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VISIONS OF UNITY 2017
Literary Anthology

by

High School Students from Torrance, California

Visions of Unity Sponsors

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In memory of the late Jan King, whose initiative as a piano teacher and a Baha'i mother of black and white children in Torrance inspired the first Visions of Unity contest in 1996.

Special thanks to our parents, student contestants, and participating teachers. Your support is what keeps the contest – and its vision of unity – alive.

“Let us not seek to satisfy
our thirst for freedom
by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred.”

Martin Luther King

“Without forgiveness, there is no future.”

Desmond Tutu

“Love and compassion are necessities, not luxuries.
Without them, humanity cannot survive.”

Dalai Lama

“If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other.”

Mother Teresa

“Love will find its way through all languages on its own.”

Rumi

“You must not lose faith in humanity. Humanity is an ocean;
if a few drops of the ocean are dirty, the ocean does not become dirty.”

Mahatma Gandhi

“So powerful is the light of unity that it can illuminate the whole earth.”

Baha'u'llah

“A good head and good heart are always a formidable combination. But when you add to
that a literate tongue or pen, then you have something very special.”

Nelson Mandela

VISUAL ARTS – WINNERS AND HONOREES

The students listed on this page submitted winning visual arts entries for the Visions of Unity contest, and we proudly recognize their achievements. Their art works are displayed at the Awards Celebration and the Torrance Civic Center Library.

PAINTING

First Place, Ji Young Wu (South HS)

Second Place, Hanbee Lee (West HS)

Third Place, Esther Shin (West HS)

Honorable Mention, Brian Wong (West HS)

PHOTOGRAPHY

First Place, Beatriz Retana (Torrance HS)

Second Place, Kylonni Gordon (Torrance HS)

Third Place, Sydney Lima (Torrance HS)

COMPUTER GRAPHICS

First Place, Dream Clark (SoCal ROC)

Second Place, Lesly Ruiz (SoCal ROC)

Third Place, Ryan Wolf (South HS)

SCULPTURE

First Place, Kiley Snider (Torrance HS)

Second Place, Antonia Valencia (Torrance HS)

Third Place, Kurt Wada (Torrance HS)

LITERATURE – WINNERS AND HONOREES

SHORT STORY

First Place, Annie Chen (South HS)

Second Place, Ichinosuke Ueda (South HS)

Third Place, Jesse Saldivar (North HS)

ESSAY

First Place, Alyssa Suzuki (North HS)

Second Place, Kaleo Astorga (North HS), Anoushka Gupta (West HS)

Third Place, Amanda Aldis (North HS), Jordan Macneil (West HS), Sofia Siapkas (West HS)

Honorable Mention, Korena Chrissanthos (South HS), Cody Johnson (South HS), Alice Lee (South HS), Kailee Sawai (North HS)

POETRY

First Place, Judith Epele (North HS)

Second Place, Brian Hong (West HS)

Third Place, Tia Morimoto (North HS)

Honorable Mention, Faheema Ahmed (North HS), Anirudh Eranki (West HS), Christian Gutierrez (North HS), Danielle Hirano (North HS), Laina Wolf (West HS), Mika Kainuma (West HS)

Short Stories

ANNIE CHEN
South High School (Carlene Schultz)
First Place Short Story

Eat Your Rice with Pride

I warily gazed around the circle of sitting girls. This wasn't Torrance anymore, being surrounded by a million Asian people. This was the middle of Tennessee. This was a world I didn't know.

Lunch.

For a student, it was synonymous with break. But there was more anxiety piling up in my gut than during a final exam as I watched everyone else eat without fear, their buttered toast ham sandwiches and hot dogs with extra pickles. An untouched Thermos sat in my bag, still warm to the touch and filled to the brim with whatever food I knew my mom woke up extra early to prepare. But I didn't eat. I knew what I had compared to everyone else was outlandish, alien, and foreign. For forty minutes I busied myself with homework and conversation hoping to draw no attention to the fact I wasn't eating, and formulating lies to tell in case someone noticed.

Hunger was something I could deal with. Shame was something I couldn't.

Every lunch was the same. I lived in constant fear of being noticed. But as the days went on, I grew hopeful. It began as a small seed. A tiny grain that broke its shell with time and grew a little every day. I was hopeful that maybe I was just being paranoid for no reason, maybe I was overthinking it. These thoughts swarmed my head, busily buzzed around, and never went to sleep at night. Until one day they finally convinced me, and I did what I had been avoiding for two months.

It seemed unreasonable, ridiculous almost that I could be so nervous for lunch. But to me it wasn't just a lunch period anymore. It was testing if I belonged. If my status as a foreigner with a different culture had a place in this new world.

My Thermos was slowly unscrewed with a shaky hand. I watched as the lid was placed gently on the cold concrete floor, while a hand pick up a pair of pristine porcelain chopsticks that clacked when they met.

So far so good.

I peered down at the fluffy rice piled up like snow, at the sunshine scrambled eggs, the fiery red tomatoes and took in the most familiar scent in the world. I felt the softness of the rice as two poles forced their way through the white barrier, and closing my eyes I let the steam bathe my face in warmth. Happiness and relief simultaneously flooded through long closed gates.

“What's that smell?” an inquiry broke me from my daydream. “It's new.” A light in a pair of unreadable ice-blue hawk eyes flickered on to meet my gaze.

I froze. Caught red-handed.

“What are you eating?” the hawk smirked. But without waiting for an answer she promptly set her sandwich down, sashayed over, and leered into my lunch.

“Are those scrambled eggs swimming in tomato juice and rice?” her voiced echoed out of the metal container. “Ew that's disgusting. Who combines those? You freak.”

Like a horror story, all seven other assorted blonde heads in the circle snapped up to observe the newly chiseled statue.

A massive boulder fell on my chest suffocating me. But I wanted to let it sit there and drown under its weight. My heartbeat made itself known, and my hands no longer felt touch. Tears welled up threatening to spill over at the slightest agitation, blurring my vision. Months of hopeful wishing came crashing all at once, raining down like broken bones and shattered dreams.

“It's...” I choked on my own voice struggling to breathe. No sound would come out. Years clocked by. My head spun.

“It smells amazing actually,” came a savior voice “Who combined those because teach me puh-lease.”

From this one trigger, six other voices began to chime in. Trickling like a slow stream initially, then gradually broadening into a steady waterfall of encouragement.

“Can I try some?”

“It smells so delicious my mouth is watering.”

“The colors are so vibrant!”

Then the tiniest sound came from a small corner that hadn't contributed to the conversation yet.

“I’m sorry.”

There was silence as everyone’s attention redirected focus onto the noise.

It continued, slightly stronger. “I was only jealous that you had something so nice while I sat with the same thing slapped between two pieces of bread every day.” A bowed head looked up hesitantly. Ice-blue melted into an aquamarine with depth that I couldn’t decipher. They searched the crowd for the slightest sign of understanding. They plead for an ally.

I watched my arm extend, food in hand, and spoke, “wanna try some? I know this probably doesn’t show up a lot in Tennessee.”

Her face lit up with laughter, “it must be wonderful to have a culture that doesn’t only serve sandwiches for lunch. I wish I was Asian.”

I happily gazed around the circle of sitting girls.

This wasn’t Torrance anymore, being surrounded by a million Asian people. This was the middle of Tennessee. But it didn’t matter if it was Torrance or Tennessee to feel a unity in culture or the acceptance that I was feeling now. I was different, sure, but we’re all alike in our humanity. But out of all the places I thought I would discover this amazing truth, never once did I think it would be in a lunch circle.

ICHINOSUKE UEDA
South High School (Julie O'Brien)
Second Place Short Story

Colors of Society

A little boy named Greg once lived in Vermont. He went to Middle School, just like all the other kids. Except, he's yellow, while everyone else is white. He remembered the past, when his family luckily moved from China to America for more opportunities. His father was able to request the top schools in the U.S., located in Vermont, to accept Greg as a student, as he wanted to reach his goal of becoming a world class scientist, like his role model, Albert Einstein. However, he found it hard to fit in with the other kids. Some people did not accept him for his yellow skin or his distinct face. Greg also had a hard time speaking English. In school, his own religious practices were not allowed since it was different from everyone else's. Although Greg aced his academics, he began to feel his world becoming duller. Every day, it seemed as if his eyes had become weaker and weaker, until one day, his vision completely became like that of an old scene from an old movie - black and white. This corruption with his vision, disturbed his grades, and a day came where he could not focus on schoolwork, and was on the verge of insanity.

A month or so later, his father came back home with the news that their family had to move to California because of a business opportunity. Greg was somewhat excited, even though he had no idea where it was. After another two weeks, they have moved into a city named Torrance. The first place he went to was the beach, since he never went to one before. When he arrived there, although he couldn't see the color of the ocean, he was able to feel the sea breeze with its salty aroma flowing through the air. He also noticed that there were a lot of different people, and he could tell that some of the people had the same kind of face that he had. He went to the shore to touch the water, and ran all over the place because it was so cold. He bumps into another kid, and he stumbles to the ground. The kid offered his hand, and Greg looked up at him. He noticed that it must have been someone from the same place he came, China, because his face looks wildly familiar. Greg pleasantly accepted the kid's hand, and the kid told him that his name was Thomas. Greg asked him

curiously what his real name was, and he revealed that it was Lao. Then he remembered, that he was in his same elementary school in China, but he had moved to Torrance soon after Greg went to Vermont. The two stared at each other in awe, and discussed their life stories for a while. They also found out that they were going to be attending the same high school, so Thomas told him that he would introduce all of his good friends to Greg.

The first day of school started, and Greg got ready. He had a nervous feeling that he was gonna end up the same way like in Vermont, where he was very lonely, but the fact that he already had Thomas as a friend relieved him a bit. As Greg went to school, he noticed an immediate difference. Although he couldn't see colors, he was able to distinguish a lot of differences between the flood of students who were rushing to their classes. During introductions in classes, many people started talking to him, and he tried his best to speak out. The school had small periods of break times, where students got to take a break from their classes. Greg met up with Thomas, and he introduced him to his group of friends. There was Neil, who his family came all the way from South Africa to live in America. Dana came from Ecuador in South America. Ahmid came from India. Takeshi came from Japan. Greg was surprised by the fact that there were so many different people in California, like Thomas' friends. After their next classes, they ate lunch together and talked. Greg shared how he came from China, and what happened previously in Vermont. They also started sharing their own cultures, and Greg was happy that he was able to share his own, while also learning about other practices. He began to feel his world brighten up, as he felt his eyes becoming better.

The next day, when he woke up, he was excited to go to school, and wondered to himself if he had ever been so happy just to go to school. That day, Greg had another full adventure, and he hung out with his new group of friends after school. Time began to pass by so quickly as he was having so much fun, and his grades were at constant perfection, thanks to his new life. A month passed, and one morning, he looked out the windows to check the weather, and saw the flourishing light blue color of the sky.

JESSE SALDIVAR
North High School (Jonathan Sperling)
Third Place Short Story

Mister

“Hey Mister,” said a skinny little white boy from behind me. It had taken me by surprise. No one had ever called me mister. The boy had hair the color of wheat and big blue eyes. He wore a white button-up tucked into nice black shorts. They were Sunday clothes.

“Yes, little man?” I said, deciding to play the part of a Mister.

“Are you gonna take a sip o’ that fountain there” I most certainly was, I thought.

“I most certainly am.”

“But Mister, that sign right there says ‘Whites Only’ and you don’t look like a white man.” The child’s observation was true. I needed something to combat that June’s weather. I was burning up mighty fierce. All the colored fountains in the three parks near me had gum stuffed in them. All over the drain and nozzle. Some had dirt in them.

“I am not a white man little boy, but I’m still a man. I need water.”

“Aint’ that against the law?” The boy looked at me wide-eyed.

“Foolish law, don’t you think?” I asked the little boy. He took a few steps forward, and his face was illuminated by the setting sun.

“My papa says there ain’t any other way to make sure they know their place,” he said, his voice hushed. It was the voice a little kid uses when they have been caught doing something bad.

“To make sure who knows what place?”

“Your place.” He must have felt he was in big trouble because he quickly added, “But that’s just what my papa thinks.”

“Well little boy, it’s a good thing your papa ain’t here.” With that, I remember bowing my head so the water would grace my lips.

My hand barely touched the button when he said, “But Mister, you’re gonna get in big trouble if you’re caught.” I turned around to face him. His face was flushed.

“Why do you care, little man?” The following silence was filled by songbirds and laughing children. The trees were standing still that day. The stale air did not keep away the recently freed children. I never took pleasure in parks. I never know which ones would let me in.

After a good long while, he answered, “My papa ain’t a very nice man, so he must be wrong. Right, Mister?” I laughed. Then he laughed because he was just a little boy who wanted to laugh with a grown-up.

“What’s your name, son?”

“Jacob,” he smiled. “Yours?”

“Friends call me JJ. Now, if you have nothing else to say, I have a law to break.”

“But Mister...” He did not continue. He must have thought better of it. I took a sip from the fountain and walked away. Jacob gawked at me, amazed that a sixteen-year-old boy took a sip out of a whites-only fountain.

Jacob gave me the courage to drink out of every whites only fountain in every park within walking distance. It was a rush, defying the rules like that. It was ten past nine when I got caught. I had to pay a five dollar fine with money I did not have. It was worth every cent. That night, I was standing under a streetlamp waiting to cross the road. I looked up at the moon and waited for change to come.

Now I know change takes time. Sometimes I think I’m still waiting, then I meet people like Jacob. Men and women like Jacob make me believe in a better world. Unity is what it is. They make me believe in unity.

Essays

ALYSSA SUZUKI
North High School (Ken Anderson)
First Place Essay

Solidarity in Diversity

As we embark upon this new year, it is obvious that in 2017 we have our work cut out for us. Although we have indeed advanced further in our acceptance of people from differing religions, ethnicities, and backgrounds than our own, we are nowhere near the finish line in regards to equal respect and consideration for all people. A world of unity is not unimaginable but it has yet to become a reality. This is evidenced by the rampant racism running through some parts of the globe, the blind eye turned to the less fortunate, the persecution of religious adherents, and the hostility shown to refugees. Smaller glimpses of these issues are also apparent in everyday life, amongst people who claim, “I can’t believe there were people that let things such as the Holocaust happen”, or, “I’m so glad I didn’t live during that awful time”. But these people, who tell their children not to make friends with “those kids at the trailer park” and who go to school and shun the girls wearing hijabs or boys wearing kippahs—these people don’t realize that they are actually living the Holocaust. And not only are they living it, but they are part of the root cause.

I believe that although the Holocaust is known primarily as a horrific event of the past, it is something that has been around for much longer than the 1940s. The Holocaust is not just a genocide that occurred during WWII. Leaving it as such would be a gross understatement. The Holocaust is a global theme that has perpetuated itself since the beginning of time and propelled itself up until today. The Holocaust is a way of thinking, and a false notion of one’s superiority. It’s thinking that because your skin is a certain color, you speak a specific language, and you make a certain amount of money, you are better. It is allowing for a fear of the unfamiliar to triumph over a desire to understand and celebrate diversity. It means choosing ignorance over a spirit of learning, thereby cutting yourself off from progress because you refuse to observe other cultures, peoples and lifestyles. Most importantly, if you are Holocaust, you see your own “Jews” being beaten and choose to do nothing.

Your Jew may be that family across the street who recently immigrated from Korea and can't speak a word of English. Your Jew may be the widow in your neighborhood who gets stolen from all the time, or the kid in school who always sits alone at lunch. Perhaps your Jew is one of the starving children in Africa who you could support with a portion your income every month but don't. Regardless of whom you are or where you live, you have a Jew, a person that society has averted our eyes from and is scared to reach out to. The power and fear of association with the "wrong" person, is mighty. But we need to be bigger than this fear, this Holocaustic characteristic.

It has been theorized that the Holocaust went on for the length of time it did as a result of the bystander complex. If the masses of people had chosen to intervene, Hitler's regimes may have been stopped in a matter of weeks, and innumerable lives could have been saved. But instead people chose to turn the other way lest the Nazis come after them too. Today society follows a scarily similar pattern. There are new "Jews" and the antagonist is no longer a man named Adolf Hitler. However the modus operandi remains the same. The Jews are now a variety of people or ethnic/religious groups, targeted and not necessarily terrorized but ostracized by people wary of anyone different from them. Unity, is something we are afraid of. Solidarity with someone we feel we have nothing in common with, scares us. But why? There is no reason. Unity, not after we reconcile our differences, but rather in the midst of it, and because of it, should be sought at all costs.

There is a common saying, "United we stand, divided we fall." That is why we must strive for unity, especially with "our Jews" and with those people we don't seem to have anything in common with. Unity doesn't mean the absence of diversity, in fact diversity thrives among a united people who respect, and appreciate one another. My school's annual Multicultural Assembly stands as testament to this fact. Every year, us students practice months on end to perform dances from certain cultures, not even necessarily our own. We take pride in our own roots, and simultaneously we admire and honor the culture of our peers, and that, I believe, is the exact unity the rest of the world should strive to achieve.

KALEO ASTORGA
North High School (Jonathan Sperling)
Second Place Essay - Tie

Media Monsters

*"We become what we behold. We shape our tools and then our tools shape us." –
Marshall McLuhan.*

I know discrimination. At first glance you'd think I wouldn't "really" know what discrimination is like. After all, I've never had it aimed toward me, used against me, had it sent my way. Even though I am technically a minority, I have had the luck to be given accepting friends and family in my life. If only everyone had luck like me.

If all the minorities on the news that get hated, get hurt, get killed because of their race had the luck I have- well, there'd be no problem, right? After all, every day people in modern media share their stories of discrimination and racism. There's no denying we've got a major problem on our hands.

But how did it get this bad?

Once an event of racial bias or prejudice occurs, it gets lots of media attention. From discussions and debates to interviews, us viewers want someone to blame. That someone happens to be the instigator, and then naturally the blamed person or group defends themselves. The media retells it to the masses. Then the other side gets mad, calls them out more. The media retells it too. Back and forth they go like a pendulum, both sides retaliating and never stopping.

Meanwhile, something similar occurs, and the whole cycle repeats with new subjects. The media, as usual, covers it nonstop, with more discussions, debates, and interviews, and then BAM! People hate each other.

Eventually, when there are enough similar cases, someone's reputation gets ruined in the form of a stereotype. Some black people are committing crimes? Oh well, now all blacks are criminals. Some Hispanics have been arrested for possession of illegal drugs? Oh well, now all Hispanics are drug addicts. Some Asians have trouble speaking English since

it's not their first language? Oh well, now all Asians can't speak correctly. Sucks to be them, am I right?

All in all, the media promoted stories of racial prejudice to the masses, until they got so much momentum that they seemed to be unstoppable.

But believe it or not, we are also to blame.

Sure, the media is the one who reports all these stories. But we give these stories the attention they seek, we give them their views and retweets. We start to believe stereotypes about other races. We add fuel to the fire.

Face it- we don't tune in to media to see people be friends, or to be nice to each other. It gets boring to us, sadly. We want excitement, drama, thrill. That's why we watch stories about racism, not to try to make a difference, but to feel excitement in our lives. That's also why things like peace rallies don't really get as much attention- there's not as much excitement to be found there. The result is that we get angry with one another; we retaliate against who we feel is to blame. We let the media feed us hate, and we've absorbed it.

There is a solution to this nightmare. It's simple, just be kind to one another, always. I know that's a really cliché thing to say, but it's true. Once we start being kind to each other, we won't take as much pleasure in watching others hate each other sue to race. In fact, there'll be less of these racism stories for the media to report. It's the perfect solution to the perfect epidemic.

I understand that's easier said than done. It's especially difficult now that there are so many angry folks in the world, it's easy to feel overwhelmed. But any kind act can give inspiration to many others. Even if it's a small step forward, even if the step seems infinitesimal compared to what hate does, any step forward is progress.

That's how you can solve the problem. That's how you can create a vision of unity.

ANOUSHKA GUPTA
West High School (Mary Secura)
Second Place Essay – Tie

What's In A Name?

Ellis Island, a symbol of hope, immigration, and most of all, the American Dream. When people saw that great big, green statue, they were able to sigh with relief at the realization that they had finally reached a place where they were free to be who they were without fear of persecution or backlash. However, it may surprise you that one of the first things many of these people did when they arrived was change their name to sound more “American”, shedding their own identity in the process.

We put a lot of meaning in names, so the decision to change your name isn't an easy one, which makes the fact that so many people changed their name, to the point it became commonplace, astonishing. There are many reasons why someone may want to change their name, such as a desire to assimilate, fear of persecution, or to simply make their name easier to pronounce and spell. A Japanese immigrant named Tomoyoshi may shorten their name to Tommy or a Polish family may change their name from Kowalczyk to Smith. Changes like these may seem small and meaningless, but they do show how hard life is for the average immigrant.

To leave everything you've known in hopes of a better life is a task in itself, but to have to erase parts of you to achieve that only makes it harder. And the most tragic part is that “Americanizing” yourself actually did make life easier. A study done by *The Economist* reported that immigrants who changed their name actually earned 14 % more than those who did not. To have people believe that changing their name will lead to an easier life is one thing, but to have society make their beliefs true is another, much more sinister, thing.

Today, many people still believe that changing their name will make their lives easier. Even at my school, West High, in Torrance I know many people who go by American nicknames instead of their legal foreign names. It often seems like there are very few people who go by their given names and some seem almost ashamed when they are called their original name by accident, as if their name was shameful or embarrassing. Even I was often pressured to change my name when I was younger. My name has a pretty

straightforward pronunciation, but for some reason when people attempt to pronounce it, it seems to stick on their like molasses, as if the mere sight of a name that wasn't Sarah or Catherine paralyzed their tongue. I remember feeling embarrassed when someone mispronounced my name or when I was asked repeatedly whether I had a shorter nickname.

Despite all this, I still stuck to my birth name, mostly to honor my parents. My name, Anoushka, means "one who fulfills dreams" in my language and my parents named me it as a symbol of both how I was a symbol of them fulfilling their dreams and so I could strive to fulfill my own dreams. To me, changing my name was the same as throwing away the hopes and ambitions my parents had for me and the love and care in which they had chosen my name. I'm sure many feel the same way when they're make the decision to change their name, so why we are we encouraging people to adapt themselves when we in reality we should be able to adapt ourselves and allow people to feel comfortable with their own name.

The fact that so many people change their names really goes to show that despite our claims that America is multicultural, all we've really done is take people of different cultures and attempt to erase who they were before and make them into a copy of an American. We say that we are a melting pot full of different cultures, but in reality we are nothing more than a bland soup of imitation ingredients. My vision of unity is a society where people don't have to be ashamed of their name or feel like they have to change their name to please society, because a name is chosen to symbolize a child's future and past culture. A society that embraces other cultures without attempting to change them. We may not be able to go back to Ellis Island, but we all still have to ability to make new immigrants today be able to be themselves without fear of backlash by allowing them to be proud of all that they bring with them, even if it makes it harder for us. If we are able to become less prejudiced against things foreign to us, we are able to take another step forward in becoming a multicultural and unified society.

AMANDA ALDIS
North High School (Jonathan Sperling)
Third Place Essay - Tie

The Differences Within Our Borders

When you look around, what kinds of people do you see? Are you greeted by faces that look like yours and brains that think just like you? Or are you met with a variety of different skin tones and conflicting opinions? The city of Torrance, California definitely holds an abundance of diversity within its border lines. Diversity is a topic that is often overlooked, but as someone who grew up in a diverse city, it is clear that diversity is needed in order for people to understand each other and their ways of life.

Torrance offers a wide variety of things to experience. In this big city, you can expect a colorful amount of restaurants, shops, family-owned businesses, and much more. Even in public schools such as North High, you will see a different colored face each time you turn around. Schools are scattered with every single race, ethnicity and religion. This diversity contributes to the endless amounts of cultural clubs and exciting assemblies.

In many ways, people overlook the importance of diversity. They think, "I grew up with a lack of diversity and I turned out alright." But they miss the whole idea of living with diversity, which is supposed to help people understand other's cultures and ways of life. People who grow up with a lack of diversity are more likely to think poorly of different races and religions because they seem so foreign and they refuse to try to understand them. They could also look at certain groups with fear because since they know so little about them, and they may believe every stereotype about them. When you grow up with a lack of diversity, you grow up with a lack of education.

Although many may not see the importance of growing up with diversity, it definitely does matter. I am lucky enough to have grown up in Torrance. The diversity here has educated me about the significance of various types of people and accepting them. If it were not for this diverse city, I might have grown up to look down upon certain races and religions. So the next time you look around, notice the types of faces you look at and think about the significance of where you live and the people around you.

JORDAN MACNEIL
West High School (Aura Imbarus)
Third Place Essay - Tie

Honorary Asian

As a white female I will never truly be able to understand the way most minorities feel targeted by society. However, growing up in West Torrance has taught me a small amount about not “conforming” to the society you are placed in. When I was in kindergarten, I started looking around at the kids I was playing with, and I realized I didn't fit in. I looked around and saw kids who had dark hair, eyes and skin tone. I however have platinum blonde hair, green eyes and my skin is white as a sheet. Confused by my new found difference, I asked my mom. She informed me that I was not in fact Asian, like my friends are, but white. For some reason, I didn't put it together that I was different from my friends. But from then on I longed to have long dark, hair that my friends have. I would beg my mom to let me dye my hair black so I could fit in better. As I grew up, I resented the fact that most of my friends would call me their “white friend”. I would honestly forget I was white until I started ordering something off a menu from a Japanese restaurant and could see the look on the waitress's face that said I was completely butchering the pronunciation. I really hated being white, and I often found myself wishing that I was Asian.

It wasn't until I realized that my Aunt is adopted that I started to be okay with my “whiteness”. She was adopted from Korea when she was four. I did not know she was adopted until I was twelve. In fact, I probably would still not know that she is adopted to this day if I had not saw that on her birth certificate it said she was born in Seoul. Even though she lived with my family for the first four years of my life, I never figured out that she was Asian. She was my Aunt, and I assumed that since the rest of my family is white, she was too. My friend, who was with me at the time of my epiphany, looked at me dumbfounded. She did not understand how I could not see that my Aunt clearly looks nothing like me. Whenever other people looked at her they saw that she was Asian. But I just saw my Aunt Cathi. This made me realize that my friends did not just see me as their “white friend”. My friends saw past my pale complexion, and accepted me into their family.

In recent years, there was an adoption frenzy in my family. Between both sides of my family, I have cousins from all over the world: a China, Korea, Ethiopia, Haiti, Italy, two Native Americans, two from Malaysia, and three adopted from the United States. This has led to some pretty confusing family photos. But it has also allowed me to be able to experience multiculturalism within my own family, and not just at school or in my community. It has also given me a new perspective into the world of adoption and foster care, and the hardships they had to overcome to be a part of my family. My cousin from China was abandoned at a bus station when she was eighteen months old and in an orphanage until the age of four. One of my cousins were addicted to methadone at the time of her birth. Another had more than four broken bones before his first birthday. All of my experiences with my cousins and growing up in West Torrance have made me comfortable around all groups of people. I have grown accustomed to looking around and not seeing that photocopies of myself everywhere I turn. As I start looking to colleges, I come to terms with the fact that it will not be as racially diverse as Torrance. But my time spent in Torrance has provided me has provided me with the greatest lesson I will learn at any school, acceptance.

SOFIA SIAPKAS
West High School (Aura Imbarus)
Third Place Essay - Tie

Uniqueness: A Blessing or a Curse?

Αποδοχή. You may not recognize this word, but in my household, it is not so peculiar. Meaning acceptance in Greek, many in Torrance are probably not familiar with this word or language, but I am. It is stunning how many ways a word can be spoken and understood. People don't realize just how many languages are spoken in our one city. When we were little children walking into the first day of kindergarten, there were an immense amount of exposure to all of the different ethnicities and races in the world all in one place – elementary school. Being at the hopefully pure age of four, five or even six, children are usually pretty open-minded when it comes to making friends and communicating with the new adults that surround them. Regardless of the many influences or pressures that can be presented to a child's developing mind in their households, every young individual can become a tolerant human being in their multi-culturally diverse society. We are incredibly lucky to live in a city like Torrance where so many different nationalities are represented allowing citizens young and old to create relationships with people different, yet so similar to us. We are all human beings, but it is our differences that make us unique in our world of possibilities.

Thinking back to elementary school, a project I significantly remember is when we had to make a family tree and create a doll that represented who we were ethnically. Doing this, I learned so much about my Greek, Serbian and Bulgarian culture and realized just how amazingly interesting it is that one person could be so many different things. I mean this in the sense that a human can represent a little bit of so many countries, yet we all live in one place. To be a respectful and tolerant person, we must be raised or develop the mindset early on in our lives. Young children need to learn to see the beauty in the uniqueness we all hold within us. I say uniqueness rather than differences because a difference can often be seen as an unfavorable thing. Some products are the same in stores but are made of different ingredients, making some better than others. I believe with

humans this is not the case. The charming uniqueness we hold from the color of our skin, to the textures of our hair or the customs that we follow are all characteristics that make us special in this world of billions of human beings.

It is easy to track back a lot of our judgments or perceptions of society from the words or actions of our parents. My mother has always been a very open-minded person when it comes to meeting new people. She questions peoples' cultures and tries to impress them by saying a word of their language if she knows it. My mom has the capability to find the beauty in people and identify what makes them unique. I have always noticed this trait in her and try to incorporate it into my very own life daily. Language is an exceptionally significant aspect of our society because so many of them are spoken in one city alone, like Torrance. My father's first language was Greek while my mother's was Serbian. My best friend's mother speaks Spanish and the woman that I babysit for speaks German. In our diverse community of Torrance, a little bit of every piece of the world is represented. We are fortunate to live in a place where we have the opportunity to connect with the world within only the city's borders.

When I think of the word unity, a simple and maybe even childish, yet perfect representation of it appears in my mind. I remember seeing a picture in elementary school of people holding hands in a circle around Earth. These human beings were all of different races and ethnicities, yet together. We have the opportunity to come together as a community and even a world that did not always exist. A multitude of people fought for this unity we have today. They fought for us all to be able to hold hands in a world that does not always accept the uniqueness we have to offer. To be loving, kind, accepting, tolerant, or open-minded is not only being a great person – it is being human. The moment we are able to look at someone through the eyes of tolerance and acceptance and take their hand is the moment that we make Martin Luther King Jr. proud. Our society becomes a better place to live in. Torrance is a city where this happens daily and I feel truly blessed to be a part of it.

KORENA CHRISSANTHOS
South High School (Julie O'Brien)
Honorable Mention - Essay

Discrimination Is Still A Problem

For hundreds of years discrimination has been a major problem in America. During the civil rights movement of the 1950's and 1960's Martin Luther King Jr. and other leaders fought for those who did not have a voice. Still in 2017, more than 50 years later, many people are still facing discrimination or being treated unfair. Not only are some of the old problems still plaguing society, while more new problems have arisen as well. Women and men all across the country are still not getting the treatment they deserve.

For example, many women are still getting poor treatment in the workplace. Often women who have the same job and work the same amount of hours as men still get paid less. Women also get unfair treatment when trying to find jobs because some employers would hire a male rather than a female. Though the situation may have gotten better over the years, women are still facing discrimination as they did during the 1950s.

Another big problem is racial discrimination. People often hold negative stereotypes based on race, ethnicity or religion. For example, if you are Hispanic some assume you are an illegal immigrant who is smuggling drugs. In some cases African-Americans are pulled over by police simply because of their race. Sometimes people assume that if you are Muslim you are a terrorist. Not so long ago I witnessed discrimination at Disneyland: a Muslim man was getting patted down by security far more than the other people in line. This made me sad to think that this man, who was just trying to enjoy a day with his family, was patted down just because of his appearance. It is even worse to think that some people grow up in an environment where they think being racist is acceptable behavior. Often people only know what they are taught and told by their parents.

I have been very lucky that I have not faced discrimination. But many of my Greek ancestors did when they first came to the United States in the early 20th century. My *yiaya* (grandmother) has told me many stories about my great-grandfather coming to America as a young boy. When he came no one wanted Greeks here because of their religion, their

inability to speak English, and because they did not believe Greeks could ever become true Americans. This made it very hard for them to find jobs and homes, and led to a number of racist incidents.

Luckily today things have changed for Greeks-Americans quite dramatically. I hope this means that things can change for other groups for the better as well. In order to defeat discrimination we all need to come together. Everyone should treat everyone else as equal; as it says in the Declaration of Independence "All men are created equal". We should not make judgments or assumptions right off the bat. If you think about it we are not much different from one another. Most of us have the same goals of having a good job, a nice home, food on the table, and a family. Instead of focusing on the differences such as race, we should focus on our similarities. By coming together we can beat discrimination and make America a better place for future generations.

CODY JOHNSON
South High School (Julie O'Brien)
Honorable Mention - Essay

Come Together

From birth, the majority of people are taught to be loving and accepting of others. They are taught to accept other people's beliefs, cultures, and ways of life. Even if this is the goal in a lot of people's hearts, it doesn't always work out. People all over the world are still discriminating against other races, and even though you might teach your child to be accepting, their peers might change their opinion. People these days have experienced some extremely cruel treatments simply because of the way they look. However, I have had a different experience growing up because I live in a household where both of my parents were born in America and all of my close relatives are not foreign. I have yet to even go out of the country and experience other cultures first hand, which is one of my biggest dreams for the future. However, I have been able to experience a way of life other than my own at South Torrance High School.

I am in eleventh grade at South, and I have been taking Korean since eighth grade, I am currently in Korean 4 Honors. Taking this class has opened up a whole new world I was never exposed to before. As crazy as this sounds, I didn't know where North and South Korea were on a map, I didn't know what their flag looked like, I didn't even know what Korean BBQ was before this class. These details may seem miniscule compared to what knowledge could be obtained; however it has changed my view on the Korean culture entirely. My Korean teacher goes above and beyond just teaching the class how to conjugate vowels. We learn about Korean food, even getting to make dishes in class. We learn about the people, their beliefs, traditions, fashion, and their ways of life. People always asked me why I was taking Korean if I am white, and my answer would always be the same, I want to learn something new about culture and language.

This is what sets Torrance apart from other areas of the world, its ability to bring people together in ways that people can't explain. Torrance is a very multi-cultural area, it isn't just one race occupying the entire city. This shows that the people living and leading in

this city are open-minded and accepting of others. All the clubs at the high schools, fundraisers, and events unite people of all kinds of races together. The Torrance School District's requirement for students to take a foreign language class in order to graduate is demonstrating a change in people's mindsets. People are broadening their scopes, and students are learning new things about different parts of the world even if they didn't know it going into it.

People are different, of course, but recognizing those differences and accepting them is what will end up changing the world in the long run. It has to start somewhere, perhaps in a small town, or city like Torrance. People are going to be the ones to bring change. People, together, are able to make change, maybe that's school, on social media, or changes within the community. Together everyone can make a difference. All we have to do is unite together as one.

ALICE LEE
South High School (Jena Akin)
Honorable Mention - Essay

A Barrier That Brings Us Together

“Wo ting bu dong ni zai shuo shen me. Yong zhong wen gen wo jiang.”

These are sentences that I have heard from my mother a countless number of times. They are simple sentences, yet they have the ability to spark both screaming arguments and long, bitter periods of silence between us.

My mother, although she has lived in America for over twenty years, does not speak fluent English; she did not receive her education here. On the other hand, I, being born and raised in California, am much more comfortable speaking English than I am Chinese. As ashamed as I am to admit it, my mother’s English has been the source of a great amount of embarrassment for me. I have a number of memories of her, standing in line at the store, asking me to translate sentences into English for her so she does not have to struggle with her broken English in front of the cashier. When I was younger, I often purposely walked off once it was her turn, pretending to be interested in items nearby in order to avoid being seen with her.

This language barrier has always been an intense source of tension between us. However, as I got older, I became extremely impatient with her; there was a period of time when her requests for me to translate my words were continually met with silence. I believed that, instead of exhausting myself trying to translate my comments, rants, and stories, it would be easier for us to stop speaking altogether. In return, my mother constantly complained that my siblings and I only spoke English in her presence because we wanted to embarrass her by showing others that she could not understand.

At the time that our relationship was at its worst, I often wondered why I happened to be born in a multicultural family. I saw it as something that permanently broke us apart, something that would always prevent us from forming close relationships. In my mind, we were like pieces of a puzzle that did not fit together, forever separated by our unchangeable shapes.

However, despite all of these challenges, I have realized with time that our mix of cultures can actually serve to do the exact opposite. It is this blending of Chinese and American cultures that make it possible for us to learn so much from each other--for me, the Chinese traditions, and for my mother, the American. It is our differences that make us so capable of forming not only a close relationship, but a strong one as well.

When we encounter people who are different from us, it is easy for us to distance ourselves with the belief that we will never be able to identify with them. However, the reality is that these people are often able to teach us the most; they can give us a perspective on the world that we have never yet considered before. This can, in turn, make us more understanding and compassionate towards each other. Regardless of whether one's differences occur in their culture, beliefs, ethnicity, abilities--having a heart that is willing to love and a mind that is willing to learn will allow us to live in unity and peace. Diversity should not be used as a weapon that tears people apart, but seen as a gift that makes individuals more accepting and open minded.

Now, I have begun to see the value in translating English words and sentences for my mother.

“Wo ting bu dong ni zai shuo shen me. Yong zhong wen gen wo jiang.”

“I can't understand what you're saying. Say it to me in Chinese.”

Her words are no longer met with cold, unspoken hostility, but warm kindness and patience; I have finally started to make an effort to speak to her in Chinese. When we go shopping, I accompany her to the cashier, filling in her moments of hesitation with translations. Although these actions may seem small and insignificant to many, they are steps in my journey to becoming more understanding towards my mother. These tiny changes in my behavior represent complete shifts in my mindset--from one that was overcritical and judgmental to one attempting to exercise ideas of acceptance and love. My mother and I still have our differences, but what has changed is that they no longer divide us; our differences bring us together.

KAILEE SAWAI
North High School (Jonathan Sperling)
Honorable Mention - Essay

The blazing August sun shined on the heads of thousands of people dancing in harmony. The lanterns fluttered in the wind, and the music is flowing throughout the streets. The traditional kimonos and happicoats are flowing with every movement. There is laughing and everyone of all ages are having a great time. There are diverse people dancing, including Japanese, Caucasians, African Americans, Hispanics, and many more. They are dancing a traditional Japanese dance called Obon.

Obon dancing originated in Japan, which celebrates the remembrance of loved ones or relatives that have died. It has been said that the spirits of one's ancestors travel onto earth during the festival, usually on the 15th day of the seventh month in a year. They go into paper lanterns and watch as many people dance in harmony honoring the remembrance of their lives. There are festivals held every August, and there are many places in the world where festivals are held. They include some parts of Asia, South America, the west coast of the United States, and Hawaii. The most popular attire to wear is a kimono, happicoats, and yukatas, but people can wear anything they want to dance.

This festival can be considered a multicultural event, because many races besides Japanese come and celebrate, or come to the festival to dance and have fun. Coming to an Obon festival can benefit someone new, because they can learn about the Japanese culture and have fun dressing up and dancing. Obon dancing can change someone's view on the afterlife, and it can make them happy and have great thoughts about the new world, so they won't be worrying and be negative too much about it. Tourists from around the world can attend one and join in dancing, celebrating the remembrance of relatives.

I go to the Gardena Buddhist Church Obon every August, and I have been going since I was 2 years old. I could barely walk, maybe a little wobbly, but my mom felt it was an important part of our culture that she wanted to share and instill with my family. Before in my younger years, there used to be 90% Japanese people attending and dancing, and the extra 10% were non-Japanese attendees. But as the years went on, more and more non-Japanese people started showing up to the festival and were dancing alongside many other

people. Today, there are probably 50% Japanese and 50% non-Japanese people attending the Gardena Obon festival. It is pretty neat seeing many different races showing up to the festival and learning the culture of the Japanese people dancing to Obon. It truly is a great experience to partake in. Every year I attend, I have a blast dancing alongside my friends and family.

People who are not Japanese can learn a lot from attending Obon festivals, and they can learn about the Japanese culture attending the festival. Their whole views on Japanese culture can change from showing up to the festival in August. Their opinions about the Japanese people can change if they attend too. There doesn't have to be a specific ethnicity and race that can attend a festival, and everyone is invited to show up and have a great time.

My being Japanese can have a few perks when I come to the festival. I become more aware and more respectful on the reason why I participate, which is honoring my deceased relatives. I changed a lot as a Japanese citizen living in Torrance because I know a lot about my culture and learn about my ancestors and what they did before me to help shape me into the person I am today. My values in life can also change. I have learned to value family more than money, and I have learned to be polite, to respect your elders, and to work hard to succeed.

The Obon festival every August has changed me as a person, and has helped many other ethnic cultures appreciate the Japanese culture. Obon is welcome to everyone, and the cause may seem sad on celebrating the lives of your deceased relatives, but it is a joy to celebrate it with thousands of others dancing around the lanterns. It is a true multicultural event that occurs every year, and everyone has a good time seeing each other and remembering their relatives together in harmony. Dancing can wash all of the worries and doubts away, and it is harmonious with the thousands dancing alongside you remembering the lives of their loved ones too.

Poetry

JUDITH EPPELLE
North High School (Kenneth Anderson)
First Place Poetry

La Flor

Mi nombre es Flora
Named for the hope of blossoming
Even if people try to stomp and crush me
I will be too strong to wilt, to die

The soil cradled me as a seed
I learned about my roots
The songs of my culture flowed like water
I felt alive

They called me Mamí
But I was no mother
They whistled and called like dogs
Did they expect me to adopt them?

They asked me if I was on welfare
I said I fared pretty well
They said to go back to where I came from
I said I already bought all the groceries I need, why would I go back to the grocery store?

They slammed me against a wall
A fire in their eyes
They called me illegal and to get out of their country
I didn't think they looked like the president, and a woman walking by agreed with me

She came to stand next to me
A fire in her eyes too
But she spoke to them calmly
Her words built me up without tearing theirs down
Their fire shrank down as they listened to her
When I looked at them now, it was as if a new wave had washed over their face
Eyes immersed in understanding

Mi nombre es Flora
I grow strong in the face of adversity
But I flourish when we stand in unity

BRIAN HONG
West High School (Aura Imbarus)
Second Place Poetry

Gangland Fouls

Seoul born, LA raised.
Soul lorned, pigment caged.
Judgement solely based off of shade.
In LA, that could get you a fade
and not the haircut, but real bodies being laid.

I'm pure Korean and not talking Gangnam style.
We're talking gangland fouls.
Words could get you killed, like a bad hangman round.
Guns going off, popping in your ears, with that "click-clack" sound.
Potential wasted, never college bound.

There are music artists out there, playing with guns and likes.
When there is a kid in every major city that is going to die tonight.
It is a major pity to be locked in the sights,
To die and see that end of the tunnel, that forsaken light.
Should I fight or fly?

It is really a shame.
This life is not a video game,
You can't pause, resume, respawn.
No real cause, only lose, we're all pawns.
But one day, I'll be the don.

I'll lift myself out of this,
I always hit, never miss.
For my death will never come
I'll be known as 'Greatest of All Time':
#1.

"Never Stop Creating."
Always educating, I'm demonstrating
That my success is constantly levitating.
Never fading.
A new legacy is currently dedicated,
To me.

I aspire to be like Jobs, Einstein and West
Without a doubt, I'll be the best.
Against all odds, I will rise above the rest.
Inspired by dumbfoundead.
People expect the kids where I'm from to be dumb, found dead.

TIA MORIMOTO
North High School (Jonathan Sperling)
Third Place Poetry

Biracial

Am I white or
Am I Japanese?

When I am with my
White side of the
Family, do they remember
What I am?

My grandfather, a
World War II veteran.
How could his daughter marry
One of them?
The ones he fought to
Defend his country
Against.

Am I white or
Am I Japanese?

When I am with my
Japanese side of the
Family, do they know my
Grandfather despises them?

Do they know the
Awful things he has said about
Them?

Do they remember
Their people were put into
Camps because of them?

Am I white or
Am I Japanese?

A grandchild, the bridge
Connecting the two families.
That grandchild will
Teach both families to
Embrace each other with
Open arms.

I am white and
I am Japanese.

FAHEEMA AHMED
North High School (Kenneth Anderson)
Honorable Mention - Poetry

I Will Rise

I see myself as a person with a good heart
But others see me more as a threat
And that makes my whole world fall apart
That's still not enough to change them, I bet

My heart is filled with goodness and purity
But some overlook that and just focus on my beliefs
It fills me with sadness and insecurity
Makes me wonder till my brain is weak

Although I know my beliefs are not of sin
The hatred really does run deep
Am I supposed to give in?
Do I stay worrying while they're sound asleep?

NO
Never
Not today
Never ever

I refuse to ever let them win
As long as my heart beats
I'll prove my deeds and not stand still
I will climb up, no matter how steep

I will continue to thrive
Never stop. Never quit
Not even the day I die
I will not fall
I will only rise

ANIRUDH ERANKI
West High School (Mary Ann Lange)
Honorable Mention - Poetry

The Faces

I once went to the store
And as I walked in the door
I saw a face
That was all I saw
So I walked closer to the face
And as I did so
I soon observed a group of faces forming around it
All of them were different colors
As I walked into the circle
I noticed something quite remarkable
They were talking to each other!
So I listened to what they were saying
And to my surprise
One at a time, each of the faces told each other about their troubles
They told each other their passions
They told each other EVERYTHING
And that made me wonder how such different faces could possibly get along
How could they share their feelings
How could they talk to each other without noticing that they were a different color
I was stuck in thought
I couldn't find the answers
I just couldn't
So I looked more closely
And then, I saw it
The faces were only different in their color
Everything else was the same
So I questioned myself
How could they NOT get along
Was I not thinking straight
Then I realized these faces were the same
It was just how I first looked at them that changed everything
Maybe I should have just looked at them a little harder

CHRISTIAN GUTIERREZ
North High School (Kenneth Anderson)
Honorable Mention - Poetry

Cultural Couplets

To make me, dark met light,
And had it all just right.
Torrance met L.A.,
And skirt steak met filet.
Yes I've had mole,
And lots of posole,
But I've also had a sandwich,
And even some creamed spinach.
I was 7 when I left Lawndale,
But my new town was on a bigger scale
Growing up mixed-race is nice,
But Torrance introduced new rice.
Sure Mexican-American was enough,
But Torrance's Japanese introduced new stuff.
My old friends were like vultures,
But the new friends shared their culture,
Many people only experience one,
But I've seen so many and I'm not done.
Without these experiences life would be half as good,
And the biggest reason it's worthwhile is the food.

DANIELLE HIRANO
North High School (Kenneth Anderson)
Honorable Mention - Poetry

Look Me In The Eyes

“You’re eyes are too small, you’re practically blind!”
“Haha, Ping pong, ching chong, Ling-Ling!”
Close your eyes and cover your ears, stay locked in your mind.
You feel the tears run and feel the sting.
Wanting to turn around and say something back,
But you know that you’re bigger and better than that.
Walking away, not moving to attack,
Because you know it’s the best way to combat.
They don’t get it, at least not yet.
They can’t see or understand what you can,
Though in time, you bet
They’ll understand that a man is a man
No matter what the race.
If they put colors aside
And just looked in your face,
At the eyes that have cried
Countless days and nights,
They’d see something staring right back
And rethink the wrongs and the rights.
A new opportunity
To finally accept unity.

LAINA HOFF
West High School (Aura Imbarus)
Honorable Mention - Poetry

The Infectious Seed

The tree is looming--
decorated with strange fruit
The King calls to uproot:
People protest peace in the streets
Rosa stays in her seat
Little Rock leaves a legacy
The tree is falling,
the fruit now drained.
But Ferguson still complains
Charlotte riots still pertain
The media still contains
Black Lives Matter still remains
The tree may be weakened,
Its leaves turning brown
But they still float in the wind
Spreading its seeds on the ground.

MIKA KAINUMA
West High School (Aura Imbarus)
Honorable Mention - Poetry

The Flag That Stands Alone

As I'm blown by the wind
Yet being set on fire by the discrimination and labels
Standing strong and bold
Is me

Born as a half of rival countries
Difference in culture and language
Sets there a line between me and them

A line in which of I'm unsure to cross
An answer not yet clear
At times of being accepted and at times of being rejected

1592
The start of disagreement
The battle between my two countries
In which I believe
Should exist peace

The words of hate
The labels given to me
As a Japanese-Korean who betrayed her own countries
Whether I was to be a Korean or a Japanese were the only given choices

But that choice is never to be made by them
Nor to be given to me
Not as a Japanese and not as just a Korean
But I as both
That flag that is tied together with white stitches
Is me
A Korean- Japanese flag

As an unique individual
On a view in which are seen through my eyes

The Flag That Stands Alone