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VISIONS OF UNITY 2014

Literary Anthology

by

Student Writers from Torrance, California High Schools

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Special thanks to our record-number of participating teachers, students and parents,
with 23 participating teachers and 242 students.
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

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VISUAL ARTS

The students listed on this page submitted winning entries for the Visions of Unity contest, and we proudly recognize their achievements. Photos of their art works do not appear in this anthology, but they are displayed at the Awards Celebration and the Torrance Civic Center Library.

FINE ART

First Place, Joohyun Lee, South High School

Second Place, Phylishia Johnson, Torrance High School

Third Place, Nefit Sanchez, Shery High School

Honorable Mention: Jacob Choto, Torrance High School

Lana Robinson, Torrance High School

Kayla Gardner, Shery High

PHOTOGRAPHY

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ESSAYS

Niko Murakami
North High School
First Place - Essay

Unity to All

Unity is the act of bringing people together and forming peace. There is one form of unity that society is working on and will for future generations to come, and that is treating people with disabilities equally. People with disabilities have been misjudged many times. Some have no ability to see, hear, or take control of their body. Little do we know that these people with disabilities are waiting for acceptance into a society that makes them feel like they belong.

This year, I have become good friends with a student named Jovany. Sitting next to him in history class has changed my understanding of someone who has a sight disability and also others with disabilities. His sight only allows him to read big printed words. The words on this page would be too small for him to read so he has to print a bigger copy or use a magnifying glass to aid him in reading the print. At times, I wonder why Jovany, out of so many people in this world, had to be the one with a disability. To me, Jovany is the most generous person you can ever be friends with. You can never be bored around him because his personality just entertains you. He can speak French, and he makes you laugh just by hearing his thoughts about the classes and teachers he likes and dislikes. He has many dreams. One dream I learned that he and I have in common is travelling all over the world. Right now, we are in a school club together known as "Saxon Buddies" which allows students in our school to spend some time with students with physical and mental disabilities. As nervous as I was becoming a member of the club, I have grown to love the group and everyone in it. They have become my friends and my teachers. Teachers tell me that every person, disabled or not, deserves to have a friend. The one teacher I will always admire is Jovany.

Disabilities are not only acquired at birth, but they can also be the battle scars received by a soldier in war. My father told me about the "Wounded Warrior Project" and people who grew up like me but unlike me made the decision to serve their country. Knowing the risks of fighting in a war, they endured great pain and many received battle wounds. For soldiers being able to come home with severe injuries, one thing most of them want is to live life the way they used to live before their service. Recovering is a gradual process, but despite how long the wound takes to heal, soldiers in the "Wounded Warrior Project" will never let the damage get in the way of things they hope to do.

Being a member of "Saxon Buddies" and admiring the work of the "Wounded Warrior Project" has awakened a part of me that makes me want to help people with disabilities. I am planning to major in occupational therapy after high school. With my college degree and studies in occupational therapy, I hope I will help many people. It is not an easy task, but I am willing to accept a challenge and give someone back their ability to live a better life.

Hopes for people with disabilities remain alive in my heart. To understand someone is to not judge by how they appear, but to open up to them with words full of kindness and respect. Most of us are afraid to break barriers and bring unity to all who seem to be different than us. Little do we know, we are not that different at all.

Jacqueline Tayra
North High School
Second Place (Tie) - Essay

Origins: Our Influence Matters

Closed-minded people are usually the most pessimistic and judgmental when it comes to how they view others. Being closed-minded limits a person's ability to accept anyone beyond their normal standards of how one should look, act, or behave. When somebody is open minded, however, they are open to what is beyond their realm of normality and more likely to accept and love those who are different than them. Our ability to look beyond the differences between ourselves and others roots down to the way in which we are raised, who we are raised with, and the experiences we face in life.

As a child, one learns from the way our parents act and the way that they speak, especially about other people. We usually grow up to imitate the way our parents are. If a father, who is a leading role model in a child's life, is constantly being judgmental and talking badly of others, a child would think doing so is acceptable and be more likely to do the same. Growing up in an environment where others are not accepted or viewed differently gives someone a reason to believe that it is only the normal way to view things. In contrast, I myself was raised by a Catholic mother and taught to view others as equals and love them. How we react to anyone or anything unlike ourselves really depends on how we were taught to react to it since we began to listen to our parents.

Being open minded and loving could also come from the diversity of people with whom we grew up. Seclusion from people who are different than us could make us uncomfortable when faced by them later on in life; we'd be more likely to not accept them. This is why it is important to be introduced to a diverse variety of people since we are young. Being a student in Torrance, I see the diversity of cultures, and I believe that is why our schools' students are closer and more united than students in most other school districts.

Although we usually act the way we learned to as children, sometimes our own experiences in life could alter our perspectives. Many times we are put through hardships or forced to experience something that opens our eyes and makes us more accepting of others. For example, someone may have been raised in a household where homosexuals were viewed as being abnormal and frowned upon. Later that person might grow up to have a son who was homosexual himself. Supporting and loving their child could mean they only have left to accept their son the way he is. Our ability to accept and love others could be shaped not only by our origins, but by our own life experiences.

Lastly, I believe that being open minded and loving also comes from how we are treated by others. When we are treated kindly and lovingly, we are more likely to do the same and "radiate" that attitude. Spreading these positive traits could be achieved by each and every one of us by simply being kind and accepting of one another in our community and beyond.

I believe that by trying our best not to judge others regardless of what separates them, we would be able to make a big difference and impact on others. As parents, students, and teachers, it is up to us to spread loving attitudes and influence those around us. We are in charge of the way that the future, and therefore must work now to create more loving and accepting generations to come.

Julia Barrett
West High School
Second Place (Tie) - Essay

We Must Learn the Language of Unity

I am a part of you.
I sit on your face and I bring in the smells,
I am a part of you.
I wrinkle when you smile, run when you are sick,
I am a part of you.
You hold me under water or when I bleed,
I am a part of you.
They make fun of me and you want to hide me away.
You are embarrassed; you are ashamed,
But I will always be a part of you.

A nose. Everyone has one. Shocking, and disturbing, to find that something common to us all could actually set us apart.

From the time I was a little girl, I knew my culture set me apart. We were the only Jewish family living in a town (a world, really) that was mostly Christian. But I was naïve. I was lucky to grow up in a community where friends and neighbors treated me as equals, let me share in their culture, and were interested to learn about mine. As I grew older, I learned about hatred. I heard people make derogatory remarks, but never towards me.

Everything changed in ninth grade. Joining the junior varsity cheer team as a freshman had been difficult enough, but it became more challenging because I missed some summer practice while away at Jewish summer camp. Some girls were upset that I was allowed to stay on the team. One I'll call "Lauren" seemed particularly bitter.

One day, several girls were playfully giving me a hard time for missing practice when Lauren joined the group, and, with no warning, reached her finger toward my face, shoved my nose and said, "Ew, what a Jew nose!" Lauren then walked away, laughing.

I was shocked and embarrassed; her words stung. I wanted to hide and scream. What made my nose different? Though I knew this was a stereotype and irrational, I was ashamed.

But looking back, I have to thank Lauren, for in that moment I made a decision. Despite my wanting to hide, I marched up to her and explained why her words and treatment towards me was unacceptable. It was hard to summon that courage, but I am forever glad I did. My nose is a part of me, as is my culture. I am proud to be different and to stand out. Superficial differences such as nose shapes or skin color should not separate us. I learned firsthand that bigotry, ignorance, and intolerance do not correct themselves. People have to speak out and confront those who use stereotypes to intimidate. In the moment, it is easy to feel belittled, but mustering the strength to say, "No, that is unacceptable," helps us regain power, pride, and self-respect. I look in the mirror today and smile knowing that what sets us apart can ultimately bring us together, if we speak out.

My vision of unity requires education. Lauren may have thought that joking about the size of my nose was funny, but most likely she knew nothing about the Holocaust and the Jewish people's history of persecution. I know that in my hometown of Torrance, Lauren is not the only teenager who is ignorant about other cultures. We may be an hour drive from downtown Los Angeles, but many of my peers have never even been there. Torrance feels like a very small town, and has many of the best qualities of small town life. People know their neighbors' names, and there is little of the violence of big city living. But, Torrance, like the rest of America and the world, can do a better job in uniting people by helping them learn more about each other's cultures.

My vision of unity is multi-lingual and multi-cultural. Within my own family, I have aunts on my mother's side from India, France, and Belgium; and three aunts on my father's side have dual Israeli-American citizenship. Growing up, family parties rang with the sounds of different languages and songs from different cultures. But even those without a diverse family can become educated and embrace other cultures. I have been fortunate enough to study both French and Hebrew, and to travel to Israel and Europe. My interest in different languages and cultures has inspired my dream to have a voice, to speak out and to be influential among people all over the world. Imagine just how many people I could unite if I had the ability to speak out strongly against discrimination in a multitude of languages. And, if everyone studied different languages and cultures, from elementary school through high school, we would all have a greater respect for one another's differences, and we would find our common ground. We would be able to learn what separates us and find what unites us, both in our neighborhoods and the world at large.

Kayla Sawyer
North High School
Third Place (Tie) - Essay

What Am I?

From the early 1900's to now, things have changed immensely for people of different ethnicities. From marriage rights to diversity in schools, from not accepting other ethnicities to acceptance, from knowing you were different to not knowing who is different by the color of your skin, by where you were raised, and by whom you were raised.

Back in the early 1900's people of Japanese descent were not treated like people, whether they were immigrants or born in this country. They attended segregated schools because they weren't allowed to go to school with Anglo-Saxons. Marriage outside of your own race was not even a consideration unless you wanted to be disowned or shunned from your family.

In this day, and even in the community I live in, everyone is very accepting of diversity. People of all ethnicities attend the same school and there are many kids who are of mixed ethnicities, myself included. Some of the evidence of acceptance can be as simple as being able to choose more than one ethnicity on surveys. When my parents were growing up, people were only able to choose one ethnicity so many who were of mixed ethnicities had to choose what they were. Now, I can choose both "White, not of Hispanic descent" and "Japanese" and I am not forced to not identify a part of who I am.

Until recently, I never even thought about my ethnicity. I knew that I was Japanese and White but I didn't realize how fortunate I am that I live in an age where I am not discriminated against. The beginning of this journey began when my mom took me to a photo shoot for the book *Mixed, Portraits of Multiracial Kids* by Kip Fulbeck. He is a photographer who is Japanese, French, Chinese, Irish, Swedish, and Sioux and he was looking for children who were of mixed ethnicities to photograph. When the book was published I was honored that not only was my photograph in the book but it was also chosen to be in the exhibit. I went to see the exhibit at the Japanese American National Museum, and I realized how amazing it is to see so many children who look just like me.

My mom took me through the museum which recounts the Japanese-American history in America, what happened, how they were discriminated against and how they overcame many obstacles to win the acceptance of the American people. One section talks about inter-racial marriage and how even in Japan it was not accepted. Mixed children were put in orphanages and shunned because they were not seen as Japanese citizens even though they were born in Japan. It mirrored what was happening in America at the time. Luckily, an inter-racial couple fought the law condoning inter-racial marriage and won. The *Loving Act* came into being, and, from that, couples who were of different ethnicities could legally marry.

It was still hard for children of mixed races to fit into a specific group of people and they were often taunted because of their exotic looks. Many were asked the derogatory question, "What are you?" and when they answered they were often teased and called names. Now the response could be, "What am I? I am exactly the same as every other person in 2500." As stated by Kip Fulbeck in his first photography book entitled *Part Asian – 100% Hapa* which was published in 2006. For *Mixed, Portraits of Multiracial Kids*, I was asked "Who are you?" My answer then was, "I am a basketball player and a hula dancer." My answer now would be, "I am a volleyball player, a hula dancer, and a Girl Scout, but most of all, I am my own person. I am a freshman in high school, I am hapa and I am perfectly happy this way. I am me."

All of this goes to show that our beliefs and our society's beliefs about people can always change. Change and acceptance do not happen overnight; it can take many years to happen. Sometimes it happens without our ever knowing it. Sometimes it happens and we see it but don't understand it. Sometimes we are asked a simple question and that question can shape or reshape our beliefs in ourselves and in others. I am glad that those "sometimes" happened, and I am glad that I am beginning to understand how those sometimes have shaped me. I look forward to seeing how those sometimes and the nows can change me even more. I am excited for this journey into my life, my ancestry, my own past, my present, my future, and my ability to always answer not only "What am I?" but "Who am I?" too. I am me.

Melanie Nomiya
North High School
Third Place (Tie) - Essay

Distance Isn't Measured in Miles

The world is definitely bigger than we think, but it's not the vast oceans or thousands of miles that separates people from each other. Of course everyone is different and has their own idiosyncrasies, physical appearances, and ideologies that make them unique to the world. What most people don't realize is that we're more alike than we are different.

This past summer, I was selected to be one of eight high school delegates for Torrance Sister City Association's three-week cultural exchange to Kashiwa, Japan. As the days crept closer and closer towards our departure, I was ecstatic. I was happy to go to a foreign land to meet new people and experience the culture—especially the food.

At the same time, I was really anxious. I remember sitting in the airplane for twelve hours being the usual worrisome person I am. *What did I get myself into? What if I get homesick? How am I supposed to survive in a country where I don't know anything?*

As soon as I took a step off the plane, I was immediately hit with a wave of intense heat and humidity. The bus ride from Narita Airport to Kashiwa's city hall was approximately an hour away. Japan seemed so different from America. I couldn't stop staring outside the window because I was so mesmerized by the lush green trees and grass that blanketed the country. The skies turned into hues of bright orange and the city was rustic yet charming—Japan's beauty at its finest.

I was the first student to get off of the bus and enter city hall. To my surprise, a crowd of strangers were all smiling and greeting me with so much warmth and kindness. Never in my life have I ever seen people so happy to meet me. I was nervous to meet my host family for the first time, but when I actually did meet them I had the most comforting yet surreal feeling ever. My first host family took me into their home not as a guest, but as a part of their family. *Was I really in Japan?*

I had two host families in Japan. My first family was comprised of three generations living in one traditional-style Japanese house while my second family was made up of parents and two daughters living in a small apartment. While the tangible elements of these homes were very different from what I was used to in America, the atmosphere was very much the same. We all ate dinner together at the table, talked about our day, and made jokes together. These people who took me into their home for ten days weren't any different from my blood-related family.

Throughout my three-week stay in Japan, nearly all of the people I encountered were genuinely interested in getting to know me. I remember sitting on the bus with my new friend, Hikaru, talking about the differences between Japan and America. Despite the differences, it turns out that we had so many things in common, like our love for shopping and aspirations to study abroad in college. Even though the language barrier hampered me from having more complex conversations with the new friends I made, it didn't stop me from bonding with them and sharing tidbits of ourselves with each other.

Leaving Japan was one of the hardest things I ever had to do. I tried to keep my cool composure leaving city hall with the same crowd of people who were just strangers to me in the beginning ended up being people I consider to be my family. My host grandfather hugged me for the last time and told me, "My home is your home. Please come back soon." At that point, I couldn't help my tears from spilling everywhere.

In August, eight student delegates from Kashiwa came to spend three weeks in Torrance. They all experienced “American” culture, which is so diverse compared to the traditional customs in Japan. Even so, they experienced the same feeling I felt while I was in Japan—a sense of cultural unity. The program ended when the students returned to Japan and again, I couldn’t stop bawling my eyes out. The program may have ended, but distance doesn’t stop our friendship. We still keep in touch to this day.

Being a part of this cultural exchange made me really appreciate my culture and the city of Torrance so much more. Not every city is lucky to have a sister city exchange program like this. Kashiwa really is like a “sister” to me, and I hope to see more cities establish cultural exchange programs like this. Racial boundaries are still a huge issue all over the world, including America—a country that advocates opportunity and equality for all. Once people realize that we can coexist with each other peacefully and maybe even, possibly, *love each other*, despite the color of our skin or the language we speak, the world will be a much more beautiful place.

The Maple Tree

Picture an average, ordinary-looking maple tree. This tree in particular is only seven feet tall and appears to have crispy, dead leaves. Additionally, this tree is very scrawny, and you feel as if you would be able to break it with just the touch of your finger. "How puny," you think to yourself. You are superior over this destitute, weak tree.

Do you judge the tree for what you perceive or for what it has the potential to become? Does one jump to the conclusion that the tree is worthless or does one become familiar with it, and nurture it to grow? Sadly, many people would judge this tree, whether tall and strong or short and weak, simply by its appearance. These people may never even begin to consider the capabilities and meaning of this magnificent, pleasing tree. This is discrimination, a sad aspect to this world.

Discrimination occurs when a person is degraded or prejudged in any way due to any "different" characteristics of his/her personality, traits, or features. It arises in forms ranging from matters as simple as grades to more extremes, such as sexual orientation or race. For example, the tree analogy, in a way, represents discrimination. This is because the solitary tree was never even given a chance to prosper in its own way. How can someone be so cruel as to "judge a book by its cover" and so hastily? The answer is, again, discrimination.

What can a tree do that does not pertain to its looks? A tree can be made into many useful items, such as timber. Timber may be made into everyday household objects that are almost necessary for a moderate quality of life (such as tables and chairs). Therefore, no matter the appearance of a tree, the tree may be used for making other items that are certainly useful to humans. This same concept applies to humans in the way that each human has the potential to become something entirely new, if they are given a chance. However, in reality, many people do not realize this fact and ignorantly "push that person" aside.

What matters more, the appearance of the tree or the sap of the tree? When one really ponders upon this, one will find that as long as the sap of the tree is pure, the tree will be valued. With people, the sap may represent their personalities. The point here is that people should not be judged by their appearance, but rather by their personality. They may be unappealing, but they may be full of sweetness on the inside (like trees full of sap). After all, isn't it more important to have a sincere kindness within one's heart, rather than a beautiful face with no care for anyone? Compassion and love are both vital elements for the prosperity of mankind, and with discrimination, these components of life cease to exist.

Even I, a fourteen-year-old Pakistani-American student, have been discriminated against. In fact, when I was in seventh grade, I spent a lot of time with other students of similar heritage. One day, as my friend and I were walking and talking about homework during lunch, a former security guard of my school commented, "Are you guys planning to blow something up?" After this, the man proceeded to laugh and then he walked away. My friend and I looked at each other in both surprise and anger. As this was not normal for our school, it stood out as discrimination. Even so, we did not report this to anyone, for the security guard was retiring that same year (not to mention we did not want to get involved with his personal affairs). One may even go as far to say that we were scared of telling anyone the reality and magnitude of the situation, almost leading to us being in a state of immobilization. Similarly, the tree was also discriminated against because it did not fight back, and in this way was equally immobilized.

Think back to the tree. In your mind, does this tree have a value? The correct answer is: yes. The tree may be made into timber used to construct furniture and other objects. In this way, it is our traits that leave a mark of who we were. Discrimination against the weak and poor is wrong, for they all have the potential to become or remain something useful.

Beatrice Barbat
North High School
Honorable Mention - Essay

Opening the Door to Diversity

Anthony D'Angelo once said, if you believe that discrimination exists, it will. We live in a society full of different races, cultures, and ideologies. No two people are exactly alike, even if they have the same cultural background. Discrimination is able to exist because it is given the opportunity to exist. It cannot be passed on to someone who has never experienced it because it is learned. No one is born with a feeling of hatred towards others who appear different, and if someone is never exposed to it they will not feel the need to discriminate.

My parents spent most of their lives living under the communist reign of Nicolae Ceausescu in Transylvania. During that time, Romania had minimal cultural diversity. Most of the population was made up of Romanians, Hungarians, and Germans. Many of the people living in the country had only heard rumors of other races or only seen them in movies. In 2007, my grandfather left Romania for the first time in his life to visit my mother and I in Torrance. When he arrived he was exposed to the massive melting pot of Southern California. I was with him when he saw an African American man for the first time. He asked me what was wrong with the man, he thought he had some sort of disease. He was having trouble understanding that there was nothing wrong with him and that he was simply another race. However, within a few minutes, my grandfather was trying as hard as he could to keep up a conversation with the man with little bit of English I had taught him. Looking back at this situation, I learned that he was never able to discriminate against the African American man because he was never exposed to it in Transylvania. He was not born with these racist ideals rooted inside of him. Once he realized that the man was normal person just like him, he had no problem with the man.

In late 2007, when my grandfather returned to Romania, the city he lived in was deemed the Cultural Capital of Europe. Tourism exploded as people from all over the world traveled to Romania. The country had become more culturally and racially diverse than it had ever been. Chinese restaurants began popping up throughout the city and there were even pizzerias serving any type of pizza you could possibly imagine. These dramatic changes caused uneasiness among Romanians because the only other group of people they had been exposed to were the gypsies that roamed throughout the country. They had no idea who these foreigners were and what this meant for their country. However, many Romanians openly accepted them. They were curious about these people and wanted to learn as much as they could about them. The only thing that made them stand out was the color of their skin. They were still the same human beings, they had the same number of fingers and toes, they walked and talked the same, so then what was the big deal? They had the opportunity to form their own opinions and they chose to remain positive and give the foreigners a chance. My grandfather is only one of many examples of why discrimination does not have to be a part of the world we live in.

Jimmy Carter once said that the time for racial discrimination is over. We can stop these negative feelings from polluting the minds of future generations. Even a man who has been only exposed to one specific way of life for seventy one years was able to open his mind and be accepting of other people's differences. This is only one of many steps towards a better and more understanding world. My grandfather showed that if no one experiences racism, then there would be no racism. I truly hope that one day people of different races and cultures will be able to walk freely without the fear of being judged or persecuted. If we emphasize equality rather than discrimination, maybe one day a completely accepting society can become our reality.

Bree Hannah
North High School
Honorable Mention - Essay

Mixed Plate

A mixed plate is a type of plate lunch with more than one entrée. I feel like that is exactly what Torrance is: a medley of different cultures all in one place. You could dine on Vietnamese bánh mì for dinner and then travel down the street to finish it off with some Italian gelato for dessert. I'm quite lucky to enjoy so many of the various cultures of the world right here in my Torrance.

I've lived in Torrance for so long that I've forgotten that other places aren't as diverse as we are, specifically where I call home, North Torrance. Every year at North High, we have Multicultural week where students can experience each other's customs. This includes a food day and a special assembly where all the cultural clubs at our school get the opportunity to show off their smooth dance moves and musical talents. Now, keep in mind that the performers aren't limited to just one dance, and many of them choose to be in multiple. It's quite spectacular to witness a Japanese club performer quickly switch out of a happi coat to an Indian sari to be in the next dance. I love watching all the cultures being able to take pride in what they are doing and also seeing people who were given the opportunity to take part in another's culture.

In the end, I usually find myself (secretly) tearing up because of all the togetherness and love I feel radiating from everyone. The finale performance hits me especially hard because it is when all the performers come together as one to sing and dance. Everyone intermingles and there ends up being a whole crowd of happy people grooving together as one big mass on the gym floor.

This is what unity is all about in my eyes: no one caring what race, gender, religion, etc. the person standing next to them is because they're all having a good time together.

Tallie Spencer
West High School
Honorable Mention - Essay

Living in a Colored World

I can see the world in a way that most people can't. I refuse to take the same path as anyone else. I am able to analyze and compare differences among people in society as well as understand a variety of different opinions. This ability comes from being biracial in a country that sees the world in black and white.

Being mixed with both black and white has taught me more about myself and the racial problems in society today than any textbook ever could. My quest for self-identity began at age six when my mother told me that I was part black and part white. At school, I couldn't help but feel like I was too black for the white kids and too white for the black kids. The older I became, the more I was aware of the fact that I did not fit in with kids at my school, and I did not "fit in" with a majority of society either. This separation made me feel lost somewhere in the middle, which made it hard for me to make friends and prove to them that although I was different on the surface, I was ultimately just like any other kid that wanted to only fit in with everyone else.

My parents always told me, "Being different is good. You're special." However, this was hard for me to believe. I did not feel the least bit special. It was a lonely period of time, watching other kids play and interact with each other from a distance. I wanted so badly to be a part of that experience. However, I learned that this experience only broadened my perspective. People cannot help but look at you differently and judge you when you are in fact different. I've learned to accept this judgment, however, because I know exactly what I am capable of.

Being mixed is a lifelong struggle for public-acceptance, self-acceptance, and security. I didn't know which category or group I belonged in, and this scared me tremendously. Where did I belong? The first day of first grade was one of the most memorable days of my life because I became aware that I was racially different. I was the first student to arrive to class that day, eager to pick my seat and meet new people. When the bell rang, I noticed the other students walking in and choosing their seats as well. Some kids knew each other already and went to go pick seats on the other side of the room. I remember sitting up tall in my seat and smiling at every kid who glanced and walked by me. I looked over to see my new seat buddy, the person who was going to become my new friend, but to my surprise no one chose the seat next to mine. This made me feel alone and unwanted.

At that moment, I had to make a decision: was I going to be someone who lived in fear of getting rejected by people different than myself, or was I going to stop feeling sorry for myself and show people who I really am, regardless of my race? As the tears in my eyes rose, I got up, took all of my pencils and went to go sit next to a girl with blonde hair and blue eyes. Eventually, we got to know each other and she became my best friend throughout the year.

Taking that risk made me realize that who I am does not depend on what I look like, but on how I behave and carry myself. Being biracial has taught me that black and white are not opposed to each other but immersed in each other; the same way we all have some masculine and feminine in us, or a sense of right and wrong. From that day when I moved my stuff, I knew that I had a unique challenge of finding a way to embrace all of who I am, while still finding a way to identify myself. Yes, I am as equally black as I am white. Because of this experience, I no longer see the world in black and white. I now see the rainbow in between. I would like to further my understanding of differences and help society unify and see this rainbow as well. I want to help people realize that appearance is superficial, and never to underestimate anyone.

Mark Loera
Bishop Montgomery High School
Honorable Mention - Essay

Conflict on Unity, and Its Necessity

Unity. Including a few other select words, I despise this abstract, intangible, fluffed up word. I sneer as coaches use the word to describe their team, when the difference in treatment of the star players and the few stragglers is so blatantly obvious. I wince as parents with time only for work speak of the “unity” of their family even as the children suffer and the prospect of divorce is ever so apparent. My reaction to those of the upper class claiming to be “unified” with the community while the disparity between them and the homeless and those struggling to support their family is simply a blank stare, devoid of comprehension. I should refrain from mentioning my contempt of the world leaders who preach “peace” and “unity” among other idealistic concepts and dreams even as protests, civil wars, and wars rage on throughout the world.

However, no matter how much I claim to doubt unity, attempt to downplay it, and pretend to despise it, I arrive at a single thought: Who am I to deny the instances of unity, whether minimal or extreme? Who am I to deny the laborious work of those hardworking children who do their best to struggle and “keep on keeping on” in order to remain a component of the unity in their team? Who am I to degrade the difficulties of those families that decide to stay together through thick and thin, putting their partner and child before themselves? Who am I to downplay the benevolent humanitarians combatting the nigh-impossible crisis of world hunger? Who am I to doubt the unity of the American people during crises such as 9/11, and the cohesive unity of countries around the world in aiding countries in need, with recent examples being Haiti, Japan, and the Philippines? Indeed, no matter what I may say, these instances of integrity, of compassion, of unity, cannot be in any way refuted. In fact, I should put down the act already: I do quite fawn over the idea of unity.

For unity is what every human being desires, deep in their hearts. It may be covered up or hidden away by selfishness, competitiveness, pride, doubt. However, when one is hurt, one will seek consolation from peers, and when one sees another in pain, one’s heart cannot help but to be moved in compassion, in pity. Deep inside, we all realize it. Deep down, we all acknowledge it. For although many things, such as language, religion, nationality, race and ethnicity, athletic and academic ability, morals and values, and the list goes on and on, as each and every person is born uniquely special, may separate us – we are all still human, personas, homo sapiens, hito, dynol, człowiek, человек, whatever it may be called; no matter what, this is a category, no, something much more personal, a family, that we belong to. And, just as plants cannot live without sunlight, fishes cannot live outside of water, and human babies shrivel up without human touch: so too does humanity suffer when living out of unity.

Ahsan Zaman
North High School
Honorable Mention - Essay

A Multi-Ethnic Enclave

I will never forget that day when I first stepped into my Korean friend's home. Jae-shin had that same bed in a corner, that same computer desk pushed against a wall, and not to mention, that same messy air *my* room always had. From the living room came sounds of the channel his little sister was watching—it was the same program my little brother watched all the time. As the curtains were being drawn, smells wafted through the little apartment of the dinner Jae's mother was cooking—just as delicious as the smells of the food my mother cooked. When his mother called us to dinner, I had a *déjà vu* moment because that's exactly what I heard every night at *my* house. I had gone there to work on a project for school, but I came away with much more than just a completed piece of work. I learned how similar we really were.

Coming from an obscure country in South Asia, I had very little experience with other cultures. Torrance was also a relatively new place for me. I had lived most of my junior high years in Westchester, where ethnic differences weren't too pronounced. When I moved to Torrance just before high school, I was amazed at all the different cultures represented in just my geometry class. Even my teacher's name was completely alien to me. Frankly, I felt as if I had stepped into a new world.

But the one feature of this new landscape that surprised me the most was that there was no bullying of anyone. Almost everyone got along, even with all their differences. From what I had heard about high schools in other districts where ethnic gangs or whatnot terrorized students, it was a refreshing breath of reality.

Even without consciously being aware of it, I rapidly realized what my classmates had known all along. Even with our various cultures, backgrounds, or religions, we were fundamentally alike. There was little that set us apart. The wars and strife between communities that I had read about in my history books happened because those warring groups did not realize this truth. If the catalyst for another LA riot were to take place, would events repeat as before? I doubt it. We know each other too well now.

Other cities have ethnic enclaves. Here in Torrance, we have our own version of that—a multi-ethnic enclave. I'm proud to live in this city.

Jenn Willson
North High School
Honorable Mention - Essay

Students, Students, and More Students

For almost 10 years, my family and I have been hosting foreign students. Most of them are from Japan, but we have had a couple from other countries as well. We have had at least 15 students stay at our house throughout the years. Some students stay only for two to three weeks, and some stay as long as a year. Having these students has taught me a lot about different cultures, fashion, foods, and ways of living. I learned that things that I find normal may not be as normal to people of another culture.

In Japan, most people don't drive as often as Americans do. While they have cars, they find it easier to take the train from place to place, even the supermarket. They have to go the supermarket daily because they cannot carry a lot on the train. As an American, I didn't know that some people don't drive, and I find the idea of going to the store daily to be odd and tedious. Taking the train from place-to-place is quite outlandish to me because most people in America drive or fly to the places they need to go.

Table settings in Japan are different as well. Generally, they eat with chopsticks which are placed at the top of the bowl or plate, with the pointed end facing left. When they eat with a fork or spoon, placement does not matter. This seems strange as well, but considering most Americans do not use chopsticks on a regular basis, it makes perfect sense. As a young child, my parents and grandparents put an emphasis on proper table settings, manners, and posture. Most of the students we have had in the past have slurped their soup or drinks. According to my current Japanese student, that is not proper, but it may depend on the region of the country they come from or how they were raised.

Hosting these students has made me tolerant of different things, and has made me aware of the fact that people do different things according to their upbringing. The awareness of differences in cultures is important because if all we know is one specific culture, we won't expand our knowledge and be accepting of other cultures. When we unify multiple cultures and their input into our lives, we bring a newer level of acceptance and unity into our lives, and into the world.

SHORT STORIES

A Lost Country

I shut my eyes tight trying to hold back the tears, but they ran down my cheeks freely anyways. My head was shaking violently from side to side, trying to blank out the scene that had just happened. It was no use. The horrid memories pushed their way into my mind's eye, so that I can relive the most horrifying moments of my life.

In my usual outfit that I wore to school with my plain white hijab, my friends and I stood in the hallway talking about a test we had, like we usually do. Nothing felt unusual, and we began to say our goodbyes as this tall dude knocked into my shoulders and my books were tossed out of my arms.

Things like this happened all the time, as the hallways were narrow and students rushed to get home. As we bent down to pick up the books, a long foot stomped right on top of them. Now *that* was unusual. We looked up only to find the tall dude smirking right into my face. I furrowed my brows and got up. "What do you think you are doing?" I asked.

The tall boy replied, "I'm only doing to you what you deserve."

I crossed my arms in front of me defiantly. What on earth was this guy talking about? We don't even know each other, and he is treating me any way he wants? "Look, I don't have time for you. So you can just move your foot and walk away. I don't think you want to turn this into a big problem."

"This is *exactly* what I want. I WANT EVERYONE TO KNOW THAT THERE IS A TERRORIST IN THE SCHOOL AND NO ONE IS DOING ANYTHING ABOUT IT!"

I stared at this guy in disbelief. Was this fuss really just about that extra piece of garment that I chose to wear to cover my head? And that word, Terrorist, I had come to loathe it as everyone associated it with my religion, my beliefs, my family, my culture, and me.

Rage surged through me as people started gathering around us. Everyone was just watching, doing nothing. I turned around to seek support from my friends, but what I saw replaced my rage with betrayal. My "friends" were part of the mob now, standing there, with blank faces. Faintly, I heard a rhythm that I couldn't pinpoint, but it sounded very familiar.

After not replying for so long, the tall boy gave a short evil laugh.

"Oh what? Do you feel powerless since your leader Osama Bin Laden is dead? Don't tell me you were aiming to bomb this school to avenge him!"

I blinked thinking I hadn't heard him right. The song was playing more vividly in my head now.

"Why do you live in our country? Can't you leave us alone and go back to that desert where you belong?"

I might have not been able to answer some of the previous aggravating questions, but I *knew* the perfect answer to the last question. The National Anthem began to flow smoothly out of my mouth. Everyone was shocked into silence as I sang the lyrics the entire school sang every morning.

When I was done, I smiled sadly and said with a confident voice, "I hope you all understand." Then I turned to look directly at my friend's faces, making sure I made eye contact for a few seconds. I did not turn around to look at the tall dude's eyes. I didn't care for him. He was just a brainless creature brainwashed by nonsense. Then I broke through the mob, picked up my books, and walked away. When I came back home, my mom welcomed me with a warm smile. "How was your day honey?"

“It was... not normal,” I replied with a fake smile.

I crashed down onto my bed as tears flowed down my face endlessly, until there was a mountain of tissues near me where I had just carelessly thrown them on the ground. My entire body couldn't stop trembling. I was crying because no one did anything! No one spoke a word against the stupidity of the tall boy's claims. They had all just silently accepted the evil, as if they had no other choice. I *cried* because I had lived with the illusion that I had a life with friends, but within an instant, some ignorant words had destroyed that.

I was crying for the future of a country that had lost its way, that had allowed itself to be tangled and dictated by the evil jungles surrounding it. It found it easier to just yield to their bounding, and forget the goal it had set.

At that moment, I made a goal for myself. I vowed to never be a bystander, and to live in unity with everyone. That is why I decided my memories must be shared.

I picked up my pen, and began to write. My hands moved swiftly as if knowing what to do. Every letter I wrote was written with confidence and truth. I refused to let go of hope. I believed this world can be detangled and up on its feet returning to its rightful path. I already knew it would, because that's the only thing I saw in my mind.

The Fulfilling Recipe

Three rivals, Flour, Salt, and Yeast, all lived in old Mrs. Baker's kitchen. Each of them believed that they were better than their other cupboard mates. Flour thought that Yeast was uncivilized because of his tannish color, and that Salt's coarseness translated to a rough personality. Though Salt shared Flour's view on Yeast, he still hated Flour's ignorant ideas about fineness equating to a more gentle personality. Yeast disliked Flour and Salt because they just didn't seem like fun guys.

Though the three of them could never get along with each other, they did have two similarities. First, they all felt as if they were worthless, but their prideful natures refused to tell the others about this insecurity. Mrs. Baker had never even touched any of them for as long as they could remember. It was as if they had no purpose in being there in that cabinet at all. Their other similarity was that they shared a very close friend, Water, who lived downstairs on the Counter.

No amount of words could describe Water's giving personality. She loved Flour, Yeast, and Salt dearly and constantly tried to make them befriend one another. Having three friends who despise each other was no fun at all. Water could never have a decent conversation with any of them without hearing a rude comment about the other. She couldn't bear seeing her caring friends filled with so much hate. At some point, after years and years of hearing comments about Yeast's color, Flour's superiority, and Salt's coarseness, Water was tired of it all. She thought day and night trying to think of a way to make her friends like each other. Finally, she came up with the perfect plan.

The next day, Water invited each of them individually to her house in the Bowl on the Counter. She conveniently forgot to mention that the other two were also invited, of course. Flour, Yeast, and Salt had never been to Water's house before so they all graciously accepted. In preparation of going to Water's Bowl, Flour made himself as white as possible, salt as shiny as possible, and yeast as yeastish as possible. Water hoped that this meeting would help her friends happily join together. Flour, Yeast, and Salt had never actually even talked to each other before, so Water hoped that once they started conversing, they'd be friends in no time.

When the day of their little get-together finally arrived, Yeast came first. He complimented Water on her sparkling Bowl. Then, Salt came in and furiously saw Yeast already sitting in there. Flour arrived soon after and the three looked at each other with great contempt. How could Water invite people like *this* to her house, each thought to themselves. They all respected Water too much to say anything though, so they just sat there scowling. Water, sensing danger, quickly turned on some music and encouraged them to dance.

Unwillingly, they got up one by one, keeping as far apart from each other as they could. As these guests were dancing, Salt fell down and hurt himself. Yeast quickly ran over to make him feel better. Salt tried to ignore Yeast at first, but soon, both Flour and Salt discovered Yeast's ability to lift up people's spirits. He could make them feel joyful faster than most others. Flour helped Salt get up and gave him the support and base he needed. The three of them started talking after this little incident, and Salt's touch of bringing flavor to any environment added to the fun of the party. Water was ecstatic that her three friends finally got along with each other. The group of four friends danced all night, mingling with each other, and creating strong bonds.

When Mrs. Baker's maid came to the kitchen, she was surprised to see a bowl of a mysterious clay-like object on the counter. She assumed that Mrs. Baker was experimenting again and placed the bowl in the oven. After about half an hour, Mrs. Baker went to the kitchen, only to find something of a golden brown color in the oven. She took it out and tasted this creation and found her taste buds go to heaven and back. Whatever this was, it was mouthwatering. Mrs. Baker tested out a few ingredients and soon found out how to make this food item.

Mrs. Baker ended up making huge profits selling her new creation: Baker's Remarkable, Edible, Awesome Discovery (B.R.E.A.D.). Flour, Salt, and Yeast felt as if all their dreams had come true. They were finally being used by Mrs. Baker, and they just gained two new friends. And Water? She was just glad that her friends finally realized that being with others peacefully was the best way to live life.

Jae Woong Jan
West High School
Third Place - Short Story

Chair

My grandfather sat. He sat in his blank room, in his favorite wooden chair which seemed to be glued to his buttocks. He never stood up, he never smiled, and he never spoke. However, with the present understanding of my grandfather, I now know that he could not stand up, smile, or speak. I was too young and immature to realize the truth behind his actions.

Whenever I drown myself in the memories of my grandfather, I see myself, a six-year-old child, at my grandfather's moss-filled apartment without any entertainment. Everything at the apartment revolved around my grandfather. The cold stainless pipes attached to the walls, which felt good on my cheeks as it cooled down my body when I was sweating, were there to help my grandfather move around his house. The low baby sink in the small bathroom right next to his room was made to help my sedentary grandfather wash his hands and face while sitting. None of these were for me, and I did not care too much about pipes and sinks, but to be honest, I was sorely disappointed that there was nothing special for me at my grandfather's house. As a child, I thought grandfather was very selfish. While my friends brought to school robot toys and glow-in-the-dark dinosaur stickers that they received as gifts from their grandfathers, all I brought from my grandfather's home was the special mossy scent that constantly filled his house.

In my memories, my grandfather is a monster that speaks in a language of the beasts. My mom would always make me bow to him once I reached the apartment in order to make me show respect to him. When I would walk in to his room pushed by my mother, I would see him in his black Nike t-shirt and Mickey Mouse shorts that came to his knees, or his generic bright green tank top that was probably purchased by grandmother at the dollar store, or his loosened up hoodies and sweat pants that came only to his ankles. He would nod in his chair, as if to say, "it is you again," or "leave me alone," or maybe even, "why are you here?" I only assumed he thought this way since he never spoke. He only moaned, roared and shrieked in a language that I could not understand when I made my respectful Korean bow.

According to my mom, my grandfather was not always like this. He was a very diligent man before and even shortly after I was born. He would wake up at 6:00 in the morning on his lazy days, only to walk around outside the apartment to pick up litter. He would go to the city parking lot, where he earned a living for the family, and run around to check for people that ran away without paying the parking fee. He would have a pleasant drink with his friends at a nearby bar and make them burst into laughter with his exclusive superpower, his sense of humor. He was the happiest one at the moment of my birth, asking the nurse how to hold a baby properly and purchasing a book titled *100 Things You Can Do For Your Grand Child*. He was that man: a caring husband and father, a humorous friend, and an affectionate grandfather. Then, everything changed once he became a victim of a stroke (the story in which I will not go into great detail in this piece). He collapsed one morning and was transported to the hospital by an ambulance after grandmother called 119 (911 in the United States), only to be sentenced to a half-body paralysis due to a vein that burst in his right brain; he would not be able to use the left side of his body again.

My grandfather passed away when I was 8-years-old. That morning, my mom received a phone call from my grandmother, and our whole family went to our grandparent's house, which was five hours away, by car, from our house. I did not feel very sad that my grandfather had passed away, since I thought of him as a self-centered, blasphemous man. The only thing that

mattered on that day was that I did not have to go to school. I think back to this day with the understanding I have of what happened to grandfather, and I endure an enormous guilt that swells up inside of me. Those roars and cries that came back as replies to my bows may have been words such as "Good to see you again!" or "I missed you so much!" or maybe even "I love you." The more I understand, the more it hurts me, for I was the selfish one, not Grandfather. I was the one who assumed things about him without giving it a second thought. I was the one exasperated at the fact that there was nothing to do at his house. I was the monster that blocked my ears from his murmurs of love.

I sit when I go to my grandfather's house. I sit in my favorite wooden chair, the one that used to be my grandfather's. When I close my eyes in the chair, I can hear my grandfather roaring some words boisterously. I do not fully understand what it means, but I do know that he is welcoming me with all his heart.

Nicole Dunseith
North High School
Honorable Mention - Short Story

To Be Both

Characters:

Nikki—She is a smart and slightly angsty 17-year-old girl. She is half Japanese and half American. She is struggling with her own identity. Being from two very different cultural backgrounds has taken a toll on her sense of who she is.

Old Lady—Caucasian. She is ignorant toward other cultures and unintentionally racist.

We begin with a bare stage except for a big Japanese flag hanging on the right, and a big American flag to the left.

***Nikki**, looking down, enters from stage left slowly, as if in thought or distracted by something. She is petite, not too old looking, and is dressed in typical casual clothing—nothing too outlandish or bright. She is just a typical teen.*

As she crosses to center stage, a small old lady enters from stage right and hustles, on a mission, to get to where she needs to be.

Old Lady (*stopping Nikki right before she gets to center stage*)

Excuse me, young lady! I was just standing over there when I noticed you.

Nikki (*shocked having never seen this woman in her life*)

Oh. Um—

Old Lady

You have an interesting face. I haven't seen too many like you. What are you?

Nikki

Um...Japanese and wh—

Old Lady

Oh I knew it! I knew you were some kind of oriental! (*calling toward where she came*) Betty! I told you she was a Chinese!

Nikki

Japanese actually—

Old Lady

Well thanks for clearing that up for me. I just won \$10. (*shuffling back to stage right entrance joyfully and triumphantly*) Betty take out your coin purse! (*laughs*) And you thought she was white.

Nikki

Well actually I'm—(*old lady exits*) both. Ok well she didn't hear me. Or really care. (*cross to center stage and speaking to the audience*)

But yeah, I'm both. My mom is from Japan, and my dad is from Missouri.

Most of the time, I don't really notice that I'm Asian or white. I'm just Nikki. The only time that I notice that I'm any different than anyone else is at times like these. But I'm not bothered by it. She's just an ignorant old lady that didn't know any better. Although, she was pretty rude. After moments like that though, it makes me think.

It's like when you're breathing heavily but you don't notice it until someone points it out, and then you start breathing manually. And you start concentrating on controlling how you breathe until you finally forget. That is until you realize that you stopped focusing on it. And because you brought it up again the whole cycle starts all over. *(pause)* It's like that.

I usually forget about my ethnicity until someone brings it up, or when I start thinking about it again. I mean I know that I'm half Japanese and half white, but which one *am I*? Am I more Japanese? Or more white? It's weird that I feel the need to pick one or the other when it comes to how I define myself. Why can't I just be both?

I guess it's because society has a hard time finding a place for someone like me to fit in. It's easier to judge a person by one aspect of who they are than by making things complicated by adding another race into the mix. Look at Tiger Woods or Barack Obama. According to society, they are both black. But that's only part of them. So why do people feel the need to categorize mixed people to just one race?

I guess when I think about it, a person's first impression of you is based mostly on how you look on the outside. For example, if I saw an Asian person walk by me, I would assume that he's a mathematician. Or if I saw a seven-foot-tall black guy, I would assume that he plays basketball. Subconsciously when we judge people, we judge them by their stereotype first.

So how do people see me? Do they see me as just another Asian person? Or white girl? Or both? *(pause)* Maybe they don't know what to think either. And because they don't know, they can't judge me based on a stereotype that doesn't exist. They have to judge me based on who I am. And isn't that the goal of diversity and equality? To be judged by what you do and not by the color of your skin?

Huh.

I'm lucky. I'm diversity in action. I *can* be both. There is no need for me to try to be one or the other. *(smiling)* I don't need to fit into society that way. Society needs to catch up with me.

*Smiling and assure of herself **Nikki** exits stage right.*

Julie Kaplan
West High School
Honorable Mention - Short Story

Alone Good Together Better

Cameron Rose Valdez. Just her sight took your very breath away. And what was on the inside was even better. Not a moment went by when Cameron wasn't yearning to change the world.

I had the honor of sitting next to her in biology. She never listened in class though—she was always doodling on the margins of her notebook. She drew stars, hearts, penguins, and basically anything else a teenage girl would draw.

One day we were sitting in biology and she whispered to me, "Joey, why are we here?"

Alarmed that she was actually talking to me, for she was usually quiet, I quickly replied, "Because we have to take biology?" It was more of a question than an answer.

She shook her head, "No, not that. Why are we in this huge school?" Cameron stared at me, her murky green eyes boring through my brown ones.

Why are we in school? That didn't make much sense at all. I looked at her quizzically and whispered, "We're in this school because it's the only one in town and we have to learn."

Cameron roughly pushed her dark hair out of her face, "Joey, you've got it all wrong. We're here because it's expected of us. We're here because we have to be!"

What? I slowly scratched my head and said, "Cameron, you've lost me..."

She broke her gaze from mine and shook her head sadly, "You don't get it do you? You of all people should understand. I assumed you were different... Like me. Just... never mind."

I looked towards the floor disappointed. Why didn't I understand what she meant? I wanted to be like her. Why am I not different?

She took a deep breath and grabbed her pen and notebook. "Joey, look at this," she said quietly, drawing a huge circle on the paper.

I nodded and mumbled, "Mhm."

Cameron then drew a tiny little square in the center of the circle. "Look at this square. Just pretend for a second that it's the school we're in right now."

What was she getting at? "Okay..." I went along with whatever she was doing.

She slammed the pen down, "Can't you see? The circle is the world. This school is one tiny little piece of the world. And we're just sitting here!"

I still couldn't see where she was going with this. I was pretty sure I saw some tears in her eyes though.

"Joey! At the moment people are starving, and falling in love, and dying, and getting married, the ocean is being polluted, and and..." She stopped talking and looked at me. Her eyes were watering and she looked at me desperately. "And all we're doing is sitting here. In this tiny little school that is completely and utterly insignificant. And we're just sitting here."

Oh. I took a deep breath ready to reply to her when I was cut off.

Our biology teacher yelled, "Joey! Cameron! Pay attention!"

And just like that our moment was over.

Cameron and I didn't talk for another week or so. But what she said was burned in my brain.

On February 4th, Cameron talked to me again. This time it was during lunch. I was sitting alone in my usual corner of the cafeteria when she just walked up to me, and sat down right across from me. I was about ten levels beyond surprised. Cameron was popular... and I wasn't.

She ran her hand through her long dark hair, “Joey, I need your help.”

I internally sighed. She would probably ask me to do her homework for her. That’s what most people ask me to do. I had hoped that Cameron wasn’t ‘most people’ but I guess I was wrong.

“Yes?” I said somewhat dully.

She looked away for a second and smiled slightly, “I’m trying to create an organization, and I need your help.”

Huh. This girl always threw me curve balls.

“What kind of organization?” I said slowly, cracking my knuckles.

“One to help people... Where I—we can raise money for people who actually need it. If we’re sitting here, why can’t we at least make a difference?”

No words came out of my mouth. This girl was perfect.

I nodded, “I’ll help you. But why me? You have a bunch of other friends.” I was pretty curious.

She fiddled with her hands, but stopped and looked at me square in the eyes, “Because, Joey, you’re different.”

You see, when I was alone I didn’t amount to very much. And Cameron just thought thoughts. But together... We were really something.

Justin Lackey
West High School
Honorable Mention - Short Story

The Story Of Jamal

“Ha! Charcoal, burn in the sun!” yelled Jason, a tall and muscular white boy.

Jamal was lying down on the ground with burn marks on his arms from Jason’s lighter. *Why are white people teasing and making fun of blacks?* thought Jamal. This question has always been in his head. *Almost a hundred years since slavery was made illegal, and yet here we are with a new problem: discrimination.* The crowd started to disperse. Jamal stood up just to be kicked in the back of the ankle.

Jamal collapsed once again in pain. “And stay down!” yelled Tom, a short and stubby white boy. Tom leaned over and spit on Jamal.

Jamal groaned and rolled over. Tom ran off to catch up with Jason.

Jamal got up and limped to the bus stop. It was roughly six in the afternoon. The sun was starting to set making the sky change color. Living in Washington, D.C. in the middle of the 60’s was cool, but he wished there were fewer whites to boss him around.

The bus arrived. He boarded, paid, and sat with the rest of the blacks. The rest of the journey home was a blur. He couldn’t concentrate on anything but his growing pain. Once the bus got to his stop, he walked inside and went straight to bed. His burns hurt, but his ankle hurt much more. He felt like he was on fire, and like he was shot in the ankle at the same time. Within minutes he fell asleep.

“Get up honey! Time for school,” whispered his mother. He opened his eyes and there she was at the door to his small room. All he had in his room was a bed and closet.

“I don’t want to go to school,” he moaned. “I hurt too much. Got burns on my arms and got a kick in the back of my ankle.”

“Sorry, but you still need an education. Who did this to you?”

“Jason and Tom.”

“Those white boys?”

“Yeah.”

“Sorry. Now get up, I’ll get the Vaseline.” Then she left the room.

He sat up and looked around. Then, he got up and got ready for school. After putting on a red plaid shirt and blue jeans, he walked down the hall to the kitchen.

From the kitchen came an amazing smell of eggs, bacon, and biscuits: his favorite breakfast. After he ate, he got the Vaseline and applied it to his burns. *Amazing how such a small lighter can cause such pain* he thought. He said good-bye to his mom and walked out the door.

The walk to school was short, about ten blocks and only one major street. The school was way too small to hold as many students as it did—roughly 1,000 students in a one-story building about the size of two football fields side by side.

As soon as he walked onto the school campus, Jason and Tom were at his sides, calling him names and yelling insults. *Why do they only bother me? Or do they bother other people but focus mostly on me?* He thought this to himself, ignoring what they were saying. Once he walked into his science class, Jason and Tom left to go to their classes. His science class consisted of 40 students: 38 white, 2 Black. He walked to the back of the class and sat next to the only other black student there and one of his best friends, Barack. “Did you hear about

Martin Luther King's upcoming speech? Do you want to come with me?" asked Barack obviously excited.

"Asking questions so soon?" Jamal replied. "Sure, I'll go with you. What did he call it? 'I Have Had A Dream'?"

"You mean 'I Have A Dream'?"

"Yeah, that one."

"All right class, science awaits," said Mr. Bock, the science teacher.

The rest of the week went by rather quickly. Jason and Tom yelled insults and Barack talked excitedly about the upcoming speech. Then the day finally came. MLK started his speech. Barack and Jamal were standing listening. *Man this guy is bold. I wish I were more like him*, he thought.

Soon the boys were heading to Jamal's house, talking about what they had just witnessed. Suddenly Jamal stopped. His blood ran cold. The best day of his life just became the worst. His front lawn was on fire in the shape of a cross, the windows smashed, and the door was broken down. Men in all white were dragging the dead bodies of his parents out of the house. He knew who they were immediately: the KKK. One man spotted them and shot them without hesitation...

"AHHHH..." yelled Jamal. He sighed as he realized it was all a dream. "Talk about 'I Have A Dream'. Except mine isn't as good as Martin Luther King's." He was glad it was 2013. Blacks have all the same rights as the whites. But he was even happier about not being judged just because of his race. Then an idea came to him. *What if I write a short story based on my dream and enter it into a competition?*

POETRY

Kyle Cuaresma
North High School
First Place (Tie) - Poetry

The Cure to a Disease

Discrimination is like a cobra
It can strike at any moment
If you try to attack it, it has a counter move
Once bitten the venom spreads through you like injustice
It causes you to ache inside and fill you up with fear

Discrimination is like a lion
Huge, ferocious beasts, full of pride
When seen it causes you tense up and fill up with fear
Everything fears it and nothing dares to challenge it
Its bite leaves a massive scar

Discrimination is a virus or disease
It can't be seen but you can see the effects of it
It causes fear and paranoia
It can't be avoided and it affects the people around it
But there is always a cure

Discrimination is fear itself
You are always scared of something
But it's up to you to not be scared
To not let the disease of virus affect you
To not let the venom spread throughout your body

The Cure to prejudice is being able to not fear it
To one to resist the venom
To be the one who challenges the Lion
The one who is immune to the disease
The one to resist discrimination and its causes

Mishell Reyes
North High School
First Place (Tie) - Poetry

Can't you see?

Children and the blind are much alike
They can see
Unlike those who do not understand
Diversity.
They can see a person as they are
Not as the color of their skin
As a person with aspiration, dreams, and hopes
Not as a slave, gardener, or any other
Stereotype.
They see the beauty within,
The love in their hearts,
And the wisdom they carry along with them.
Children and the blind are much alike,
Can't you see?

Annabelle Davis
North High School
Second Place (Tie) - Poetry

All

A stroll around the block in Torrance may seem very ordinary,
The trees become filled with an array of colors in the fall,
In the summer, lush gardens, vivid green grasses, and flowers, just look at them all,
Apart from our cities appearance, we may also see something else, very extraordinary

We may pass a bus stop with an advertisement, which with no surprise, I cannot read,
I may then look up to a bus that greets everyone in Spanish, and in English, as it passes
I could approach a street with restaurants, signs so big, no need for glasses,
Italian and tacos, followed by Pho and Chinese food, who planted these seeds?

Many families in search of something greater than what they had,
Combined to make this multicultural thing a new fad,
Torrance has this with no effort, just neighbors happy to accept,
A night with the smell of food from Pakistan, Mariachi music, and an American flag, hard to
imagine, I bet,
Not here, Torrance is a mural painted with colors from all over the earth, every color is so pretty,
All the nations and cultures in our world can be found within 20 square miles of our city.

Angelena Duarte
North High School
Second Place (Tie) - Poetry

When The Seed Sprouts

You have a concern,
And start by telling your parents,
Then family,
Then friends,
Suddenly it's multiple people's concerns.

Soon you get enough people to back you up.
You start an organization,
And get the word out there.
Now as a whole you get supporters to tell a concern.
Now, the whole community knows about the concern.

Once the community knows, you can start to resolve it.
Everyone expresses their views and how we can seek the answers.
On the way to seeking the answer, the community grows.
After the community starts to grow, people get to know each other.
Now, the community is on its way to harmony.

While this is happening, more and more ideas are spreading.
At this point, we are all working as a team.
We respect and accept each other.
We walk in each other's shoes.
That is how we become united.

Holly Glickman
North High School
Third Place (Tie) - Poetry

Parade-side View

March 17th on Pier Avenue
I'm up on a hill with a parade-side view
The Irish are here in shades of green
With assorted people in between
I stop and think I'm Irish too
But we all represent red, white, and blue
Kilts & saris & wraps & coverings
This diversity means everything
Foreign backgrounds and our unity
A perfect blend in our community
Picked for a quince, I learned the dance
A different culture, a special chance
I feel the peace on this sunlit day
We all just want to hear the bagpipes play

Courtney Sam
West High School
Third Place (Tie) - Poetry

Voice of a Visionary

A man dared to dream of a perfect world
When his was a sunless day on a winter's night
It was one not for the faint of heart
Nor the weak and weary

Yet he pressed on
Never a fear for his life torn apart
A fight for freedom
A battle for the brave

Scathing slurs, ugly aspersions hurled with hate
Struggles and strikes for justice
He marched for the people
With a wondrous vision of what could await

One soul, a beacon of hope
Fallen far too soon
By the pull of a trigger and a sudden shot
This vision, this light gushing on the cold ground
Millions touched, mourned and wept
A melancholy tune

But, little did he know
Because of his plight long ago
That what has now come to pass
Would fulfill a once far out fantasy
And we can all scream out with conviction
"Free at last! Free at last!"

Cameron Lippon
North High School
Honorable Mention - Poetry

I've Done Nothing Wrong

Why are you stopping me, I have done nothing wrong
But driving with my friends with the music cranked up loud,
Because they're playing our main song

I worked my way through college to earn my degree
Got a good paying job so my family won't have to live under a tree

I believe in Human Rights and helping my fellow man
I give back to my community whenever I can

I've committed no crime, no stealing, no lying
The only crime here was surviving the ghetto without dying

So why are you treating me like some common criminal
In this stereotypical nation you may think of me an animal

Is there justice in what you think you're doing?
Or is it the color of my skin that has you stewing?

Take off those colored glasses and find out what's inside,
See with your eyes how we're not so different,
We're all humans living together in this small world with pride.

Why can't this world be a different place?
A place where there are many elaborate colors,
And no superior race.

So keep your racist thoughts to yourself,
And next time you see a brother in a nice ride,
Try to treat him like he's white
And let him slide.

Shane Wolf
South High School
Honorable Mention - Poetry

Are We The Same?

All the ethnic groups are accounted for
Race doesn't seem to matter out here
Everyone has the same goal in mind

With the will to work hard
Each player puts in the blood, sweat and tears

The coaches coach and the players play
Helmets, pads, jerseys and cleats know no race
Ethnicity is only seen on the outside

Sacrifice, studies and sportsmanship all have to be met
At the least, that's all our parents can ask for
Make a difference on and off the field
Every word you use has meaning, so choose with care

You can only hope that we all feel the same inside
Each one of us have feelings and dreams
So... ask yourself, are we all the same?

The answer is found within.

Kathy Sidarous
North High School
Honorable Mention - Poetry

Culture

Connecting worlds together.
Unity is created within.
Leading people to see how the other half lives.
Traveling the world doesn't change one's traditions.
Unraveling paths to different ways of life.
Reaching out to those who are different.
Everyone laughs in the same language.

William Kang
North High School
Honorable Mention - Poetry

Child's Play

Adults always tell me, "You can become anything you want to be!"
They are always taken aback when I say, "I want to be three."

Because kids see your heart before your skin,
They don't care what God you believe in.
They do not mock, jeer or ridicule
And they earnestly live by the world's greatest rule:
Everyone knows this, but for some reason it needs to be repeated,
Treat everyone the way you want to be treated.

Though as kids, the notion of it was profound,
Gravity was the only thing keeping us down.
It was not the words of others or even ourselves,
In the stars is where our dreams dwelled.

All of this may seem like child's play,
But it is true. We lose ourselves day by day.

We grow up all too fast in this world,
Our limbs grow, yet our souls are curled.
Come now child, do not let the world corrupt your mind.
To those who are hateful, be kind.
Because in an instant your heart can turn to stone,
But be not afraid, for you are not alone.
I will be here, you have someone to call friend.
Your skinned knees and bruises I can mend.

I want to look at things with innocent eyes again,
When things like war were games of pretend.
However, we are fighting one as we speak,
Enlist now, or our future is bleak.
The world needs us to make a stand.
Get up I tell you, we can no longer play in the sand,
Our mouths weapons, our ammunition words,
But sometimes, in order to go forward, we must go backwards.

So let us all grow up then, and become kids,
Bring people out of the shadows where they once hid.
Take their hand, embrace them in your arms
Because to this one playground, we all belong.

Kelsie Maculam
North High School
Honorable Mention - Poetry

Love is Blind

My father is Filipino and my mother is white
Disapproval and hurtful gossip about them soon took flight
How could anyone say two people can't be
Despite their cultural differences, their love was obvious for all to see
Why couldn't they be together simply because of the color of their skin
Ignorant comments and judgmental stares made it all seem like a sin
Look at all of the major changes that have been made
But in our society, racism is something that has yet to fade
Who decided that any race was a step above
Skin color does not determine true love

Nellesha Bettis
North High School
Honorable Mention - Poetry

Harmonious

Harmony between groups of people differentiating in culture and race
Wonderful, isn't it?
Isn't it beautiful: mixtures of people of different backgrounds together
Standing as one?
Without judgment of one another just because of their skin color
Being diverse and free, without a care in the world
Loving those that you love despite race, religion or background
Respecting the cultures of the individuals amongst you while you always stay true to your own
Never being ashamed to be who you really are, and be proud of the skin you're in
Being proud to be around others that have different ideas and beliefs than your own
And not being ashamed to declare your belief in diversity
Now that's courage.
Heterogeneous groups of people, standing together, as one.
That's the future and present that is sought by many
Despite the past that America had faced before.
Who cares what race or religion somebody is?
Who cares what their culture or background is?
As long as a person is a human, they should be respected and treated as one
And accepted as an equal.

Lily Kawaoto
North High School
Honorable Mention - Poetry

Equality

They say that we will be forever equal:
unprejudiced, fair, and just.
But I wonder, what does equal mean,
if people differentiate "us"?
Does it mean for all to have the same rights,
to work together happily and cooperate?
We were told that we're fine as we are,
yet some want to separate.
We're surrounded by many different ethnicities,
in school, in town, throughout.
If "equal" means acceptance and respect,
why do people leave others out?
Hide and seek is a game that little kids play,
so why do we still decide who's "it"?
It's time for us to realize
That we have something to admit:
We've been close-minded all these years,
a mistake that caused this mess.
If we continue to do this, it will never bring success.
Acknowledge the differences that make us who we are,
and in doing so we can make the world a better place for all.

Makenna Enomoto
North High School
Honorable Mention - Poetry

Be Yourself

Living a positive life is not always easy,
When you have a society that is not very pleasing.
They judge you on how you dress, how you act, and how you look,
When we all know better than to judge by the cover of its book.
We should all live life in compassion and unity,
Because we are all individuals living in the same community.
It would be nice if we were all open-minded and loving,
But we all know that not everyone is understanding and caring.
We try our hardest to fit in and be accepted.
In a world where we have to earn respect and try not to get rejected.
In this generation the standards are so high,
When all we want to do is live life and not in someone else's eye.
Life is all about making mistakes and learning from it,
Because if not then you won't grow from it.
Life is full of ups and downs,
But anyone is strong enough to bounce back from meltdowns.
So take chances and forget what people say,
Because it's your life and you live it your way.

Dwight Morales
North High School
Honorable Mention - Poetry

What Defines You?

My choices are a measure of my character
These choices, wrong or right, should define me
What defines you?

My skin color reminds me of my ancestors
It is part of my inheritance from them
I did not choose it but I do choose to embrace it
I cannot escape it, for it is my gift
Will you embrace it?

My community is made up of people
I am like you and you are like me
I am a student, son, brother, and friend
We make up this community so let us look out for each other
How will you preserve our community?

My color may not be your color
My ancestors may not be your ancestors
However, my community is your community
If we judge each other by our color, we cannot be united
Will you partner with me and not judge others based on color?

MLK once said that people should be measured by their character
Our choices are a measure of our character
We do not choose our skin color
but we can choose to make right choices
I choose to embrace my skin color and your skin color
What defines you?

Samantha Caponpon
North High School
Honorable Mention - Poetry

Human Nature

Prejudice.
The tensions raised and
inflated miniscule issues published
based on the imaginary.

Fear and Hate.
Propaganda.
Coup d'etat.
Chaos.

Disaster.
The loss of many that
are killed in nature's fury destroying
all buildings alike.

Running and Hiding.
Scared.
Relief.
Death.

But,
these are times of coming together.

The flags unite
and gather forces
to stop the unjust,
to stop the injustice.

They bring an end
to the chaos,
fear, and hate
to bring relief to the people.

People collect and
donate their belongings
to benefit others regardless
of status, race or country.

They help in anyway
possible to ease their
suffering and pain
witnessed before them.

Why can't it be like that all the time?

Torie Oishi
North High School
Honorable Mention - Poetry

The Beauty of My City

Torrance is a rainbow
Full of many colors and shades of each
All beautifully glowing near the beach
North, south, east, or west
Diversity exists, which is the best

Torrance is a melting pot
No matter how different we are
We could have come from near or far
But after all, we blend together as a community
So no matter your race, you still have equal opportunity

Torrance is a medley
All sorts of people united
Which makes everyone excited
However we know in order to stay together forever
We must be kind to one another and always be clever

Torrance is a bed of flowers
Dandelions, carnations, lilies, or roses
They all look good with natural poses
The flowers need each other to survive
Just as we humans must stay together to thrive

Torrance is a blend
White, black, brown, yellow, orange, or red
Everyone is bonded through a very thick thread
No one is left behind in the dust
We are bound together by our trust

Torrance is diverse
There are many types of people with many different backgrounds
No matter how different, we all stick around
Everyone is unique, yet similar in a way
Regardless, no one is a stray

Kim Bui
North High School
Honorable Mention - Poetry

A Change for the Good

Some lived in a world
Where no one was safe.
Can't go places without being picked
On because of the color of their skin.
Some lived in a world where one race
Was on a higher pedestal than the other.
But now the world has changed.
A change for the good.
People with different color skins and
Ethnicity walk hand in hand.
Even though we don't look alike or
Even if our cultures are completely
Different, we all share the same common
Values; to treat everyone with love and kindness.
By accepting one another, Torrance
Has become one of the most beautiful
And unique cities in all of California.
We accept one another for who we are,
Not by the color of our skin.
There has been a huge change in history,
But this change is for the good.

George Flores
North High School
Honorable Mention - Poetry

Torrance Today

Living in a city filled with diversity
where culture, religion and political beliefs do not matter.
A city just like a melting pot.
Where people from many cultures come together
with warm hearts to help those in need.
As a child growing up in this city
I've embraced what it has to offer sports, education, culture, family and friendships.
Torrance unlike many other cities brings communities
together seeing no differences amongst them.
Torrance is the heart of the south bay
embracing everyone living amongst it.

Grace Manchala
West High School
Honorable Mention - Poetry

A Nation's Rainbow

We toiled in the Mire
Unrequited by our Passion
For the Freedom that lay in our grasp
A Freedom for our Children

A People not reckoned with
We were the Oddity of the Nation
Yet we still rode forward
On our Chariot of Fire

We were the Proof
That a new World was to be discovered
A new World with new Beginnings
A World without Hate

As the Rainbow in the sky sheds a new Aura
So we too became that Rainbow
Yielding a View with no Spite
So we could become a World of Peace

And now as we gaze up at the Stars
Holding hands with a Rainbow of People
We sense the Love of a Nation
Intermingled with an Array of Color

Brianna Bengé
West High School
Honorable Mention - Poetry

21st Century Generations

Apps,
smart phones.
Tablets,
gadgets,
and gizmos.

All this new technology,
new apps.
All social medias,
and we use it to offend.

New resources,
meant to better the world.
Yet, ignorance consumes these sights.
You would think such productive tools,
would make it an easy way to support.

Instead of leaving offensive comments,
and trash talking.
How about send a message of affection and confidence.
Use your means for bettering ourselves
and each other.

Laura Oelsner
West High School
Honorable Mention - Poetry

Compliments

O, how ridiculous it may be
For people to treat you different from me.
Your skin is dark, mine is light,
But here is no need to be impolite.
The sunset is made of different colors,
We all come from different mothers.
Pink, orange, and yellow create the beauty;
Working together is our duty.

Alone we cannot stand.
There are many instruments in the band.
Come with me; I'll be friends with you.
Together there is nothing we cannot do.
If our differences matter,
It is for the better.
Complements we will be,
And a perfect and free family.