







STOPHATE AWARDS CEREMONY PRESENTED BY MALTZ MUSEUM

























WELCOME

Dear Friends,

You are about to meet 32 exceptional 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 17th anniversary of the *Stop the Hate*® program. Each year, we marvel at the thousands of students using the power of words 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.

Since the program launched, we have provided \$1.7 million in college scholarships and anti-bias education grants, and we have engaged over 50,000 students across 15 Northeast Ohio counties to stand up and speak out against hate.

The world needs 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.

No single person on Earth is exactly the same as another. We are all different. And together we celebrate those differences. To all the students who have participated in *Stop the Hate®*, this is only the beginning. Your voices can and will make an impact! Never stop fighting for what you believe. We can't wait to see what you'll do next!

Sincerely,

Tamar and Milton Maltz



ABOUT STOP THE HATE®

Stop the Hate® is the Maltz Museum's signature educational program, serving Northeast Ohio students and school communities by encouraging personal storytelling that builds bridges and creates empathy. Through this program, students gain awareness of hate-related issues, discrimination, bullying, etc., while being inspired to courageously create positive change when facing these challenges. The program celebrates Northeast Ohio students committed to creating a more accepting and inclusive society.

For this year's Youth Speak Out contest, students responded to the following prompt:

"Despite all the troubles of our world, in my heart I have never given up on the love in which I was brought up...In life, just as on the artist's palette, there is but one single colour that gives meaning to life and art-the colour of love" - Marc Chagall

Marc Chagall was a Jewish artist born in 1887 in Belarus, then part of the Russian Empire. Chagall lived in France before the start of World War II and the Nazi occupation. In 1941, he escaped to the U.S. where he settled in New York City and continued making art.

In this quote, Chagall describes placing his hope for the world in the love he has seen and experienced throughout his life. This could be the love of a family, the love we have for our friends or neighbors, and even the love we show to strangers through kindness and helping others.

Being an upstander-standing up or speaking out for someone experiencing injusticeis an act of love because it shows care for someone in pain. Artistic expression is also an act of upstanding love when used to expose injustice or to celebrate diversity. Chagall suggests that both art and life, no matter how beautiful, are meaningless without the presence of love.

STOP THE HATE® SCHOOLS & TEACHERS OF THE YEAR

STOP THE HATE SCHOOLS OF THE YEAR

Together with our partners at Lake Erie Ink, the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, and ROOTS of American Music, we offered free workshops in song, essay, and poetry writing to schools and educators. These workshops provided anti-bias and social-emotional learning tools while teaching history, literacy, and the arts to middle school and high school groups.

Congratulations to:

Almira PreK-8 Academy

Anton Grdina

Bolich Middle School

Brooklyn Elementary School Charles F Brush High School

Cleveland School of Science and Medicine

Collinwood High School East Tech High School Euclid Middle School

Garfield Heights High School Garfield Heights Middle School

Garfield Middle School Glenville High School Harding Middle School

Hathaway Brown

Horizon Science Academy Cleveland

High School

Hudson Middle School Incarnate Word Academy John Marshall School of Information

Technology

Kirtland High School

Langston Middle School

Mary M Bethune School

Max Hayes High School

Midview High School

Milkovich Middle School

Mound Stem School

North Ridgeville Academic Center

Oberlin High School

R.B. Chamberlin Middle School

Roberts Middle School

Shaw High School

St. Stanislaus School

Twinsburg High School

W.H. Kirk Middle School

Windham Junior/Senior High School

ANTI-BIAS COMMUNITY GRANTS:

Educators in Northeast Ohio dedicated to fostering inclusive learning environments were eligible to apply for one of three \$6,000 Stop the Hate Anti-Bias Community grants. These grants fund educational experiences that promote unity, understanding, and commitment to stopping hate among students and educators.

Congratulations to our three grantees:



Windham Junior/Senior High School



Incarnate Word Academy



Urban Community School

STOP THE HATE® SCHOOLS & TEACHERS OF THE YEAR

STOP THE HATE TEACHERS OF THE YEAR:

With nominations from our partners at Lake Erie Ink and ROOTS of American Music, the Maltz Museum named two recipients of the Stop the Hate Teacher of the Year award. Each honoree receives a \$1,000 cash prize in recognition of their dedication to their students and anti-bias education.

Congratulations to **Helena Toplak of Horizon Science Academy Cleveland High School and Matthew Thompson of Garfield Heights Middle School**.

"Helena is clearly beloved by the students, and it is for good reason. She was clear from the start about her expectations for the students doing the Stop the Hate workshop-their behavior and attitude toward us facilitators, behavior and attitude toward each other, the writing and content of their essays, all of it. She communicates explicitly and with kindness to every student. She encouraged her students at every step, and it was obvious that the students felt respected and safe in her classroom. When writing about injustice, there is a very real possibility that students will be writing about extremely emotional, sensitive experiences, and Helena fosters a caring, secure environment for students to be open, honest, and vulnerable when sharing their writing."

- Ellie Piszel, Lake Erie Ink Teaching Artist

"As a middle school Creative Writing educator, an artist and writer himself, Matthew brings maturity, vulnerability, and possibility to the teenagers. His room is filled with messages that I was able to point to during discussions that directly align with Stop the Hate objectives. His whole vibe, his openness, and dedication made it remarkably effortless for me as a teaching artist to directly connect the project to the deeper and more personal reasons behind each student's "why" in participating with the conversation and executing the song assignment."

- Mikey Silas, ROOTS of American Music Teaching Artist

FINALISTS



2025 Youth Speak Out Essay Finalists:

GRADE 12

Will Colafella, Hudson High School
Angela Freeman, St. Vincent-St. Mary High School
Mackenzie Lane Frost, Aurora High School
Manisha K. Girn, Aurora High School
Rania Rafiq, Aurora High School
Tori Smith, Magnificat High School
Lamaree DeShae White, Rhodes School of Environmental Studies

GRADE 11

Sana Hameed, North Royalton High School Amelia Kilway, Aurora High School Nandita Srikumar, Solon High School

GRADE 10

Jashmina Bista, Cleveland School of Science and Medicine Addison Captain, Shaker Heights High School

GRADE 9

Rebecca Chelbezan, Kenston High School Lyla Levin, Laurel School

GRADE 8

Abby Gourley, Beachwood Middle School **Sophia Tsuang,** Laurel School

GRADE 7

Asha R. Bauer, Hathaway Brown
Farai Amanda Chiunda, Beachwood Middle School

GRADE 6

Adeline Chalker, Harding Middle School **Mia Schilkowski,** Hudson Middle School

^{*}Please note, students have used fictitious names within their essays and poems to protect identities.

FINALISTS



2025 Youth Speak Out Poetry Finalists:

HIGH SCHOOL

Rebecca Ester, Glenville High School
Teresa Gladish, Twinsburg High School
Roman Hoyle-Smith, Oberlin High School
Cara Miller, Garfield Heights High School
Martha Louise Röseler, Kirtland High School
Nicholas Stalnaker, Oberlin High School

MIDDLE SCHOOL:

Zoey Bloom, North Ridgeville Academic Center Ella Bogniard, Hudson Middle School Elliot Gionfriddo, North Ridgeville Academic Center Madelyn Kimberly, North Ridgeville Academic Center Miina Tabata, Hudson Middle School Lam Tran, Hudson Middle School

2025 Youth Sing Out Songwriting Contest Winners:

Collinwood High School

First Place High School "Everyone is Equal"

Shaw High School

Runner-Up High School "Weak People with Power"

Milkovich Middle School

First Place Middle School "Stop the Violence"

Harding Middle School

Runner-Up Middle School "Listen to our Words"

Will Colafella

12th Grade, Hudson High School

My mom recently shared with me an article by New York Times Opinion Columnist David Brooks. The article, titled "The Character-Building Toolkit," talks about the difference in schools between "downloading content into a bunch of brains," and fostering "an inner transformation of the heart." My participation in the service-learning program at my high school has been what Brooks called "more about inspiration than information." Never did this come into play as much as it did during my visit to South Street Ministries in Akron.

South Street Ministries is a community gathering place and redirection services program for the formerly incarcerated. My classmate and I chose to reach out to this organization to gain a better understanding of the path out of prison and the humans behind the bars. We chose this group, specifically, due to the extremely harmful stigma that surrounds them. People in society neglect these individuals and exclude them from the gift of respect, empathy, and most importantly forgiveness, which I believe is the ultimate form of injustice. This leaves them feeling highly unseen within society. Among these men were pimps, drug dealers and thieves. The night we joined their company was dark and freezing, but their reception was surprisingly light and warm. We were not their typical guests, and they could have easily scoffed at our suburbanness.

Instead, we heard them talk candidly about their upbringings and ambitions. We served them food, prayed with them, and offered ourselves to them as people who looked only at the present moment rather than in the

past. We watched them support each other and escape loneliness in their circumstances. We were outside our comfort zone but evolved by comforting others. Brooks writes that you can approach the world with "eyes of judgment" or with "generous eyes." With generous eyes, "you'll see people doing the best they can." These men were doing the best they could, just like everyone in any situation is each and every day.

This experience taught me that I want to see the world with generous eyes, and stepping out of my comfort zone made it crystal clear why this matters. Additionally, this moment taught me that allowing others to be seen and understood is extremely valuable. When people such as the formerly incarcerated can experience these things, simply by one's giving of kindness and love, their self-esteem and overall motivation can drastically increase. This phenomenon doesn't only apply to my unique experiences, of course, and also to our communities and the whole entire world. Kindness and love simply have no limit in terms of their power to respond to injustice and to address the widespread exclusion within our society, something I saw extremely clearly during my time volunteering with formerly incarcerated individuals.

Will loves sports, especially teams from Pittsburgh, where he lived for five years. He plays both basketball and baseball and has sat courtside at an NBA game. His favorite subject is History, and he enjoys writing. Will can play the acoustic guitar and looks forward to learning to play more instruments in the future. He is an active volunteer at his church, local food pantries, and assisted living facilities. Will hopes to continue volunteering through service-learning programs in college. He would also like to continue playing music and hopes to work in a field where he can utilize his writing skills.



Angela Freeman

12th Grade, St. Vincent-St. Mary High School

The sirens and the light blinded my eyes and my mind as well. People passed, lights flashed, and so much noise. I heard voices. They were drowned out by all the commotion in my head. My mother and brother had been shot, and I, just nine years old, had to get help. Though I acted as quickly as I could, I lost them both that terrible night. Working through my grief changed me radically, but I also discovered an inner strength I didn't know I had. Overcoming this devastating obstacle made me realize there was nothing I couldn't triumph over.

If you can think of the "world's greatest mom," mine was the greatest. When my mom found out she was pregnant with me, she started crying. She did not know what to do with a baby at forty. My brother was about to graduate high school.

One night I awoke to darkness in my room and the sound of someone groaning as if in pain. I found my mother by the stairs leading to the attic. She had been shot-so much blood stained her chest black.

I called 911 and I told my Aunt to pick me up as my mom painfully instructed me. Meanwhile, I put clothes in a bookbag and put on my shoes. 911 services arrived. They put my mom on a stretcher, but I did not see her because the police pulled me aside to ask questions. At the police station, even more questions were asked. The room was so bright, full of fluorescent lights. My mind flooded with everything that had happened so fast. I was praying, hoping, and making deals with God. I promised that if she lived, I would do anything.

Then, the call came.

My mom died at the hospital, and my brother died upstairs at home. Tears flooded out. My aunt, who was also crying, embraced me.

It is heart-wrenching to see people my color and age with so much potential and purpose succumb to the criminal justice system. But what do you do when you have had no role models or second chances in life? This is where the criminal justice system needs to fix its disparities. I believe that the system needs to be reworked to fit in with minorities who have been beaten down for too long. Despite this painful night, I have decided that I will turn my trauma and pain into a passion to help others. I realized how brief life is and not take it for granted. From this, I learned to be resilient and take all the trauma to turn it into an impact to help the underrepresented and unheard. I plan to become a lawyer and speak up to help children and others like me who need to be advocated for, protected, and represented. They deserve a chance to be heard and seen as human. I intend to combat the criminal "injustice" system and serve those who have been silenced and oppressed.

Angela is an active member of many clubs at school, including marching band, where she plays trombone and show choir, where she sings alto. She also serves as President of the Spanish Club, Founder of the Crochet Club, and is involved in the Black Student Union. She enjoys spending time with her dogs, Orio and Lillie, as well as online shopping, watching TV, reading, doing DIY projects, and volunteering in her community. Angela participates in Junior Leadership Akron, the Mayor's Youth Leadership Council, tutoring, Hugs n Gloves, Cleaning Joy Park for Martin Luther King Day, and speaking for MLK Day and the Day of Peace for Chemnitz, Germany. Angela plans to major in Pre-Law and Psychology, minor in Spanish, and specialize in either child advocacy or criminal law to advocate for those who need it. She also hopes to have a family of her own to travel and spend time with.

Mackenzie Lane Frost

12th Grade, Aurora High School

I was six years old when I got into a "bus crash." Well, technically, school bus number 26 did not crash and the world did not stop for anyone else but me. However, three words an older kid spoke on the back of the moving vehicle left me emotionally paralyzed for years. Only three words and four syllables. I easily comprehended the first two words, "shut up," but my brain lingered on the last one. I had only heard that word in movies. Movies I loved about great African American heroes who had faced adversity and came out stronger. But I didn't feel strong.

I was silent for the rest of the bus ride and the rest of the walk home. I tried to smile. Who cares what some random kid says on the bus? But I cared. I cared so much that it consumed me entirely. When I got home I went straight upstairs to the sink. I stood on my step stool at six years old and spent sixteen minutes with a washcloth and soap. I tried to scrub the melanin off my skin, to make it white like my mothers, my neighbors, the kids on the bus. I eventually sat down; arms not white but red from irritation. I tried to cry as quietly as possible with my torn-up arms and self-image. That was the first time in my life I felt like I was different in a bad way.

This "crash" stunted me for years and yet the shame I felt kept me silent. The change in my attitude in school was immense. I didn't want to be loud anymore, I barely wanted to talk. I moved out of my hometown at age eight and tried to bury what happened in the soil of Ohio. The shame and trauma took years for me to even acknowledge. After burying it down so far, it felt like gravedigging when I began to talk about it. When I opened the bus accident wound, I also opened a conversation. I wasn't alone, very far from it.

Not only did this start a conversation in my family, but talking about my experience helped open doors in my school that had never been opened. In high school, I made it my mission to keep the conversation going. To prevent future "crashes," I became a co-president of my school's international club to promote understanding of other cultures and eliminate bigotry and ignorance; the same bigotry and ignorance that had caused my "crash" in the first place. I joined a "Stop the Hate" club at my school to share my experiences with those interested in understanding. I continue to spread my knowledge and turn the hate I have endured into learning experiences for others.

Mackenzie enjoys spending time with friends, reading, watching movies, and volunteering, especially packing food for local families. She loves listening to albums and started a club at school to discuss modern music. She is also active as secretary of the Student Council. Mackenzie wrote her first book at the age of five about a superhero who wore mismatched shoes. She hopes to continue writing in the future as a journalist for a newspaper or website. Mackenzie plans to travel the world, writing about and for marginalized groups.

Manisha K. Girn

12th Grade, Aurora High School

Growing up as an Indian in a predominantly white town, I always felt like an outsider. I was immersed in a world where my cultural identity was frequently met with misunderstanding and prejudice. Encountering hate can be a powerful experience, often arising from ignorance rather than malice. I have faced subtle and not-so-subtle criticisms about my skin color, my name, and my language within the community that raised me.

In 3rd grade I brought my favorite food to lunch one day—daal makhani. One of my classmates commented on the color of the dish with fake vomiting noises and occasionally plugged their nose regarding the smell of the food. The two friends I was sitting next to comforted me and told me not to listen to that classmate, but my 8-year-old self could not help but continuously think about those few comments. From that day until I was in high school, I did not even think about bringing Indian food to school because I was afraid of what people might say or think about it.

Although I hesitated to bring the food I loved for lunch, the words that my friends shared with me to help with the situation changed my life forever. Whenever I am in an occasional situation where discrimination or ignorance arises, my mind travels back to the beauty of the words that just a few 8-year-olds said to help a friend in a tough situation, and I am forever grateful for that.

One random day in 6th grade, I found myself looking around my math class and realized I was the only person who did not look like everyone else. Although I was not treated differently in that class, this observation was the catalyst for the realization that my cultural identity has been diluted by what I have grown up around all this time.

12 first days of school, countless substitute teacher roll calls, and thousands of introductions of myself - all of this totals the number of times I have needed to correct the pronunciation of my name and answer the follow-up questions about the origin of it as well. Instead of being upset at the ignorance, I try to find the beauty in teaching my culture and the history of my background. What once was shame quickly turned into pride in educating my friends and the people of my community about the beauty of Punjab, India.

Over the years, I have made new friends and found myself surrounded by people who are just like those two friends I sat with at lunch. They do not make me hide my identity, one that was lost for many years. They are intrigued by the depth of Punjabi culture, the food, the music, and the clothing. In these moments, I have realized that education—not confrontation—

is the most powerful weapon against hate.

Manisha has been playing golf for six years and has a handicap of 4.7. She loves cooking, a passion she attributes to her culture, family, and travels. Manisha has been to twenty different countries, in four continents, where she has been able to explore different cuisine. Her favorite subjects in school are AP Chemistry, AP Government, and AP Literature. She is also active as President of the National Honor Society and tutors in Spanish, math, and chemistry. Manisha plans to major in Industrial Engineering, then attend law school. She hopes to help engineers navigate the legal challenges of creating new systems and protecting their ideas.



Sana Hameed

11th Grade, North Royalton High School

"If drinking cow piss was an Olympic sport, it would be the only medal India would get."

Reading that comment snapped me awake quicker than my energy drink. The other comments were filled with similar hateful rhetoric: "Indians when you ask them to wear deodorant: angry emoji," and "Get these monkeys out of here." But with every fiber of my being, I knew that this hatred for Indians didn't stop at comments; it bled into real life too. Racism towards Indians is unique because it isn't in-your-face hatred. It's just a joke, just a little teasing, and you're supposed to learn how to take a joke. But what's the joke? My people's culture? The food we eat? Having an accent when speaking English, a second language for many? Racism towards Indians isn't just mocking parts of our identity--it turns us into the joke itself.

This dehumanization doesn't just live in the present--it lingers in my memories too. I only remember my past in moments. I remember when I played Family with my neighbor as a kid; I could only ever be the servant because I was dark-skinned. I remember when kids used to tell me that "Indians are only good at math" when I didn't do well on a reading test. I remember when just weeks ago, a group of boys sitting behind me in class started loudly playing songs where the singers had Indian accents and even started singing along themselves. All my life, I had ignored it. I swallowed a pill of hatred and let it become a part of me because I didn't think I had any other choice.

But this time, I was sick of pretending that I could just ignore their words, and I was sick of pretending their actions were "just a joke" to be shrugged off. You can't shrug off hatred. The opposite of hatred is love, and to love someone is to know them. Hatred, especially

through discrimination, is often rooted in ignorance and fear. When my younger cousins would tell me that even today, people still hate them for who they are, I knew something had to change. I knew I had to be the change I wanted to see. My friend and I created the South Asian Culture Club at our school to serve as a community for South Asians and an educational platform to teach others about our culture. At the first meeting, I was scared that nobody would show up beside a few friends. But the support was overwhelming: over 60 people showed up and joined our club! Many other South Asians from my school stepped forward to give their fun ideas of how to share their culture through education. By learning about others and their culture, people will be inspired to have an open mind and learn how their actions can impact others. The change might be slow and hard, but I believe it's possible.

Sana enjoys reading, crafting, playing tennis, and volunteering at her local cat shelter. At school, she is active in Varsity Tennis, Mock Trial, Model UN, Key Club, and the South Asian Culture Club, which she founded. As her favorite subjects are math, chemistry, and government, Sana plans to pursue a career in STEM, law, or a combination of the two. Her dream is to travel the world one day.

Amelia Kilway

11th Grade, Aurora High School

I remember childhood beach days, rushing into the cool ocean water in Maine, with my uncle, brother, father, and cousins. Soon, reaching the sand for my uncle would become a struggle, and the water would lose a visitor. The most important things, like love and kindness, are often swapped for exclusion and discrimination against others. I have become more aware of the amount of exclusion and loneliness that disabled children and adults face through my uncle's amputation. Although some may believe children are unaware of their actions when excluding others: I disagree. Discrimination in young children is a learned behavior of exclusion. I've grown more aware of their bleak greyness of isolation and their inability to play with others. On numerous occasions, children have excluded children with disabilities, thus negatively impacting their mental and emotional health.

To fight this battle, my robotics team and I came up with the idea of a sensory communication board. The sensory communication board would dictate a specific word and include an image of that word. This idea was inspired by a prompt that incorporates the foundations of collaboration and innovation. When I heard this prompt, fireworks exploded in my mind. This could be my opportunity to help those often overlooked. My team and I met with the mayor, the city project manager, and the city engineer about the placement of a sensory communication board. Through positive feedback shared within group meetings, we felt supported and excited to paint a picture of the future. With our design, disabilities would no longer be a barrier, everyone could play together, form more friendships, and end the divide among all children.

Our idea came to fruition the following year as the city leaders further developed the sensory communication board. I was amazed by how a small group can make a big difference. In addition, the school board implemented inclusive playground equipment which my robotics team encouraged and supported. The new addition has lit up so many children's faces. The longing and lonely expressions on students' faces are now transformed into happiness and love brought on by new friendships. Seeing my team's idea supported and encouraged by the city leaders motivated me to continue thinking outside the box when faced with struggles of exclusion. Through the emotional transformation of young disabled children

and the physical transformations of playgrounds, I promised myself to continue to think about inclusivity and support everyone with kindness and love. The integration of the inclusive playground at my school has allowed me to see firsthand the joy and excitement the children experience every day. Even though this is a great

advocating for those who cannot.

Amelia has played the violin since the age of five. She is very committed to her instrument and says it allows her to express difficult emotions through beautiful pieces of music. English and math are her favorite subjects in school, where she is also active in orchestra, track, and cross country. She enjoys running and spends her free time reading, crocheting, and going on walks with her dog, Theo. Amelia plans to go to college, continuing both her athletic and musical careers. She hopes to travel to Greece, walk the El Camino in Spain, and have a small cottage on the coast of Maine one day.

Rania Rafiq

12th Grade, Aurora High School

One 18-hour plane ride and two drives later, my 12-year-old self was halfway across the world. From Bangladesh- a country where my life had taken its first breath and steps- to somewhere unfamiliar- Ohio. Once here, I felt isolated, unsure of how to fit in or express my identity in a place where few understood or even knew about where I had come from. This feeling of being out of place began even before we reached Aurora. After landing in the U.S., my family was pulled aside for "extra screening" at the airport. We were ushered into a small, windowless room, where an officer shuffled through our passports and asked questions that felt more like accusations: "What is your purpose here? Why are you traveling as a family? What's in your bags?" My parents answered calmly, their voices steady despite the fear I could feel radiating off them. I sat on a plastic chair, too young to understand the concept of bias but old enough to know we were being treated differently. Clutching my backpack, previously violently rummaged through, I watched the officer's hand hover over our luggage as if a bomb might appear out of thin air. We were eventually released, but as we walked out, my father's hands trembled holding mine, and my mother murmured, "Na amader desh, na amader manush." (Not our country, not our people.) I didn't fully understand then, but I knew enough to realize that we were being treated differently because we were Muslim and brown. The incident left an imprint, an early understanding that my family's identity, my identity, was going to be a target of lifelong bias and suspicion.

Over time, the moments of prejudice I feared multiplied- from being called "basically Indian" when I shared my heritage to hearing slurs I hadn't known existed until they pierced me. These experiences, painful as they were, became a turning point. They fueled my desire to create spaces where differences were celebrated rather than

ridiculed. I joined the AHS International Club during my freshman year and became its co-president my sophomore year, helping organize events showcasing the beauty of cultural diversity. We hosted Fulbright scholars from across the globe and welcomed exchange students. Outside of school, I got involved with BANEO, a local Bangladeshi organization that runs cultural events and fundraisers. Whether helping set up a community picnic or organizing a fundraiser, I found pride in keeping my roots alive and sharing them with others of the same background. As I grew and found my community at my school, explaining why I ate with my hands and didn't celebrate Christmas became a moment of pride rather than shame. Kindness doesn't always have to be grand. Sometimes it's as simple as inviting someone to a cultural celebration or listening to their story without judgment. These small acts of love and understanding taught me that even in the face of hate or bias, we have the power to build bridges instead of walls.

Rania knows many languages and dialects. At school, she is an officer in three clubs: National Honor Society, Science Olympiad, and the International Club. She is interested in interior design, architecture, science, and math. Rania loves listening to music, cooking, hanging out with friends, her cats, and studying at libraries and cafes. This fall, Rania will attend The Ohio State University where she will focus on either Biomedical Engineering or Architectural Engineering. Whether she becomes a researcher or an architect, she hopes to be successful and plans to establish an international outreach relief program in her home country, Bangladesh.

Tori Smith

12th Grade, Magnificat High School

The first time I read the document, my heart sank. The Cleveland Diocese released a three-page document to address the "scandal" and "confusion" that LGBTQ students brought to Catholic schools. Despite scattered words of "love" and "acceptance," the message was clear: my identity was unwelcome.

As I walked through the halls, these words stuck to my skin like a leech, sucking every last drop of pride and confidence I had in myself. I was paranoid by the thought of my peers and teachers labeling me in the same way as the Diocese. These regulations were supposed to ensure "safety" in the classroom, but they only alienated students on the sole basis of prejudice. Being a lesbian in a Catholic school, I thought I had perfected my tightrope act, balancing between belonging and self-acceptance—but this document felt like a gust of wind, threatening to throw me to my fate. But I couldn't fall, and I knew I couldn't be silent.

Working with another student, I centered my junior year "Agape" project around highlighting high-achieving queer women in Cleveland. The objective of the "Agape" project was to address an issue I was passionate about, and my immediate response was to work toward breaking the stigma surrounding LGBTQ women at my all-girls school. I interviewed local politicians, entrepreneurs, and activists while collaborating with Cleveland's LGBTQ Center for resources, sharing their stories with my peers to challenge stereotypes and elicit understanding. After presenting my project, these interviews started a conversation, encouraging some students and teachers to reflect on their biases and express their support for the LGBTQ community. Although the guidelines remain in place today, I am proud to have spoken up against injustice to initiate open discussion and forward movement. This experience taught me that love and kindness can dissolve hate; when we empathize with others and honor the values that shape us, we create a world where respect rises above differences.

After my presentation, I felt empowered—this was my first time dipping my toes in activism, and I couldn't get enough. Looking for ways to get involved, I traveled to a social justice conference in Washington D.C. so I could learn new ways to advocate for myself and others. While attending workshops on environmental, LGBTQ, racial, and immigration justice, I found the community I longed to be a part of: a group of selfless individuals working for justice.

Since the conference, I've looked for little ways to spread love in my community. From donating to a local women's shelter to starting a computer science club for girls in tech, I take my advocacy strategies and compassionate mindset with me everywhere I go. I spread love because I make a point to care—a crucial task in a time when indifference runs rampant. In the future, I want to use kindness and love to continue inspiring collective action, because the future of our world depends on strong communities who care for one another.

Tori is passionate about volunteering and advocacy, much of which she does through her school's campus ministry. As a lover of math and French, Tori is president of her school's French club and the founder of Girls Who Code, a club where she can expand her coding knowledge and share her love of computer science and social justice with others. Tori enjoys sewing, quilting with her grandma, cooking, spending time with friends, traveling, and dancing, as she has been a competitive dancer for nearly seven years. She is currently working on an independent study in data science to analyze food insecurity trends in the United States. In the future, Tori plans to earn a degree in Data Science and Behavioral Neuroscience, continue

her advocacy work, and use technology to support

community needs and promote equity.

Nandita Srikumar

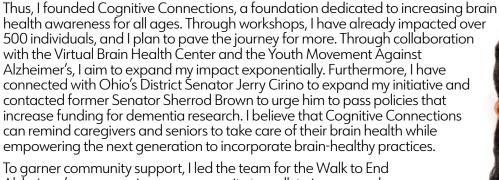
11th Grade, Solon High School

"Help, help me, please! I need someone to help me!" These were the shrill, repeated cries of a dementia patient that I witnessed at my local medical center during my volunteer shift. The pleas never stopped despite the patient receiving constant attention. However, those endless, repetitive requests had worn the nurse down leading to frustration. Soon I witnessed the nurse's face, which was once bright and warm, wash over with annoyance and unintentional hatred, as the nurse slowly began to ignore the patient. Second by second, minute by minute, I could see the dementia patient being more and more excluded.

At that moment, I felt a wave of emotions crash through me: empathy for the caregivers, sympathy for the patient, and a sense of resonance for the 7 million dementia patients and their caregivers in the United States. I knew something had to be done. Could I find a solution to aid both the patient and the caregiver?

I began to research the costly toll that impacts both the patient and the caregiver. I realized that while caregivers make every effort to help their loved ones, the simple, yet profound, fact that dementia has no cure leads to caregivers feeling more and more hopeless. This ongoing cycle leads to unintentional hatred by the caregivers, causing social isolation of the patient.

Realizing the gravity of this issue and the fact that the best cure to prevent dementia is preserving one's brain health, I knew I had to go one step further. While I couldn't hit the reverse button for the patient's life, I could pave a journey for the next generation: a journey against dementia, a journey against unintentional hatred, and a journey for brain health inclusivity.



Alzheimer's, encouraging my community to walk to increase advocacy and care for dementia. Through this, I not only raised funds but also increased awareness within my community.

Those cries, screams, and desperate calls for help still ring in my ear today. It was that unforgettable moment that started my journey of working towards a society with brain health awareness for all, and it's that moment that will drive me forever. Step by step, action by action, we can work together to stop the hate towards dementia.

Nandita has been involved in the Future Problem Solvers Club since 7th grade, where she tackles futuristic challenges, both regional and international, and comes up with innovative solutions. She volunteers at a local hospice and is active in both Speech & Debate and Congressional Debate, where she debates various pieces of legislations weekly. She also practices Bharatanatyam, an Indian classical dance. She is the founder and president of Cognitive Connections, a brain health awareness initiative for all age groups. Nandita plans to continue studying the complexities of the brain, contribute to the movement against neurodegenerative diseases, and make an impact in this field through the intersection of research

and brain health advocacy.

Lamaree DeShae White

12th Grade, Rhodes School of Environmental Studies

I never knew how much simply being present could impact someone's soul and bring people together for a lifetime. Now I know.

Throughout preschool to middle school, I witnessed and fell victim to endless acts of bias and exclusion. I've always wanted people to know they're cared for, seen, and loved. I began to really understand this around 2012, when I met my first ever friend. We spent our entire childhood together and throughout that time I watched him consistently fall victim to endless acts of bullying and exclusion due to poverty.

I saw how much and how quickly bullying can destroy someone's confidence. Students would be laughed at and have to pretend as if they couldn't hear it. Watching my peers be bullied and/or excluded due to conditions they couldn't control, like having to live in houses that weren't necessarily very visually appealing to some, having to wear clothes/shoes that were indicators of poverty, and coming to school with hairstyles that others wouldn't have worn. Poverty determined how we were treated! Many of my friends and classmates were African American, so the feeling of "less than" was constant, but to hear it from those like us can leave one with little hope or joy for living. Living without hope is an emptiness that is unexplainable.

My friend was being picked on for things completely out of his control and I felt as if I could see into his soul and feel everything he felt. The internal damage was unbearable. I could virtually see the words of hate that were thrown at him seep into his soul and destroy his confidence. I felt so passionately for him as a friend and about my beliefs on bias and exclusion that I knew I had to do something so that he would know that he was cared for and seen and that there was more to life than money and material possessions.

It became clear that the best course of action I could take to accomplish this would be by simply always being his friend so that he didn't feel alone. So, throughout our time of knowing each other, I maintained being his friend. Someone once told me, "When I'm feeling down, I just want someone to listen". The power of listening. Being there. Not just him, those like him in my school, my neighborhood, my family.

I became a Social-Emotional Learning team member in my high school, so I could spread this experience and give peace to those who need it. I created and presented workshops to classes throughout my school, helped organize school-wide activities and decorate the halls with positivity. Now I know the power of change. The power of effort. I see it in the faces of the underclassmen. This will continue in college and eventually in law school when I help those who don't have a voice. I found my voice so I can speak for those who haven't found theirs.

Lamaree enjoys traveling, going to basketball games, and spending time with friends and family. At school, she is active in Civics 2.0 and Reading Buddies, a volunteer program that helps strengthen children's literacy. After college, Lamaree plans to attend law school and become a criminal lawyer. Her hope is to advocate for others, bring justice to the Black community, provide innocent people with the help they need, and fight for causes that are bigger than herself.

Jashmina Bista

10th Grade, Cleveland School of Science and Medicine

When I was little, I loved helping my big sister make a Nepali dish called chatpate. I'd chop the vegetables, prepare the spices, and boil the potatoes, excited for the smell of roasted cumin and mustard seeds filling the house. The best part was always eating it with my family, savoring the mix of spicy, sour, and crunchy flavors. One day, I decided to bring some to school to share with my classmates, thinking it would be a cool way to show them my culture.

But it didn't go as I hoped. Some classmates made faces and laughed, saying, "Ew, what's that?" and turning up their noses. I froze, feeling ashamed and confused. I didn't know how to explain that this food, part of my identity, was something I cherished. Instead, I felt like something normal and comforting to me was suddenly strange to them. That moment stuck with me, making me feel like I had to hide the parts of myself that were different.

I started to believe that being different was something to hide. I asked my parents to pack me "normal" American food like Lunchables and PB&J sandwiches, hoping it would help me fit in. For years, I suppressed my pride in my culture, feeling like it didn't belong in a place focused on being the same. I even questioned my heritage, thinking I had to erase parts of it to be accepted.

But as I got older, I realized how wrong I was. My culture, food, and background made me unique and strong. I didn't want anyone to feel the way I did, ashamed of their heritage. Last year, during Asian History Month, I decided to turn that painful experience into something positive.



Addison Captain

10th Grade, Shaker Heights High School

The Impact of Colorism and the Power of Kindness

Growing up, I often felt the sting of colorism, both subtle and overt. As a dark-skinned girl, I experienced moments where my skin tone was a source of ridicule. Peers during Black History Month would often use a whipping sound effect to whip darker students throughout the halls. Some "friends" even advised me to avoid the sun or use cold showers to prevent my skin from getting darker, as if my natural complexion was something to be ashamed of. These experiences often left me questioning whether to hate back or combat the hate with love. Colorism, rooted in the remnants of systemic racism, not only perpetuates division but also erodes self-esteem and creates barriers to kindness and acceptance, which I stand for. As a youth at my mainly white school, I experienced racism from those different from me in the 4th-grade halls. When I moved to a more inclusive school, I never thought my eyes would open to a type of hatred from my own culture.

However, a single act of kindness can pierce through the shadows of hate. I remember a moment when a fair skin cashier took the time to affirm me She said, "Look at Mrs. Chocolata, so beautiful," as she pointed out my summer tan of chocolate. Her words weren't elaborate, but they were sincere. That small gesture made a world of difference. It reminded me that my worth isn't dictated by others' biases and that kindness has the power to heal. I also learned that words have a lot of power.

This experience taught me that love and kindness are not just responses to hate—they are shields. They have the ability to create a buffer against negativity and provide the strength needed to stand tall in the face of adversity, and to love more and hate less.

I now strive to use acts of love and kindness to make a positive impact on my community and the world. By mentoring younger girls who look like me as well as working on projects with my fellow school scholars, I have a support group to help on the journey of spreading love and not hate.

In a world often divided by hate, love and kindness are powerful forces. They remind us of our shared humanity and the power we hold to create a better, more equitable future. By choosing kindness, we can heal wounds, foster connections, and ensure that no one feels diminished by something like the color of their skin.

Addison is very outgoing. In 2017, she was the primary division winner of the Statewide Martin Luther King Oratorical Contest, where she had the opportunity to meet Martin Luther King III. She is currently a member of the Shaker Heights Minority Achievement Committee as well as Delta G.E.M. Addison was also selected to participate in the League of Women Voters Shaker Heights Legacy Fellowship Program. She loves vegan cuisine, traveling, and mentoring younger students. In elementary school, she started her own online backpack company.

Rebecca Chelbezan

9th Grade, Kenston High School

No one is a fan of being called names. No one is a fan of being laughed at. No one is a fan of crying at school. High self-esteem and confidence are important traits to have as a teenager, or any age for that matter. As soon as those traits disappear, your world feels like it plunges into "darkness."

Injustice and exclusion are things that should never happen, yet they often do. Shielding yourself or others from this is only through using the shield of love and kindness. It's never good to be a bystander; there's always something that can be done. Being friendless is tough, which usually happens if peers deem you weird or that you don't "fit in with the crowd."

When I saw a student at our school rushing to the bathroom with tears in her eyes, I knew something had happened. As I walked into the bathroom, I heard her sobs and wondered what could have happened to make her sound so anguished. I sat down on the floor next to her and asked her if she wanted to talk about it. At first, she tried to stop crying, but then after a while, she started talking.

At the moment, she wasn't getting along with her siblings. A couple of family members she was close to died, and some were on their deathbed. On top of that, as people didn't realize what she was going through, she was bullied for acting sad, and people were telling her they wished she would move to a different school. I lent my shoulder for her to cry on, knowing that what she needed more than anything was to have a real and honest conversation with someone. We talked for some time, and when she pulled herself together, she thanked me and asked if she could talk to me again the next day. I responded that of course she could.

Her spirits were considerably higher now that she had a new friend. I was greeted with a smile each time I saw her. Sure, there were some rough patches and obstacles she had to overcome in her life, but she had someone to turn to, and someone to rely on. The bullying subsided and we have been best

friends for 8 years now.

As cliché as it is, the quote "in the midst of darkness, light persists" is spot on. In the midst of her dark moments, I helped shine a path for her. She told me the difference I made in her life, as she now had a newfound friend who stood up for her to bullies. I learned that you cannot fight darkness with darkness. Add light and love, and it will shield you from the darkness and haters. I finally understood the quote by Edith Wharton, "There are two ways of spreading light: to be the candle or the mirror that reflects it." I became the candle, and she became the mirror.

Rebecca is bilingual, plays soccer and tennis, and is active in planning and fundraising for her school's student council. She has played piano since the age of four and sings weekly with her youth group worship team. She enjoys reading, problem-solving, and would love to visit Naples, Florida and Romania. In the future, Rebecca plans to become a pediatrician and hopes to open her own clinic where she can serve the community.

Lyla Levin

9th Grade, Laurel School

The world can change in an instant. Moments flash and suddenly nothing's the same. My grandparents have shared stories of escapes from the Holocaust, and draft numbers for the Vietnam War. My parents can share their exact locations on the morning of 9/11. I will be able to share my experience on October 7, 2023, the deadliest day for Jews since the Holocaust, when over 1,200 Israelis were killed and 254 people were taken hostage at the hands of terrorists. The lives of those dancing to songs of peace amidst a field of smiles were suddenly cut short, as peace instantly turned to terror. The echoes of screams and remnants of bullets remain in the now blood-soaked site of the Nova Festival.

The sound of the Israeli sirens sparked a panic that quickly spread throughout the world that fateful morning. For me, the panic manifested as I entered my parents' bedroom and saw the Breaking News report. Pale-faced, my mother informed me of the attacks, and we, like many Jews throughout the diaspora, waited for WhatsApp messages to come from our family and friends in Israel.

Recently, a girl at my school admitted she was unaware that antisemitism still existed. Truthfully, until October 7, my personal antisemitism radar — as an observant Jew who attended religious day school for 10 years — was similar to hers: I was unaware. However, this awful terrorism opened my eyes, and the nightmares have haunted me since. In the following weeks, I felt the inescapable weight of the growing number of those declared missing or dead. All I could think about were kids just like me living in complete fear. I watched everyone around me cry for the relatives and friends lost or serving on the front lines, and I felt useless and restless.

How could I, a girl from Cleveland, make a difference? The answer came November 13, as we drove to D.C. to attend the "March for Israel." I walked through the city streets wrapped in my Israeli flag joining over 290,000 people standing against

hate. The term Jewish Community came alive as I walked hand in hand with my two best friends, one of whom is Israeli. The love and support were palpable as we marched on the National Mall, spreading not only our solidarity with Israel and Jews worldwide, but embodying the Israeli national anthem, "Hatikvah," translating to "The Hope." As tears streamed down my face, I mourned for all those lost, all those uprooted, and all those still captive in darkness. But then I listened to the 290,000-member ensemble crying out the words, "Our hope is not yet lost/The hope that is two thousand years old". At that moment, I felt the D.C. sun shining on us; its rays of hope illuminating a world free from hate, and I knew we wouldn't give up, but rather continue fighting, educating, and one day emulate the famous words from the Nova Music Festival, "We will dance again."

Lyla loves musical theatre. She has taken voice and piano lessons and participated in numerous productions across Cleveland. She also plays volleyball and volunteers at the Friendship Circle. She participates in Testimony Theatre, a teen program that interviews Holocaust survivors and performs their stories in short plays. Lyla enjoys traveling, summer camp, and spending time with her family. Wanting to bring people together and find solutions, Lyla plans to study International Relations, and hopes to one day work in the State Department, specifically in Foreign Policy.



Abby Gourley

8th Grade, Beachwood Middle School

Perspective is a funny thing. It's not just how you see others, but also how you see yourself. Your perspective grows just as if a flower may blossom from what was once a seed. Slowly but surely, your petals get picked away until it's just the stem, center, core. When my mom and I were walking out of the mall one day, I noticed a bunch of older men shouting at a group of girls. While I didn't understand what they were saying, the tone of their voices sounded threatening. My mom's grip tightened against my hand and her pace increased rapidly. I struggled to keep up, for her legs seemed to have grown since moments before. I began to look back at the men, but she pulled me abruptly and told me to keep my eyes forward. As I've grown and reflected on what happened, I've realized they were catcalling, a type of verbal harassment. I was unsettled by the idea that men were making comments about a stranger's appearance. Pointing out imperfections like picking petals off a flower. The funny thing was, as I drove away from the mall I noticed the girls again. The difference was this time they were laughing together. Just minutes before they were staring at their feet avoiding eye contact with the men. What was once a terrible experience filled with levels of embarrassment morphed into what seemed to be a place for them to express themselves. Just being there for each other provided a safe space and support.

Years later I still think about that circumstance as well as similar ones all over the world. Women every day are harassed because they don't fit the unrealistic beauty standards set in TV shows, magazines, and social media. A study done in 2022 titled "Instagram Use and Body Dissatisfaction" showed that even Instagram idealizes body image and causes particularly young women to undergo lower levels of body satisfaction (Pedalino). It is this image of so-called perfection that indicates who women should be, not who they are. What happened to those girls may not seem like a big deal, but it could have impacted their self-esteem and caused deep insecurities.

Feeling small and hurt in these situations is extremely preventable. We cannot control what others say, but we can change how we view ourselves. Creating an environment we can turn to is the first step. Global Fund for Women is a nonprofit organization that aims to advance gender equality and advocacy for Women's rights. Places like this are founded because of these types of scenarios. It is hard to live in a world where body image and appearance are thought to be more important than everything else. Still, we must stick together and advocate not just for ourselves but for future generations as well. We will take what was once broken petals and mend them with the love of our community.

Abby has been a figure skater since she was four. She participates in many activities, both at school and in her community, including Model UN, club volleyball, snowboarding, skateboarding, theater, and figure skating. When Abby gets older, she plans to become an orthodontist to help people gain greater confidence in their smiles.

Sophia Tsuang

8th Grade, Laurel School

Cold leather bus seats. Breathing through scratchy masks. "How do you say your last name?" She asks me the question I've heard too many times before, making a pit grow in my stomach. "Say it just one more time." I think. I turn around in my seat and answer her. But she doesn't stop there; she spends the entire bus ride trying to pronounce my last name as if it is a game. Each wrong syllable that falls out of her mouth awaits my correction. Each time she mispronounces my last name it is like a heavy lead weight pulling me down. I ask her to stop, but to no avail. Unable to correct her pronunciation feels like being stuck in a snow globe. Everyone sees me and assumes that however she pronounces my name is right. I hear everything they say, but no matter how hard I scream, they don't hear me.

In Mandarin, my last name means 'to revere and to honor.' My great-uncle was the first of my family to leave Taiwan where my ancestors are from. He studied abroad in England where our last name was translated to English. I carry my last name with pride. The challenges it brings make me wonder: how should I respond when people make me feel like I do not belong? I could let the volcano erupt at every injustice I encounter, spewing hot lava, but just like screaming, doing so would only exacerbate the problem. Instead, I chose to create a space in school where different cultural experiences can be shared and understood.

In order to shine light on those who feel out of place, I started an affinity group at school. The purpose is to build an environment where people can discuss personal experiences without worrying about being critiqued. This affinity group inspires and encourages others to speak up for who they truly are and what they believe. It also gives people opportunities to learn about each other's cultures and brings awareness to the community. When the space where my

voice could be heard did not exist, I created one. In this affinity group, I define who I am. It is where the authenticity of everyone's cultural roots is appreciated. Despite the lead weight in my stomach that returns sometimes, there is an eternal ember of hope in my heart telling me that change is possible. It takes not one or a few of us to make the difference - it takes each and every one of us.

There were times when I wanted to disappear into a blackhole, remain silent forever and let everyone decide who I am at first glance - but I fought back. I choose to rise into the sun's rays and define myself before anyone tries to bring me down by telling me I do not belong. The "otherness" that I experienced eventually gave me the strength to lift up not only myself but many others in my community.

Sophia is a dedicated figure skater who practices in both Cleveland and Taiwan, where she spends every summer with her family. She plays the violin and participates in student government, Power of the Pen, and Mock Trial at school. She started an Asian Affinity Group and a club promoting healthy habits for dementia and Alzheimer's prevention. Sophia's dream is to become a doctor, find a treatment for dementia and Alzheimer's, and speak up for those who are less fortunate. She wants to inspire people to reach their potential.

Asha R. Bauer

7th Grade, Hathaway Brown

It was a chilly winter morning, and I could see the delicate, fluffy snowflakes dancing through the sky as they fell. I look down at my humanities homework. 'Why was Mansa Musa so influential?' Geez, I don't know. I thought.

"Hey Asha!" I whipped my head around and saw my friend Karina walking toward me with a binder tucked under her arm.

"Oh, hey, Karina. What's up?" I responded as I patted the floor next to me.

As she sat down, she asked, "Can you please help me with my math homework?"

"Of course!" I accepted. Overhearing our conversation, Brittney walked over in that strut of hers like she's better than everyone. This can't be good.

"Why do you need help with math? I thought you were smart because you're Asian. But you're not." Brittney said to Karina, who is Taiwanese. Karina rolled her eyes and went back to her homework. I know Brittney is mean, but she isn't racist, right? I'm Indian and proud of it, and I felt that Brittney wasn't just saying something to Karina, but to our culture as a whole. There was anger bubbling inside me like a squealing tea kettle that refuses to shut up.

"You can't say that, Brittney!" I exclaimed. "Do you know how hurtful that is? Just because we ask for help on something doesn't mean we aren't smart. You have to understand that you can't say everything that you think!"

"I....." Brittney's eyes searched the room frantically. "Whatever," Brittney snapped and walked away.

"She doesn't think before she talks," Karina whispered to me with a surprisingly steady voice. I know that Brittney's words had hurt her, but she didn't want to show it.

"I know, right? But you know, Karina, asking for help doesn't change how smart you are. All of us are better at some things compared to others. You always help me with science." I said, giving her a hug. Karina is a strong girl, but nobody should have to hold in their emotions because they feel that nobody is going to support them. Karina and I finished her homework together just before the bell rang for advisory.

"Thanks Asha. I really appreciate you standing up for me. I don't like it when people judge me based on what I look like." Karina said.

"Don't worry about it! Even if she meant nothing of it, a comment like that hurts." I replied.

This act of kindness made a difference to Karina, and it made her feel safe in her community. Even though Karina will remember this moment as an act of hate, maybe me standing up for her will let her look back on it with a memory of friendship and support. We all experience hurtful comments in our own lives, but what helps us move forward is speaking up, helping others, and breaking stereotypes. As a team. The Random Acts of Kindness Foundation says, "Kindness is choosing love over hate, light over darkness, and compassion over judgement."

Asha plays the cello and swims for both the swim team and swim club. She is active in debate, the Asian Student Association, Gold Key, an ambassador program for her school, and Purple Council, a student advisory group. Some of her hobbies include dancing to K-Pop and traveling. In the future, Asha plans to go to the University of Pennsylvania to study medicine. She would love to become a pediatrician.

Farai Amanda Chiunda

7th Grade, Beachwood Middle School

"Fare-eye"

"Fa-rye-a"

"Fare-aye-eye."

My name has always been a complicated thing.

Over the years, adults, kids, and teachers have struggled to pronounce my name correctly. My name has been made fun of, laughed at, and turned into a joke multiple times. But the worst experiences I've had with my name are when we have to take attendance. Since Kindergarten up until 7th grade, I have been called atrociously mispronounced versions of my name.

I remember when we had a substitute teacher in Spanish. She cleared her throat and said:

"I am about to take attendance. Please say 'here' loud enough for me to hear."

"Oh gosh," I thought.

She began.

"Mariah A."

"Here."

She continues to call out names until she says, "Fare-eye C." I'm not making it up. That is literally how she said it. The entire class started snickering. I felt myself sink down in my chair. One kid said "'Fare-eye' is crazy." I raised my hand and mumbled 'here' as the heat from shame creeped up my cheeks.

I am 100% Zimbabwean. My parents immigrated to the United States from Zimbabwe when they were about 18. Their native language is Shona. My mom named me the Shona word for "rejoice" or "be happy." She's loved that name since she was a child and felt privileged to give her daughter a name that represented her culture. But in school, when my name is laughed at when pronounced incorrectly, it makes me feel like the portrayal of our culture that is supposed to be my name, loses its value.

My name has always faced the brunt of laughter and disrespect. Throughout the course of my life, I've faced discrimination from others just because my name is different from the stereotypical, "easy to pronounce" names. My friend, who is Indian, also faces the same conditions. Instead of being defended when our names are mispronounced, we're laughed at. Instead

Farai plays both the piano and the cello. She loves to travel and hopes to one day see Germany, Japan, and revisit Zimbabwe. Some of Farai's favorite hobbies include sleepovers, movie nights, and school. She also loves baking; her signature bakes include banana bread, coffee cake, and blueberry cake. In the future, Farai plans to work in the medical field as a radiologist.

of diversity being celebrated, it's ridiculed. A lot of people think that cultural variety is only when people come to school dressed in traditional clothing and give presentations on their special holidays or traditions. But it's not. Diversity comes in many forms. Names are one of them, and they should be cherished and treated with openness and respect.

One of my school's beliefs is this: "Many cultures, One Bison." This basically means that even though we all might not be the same race, faith, or ethnicity, we are still united as one student body. That message alone should be enough to spark positive change. That alone should inspire people to love and appreciate diversity. I know it inspires me. Because when I come across someone whose name is harder to pronounce, I work to make sure that at least five minutes after talking with them, I'm pronouncing their name correctly. It starts with the small things. Because it's the small things that spark change. It's the small things we do that can lead us to once and for all stop the hate.



Adeline Chalker

6th Grade, Harding Middle School

Our world revolves around hierarchy, prejudice, and inequality. I'm not quite sure how or why it got to be like this, but now we are here just sitting around watching TV shows on Netflix waiting for it to get better. Quick news flash... that's not going to just happen. That is why I am going to try to convince our world that we need a change, but not just for us, for transgender people whose rights are revoked and are made fun of. In this essay you will see how our world needs to change from rude and unjust to kind and useful.

I first noticed this unfair treatment towards transgender people when my mom's friend's son transitioned to a female. I still remember how supportive my whole family was that night when my mom told me what it meant when someone was trans and ever since then I have heard and seen people do nothing but be rude to trans people and even try to make laws about their freedom. To give substance to this, SB 14 is a law that was passed and signed by Texas Governor Greg Abbott on June 2, which stopped allowing transgender minors from receiving hormone therapies and puberty blockers. It goes into effect next month. These horrible laws have caused trans people to take their own lives because they can't be who they are. It took so long for my mom's friend's daughter to be able to use her correctly gendered bathroom. That is just horrible! Now you see why we need a change, so let's make one.

We need to be kind. Not just to transgender people, but to all of us. You see, if every day we all could say at least three kind things to people our world would become so much better, and especially to people who transitioned their gender. If we strive to not make fun of them and just act the same no matter what gender they are, we all would feel welcome in this world. Also, if we started to write peaceful petition papers to our government saying anything along the lines of how unfair it is to trans people who are trying to get sex change surgeries and can't because they may be under 18 or how it's illegal to have that surgery where they live, we could start to make a change. Also, if we

all do a little research and find out about the restrictions that trans people have, we can further understand their pain and share that with the world to make more people see the change we will and can make. If we act on this and do what is right, our actions will inspire change. I'll be a force for good change and not just sit around when people can't become who they truly are. We only have one world so let's make it a good one.

Adeline enjoys traveling and has been to seven different countries. She is involved in many school activities, including Junior Model UN, Harding Singers, and the swim team. She plays piano in her school's jazz band, percussion in the concert band, and has been in many theater productions with her school's drama club and Beck Center Theater Productions. Regardless of where life takes her, Adeline hopes to be remembered as a kind, smart, and talented person who made a positive impact on the world.

Mia Schilkowski

6th Grade, Hudson Middle School

It's a hot day at the pool with my friends when the sounds of laughter and people chatting reach my ears.

After a while of swimming and playing around, I get out of the pool and head to my bag; I hear a small beeping sound come from my phone and realize that someone is calling me.

I answer the call and I hear my mother's voice.

"Hey, your blood sugar is low. Can you do a finger check?" She asks.

"Yeah, I can," I say, reaching into my bag.

After completing the finger check and the device flashing a big 55 at me, I let my mom know my sugar.

"Can you sit down for a little while? I don't want you to go down any lower." My mom says to me,

"Yeah." I say.

Afterwards, I tell her I love her and then hang up the phone.

I move to a spot in the shade and sit down, feeling the cool pavement against my skin. I am used to this by now. I've learned to just deal with the stares and questioning looks, however I still wish that I could be able to do normal activities without my blood sugar interfering.

I glance over at my friends, still hanging out in the pool, and a sense of longing washes over me and swallows me whole, wishing that I could do the same things I used to do before I got diagnosed with this lifelong disease.

Out of the corner of my eye, I notice one of my friends hop out of the pool and make her way towards me.

Once she reached me, she took a seat down next to me.

"Hey!" she says.

"Hi!" I respond, smiling.

"Are you okay?" She asks me, a hint of concern in her voice.

"Yeah, I'm okay. My blood sugar is just low."

"Oh, alright! I can sit with you." She says kindly.

"That'd be nice, thank you Lilly."

I feel fortunate to know that my friends care about my wellbeing.

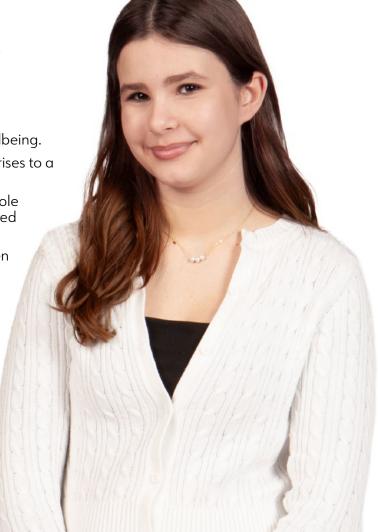
We sit there in a comfortable silence until my blood sugar rises to a high enough level to swim again.

I realize how compassionate my friends have been this whole time, taking time out of their days to learn about what I need and being understanding the entire time.

If everyone took the time to listen to what others need, then everyone can have the feeling of being understood.

I know that if I continue this train of listening to others, then the world will slowly pay the kindness forward.

Mia loves to create art and enjoys painting and drawing, especially portraiture. She runs cross-country and enjoys being part of her church's youth program. Her favorite subjects at school include Social Studies and Language Arts. Mia enjoys helping people and making them feel happy. She plans to go into the medical field, where she can make a difference in the lives of others.



Rebecca Ester

11th Grade, Glenville High School

"African Girl"

Every African girl grows up hearing the phrase "Is this how you will behave in your husband's house?" See we're raised being told that marriage is our destination

But...

There are other destinations in life than just marriage
Destinations like going to college
Destinations like becoming a nurse
Destinations like getting my own house

But...

I refuse to only be someone's wife I refuse to depend on a man for my needs I refuse to only give birth to babies

See...

I have a bigger plan for myself
I have plans of being in the medical field
I have plans of buying myself a house
I have plans

I have plans of buying my own car I want to provide for myself I have plans!

See...

I refuse to be looked down on because i am a woman

Rebecca is a very friendly person who enjoys braiding hair and cooking. She is currently in a nursing program and looks forward to working in the medical field one day. Rebecca plans to become a nurse, but she is still undecided of which area she wants to specialize in.

See...

I refuse to follow the path that other African girls are following

So I am going to push myself to success No matter how many times they say you are wasting your time

I am going to be a successful African girl
I am African and I am capable of doing anything.



Teresa Gladish

11th Grade, Twinsburg High School

"Art Project"

I call myself a poet

but I can't get the words right.

A musician

but the lyrics never turn out how I thought they might.

An artist

but the grip on my pencil

always too tight.

Maybe that's what makes a poet.

A musician.

An artist.

Unpredictability.

Beauty.

Relatability.

I find comfort in perfection,

yet find the imperfections

just as satisfying.

I'm learning to not care as much;

living life like a bittersweet symphony.

I find those symphonies when with my friends,

my family,

when playing the guitar.

Living life in the frets;

playing music that tastes like cranberry juice and sweet citrus

spilling from my fingertips.

Harmonies ring.

An echo.

Of my Past.

My Present.

Future.

I'm woven together like yarn

With a new thread for each experience.

A mosaic of memories.

Each piece of glass,

ceramic,

stone,

plastering the walls of my soul.

How my dad chose addiction over me.

The thought of him having to accept

that the addiction never loved him

but I did.

Still do. In a way.

Subject to endless bullying.

Words spoken behind my back.

the fat girl.

the weird girl.

the annoying girl.

there's something wrong with her.

More pieces of the mosaic

wedged into the wet plaster of my soul.

A plaster that never dries

as long as I'm alive.

I used to be lost in deep humility.

Fighting to fit in.

Beating myself down

until my blood vessels burst

with insecurities.

I was bruised so bad

i couldn't recognize the person who looked back at me

in the mirror.

A botched pottery project

shattered

after hitting the linoleum

too hard

too many times.

It took me a while to realize that my individuality,

(Continued on next page)

the pieces of sharp clay
splayed out in front of me,
the ones that dig deep into my skin;
my sexuality,
my identity,
my faults,
my way of simply just being;
should not be the cause of my suffering.
I wanted to stop fighting myself;
let the wounds heal.
Pick out the shards from under my thick skin.
Glue the pieces back together.
Make something beautiful out of it.

I'm a song that no one knows the right lyrics to.
A genre most don't listen to.
I don't understand some of the lyrics myself,
but I appreciate all who care to listen
to my bittersweet symphonies.
The ones who are willing to interpret me
like a work of art
in a museum full of odd artwork.

I can grasp my meaning the beauty in it.

The beauty in my imperfections

How my stomach spills from my pants.

How I can't see without my glasses.

How my face scrunches asymmetrically when I smile too hard.

I smile often.

That's the beauty of being human.

Teresa competes in a show choir group at school called Great Expectations. She also enjoys playing guitar and running. After graduation, Teresa plans to join the Air Force and then go to college to study business and cosmetology.

The beauty in the brush strokes blending together blurring the lines between true authenticity and fear of criticization, sanity and mania, self-love and self-loathing.

I am a work of art.

I'm not supposed to be perfect,
I'm just supposed to be.



Roman Hoyle-Smith

10th Grade, Oberlin High School

"Seeking Generational Freedom"

I am curious

I am determined

I am free.

That doesn't pair well

With a cool toned West Coast mother

Whose ancestry has taught

That you must fake normalcy.

I am cautious

I am timid

I am free.

That doesn't pair well

With a warm, vibrant Hispanic father

Whose family is a collection

Of brave, hardworking, jokesters.

I am determined

I am cautious

I am free.

That doesn't pair well

With a confused young girl

Whose family is a collage

Of different values in life.

I am loyal

I am strong

I am defiant

I am anxious

I am scared

I am fierce

I am loving

I am free.

That doesn't pair well

With a manipulative, abusive friend

Whose dagger sharpened family has taught them

To break me until I stay.

Out of fear.

Not free.

I am curious

I am determined

I am free.

This pairs well

With my devoted mother

Hiding colors under a blanket of gray

Simply wanting her child to grow past

Generational issues and live their own life.

I am cautious

I am timid

I am free.

This pairs well

With my loving father

Who knows that vibrant colors get tiring after a while

And simply wants his child to learn

To set boundaries and know when to take breaks.

Lam determined

I am cautious

I am free.

(Continued on next page)

This pairs well
With a brave kid
A collage of art styles
Who is a combination of many histories
And generational stories.

I am loyal

I am strong

I am defiant

I am anxious

I am scared

I am fierce

I am loving.

I am free.

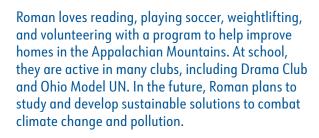
This pairs well
With me, a young gringa-Latina.
A vibrant yet calm and collected tapestry
Woven by a history of beautiful people
Seeking love
Shelter

· · ·

Security

Community

And Freedom.





Cara Miller

10th Grade, Garfield Heights High School

"Mammy"

"Who is Mammy?" my friend asks,
I ask myself that as well when I see the name printed on my photo,
They see me and paint me with colors not my own,
A canvas of shadows, a story they've shown
A roll I didn't choose, a badge of their shame.

Big lip, they mock, as though they're a sin, Twisting my features to fit within. They call me "mammy" a hackneyed name. Mocking me as if I'm to blame. Mocking me as if I'm to blame,

I walk in school, where hearts don't collide Where judgment lurks whispers aside. As If their judgment doesn't make me cry.

Mammy, a word that stings,
A role forced upon the black woman,
A stereotype that dehumanizes,
Brutalizes the mind.
But then I realize,

I am not Mammy, I am not their shame, I'm a soul with a dream, a heart with a name, I am no ones shame.

But I choose kindness, a quiet embrace,
To soften the sharp edges of a closed space.
Not for their sake, but for my own,
To build a world where love is shown.

"Mammy is someone who is a kind, strong, and independent woman" I answered my friend.

Cara plays for her school's varsity softball team, sings in the choir, and has been playing the electric guitar for two years. In her free time, she enjoys drawing and writing. Cara hopes to become a Newborn Intensive Care Unit nurse or a pediatric doctor. She also plans to advance her writing and make a difference in the world.



Martha Louise Röseler

10th Grade, Kirtland High School

"A Byte of Cookies"

Staring at my screen, I can see the lines of my code run like a well-oiled machine, until they don't.

"Women are just not smart enough for this," he snarls like it's an undefeatable truth.

Knowing I shouldn't, I look up anyway.

By he, I mean a dumb – not as dumb as I wish he was – young, arrogant boy, trying to feel better about himself.

Knowing I shouldn't, I bark back anyway.

I don't even know why,

maybe because I wasn't allowed to have Barbies growing up,

maybe because I'm young enough to think I can change the world,

or maybe just because I'm tired of biting my tongue.

And I know somebody should explain to him why he is wrong for all the good reasons, and I know I should be calm, even nice,

and I definitely shouldn't be mean, but I've had enough.

"At least I'm smarter than you," I proclaim.

He loses it completely. He yells at me, provokes me, insults me, his eyes bulging out of his head.

I know I shouldn't be, but deep down I'm ecstatic, just a little bit.

Maybe because we both know it's true, maybe because he now feels how I felt too often, or maybe just because he looks funny, a face as red as a tomato.

At the end of his rage, we're both close to tears; all the vitriolic words hanging between us.

Then something unexpected happens, his little doglike sidekick turns to him:

"I don't think that was okay. Just say sorry. Do it for me and the cookies I've brought you every week."

I thought his puppy was talking to me, but he wasn't. I can tell by the boy's look that he thought the same.

He laughs, irritated, at both of us, not even thinking about it for a whole moment.

I know I shouldn't be smiling, but I am.

I didn't change him; not even just a little bit.

He is still a dumb - not as dumb as I wish he was - young, arrogant boy,

but I stole his little helper, the reassuring voice behind him; his yes-man.

From now on, every week, I steal even more: his cookie

(Continued on next page)

and all that comes with it.

He pretends it doesn't bother him; I know it does.

I still know I shouldn't be smiling, but it's just a little bit.

I eat his cookie, every time, and it makes my life just a little bit better, every time, and it tastes just a little bit better, every time. I know it's not nice; it's the truth.

I still ask myself, "How can a little Byte change that much?"

I know I didn't win the war, but sometimes a box of cookies needs to be enough.

Martha is a foreign exchange student from Germany. Back home, she is active in ballroom dancing, programming, and badminton. At Kirtland High School, she participates in several clubs including the First Tech Challenge, a robotics competition, Drama Club, Academic Challenge, and Key Club. Martha enjoys reading, with favorites like The Bird That Drinks Tears and Fight Club and watching movies and shows such as Inception and the German detective series Homicide Hills. Passionate about technology and building, Martha plans to pursue a STEM career and develop things to make the world a better place.



Nicholas Stalnaker

10th Grade, Oberlin High School

"Imagine"

imagine

a clawing monster grabbing any strand of nonconformity and unraveling a blanket of creativity into silent handcuffs of string

imagine

a flat plane ignorant to the third dimension able to conceptualize but not experience watching flight while grounded

imagine

a loyalty to initial conditions perfect banal determinism, ensured to remain constantly still

or

imagine

a world just above the boundary of the constrained mind:

a lone bird flapping its chaotic wings above the limits of hate,

falling and

rising and constantly moving and

a naive boy

looking up, blinded by the lights of change, confident fingertip steady against the shaking wind

asking,

"how does it fly?"

Nicholas plays both the violin and piano. He enjoys photography and reading, and is interested in math, science, languages, and philosophy. At school, he participates in Model UN, Yearbook, and the Tri-M Music Honor Society. Nicholas plans to study and pursue a career in physics. He would also like to learn different languages, make music, and help make learning more accessible to others.



Zoey Bloom

6th Grade, North Ridgeville Academic Center

"I Won't"

The one smart, beautiful girl

Who does everything right.

Being tossed around like pizza dough.

I can tell she's suffering through it all,

As she's being grabbed and thrown.

I see her with those beautiful blue eyes,

Shimmering and glimmering.

Yet those tear-filled eyes,

still shimmer and glimmer.

I wonder why she doesn't say a peep,

Why does she keep?

Keeps it sealed, so so tight,

Through the darkness of the night.

Shoved against lockers,

I see with a fight,

In those beautiful, blue eyes, oh so filled with fright.

"No."

"I won't."

I utter with a grudge,

As I step out into the spotlight.

They turn and gaze,

And roll their eyes,

I say, "Stop it, I won't let you do that."

She peers at me, like a puppet on a string,

Dancing around forcefully,

Being forced to cling.

"Oh please, Oh please! Stay out of our way,

Or you're gonna have to be our next prey!"

They grasp her hair tighter and tighter,

With each breath she takes, she

Slowly begins developing tears in

Those beautiful blue eyes.

"Stop this now all at once,

I may be blunt but I won't

Let you do that," I utter at once.

"Why must you do this to

Such a precious girl?" I wonder and think.

"Her tears are on the brink, even more than the last blink!

Why shall we not do this to such a dark-skinned girl?"

They laugh and giggle, sucking her in.

Their trap, making her lose it.

That spark in her eyes,

I must bring it back.

My duty, I have to crack.

She shrieks and screams,

Cries and whines.

Now that's the last straw,

I have to help her shine.

I pull her away,

From all the pain,

I can tell from that spark,

She is bound to slowly gain.

(Continued on next page)

I comfort and settle her,
And as the bullies flee,
They see my death staring gaze.
I mutter to her "It's alright,
Don't worry, you're free,"
"Don't be ashamed of how
You were made, you look
Absolutely beautiful.
I won't let them do
That to you ever again,
I promise,
I won't."



Zoey is a very artsy person. She makes bracelets, does wood burning, writes, and plays soccer. She is active in the Girl Scouts and is part of both the Art Club and Builders Club at school. Zoey is very interested in crystals. She collects them, grows them, and hopes to become a geologist. She also plans to pursue poetry, as she recently realized she enjoys it.

Ella Bogniard

6th Grade, Hudson Middle School

"A Simple Breeze"

If you pay very close attention,
to the wind on a hot summer day in June,
the stir in the air
can manifest a breeze.
When you place a wooden spoon over
a boiling pot of tomato sauce,
do you ever notice the cauldron of spices doesn't boil over?
Or when you walk to the park,
but stop so the little gray bunny
isn't as scared and frozen as the wind in fall.

Sometimes all kindness ever has to be is a barrier, blocking the wrong fork in the road.

The fork that leads to the noise inside your head, clouding everything with a thunderstorm of worry. The fork that leads to greedy goblins, stealing happiness and leaving behind only the muddy footprints of doubt.

Instead, you now take the cobblestone road leading your mind down the path to recovery.

It might be a tad bit longer, but on the hot summer day in June walking to the park, you might again realize the harsh winds of today, will be a vivid memory of a breeze tomorrow.

All it took was the impenetrable barrier of self-kindness.

Ella loves the outdoors and recently learned to code. She also loves to crochet, has participated in craft fairs, and started an Etsy store last year where she sells her crochet, resin, and other craft items. Her dream is to attend Yale University and visit Sequoia National Park. Ella plans to become a Gifted & Talented teacher, an author, and work with fiber art to add to her Etsy shop.



Elliot Gionfriddo

6th Grade, North Ridgeville Academic Center

"Pointing out Flaws"

If you look closely, you can see the dark circles underneath my eyes.

If you pay attention to my smile, you'll know it's fake.

I've been thinking about some things lately.

The rolls of my arms, the width of my thighs.

I start wearing baggy clothes to cover the

fat

blob

of

flesh

that is my body, thinking the clothes are my way to cope with the virus infecting my brain.

Every night, I turn into a ball of my thoughts and leak tears of sadness, anger, and hopelessness.

But one day someone asks me if I'm okay.

The thoughtful question surrounds me like a thick blanket.

I wonder if I should answer honestly.

Then I reply "No, I don't think so."

Then something amazing happens.

The person wraps me in a warm hug.

When they pull away, I feel different.

Like this person has cured me.

Like this person has shown me a light in pitch black darkness.

Like this person has provided a soft, kind hand to smooth out the jagged edges of hate.



Elliot loves baking, playing volleyball and trumpet, horseback riding, and building with LEGO. She identifies as a loyal "Swiftie," but has recently gotten into Selena Gomez. As an avid reader, some of her favorite books include the Front Desk series, Dear Sister, P.S. I Miss You and works by Katherine Applegate and Christina Wyman. She became a published poet in fifth grade, after placing in Kent State University's "Write Where You Are" contest. In the future, Elliot aspires to work in a career that allows her to make a meaningful impact, with interests in government, Congress, and acting.

Madelyn Kimberly

7th Grade, North Ridgeville Academic Center

"Jar Full of Kindness"

If I had a jar full of kindness, I would not want to let it go The yellow warm light is not too bright Like the shimmer of falling snow

However, if someone's jar is empty
I crack mine open, but not too much
For I am not sure if it will replenish
As the golden glow coats the bottom of the jar
You can see the result as an arc beams across their face

The more I seem to give to others the more my jar fills with warm and glittering light

And I am engulfed in darkness

But when the lid grows tight I am no longer able to unscrew the top Soon the light starts the trickle out a crack in the bottom

I am afraid to scream for fear that none will hear me in this black void So I sit and wait And hope

But the silence is too quiet
The void is too dark
I scream
I yell until my voice dies low
And the remarkable happens

I see a person

Madelyn plays volleyball and is a dancer. She has been practicing ballet since the age of three, advanced to pointe at eleven, and competes in tap dance, having participated in two competitions this year. Some of Madelyn's favorite subjects include English, Science, and History. She's also great at Harry Potter trivia, having read all the books eight times. Madelyn plans to attend college and hopes to become a fantasy author, creating a young adult series for other kids to enjoy.

They come up close so that I can feel their warmth
They gently unscrew the jar and pour their light inside
Soon enough others do the same
Until the jar overflows with the warmth and love it
needed

The jar still has cracks
But the dripping has slowed

At last I am able to see



Miina Tabata

8th Grade, Hudson Middle School

"Just The Way You Are"

My mother tells me every day, you're beautiful just the way you are.

Hearing this,

I smile,

Feeling confident

And ready for anything.

Ready,

to go to a new school.

I take a deep breath and step inside the school.

But,

No one,

prepared me for what would happen.

As I walk in,

I see other people,

Side eyeing,

Whispering,

Staring.

At me.

I feel a heavy weight,

Pulling me down like

I'm carrying many,

Big,

Heavy,

Rocks.

Panicked and conscious,

My brain races fast,

Do I look ugly?

Am I ugly?

Do I look bad?

What's happening?

My mind keeps racing until, It comes to an abrupt stop.

I stop and think

Maybe it's because,

I look different.

I can't help but look down

At the shiny floor.

My face is flushed,

With embarrassment,

And fear..

I make myself as small as can be,

So maybe,

No one can see me.

I feel so small,

And alone while I walk

As everyone,

Stares,

Whispers,

And judge.

When I stop at my cubby,

Everyone stares,

Clears the way,

Like I'm the ugly duckling.

They move,

So that they aren't near me.

Or close to me.

"I can't make any friends"

I think to myself.

(Continued on next page)

I hang my head,

In silence,

As my day feels

As if a storm cloud,

Was over my head,

Raining,

With judgements,

That aren't,

Really

True.

I sink down,

Deep,

In my heart,

With sadness,

Loneliness,

And drown with these

Judgements.

But the thing about rain is,

There's always a rainbow.

Bright,

Stunning,

And Beautiful.

Just the way it is.

A girl comes to me

With a kind smile.

That brightens my day.

"Hi"

She says,

"You look so pretty in your outfit today!"

Which then makes me smile.

We talk and we talk,

Like it can never be stopped.

And before we know it,

We then become,

Friends.

She was the sun to my rainy day,

The bright yellow flower,

In a field full of dark,

Her smile to me,

Was a beacon of light,

Giving off feelings,

Of warmth,

And kindness,

Always remember,

To be true to yourself

To remember

That you

Are perfect

Just the way you are

She was my hero,

When judgements,

Would cower over me,

She was my shelter,

When the rain would keep

Pouring on me.

From then on,

I accept everyone,

Learning that kindness,

Always comes from the heart.

Kindness,

Will brighten

Anyone's day.

(Continued on next page)

I choose to be,
the person,
Who gives an umbrella,
To anyone who's feeling,
Alone in the rain.
I choose to be,
The person,
Who smiles and comforts,
To anyone feeling sad.
I choose to be,
The person,
Who accepts anyone,
Just the way they are.

Because I know, You, Are Perfect, Just the way you are.



Miina is a pre-professional dancer who love all different types of dance but focuses on ballet. Her favorite subject is math and she loves to play her cello, an instrument she has played since fifth grade. Miina was born in Japan and returns every year to visit family. In the future, she wants to become a professional ballet dancer. It is Miina's dream to

tell her story through dance.

Lam Tran

8th Grade, Hudson Middle School

"Chains"

Sometimes you might feel like,

you could never run a mile as fast as this kid,

you could never have 30 friends like that kid,

you could never have grades as good as everyone else,

you are just not enough,

always putting yourself down.

You might even feel that

hurting yourself

will make others feel better.

Yet every night, as

you lay in bed,

you feel jealous, and

you feel hurt, and

you feel like an old toothbrush,

only existing for the benefit of others.

You feel...

forgotten?

Never appreciated?

Before you know it,

you feel indifferent to being

kind.

You've been blinded

by your own

hate.

But, if

you put less pressure on yourself, and if

you have self-respect, and if

you know your worth,

you'll end up treating others

with that same love and respect.

Because, how

you treat yourself is reflected in how

you treat others, and

sometimes,

you can be your story's cruelest

villain,

tearing out the pages of your book as

you tear yourself apart.

Maybe

you'll never run a mile as fast as this kid,

you'll never have 30 friends like that kid, and

you'll never have grades as good as everyone else.

That's okay, because

you'll always be enough,

no matter how hard

the chains wrap around

(Continued on next page)

your mindset.

Maybe
you'll try your hardest to stay active,
you'll try your hardest to build healthy friendships,
you'll try your hardest in school.

Any act of rebellion against
the hate
experienced in our world today
is one more chain unwrapped
from humanity's chest to equity,
and that starts with unwrapping
our own



Lam plays both the piano and saxophone. Her favorite things include math and the color blue. At school, she is active in both cross-country and track. In the future, Lam plans to work in a science-related field.

chains.

ABOUT STOP THE HATE® YOUTH SING OUT

Voices United for Social Change

This year, 1,215 students across 60 classrooms from 18 schools collaborated to write and perform original songs, using their voices as powerful tools to advocate for change. *Stop the Hate®, Youth Sing Out* is an arts-integrated learning initiative that encourages students to express their views on discrimination and injustice, fostering awareness of hate, racism, bias, bullying, etc., and inspiring action.

Through the Maltz Museum's Stop the Hate tour, the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame's *Power of Music in Protest* online experience, and the guidance of ROOTS of American Music teaching artists, the program enhances written and oral language skills, deepening students understanding of human rights issues. Classes compete for anti-bias education grants for their schools.

Congratulations to all participants for using your voices to make a positive impact!

Youth Sing Out is presented in partnership with ROOTS of American Music, the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, and Suma Recording.







Behind the Scenes Photos from Songwriting Workshops











Collinwood High School FIRST PLACE HIGH SCHOOL "Everyone is Equal"

Recipient of a \$3,500 Anti-Bias Education Grant Congratulations to Violet Taylor's 7th Period Class



Shaw High School RUNNER-UP HIGH SCHOOL "Weak People with Power"

Recipient of a \$2,000 Anti-Bias Education Grant Congratulations to Antoinette Brown's 7th Period Class

Milkovich Middle School FIRST PLACE MIDDLE SCHOOL "Stop the Violence"

Recipient of a \$3,500 Anti-Bias Education Grant Congratulations to Mary Matisak's 3rd Period Class



Harding Middle School RUNNER-UP MIDDLE SCHOOL "Listen to Our Words"

Recipient of a \$2,000 Anti-Bias Education Grant Congratulations to Aaron Waryk's 6th Grade Class



"Everyone is Equal"

Violet Taylor's
7th Period Class
Collinwood High School
FIRST PLACE HIGH SCHOOL
ROOTS of American Music Teaching Artist:
Charlie Mosbrook

Verse 1:

It's crazy how us females get treated unequal treated like we're not really people It's crazy how we get shamed for the way we look. It's crazy what we can't wear You don't know what you took

Males think they can tell us what we have to wear And wear anything they want Well I don't think that's fair

Chorus:

Males, Males, Males what can I say they get what they want
The system lets it happen anyway I don't think we should let these men be disrespectful Let's demand our rights.
Everyone is equal.

Verse 2:

I am a woman, and I have rights, Men and boys will never understand They use nasty slurs, make us feel unsafe Accuse us of being dirty and.....

Chorus:

Males, Males, Males
what can I say
they get what they want
The system lets it happen anyway
I don't think we should
let these men be disrespectful
Let's demand our rights.
Everyone is equal.

Bridge

What can I do to become a better man? Show my emotions And Respect myself Learn to Communicate What skills can I use? Surround myself with people Who support me and my crew I can help women and Keep an open mind Accountable to you Always be kind Taking responsibility makes you a better man Being accountable makes you a better man Being open minded makes you a better man Being respectful makes you a better man

Verse 3:

Without fear or assault we should be able to feel safe Some say "It's the way I dress." But I don't think that's the case

Chorus:

Males, Males, Males what can I say they get what they want
The system lets it happen anyway I don't think we should let these men be disrespectful Let's demand our rights.
Everyone is equal.

"Weak People with Power"

Antoinette Brown's
7th Period Class
Shaw High School
RUNNER-UP HIGH SCHOOL
ROOTS of American Music Teaching Artist:
Charlie Mosbrook

Chorus:

Corruption, manipulation Full of lies, Weak people with power Committing crimes

Verse 1: Calls for change in community laws Stronger policies To protect us all.

Our black community is getting killed day by day. While police are forced to look the other way.

Chorus:

Corruption, manipulation Full of lies, Weak people with power Committing crimes

Verse 2:

No matter how small We have the power to make a difference What are you going to do with your hour.

Educate ourselves be kind to one another We can stop the crimes With our sisters and brothers.

Chorus:

Corruption, manipulation Full of lies, Weak people with power Committing crimes

Verse 3:

No matter how small We have the power to make a difference What are you going to do with your hour.

Educate ourselves be kind to one another We can stop the crimes With our sisters and brothers.

Chorus:

Corruption, manipulation Full of lies, Weak people with power Committing crimes (x2)

"Stop the Violence"

Mary Matisak's
3rd Period Class
Milkovich Middle School
FIRST PLACE MIDDLE SCHOOL
ROOTS of American Music Teaching Artist:
Esther Fitz

Chorus:

Too many people hurting Life just seems uncertain How can we make a change Seems like nothing is working

Too many family's crying
Too many people dying
Can't keep staying silent
We need to stop the violence, yeah
(x2)

Verse 1:

Way too much aggression It just so depressing The violence needs to end We need more protection

Let's come to our senses Stop being so reckless Think about the future Stop acting so senseless

Show more love to others Be here for each other We are all the same We're sisters and brothers

If we do our best We don't have to wonder If we did part To bring this world together

Pre-Chorus:
Put the guns down
We should stop now
Killings all around
Bodies being found
Time to talk about it

Shooting in our schools
Bullies being rude
There's something we can do
Gotta get the message through to you

Chorus:

Too many people hurting Life just seems uncertain How can we make a change Seems like nothing is working

Too many family's crying
Too many people dying
Can't keep staying silent
We need to stop the violence, yeah
(x2)

Verse 2:
Stop retaliation
Need to stop the hating
Let's be real about it
We should stop the faking

We can talk about it
Open conversation
No more violent confrontation
We need more communication

Pre-Chorus:
Put the guns down
We should stop now
Killings all around
Bodies being found
Time to talk about it

Shooting in our schools
Bullies being rude
There's something we can do
Gotta get the message through to you

Chorus:

Too many people hurting Life just seems uncertain How can we make a change Seems like nothing is working

Too many family's crying
Too many people dying
Can't keep staying silent
We need to stop the violence, yeah

"Listen to Our Words"

Aaron Waryk's 6th Grade Class Harding Middle School RUNNER-UP MIDDLE SCHOOL ROOTS of American Music Teaching Artist: Charlie Mosbrook

Verse 1:

She needs more Respect, And opportunities She needs encouragement From her community

Chorus:

Listen to the words Women have to say Listen to her needs take her seriously

Verse 2:

She needs to make the rent She needs equal pay a little less judgment Less frustration in her day

Chorus:

Listen to the words Women have to say Listen to her needs take her seriously

Bridge:

She is single, just out of college, She doesn't want to be a housewife She wants to be acknowledged, She's starting to build a life, Being Barbie was not her dream, She wants to be the leader, The leader of the team

Verse 3:

She needs some encouragement And a little less shame She needs fair expectations Not a man's last name

Chorus:

Listen to the words Women have to say Listen to her needs take her seriously

Listen to her needs take her seriously

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We are grateful to the 178 volunteers who generously donated their time to blind score this year's essays, poems, and songs.

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