

The Twenty-Ninth “**Celebration of Youth**” Essay Contest

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PEARLS OF WISDOM FROM THE STUDENTS RECEIVING HONORABLE MENTION

Contest Theme: Having a better world begins with each of us. Write an essay about a situation in your own life where you want things to be different than they are now. What is one small action you can do on a consistent basis that would make the situation better for you, and perhaps, for those around you as well. Why would you choose this action? What is the outcome or result you want?

***AHMED AHMED** is a 9th grade student at McKinley Technology HS. He shared: “I moved to the United States in 2014. ...I don’t see much of ...the culture that I grew up around which is the Saudi culture, the food, the people, and the language. I mostly miss talking with a friend in Arabic. To make myself feel better...I teach my friend a little bit of Arabic. ...they get to learn a new language and I get to communicate with them using the language I love.

ERLINA BERISHA, a 5th grade student at Capital City Public Charter, wrote: ...I confronted the bullies... I’m still being bullied, but I remind myself I am amazing and worthy. A way I can work on stopping the issue is by creating posters, making videos, writing speeches, etc. I feel as though no one should be bullied... ... Why insult someone and create a bad day, when we can give each other compliments and create a happy community?”

ALEXANDRIA ANAYA BROWN, a 7th grade student at KIPP DC Northeast Academy, said: “Breaking the chain of silence is my stance on how these young black and brown girls can be found....One small action that I can do on a consistent basis to help bring #missingdcgirls back home is to use my voice and writing skills to design positive memes on social media. ...As a 12 year old girl who is the same age of the girls getting kidnapped, I want to feel safe and put an end to kidnapping.”

***DANIELLA CICCIONE** is an 8th grade student at Hardy Middle School and she wrote: There is one problem I have with this school... They all stereotype one another. For example, not all black people like watermelon and not all Hispanics are from Mexico. Another child at school said, ‘all white people and cops are bad.’ This really hurt me because I am white myself. ... one day, my brother came home from school and asked my mother, ‘Mommy, why can’t my skin be brown like my friends?’ ...I want everyone to feel proud of who they are.”

***DESTAINIE COLEMAN** is in the 5th grade at Whittier Education Campus. She shared, “I don’t have my father in my life. ...What did I ever do as a child to make him not want to be around me as much as I want to around him and my brothers? I know that my dad loves me, I just wish he did a better job with showing me that. Although it is hard for me as a child to change the actions of an adult... I will keep calling, keep texting, and keep hoping that one day my dad will come and see me.”

***DEVON CREQUE** is a 4th grade student at Barnard Elementary. He expressed: "...An action I would take on a consistent basis...is to start to think before I say things. ...it will help me more understand that some things should just stay to yourself. Also...it might make it better for family, teachers, and others. ... The outcome I want is that I will learn how to control my mouth so in the future I will not get into trouble. ...it will ...set an example for other students and people...

***HAZEL CROSS** is a 4th grade student at Inspired Teaching School and she shared: ...there are not a lot of black females on screen, I personally feel excluded because it's harder to find a movie that represents me. ... What I could do is have my 'black girl club' write letters weekly to different casting directors to explain how we do not like this problem. ... Reaching out and communicating how you feel is always best. ...they could realize they ... do need black females.

FATIMA DIALLO, a 9^h grade student at McKinley Technology HS, wrote: "As a female teenager I have been struggling with my appearance. ... People always shame each other so they can feel better about themselves. ... Loving yourself and your body is something that we all need to learn how to do, even though it took me a while to understand that everyone is different and unique, and I had to learn how to love, appreciate, and accept my body."

***TESSA FURLOW** is in the 6th grade at Alice Deal Middle School. She shares: "I wish that I was not as shy... I really like acting but I get nervous whenever I want to try out for something. ... To get over my stage fright, I will practice making a speech or performing something in front of my parents. Recently I gave a presentation to my Girl Scout Troop...I'd like to make a Virtual Reality stage fright app that would allow you to stand in front of a 'scary' audience where you give a speech or perform. ...I can do it with my phone every day to overcome my fears."

***DREW HEAVEN** is in the 8th grade at Hardy Middle School. He shared; "My older brothers have the sickle cell disease. Recently, my oldest brother, Wayne, passed away because he had sickle cell anemia. ...Seeing my brother pass, and seeing my mom mourning...is one of the worse things I've ever experienced. ...Since I can't do anything to prevent this disease, I will try to make my brother Aarion's life better. ...I will be there for him when he needs me. ... I will make sure I don't take for granted the time I have with him.."

***LINNEA LEIJON** is a 6th grade student at Alice Deal. She expressed: "While fighting isn't the best way to resolve our conflicts, the arguments I have had with my brothers have taught me many things. ... While I learned debate in school, my brothers taught me that you need to have convincing evidence and an interesting argument. I have learned these skills for when I have wanted something in a brother's possession and need to convince him to let me have it. I believe that if I have conversations with my brothers, I can continue to learn new skills and avoid fighting."

***FELIPE LEMUS** is a 4th grade student at Bancroft Elementary. He wrote: "One issue ...I am interested in ... is global warming. ...because as a child, playing outside is one of my favorite things to do. I often wonder how I, one person and a 10 year old, can make a difference to make sure other children experience the joy I experienced... I decided I was going to grow different plants in my apartment. ...the plants would suck in carbon dioxide. This... would help humans and the weather."

***IMANI NESBETH**, in the 4th grade at Whittier Education Campus, shared: “When people bully me, I sometimes feel I like I don’t belong or I think they are right. ...Being from Jamaica I like to eat ...dumplings and auki with corn beef. Lots of kids bully me because I don’t always eat pizza, spaghetti or fish sticks. ... I will always treat people the way I want to be treated. I want to change the fact that I get bullied. The only way I can change that is to continue being me.”

***ROSE NGATCHOU** is a 9th grade student at DC International School and was the Second Place in the older division in 2016. She shared: “There have been people who told me that they believe in me. But I don’t think that I can believe them before I believe in myself. It all starts from within. If I want to be happier I have to let go of all the bad thoughts I think... as well as negative energy from others. I have to know that I can amount to anything I want but it takes work, dedication, and perseverance to get there. ...I may be at a low point now but I will triumph.”

***AMAIA NOURSI** attends the 6th grade at Alice Deal and wrote: “One small action I could do on a daily basis is recycling and picking up any trash I see...This helps water and land pollution. Recycling plastic especially will help a lot. At least 100,000 mammals and birds die from plastic each year. Picking up trash can decrease the amount of contaminated habitats...if everyone does it, they do something really big. We can all help... our animals, our world, our surroundings, nature, and friends.”

***KAMIYAH OLUMBA**, is in the 5th grade at Whittier Education Campus. She shared: “A situation in my life that I want to be different is not really seeing my mom because she goes to school. I am proud of her and I will always love her for the sacrifices she is making for us...I know my mom goes to school...to make things better for me, my siblings, and herself. ...calling her via facetime would be the best choice because I can actually see her. ... I am so happy my mom is graduating in December of 2017.”

***XAVIER ROBERTSON** is an 8th grade student at Wheatley Education Campus. He revealed: “...late one night my father and my mother got into this major fight. There was so much screaming that all five of us, my siblings and I, woke up and listened. ...Eventually, silence took over...When morning came, my mom put my father out of the house. That day, I cried so much it hurt. Ever since then I have been thinking of all of us being together again.... So far, I have made very little progress with getting our parents to reunite. But I will continue trying.”

CAMELIA TERRAZA is in the 7th grade at Alice Deal. She shared: “...Andrew and Robert disrupt the class constantly. ... They are like an annoying mosquito bite that never stops itching. This exemplifies my many long days in Mr. Martis’s homeroom. Robert, Andrew, and the others never got any better. ... I realized that I can’t do anything to change them. I can make a positive impact by being the bigger person. Every day, little by little, I began to deal with, and learn from those difficult people in my life.”

***MARIELA TIRADO** is an 8th grade student at School Without Walls at Francis Stevens. She shared: “My situation that I would like to change is my family. ...We don’t speak that much and we never ask what’s going on anymore. ...I can never have the courage to say anything about it...I want to have a nice chat and laugh with my family. I want them to see me accomplish something wonderful and see me graduate. One small action that I would do ...is to have a meal together. ... I guess all I have to do is speak up and get their attention of what’s bothering me...”

***TORRENZ WARD** attends the 9th grade at McKinley Technology HS. He wrote: “Being late and missing days was not just affecting me it was affecting the people around me like my mother who would be late most of the time because of me...As soon as my mother and I had a talk about...the consequences...I immediately had to change because I did not want her to lose her job. Every morning since then everything went right for the first time in a while.”

***ALEXANDRA WEBBER** is an 8th grade student at Alice Deal. She wrote: “If there was something in my life that I would want to be different, it would be my lack of self confidence. Being black does occasionally have its disadvantages such as kinky hair, huge lips, and oily skin. But being black also has its advantages. ...the natural look is ‘in.’ So curly, black hair is sheik instead of shameful. I believe that every race has its challenges. ...we should all be proud of our backgrounds as well as their inner and outer impacts.”