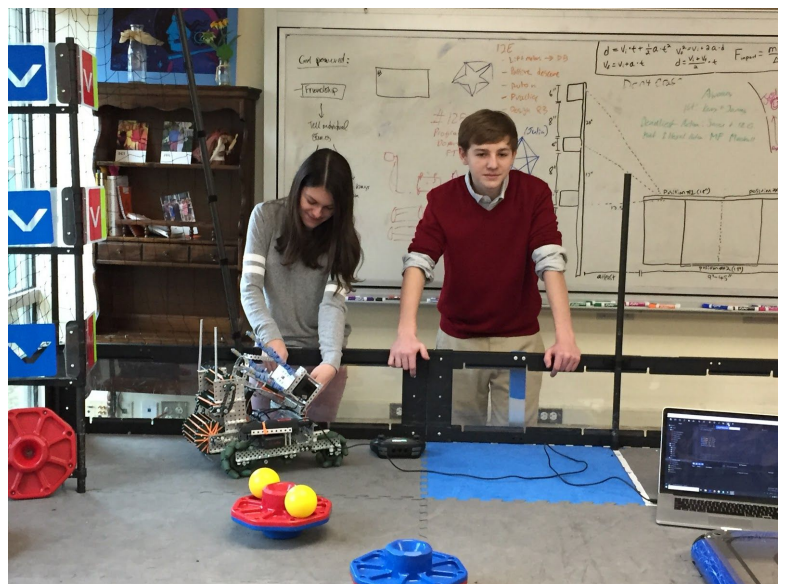


What Girl Power Means to Us

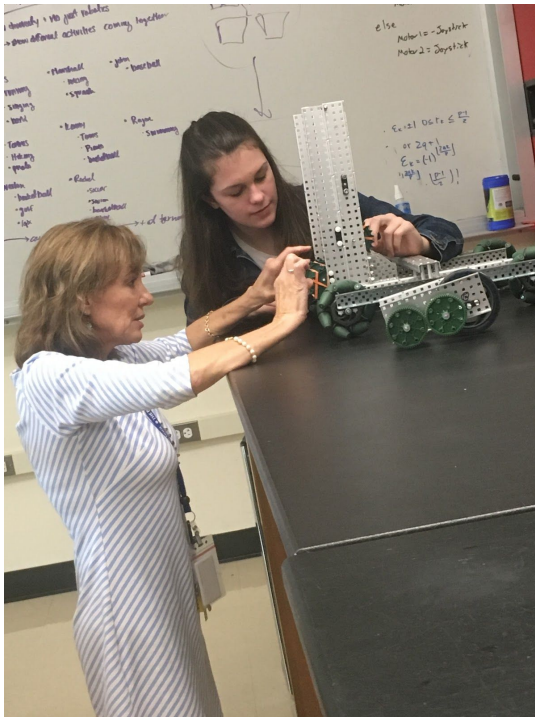
What does Girl Powered mean to me? That is a hard question to answer because of how dramatically my viewpoint has changed in the past few years. My first experience in robotics, when I first came upon the phrase, I was a part of an all-female team that was friends in and out of the robotics room. At that point, I was proud to be a member of a “Girl Powered” team and smiled when I heard them announce such. In the following year, my team was forced to dissolve as we entered high school VRC, and I was placed on a co-ed team with two other girls and four boys. I was confused, we no longer qualified as a “Girl Powered” team despite the fact that one of our team captains was a girl and we were an incredibly inclusive team. I mentally ran into the same problem when my male friends said that they couldn’t be feminists because they weren’t women. I felt that for women to be treated as equals in STEM fields, a change had to take place on both fronts, and therefore to not encourage co-ed teams for their equality was weird and bizarre. It was much easier for me to be on an all girl team, than my freshman year co-ed team, and that was why I was hesitant to take an even bigger step by being the only girl on my sophomore team. The team was composed of four other guys and myself, a male to female ratio of 1:4, which is pretty dismal. Though I liked all of the people on the team, I was hesitant because I had heard from my female captain last year of how as the only girl you are treated differently. I joined the team despite my worries, and my perception of “Girl Powered” changed again. No longer did “Girl Powered” mean all girls, or even mostly girls. I became co-captain of the team and helped to create a community such that my other female friends, who had previously had no interest in STEM, would elect to join me in the robotics room during lunch, and ask questions about the robot, the game, and how competitions worked. This new team dynamic completely got rid of any of my worries, as they didn’t treat me as a “girl”, but as a person. I think that at this point in my life the meaning of “Girl Powered” is completely independent of the male to female ratio of a team, rather it is solely dependent on how the team and community treat the individual members of the team despite their different backgrounds.

My team this year is comprised entirely of sophomores which, while it does have some setbacks, offers the incredible opportunity to learn. This is everyone on the team’s second year competing in VRC, and last year we were all apart of different teams with more experienced members. Being on a team where no question is stupid because everyone else was thinking about it as well, or had just finished asking an obvious question, has been a great experience for me. This environment has allowed me to grow not only as a member of my team but as a scientific thinker and someone who hopes to later work in a STEM field. Since we are also all still learning about VRC, we experiment and test out different jobs on our team. Though



last year I worked mainly on my team's engineering notebook, this year I have strategized, built and even been a member of the drive team (something I had previously never had any interest in but now really enjoy). The special thing about my team is that we understand each other in ways that randomly thrown together people never will. We go to the same classes, eat together most days in the robotics room, spend our afternoons together trying time after time again to make the autonomous turn just a little bit more, and genuinely enjoy spending 13 hours together at tournaments.

I have had so many great opportunities to promote Girl Power in my community, and every time I participate my perspective shifts. In 8th grade when I had just joined robotics and was on an all girl team we went to Vex IQ worlds and listened to a panel of successful women speak. At the time I felt that simply being a girl in robotics was enough, that I was making a big enough of a difference. Sadly it wasn't until a few months later when I was helping run a Girl Power Vex IQ stand at my school's carnival and I saw little girls hang back while their brothers played with the sample robots that I realized that I couldn't be a passive bystander. I am now a proud member of the Fem'n'Stem club at my school, which helps to get young girls interested in STEM through fun activities, and use my position as a summer camp counselor to get my campers interested in STEM.



Lastly, I wouldn't feel like this essay would be complete without recognizing my robotics coach, mentor, and all around role model, Mrs. Jarratt. Mrs. Jarratt is the single smartest, kindest, most caring person I have ever meet and anyone you ask will tell you the same. Other than dedicating innumerable hours to making sure my team keeps our sanity before a competition and keeping the robotics room full of food so that we remember to eat, she wholeheartedly dedicated to each and every one of the students who walk through her doors. She talks passionately to my non-robotics friends who spend time in the room, in an effort to explain as much as she can to them about Vex while still keeping order, and asks about how they are doing when they are away. She was the one who told me when I wasn't sure whether or not it was appropriate for me to submit something for the Girl Powered challenge because I was the only girl on my team, that it is much harder to be the only girl on a team, than one

of the many. This hadn't occurred to me in a long time, despite my worries before the season began, because of the inclusiveness of my team members. While we all have different opinions and viewpoints, we are all peers and are all working on figuring this out together as a team.

Credits: Julia Jackson

Team: 12P

Title of Submission: What Girl Power Means to Us