



VISIONS OF UNITY 2015

Literary Anthology

by

High School Student Writers from Torrance, California

Visions of Unity Sponsors

Human Relations Forum of Torrance
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Special thanks to our parents, 118 student contestants, and 15 participating teachers.

Your support is what keeps the contest – and its vision of unity – alive.

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

Martin Luther King

“Without forgiveness, there is no future.”

Desmond Tutu

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

Dalai Lama

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

Mother Teresa

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

Rumi

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

Mahatma Gandhi

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

Baha'u'llah

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

Nelson Mandela

VISUAL ARTS

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 Dan Bi Han, West High School

Second Place Joohyun Lee, South High School

Third Place Joey Hoffman, Shery High School

PHOTOGRAPHY

First Place Alex Hattori, South High School

Second Place Alison Walsh, South High School

COMPUTER ART

First Place Dominic Wimbish, So Cal ROC

Second Place Jonathan Uranca, So Cal ROC

SCULPTURE

First Place Irene Chin, West High School

Second Place Erika Yanke, South High School

ESSAYS

First Place

SeungHyun Lee (p. 9)
North High School / Grade 11
Teacher: Anderson

Second Place (Tie)

Lori Moses (p. 11)
South High School / Grade 11
Teacher: O'Brien

Akane Okumura (p. 13)
North High School / Grade 11
Teacher: Anderson

Andrew Rodov (p. 15)
South High School / Grade 11
Teacher: O'Brien

Third Place

Erica Quang (p. 17)
North High School / Grade 11
Teacher: Anderson

-----Honorable Mentions-----

Sean Baron (p. 19)
South High School / Grade 9
Teacher: O'Brien

Victor Bonilla (p. 20)
West High School / Grade 12
Teacher: Altenberg

Yota Iwasaki (p. 22)
South High School / Grade 11
Teacher: O'Brien

Sydney Tayag (p. 24)
North High School / Grade 11
Teacher: Anderson

SHORT STORIES

First Place

Timothy Lau (p. 27)
South High School / Grade 9
Teacher: Carroll

Second Place

Dan Bi Han (p. 29)
West High School / Grade 10
Teacher: Elwood

Third Place

Christina Anyiam (p. 33)
North High School / Grade 11
Teacher: Anderson

POETRY

First Place (Tie)

Nilah Epperson (p. 35)
North High School / Grade 11
Teacher: Anderson

Shane Wolf (p. 36)
South High School / Grade 10
Teacher: Guest

Second Place (Tie)

Matthew Bui (p. 37)
North High School / 11
Teacher: Anderson

Davina Flores (p. 38)
North High School / 11
Teacher: Anderson

Third Place (Tie)

Anna Joh (p. 39)
North High School / Grade 11
Teacher: Anderson

Albert Park (p. 40)
North High School / Grade 11
Teacher: Anderson

-----Honorable Mentions-----

Hugo Abe (p. 41)
North High School / Grade 11
Teacher: Anderson

Isaiah Cadogan (p. 42)
South High School / Grade 11
Teacher: O'Brien

Jae Won Choi (p. 43)
North High School / Grade 11
Teacher: Anderson

Helen Chung (p. 44)
North High School / Grade 11
Teacher: Anderson

Christine Anne David (p. 45)
North High School / Grade 11
Teacher: Anderson

Maya Emmanuel (p. 46)
North High School / Grade 11
Teacher: Anderson

Lily Kawaoto (p. 47)
North High School / Grade 10
Teacher: Stover

Rachel Lee (p. 48)
North High School / Grade 11
Teacher: Anderson

Megan Takata (p. 49)
North High School / Grade 11
Teacher: Anderson

Maria Voit (p. 50)
North High School / Grade 11
Teacher: Anderson

Ashley Zurita (p. 51)
North High School / Grade 11
Teacher: Anderson

ESSAYS

SeungHyun Lee
North High School
First Place - Essay

A New Life

Dad slapped my sister's hand with his chopstick and raised an eyebrow, silently reminding her not to use her left hand to eat. Feeling a little guilty and ashamed, she obeyed without a word. Everyone at the dinner table knew about the Korean curse: A left-handed family member brought bad luck to the entire family. That was only one of many cultural differences that I feared would separate me from Americans when I first immigrated; however, I was pleasantly surprised that the adjustment went rather smoothly and relatively quickly.

My parents decided that the best opportunity for education and good quality life for my sister and I was in America. I was fourteen years old and absolutely fearful about having to deal with America's different culture and language. I came with many misconceptions. I thought Americans were selfish, individualistic, inconsiderate, disrespectful, and arrogant. Some people even told me that Americans didn't like foreigners and had much animosity toward anyone who spoke with even a slight accent. It didn't take long before I realized how terribly wrong I was.

On my first day of school in America, I went to the office, where three busy administrators stopped to greet me. A girl stood up from her seat and offered her hand to me. She introduced herself in Korean. I shook her hands and a ton of weight was lifted from my shoulders in my great relief. I was so glad to find out that there were other Koreans at the school. The girl showed me around the school and introduced me to many other students who were quite nice. Despite my older sister's teasing that I would surely become a victim of bullying, everyone was incredibly nice and friendly. Even though I was a complete stranger to them, most students went out of their way to help me.

My preconception of America was replaced with optimism and excitement. Unlike the blond hair, blue-eyed people I had envisioned, my school had great diversity and consisted of students and teachers from all around the world. The diversity allowed me to

fit into a complete new environment with ease, which made my school life enjoyable. Although I had to deal with the difficulties of having to learn English and keeping up with classes, I was grateful for a welcoming environment where I could study comfortably.

A couple of years after my first day of school in the United States, I spotted a girl nervously biting her nails, sitting in the seat inside the school office. With the warmest smile I could gather, I offered her my hand and introduced myself. She barely said “hi” with a shaky, soft voice. As I led her out of the office to take her to her first-period class, a sense of pride and joy overcame me. I had become the welcoming person who was able to help other new students.

Just as others have shown their generosity and kindness to me, I tried my best to help all the new students. I even started a new club called the English as a Second Language (ESL) Club, where students can meet other students who shared similar experiences of having to learn a new language.

I believe that my smooth transition into a new country was possible because it was the city of Torrance, where so many people from so many backgrounds share the community. The diversity in Torrance is what makes this city so great; it doesn't only tolerate, but it values our differences. I know that my life is better because of where I live.

Lori Moses
South High School
Second Place (Tie) - Essay

Identity Crisis

I was born into a traditional Armenian family where I was taught the importance of preserving a specific cultural identity. My mother and father were insistent that Armenian be my first and primary language, so at the age of four, I was shipped off to the “Armenian Center,” where they had established a makeshift “Armenian school.” Although I enjoyed it at first, I eventually began to resent spending my Friday nights learning traditional songs, dances, and poems—never mind learning the difficult grammar rules and the 38 letters of the Armenian alphabet. Instead, I wanted to spend time with my American friends, who thought it was “so weird” that I had to go to this embarrassing, imposter-school. Now that I am almost out of high school, I look back on those nine years of education and appreciate my mother’s intentions.

Juggling my disparate identities as an Armenian-American is equal parts challenging and rewarding, and this struggle has made me a more open-minded person. Throughout the San Fernando and San Gabriel valleys, there are an abundance of private Armenian schools that parents can send their children to. However, in the South Bay, our options are limited to one unimpressive building where a handful of parents have banded together to keep the Armenian heritage alive. The Armenian Center opened its doors over forty years ago in October of 1967, with 24 students and four classes. The purpose was to “preserve the rich Armenian heritage and culture in the school,” and throughout the decades, hundreds of students have passed through these doors, having learned the history, arts and language of the Armenian people. Although I often felt like my Friday nights were ruined by the chore of attending this school, I now understand how it has shaped and transformed my sense of self.

During my years in middle school, I was often afraid of being categorized as a foreigner who did not fit in with my peers. This fear was realized when one of my classmates told me to “go back to where I came from.” As an impressionable girl, this

statement affected me in dramatic ways, so I tried harder to conform to American constructs. I asked my mother to stop putting my favorite Armenian foods in my lunch bag, and I refused to speak Armenian in my home. I thought these acts of rebellion would win me the favor of my classmates, but as the months passed, I realized I was denying an essential part of my identity.

Today I am proud of my culture, one that continues to thrive despite its charged and heinous history. 2015 will mark the 100th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, where 1.5 million Armenians were systematically murdered at the hands of the Turks. Unfortunately, the Turkish government has never taken responsibility for their actions, but I am hopeful that one day, we will see a fair resolution to this issue. Although the Genocide has left deep scars on my community, I refuse to let it define me. Instead, I want to focus on the important global impacts Armenians have made, and I want to celebrate their accomplishments. For example, I recently came across a book called *Yes, We Have*, by Stepan Partamian which opens with a quote from President Obama: "The United States of America is a far richer country because of the many Americans of Armenian descent who have contributed to our society." The book chronicles the amazing influence of the Armenian people, ranging from John Najarian, an organ-transplant pioneer, to Asadour Sarafian, the inventor of the first automatic transmission.

Partamian's mission was to, "remind American leaders of their American-Armenian constituents' outstanding contributions to our country [and to] share our sense of pride with the American public at large." I am honored to be a part of a people who have made such important impacts on the global community.

Many Americans strongly identify with other cultures as well, and they have a deep understanding of how difficult it can be to assimilate to American ideals. However, our unique views are what make America successful. By embracing diversity, we are opening our arms to the ideologies of more than one culture, giving us a larger spectrum of knowledge. Being torn between two cultures has been a learning experience for me, and ultimately, I have understood the importance of appreciating and internalizing the advantages of both. I am proud of my people, of their heart and enduring spirit, and I am privileged to live up to their legacy.

Akane Okumura
North High School
Second Place (Tie) - Essay

Diverse at Its Finest

Being a student at North High has really made me realize how important diversity is. Because once you step into a pool of different kinds of people, in terms of race, personality, body-type, and gender, a person becomes much more capable of thinking outside the box.

Suddenly, small details start to not matter. It becomes much easier for people to accept that, in fact, everyone is different from everybody else. Quoting from what Octavia Spencer said, "I'm not an optimist. I'm a realist. And my reality is that we live in a multifaceted, multicultural world. And maybe once we stop labeling ourselves, then maybe everyone else will." The world is one big place, and as we all co-exist, I feel that we need to preserve this interracial, intercultural harmony, because it's what separates us from anything else in the world. We really have to harness and appreciate our differences. The world works with people who have different views and opinions, and we each bring a different background with our unique and distinct cultures.

I was born into a Japanese household, and as a child I never really valued family ideals. The only family I have here in America is my mother, my father, and my brother. To others it may not seem like much, but to me, it's everything that I need, and yet I still had something missing.

Some cultures value family a lot and other cultures don't. I found that out as I learned, and that's what made it okay. I didn't want to constrict myself to just one culture or one concept to live my own life. As I grew up, I learned to take in more cultures and to really fill my life and the hole that always lingered in the back of my mind with different concepts. The great part was that this was the way my parents wanted me to live. They wanted me to embrace the fact about how privileged I was to live with such a capacity and to really explore every crevice of it. That's why Torrance was the chosen and destined place to move into. It's a safe environment for kids, but also very welcoming of all kinds of cultures. Looking back, there's really no stereotype for the people living in Torrance.

Going back to the beginning, I've always heard that North High is a diverse school. Some might find that hard to believe, but it's true. I truly feel honored to be a part of something big and to be a North High Saxon. Do you know why? It's because every year, North High hosts a week full of multicultural activities. It gives the students a chance to dive head first into some of the world's finest cultures, and it expands their knowledge of things they already knew and things they didn't know, from food to certain activities specific to each culture. The whole week circulates around an assembly in which the students perform dances from certain cultures.

School is a place to learn, but sometimes there are things outside of books that students should experience, and Multicultural Week allows every North High student to experience things that happen around the world. The best part about it all is that it's fun and it sets apart our differences in an accepting way.

Diversity is around us and it's inevitable, but it's something that shapes people, and to be able to be in contact with so many cultures is what sets people apart from others. It's important to surround and submerge the being in an environment like this because it enables one to open up to more possibilities, and any thoughts of discrimination are suddenly thrown out the window.

Be willing to accept the possibilities of all kinds of people, and looking back, it's amazing to live in a time and age where we are allowed to accept this way of life as a social norm.

Andrew Rodov
South High School
Second Place (Tie) - Essay

Perseverance over Adversity

Growing up in the diversity of cultures, languages, and ethnicities in Torrance, I have been exposed to a number of people from different backgrounds who all have different views on the issue of civil rights. My parents and the rest of my family emigrated from the former Soviet Union on the simple grounds of social and economic freedom, along with the hope to escape oppression because of their religion. I was born into a country of freedom; a country that provides a sanctuary for members of all ethnicities, races, religions, and opinions, with liberty and justice for all. Nevertheless, I was taught at an early age about the idea of anti-Semitism and the many places where it still exists. And how although I am blessed to be brought up in the greatest country on Earth, I have to persevere and do my best in all aspects in my life in order to overcome what others may think of me simply based on my religion. In the same way, all other minorities, and even majorities, need to believe more in their abilities rather than dwelling in the past in which their people may have not been as well off as they should have been. A diverse community will be a much more productive place once people work hard towards a goal they set, and overcome the adversity they face.

Although most students may disagree, I firmly believe that school is the place that sets the pace for a person's life--how hard they are willing to work, how much effort they are willing to put in, and also how they view their abilities. I too often hear people say things like, "I don't want to do it," "Why are we doing this," or "Is this even necessary?" From the segregated, unjust mid-twentieth century to the much improved country that we all live in today, we must all celebrate the immense progress we have made. However, some may ask, "Now what?" There is no doubt, that the future needs our hands to mold it, but there is a right way to do it. Instead of using the word "racist" to make words like "black, Asian, white, etc." taboo, we need to push kids to understand that they can do anything they set their minds to and teach them that any human can broaden their horizons regardless of physical appearance or personal beliefs.

I personally have yet to experience discrimination because of what I believe in. I think that says something about the great society we've come to be. Nevertheless, just because I have not personally dealt with such a situation, there is not a doubt in my mind that such horrid things occur. But the correct way to deal with this lies in a direction some may not even consider. Some may do the generic angry thing, and just yell or curse at the one who made the comment. Others may get very depressed and go to therapy. But the simplicity of the thing that not only will make children who are discriminated against feel better, but also disprove the rude person, is to do something great. To work hard, be nice, stay healthy, spend time with family and all those things people include in an ideal, perfect life. In Torrance, and for that matter, the United States, anyone can reach any one of these goals, and this is the exact idea that we have to express to our students. In fact, these morals need to be expressed to everyone, because when people believe in something, it mostly certainly will happen.

Erica Quang
North High School
Third Place - Essay

What Is Race?

It was a night like any other when the question first popped into my head. I was having dinner with my family – normal Chinese dinner with rice and sides of vegetables, meats, and a bowl of my favorite eggs and onions. My little brother and I began to do what we always do to our mom – rant and complain about our day. Finally, I told my mom about a time my friend played a prank on our teacher, who was quite a sour person, and made a spectacle of him in front of the whole class. My mom seemed shocked that I found the whole brouhaha funny. She glared at me and told me that that’s the American way of thinking. Believe me, I went through a night of self-contemplation after that comment. According to my appearance and ancestry, I was certain I was Chinese. However, because I thought in the so called “American way,” I guess I wasn’t totally Chinese after all. All the pondering led me to wonder about my identity and another question even more powerful: What makes a person belong to a race?

Now, to some people, this question might be like one plus one. However, it must be understood that there are multiple point of views on this subject, just like there are multiple races on this planet. The first answer that occurred to me was that people are a certain race because of where they lived. If you live in France, you are French. If you live in Iraq, you are Iraqi. But because so many different looking people live in the same place lines blur. Take the United States for example. It’s harder to define an American than it is to define a Chinese person. If you consider the country’s past, the only true Americans would be the native tribes that are, nowadays, a minority in their own country. From cinema, Americans seem to Caucasian, but even their ancestries lead back to Europe, nowhere close to North America. The writer, J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur, wrote in his “Letters from an American Farmer” that America is where “individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men, whose labors and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world.” There is a mix of people here and most of them came from not America. However, just because you live in a place doesn’t entirely mean you are one of them. For example, I know

many people, like my mom who never referred to themselves as American, although they have a citizenship and lived more of their life here than in their home country. People identify themselves as a certain race. People believe that their race is better than other races. People go to war for race. Race is an important basis of humanity, and we don't even know what it truly is.

A few months after I had given up on the question entirely, I found it, quite coincidentally and ironically, on a T.V show called *Code Geass*, which took place in an alternate future in a struggling Japan, which was being ruled by a powerful but evil foreign empire and was in the process of a great revolutionary war. The main character asked his enemy what made a person Japanese. The enemy replied, "It's in the heart." The truth is, all those things don't matter. Race has nothing to do with where you live, what language you speak, what your parents say, or what you look like. The only thing that is important is what you think you are. Your mind and actions are what determine you being part of a race.

The more I thought about it, the more convinced I became. It would explain why a friend of mine has Asian parents who speak fluent Spanish at home, and why so many people living in this nation look so different from each other yet hold the same citizenship and rights. Everyone is whatever race they believe they are. There is no race but the human race. There will never be a peaceful world, but just by eliminating race from the list of things to argue about, we might be able to fight over something more logical instead.

Being a part of a race shouldn't be relevant to moving forward in life. Lauren London once said that "Whatever your ethnicity is, in this life you are going to be on a journey to discover who you are and how you feel about yourself." I am Chinese, and I am American, and that's just a small part of who I am and who I will become.

Sean Baron
South High School
Honorable Mention - Essay

Life in Torrance

Torrance is like no other city I know. The people here come from many places in the world. America to Asia, Caucasian or African American, tall or short, rich or poor, it doesn't matter who you are or what you are because Torrance accepts everyone. Although Jared Sidney Torrance may not have imagined Torrance to become the city it has, most people including Mr. Torrance would probably want their city to turn out the way ours did. Being from different cities makes us unique and most people are proud to call their Torrance their home. Being different is a good thing.

Racism is a big topic in the US right now; here, however, we are so diverse that the majority of the population has learned to accept all races. No guns are brought to Torrance schools because of racism, our teachers influence and set good examples by not being racist to students and accepting their beliefs. Torrance leaders have done a good job not letting incidents like racism with city workers slide. City leaders will get rid of the racists so that our community is safe. Not all cities are like us; many wait until something big happens before they do something about it.

When people think of Torrance they do not say, "Oh my gosh, they are so rich." They don't say, "Oh my gosh, they are so poor." The reason for this is because we have almost every social class. Some people here are very wealthy and others have little money and can't afford things that are everyone else can. Torrance doesn't care about how much money is in your bank account, just that you follow the laws and keep our city one of the safest cities in LA.

This place we call Torrance may be different from other cities but that is not a bad thing. Anyone can fit in. People can find jobs whether they want to work on clothing or cars. Food from all over the world and people from all over the world, there is everything here. Torrance has a variety of everything making this city unique compared to others. Living here shouldn't be taken for granted because not all places are as good as Torrance.

Victor Bonilla
West High School
Honorable Mention - Essay

Humanity Is the Answer

Life seems to always rely on the numbers. We as humans also give quantity an important role in our lives. We always want more but we always try to give less. We try to earn more, but pay as few bills as we can. We would like to have a house with 10 bedrooms, even though we probably only need 3. We want fast cars, a house in the beach, and a perfect life. We want to have the best, but sometimes we are not willing to get our hands dirty and work for things that are actually important. Is it a part of being a human, is it in our nature to be like that? No, we as humans we are better than that.

We are better because we have another trait called humanity. We love our family and friends, we have feelings, we worry about others, we smile, we feel pain. Humanity is what unites us, and unity is something that we all must achieve if we want to leave all the filth behind us and if we want better days to come. Even in the animal kingdom it is important to be united in packs; numbers are crucial for survival.

When you are facing a problem, there are many ways to approach it. I came to the U.S. in 2013. I came from a small country from Central America, El Salvador. In El Salvador I went to a private school and pretty much got along with everyone and everyone seemed to like me. I am who I am, and I like to be nice and to help in any way that I can. Times can get bad and sometimes things do not go the way they should. But still we keep trying.

Coming from a third world country, I remember how strong the bonds are between people. Not because they were looking for benefits from the others, but because it was something that emerged from their hearts. We are all the same, and together we can have a better world. From kids to the elders, that hope is something I found everywhere back home.

So why can't we do the same here in Torrance? Is the U.S. a first world country? We are all humans. We all bleed, we all suffer. We love and we enjoy life. But why can't we spread that joy to others? Is it that hard to help each other? We are forgetting our humanity. Is it easier to say that "no one does that anymore" or make excuses that no one is "that stupid to help people anymore, it just doesn't happen." Is it that easy to ignore our humanity? Is it that easy to mute

our conscience and leave others behind as long as the system works for us? As long as we can keep pace and don't trip and fall?

But what is going to happen when you stop and look back? When you stop and you surrounded yourself in a world full of emptiness? In a dark place, when you are loaded with objects but are hollow on the inside? We need to help one another because it is our duty to be better every day.

What are humans without humanity except empty vases or animals that only follow their instincts? What will Torrance become without unity? What will California or the U.S. become without unity? I hope I'm not here anymore if we ever reach a world without unity... Because there won't be much left by then, of our world... and even worse... our humanity.

We need a society in which we all seek to better ourselves. I will always do my best to make our old planet that we call home a better place. Not because I deserve it, but because we owe it to every single one of us. Do not give up, give your best every day. Set the bar higher. Run the extra mile in your actions every single day. A general is only one man without an army. We need to rely on each other, because strength and survival relies on numbers.

Yota Iwasaki
South High School
Honorable Mention - Essay

A Unified Society

In our very own city of Torrance, California, there exists a ridiculous amount of diversity and variance within the nationalities and ethnicities of the residents that choose to settle here. People from dozens of different cultural backgrounds can be seen at any given time and place, all coming together to form one society. White Americans, African Americans, Mexicans, Asians, and Middle Easterners all take part in creating the atmosphere and livelihood of our city. This kind of diversity is a very rare trait that is possessed by very few areas of the world and makes the city of Torrance a very unique place to live. Because our city possesses such distinctive qualities it is a perfect place to showcase the benefits of a multicultural society and how those benefits in turn affect things such as our lifestyle, philosophies, and most importantly, our tolerance for other cultures.

The incredible degree of diversity within our community can be seen even within just the stores and establishments that have sprung up around our city. Within Torrance, one can visit a Korean market, a Japanese dollar store, and an Indian curry house all within only a few minutes' drive of each other. This kind of accessibility to the variety of cultural foods and goods that these establishments offer creates an unprecedented opportunity for new experiences and expanded horizons for the residents of Torrance. Such an exceptional chance to experience different cultures and lifestyles is not one that is offered in many other places in the world.

In addition to offering a gateway to discovering new lifestyles and experiences, our city's multicultural society also affects the way people think about cultures other than their own. For example, in a predominantly white society, many people may have misconceptions about people of other ethnicities, because they have not had many personal experiences with anyone possessing ethnic backgrounds much different from their own. This ignorance may lead some people to believe in false stereotypes, or develop a low tolerance for cultures other than the one they are already familiar with. In stark contrast to

this, individuals living in diverse cities such as Torrance have many firsthand experiences with other races from within their everyday lives, providing insight into what life in other cultures or lifestyles is really like.

This kind of authentic insight into different civilizations and ways of life also produces an unparalleled amount of tolerance for and cohesion between various different ethnic groups in a society. Only when experiencing a culture's true background firsthand can many people come to the realization that people from different cultures are ultimately not so different from themselves. After all, a society cannot flourish without harmony and unity within the various units comprising it.

We, the residents of Torrance, are very lucky to be blessed with such a remarkable environment to call our home. The tremendous diversity between the citizens of our society nurtures acceptance and caring among many different racial groups, and achieves an unrivaled degree of tolerance for other human beings in general. Although our society is built upon a mixture of very different people, in turn the bonds of unity between members of our society are strengthened even further.

Sydney Tayag
Honorable Mention - Essay
North High School

Discrimination Is Discrimination

During my freshman year, I attended a private school. It was very different because it was a bigger school, and there were a very few people that were Asian, like me. If they were Asian, most of them were foreign exchange students that came from Korea, China, and Japan. It was also very different because I attended a middle school in Carson where most of the students were Asian, but at this new school, there were many people of Italian, German, and Hispanic descent. I did not think much of it. In fact, I was very excited. However, a few months into school, I noticed people making rude remarks against my race, and even other races as well. I hate to admit it, but I was also one of the people who made racist jokes as well. I didn't think much of it until one day at the start of my junior year. I was sitting down at a table with my friends, when a girl who was a grade younger than me came up to my table and asked us not to sit there anymore because her and her friends wanted to sit there. I looked at my friends and they all looked too scared, and I wanted to say something back, but I did not want to start drama. So I apologized.

After that happened, I overheard her and her group of friends making racist comments and telling us to go back to where we came from. After that incident, I started telling myself that that school was not where I belong. I stayed for two weeks at that school until I transferred to North Torrance High School. When I got there, I met up with my counselor to decide on my classes. He was very welcoming and even assured me that this school is very diverse and that I would definitely fit in. I did not even meet the students yet, but I already felt welcomed to the school. I was very nervous for my first day because I did not know one person and this school was about four times bigger than my previous school. But when I got there, people were so easy to talk to, and every race got along with each other.

Another experience that helped me open my mind more was when my mother decided that we should have exchange students from China over at our house. I got to know one of them. His name was Erik, and he was attending the school that I went to for my first

two years of high school. He told me that he came here to learn more English and that going to a school where the first language is English was supposed to help. Later on, he also told me, how it is hard to communicate with students when they are never serious with him. I felt pity for him, because I remembered attending that school and how I felt like I did not belong there. I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to transfer to North High.

When I think of the 1950's and the 1960's I feel grateful that times have changed and society has evolved. There is racism still roaming around, but it has gotten better. I think that people should learn to be more open minded about others. Personally, I live by the rule, "Treat others the way you want to be treated." My parents have raised me to live by that rule. I was always taught not to be judgmental and to only defend myself when I need to.

Being the teenager that I am, social media and technology are big part of my everyday life. I have seen racism and bullying online, but I also do think that technology has made it easier to achieve a vision of unity in our area, and even in other parts of the world. There are countless websites that can help with dealing with racism and bullying. Social media does not only help people who experience discrimination, but also spreads awareness on what is happening around the world.

SHORT STORIES

Timothy Lau
South High School
First Place - Short Story

Invisible

When my twin brother Mark and I moved to a new school, we tried to settle in quickly. Both of us love sports, so we met most of our friends at the basketball court. For some reason, however, I felt more connected to our new friends more than Mark did. While I was busy talking to our friends, he would stay to the side and just listen. Back at our old school, he would always be more social than I was. He definitely was having trouble fitting in at our new school. Since birth, Mark had a big red birthmark on his forehead. Doctors told us it was called a port-wine stain, but it wasn't serious. When he first started elementary school, kids used to make fun of him. Over time, everyone got used to it, so much that nobody really noticed anymore.

But now, here we were in a new school, full of new people. Mark would have to be accepted all over again. During lunch one day, I saw one boy named Aaron walk up to him with a weird look on his face. Aaron yelled, "Hey Mark! What's wrong with your face?"

Mark had plenty of practice with this. In his most confident voice, he replied, "It's just a birthmark. It's called a port-wine stain or something. I was born with it."

Cutting Mark off mid-sentence, Aaron said, "Whatever it is, it's ugly. It's like you colored permanent marker on your face or something."

Mark also had an answer for this. "I don't care. I'm used to it. It looks fine to me."

"Well, can't you get rid of it or something?" asked Aaron.

This conversation continued on for a while, with Aaron firing insults and rude questions at him and Mark answering back, trying to hide any hurt he was feeling. This was nothing like

anything Mark had experienced at our old school. Then, the bell for fourth period rang, so the conversation abruptly ended. For the rest of the day, Mark seemed even quieter. His eyes seemed sad, almost angry. I thought he would get over it, but he acted like that for the rest of the week. I also noticed that he avoided Aaron.

Later at home, I asked him, "What's going on? You haven't seemed like yourself lately. Is everything all right?"

He answered, "Yeah, I'm fine. It's just that... I'm worried about what people will think about my birthmark. When I'm talking to someone, I feel like they're just staring at my forehead and not really paying attention to me or anything I say. I don't know if I'm just imagining it or something, but I still worry."

"Mark, everything's fine. You're good at basketball. You're funny and nice. You'll be fine. Are you still bothered by what one person said?"

He sighed. "I guess you're right. I shouldn't worry about it. Everyone else accepts me. I'm going to sleep now. Good night."

The next morning, Mark and I were walking to school when Aaron walked up behind us. Again, he asked Mark what was wrong with his face. Mark said the same thing as he did the first time they met. But Aaron kept insulting him, saying things like, "I can't even bear to look at you!" and "No one wants to be your friend when you look like that. Everyone is just pretending to like you." Defeated, Mark stopped responding. He just said nothing, and Aaron kept making fun of him.

This was just too much. I yelled, "Stop! Now!"

Surprised, Aaron jumped back. I shocked myself a little bit too. People were starting to look at us. But I had to stand up for my brother. "Why are you being so mean to him? I don't

think he's ugly, and no one else does either. You barely even know Mark, and you treat him like he's your worst enemy."

A voice behind me said, "Yeah, he's right." It was Jon, one of our friends who played basketball. "To me, the thing on his forehead is pretty much invisible. There's nothing wrong with Mark. He's a great guy."

Steve, who was with Jon, said, "You shouldn't judge people like that, Aaron."

I added, "If you really took the time to get to know him, you wouldn't care that he has a port-wine stain on his forehead."

More of our friends joined in and said nice things about Mark. He was smiling now.

Eventually, Aaron scowled, said "All right, I'll stop," and walked away. We were all late to class because of this whole thing, but I didn't mind. Now Aaron wouldn't bother Mark anymore.

During class, I heard a piece of paper hit my arm. It was a note from Mark that simply read, "Thanks" with a happy face underneath. I smiled at him a few rows back. It felt great to make a difference in the world, even if it was only for one person. But it was for a very special person in my life: my twin brother.

It's been two years since those events took place. After our experience with Aaron, my friends and I have helped other new students feel loved and accepted at our school. Since then, I've realized that we all have the power to make a difference in others' lives, and sometimes those opportunities are closer than we think.

Dan Bi Han
West High School
Second Place - Short Story

A Loaf of Bread

A fair lady promenades down a street, clicking her heels in a steady staccato. She holds nothing in her hands and is dressed humbly, but from her graceful posture, one can immediately perceive her fine aura. On her neck hangs a simple yet exotic pendant: two rings, black and white each, entwine intricately in perfect swirls. Unconsciously, her thin fingers carefully caress the outlines of the necklace.

Tok tok tok. The clicks of her heels continue. Calm but deeply irked on the inside, the fair lady whispers to herself, "Why?"

Her muddled thoughts become reflected in her eyes, tinged softly with sorrow. She turns her head to observe a sign – one that prominently labels every store on the street. Countless shops occupy the road, but each displays a sign that reads the same: "No Blacks Allowed." Unity is difficult.

That was the first thing her father taught her when she was a little child, back when she was too young to know the implications hidden beneath one's skin. Oh, how desperately she wished to become a child anew, blind to colors and free from prejudice – just like her father was.

Gripping the pendant inherited from her father, the lady mutters in despair and hope, "You promised, Father. You told me that someday I will understand." The rhythm of her shoes on the pavement slackens to a ritardando. She comes to a halt, standing halfway between a bakery and two boys huddling in each other's warmth. One is white, and the other looks black. She glances down at her necklace.

Presently, drops of water begin to fall from the sky. They descend in tiny, shimmering beads at first, but with every second, the droplets grow in ferocity. Angrily, it pours. The fair lady turns

around and hurries toward the bakery shop. Thinking of the two boys, vividly visualizing their starved faces and tightly crouched bodies, she hastily opens the door to the store. Leaving a trail of rain dripping from the tips of her sleeves, she approaches the clerk, whose distasteful expression becomes more defined as her sleeves create an extensive trail.

She undoes the clasp around her neck so that the pendant now rests on the palm of her trembling hand. She lightly squeezes the beautifully ornate swirls. Unfolding her grip and confidently presenting her father's legacy to the clerk, she orders, "Give me all the fresh breads in this store. This necklace will be my payment." With a bitter smile, she hands over her pendant.

To the lady's indignant surprise, the clerk replies with an insolent snort, "Eh? Who are you trying to fool? This cheap accessory's not enough to buy a single loaf. Now, stop dripping water all over my floor and leave!"

"But this pendant..."

"No 'buts' in my store. Here, if you're that desperate, I'll give you half a loaf for this cheap thing." Before she can object, he lifts the precious pendant from her palm and replaces it with a meager chunk of bread. The symbol of unity – worth less than a loaf of bread.

Tok tok tok. Impatient heels click toward the boys. She maintains her poise by allowing the cold rain to conceal her warm tears. The bread lies in her arms, soaked with misery.

Abruptly, a quandary enters her mind: to whom will she give this bread? Five feet from where the boys are taking shelter, her pace decelerates. Obviously, the bread is not enough for two, which means that while one relieves his hunger, the other might cry in pain. She must choose.

Four feet left.

But whom must she choose?

Three feet.

A white boy?

Two feet.

Or a black boy?

Then a foot.

The lady, who looks not so fair anymore, imagines the tangled swirls of her pendant breaking apart, fragmenting into meaningless shatters of black and white. Shortly, she stands in front of the two boys. Cautiously and hopefully, as if dealing with two ravenous animals, she holds out the small, soggy bread. The boys watch her expectantly, their eyes twinkling at the sight of food but also weary in suspicion.

“Go ahead. It’s yours” She could not choose. Her father trusted her to realize the vanity of skin colors, but in the end, pigmentation was all that she could see. A black boy and a white boy. That was all that she saw.

She thought, “The boys will fight over this bread. They will abandon their friendship and never seek each other’s warmth, ever again.” This bread will become more valued than unity. Hesitantly, the white boy reaches for the bread then successfully clutches it in his hands. With his clumsy fingers, he divides the food into what appears to be two, equal halves. He offers one of the two chunks to the black boy, who gladly accepts.

“Why did you...” she begins to murmur. Simply shrugging his shoulders, the white boy answers, “I know it isn’t enough for us.” “Ma’am,” the black boy suddenly asks, “What color is the rain to you?”

Baffled at his randomness, she turns around to observe the rain, plopping on the road. “I don’t think there is a color to rain... It looks clear to me.”

Nibbling at his share of bread, he replies, “Then why do you think there are black and white tears?”

At that, the fair lady cried colorless tears. She finally understands: A mere loaf of bread is enough for unity.

Christina Anyiam
North High School
Third Place - Short Story

Discrimination

During the time I was in elementary school, I experienced discrimination. I was young and I wasn't worried about anything at the time. I always enjoyed coming to Howard Wood Elementary School. I had a lot of friends there, and I had never had a problem with anyone until that day.

One day my cousin and I decided to play near the playground. All the kids were having fun. We went to the jungle gym and played tag for a while. Next, we headed over to the bars where you put one leg over and flipped. The bars were already occupied, so my cousin and I waited until the two girls got off. As soon as the girls saw me, they whispered to each other. They whispered so loudly that I could hear them from where I was standing. The girls were white and so was my cousin. The girl whispered, saying, "Ew! Don't let her get on the bars because she's black. Let the other girl get on because she's white." Afterward, they both gave me a disgusting look. My cousin looked at me. The two girls walked away. My cousin got on the bars, and I just stood there. With the comment they made about me, those girls ruined my day and my chance to play. I walked away because I wasn't in the mood anymore. I went to sit down until recess was over.

At the time, I didn't really understand why they treated me that way. I didn't do anything to deserve to get disrespected or mistreated. I didn't tell on them or anything, because I wasn't really worried about it. Besides, I didn't remember what they looked like.

Anyone who sees discrimination should stand up and say it's not right. I wish my cousin could have stood up for me. We are past that stage in life now. We can't control people's thoughts and feelings. Some people were born and raised around ignorance like that. A lot of people wish there was unity in this world. We shouldn't show hate.

Now that I look back, I wish I could have stood up or said something to those girls. It makes me a stronger person to not care what people think about me. People have their own mind and will judge or talk about you for anything. I've accepted the fact. I have never experienced something like this until that day in elementary school.

POETRY

Nilah Epperson
North High School
First Place (Tie) - Poetry

We Are Worth More

We are worth more than the slang name you give us
The taunting and teasing and even the deep lies
People of color are brilliant and inspiring
Not slow and ignorant
Just look President Barack Obama being the first Black president
Look at Madame C. J. Walker
Not only is she the first Black female self-made millionaire
She created herbal hair care products that make us look as fabulous as we do today
Take a peek at John Lee Love
He created the world-famous pencil sharpener that almost every person still uses to
this day
Lastly take a glance at George Speck Crum
Without him lots would not be eating America's favorite snack
The Potato Chip
So the next time you want to say a mean insult or hurtful term
We are worth more than the name you give us.

Shane Wolf
South High School
First Place (Tie) - Poetry

There Was a Man

There was a man in **F**erguson
Who looked to be a threatening susp**E**ct
Failing to fit in with the **R**ight people
An officer pulls up with his **G**un
Unloads a few shots
Into the man he thought he wa**S**
Oh if that man wasn't so prejudged
That man could still be a man in Ferguso**N**

Matthew Bui
North High School
Second Place (Tie) - Poetry

One in Forty-Four

Out of all the presidents,
One in forty-four.
It was unprecedented,
That out of forty-four, only one black man stood.
When this country was brought up,
Some believed that the black man would,
Indeed many never believed he could.
That was how things were supposed to last,
The injustice and prejudice
It is what it is.
But that has long passed..
Look at how far we have gone,
To see the day that the black man had come upon.
A black man, in a White House.
I think that we all can agree
That the times have changed.
This is the land of the free
And that can never be changed.

Davina Flores
North High School
Second Place (Tie) - Poetry

Some Call Me a Mutt

Oreo. Light skinned. Half and half.
Three words, same meaning.
They ask me "**What** are you?"
Human.

But please ask me **who** I am,
Not **what** I am.
They look and stare
As if I am some rare exotic thing that cannot be defined.
They make me feel **different**,
As if I am in my own race all by myself.

Some call me **mutt**,
But I say mixed.
Culturally diverse. Racially integrated. Biracial.
Three phrases, same meaning.
"**What** are you?"
"**Blaxican.**"

"Come again," they say.
"**I am mixed.**"
Two cultures in one.
"Black and Mexican."
I am living proof that two cultures can be one.

People, standardized tests, and job applications,
May ask me to choose one,
But I say no.
I choose both.

Anna Joh
North High School
Third Place (Tie) - Poetry

Culture Makes Family

Cultures unite us
They are so different
Yet so alike
Passed down from generation
To generation
Food, clothes, religion, music

Being in Torrance
Lets one experience all kinds of cultures
Japanese, American, Hispanic, African American, Korean
Living together in one community
Lets us grow as a family

We go through hardships and struggles
But we go through them together
And learn from each other
As one big family.

Albert Park
North High School
Third Place (Tie) - Poetry

A Dream Come True

The colors that define us are but an illusion
and it deceives many to this day.
M.L.K. died to see this illusion no more
and it seems that this hooray
is almost come forth

Hugo Abe
North High School
Honorable Mention - Poetry

Look Back to Those Days

Look back to those days when we first held a puzzle piece.
Peculiar looking objects that came in various shapes and sizes.
Not minding their difference, even their convenience at the least,
Since they all solved the same puzzle in our eyes.

Look back to those days when we still used to draw.
With a large assortment of colors we danced in excitement and awe.
A diverse spectrum, from light to dark all in one mixture,
Merging them all on a canvas for the purpose of one single picture.

Look back to those days when we were still all undeniably cute.
Wherever we went, parents squeezed and pinched our face;
Small, round, and maybe a bit chunky, but our good looks were in no dispute.
Feeling like pompous kings, we have all once been at that same place.

Look back to those days when we all shared our mind.
When all of our thoughts and action were aligned.
So hope that we can still relate to others without any shame!
Look back to those days, since we were all the same.

Isaiah Cadogan
South High School
Honorable Mention - Poetry

United We Thrive

It's a fact that cannot be concealed
In reality we were all born to die.
A truth that must be revealed,
If so then our society must comply
In order to come together as one
And not be divided into many.
So discriminate against none
And spread love to any.
Unite against all discrimination
Because a society divided cannot survive
Without a solid foundation.
Therefore unite so that the youth may thrive,
For they are the next generation
To leave their mark on this vast earth
By the quantity of their impact on this nation.
So decide how much uniting is worth
Since their future is in society's palm.
Therefore end all discrimination
So the people of this society may return to being calm
Especially with the recent crisis in this nation
For now is more important than ever
To unite as one and retain peace.
So when death is upon us, the youth will have it forever
And the level of fatality may decrease
So that this earth will be a place of prosperity
And dreams of success will have clarity.

Jae Won Choi
North High School
Honorable Mention - Poetry

The Colors in Unity

Black or white or yellow or Brown,
what difference does it make to us
we all have so much in common,
but we act like when someone is of a different color he is so foreign,
like it matters so greatly what color defines us.
I believe we are better than this
and that we can escape from this deep dark abyss
that leads us to discriminate in such lowly and gloomy hatred.
In the end we are all the same.
Colored or not we all are a part of the shame.
So now we must make up for that shame,
as our predecessors have done,
we must strive to make the world one and united.
To envision and make true a world filled with love and equality for all
and to get rid of all the wrong in discrimination once and for all.

Helen Chung
North High School
Honorable Mention - Poetry

Bilingual

One learned since birth
One learned since preschool
One culture learned since birth
One culture learned since preschool

Two very different accents
Two very different lifestyles
Two very different cultures
Two very different colors

But together it's a perfect harmony
But together it's a beautiful color
But together it's a perfect match

Separated it looks odd
Together it looks good.

Christine Anne David
North High School
Honorable Mention - Poetry

Bridges of Unity

We may not be talking to each other face-to-face,
But I know that when you type “I hope you had a good day”
You have your hand pressed on the computer screen, like me.

You don’t even know what “asexual” means,
But your friend says she is.
So you look it up, started educating yourself,
And you apologize.

She thought that she was all alone,
Until she met people from all over the world—
Friends who would stand by her for a long time—
Without leaving her room.

Video chats that connect us to loved ones,
Information within our reach that helps us understand them,
And social media that helps us meet new ones.
We are building bridges of unity.

Maya Emmanuel
North High School
Honorable Mention - Poetry

A Community of Unity

A city of diversity
With many different people
And backgrounds, which

Come together to
Form a community
That brings so many

Cultures together.
Creates a comfortable place
Where people can celebrate their traditions

And show other people about themselves,
Which leads to a better understanding of each person,
And brings people closer together

But failure to exemplify that
Leads people to become ignorant and judgmental.
Many other communities

Don't have a cultural connection
This causes people

To feel isolated and judged
A community should accept
And learn about someone's customs and traditions

Because that's the respectable thing to do.
Torrance
A community of equality.

Lily Kawaoto
North High School
Honorable Mention - Poetry

A Given Choice

We come from different backgrounds;
we hold different beliefs; we have different dreams.

Take some time to see
the diversity of our team.

Listen for a little bit
for what each of us has to say,
and maybe you'll hear something
that resonates and stays.

But unless you are willing to know,
to be inspired by words,
it'll all just feel like a boring show.
See the bigger picture of this
and not just your artwork,
because ignorance is not always bliss.

Surround yourself with different opinions,
embrace these words that may be foreign to you.
Acknowledge it to become open-minded and loving,
for in the end, one thing is true:
it all comes from within.

Rachel Lee
North High School
Honorable Mention - Poetry

Alone

They stared at her from a distance
Muttering about her unfortunate existence
Just because her skin was marked with color
They thought that made her worth smaller
Whispering, smirking, and staring
Judging whatever she happened to be wearing
She felt so excluded, so in pain
Shunned for a reason that she couldn't explain
One day things changed and people started to care
For a new girl was in town that made people aware
Of the discrimination occurring right before their eyes
Making sure others knew that it killed her inside
As a group they stood up against what they thought was wrong
And created a friendship that lasted because of a bond so strong
See, when people come together, there's more power in number
And so fight against discrimination, it's not right, so remember
All humans were made equal, there's no reason to be mean
So please be accepting, and keep your thoughts clean

Megan Takata
North High School
Honorable Mention - Poetry

Torrance

There are friendly faces all around

Operates on the kindness of the people

Races of all are represented

Rich in diversity and equality

Able to get along even with the differences of the people

Negativity is rarely seen

Caring and compassionate

Even with all these differences Torrance has become the city it is today: amazing

Maria Voit
North High School
Honorable Mention - Poetry

Unfinished Puzzles

Eyes everywhere, but no eyelids
They don't blink, they stare
I look down as if a heavy block sits on my head
Clay, I am wet clay
Trying to fit a foreign mold
There must be too much clay because the fit is too tight
Someone keeps pouring water onto me
I cannot dry even if I fit
I am like a spare puzzle piece to a finished puzzle
They laugh, no, worse, they snicker
Differences seem to amuse people though I can't understand why
There are different colors, accents, shapes
I judge their differences too
There are many different molds to society
Many different clays
I suppose there are other puzzles too
Unfinished ones with missing pieces
I just have to find mine

Ashley Zurita
North High School
Honorable Mention - Poetry

Letting the Rain Fall

I stared at the sky that seemed ever-changing.
I refused to let the sun disappear,
But in an instant I blinked.
Boom! Went the rain
That fell at the speed of light.
I looked away as the clouds grumbled.

They all laughed at the sky.
The tradition of the Nuevo Año must be upheld! That was their battle cry
As they stuffed big dolls with newspapers.
The dolls of the past must wave goodbye,
So the dolls burned in the winter-like sky.
The smoke crept from all the rooftops,
The sign of a New Year celebration up high.

Here I was surrounded by warm hugs,
Sweet voices and hoarse laughter that tugs,
The smell of the tortilla de maduro wafting through,
The salsa and merengue music grew.
Feet danced, the generations-old dance,
Beautiful steps that left you in a trance.
Then there went the wind inviting me along,
I realized the missing part was here all along.

The rain began to taste salty with my joyous tears,
This heritage was nothing to fear,
Culture is something that matters.
The rain bitter-sweetly, pitter-pattered,
Ringing throughout the land,
Through my soul with my heart in hand.