

## The Perfect Shirt (487 Words)

Some people might think I'm just a t-shirt. But I know I'm much more special than that.

This morning, Kenny was so excited to put me on for school. He told his mom he wanted to wear his favorite shirt because there was going to be a celebration today. That reminded me of the first time I met Kenny - on a bright morning at his school, during the Project UpLift Student Success Celebration.

When they called Kenny's name for Perfect Attendance, he ran up to the stage, eyes shining. That's when I was given to him. I'm bright orange, soft, and bold, with the word *Perfect* across my front in many languages and *Roots and Wings* on my back. The moment Kenny slipped me on, I felt like I had a purpose.

I was part of something much bigger - proof that Kenny had shown up, worked hard, and believed in himself. I could feel his pride through the warmth of his smile. He couldn't stop tugging at my sleeves and showing me off to his friends.

Since that day, I've gone everywhere with him - to school, after-school Project UpLift tutoring classes, even weekend outings. I know I'm special because Kenny always makes sure his mom washes me right away, so I'm clean and ready to wear again!

In his Project UpLift after-school class, I've watched Kenny read with his friends and laugh with his teacher, Mrs. Smith. He's growing more confident every day. He's sounding out words that used to make him frown - now reading them aloud with pride. Last year, he earned recognition for his reading progress through Project UpLift. This year, he's already talking about what he'll achieve next.

Sometimes, after school, Kenny's little sister sits beside him at the kitchen table, tracing letters in her workbook. She looks at him in his bright orange shirt and says, "One day, I'll get a shirt like that too."

When she says it, I feel a spark - like I'm glowing from the inside. Because I know what that means... She's watching him. She's learning. She's believing in herself too.

Kenny grins and tells her, "Yes, I earned it for going to every session of my Reading Club!" And that's what this is really about: showing up. Every day. Every effort. Every small step that leads to something bigger.

So yes, I may be just fabric and thread. But when Kenny wears me, I become a badge of effort, a symbol of perseverance, and a reminder that he can do hard things - and that every day he shows up, he's already winning.

Project UpLift has helped Kenny grow as a reader, but it's also taught him something even greater: that being "perfect" isn't about never making mistakes. It's about learning from your mistakes, believing in yourself, and continuing to *show up*.

And that's why I'm happy to remind Kenny that he's "perfect."