

10TH ANNUAL **STOP** **THE HATE**[®] AWARDS CEREMONY

PRESENTED BY

MALTZ MUSEUM OF JEWISH HERITAGE



@stopthehateUS
#stopthehate



April 29, 2018

Dear Friends,

You are about to meet 25 remarkable young people. Their voices will be heard and their message is destined to be shared. They are part of a legacy of student upstanders with vision and promise to ***Stop the Hate***.®

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the ***Stop the Hate***® program.

In that time, we have heard from thousands of students using the power of the pen to reflect on and respond to intolerance and indifference. As a museum that stands firmly aligned with diversity and inclusion, we are proud to support students who use their voices for good.

In ten years, we have provided \$1 million in college scholarships and anti-bias education grants, and engaged 30,000 students across 12 Northeast Ohio counties to stand up and speak out against hate.

Who would have thought, in ten years, the world would need this kind of program now more than ever? The time is now to support compassion and empathy – not only for others, but also for ourselves.

There is no singular person on this Earth who is exactly the same as another. We are all different. And we all matter. To all the students who have participated in ***Stop the Hate***®, this is only the beginning. Your voices can and will make a difference. Never stop fighting for what you believe. We can't wait to see what you'll do next!

Sincerely,

TAMAR & MILTON MALTZ



ABOUT STOP THE HATE®

Stop the Hate® challenges young people to consider the impact of intolerance and the role of the individual in effecting change. The Maltz Museum initiative celebrates Northeast Ohio students committed to creating a more accepting, inclusive society.

This year, we asked 6 – 12th graders to respond to questions inspired by the legacy of Carl and Louis Stokes. Carl transformed Cleveland politics when he became the first African-American to be elected mayor of a major American city. Louis Stokes was the first African-American congressman elected from Ohio and a founding member of the Congressional Black Caucus. Both men were fierce fighters for justice for all people.

We asked the questions:

“Have you seen or experienced opportunities to fight racism, bigotry, violence, discrimination, or injustice? How did it inspire you to change the circumstances that created this problem? What actions have you taken toward making these changes a reality?”

YOUTH SPEAK OUT IS GENEROUSLY SUPPORTED BY



maltz museum of jewish heritage



2018 Youth Sing Out Winners

CLEVELAND HEIGHTS HIGH SCHOOL – First Place High School, “Words on the Wall”

SHAW HIGH SCHOOL – Runner-up High School, “Too Much Going On”

NEWTON D. BAKER SCHOOL OF ARTS – Tie First Place Middle School, “Keep History Alive,” “Why Hate”

HARDING MIDDLE SCHOOL – Runner-up Middle School, “Between Me & The Media”

2018 Youth Speak Out Grand Prize Scholarship Student Finalists

GRADE 12

JOHN KUNZO III, Gilmour Academy

MEGAN LEBOWITZ, Solon High School

PEYTON LUNDER, Padua Franciscan High School

JULIA MAYER, Solon High School

HAILEY NUDELMAN, Twinsburg High School

MARIA ZOU, Hudson High School

GRADE 11

TADJ JOSIAH ADAMS, Hawken School

DAHLIA MOSKOWITZ, Fuchs Mizrahi

SCHUYLER RADIVOYEVITCH, Cleveland Heights High School

HANNAH SHUFFER, Orange High School

2017 Youth Speak Out Essay Student Finalists

GRADE 10

EMI CUMMINGS
Laurel High School

ANAYA HUNTER
Whitney Young High School

SABRIYA ZAMAN
Solon High School

GRADE 9

CARA FINNEGAN
Elyria Catholic High School

JONAH GILBERT
University School

RILEYANNA KARIC
Brecksville-Broadview
Heights High School

GRADE 8

ALI HOLTZ
Chagrin Falls Middle School

ELANA ROUSE
Rocky River Middle School

BOWEN ZHANG
Beachwood Middle School

GRADE 7

MAGGIE CHEN
Memorial Middle School

REBECCA LAWTON
Beachwood Middle School

JENNIFER WILLIAMS
Old Trail Elementary

GRADE 6

FLANNERY COSTELLO
Rocky River Middle School

ISABELLA KOVACS
Rocky River Middle School

SCOTT O'NEILL
Newton D. Baker
School of Arts

*PLEASE NOTE: Students changed names within their essays to protect identities.

TADJ JOSIAH ADAMS

11th Grade, Hawken School

Growing up black in an upper class “white” private school is a truly unique experience. So when I think about my own role in fighting racism, I believe I have a unique perspective to offer. The more I have thought about it, the more I have realized that simply being black in America is an opportunity to fight the web of racism.

There is a very popular stereotype that black people, especially black men, are ill-tempered, aggressive, and quick to engage in mindless violence. However, from my short sixteen years in this country, I can say that this notion cannot be further from the truth. For blacks, the question is not if we will face opposition, it is when. As such, when considering the adversity we are subject to, black people possess a remarkable amount of self-control. I cannot count how many times smiling white lips have uttered that I am “smart for a black boy,” or told my sister she’s “pretty for a black girl.” I cannot count the number of confederate flags I have shied away from, and perhaps most disturbingly, I cannot fathom the amount of senseless hate and cowardice one must possess to lean out of a window of a speeding car and call a dutiful father and his two children niggers.

Ironically enough, racism is indiscriminate. It will scratch and claw at those on the lowest rung of society, and will poison the image of those on the top. Media outlets spitting on Trayvon Martin’s name while simultaneously questioning President Obama’s true birthplace. Without mincing words, racism made me afraid to be black. Made me wonder what I could have done, what my father could have done, what any black person could have done to deserve their treatment. At its very worst, racism recruited me. It burrowed into my thoughts, annexed my feelings, and scarred my view of those who look like me. Racism’s most terrifying ability is its tendency to make you believe that you deserve what is coming to you. That somehow, the tremendous burden of blame rests upon the marginalized. That is why I say that simply being black is an opportunity to fight racism. Anytime a black person conquers their inner demons and refuses to let racism take hold of them, they are fighting racism. Anytime a black person resists stooping down to the level of their perpetrators, racism loses its grip on us. In a society that turns a blind eye towards instigators, we black people cannot be reactionary. So anytime I choose to educate instead of argue, anytime I choose to hold my tongue and strive towards the high ground, and anytime I choose to turn the other cheek, and perhaps even forgive, racism shudders. In my nine years in a white school, I have had plenty of opportunities to let racism win the war. But refusing to let racism dig its claws into you is the integral first step for efforts against racial discrimination everywhere.



Tadj Josiah Adams is a junior at Hawken. He enjoys participating in theater and tennis and is currently participating in a cultural exchange with students from Chile. He continues to educate himself on matters of racial justice and uses that knowledge to eradicate hate through printed media.



JOHN KUNZO III

12th Grade, Gilmour Academy

"You aren't Black. You're White." Speechless, I let out a fake laugh because I was shocked at the racial slur. After all, these are my friends!

Growing up attending prestigious private schools, I have grown accustomed to brushing off racial insensitivities. The occasional fried chicken and Kool-Aid joke is commonplace to me; it goes in one ear and out the other. I have even grown thick skin to naively racist questions such as, "What happens to your hair when you're in the shower?" And, "Can you only say N-I-G because you're half?" However, when called white because I do not fit my friends' image of an African-American male, I was taken aback.

The image my peers think of promotes gun violence, profanity, and drug use, all blending to pervert an uneducated person's idea of blackness. So, because I do not participate in these endeavors, I am thought of as white.

Genetically, I am biracial, and I am proud of it. I am too dark to be Caucasian, and African-Americans often ostracize me once they realize my father is White. However, my mixed background was not the basis of the initial insult. Rather, it is my passion for excellence and success academically, culturally, and socially as an African-American.

As a senior in high school, I had hoped that this would no longer be a problem for me. Students are mature enough to know that African-Americans are not "cookie cut" into rappers and instead aim for higher standards. Most want to go to college, be well-spoken, and have the desire to succeed. But, somewhere between these polar opposites, the idea of a Black man has evolved into no more than a thug. To the people that believe that, I wish to tell them: Being Black is a race, not a lifestyle. Same as being White, Asian, or Hispanic.

At my school, I aided a teacher in forming a group for students of African-American backgrounds to gather and discuss problems. When Non-Black students heard about it they laughed, then undermined the club by joking about creating a "White Student Alliance" in retaliation. What my apathetic classmates fail to realize is that the club is not for any one race; it is a support group for any student dealing with racial insensitivity. It is for the experiences we share, like mine, that people throw at us every day, with or without intention.

Although the Black Student Alliance has been established, I would like to go further in debunking racial insensitivity among classmates and peers in other schools. Through something as simple as a talk by a diversity coach such as the well-known Eva Vega-Olds (whom I heard speak at a Leadership Summit), positive steps could be made, advancing empathy in school communities. The ultimate goal is to not have to brush off hateful comments but instead share a refreshing glass of Kool-Aid with peers, enjoying each other for who we are, not what we look like.

John P. Kunzo III

John Kunzo III is a senior at Gilmour Academy, where he is a member of student council, National Honor Society, Black Student Alliance, Speech and Debate Team, and President of the ESPN Club. He was selected a Bank of America Student Leader, and intends to study political science.



MEGAN LEBOWITZ

12th Grade, Solon High School

"Do you know any suicide bombers?" a middle-aged woman, a total stranger, asks my darker skinned friend, who is sitting alone at a local Subway. "Get out of my country."

When my friend told me how she had been treated, I was shocked and appalled. How could there be such extreme prejudice within a twenty minute radius of my home?

I am Jewish, but I have Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and Hindu friends. Religious differences never prevent me and my friends from getting along. To the contrary, our diversity prompts collaborative discussions about culture and belief systems. Why do cultural divisions drive conflict when beliefs are determined primarily by the randomness of where we are born? If I had been born in India, I would likely be Hindu. In Saudi Arabia, Muslim. Inside, we are all the same.

When I watched Donald Trump's speech in 2016 calling for a Muslim ban, I was shocked and upset. I remembered all of the lessons about my Jewish ancestors being persecuted. Now it was happening again, with Muslims. As the year progressed, Americans saw more and more acts of prejudice—women attacked for wearing hijabs, Jewish gravesites vandalized, bomb threats at JCCs—all violence in the name of nationalism.

I wanted to do my small part to spread religious tolerance to the next generation, so I founded Northeast Ohio's first "Interfaith Improvisation Summer Camp Program," using improv to unite Jewish and Muslim middle school students.

Performing improvisational comedy requires spontaneity. Planning an improv camp from scratch, however, took months of preparation. I contacted Muslim and Jewish community leaders, asking them to distribute fliers and registration information. I fielded parent and clergy questions and developed a program agenda. I located a library willing to provide rent-free space. Then the hard work began.

On Day One, an equal number of Jewish and Muslim campers arrived, unsure what to expect. I purposely avoided any mention of religious differences for the first few days. I wanted the students to become acquainted with each other as people, without labels. I invited a Jewish cantor and a Professor of Islamic Studies to join the class on the last day to lead a discussion about interfaith relations. The campers laughed at the same jokes. They enjoyed the same games. It did not matter what their last names sounded like or how they prayed.

Jews and Muslims have more similarities that unite us than differences that divide us. One person at a time, Americans can work to improve tolerance. Improv was the natural way for me to do my part. I encourage everyone to find their own way, one that is meaningful to them, to make a difference. No one has to change the world single-handedly, but with everyone taking small steps, we can make a momentous impact.



Megan Lebowitz is a senior at Solon High School, where she is President of the Drama Club and leads a monthly improv program. She performs with the Music in Motion Show Choir, and plans to pursue a career in journalism and activism.



PEYTON LUNDER

12th Grade, Padua Franciscan High School

In my life I have experienced profound obstacles that have taken immense strength and courage to overcome. I have experienced abuse and injustice at the hands of someone who was supposed to protect me from them. From the time I was three until I was twelve, I was sexually and mentally abused by my father. I was told that no one would believe me if I tried to tell them, or that people would think I was stained, like it was my fault. I was silenced, and I was robbed of a childhood that I might have had, and it took me nine years to tell anyone about the abuse for fear of what might follow.

When I finally told my mom what was happening to me, my entire world changed. I went through a period of my life where I felt extremely lonely. I moved to a new school with new kids and teachers, and I didn't know anyone. I missed my old friends, my old routine, and even my dad. Not my abuser, but my dad. It took me a long time to find the strength within myself to speak out about the injustice happening to me, and to forgive my dad for what he did. I went to many different therapists and talked one on one with them, but I still felt alone. It wasn't until I started going to a summer therapy group with other girls my age that I started to open up. I felt like I had finally found a place where people understood me and I could speak openly.

I spent years hiding behind the epidemic of silence. Too afraid to open up and talk about what happened to me; too afraid that I would be judged, or that no one would understand. Little did I know, there are millions of people all over the world who have felt the exact same way I did. Every year in the U.S alone, 321,500 people will be victims of sexual assault. The number of those cases that will be reported, however, is less than half. Young girls, just like me, are too afraid to speak out against their abusers. Some of them have no one to trust and confide in, no one to be a shoulder to cry on, no one to help them break their silence.

In my seventeen years, I have been given a platform and an opportunity to share my story and speak out about destroying the plague of silence. I have been able to work in therapy groups to talk about the injustices that were happening to me, and to hear ones that others have faced. I have learned that people from all walks of life have stories just like mine. Stories of domestic abuse, racism, bullying, prejudice, sexual assault, and many others that go unheard of every single day. In finding my voice and speaking out, I have been able to help others find their voice, and shatter the silence.



Peyton Lunder is a senior at Padua Franciscan High School. She is passionate about arts and writing in particular, with a goal of using her voice in a career in marketing and journalism, where she will continue to have her voice "heard in the world."



JULIA MAYER

12th Grade, Solon High School

Their glares were darts in my side. The people on that eternal plane ride stared at my family as if we were animals, their eyes glinting with fear, amusement, indifference, or worst of all, pity. We had deviated sharply from my sister Elizabeth's routine—a potential disaster for a child with autism. The disaster was now playing out loudly. As she screamed, cried, and lashed out, the tension mounted. Mothers pulled their children close. I despised being on the other end of those stares, but I hated it even more for Elizabeth.

Moments of conflict like this were always difficult for me. I was a sensitive kid, so hearing curse words and insults made me angry. But after three years of high school, I've become desensitized to bad words—all but one. When the word "retarded" is tossed around as a diss, I physically recoil. My life experience tells me that connotation can't be further from the truth. I've watched Elizabeth sort out the unspoken emotions of the people around her better than most typical people. Day after day, she tries harder at life than anyone I know. The belittlement of people with special needs like my sister inspired me to take a stand. Ironically, it was barely verbal Elizabeth who taught me how to use my voice for good.

In my childhood, I often found it easier to comply with aggressors rather than stand up for myself. That is until I heard a kid slide next to my sister on the school bus and hiss insults at her, including the "r-word." This boy was taking advantage of Elizabeth, using her as a defenseless punching bag for his repressed emotions. For the first time, I stood with no fear shaking my bones, and I planted my hand firmly on his shoulder. "Retarded doesn't mean stupid. My sister is smart and important, and it doesn't do you any good picking on her, so please stop." As he scurried back to his own seat, I felt strong. I hadn't stooped to his level by retaliating, and somehow that felt right.

When I climbed back to my seat, my head was swirling with realizations. There is power in calling out injustice! I have a voice! As years passed, I became more convinced that truth can stand alone, that insults—commonplace though they are in high school—derail intelligent conversation and block us from really understanding one another. I continue to fight ignorance about the harmfulness of the "r-word" by simply educating my peers. Whether it be teaching strangers about ableism through my school's GirlUp chapter or simply reminding passersby of the implications of their words, my crusade against hateful comments pays off every day in my community.

I live for the moments of social progress I see in our toxic world. It's like when the older sister in me lights up as Elizabeth defies expectations. With love and empathy as our shield, I have a feeling that the darts can't hurt us anymore.

Julia Mayer

Julia Mayer is a senior at Solon High School. She is an active participant in speech and debate, drama, Madrigals vocal jazz ensemble, CASS anti-bullying program, and editor of the school literary magazine. She plans to continue writing and performing in the future.



DAHLIA MOSKOWITZ

11th Grade, Fuchs Mizrachi

The Passover Seder is a time for us, as Jews, to reflect on the religious and historical significance of our liberation from Egypt. As we read through the Haggadah we question, "why is this night different from all other nights?" I ask myself that question as I lie curled in a ball, alone, shaking, hiding, in the dark, during our family Seder. Minutes earlier, I was surrounded at a table by my grandparents, my dad, my stepmother, and my siblings. I was told by my stepmother not to sit next to my brother because "He is a bad influence," and "a lost cause." I know she is referring to his sexual orientation. My brother is gay. When these painful words were spoken publicly, all eyes turned to my brother. His head was down, tears falling down his cheeks. There was silence at the table and the silence was unbearable. I was not going to allow my brother to be victimized and shamed. I put my arm around him as a show of solidarity. Everyone was waiting for someone to say something in defense of my brother, to tell him and everyone sitting at the table that we would love him unconditionally, regardless of his sexual orientation. Suddenly, a family member, with cold, hate-filled eyes and breath reeking of alcohol, stood up. He yelled at me to move away from my brother. I felt a painful, burning sensation across my cheek and I fell backward. I covered my face from the repeated strikes.

Why was this night different from all other nights?

Why was I struck? Why didn't anyone else stand up for my brother? Why was there silence? Why was there hatred? I was embarrassed. I was heartbroken. I was devastated.

I have always tried to respect my elders. How could I continue to honor this family member when he caused physical harm to me and emotional harm to everyone else sitting around the table. The bruises may fade but the emotional scars will never heal completely.

My eyes were opened for the first time. My conscience was awakened. I decided to dedicate my life to educate others about discrimination. I decided to pursue a career in medicine to help people cope with their emotional and behavioral disorders. This past summer I conducted research at the Cleveland Clinic Summer Internship Program, and I will be undertaking more research this coming summer at Case Western Reserve University. I never want another child to endure the pain that my brother and I experienced at that dreadful Seder.

My Passover Seders will now have additional significance. They will convey the message of respect, acceptance, tolerance, compassion, civility, sensitivity, and forgiveness. A love without name calling and without violence. A love for a gay son, brother, or grandson. Freedom to celebrate and embrace our differences.



Dahlia Moskowitz is a junior at Fuchs Mizrachi. She volunteers with Friendship Circle, captains the varsity soccer team, plays softball, and loves travel, with Israel a dream destination. She plans to attend medical school.



HAILEY NUDELMAN

12th Grade, Twinsburg High School

Seventh grade: I am 12 years old and am going through the tough age of transitioning from child to teenager. Seventh grade: it was the first time I was a victim of anti-Semitism. Who would think that at this age any child would have the capacity to say something so hateful because of one's religion, so hateful that the police had to step in? It was Yom Hashoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day, and my class had just finished watching a Holocaust remembrance video. I had tears streaming down my face, very close to letting out that pent up sob, but holding it back. After class as I walked to my locker, a boy I have known almost my whole life, a boy who lives on my street and rides bikes with me in the summer, said something I will never forget.

He looked me in the eye and told me that he would kill me, that if we lived in the 1940s, he would put me in a gas chamber and make sure I died a painful death. I stared at him with tears in my eyes and questioned if I heard him correctly. He keeps taunting me, but I hear none of it, I am too busy trying to hold myself together, feeling my heart shred into pieces. Finally, after what felt like years, a teacher stepped in. As he was taken to the principal and I was questioned, I vowed to myself to do whatever I can to prevent this from happening again to some other child.

In Twinsburg, Ohio, there is roughly a 0.4% Jewish population; for me, this means that the majority of people around me do not know much about the Jewish religion. Over the years, my vow to not let something like what I experienced happen to someone else seemed untouchable. I felt as though there was nothing I could do except educate the people around me, letting them know if they were saying or doing something offensive. I was not able to do anything on a larger scale until Icnex. Icnex is a group through Akiva, a Jewish Education Center of Cleveland, in which students learn about the history of Judaism, Israel, and more. I am in my second year of Icnex, the project stage, where the whole year is dedicated to using our knowledge to do something significant. I am part of the Anti-Defamation League, otherwise known as the ADL. In this group, I am learning to facilitate a workshop on dealing with anti-Semitism, not how to prevent it, but how to respond. I have been using my knowledge and skills from this group to help others around me, younger and older. Before I joined, my vow was to never let someone feel the hate of anti-Semitism again, but I realize it is not going away. To change the world, I need to work from the inside out.



Hailey Nudelman

Hailey Nudelman is a senior at Twinsburg High School. She is active in the Jewish organizations NFTY, BBYO, and Icnex. She is also in Girl Scouts and her school's environmental club. An avid reader, Hailey intends to study psychology and art history.

SCHUYLER RADIVOYEVITCH

11th Grade, Cleveland Heights High School

"Get out of the shower, I don't want to take a shower with a gay guy." My teammate spit out these words after a grueling three hour swim practice. While his comment wasn't directed at me, I felt the hate behind his ugly words. The bully and his victim had swum side by side for over 100 hours, yet he acted now like they were mortal enemies.

This absent-minded hate confused me, and I was temporarily dumbfounded. After he proceeded to berate his teammate, I spoke up and told him to just leave if he had a problem with it. I completely understood that this was just a temporary fix. I feared he would harass our teammate again and wondered how long this had been going on. In order to create a more permanent fix, I told our coach about the bully, and my team captains about the incident, so that we could work together to support the victim. This incident took place in the middle of the swim season, but it deeply affected everyone for the several weeks that remained. There seemed to be an undercurrent of distrust and suspicion, even after the bully was removed from the team. An undercurrent which could negatively impact next year's team.

I was a sophomore when this all happened and, though I did the best I could, I felt discouraged. I knew deep down that pivotal changes needed to happen. It occurred to me that this type of discrimination was not only a problem on the team, but more deeply rooted in our society and in our world.

My junior year, I got voted a team captain, and I now work hard every day to create a team culture devoid of discrimination. Everyone is welcome on the swim team. We actively engage students of other cultures, including exchange students with limited swimming skills. We are there to provide the support that each other needs to know that they are valued members of the team. Swimming is a team sport made up of a set of individuals who respect each other's differences. Without the bully on the team this year, we have become a social safe haven.

This past fall, in order to create a more permanent way to help people who are often targets of discrimination, I created a garden at a local therapeutic preschool for children with emotional issues. This garden might not stop the prejudice they may face, but it does allow them the opportunity to learn the joy of helping other living things.

Voices are tools that some people use to torment others for their uniqueness, yet I now know that they also hold the power to help people in uncomfortable situations. If I hadn't said anything to my coach, then the bully may have continued to harass my teammate for an unchangeable part of his identity. It is our job to stand up for those who cannot stand up for themselves.



Schuyler Radivoyevitch is a junior at Cleveland Heights High School. He is active on the swim team and Boy Scouts and was a student ambassador to the Taizé Monastery last summer. He plans to study economics, ideally at Ohio State University.



HANNAH SHUFFER

11th Grade, Orange High School

Sounds of pure happiness rise from the depths of his belly and caress my ears, he gleefully shakes his rattle toy as if applauding the orchestra on the CD, he wiggles so passionately that his wheelchair nearly falls apart. He is my older brother, Nathan. I love him very much. Nathan was born with a severe form of cerebral palsy, which means that he cannot walk, talk, or see. I see none of this. I only know the older brother who loves classical music and can sleep in nearly any situation.

Growing up, it took me a long time to understand that not everyone had a sibling with a disability. I would go to my friends' houses and wonder where they had their wheelchair lift. This assumption led me to believe that when walking around as a family, people's looks of antipathy were them looking at something else, not my brother. No one would ever give that look of revulsion to my brother, especially since they wouldn't want someone giving that look to their own loved one. Right? Then I grew up. I began to recognize that these looks were directed at Nathan. Grown adults would pretend not to see Nathan. How come people refused to see the loving, playful person that I saw?

It is inexpressibly hard to watch people treat my brother like he has no feelings, like he is lesser than, like he is not human. I soon began to realize that like most forms of discrimination, people's preconceived notions had blinded them from the truth.

In middle school, my friends and I would trek to a secluded room in the basement. There, we would play board games and Wii with the kids who had disabilities. After we started high school, we joined Project Support, a club that encourages students to hang out with students with disabilities. After hearing the offensive joke of, "Are you a special ed kid?" an upsetting amount of times, my friends and I decided to start a campaign that makes students aware that people with disabilities are just like everyone else. We are planning an awareness week with a school-wide video kickoff, a bulletin board where people can respond to #lookbeyond, and selling wristbands (with the proceeds going to local schools' special education programs). We want people to see the goofy, sassy, and fun people that we get to hang out with all the time.

I know that our campaign alone won't end all hate. But even if it only makes one person stop discriminating, then I consider that a success.

Bringing awareness to issues is not a foolproof method of eliminating hate, but it does educate people on things that they may not even realize are hurtful. I want a world where people don't just see my brother's disabilities and assume that that is all there is to him. I want people to dive into the ocean of his personality and discover the same infinite amount of beauty that I do.



Hannah Shuffer is a junior at Orange High School. She is active in track and soccer, and especially active in Sister to Sister, a female empowerment club, and Project Support, a mentoring group for students with developmental disabilities. She plans to attend medical school to use her talents to help people.



MARIA ZOU

12th Grade, Hudson High School

Although we were eight years apart, my sister and I have always had a close relationship. Growing up, I idolized her and imitated everything that she did, from watching “The Real Housewives” to cursing at my computer screen, all by the time I was ten. In 2008, I blindly supported my sister at the dinner table as she argued for Obama against my McCain-loyal dad, and I nodded fervently— and just as cluelessly— when my sister ranted about the systematic sexism and the impenetrable “glass ceiling” women faced. But despite all this, I never understood the true weight of these topics. I had my first taste of reality, however, in my sophomore year of high school.

That year, I auditioned to be an attorney for my high school’s Mock Trial team. When I not only became one of the two attorneys on the team, but also won the Best Attorney award, I was ecstatic and confident that I would once again become one of the leading attorneys on the team the following year.

However, one day after school, I overheard our coach’s conversation with the team captain while they were discussing attorney selections. I was shocked to hear that the coach was considering replacing me with an inexperienced new member “to see if he’d do better in competition as a white male.” I could hardly believe what I was hearing.

For the first time, I began to understand why my sister had so passionately complained about the lack of female partners in big law firms. I understood why she would always call my parents out when they made off-hand comments suggesting that her ambitions would be better suited for a man. My coach’s words had become a catalyst that morphed the metaphorical glass ceiling that my sister had so passionately described into something so much more concrete, something that I had previously been too naive to see. Suddenly, this was not about simply getting the attorney position on my mock trial team, but a wakeup call to all the societal hurdles that I would have to face in the future.

With this realization, I rushed forward with a renewed sense of empowerment. I organized a group of teammates to speak to administration about the sexism of our Mock Trial coach. I joined and helped lead our school’s Feminist Forum to raise awareness for the presence of sexism. I volunteered with my local Planned Parenthood in planning marches, rallies, and sit-ins in support of women’s health rights. Now, every time I speak out against gender inequality, my words are no longer emulations of something that my sister would say. Instead, they each represent a tiny drop of force comprised of my own ideas. And while my efforts now may only be a soft tap against that unforgiving barrier, I will not stop until those drops eventually grow into a wave that will crash its way through that massive glass ceiling.



Maria Zou is a senior at Hudson High School. She is passionate about chemistry and is active in organizing both the high school and middle school Science Olympiad. She is also concert master of her school orchestra and a member of Cleveland Youth Orchestra. She plans to study chemistry and political science, and also to attend medical school with the goal of joining Doctors Without Borders.



EMI CUMMINGS

10th Grade, Laurel High School

Growing up as a biracial, bilingual and multicultural female in Cleveland has been a complex experience for me. I have brown skin and tight curls like my African-American father; yet solely speak in Japanese with my Korean mother who was born and raised in Japan. I grew up accustomed to getting bewildered looks from strangers when I am with my mother, but none when I am with my father. Throughout the years, I have faced a fair share of confusion, surprise, and even racism when my peers learn that, despite my outer appearance, I am multicultural inside and feel at home speaking a foreign language.

While it is difficult to read the inscrutable countenance of strangers when they hear me speaking in Japanese with my mother, my peers and friends have asked me about my heritage and upbringing to better understand me. In many cases, their questions stem from curiosity and are respectfully asked. Some peers ask out of formality with no genuine interest and pay little attention when I explain my ethnic composition. Others think that I am speaking in Chinese or tell me jokingly that they thought I was Hawaiian. These encounters aren't racist, but rather innocent in nature. However, there was one experience where I was forced to directly confront racism at school.

The incident occurred in eighth grade when one of my classmates and I were casually teasing each other at lunch when she suddenly blurted out, "why would an African-American ever want to marry an Asian?" To my horror, the students at the table laughed nervously but did not denounce her for what she said. The statement took me by surprise and I was at a loss for words. Later, I was appalled by the fact that everyone sitting at the table remained completely unfazed by what I considered to be a personal insult. I was even more saddened that they failed to recognize how problematic and racist her statement was. It revealed to me that underneath those words was a veneer of countless racial biases held perhaps not only by that one particular classmate but others as well.

My goal is to increase the awareness of my peers at school of the existence of multiracial and multilingual families, with the hope that they will learn to accept people for their choices and be less judgmental of what they are unfamiliar with. While I have yet to implement changes, I have begun to take several small steps toward my goal. For example, I write about my bilingual and biracial experiences and make a conscious effort to listen to the thoughts and perspectives of everyone. I try to set a positive example by carrying myself as a young proud woman defined by her inner qualities and not by her physical appearance. I want to help build a society that is free of preconceived notions but instead embraces people for who they are.



Emi Cummings is a 10th grader at Laurel School. Emi loves musicals and has been playing piano for 9 years. She also runs track and cross country. She is passionate about food and access to healthy food, and hopes to create a business model to make healthy food choices readily accessible and affordable to all.



ANAYA HUNTER

10th Grade, Whitney Young High School

School isn't one of the easiest places to be yourself. When most people get to school they become a different person from whom they actually are. Not even because they want to, but because they feel they'll get judged or bullied if they don't fit in. I helped my friend overcome bullying.

From 3rd to 6th grade my best friend and I did everything together, from birthday parties to library visits. She was fun to be around and different, I thought; others didn't. My best friend was about 5'9 and dark skinned with short hair. She didn't wear designer clothes, so people wouldn't give her a chance. My most judgmental friend disliked my best friend for no exact reason. She didn't even attempt to get to know my best friend. My judgmental friend chose to pick on my best friend about her height and said inappropriate things about how she dresses; others followed. While at my best friend's house one day, I knew something was wrong. She finally told me that at times she feels so down and insecure to where she hates who she is. When I heard that, I said everything I could to let her know how amazing she was, not only as friend but a person. I felt awful. Even if she never spoke up for herself, I should've. That whole night, it was on my mind, I knew there was something I had to do. I either had to pick sides, or do something to make my judgmental friend know my best friend, just as I did. That's when I got my idea.

The next day I brought my idea to the principal and counselor's attention. They were all for it. When it was time for lunch I made my announcement for a "Lunchtime Mix-Up." Students had to sit with someone they didn't know or didn't usually sit with. It was mandatory and anyone who didn't participate had to eat last. I hoped the two would end up at a table together; they actually did, and I joined them as mediator. By the end of lunch they talked out their problems without yelling or arguing. They didn't become the closest of friends but my judgmental friend stopped bullying my best friend.

My principal was really proud that I decided to do this. I never let her know why I did it but I'm happy it turned out well. I was really happy because I did not want to have to choose sides. Not only did I fix the situation myself but I started something that benefited others. Not everyone wanted to participate and that was fine; they missed out. Since it was such a success, we decided to make every Monday's lunchtime a "Mix-Up Monday."



Anaya Hunter is a 10th grader at Whitney M. Young and is an avid reader, writer, and poet. Anaya plans to become a midwife and a motivational speaker.



SABRIYA ZAMAN

10th Grade, Solon High School

I am a woman; I am a person of color; I have a brother with special needs. These are three reasons why people treat me differently. I can unfortunately think of a number of times when an injustice was committed against myself, but more importantly against someone I love. Back when I lived in Pennsylvania, I can vividly remember a time when my best friend and I were at a birthday party. My younger brother with autism tagged along, and since my best friend and I were both familiar with kids with disabilities, we didn't think much of it. My heart ignited with rage as I heard kids murmur taunts as my brother bounced up the water slide. I was enraged and Lilly practically had to hold me back. Not long after, we were backing out of a gas station and someone shouted something to my mother. At the time, I was busy with my friend, but later I inquired what the man had said. My mom tried to be as nonchalant as possible while saying, "He said: 'Go home!'" Once again, anger consumed me. This is when I realized I was not a person who could let injustices go unheard.

My all-time favorite quote is by Don Ward, "If you're going to doubt something, doubt your limits." This is a saying that has propelled me through life. It is something I have to remind myself of every day. That day when the kids from my brother's class muttered about him, instead of shouting at them, I managed to compose myself. I said, "That's my brother. Do you have a problem with that?" Looking back, my fourth grade self probably could have been a tad nicer, but I had the right intention. I wanted to try to answer the kids' questions because it turned out they were just a bit afraid! I don't blame the kids at all, our curriculum and lifestyle doesn't teach everyone how to interact with different types of people. Now, if I can tell a child is apprehensive when seeing my brother, I calmly explain that he has autism and he is actually a sweetheart. When people actually get to know my brother, they find out that he is not just a stereotype.

I have joined clubs like Council of Exceptional Children (a club where the members go on outings with kids with special needs) and Speech and Debate (where I use my platform to educate students about racial profiling) to spread the message that people so desperately need to learn. These clubs help me shatter stereotypical thoughts which cause discrimination. I realize that some people don't have exposure or take the time to learn about others. That is exactly why it is the job of those who are aware of inequalities to inform those who don't know what's happening around them. Education is an integral part of becoming an inclusive society who will stand up for what is right no matter what.

Sabriya Zaman

Sabriya Zaman is a 10th grader at Solon High School, where she participates in speech and debate, Key Club, Mock Trial, and CEC. She is "shadowing" a city council member in search of summer internship opportunities—and hopes to travel the entire United States one day.



CARA FINNEGAN

9th Grade, Elyria Catholic High School

The Empowerment of Women

"Because you're a girl." This phrase brings back a plethora of memories of my childhood. My elementary years were filled with the pain of bullying and sexism. This began roughly at the age of nine. I had always tried to fit in with my classmates, but I was always different. I was taller than most of my classmates, and I was obese as well. I enjoyed sports; however, my classmates said that I should not play volleyball or basketball. They explained that "Fat girls can't play volleyball." These words broke my heart.

I was cast out by my fellow female classmates in elementary school. They told me that I was "too fat" to be in their group. I didn't understand why they socially banished me because I was overweight. I came home crying every single day, and I cannot remember a night when I did not cry myself to sleep. I vividly remember sleeping on a pillow that was stained with tears as I drifted off to sleep every night. I was sad and in distress when, one day, a few boys in my grade came up to me and asked me to play kickball with them. I gladly accepted their invitation and played with them, not worried about my gender, but worried about kicking the red, shiny ball over the fence. Some older boys approached me and said that I couldn't play because "I was a girl." At the time, I didn't understand why I was being treated like this. I didn't understand why my gender was a barrier between myself and my happiness.

What I have never understood about sexism is why it occurs. We are all human beings, and, though different, we are all the same. In the end, aren't we all just flesh and bone? Especially as females, and most importantly, as humans, aren't we supposed to empower each other? Rather than tearing each other down, we should find joy in our differences and accept them. Why must our society condone women tearing down other women?

This brings me to who I have become today. I have developed physically, mentally, and emotionally. These events in my life, though sad, have shaped me into the young woman that I am today. I have developed so much strength and confidence in myself. I lost weight not for society, but for myself, so I could be a better athlete. I try to empower other young people in the hopes of sparking a flame within them, too. Someday, I will make a difference in our world. Today, I will support others, in the hopes of making this world a more positive place. Maybe, someday, I can empower other women to not only love others but love themselves.



Cara Finnegan

Cara Finnegan is a 9th grader at Elyria Catholic. She is active in her community, baking for St. Elizabeth's homeless shelter in Lorain, and distributing food with the Salvation Army. She hopes to study medicine and to serve those with limited or no access to health care.

JONAH GILBERT

9th Grade, University School

"Strong people stand up for themselves, stronger people stand up for others." – Chris Gardner

Hate has permeated through America for many decades. I have come across several discriminatory actions in my life, but one, in particular, has resonated with me. In 8th grade, one of my close friends that I have known for almost my entire life was specifically targeted and threatened due to his religion by another student. I heard that the student who verbally attacked my friend had been saying offensive things all week, however I did not witness any. In English class, we had started reading MAUS, a book that details the events of the Holocaust. Multiple times after a Nazi killed a Jewish person he would chuckle and smile towards my other Jewish classmates. This behavior made me extremely uncomfortable.

I should have realized that something was bound to happen with this student. He had gone around school threatening students who were Jewish, and performing Hitler's famous salute a plethora of times. Given his behavior and the multiple rumored incidents involving this student, I knew I had to do something. I had never seen the salute or any other Nazi action performed in real life. However, after school one day, my friend and I were walking down the hall, when out of nowhere the student comes from behind and "attempts to see how tall I am." He does this by stretching his right arm out at a 45-degree angle with a straight hand towards my face—essentially performing Hitler's notorious salute. My friend stepped in front of me and told the student to go away. The student then aggressively told him that "he was going to burn like his people." This was extremely insulting, hurtful and inhumane.

It was clear the treatment that Solomon and I received was disgusting and wrong. Directly after the incident, my friend and I went to a faculty member that we trusted and informed them about the incident. We both went home and I told my parents about what happened. We discussed possible outcomes that would make me feel comfortable at school. The next morning, I discussed them with the director of the middle school. Ultimately, a decision was made and the student was removed from the school.

This event inspired me to always stand up for not only myself, but others as well. Since then, I have experienced other discriminatory acts and language. I have not hesitated to stand up and speak out whenever someone says something disrespectful, whether it's about race, religion, gender or sexuality. I step in and tell them to think about what they said and how the person they just offended and hurt would feel. Also by calling these people out, they may stop their demeaning tactics. I hope to continue spreading positivity, respect, and equality, while bettering myself as a person through standing up for others.

Jonah Gilbert

Jonah Gilbert is in grade 9 at University School, where he is active in sports journalism, basketball, and science. He dreams of working with ESPN, combining his passions.



RILEYANNA KARIC

9th Grade, Brecksville-Broadview Heights High School

Transgender discrimination in schools and how to fix it!

Imagine waking up every day and feeling gender dysphoria about your own body, to be so uncomfortable in your own skin that happiness is a foreign concept, and going to school is a whole new challenge because of discrimination and hate. This is what many of the thousands of kids who are transgender have to deal with. Being transgender myself, I have faced much discrimination. I have been taunted in person and on social media, I have had death threats, and even intolerance from teachers and parents.

Many schools do not have policies for transgender issues. This makes things frustrating not only for the students, but the administration. It took many months for my school to permit me to use the bathroom of my gender. I was told to use the clinic bathroom, which further reinforced the isolation and shame I felt. I have been called a molester and rapist many times, even by a close friend's mother. School administration also denied me from sharing a room with one of my close female friends on a school trip, who I would have felt safer with, and instead said I should share a room with a "trusted boy." In my Spanish class, a classmate said very loudly that he couldn't sit by me because his family "doesn't believe in gay people." When I tried to inform my teacher she stated that "Now is not the time," and insisted that I stop talking about the situation that even she had overheard. My school who was supposed to protect me told my mom that there was nothing they could do since the boy did not violate my rights, even though he humiliated me in front of the entire class.

One situation that really changed me as a person was after a school football game, a group of older boys from school followed me into the bathroom and started shaking and looking through the sliver of my stall door. I remember seeing an eye looking at me and feeling so exposed and violated. I tried to file a police report but there was nothing they could do. To this day, I get anxious walking into any public bathrooms.

Even though all these awful things transpired, it has shaped me into the person I am today. These experiences have given me the strength to speak up and inspired me to speak out in support for other LGBT students at my school and to make their lives easier, first in my school's Gay-Straight Alliance and in the future my community. Happiness is out there and everyone deserves the chance to be happy while being who they truly are. The hatred and violence against my community has to end, and I consider it my duty to finally stop the hate!

Rileyanna Karic

Rileyanna Karic is in 9th grade at Brecksville-Broadview Heights High School. She is an aspiring actress but also plans to attend vocational school for cosmetology, with a broader plan to turn her success into a way to give back to her LGBTQ+ and Serbian communities.



ALI HOLTZ

8th Grade, Chagrin Falls Middle School

How could you be part of a team when you receive a different locker room, a different coaching style, and face a different stigma than everyone else? I grew up isolated in a team sport because of my gender. Being a girl hockey player means being a strong female in a primarily male-dominated sport. It was difficult enough without the constant reminder that I was different. My early memories of the sport are marred by the scars of sexism inflicted upon me by my opponents. When I was only ten, I distinctly remember being called a “Bitch” after simply shoving a competitor. I was mortified and embarrassed as I had never been called this before. Instances like these taught me that playing aggressively was for “the guys,” but I grew accustomed to being singled out for my gender by my opponents and my team. My coaches often labeled me as “sensitive” and offered cushioned critiques filled with “good jobs” but no tools to improve my hockey. I was simply regarded as the “token girl” and was not appreciated for my talent and value as a teammate. I was limited to what my gender stereotype had set for me. While the boys were given an expansive locker room furnished with working bathrooms, I was required to change alone, in a cramped closet-like space without electricity. Throughout my boys-hockey career, I was singled out, pushed down, discriminated against, and left behind, showing that there is a drastic need for change in tone and acceptance in this male-monopolized sport.

During my 7-year hockey career, my mother has been the largest influence and encourager. She noticed the lack of support for the girls-hockey establishment and sprang into action. Beginning with my local hockey arena, she created encouraging gift bags and endorsements, making each girl feel included for a change. The movement began small but soon spread throughout Northeast Ohio, reaching many girls. She organized events celebrating our differences and brought our hockey heroes to us. My mom gave me the chance to carry the American flag during a Cleveland Monsters game and meet Olympic silver medalist Brienne McLaughlin, a woman’s hockey goalie. To this day, a change for the good has occurred throughout the media, advertising “Girls Hockey Weekend” praising our struggles and accomplishments. These experiences brought distant role models closer to home and encouraged girls to follow their dreams as professional hockey players. More frequently than not, women hockey players are not shown in the media, barely even getting a spread in USA Hockey’s own magazine. This dissociation with idols creates a lack of motivation and purpose for female hockey players. While the boys on my team could watch their role models almost every day in the National Hockey League, we girls were hardly represented in the media. But despite the many challenges facing girls-hockey, we still push on, for the love of the sport, and the promising improvement that we have made.

Alexandra Holtz

Ali Holtz is an 8th grader at Chagrin Falls Middle School. Ali has a passion for travel, math, music, and sports—especially hockey. She enjoys the art of learning and plans to take full advantage of every educational opportunity.



ELANA ROUSE

8th Grade, Rocky River Middle School

"Are you my BFF? Check yes or no." In the first grade, my best friend and I liked to pass silly notes to each other in our free time. I would often give them back to her with my answer, and fold up mine and leave them on my desk. They were usually harmless, having to do with us being "Best Friends Forever." One subject, however, that occasionally occurred in our messages was a fellow classmate.

We, along with most of our peers, didn't understand why he acted the way he did. We just thought he was "some weird kid." So, that's what we called him in our notes. This continued on for some time until, one day, my teacher read the crumpled-up papers on my desk. I specifically remember him pulling my friend out of the classroom at the end of the day, and being confused as to what it was for. After they came back in, he called me over and sat me down. Then he explained to me that the kid we were talking about in our notes had a disability.

I immediately felt the guilt of what I had done. I didn't think about my actions or opinions. I saw something, and I judged. This event made me understand that people have differences, and that's okay. I learned that nobody deserves to be judged or singled out because of who they are.

After that day, I made changes to the way I acted. The notes stopped, so did the mocking. I'd hear other kids talking about him, and tell them off. My way of thinking was completely different. When I saw anyone singled out, I was empathetic and understanding. I wanted to make sure that nobody ever felt less than others because of their circumstances.

This way of thinking has followed me throughout the years. I'll hear a friend or family member make a bigoted joke, and I don't laugh. When someone talks behind another's back, I tell them to stop. It can be difficult sometimes, especially when it's a friend who I don't want to make mad at me, but it's important to make sure that the discrimination stops.

A key part in making changes to the ideas people have today is by educating them as children about others' differences. Otherwise, any off-comments about a minority or words of hate that they hear about an oppressed group will contribute to them having similar feelings. If I hadn't been taught as a little kid about why what I did was wrong, I don't know if my feelings would be as strong today.

When I'm grown, I want to live in a world where people are no longer discriminated against because of the way they were born. I want to make sure my kids understand that being different is okay and that nobody should be treated differently for who they are. I hope that one day we, once and for all, stop the hate.



Elana Rouse is in grade 8 at Rocky River Middle School, where she is a member of Students Advocating for Equality (SAFE). She enjoys drawing, painting, and playing the violin, and looks forward to a career in the arts.



BOWEN ZHANG

8th Grade, Beachwood Middle School

Discrimination outlines the thin line of unjust prejudicial treatment of humanity. It was a word that I was not taught when I first moved to America. To me, it was just another word in the dictionary I had to learn. But soon, I realized that words are potent, and the diction a person chooses to use carries enormous power. Society says we have purged discrimination from Earth, but is that just a trick of deception?

After moving to America, I had to adjust to a new school, a new environment, and new people. One day in my new school, a girl asked me to help her with a computer. I tried my best to guide her mouse with the little English that I knew. But while I was engrossed in the computer, some boys stationed nearby started to laugh at us.

"Are you really getting help from an Asian who does not know English?" a boy asked, facing the girl. "She doesn't know English, so she doesn't know anything else either."

All of a sudden, I felt guilty for my actions. Why was there only a thin line between expectation and reality? I didn't understand most of the comments the boys had made, but I picked up enough words to feel lost and betrayed. Questions raced through my mind, soon replaced by my childish answers, debating the wisdom of telling a teacher. Of course, I kept these thoughts inside my head, helplessly prying it for the words my ESL teacher had taught me.

Mustering up my hidden courage, I muttered, "What do you mean?"

A scornful look appeared on his face, "Wow, I can't believe you can actually talk!"

My cheeks flourished with red rose buds and my frown furrowed deeper. But instead of going completely mad, I imagined him as a single feather, a feather I could easily send away with a swish of my wand.

I have found that people make discriminatory comments for the sole purpose of being defined as "cool" or "popular" by their peers. Without thinking, mean comments are stated frequently, right in front of our faces! But is it worth it for just a title of popularity? How did we enable society to change this title to a discriminatory concept? My experience has proven that words do stick with a person, either to support or destroy them. We should acknowledge the presence of discrimination and create plausible solutions to help other victims.

Today, I try to help others who are discriminated against because of their background. I strive to learn from my mistakes and try to stand up for myself and others. Next time, instead of blurting out a discriminatory comment, think before you speak and compliment someone. The world isn't a perfect place, but we can balance our situation and limit negative discrimination by creating positive compliments. I believe that the future is at stake, and if we don't change society into a kinder community, who knows what it may bring?

Bowen Zhang

Bowen Zhang is in grade 8 at Beachwood Middle School. Bowen participates in Science Olympiad and tennis and enjoys gardening, reading, and astronomy. Bowen hopes to travel and study the history of each place she visits.



MAGGIE CHEN

7th Grade, Memorial Middle School

"Hey. Are you doing cross country?"

Those were the first words I ever said to her. Sarah was the new student in my health class, and that was all I knew about her. Amidst the usual clamor inside of the locker room, she sat quietly on an empty bench in the corner. Her eyes flitted around with uncertainty, taking in the commotion. Wanting to get to know her, I approached her and started a conversation, and a few seconds later, I learned that I had a new teammate.

From that moment on, I would talk to Sarah every time I saw her after school. With each passing day, her timid demeanor would melt away a little to reveal her true personality. Soon, we became good friends, and I realized she was amiable and outgoing. I learned a lot about her, but whenever I inquired about her past, she became uncomfortable, and I left the topic alone.

One day, out of the blue, she confessed to what she had avoided saying all along. Her voice lost its usual lightheartedness, and she wouldn't meet my eyes. The reason she had transferred to my school this year was because she had been constantly tormented with threatening texts and rumors that made her old school unbearable. When she described some of the things they did to her, I was left speechless. Disgust couldn't even begin to describe what I felt. How could someone want another person to commit suicide, much less say it aloud? Did they not understand the severity of the consequences their words and actions had?

I went home that day upset, to say the least. I had never known anyone that was bullied to this extent, and whenever I tried to think of something I could do to alleviate Sarah's suffering, my mind went blank. It was my mother who suggested that by simply being her friend and looking out for her, no matter how insignificant that might seem, I was helping her tremendously.

It was evident she had been devastated by her experiences at her old school, and I didn't want her to ever have to go through it again. Although I couldn't go back in time and change what had happened in the past, it wasn't too late to prevent any bullying in the future. Whenever we hung out, I made sure that she was being treated with the respect she deserved.

Sarah no longer has to deal with bullying, but there are still 3.2 million other students that do. It's our job to look out for them and do what we can to protect victims in our community. And if we all take a stand—together—we can stop the hate.



Maggie Chen

Maggie Chen is in grade 7 at Memorial Middle School, participating in cross country, drama club, and debate. Maggie also loves to draw and play guitar, and she dreams of one day starting a chocolate company.

REBECCA LAWTON

7th Grade, Beachwood Middle School

While sitting on the playground on that autumn day in fourth grade, my eyes wandered through the skies. My best friend and I were on the bench talking about gymnastics. It was a warm day, and we were watching the other kids play around. We preferred just to sit out because Alyssa, my friend with special needs, wanted to play, and my best friend and I wanted some alone time. She was now trying to play with some other students that we introduced her to. They weren't as cordial. They were mean girls, though I didn't know it. They started tearing after her, chanting, "You're so stupid!" Then they laughed. The sound of their laughter at someone else's misfortune broke my heart. Immediately I rushed out onto the playground and started chasing and shouting at them. They caused Alyssa to burst into tears. Since she was attached to me, she gave me a big bear hug. The other girls were sent to the guidance counselor's office and were given a recess detention.

What can I learn from this? Should I have played the hero and rushed into the situation impulsively? These are the questions that keep going over and over in my mind when I think about that day. That day, I lost a few friends. Those were the ones that were chasing her. I chose to stay away from the people who were being mean, and I started hanging out with people who were kind. In my opinion, it's better to be the upstander. Until the bullies learned that lesson, I wasn't going to get myself involved in friendships that were based off of bitter acts.

Elie Wiesel was an activist who spoke up for peace. One of his most famous quotes is, "We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented". I applied this message on that day on the playground. I stood up for what I believed was right. While I may have lost some friends in the process, I stayed true to myself and to my real friends.

Today, I am the person at school that doesn't really have loads of friends like everybody else. I am a person that stays friends only with the people that don't talk badly about other people to their faces, or behind their backs. My best friend has since then moved away, but I have made other good friends, mostly outside of school. And to this day if I see someone being bullied, frightened, or insulted by someone else, I am quick to stand up for myself and for them; I encourage this among others. This is because I believe that everybody should work to get along with each other. I always try to be nice whenever I can... now all that's left to do is convince others to help me "stop the hate."

Rebecca Lawton

Rebecca Lawton is in grade 7 at Beachwood Middle School. She is an avid traveler to Israel and enjoys math, reading, and music. Rebecca plans to become a dentist.



JENNIFER WILLIAMS

7th Grade, Old Trail Elementary

When I was younger I always knew that I wanted to spread kindness, joy, and happiness, but since I was ignorant and unaware of the world around me, I was stuck and continued to live my sheltered life. However, after the past election I began to see what was happening in the world and the big impact it was making. Throughout these last two years, I have become more passionate, aware, and unsheltered. I have started to understand everything that I have seen on the news and how my generation is the future; we have to fight for the world's future.

I am terrified about the future of our world and how time is running out. Now I understand that every day what I do matters and every day I have a chance to stop hate in this world. Because if I don't, then this vicious cycle will continue. My brain has become consumed with thoughts of the racism, bigotry, violence, discrimination, and injustice in the world, and I can't be a fly on the wall anymore, so I am educating myself. I have discussions with my friend (who in her short life has already made such an impact) about injustice in the world and what we can do about it. I am now more inspired, and more passionate than ever.

As a result of this passion, my friend and I created a discussion group at our school called MADIC. MADIC stands for Making A Difference Inspiring Change. We discuss current events, participate in and create service projects, and focus on what we can do for the future of our generation. Because of this group, I am more open-minded to new ideas and realizations, and it has truly been an amazing learning experience. Now I have a focus for my passion where I can help people, educate others, and inspire them. So, every day I do my absolute best to spread kindness, because no matter how small your action is it counts.



Jennifer Williams is a 7th grader at Old Trail School. She participates in lacrosse and is an avid reader of dystopian fiction. She is an activist for civil and human rights and hopes to have a career as a human rights lawyer.



FLANNERY COSTELLO

6th Grade, Rocky River Middle School

It was a few weeks before the 2016 Presidential election. Tempers were rising and the angry words from debates hung in the air like thick, dark clouds of smoke. One of my closest friends, Anna*, and I were leaving school one day as she told me our friend Quinn was being excluded for her beliefs about the election. At first I didn't really understand what was going on; the girls who were hurting Quinn always seemed nice to me. But, intentionally leaving someone out is not nice. As we left school every day, Anna would tell me it happened again and again and again.

At lunch one day, as I found my seat with a few of my friends, Quinn chose to sit with us. Apparently, the girls who were being unkind to her saved all the seats at Quinn's usual table for people that didn't even exist. They refused to let her sit with them. Because of this, she walked with her head down and talked in a small voice. We welcomed Quinn at our table because even though we may not have had the same beliefs, she was still a nice person. As I continued to sit with Quinn at lunch, other people began to sit with us as well and, as a result, I made a ton of new friends. Simply including someone led me to meet so many nice people.

If this were to happen again in the future, instead of just including Quinn I would stand up for her. I might tell the mean girls to stop or to please include my friend. From this experience, I learned that people I thought I didn't have much in common with became my friends, and people I thought would be my friends turned out not to be very nice. I learned how to choose kind and made a whole lot of friends in the process.



Flannery Costello

Flannery Costello is a 6th grade student at Rocky River Middle School. Flannery is involved in dance and is a member of My Dance Studio's company. She plans on a career in teaching young children.

ISABELLA KOVACS

6th Grade, Rocky River Middle School

Would you ever have thought that someone would be teased about being shy? What do you think that would do to someone who is shy? There was a girl in my class who was teased about being shy. She was different because unlike all the other kids in our class she had a hard time talking to others openly. She would get nervous and start to stutter and then whoever was talking to her would laugh and point, which made others look her way and she would get embarrassed and hide in the corner. They also would tell her that she wasn't worth it. When she would ask them to stop they would laugh.

I didn't react at all at first. I didn't want the others to judge me the same way they judged her. About three months later people got really mean, like calling her the loner and shy-girl. I asked them to stop, but they said no and that she should stand up for herself. I told them that she did and they laughed. The bully classmates were still being mean behind the teacher's back. I didn't want them to keep making fun of her so I invited her to sit at lunch with me and my friends. She said sure. When she sat at my table I got to know her. She was really cool. I was hanging out with my friends one day and we were talking about skiing and I told them she skied for sport a lot. One of the other kids I was with asked if they could sit with us at lunch the next day and talk to her about skiing and what she was interested in. Eventually we had a lot of people sit at lunch with us. I learned that people can make a difference just by being a friend and listening to someone.

I recommend that everyone goes up to someone they don't know or that is sitting alone at least once and talk to them to see what their interests are and what they want to do when they grow up. Ask them if they have any brothers or sisters. You can get a lot of good friends by going up to new people. In the future I will go up to people and talk to them even if I don't know them very well. There is a club I'm in at school that has mix-it-up day. A lot of kids don't like the idea because we mix up the people and not everyone gets to sit with their friends. I noticed that the people that sit by themselves are having a lot of fun in mix-it-up day. I intend to help people in the future that are being bullied and discriminated against. I have made a vow to help and sit with anyone who is being discriminated against and bullied. I don't want anyone to be bullied or discriminated against because it lowers people's self-confidence.

Isabella Kovacs

Isabella Kovacs is in 6th grade at Rocky River Middle School, where she enjoys running, basketball, singing in the choirs, and playing drums and marimba. She is working on her black belt in karate, volunteers at the library and Rotary club, and is an avid reader. She plans a career in environmental and sustainable living.



SCOTT O'NEILL

6th Grade, Newton D. Baker School of Arts

I have a friend named Sam. He suffered from a birth injury, which led to him having his leg amputated. Sam does not like to use his prosthetic leg because it is too painful. So instead he uses his crutches all the time.

Kids in the neighborhood were always asking insensitive questions like "What happened to your leg? Were you born that way or did you do that to yourself? Do you always walk with those sticks?"

Kids often excluded him from activities most one-legged boys can't do without even giving him a chance. One day the kids were playing hopscotch after school and they didn't include him because they thought that since he only had one leg that he wouldn't be able to play the game. Hopscotch is actually one of Sam's favorite activities.

This made Sam feel small and insecure. He was left out of all the fun that the other boys were having.

People that didn't take the time to get to know him would never know how much he could actually achieve with only one leg. Since birth Sam has had to figure out different ways to do the things he enjoys. He just happens to be the best jump roper at his gym.

I feel like everyone should be given a chance to make friends. So I talked with the guys that were playing hopscotch and I convinced them to give him a chance to play. They realized that he was amazing at hopscotch and now every day he is included.

Now that he is playing more with the guys, they have gotten to know each other better and have become friends. They realized he is a nice friendly kid with a warm heart.

So you should never count someone out because they have a disability. There is more to them on the inside than on the outside.

Scott O'Neill, Jr.

Scott O'Neill, Jr., is a 6th grader at Newton D. Baker School of Arts. He is a member of Ambassadors of Compassion and is an active volunteer at his church, St. Malachi's. He aspires to continue serving the community someday as a Cleveland Firefighter.





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To every student who contributed
to this year's Stop the Hate® essay
contest, **thank you.**



ABOUT YOUTH SING OUT

VOICES UNITE FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Youth sing out for acceptance, inclusion and an end to violence

Dr. Feldman's 1st Period Class, Cleveland Heights High School

More than 1,200 students from 15 schools worked collaboratively within their classes to pen and perform songs for *Stop the Hate® Youth Sing Out*. *Youth Sing Out* is an arts-integrated learning initiative that asks students to share their thoughts on discrimination after visiting the Maltz Museum. The annual program sharpens written and oral language skills while fostering a deeper understanding of historic human rights events. Students compete to win anti-bias education grants for their schools. Congratulations to all of the participants, using your voices for good!

Youth Sing Out is presented in partnership with Roots of American Music and The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.



Mrs. Brown's 2nd Period Class, Shaw High School



2018 YOUTH SING OUT WINNERS

"Words on the Wall"

Dr. Feldman's 1st Period Class, Cleveland Heights High School
\$5,000 1ST PLACE HIGH SCHOOL

Words on the wall
They tell us "see something,
say something"
But when we do, the real question is
When are we going to
break the silence and do something?

We have so many ways to see
(spoken; media, tv, instagram)
But it seems that those
only help us watch
We post, we share, we snap,
we tweet
But nothing will change
til we stand to our feet

Hate is a sign of admiration
and the root of discrimination
But if we stand as one, one nation,
we change the world

*Don't need a bystander
We need an Upstander
Need courageous people (pause)
to change our world
Fake news defaces real news
Let's make some noise
Cause silence kills*

Bystanders we don't need none
We need an Upstander to get it done
When we see something wrong
That's when we act

We need an Upstander to get
change done

We lost our voices
the past still burns in our throats
Hate groups keep growing right in
our backyard
We should all be one

We're still throwing bodies
in ditches,
Parents still teaching
their babies to hate
We need a real life Superman
So stand up and make your mark

"Too Much Going On"

(Dedicated to Steve and Q)

Mrs. Brown's 2nd Period Class, Shaw High School
\$2,500 RUNNER-UP HIGH SCHOOL

Too much going on

Why the police tryna beat us?
They don't wanna really free us
And every time the police see us
Fire up them heaters.
It's going on right here in Cleveland
Ya don't really wanna believe it.
They shot the car 100 rounds
For no dang-gone reason
And they wonder why we demons?
Cause they always be scheming!

Too much going on

Back then we had the slave days
But nowadays is the same ways
Why we gotta deal with racism?
They tryna to beat us like we
racing them,
Like time we facing 'em
But we ain't never ever chasin them!
We don't deal with racism

Too much going on

Rest in peace our friend Steve
Rest in peace our friend Q
We don't know what to do
We gotta stop the violence though
No more souls gone
Too much going on
Too many going home

YOUTH SING OUT IS GENEROUSLY SUPPORTED BY



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2018 YOUTH SING OUT WINNERS

"Keep History Alive"

Tamara Blair's 7th Grade Class, Newton D. Baker School of Arts
\$5,000 TIE - 1ST PLACE MIDDLE SCHOOL
(\$2,500 to each school)

*Keep history alive
'Cuz the past is coming back
And we all must fight for the rights
that we deserve
Keep history alive
'Cuz the past is coming back
And we all must unite to protect the
freedoms we've earned*

*We see hate, again
Comin' back from the past
We see Nazis in the street
And people in white sheets
Speak up, Speak out*

*Before we get lost
'Cuz the price that we'll pay is too
much of a cost*

Chorus

*We have freedom of speech
And the right to be me
We have the right to kneel
And express how we feel
We need to be heard
To stop all the hurt
Before we taste defeat and hatred
repeats*

Chorus

*Get up, Get out
Get involved, VOTE!
Be the change you wanna see
We can make a difference you and me
We need love and peace
Respect and equality
There's strength in what's different
In our diversity*

Chorus

Let's Change!

"Why Hate?"

Tamara Blair's 6th Grade Class, Newton D. Baker School of Arts
\$5,000 TIE - 1ST PLACE MIDDLE SCHOOL
(\$2,500 to each school)

*Walk into the classroom
See the empty chairs
Wonderin' where my friends are
Feelin' scared
Looking everywhere
Hoping to find
A life that's better
More loving and kind*

*Why hate?
If hating can just hate you back
Why hurt?*

*If hurting can just hurt you back
Why live?
A life you wouldn't want yourself
Why do harm onto others*

*Goin' to the movies
With my best friend
Walk through the doors
Won't see each other 'til the end
Blacks go up, Whites to the front
Because of separation too scared to
confront*

Chorus

*Sitting 'round the table
My father says
He might be deported
I don't know what's next
Will I see him again?
Will the wall keep us apart?
My family is broken and it's breaking
my heart*

Chorus

Tamara Blair's 7th Grade Class, Newton D. Baker School of Arts



Tamara Blair's 6th Grade Class, Newton D. Baker School of Arts



2018 YOUTH SING OUT WINNERS

"Between Me & The Media"

Lisa Richards' 7th Grade Class, Harding Middle School
\$2,500 RUNNER-UP MIDDLE SCHOOL

Between Me & The Media

Don't come to school tomorrow
What do you mean?
I'm going to get my revenge.
Don't scare me,
what are you gonna do?
I'm bringing my father's gun
You're kidding right?
Please don't tell anybody
But I should say something
It's an online conversation

Between Me & The Media

I'm your friend, I want to help you
I am feeling, angry
I'm so tired of people making
Fun of me at school
I understand, know what you mean
you can't let it, get to you
I wanna make them feel like I do
But they aren't even worth it
It's an online conversation

Between Me & The Media

It's not your fault, It's not my fault
It's not your fault, It's not my fault

It's not your fault, It's not my fault
It's not your fault

Wanna meet, let's talk about it
Promise me you won't do anything
I promise. It's a dumb idea
I was just feeling mad about it
We can figure it out, together
You can always, trust me
I just needed, someone to talk to
I'm glad I said something
It's an online conversation

Between Me & The Media

**MetroHealth is proud
to support the
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**We salute the fantastic
students and families
who stand together
to Stop the Hate**



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