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## Divya Thomas

is an eighth grader at Kenston Middle School in Chagrin Falls. Divya loves reading, writing and music. She is first chair flute in her school's band, plays piano and is teaching herself to play guitar. Divya is also a captain on Kenston's Science Olympiad team. She aspires to attend medical school in the future.

I am an Indian, on my dad's side, and a Korean on my mom's, and have fairly dark skin. After the terrorist attack on September 11th, many people, including myself, were discriminated against for looking even remotely like those who committed the horrific attacks. Since the 9/11 attack, more than one person at my school, including one who had been my classmate for many years, called me a terrorist on many occasions.

However, besides me, other students at my school have been called chinkies, Jews, or the n-word. Or perhaps, they have been made fun of for having small eyes or flat faces. Quite simply, these people discriminated for looking, thinking, or otherwise being different than the majority.

But why, out of all the problems people face dealing with hate, is this important? As President Johnson said: "Until justice is blind to color, until education is unaware of race, until opportunity is unconcerned with the color of men's skins, emancipation will be a proclamation but not a fact." It is important to treat everyone equally in order to follow what we fought for 225 years ago at the end of the oppressive British rule and the birth of a new nation. Also, as having been the target of discrimination, I know what it feels like to be made fun of. The remorse, sadness, and above all, feeling like you don't belong. Although they do not openly say it, the manner in which people discriminate suggest that you are not wanted.

I believe that much of this attitude is driven by pettiness and a lack of understanding of different cultures. This lack of understanding makes it easier for the majority to believe that the minority do not share the same human values, and therefore, dehumanize the minority. In addition, when things go wrong, many people often point to those who look different because it is easier to blame it on someone that they cannot relate to.

To tackle this problem, I would encourage schools to actively pursue programs to discourage discrimination. Some examples could be role playing, getting well known people to speak against racial discrimination, and other exercises. Although there are already some such programs, for example, Challenge Day, they only affect a few students. However, what really encourages discrimination is that most people just stand by and don't do anything to stop it. Therefore, I intend to reach out to people, in my schools who have been discriminated against and encourage them to get involved with the program by talking about their experiences, what it feels like to be discriminated against, and how they plan to stop discrimination. All these efforts to stop discrimination are just part of the solution. Standing up against discrimination; whether it is encouraging minorities to take a stand or members of the majority joining the effort, it must be done or nothing will ever change.