

Visions of Unity 2012: Literary Anthology

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Visions of Unity 2012

Literary Anthology

By

Writers from Torrance, California High Schools

History of the Contest

In the early 1990s, a Torrance mother and piano teacher named Jan Jackson was determined to start a Martin Luther King Day observance and arts contest in Torrance. After her struggles in raising a biracial family in Torrance, she knew the arts could touch the hearts and raise awareness among a generation who would then use their skills to create change. She enlisted the help of the Baha'i Community in starting the arduous process. After the first four years, however, Jan passed away of melanoma and could not drive this cause.

The contest needed a broad base of support, and the recently formed Human Relations Forum took on the contest in her memory, honoring and enlarging the dream of Dr. Martin Luther King to embrace families from the many cultures who share a common home in this diverse city. All students from all five Torrance high schools are invited to participate. The entries, due on Martin Luther King Day, are celebrated in March each year.

The forum and its roster of partners have now sponsored this contest for a dozen years, even though some of the original members have also passed away or left the area. The importance of cultivating creative talents and practicing arts advocacy to unify humankind has proven such a powerful concept that it has carried a momentum all its own.

The dream that both Jan Jackson and Dr. King shared lives on in the works of the young artists and writers, as they discover the power of the arts. Opportunities such as these not only improve their professional skills but sharpen the tools they possess to create deep structural change in the society they will inherit and mold, for today's dream includes children of many more than two cultures playing together. Today's dream is no less than this:

*"Wherefore, O my loving friends! Consort with all the peoples...with the utmost goodwill and friendliness...that hate and rancour may vanish from the world, and the darkness of estrangement amidst the peoples and kindreds of the world may give way to the Light of Unity." **

**(Baha'i Writings.)*

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Photography

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New Media

First Place	Amanda Shields (So Cal ROC)
Second Place	Lilian Candelaria (So Cal ROC)
Third Place	Christian Sanchez (So Cal ROC)

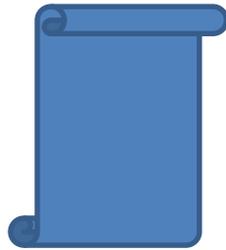
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Special Thanks

*To the Teachers and Parents Who Encouraged the Contest
Participants' Meaningful Expressions of Creativity and Purpose*

SHORT STORIES



Lauren Sullivan
First-Place Short Story

Altered Perception

I will never forget that day, that fateful day that forever changed the way I perceived others. The memory of the incident is still fresh in my mind. I can remember it as if it were yesterday.

It was the first day of sixth grade, one of the most important events in the life of your average eleven year-old. I had waited for that day to come all summer long. I would no longer be a big, bad fifth-grader, at the top of the food chain; I would be a little sixth-grader, just trying to survive in a foreign land they like to call "junior high school." (Just the thought of the words *high school* made me feel nauseous.) Anyway, after scarfing down a huge stack of banana pancakes, I felt ready to conquer the world. My mom's routine goodbye hug that morning was a little tighter and a little longer than usual, but then again, so was mine. And with that, I was off and ready to start my new life as an official middle-schooler.

When I arrived at my destination, I was excited. I was with the "big dogs" now, and it was time for me to start acting more mature. Suddenly, I spotted a small group of my old friends from elementary school. We all greeted each other and immediately started catching up on what we did over the summer. It was great being able to share the experience of going to a new school with all my friends, and the day couldn't have been going any better. Little did I know, I was in for a rude awakening.

"Hey," my friend whispered to our small group of friends as she pointed to a girl passing by, "Look at *that*." We all jerked our heads around and spotted her. She was wearing a polka dot, red and green shirt, orange jeans, and shiny, yellow rain boots that squeaked with every step she took.

"Oh my gosh, look at her outfit!" one of the girls in my group cried out.

"Ew, what a nerd!" another said. Everyone was laughing hysterically. She looked over to us and I could see her eyes start to water.

I knew, in my heart, that the right thing to do was to stand up for her, but I was in junior high now, and I knew that all of my friends were way cooler than she'd ever be. I was willing to do whatever it took to reach the top of the social ladder, and perhaps that was what ultimately led to my defeat.

"Wow!" I cried, "Where on Earth did you get that top? At the swap meet?" My friends all burst out laughing, and I joined in. "Nice one!" they all cried. I smiled, but inside, I knew that what I had said to her was awful. She stood there, trembling. Her face turned bright red and I could see the pain in her eyes. Suddenly, she bolted off toward the bathroom.

"What a loser!" my friend proclaimed. "Don't worry about her. She's just sensitive." I chuckled, but inside, I wanted to cry.

"What have I just done?" I thought to myself. My stomach churned and I felt ashamed. Is this really what I wanted to be known as in middle school? The mean girl? The bully who makes others feel insecure? I knew what I had to do, and I immediately bolted off toward the bathroom.

When I entered, I saw the girl standing in the corner. Her eyes were puffy and red. She spotted me and yelled, "Get out! Haven't you done enough already?" She started to sob. I made my way toward her and bowed my head. "Look," I said, "I'm really sorry. I shouldn't have said that to you. It was cruel and mean and I'm ashamed of myself." The girl suddenly looked up. "The truth is," I continued, "I just wanted to impress my friends and I thought that saying that to you would make me look cool. I really do like your shirt, and your yellow rain boots are so cute."

She sniffled. "You think so?"

"I do," I replied. Suddenly, a smile swept across her face and she reached her hand out toward me. "I'm Becky."

"I'm Lauren," I replied. I reached out and grabbed her hand, and from that moment on, Becky and I would become close friends.

I realized several things that day. People have preconceived notions about others before they get to know them, but we must look past their differences and come together as one. Unity is the key to a harmonious and compassionate world, and learning to accept others despite their origins or ethnicity will help us achieve this goal.

Violett Sanchez
Second-Place Short Story

The Labyrinth

I pleaded for help. I had no idea what I was doing. Verbs—nope, adjectives—nope. English was actually a lot harder than I had expected it to be, and kids in my school were determined to do whatever was possible for me to understand it even less.

My name is Florencio Rulli, and I'm from Argentina. I don't go around dancing tango all the time, and I don't believe that *empanadas* are the most delicious food in the world. I like American baseball, I am VERY fond of pizza, and my idea of dancing is stomping. This is exactly why I used to ask myself "Why do the American kids make fun of me?" or "Why do they scoot to the end of the lunch tables as if I reek of garlic? Why?" These questions were asked all throughout elementary and junior high. They wouldn't give me a chance. For them, I was always "that foreign kid."

I'm older now. I can speak English like a born American, and I still like baseball and pizza. I don't hold grudges against the kids that made fun of me, but it's heartwarming to remember it, because I think I changed a certain person's outlook on life. His name was Dylan.

"Dylan? Help—please." I looked down at my worksheet and began to scan what I thought was incorrect—everything. The look in my eyes must've been desperate because Dylan laughed.

"HA HA HA! He repeated the name 'DEE LAAN!'" At the time I usually didn't have the slightest idea of what he was saying, so I quickly ran my fingers against my embarrassed face, which I was sure had something on it. I now know that he was making fun of my English, but that's okay.

Dylan wouldn't stop laughing, so I did what any smart foreign kid would do. I ignored him. I knew I wouldn't be getting any help on my English that day, so I gave up. Lunch rolled around and I was determined to make myself nonexistent.

I walked to the back of the school, and of course, I was shouted to in the process.

"Hey Flo! Wanna come over and teach to me how to sing Mariachi songs?"

Dumb kid, by the way, he assumed I was Mexican. I ignored him.

My legs began to burn more and more as I made my way to the end of the campus, but that was okay. I plopped down onto a little dusty red bench and tried to regulate my breathing again. Hope was nowhere to be found, and I had no idea where to find it. I was tired of the kids, tired of English, and tired of my life. As I glumly pulled out a grilled cheese sandwich from my bag, I saw a *girl* peaking at me from behind a tree.

I was angry that she was looking at me, I wanted to be left alone. I didn't want to be made fun of anymore, and especially not by a girl. "What you do here!?" I must've said that utterly wrong as well, because she replied with a dumbfounded look on her face. Oh, and boy, was I bad at English.

"I came to help you." I recognized her soft voice and red hair. She was in my English class. She was the girl that never talked, and she was the girl that never made fun of me. The young girl always wore pretty dresses and had her hair nicely brushed.

"No, you don't" I replied, letting my soft side get the better of me. I felt tears gathering at my throat and blocking my sight. I suddenly thought, *Oh, great. She's putting on an act. She's going to tell everyone that the foreign boy cried and I'll be ridiculed even further.*

"Yes, I am." She sat next to me and looked straight at me. I swear that once she had fixed her green eyes onto mine, she was able to see inside my soul. She smiled. Miraculously, after all the hits I'd taken, I smiled back.

We ate together that day. I found out that her name was Anna Tildon Walker, which I thought was remarkably eccentric. I told her my name was Florencio Carlos Rulli, and she thought it was "cool." She advised me not to listen to the others, and I told her that I didn't care much. I did, however, tell her about Dylan.

"I'll talk to him" she said. "Dylan think he's *all that*, and that's not gonna change, but I'll make sure he stops bothering you," she smiled.

The next day at school was dedicated to talking about Hispanic Heritage Month, and I was actually pretty thrilled. Anna Tildon and I sat together, with Dylan on my left, of course.

We were given a lesson, and then a short assignment on the Spanish words that we learned. I slaughtered that worksheet. Anna did too, but Dylan did not.

His frantic eyes danced across the paper and he shot a blank look at me. "Help a buddy?" He smiled. It was a pure smile.

I don't know what Anna Tildon said to him, but I thank her. I helped him out that day, and we became friends. He was my best man at my wedding, and I don't think I could ever thank Anna Tildon Rulli enough for what she did.

Jennifer Le
Third-Place Short Story

Underneath This Skin

It was a cold December day. I was on my way home from school, walking on the sidewalk as the snow on the ground muffled my footsteps. The sky was covered with a dark, gray blanket of clouds. The trees were bare, with nothing on their naked branches except for some snow. A white sheet of snow spread across the lawns of the houses. My nose was numb from the chill breeze, and I could see my breath whenever I exhaled.

I was about to cross the street when I heard voices. There was more than one. They sounded angry and frightened. Immediately, I looked over in the direction the voices were coming from. From a distance, I could see two boys I knew from my school, huddled over something in the middle of the street. I, being the curious person I am, started to walk in that direction. I didn't realize what was actually going on until I got a little bit closer. My eyes widened in terror at the sight. The two boys were hissing vicious racist invectives and beating someone. I could feel my blood beginning to boil and rushing through my body at the speed of lightening. I became filled with rage and anger. The adrenaline kicked in. I looked around and saw a big tree branch lying on the icy lawn next to where I was standing. I picked it up and charged toward them. After that, everything was a blur. I vaguely remember repeatedly yelling, "Stop hurting him! Someone help!" at the top of my lungs while hitting the two boys with the branch, trying to get them to stop beating the helpless victim. I remember hearing adults coming out of their houses around us.

I didn't remember anything else except the face of the person lying in the middle of the street with people huddled around him. He was a Japanese student from my school. He sits two seats behind me in my math class, but I never talked to him because I never got the chance to. His face was badly bruised and had a few cuts. His lower lip was bleeding. Drops of red blood strained the white ground. I took him to the nearest convenience store down the street. I asked for some cotton and rubbing alcohol to clean his wounds. He flinched when the cotton ball came in contact with his cut.

After a long silence, he spoke in a soft voice. "Why did you do it?"

"Do what?" I asked.

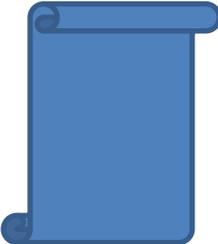
"Risk your safety to save someone you barely know," he answered.

I looked at him and replied, "Well, I heard them saying those racist things and saw them beating you, and I don't know. My adrenaline kicked in. No one should be hurt because of their race. It's cruel." He was quiet. I continued, "People are like onions. We all have layers. Some layers are darker than others, but peel off the outer layer and what do you have? We're all the same on the inside, and we all have two eyes, one nose, one mouth, and one heart. We're all the same people— just different colors." He hugged me. I was surprised by his action and didn't say anything. He whispered, "Thank you."

The next day, we went to our school and told the principal about the problem that had been occurring for quite some time now. Apparently, this wasn't the two boys' first hate attack based on racism. They were severely punished for their actions, to ensure that the school would be a safe environment for other students. To educate the school about racial unity, we've organized with the principal a multi-cultural day that enables students to celebrate cultures from around the globe.

*Our different ethnicities create a diverse community. Some people are darker than others. Some have blonde hair, others have black hair. Some people have blue eyes, others have brown. In the end, does it matter? Underneath all our external differences, we're similar. We all smile when we're happy and frown when we're sad. If we can push our ignorance aside and open our eyes, we'll be able to learn new things about other cultures. **In the end, underneath our skin, we are all the same. We are human. We are one.***

ESSAYS



Finding Community in Different Cultures

In a cozy area right next to the kitchen, I'm sitting down with my best friend's family, and we're talking loudly, passing boxes of teriyaki take-out to each other, with an assortment of familiar sauces perched all over the table, like your good ol' A1 steak sauce, and a trusty bottle Heinz ketchup. It would be almost identical to dinnertime at my house, except all that's missing is a pair of chopsticks here and there. Both scenes have the boisterous dad, talking loudly but about a topic entirely different than what everyone else is on, the older brother shoveling food down with one hand while the other is busy texting away on his phone, the mom arranging dishes around and cleaning up smudges and spills as she goes, all the while just nodding her head in agreement with whatever dad is saying. We have two different homes, two different families, but the feeling of coming together to share our day and share a hot dinner, however short it is before we all go our separate ways, into our own rooms—dad going to watch TV, brother going out to meet his friends— it's still the same. After a long day, sitting down with the people you love and feeling grateful for the food you have and being able to share it with them, it's the same.

I remember when I first went over to my best friend's house. I stepped in and immediately I was struck by the sense of similarity. It was the same busy hum that always played around dinnertime, the sounds of a parent back home from work trying to get a hot dinner ready, the brother in his room playing video games, the television or music in the background and, no matter what kitchen, no doubt there's always that ever-present bottle of A1 steak sauce, Heinz ketchup, some Spam in the cabinet, and a few assorted cans of diced tomatoes and refried beans. Sometimes it gets too easy to fall back into this daunting thought pattern where you feel like you can't approach or relate to someone because they seem so different. But that's the thing, when you manage to tear that blind off, and really see what's in front of you, instead of what you think is real, you start to see similarities and common interests. You see someone just like you, who has the ketchup in the fridge and some Chef Boyardee cans on their shelves.

Cultures are something to embrace and to be proud about. And yet, when cultures are able to come together and hold hands in peace and acceptance, it becomes this incredible thing, when people can come together, not losing who they are, but instead finding themselves in others, in the shared dreams and goals--in shared interests and feelings. One can be proud of their heritage and who they are, and still accept others for the exact same thing.

And what happens when all these different cultures, all special in their own way, come together? When these cultures that are so unique yet so similar find a way to embrace each other in acceptance and peace? A community.

When you look out at the crowd at a football stadium or a high school graduation, families from all different places and backgrounds come together on the stands, all craning their heads to look for their child, and to take pictures that will last in frames, to create memories that will last forever. The look of love and the look of unmistakable pride on each and every one of the dads' and moms' and brothers' and sisters' and grandpas' and grandmas' and uncles' and aunts,' faces shines. Each and every family is so different yet carries the same emotions on their faces. These families, no matter how different they are, when they hear their child's name called, will rise to their feet, whooping and clapping while clamoring to get a good picture in those few seconds. These people come together because they are a community.

It's moments like these, moments when you eat dinner at your friend's house—these simple yet amazing moments—that make you realize that when people come together, it's about embracing the diverse cultures and finding unity in universal feelings and hopes. For me, that is the extraordinary thing called community.

Ahrah Ko
Second-Place Essay

It's Time We Start

People encounter bullying on a daily basis, whether it is at school or at home, from strangers or even from close friends. Everyone is different and unique, so they have different methods of handling hurtful comments and actions; some people just let it out, but others hold in their rage and suffering, eventually having it pile up, intensifying their exasperation.

I am currently in a club known as Human Relations Ambassador, HRA, because every member of HRA as myself, believes that every single student deserves to feel safe and deserves to have multiple memorable epochs during their four years of high school. HRA is a program led by trained teachers and students, and the reason why this club still survives to this day at North High School is because it gives students a wakeup call about how massive bullying can affect a person's daily life. We include activities and skits to show them how prejudging can lead to a whole disaster of misunderstandings, and how one word could set a person off. In the 21st century, students don't think twice about making someone feel small and stupid, but HRA allows them to pause and meditate on their actions instead of blindly spitting out a trenchant comment just because they felt like it.

There is this freshmen who once came up to me and thanked me for teaching her methods on how to handle bullying; in fact she and I still keep in touch to this day, and she tells me about her daily struggles and how she applies those techniques not only to her life but to her friends' lives. This is the reason why HRA is not just a club, but a life changing experience for others and me. Just being part of such a program brings joy, knowing that it does and will change the community that I live in, and that I was and still am part of that change.

Bullying is part of daily life. It is something that has increased over the past several years; it is something that no one could stop; it is a process that will take forever to prevent; so it is time we start now, with ourselves, to prevent such agony in others. Eventually, by sticking up for the person who is getting bullied or by being there to listen to his or her struggles, our efforts will rub off on others, creating less bullying and building a more confident and safer society.

Allison Vo
Third-Place Essay

One Step at a Time

The immigration process dates back many years. People from different countries and cultural backgrounds began immigrating to America in hopes of finding harmony. Many faced harsh battles with the segregation between races and unwanted feelings from those who came before. With perseverance and determination, these people would ultimately shape how our country interacts today. Not only are people more open-minded about immigration these days, they are also more understanding of the different cultures and religions immigrants bring with them. To advocate for further intercultural and interracial unity, I believe the city of Torrance should hold more community events and start a group to address a variety of needs.

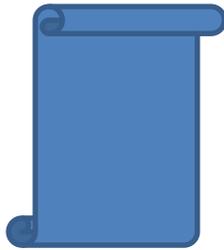
With so many different races occupying our community, the city of Torrance should put on more city events for people. These events will give people the opportunity to go to one single place and interact with everyone in the city. I also think it would be great if a few of the events were focused mainly on different cultures. For example, I think that would be a great time to throw an event for the Chinese New Year. Curious minds of families not of that religion will show up to get a glimpse of Chinese culture. It'll help people with different religions and cultures to understand other cultures in the world. Such events will cut back the racism and hostile doings of many in the public against others, creating a more peaceful and united place to live in. Every year the city should also hold a special event to celebrate the diversity we have. I believe it is something extraordinary worth celebrating—the progress and goals we have all achieved by working together.

The making of a group where people can go to confide their feelings and express their ideas should also be made available. Here people can go to speak about their issues or just go to have a good time with others. The more attendees, the bigger the bond created. These meetings will also instruct people on how to deal with their differences in a mature manner, or in another case, to learn more about the different people we see on a more personal level. I think with these meetings, great bonds and friendships could be made throughout the community, and as these feelings rub onto

others, it will begin to create a domino effect on everyone eventually lead to many different lifelong bonds and peace.

In today's world, the people of America have changed their attitude towards others, whom they now welcome with open arms. The people of Torrance have overcome the judgment of people and accepted each other for who each one truly is. To take this to a group level, the city should provide opportunities for people to get together through public events and group meetings. We truly have come a long way since many years ago, and the people of this community are ready to reach for the ultimate goal of unity amongst everyone.

POETRY



Stephanie Allen
First-Place Poetry

The Blind Man

Lucky is the blind man,
He sees things as they are.
Cursed is the man with sight,
For he cannot see far.

The blind man can't discern
Between our shades of skin,
But he can perceive
The being that lies within.

He can't view colors on a map
Or see their boundaries,
But he can surely delve beneath
Our physiognomies.

Underneath the surface
We're more related than we know.
We share our brain and blood,
Down to each finger and toe.

We all possess a heart
That we can use for love or hate.
We decide its purpose
So let us contemplate...

We can't join our hands
When they are clenched tight;
We can't make peace
With fists prepared to fight.

What makes us human
Isn't what we eat or wear.
It's not our taste in music
Or how we style our hair.

The blind man sees through all this,
From any bias he is free.
Why can't we come together,
And live in harmony?

If only we were all blind,
Then maybe we could see.

Kevin Hughley
Second-Place Poetry

Hybrid

A Black man.
He grows up in Los Angeles
He plays his sports at school; he goes to his church on Sundays
He goes to college,
Only intermingling with people of the same color.

A Mexican woman.
She grows up in Cajititlan.
She lives with her grandmother and aunts and uncles
Until her grandmother dies.
She comes to America at the age of 12.
After graduation she starts working,
Only intermingling with people of the same color.

When these two people meet they are grown and have experienced most of their
lives isolated
But for some reason this has made them curious
So curious that they give it a try
They realize that people are people
No matter how far apart in ideas and culture
They marry.

You might say how do I know this, and
Who are these people?
That answer is simple
I know this because I am a result of their "experiment" their "curiosity"
I am their son
And I am a hybrid.

Tracy Nguyen
Second-Place Poetry

Being Dissimilar in the Same Perimeter

She is considered an Asian-American
Her tongue is a chameleon
Speaking different languages,
depending on the conditions
And adhering to diverse traditions.

Murky hair as straight as a ruler,
Always wishing it was a fuller.
Light skinned, and arms like chopsticks
Her hips and waist forms bricks
Always wishing my legs weren't toothpicks.

Her best friend is considered an African-American.
Engulfed in heritage and repletion
Determined and ambitious to strive for completion
Speaks only her native tongue
But life is for learning, and she's still young.
Her body's corpulent and stout,
Hair so course, the brush can never find its route.

Two simple teenagers, so dissimilar
Yet, living within the same perimeter.
Both never accepting their personal flaws
Constantly picking at themselves, with clinching claws
Never thought they would get along,
But this is where they belong.

Shoving stupid stereotypes into the shadows,
Voting racism onto the gallows
Defying prejudice
Years ago, this would have been incredulous.
This is the living evidence,
An ordinary sixteen year old can promote benevolence.

This poem goes out to the humble,
That occasionally stumble...
Your physique is unique, Your culture is beautiful nature, and
You, have the capacity to better this community, with your compassionate
humanity.
Never let your significance and origin obliterate,
Forget the animosity, and don't segregate.

Kellie Kodama
Third-Place Poetry

The Promise

A distinguished and charismatic man Barack Obama,
Comfortable in the skin he is in
A fusion of African and Caucasian America
By the way of a Hawaiian breeze and a windy city

He was the quiet storm of 2008
A powerful yet temperate force
Giving us a chance to dream about the future again
And the fire of hope that burns bright

He wants what Dr. King wanted
Fairness through the American Promise
That our government should work for us and not against us
I have faith it will be carried forward

Why oh why does my land make me feel estranged then?
Like a dear friend that is untruthful to me
Don't tell me what you want me to hear
Abide by the Promise you made me

Government is not useless
We just need more time to heal
We the people are still so vulnerable
Amid the growing years

With so much work to be done
We cannot turn back
Barack Obama will finish his epic race
To march towards the future
With hope's embrace

Timothy Yoon
Honorable Mention Poetry

You Are It

I am sure many of you have seen the corruption
And many of you have judged them,
Saying, "I hope they go to jail,"
Or, "They need Jesus,"
Or even diagnosing them with a mental illness.

I want to ask you:
With what kind of heart are you saying these things?
Are they from a heart of anger or hatred?
Or from a heart of grieving for the public?

Even I said to myself:
"This world is corrupt—I wish I could leave it."
But then I stopped and thought,
What good would that do?
To abandon ship; to escape it?

How about revive it?
Preserve what little love we can scrape off from the bottom of our hearts;
To grow it, feed it.
Transform it into a manifestation of something the world is lacking:

Unity, compassion, understanding, and cooperation.
Stop looking around,
For that one person to start it.
You are it.

Sohee Oum
Honorable Mention: Poetry

The Voice

We are each born to a different life.
Culture, religion, sex, and race.
We are all so odd and oddly shaped.
That is the beauty of it all.

One day the whispering began, and spread among us all.
"There is only one way to live," It said; its voice began so small.
It whispered in our dreams, our reality, and in between.
"Only thin is in," It suggested—and we all began to wear.

"Nappy hair and freckles are no longer in.
Surely it's quite okay to show a bit of skin.
Hair: Pin-straight; and outfits perfectly assembled.
Faces of raw beauty were now Barbie dolls dissembled."

"You shall only be seen with the most popular and rich
Not a hair out of place, not even a stitch.
It doesn't matter how long the behind-the-scenes machination--
As long as, in the end, it helps your reputation."

We were each given a set of rules and soon our voices meant nothing;
Nothing at all compared to the nefarious, flagrant screeching.
The obvious éclat from us puerile kids was enough to satisfy the voice.
But the voice cannot be blamed; for these were our mistakes and choice.

Surely you must have figured out the mastermind behind the whispering
It is our sick, our sad society who lays such foolish fallacy that stays in our
heads lingering.
Yet being part of the general public, it is soon our turn to change and
transform.
We can help the lives of posterity if only we ostracize the idea of the 'norm'.

A lesson to the young: learn to take the road less traveled by.
Use my mistakes, be a maverick, and never dare ask why.

Abdul Haadi Khan
Honorable Mention: Poetry

A Tale of Many

Let me tell you a tale,
A tale of anger and frustration,
Wrought in a broken and fallen nation.
Let me tell you a tale, a tale of hateful discrimination.
Long ago, in a grand empire, gilded with honesty and love,
An emperor lived, watching his domain from his throne above.
He decreed justly that peace be spread and hate be lost.
He spoke with kindness and was never too cross.
And his empire listened, with sharp attentive ears.
They spread justice and peace without any fear,
They punished the evil and upheld the truth.
In their eyes, there was no sweeter fruit.
Yet, time moves ever forward, changing the tides,
For one day, evil gained victory with long backward strides.
They sent out a demon, a man from the south,
A traitor with dark skin and a blood-thirsty mouth.
He snuck into the palace, a knife in his hand,
And he killed the emperor, without shame or remand.
What followed you ask, let me tell you the truth,
What followed was prejudice, unjust and uncouth.
The people grew divided, divided by hate,
Their frustration and anger, consuming their fate.
The whites blamed the blacks, the blacks blamed the reds.
The reds blamed the browns, the browns simply fled.
They fought and they struggled, they turned all away.
Their prejudice led them, night and day.
Over time, the generations passed, one by one,
And the hate remained poised, like the trigger of a gun,
Threatening all by color, by origin, even by speech,
The hate judged all, all within reach.
Like a rampant disease, it consumed all around,
And the empire fell, broken, burned down.
And this is not one story but one of many,
For prejudice can destroy even powerful destiny.
Think! Decide! Will *you* let your world be ruined by hate?

Ezekiel Kosaka
Honorable Mention: Poetry

A Person

As I close my eyes
An image appears
A Person
This Person is neither black nor white
Nor has any color to be described
A colorless Person
Yet this Person is filled with vibrant colors
Something we can't understand or have not yet learned
But maybe soon we shall
I see this Person smiling
Knowing that everything will work out
This Person looks at me like I am no different
But I am
Yet this Person thinks I'm not
I look different I am different
Yet this Person thinks I'm not
I try to figure this Person out
He is not a man
She is not a woman
A Person
That is all
But there is more to this Person
This Person continues to smile
I just don't understand
Yet as I opened my eyes I too smiled
As another Person

Alexis Hendon
Honorable Mention: Poetry

The Shell

The shell that covers us, does not define us
So why do we judge one another by it?
Our souls have nothing to do with the skin we were born in
So why do we judge another by it?

How we are born, in what shell we inhabit,
Does not automatically shape our personality one way or another
Yet we separate ourselves by it.
If one's shell were to fall on the ground and shatter into a million pieces
We should be able to love their soul, shapeless and full of light

I could imagine that the world could only benefit from better love from the unity of
all people and the joint peace of one color to another.
If we could just learn to love, love with our eyes closed, embrace the differences
And judge the next man by the content of his soul rather than the decoration of his
shell,
I can only imagine the peace we could find.

Phoebe Lu
Honorable Mention: Poetry

Snowflake

My ancestors came from Taiwan and China
Countries filled with pain, pride, and glory
I also shoulder the weight of this.

But, stepping off a plane, to begin my long trek around my country
Revisiting the past, and reconnecting with family
I look around and all I see is, me
Same eyes, same face, same skin color
Not one single person out of line,
Out of place
Each person looking the same as the other
Though similar, not the same
A paradox in its own

Coming back from a tiring and harrowing, but successful journey
I step off a plane, to recount my many tales
What I saw, heard, and explored while revisiting the past, and reconnecting with
long lost ones
I'm instantly bombarded with different colors
Different people, different races, different styles
Not one person alike from the other
Not one snowflake similar to the next
I stepped off a plane to recount my many tales
But instead, I step off and come back to home
We are all different,
But we are all one

Kimberly Haney
Honorable Mention: Poetry

Our Pot of Gold

Red, white, yellow, green, black, and gray;
These are the people of Torrance today.
Our city is a melting pot
Welcoming people from afar
You don't have to have skills or talents;
You can come here just because you want to.
Some come for adventure.
Some to escape horrific lives or situations.
Some come to be reunited with family.
Many come for just a better life,
To live the American dream.
Torrance is a friendly city
With sister cities in Japan.
We encourage foreign students
To come and experience our varied culture.
We all dream for a good or better life.
Torrance is a city where those dreams can be achieved.

Mika Kawakami
Honorable Mention: Poetry

Our Wonderful World

I care,
About the wonderful community we have—
Richly diverse, blooming like colorful flowers.

I care,
About the wonderful state we live in,
Abundant with different cultures,
Each with its unique way of life.

I care,
About our amazing country, America.
Filled with love, freedom, peace—
Joy penetrates throughout our country!

I care,
About each individual who is living on this planet, Earth.
Each is different but indispensable;

I care,
About each individual who is living on this planet, Earth.
Each is different but indispensable;
Without their distinct cultures, humanity would not be complete.

I know,
Every human being who is living at this moment,
Or people in the past or that will soon join us,
All come from the same origin—
God is the source of creation;
Each of us is born to fulfill our mission
To create a miraculous world
of abundant diversity, countless cultures,
Eternal peace and grand harmony.

Denay Rogers
Honorable Mention: Poetry

Building This Home Called America

This country we live in,
The United States of America,
Is full of Americans.

But
What exactly is an American?

Is he a descendant from the Middle Eastern lands
Or from downtown China?
Or from downtown China?
The son of an Irish man
Or the daughter of a French farmer?

Did his grandparents carry water to their home
From a well in Czechoslovakia?
Or is he a relative of King Henry VIII?
The answer to this question
Is yes.

All these people are Americans
Living together on American soil
Sharing stories and anecdotes
Of past experiences.

These people are the building blocks of America.
Without diversity,
Our country is no longer united.

Alan Corrales-Cortez
Honorable Mention: Poetry

Promise

History has taken its toll,
And we forget about others souls.
We're all divided by segregation,
No communication because of intimidation

At some point,
It's time to forgive and forget.
Because at one point,
You'll lose someone and you will regret.

We should make like magnets and attract,
But unifying is what we lack.
Some think of that idea as superstition,
But instead of a dream, I have a vision

The vision is a compromise,
But as history shows,
We cannot keep one.
Look again at the last seven letters of compromise.

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