track during a lesson and she would say "Ok, get back focused so we can complete this work together and we can get it done faster and the correct way." That really helped me because sometimes I can get distracted really easily. She would always keep me on the right track. She also goes to my church and that's a good thing. She is a very positive person and that is a nice thing to have in your life, especially during this time. When I talk to her, it is a little distraction from the world's problems.

It is a lot different from school because at school there can be people who judge you a lot. But at GEMS camp, they don't judge, they just help you to grow, to become a better person that they know you are. Miss Betsy, who was overseeing the 6th and 7th grade girls, she was very helpful and fun. One time we didn't have any homework to do one night and Miss Betsy hung out with us and let us do her hair. It was like a big sister/little sister family moment. It was really exciting that I could have fun with someone much older and didn't feel uncomfortable. I guess you could say I felt like I was at my second home.