



13th Annual Ben Strauss
Middle School Essay Contest 2026

Honorable Mention

Maya Grace Beaman

*Losing Your Hair to Cancer:
The Emotional Journey*

According to the cancer survivor community Down Greenville Road, "Losing hair during chemo hurts." Many people diagnosed with cancer go through chemotherapy, which usually causes people to lose their hair. Because of the shock and false beliefs that come with hair loss, women who experience alopecia due to cancer are faced with a landslide of negative emotions.

For most women, their hair is their identity. From Rapunzel to Merida, the world makes it clear that hair is what makes you beautiful, and pretty hair means a better life. Now imagine if Rapunzel shaved her head- her iconic, luscious locks would be gone, and doubtless she would grieve the absence of her tresses. When somebody loses their hair, it often feels like losing a part



of themselves. Losing your hair is devastating because it can feel like you lose a chunk of your identity.

According to Kris R. D, who has experienced alopecia due to chemotherapy, “I found losing my hair was one of the most difficult parts of my cancer journey because it was an announcement to the world that I was sick.” Kris R. D. likely felt self-conscious about her lack of hair, leading to less self-confidence. According to a study done by the NIH, more often than not, someone without hair feels like they are being watched by people everywhere, and that leads to embarrassment and negative self-talk. Those who feel awkward about how they look, including Kris, may feel like people are constantly looking at them.

Just when women think that their crazy struggle of hair problems are over, they are faced with the issue of regrowing their hair. At first, many might think that regrowing their hair will be easier, and less hard on them, but they are always proven wrong. When hair grows back, it grows in patches, which people sometimes find ugly and very embarrassing. There are many phases of the regrowing process, with nicknames ranging from the “baby bird” to the “chemo hawk” to the “alpaca phase”. Often, women wear wraps, hats, and scarves to cover what they believe to be hideous.

Usually when survivors regrow their hair, it grows back in a completely new way or style. This presents the problem of finding all new products that work for the regrown hair. Many survivors are used to straight hair, and find themselves buying a completely new set of hair products which might work together for their hair, which can grow back curly. High quality products are expensive and hard to find, so regrowing your hair is difficult budget-wise as well. Additionally, someone with a whole new hair type would likely feel embarrassed because they believe that their hair is a part of themselves, and because they do not feel as beautiful as they perhaps once were.

On top of all these extremely taxing problems, there is the matter of simply feeling deeply sad because of everything you have gone through. Deep sadness is just what it sounds



like- feeling grief and misery, which can cause you to feel depressed and spiral into thousands of unhappy emotions. These unhappy emotions are the result of feeling like you are not beautiful, as well as having to regrow your hair.

Losing your hair to cancer causes many distressing dilemmas and problematic emotions. Losing your hair can be seen as losing a part of yourself, and women who spend so much time on their hair may feel empty when it is lost. Many problems caused by hair loss can feel close to as bad as the actual diagnosis, as they are very personal and usually very evident. Ultimately, alopecia from chemotherapy is such a struggle. Because of the unfortunate beliefs about beauty, hair loss will always be one of the worst parts of being treated for cancer.