

The Thirty-first “Celebration of Youth” Essay Contest

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PEARLS OF WISDOM FROM THE STUDENTS RECEIVING HONORABLE MENTION

Contest Theme: What is a unique quality you have that helps make you the individual you are? Write an essay about a time you displayed this special quality. What happened? Sharing your thoughts and feelings, what did you learn about yourself and others? How can this knowledge support you in the future?

GABRIELLA ABDELLA, a 4th grade student at Capitol Hill Montessori, shared: “I really enjoy art because I get to use my imagination and do whatever I want with it- there is no right or wrong. I started taking art classes when I was four, ... By the time the third class came around I thought it was the best decision I ever made. ...I love art in so many ways and my creativity is what I think is unique about me.”

***CEDRIA BOYKINS**, a 5th grade student at Excel Academy, wrote: “I was always cut off from reality. My whole world could be on a single piece of paper. An artistic mind imagines things that are beyond reality, and even fantasy. ...I learned that I can inspire people...I learned that I could create anything, even if it doesn’t mean anything or make sense. I learned that I am original.”

***SKYY BRANCH**, in the 4th grade at Barnard Elementary School, said: “Then I found out.. I was pretty and smart like everyone else. ... I think that I’ve learned from being bullied that nobody is in control of me, and I can be the weirdest person ever, but I still need to get good grades. Music has influenced me to be a different person instead of still being that one shy girl. ...music has helped me have more faith in myself.”

JUDE STURIALE BRENNAN is a 4th grade student at John Eaton. He stated: “I think the one trait that makes me, Jude Sturiale Brennan, who I am, is how often and easily I can get distracted. This makes me, well, me – by how I get ideas for inventions, books, or games, how I can get out of being stressed, and how I forget my homework a lot. And, while writing this essay, I probably got distracted quite a few times, but hey, that’s what make me, me!!!”

***MCKENZIE CRAWFORD** is in the 5th grade at Excel Academy. McKenzie shared: “Some people view being shy as a flaw, but I choose to see it as a quality...that makes me special. Because I am shy, I am very observant. I am a good listener... ...being shy means I can do a lot of things in my life without friends or people to talk to. This doesn’t mean I don’t need or want people to talk to, it just means that I am okay with being alone and comfortable with myself.”

***MADELENE FLORES** is a 4th grade student at Barnard Elementary. She expressed: “The next day I went to school, I was doing the same thing. Looking for friends. ...my mother said, ‘Do not worry. It just takes some time.’ Weeks passed. I still couldn’t find any friends. However, I never gave up. I kept on trying. ... I have a lot of friends now.”

***AVA GOINS** is a 6th grade student at Stuart Hobson Middle School. Ava shared; "...resilience is my unique quality. When I was 5 years old, I was in foster care. My foster mom had found a good home for me for the rest of my life. ... I was told these are my new parents and that they were going to take care of me. ...I was scared for a while but then I got used to them. I even grew to love them. So, one day...I went to court to get my parents. ... Now I am happy."

***AVA GOLDSON** is in the 7th grade at DC Prep Middle Campus. She wrote: "...drawing just came naturally to me. ... someone in the world is always going to be better than you, but you can't let that get you down. My family would repeatedly tell me...that just because I'm good doesn't mean I'm the best. This lesson...has shaped me into who I am today. I've become less arrogant when it comes to my abilities in art, and I...became aware that there are always places to improve, no matter what I do. ...Art has changed my life for the better..."

***SAMANTHA HENRY** is in the 4th grade at Shepherd Elementary. She shared; "My determination makes me stand out... my determination started...when I played in my first chess tournament. ...I made some minor mistakes...I wasn't ready to give up! The next thing you know I defeated my opponent and won! I was so proud of my accomplishment...all thanks to my determination. ... I learned that even when there isn't much hope, I should keep fighting until the end."

***KAYDEN JENSEN** is a 6th grade student at Stuart Hobson. She expressed: "Another time that I displayed the trait of empathy was when my friend's brother made a bad choice and got into trouble. ... Empathy is a quality that helps me learn about myself... I learned I can build connections...and others appreciate it...I learned that...when I am empathetic... it helps break down and get rid of stereotypes. Empathy makes us better people."

***AMALIA KENNY** is a 6th grade student at Alice Deal. She wrote: "You never think one of the people you love the most is going to be the person to hurt you the most. ...The point of my essay is to show that even in the roughest of times, I can find strength and determination in myself. I am who I am based on the actions that I take and not bad choices my father makes. I learned ..., they can't change who I am if I continue to stand up for what I believe in. I believe in honesty, kindness, and above all living my own life."

***SERGE KOUAM** is in the 5th grade at Barnard Elementary. He shares: "I have something I stand out for and that is my Martial Art Skills. ... Growing up in an abusive family where my mom and dad were always fighting, I did not know what to do to protect my mother. When I'm around my friends and they share about their parents being fun, I feel embarrassed, sad ... One day during Taekwondo, our Master shared how his dad was abusive. ...Taekwondo has helped me develop my inner strength, respect, discipline, and greater self-confidence."

MONICA RENEE LAWLEY, in the 9th grade at KIPP, shared: "My personality is very complex. I am normally a very shy and quiet individual, but once you really get to know me, I can be a lot to handle sometimes. I'm full of energy and I love to constantly crack jokes... My laugh is a unique laugh, my friends... say I sound like a dolphin or windshield wiper. ...I learned that my personality is something that can be indescribable and it's not really a bad thing."

***NAOMI LUCAS** is a 6th grade student at Capitol Hill Montessori. She writes: "...my younger cousin ...asked me to help her with a problem in her classroom. ... This experience showed me that I like helping younger children solve their disagreements. I realized that I could listen to both sides and try to find common ground. I learned that people can't always see both sides of a story. Sometimes it takes an outside person to point things out."

MIRACLE MAHOGANY attends the 5th grade at Excel Academy. She wrote: 'My quality is strength. ... I could have just been scared and continued to be bullied, but I didn't. What I have learned...is to never be scared to stand up for yourself. You don't have to be afraid of anyone. ...When I grow up to be a strong woman, I am going to tell little girls and boys that you don't have to be scared to stand up to a bully.'

***CECILIA PIROZZI** is a 7th grade student at Alice Deal. She shares: "I am in almost constant fear. If not from a danger... then from the fear of having a panic attack. ...3 of my friends noticed I had been crying and stopped what they were doing to make sure I was alright. They...asked what was wrong. ...after I gave my 'I'm fine' answer, they pushed harder, dug deeper. I didn't tell them, and instead of being offended, they hugged me, and told me it would be okay. I wanted to believe, ... Obviously everything's not okay, but I hope that some someday it will be."

AUBREY POWELL is in the 4th grade at Shepherd. Aubrey revealed: "I believe I am unique because I am creative. Out of all the ways someone can be creative...I choose architecture, art, and writing. ... a time I expressed my creativity through design is when my family moved into our new house ...last summer, my mom allowed me to pick the paint colors for my wall, pick the furniture, and she let me accessorize my room.

***SANDRA APAEZ RAMIREZ** is in the 5th grade at Capital City Public Charter School. She shared: "When I was eight, I wanted to be a baker, so I watched cooking videos. When I was nine, I wanted to be a detective, so I watched Sherlock Holmes. When I was ten, I wanted to be a professional tennis player, so I played tennis. I started noticing that I wanted to be many things. This motivated me to create and accomplish goals for myself."

***MYANGEL RAMSEY** is a 9th grade student at Luke C. Moore. She shared: "I am... tenacious and optimistic. ... A couple of years ago, I did not use these skills wisely – I entered into the juvenile justice system. ... I often spent time complaining. ...the time I spent blaming others was taking its toll on me. ...I wanted out of the courts for good. I am so glad that I found my resolve. ... I now give back to my community regularly. I want to use my experience...to speak to young people just like me – to let them know ...you can have a period of tough times- but you will come out of it stronger."

LAYLA RETHY attends the 6th grade at Alice Deal. She wrote: "A unique quality that I have is my ability to overcome my fears. I have been ballet dancing since I was three years old... I learned that when I feel fear, I can feel strong and see a challenge that I know I can overcome. A few months ago, I performed with American Ballet Theater ...at the Kennedy Center Opera House with some of my new dance friends. And it all happened because I did not give up"

***MADISON ROBERTS-HARRISON** is a 4th grade student at Barnard. She shared: “During the summer, my dad said he was coming to visit but...he didn’t. Now, I am in fourth grade and haven’t seen my father since. ...This is my story I wanted to share with you because I know that there are a lot of girls and boys who don’t get to see their dad like me. That’s what makes all of us so unique. ...If you feel like you were the reason your dad left you, then don’t because it’s not your fault at all, not at all.”

ZION SMITHEN attends Duke Ellington School of the Arts. As a ninth-grade student, he writes: “I ...discovered that I had forgotten to bring a community service form. I had an epiphany at that moment; I realized community service was not about the hours. It was doing something productive in your community to bring about positive change. I went back inside and told the organizer of the event that I was leaving without receiving the hours. I went home feeling good about myself and the positive impact I had...”