



## Trekel Hodo

Palmetto Christian School  
Palmetto, FL

To see the way 9-year-old Trekel Hodo dives into books from her school library is to appreciate how far she has come. Just three years ago, school made her feel sick, and she was in danger of repeating kindergarten. Nowadays, she has accumulated so many “accelerated reading” points at Palmetto Christian School that she is reading nearly two grade levels ahead.

“Language comes easy for her, and she just loves to read,” says Amanda Miller, Trekel’s third-grade teacher. “She just keeps pushing to go higher and higher.”

Trekel (pronounced truh-KELL) is the youngest of three siblings in a family raised by her single mother, Andrea Gaskin, and her introduction to schooling did not go well. In kindergarten at a local public elementary school, Trekel seemed afraid to talk to her teacher. When she was asked to name colors or

numbers or facial expressions, she would give wrong answers or none at all. She worried because her teacher had criticized the beads that were strung in her hair and punished her for a shirt that did not fit school dress guidelines. She felt out of place.

“I felt like the focus was more on her hair and her clothes, not on her education,” says Ms. Gaskin. “The teacher just seemed to treat her like she was slow because she wouldn’t talk.”

Through friends, Ms. Gaskin heard about Palmetto Christian and the Step Up For Students Scholarship program for children from low-income families. What she was soon to discover, she said, was that Palmetto teachers were much more encouraging to Trekel and that the atmosphere helped lessen her daughter’s anxiety about school. Their patience showed Trekel they cared.

“Trekel has always been eager to learn,” says Ms. Gaskin. “Then you have the teachers who care and tell her she can do it. They are so loving, and they just took her in.”

With the close attention of a Palmetto teacher, Renee Fulghum, who helped in the first grade, Trekel began to improve in her pronunciation skills. That success translated into a new zeal for reading and learning and, ultimately, into a self-motivation that her current teacher sees everyday. “Trekel sets her own standard, and she sets it very high,” says Mrs. Miller.

That standard leaves Trekel, who has achieved a B average, wanting more. She recently completed a full report on a variety of animals, complete with photographs and descriptions and her name in glitter, and managed the feat without involving her mom. Trekel left her teacher with the impression that the resulting grade of 96 – four points shy of perfect – just wasn’t good enough.

Trekel, according to her mom, is a “why kid.” She dissects the world around her, and inevitably asks the question “why.” In last fall’s presidential elections, Trekel followed the campaigns intently and challenged the thinking of the adults around her. She ended up finding a way to cast her own vote – on Nickelodeon.

Ms. Gaskin is doing her own schoolwork these days, as well. She works fulltime as a certified nursing assistant while at the same time pursuing course and clinical work at Manatee Technical Institute toward becoming a licensed practical nurse.

“I try so hard to do my part with Trekel, and they know that at the school,” she says. “I’ve just been blessed that she has been able to go to Palmetto Christian.”

## About Palmetto Christian School

Palmetto Christian School opened in 1995 with one classroom and now serves about 230 students in grades K-8, with 36 of them on a Step Up For Students Scholarship. The school puts a strong emphasis on phonics, reading, writing and basic math skills, and teaches Spanish to all students. The curriculum includes art and music, and physical education three times a week. Middle school students also participate in computer classes and drama. The annual tuition ranges from \$4,800 to \$5,000, and the school is located at 1601 17<sup>th</sup> Street West in Palmetto.