*Daring Greatly* by Brene Brown

**Chapter 1**

**Essential Passages**

“It feels like the world is going to hell in a handbasket.”

“Or is it? Are we surrounded by narcissists? Are we so entitled that we actually believe that we’re superior even when we’re not really contributing or achieving anything of value? Is it true that we lack the necessary empathy to be compassionate, connected people?” (pg. 20)

“We don’t ‘Fix It’ by cutting people down to size and reminding folks of their inadequacies and smallness. Shame is more likely to be the cause of these behaviors, not the cure.” (pg. 21)

“When I look at narcissism through the vulnerability lens, I see the shame-based fear of being ordinary.” (pg. 22)

“And I see how kids that grow up on steady diet of reality TV, celebrity culture, and unsupervised social media can absorb this messaging and develop a completely skewed sense of the world. *I am only as good as the number of “likes” I get on Facebook or Instagram.*”

“Scarcity is the “never enough” problem. Everything from safety and love to money and resources feels restricted or lacking. We spend inordinate amounts of time calculating how much we have, want, and don’t have, and how much everyone else has, needs, and wants.” (pg. 25)

“Worrying about scarcity is our culture’s version of post-traumatic stress. It happens when we’ve been through too much, and rather than coming together to heal (which requires vulnerability), we’re angry and scared and at each other’s throats.” (pg. 27)

“We’re called to “dare greatly” every time we make choices that challenge the social climate of scarcity.” (pg. 29)

“The greatest casualties of a scarcity culture are our willingness to own our vulnerabilities and our ability to engage with the world from a place of worthiness.” (pg. 29).

**Insights/Reflections**

As I was reading Brown’s first chapter, I realized I was facing the harsh reality that our nation has slowly fallen into the trap of scarcity. Our culture is so afraid of vulnerability, and I know I have fallen into the same trap more than once, as well. It is extremely hard not to have a scarcity mindset when the media and the world around us has set up a “competition-like” environment. Do I have a picture perfect life like my neighbors have? Since I only got 20 likes on this photo on Facebook, does that mean I’m not popular? If I dare to speak my mind about \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ will people change their opinions about me? If I don’t look like this celebrity, does that mean I’m ugly?

It’s also so easy to blame our inability to be vulnerable, with falling into the scarcity trap. We often fall into the *Never \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ enough* mindset; “I didn’t get enough sleep,” or “I didn’t have enough time.” Before we even sit up in bed, we have this attitude. This allows us to fall into the self-defeating trap of again comparing our lives to others; our marriages, our families, and our lives in general.

After reading this chapter, I’m recognizing I have fallen into this attitude of scarcity before. I have fallen into the trap of perfectionism being an issue, of measuring my talent to others, and being afraid to take risks because it is easier to stay quiet and be safe. I realize as a teacher, this has to change and I need to have a more vulnerable mindset and figure out how to encourage my students to have the same mindset, whether it be through relationships with students, lessons, etc.

**Chapter 2**

**Essential Passages**

“Yes, we are totally exposed when we are vulnerable. Yes, we are in the torture chamber that we call uncertainty. And, yes, we’re taking a huge emotional risk when we allow ourselves to be vulnerable. But there’s not equation where taking risks, braving uncertainty, and opening ourselves up to emotional exposure equals weakness.” (pg. 32)

“Vulnerability isn’t good or bad: It’s not what we call a dark emotion, nor is it always a light, positive experience. Vulnerability is the core of all emotions and feelings. To feel is to be vulnerable. To believe vulnerability is weakness is to believe that feeling is weakness. To foreclose on our emotional life out of a fear that the costs will be too high is to walk away from the very thing that gives purpose and meaning to living.” (pg. 33).

“Vulnerability sounds like truth and feels like courage.” (pg. 37)

“We love seeing raw truth and openness in other people, but we’re afraid to let them see it in us. We’re afraid that our truth isn’t enough—that what we have to offer isn’t enough without the bells and whistles, without editing, and impressing.” (pg. 40).

“Vulnerability is life’s great dare. It’s life asking, ’Are you all in? Can you value your own vlunberability as much as you value it in others?’” (pg. 43)

“When we were children, we used to think that when we were grown up we would no longer be vulnerable. But to grow up is to accept vulnerability. To be alive is to be vulnerable.” (pg. 43).

“Vulnerability is about sharing our feelings and our experiences with people who have earned the right to hear them.” (pg. 45)

“Trust is a product of vulnerability that grows over time and requires work, attention, and full engagement. Trust isn’t a grand gesture—it’s a growing marble collection.” (pg. 53)

“The vulnerability journey is not the kind of journey we can make alone. We need support. We need folks who will let us try on new ways of being without judging us.” (pg. 53)

**Insights/Reflections**

As I read through Chapter 2, Brown talked about the true meaning of vulnerability. She mentions vulnerability doesn’t mean weakness, it means uncertainty, risk, or emotional exposure. For example, I feel extremely vulnerable when someone is reading, analyzing, or criticizing a paper I’ve written. In my mind, I feel as though I’m not the best writer, so it’s hard for me to have people who I feel are proficient writers to read my writing.

I have also faced vulnerability in my past practicum and current student teaching experiences. I think the most vulnerable state for me, was getting the students to trust and form relationships with me. It’s hard being in front of a class of 30 students that first day knowing there are so many questions they have about me. They’re at a point that first day, when they can open up or shut me out. That is why it’s so scary for me and challenging to try and open up and get to know each student right away without any background information on who they are as a student. The only thing I could do in this moment was to simply be me; to be genuine in order to connect with my audience. I know that students are also at a vulnerable state with me, as well, it’s not only me. They want to know whether they can trust me as a human being or not. “We need to feel trust to be vulnerable and we need to be vulnerable in order to trust” (pg. 47).

I know that both of these are risks and make me feel vulnerable, but vulnerability is where courage and fear meet; it’s scary and exciting, and terrifying and hopeful.

**Chapter 3:**

**Essential Passages:**

Only when we’re brave enough to explore the darkness will we discover the infinite power of our light. (pg. 59).

You’re not a bad person. You’re a very good person who bad things have happened to. Besides, the world isn’t split into good people and Death Eaters. We’ve all go both light and dark inside us. What matters is the part we choose to act on. That’s who we really are. (pg. 61) *Harry Potter*

Yes, shame is tough to talk about. But the conversation isn’t nearly as dangerous as what we’re creating with our silence! We all experience shame. We’re all afraid to talk about it. And, the less we talk about it, the more we have it. (pg. 62)

In shame-prone cultures, where parents, leaders, and administrators consciously or unconsciously encourage people to connect their self-worth to what they produce, I see disengagement, blame, gossip, stagnation, favoritism, and total death of creativity and innovation. (pg. 64)

Just like Roosevelt advised, when we dare greatly we will err and we will come up short again and again. There will be failures and mistakes and criticism. If we want to be able to move through the difficult disappointments, the hurt feelings, and the heartbreaks that are inevitable in a fully lived life, we can’t equate defeat with being unworthy of love, belonging, and joy. If we do, we’ll never show up and try again. (pg. 67).

Own the story! Don’t bury it and let it fester or define me. I often say this aloud: “If you won this story you get to write the end. If you own this story you get to write the ending.” When we bury the story we forever stay the subject of the story. If we won the story we get to narrate the ending. (pg. 80)

We cultivate love when we allow our most vulnerable and powerful selves to be deeply seen and known, and when we honor the spiritual connection that grows from that offering with trust, respect, kindness, and affection. (pg. 105)

I think we have to question the intentions of any group that insists on disdain toward other people as a membership requirement. (pg. 108)

To love ourselves and support each other in the process of becoming real is perhaps the greatest single act of daring greatly. (pg. 110)

**Chapter 4:**

**Essential Passages:**

As children we found ways to protect ourselves from vulnerability, from being hurt, diminished, and disappointed. We put on armor; we used our thoughts, emotions, and behaviors as weapons; and we learned how to make ourselves scarce, even to disappear. Now as adults we realize that to live with courage, purpose, and connection—to be the person whom we long to be—we must again be vulnerable. We must take off the armor, put down the weapons, show up, and let ourselves be seen. (pg. 112)

That’s the paradox here: *Vulnerability is the last thing I want you to see in me, but the first thing I look for in you.* (pg. 112)

Foreboding joy, or the paradoxical dread that clamps down on momentary joyfulness; perfectionism, or believing that doing everything perfectly means you’ll never feel shame; and numbing, the embrace of whatever deadens the pain of discomfort and pain. Each shield is followed by “Daring Greatly” strategies, all variants on “being enough” that have proved to be effective at disarming the three common forms of shielding. (pg. 117)

Once we make the connection between vulnerability and joy, the answer is pretty straightforward: We’re trying to beat vulnerability to the punch. We don’t want to be blindsided by hurt. We don’t’ want to be caught off-guard, so we literally practice being devastated or never move from self-elected disappointment. (pg. 121)

I’m often asked “don’t you get really depressed talking to people about vulnerability and hearing about people’s darkest struggles?” My answer is no, never. That’s because I’ve learned more about worthiness, resilience, and joy from those people who courageously shared their struggles with me than from any other part of my work. (pg. 124)

To claim the truths about who we are, where we come from, what we believe, and the very imperfect nature of our lives, we have to be willing to give ourselves a break and appreciate the beauty of our cracks or imperfections. (pg. 131)

**Insights and Reflections:**

As I read these couple chapters, I reflected on my own memories of being shamed and coming up short on something. It is easy to get frustrated with the hard things and resort to something easier, but we will never grow if we never challenge ourselves. I’m thinking back to a moment in high school. I tried out for All-State my senior year on the trumpet, and due to playing French Horn for a number of years, I was a little rusty. I practiced my music for All-State tryouts, but not as much as I should have. When it came to tryouts, I ended up not making it. At that point, I felt defeated and didn’t want to pursue music anymore. I have a natural instinct that when I get frustrated with something, I just want to give up. My band director approached me and asked if I wanted to try out for the UNL Winter Winds Festival. I thought he was out of his mind because that was even harder to get into than All-State. He told me if I practiced harder than I ever had before, I would make it. He was right. After discovering my talent, I decided to try out for UNL’s School of Music and the Cornhusker Marching Band. After long, grueling hours of practice, I made both the School of Music and the Marching Band.

**Chapter 5:**

**Essential Passages**

Minding the gap is a daring strategy. We have to pay attention to the space between where we’re actually standing and where we want to be. More importantly, we have to practice the values that we’re holding out as important in our culture. Minding the gap requires both an embrace of our own vulnerability and cultivation of shame resilience—we’re going to be called upon to show up as leaders and parents and educators in new and uncomfortable ways. We don’t have to be perfect, just engaged and committed to aligning values with action.

We cant’ give people what we don’t have. Who we are matters immeasurably more than what we know or who we want to be. (pg. 177)

**Chapter 6:**

**Essential Passages**

I’ve come to believe that a leader is anyone who holds her- or himself accountable for finding potential in people and processes. The term leader has nothing to do with position, status, or number of direct reports. (pg. 184)

It’s true, isn’t it? Most people and most organizations can’t stand the uncertainty and the risk of real innovation. Learning and creating are inherently vulnerable. There’s never enough certainty. People want guarantees. (pg. 185)

There are times when you can ask questions or challenge ideas, but if you’ve got a teacher that doesn’t like that or the kids in the class make fun of people who do that, it’s bad. I think most of us learn that it’s best to just keep your head down and your mouth shut, and your grades high. (pg. 187)

No corporation or school can thrive in the absence of creativity, innovation, and learning, and the greatest threat to all three of these is disengagement. (pg. 187)

When we see shame being used as a management tool (bullying, criticism in front of colleagues, public reprimands, or reward systems that intentionally belittle people), we need to take direct action because it means that we’ve got an infestation on our hands. (pg. 190)

Shame can only rise so far in any system before people disengage to protect themselves. When we’re disengaged, we don’t show up, we don’t contribute, and we stop caring. (pg 192)

I can tell you from my experiences that it’s not fun to feel hated simply for doing work that means something to you, and it can take a serious toll on individuals and cultures. (pg. 194)

Without feedback there can be no transformative change. When we don’t talk to the people we’re leading about their strengths and their opportunities for growth, they begin to question their contributions and our commitment. Disengagement follows. (pg. 197)

**Insights and Reflections**

Reflecting on these past two chapters, I realize the truly negative effect that shame has on people in general. It is so easy to say to a student “will you look at \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, how he listened and did what he was told, why can’t you be more like him?” But that doesn’t make students feel good inside. It is important for teachers to constantly be giving positive feedback and constructive feedback, not shameful, degrading feedback.

Thinking back to a moment in high school, I recall my basketball coach reading off every player’s grade to the team as a way to maybe motivate everyone to improve in school. I had a terrible grade in math at the time, and when he read my grade, I was humiliated that everyone knew I was doing poorly in the class. It didn’t motivate me really to want to try to improve my grade, it simply made me want to go cry in the corner. Shaming, used as a tool for motivation, is not the answer to get a person to improve on a certain skill. Needless to say, I didn’t go out for basketball any years in the future.

*Be Different: Adventures of a Free-Range Apergian* by John Elder Robinson

**Part 1:**

**Essential Passages**

You’re actually not sick at all; you’re just different. Great, I thought. Very comforting. All of the sudden, the concept of “people like me” took on a whole new meaning. Moments before I’d have described myself as a middle-aged white male. Now, I was a guy with Asperger’s. I was autistic. I was still the same guy I had been the day before. I didn’t feel sick. Yet, somehow in a matter of seconds, my diagnosis had come to dominate my self-image.

I have gotten older, I have come to appreciate how my differences have turned out also to include gifts that have set me apart. One of my main goals in life today is to help young people avoid some traps I fell into. We should all be given a chance to succeed.

There’s a lot more to this story than simple disability.

All of us fall somewhere on this imaginary behavioral continuum. In fact, it seems to me that there are really only three kinds of people in the world, each grouped on a different arc of the spectrum.

And it’s not all bad. As a nypical, you are part of the majority. And what a majority it is!

If you’re eccentric or even weird, but you’re not failing at work or in your personal life, you are not disabled. You’re just different. It’s only when you fail at some key thing- as I did- that you become “officially” disabled.

Failure doesn’t have to be permanent.

Always keep this point in mind: the word “delay” means what it says. Delayed isn’t never, no matter how much it may feel like that at age fifteen or even twenty-five.

When we do finally start catching up it makes us feel good. We feel successful.

When we discover and build upon our gifts it spurs positive feelings in us and those around us, and those feelings go a long way toward dissipating the burden of failure.

Positive attitudes translate to positive results. Success breeds success, just as failure breeds failure. When we feel successful we’re less likely to melt down or lash out at other people, and we get along better socially.

Find life and work settings that minimize your weaknesses, and you discover yoru strengths and play to them.

**Insights and Reflections**

In part one, Robison reflects on how he felt his disability gave off a negative connotation. Thinking about the negative perception so many people with different disabilities are shown, this reminds me of one lesson Katie and I did during our practicum at Lincoln Southwest. In *Miss Peregrine’s Home for Peculiar Children,* the children in the book have unique peculiarities. These peculiarities are not seen as negative, but positive. We wanted students in our own classroom to think positively about their individual characteristics or “peculiarities.” For those who have a disability, for example, we wanted students to feel as thought these disabilities were no longer a bad thing, but instead helped form a community.

When students were allowed think of the different characteristics they had identified with over the years as a hindrance, and instead, think of that characteristic as positive during our lesson, students were much more willing to open up about their own peculiarities. Having this discussion, I felt, also helped form the strong, positive, and trusting classroom environment.

**Part 2**

**Essential Passages**

Your own rituals are okay as long as they don’t interfere with your responsibilities in daily life, or make you the subject of teasing or ridicule.

When I was younger, people often accused me of weird expressions and strange behavior. As a kid, I used to feel really bad about that, because I was just being myself. I didn’t know what I was doing wrong.

If I don’t meet their expectations, especially during a first impression, they won’t be friends with me, work with me, or even answer my questions.

No one from the school ever stepped up to get me back on track, so I continued on a downward spiral.

I dropped out, or got thrown out, depending on your perspective, at age sixteen. One thing was sure: By the time I left, they didn’t want me, and I didn’t want them. It was good riddance on both sides.

**Part 3**

**Essential Passages**

When my grandmother picked me up and made faces at me, I didn’t get the signals she was sending. After a few tries, she got frustrated and gave up on me. I may not have understood her facial expression, but I got the message right away when she dumped me on the ground and stomped off- I was a bad kid. Scenes like that set the stage for a lifetime of poor self-image.

I may not have been able to read from people’s subtle clues their thoughts and feelings, or their expectations of me, but I absolutely noticed when they rejected or disregarded me, and still do. I may seem robotic and mechanical sometimes, but there is nothing mechanical or cold about my internal feelings. I am just as sensitive as anyone to snide remarks and criticism. I cried inside fifty years ago, and still do today.

It’s like I’m missing half of the conversation, and I always have been.

With me, it takes more than a glance. But once my emotions get going, they are as strong as anyone’s.

Some people would say I’m a pessimist, always looking for the worst case, but that’s not true. I’d say I’m more of a survivor, and my instinct is to anticipate the worst and plan for it. That way, the final outcome is always better than I planned for.

So I don’t’ respond the way people expect, and that’s put me at a disadvantage more than once.

Some people would be overcome by emotion at a scene like that…Not me. I saw a problem to be solved.

**Insights and Reflections**

These past two parts have opened my eyes a lot to not assuming things about your students. Robinson explained that a brain defect caused him to not pick up on social cues and look at a situation differently than others. If I get frustrated with a student because I feel as though the way they are socially interacting with me is rude, I may want to look at the situation again. No matter what, every student I have will have emotions and if every teacher has given up on them in the past, it would definitely be frustrating, and would make it easy to give up. After reading these different passages, I’ve learned to never give up on a student no matter what, and to always find something positive about that student. If they see you are the one person who respects and cares for them, you might just be the one person that saves them.

**Part 4:**

**Essential Passages**

Getting along with other people has always been a challenge for me. When I was little, the challenge was learning to play without ending up in a fight. That was tough, because I was sure the other kids played wrong and I knew all the answers.

When I got older, the challenge was in making friends. That became critical in my teen years, when I wanted a girlfriend more than anything else, but I just could not overcome my shyness, social ineptitude, and fear.

It seems that nypcials are amore aware of their surroundings, especially in a social sense. I’ve already talked about how I miss subtle expressions in other people. This issue of self-centeredness makes me realize that sometimes I don’t even notice the other person at all! It must be awful to be totally ignored by someone else when he is standing right next to you.

It’s a constant source of amazement to me, how important something like simple social acknowledgement can be to others, while being totally invisible to me all these years.

One key to success proved to be acquiring some wisdom.

You should respond to what others say, not just speak what’s on your mind.

There are times when it’s better to keep your mouth shut.

Learn to coexist peacefully. Even if you can’t make friends, don’t’ make enemies. Don’t tease, torment, or provoke other people. Don’t’ be a bully to yourself. Try to understand the other person, and by doing so, make a peaceful connection. If people tease or torment you, look first to strong adults for help. Finally, if all else fails you may have to take a stand. And when you do, know that you could be putting yourself in harm’s way. But whatever happens, you will have stood up for yourself and what you believe, and that is the path to success, hard as it sounds.

After all, I’d overcome my fear of monsters, could it be that girls were scarier than T. Rex? I guess they were.

**Part 5:**

**Essential Passages**

There is more than one way to approach almost any problem You can cut a tree down with an ax, a chain saw, a bulldozer, or a heavy machine gun. The path we choose is influenced by who we are and our environment. The more different you are from other people, the more likely you are to solve problems in a unique way.

My concentration and focus let me dive into the light show in ways that ordinary people simply couldn’t.

When you’re a kid, people make fun of your special interest. When you’re a grown-up, though, your special interest makes you the expert- the go-to-guy- for whatever reason it is you really love.

One of the keys to my success was that I became an expert in something no one else understood- automotive electronics.

There is really no substitute for practice and the long easy familiarity that comes from it.

Now I know I can thank my Asperger’s for my need to know everything possible about something, and to do my work as perfectly as I can.

When I look back at the stories in this book, a few key insights come into focus. Here’s what I suggest: Find your strengths and interests, find real-world applications for your special skills, focus and hard work, and resolve.