

VISIONS OF UNITY 2016
Literary Anthology

by

High School Students from Torrance, California

Visions of Unity Sponsors

Human Relations Forum of Torrance
with
Torrance Memorial Medical Center
Volunteer Center-South-Bay-Harbor-Long Beach
Torrance Unified School District
League of Women Voters Torrance Area
Palos Verdes Chapter LINKS, Inc.

Visions of Unity Award Donors:

Los Angeles County Supervisor Don Knabe, Toyota Motor Sales USA, Jean Adelsman, Welch and Company Accountancy Corporation, Ruth Vogel, Torrance Memorial Medical Center, Shirley and Chih-Ming Ho, Palos Verdes Chapter of the Links, Patricia Kromka, Bahá'ís of Manhattan Beach, Shirley Earlise Starke, Janet Dean Baszile, Shirley Borks, Kamy Akhavan

Special Acknowledgments

Contest Coordinator: Lea Ann King
Student Reading-in-the-Round Editor: Teresa Langness
Prose Judges: Jean Adelsman, Kamy Akhavan, Julia Matthews
Poetry Judges: Ruth Vogel, Dolores Caffey-Fleming
Art Judges: Heidi Ashcraft and Ashcraft Design
Torrance Unified School District Liaisons: Tammy Khan, Terry Ragins
Contest Technology Supervisor: Kamy Akhavan
Anthology Editors: Kamy Akhavan and Teresa Langness
Facilities/Torrance Memorial Medical Center Liaison: Shirley Ho
Refreshments: Shirley Earlise Starke and Palos Verdes Chapter LINKS, Inc.
Geissert Library Art Display: Ruth Vogel
Fiscal Agent: Volunteer Center South Bay-Harbor- Volunteer Center South Bay-Harbor-
Long Beach

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

Special thanks to our parents, 298 student contestants, and 16 participating teachers.
Your support is what keeps the contest – and its vision of unity – alive.

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

Martin Luther King

“Without forgiveness, there is no future.”

Desmond Tutu

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

Dalai Lama

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

Mother Teresa

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

Rumi

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

Mahatma Gandhi

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

Baha'u'llah

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

Nelson Mandela

VISUAL ARTS – WINNERS AND HONOREES

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

PAINTING

First Place, Hanbee Lee, West HS

Second Place, Yuna Tae, Torrance HS

Third Place, Hayley Hokanson, West HS

Honorable Mention, Phoebe Kim, North HS

PHOTOGRAPHY

First Place, Miguelangel Perez, Shery HS

Second Place, Marshall Elias, Torrance HS

Third Place, Jason Lee, South HS

Honorable Mention, Shane Wolf, South HS

COMPUTER GRAPHICS

First Place, Zhaoli Yin, Torrance HS

Second Place, Leslie Morales, SoCal ROC

SCULPTURE

First Place, Amanda Chai, South HS

LITERATURE – WINNERS AND HONOREES

SHORT STORY

First Place, Zachary Luis (West HS), Noelle Soto (South HS)

Second Place, Shayla Escudero, North HS

Third Place, Anna Lee, West HS

Honorable Mention, Shashank Coorapati (West HS), Emily Garcia (North HS), Melina Hilbert (North HS)

ESSAY

First Place, Reiko Yoshizawa, West HS

Second Place, Sydney Guinchard (South HS), Talha Siddiqui (North HS)

Third Place, Chelsea Ha, North HS

Honorable Mention, Shamaree Lewis (North HS), Kelli Nakamura (Torrance HS), Nhulan Pham (North HS)

POETRY

First Place, Nicole Petersen (North HS), Noah Wittman (North HS)

Second Place, Lauryn Ishida (North HS), Zachary Luis (West HS)

Third Place, Shendey Casas (North HS), Pranit Mohnot (West HS)

Honorable Mention, Evan Abrahams (North HS), Umar Ansari (West HS), Cindy Barrios (North HS), Balpreet Kaur (North HS), Marelyna Martin (North HS), Steven Nguyen (North HS), Jacob Wong (North HS)

Short Stories

ZACHARY LUIS
West High School (Aura Imbarus)
First Place Short Story – Tie

The Things I Know

I am so happy that my owner upgraded to me last week, and ever since, she hasn't let me go. She only leaves me so I can recharge at night and so she can focus at school. I may not be considered a living being, but when I am charged up, I sure am lively. I usually have a great time with my owner, despite my not knowing her name. However, today was a different feeling because instead of hearing laughter and an abundance of joy, I hear nothing—just an endless silence that is burdening. She seems depressed and sad, yet I can't comprehend why. I wish I could help her, but I can't move on my own.

However, a sudden bird chirp that fills the white-walled bedroom makes me aware of what is going on. Something pops up on me like kernels popping into popcorn, and my owner comes to inspect this sudden noise. She looks at me, and I can read what popped up backwards in the crystal clear reflection in her eyes. Before I can finish reading this message, tears begin to fill her eyes and then a waterfall begins instantly with a rapid flow of tears. I realize that the message was from someone at her school, and it was a hate-filled message saying that she will never be successful in life because of her race and religion. I hear her muffled cries as she throws her head in her pillow as if she would disappear from the world. I am stunned but yet I can't show it.

I can't believe how much I know, but I can't do much to help her. I wish I had arms so I can just console and comfort her. She seems destroyed, and though I don't have a cognitive brain, I am thinking how someone could be so mean and destructive to another person. No one ever wants to receive hate and pain, yet there are people in the world that inflict pain and punishment on others. Her parents are absolutely oblivious to this situation, which means that she is alone to deal with this. Her spirit seems crushed, and I know that the person who sent the message doesn't even know her on the inside but judges

her on only what that person sees with their limited eyes. I know that she needs the comfort and love of those close to her, but I don't know how to help her.

However, my thinking is once again squandered when bird chirps once again echo in the silence of the room. The window is closed, which makes me dazed and confused. She does not come to investigate the chirping this time, which makes me feel more sad and empathetic. She is just lying on her bed, somber filled and in tears. I begin to notice what has popped up on me because there are multiple things on me. It is her friends sending her messages after they read the mean message. They are all messages of helping and healing, and they are all saying that she should ignore that message and that no one should be bullied or punished due to their race or religion. However, one message is very eye-catching, as it says, "Don't worry, that person will face their retribution, but we need to focus on our own success and the success of a society where judgments and punishments on people are not based on race or religion."

I need her to see these crucial heart-warming messages because I then know that her spirit will be lifted and that she will feel better. I know that she has good friends and that she needs to listen to them. There are rounds of knocking at the door downstairs and my owner knows that it is her friends by the echoing voices coming from the living room. I want her to see the messages before her friends arrive. A click is heard as she locks the door after footsteps are approaching her door. I quickly change my setting to vibrate and then she walks towards me in a cautious manner. Her expression changes from tears of sorrow to tears of joy as she is glad to see people appreciating her for who she is. She unlocks the door and she is instantly surrounded by comfort and healing. I now know that she has good and appreciative people and friends around her that like her for who she is, disregarding race or religion. With these people, our society in Torrance and around the world can be unified and reflect beauty and freedom.

NOELLE SOTO
South High School (Julie O'Brien)
First Place Short Story – Tie

The Scarved Girl

I am an American. I live in Los Angeles, California and I'm in high school. I didn't think much about world affairs and didn't really care about anyone other than myself.

Today that changed.

It doesn't take long for us to arrive at school. My mom gives us quick goodbyes and is off again. I stride over to my friends who stand talking to each other like birds chirping in the early morning.

"Hey," I chime in.

A couple of my friends turn their heads toward me, grins on their faces. They greet me with hugs while two other girls stay on their phones. Some guys from my group join us and as I'm listening to the conversation of my peers, a familiar face comes into my view. It's the girl I saw earlier this morning. I cringe and my friends notice my short attention span.

"What?" "Who's that?" The girls ask as I turn my attention to them.

Now we're all looking over at her. A taller, dark haired boy stands next to her, obviously related to her somehow. A guy from my clique, Daniel, heads over to talk to the guy. I watch them converse, and they seem to be getting along, but the girl then stands by herself.

I slide off the cool metal of the table and beckon my clique to join me. They listen and we promenade over to her. Putting on my best smile I approach her, predator to prey.

"Hi." I size her up.

My friends stand casually at my side. The girl is clearly outnumbered. You see, I have to show foreigners where I stand at this school. The scarf covers her hair and all I really have to focus on is her eyes.

Composing herself, she replies, "Hi."

Snickering, I smile a bit wider. I decide that I want to find out more about the scarved girl.

"What is your background?" I ask.

I pause, waiting for her answer.

"My name is Mediah, and I'm Islamic. I'm from P-paris," She speaks, stuttering a bit.

The girl appears to be intimidated.

"It's not easy to get in our group, especially for people like you, but I'm sure it could happen," I suggest.

Telling by her face, she seems to be offended. I am just simply giving her advice. Her eyes glance down at her shoes, but my friends decide to take it a step further.

"Yeah, people like you. Like in Paris..." "Horrible things."

They all start giggling and we walk away just as the bell rings. Before I can reach the doors, my arm is snagged back. I scoff and pull my hand away to look at who the jerk is, and see it's Daniel.

"That wasn't nice you know," He informs me.

The light-skinned male walks away from me briskly before I get the chance to answer. Little do I know the scarved girl has tears filling her eyes as she walks inside. Questions race through my mind, but I have to get to class. I scurry inside and find an empty seat.

Walking towards my third class, I prepare myself for Algebra Two. However as I walk in, I receive a note from my teacher. I scan the note to see I'm being called to the office. Not sure I read it correctly, I read it over again, but it's the same. I bite my lip and grab my things, heading towards the office, the slip of yellow paper clutched in my right hand.

Arriving at the office, still not sure why I am there, I see the attendance lady, who points toward the principal's office. I walk much more slowly. The office opens, revealing two people.

"Can I speak to her alone?" Mediah asks.

The principal agrees and lets us talk. We are soon alone.

I look up into the only thing revealed to me. Her eyes, they stare at me with such sadness, yet with grace. Waiting for her to yell at me, or even cry to make me feel bad, I avert my eyes toward the ground. Yet, she does neither and simply places a hand on my shoulder.

"Maybe you didn't intend it, or maybe you did, but do you know what you said to me?" She asks, trying to get me to look up at her.

I shake my head.

"Do you know why I moved here?"

I repeat my actions.

"The attack on Paris," She explains, "My family were just a small number of the people targeted after it happened."

"I'm sorry, I-," I mutter, getting cut off.

"People like us got death threats, and people died because others saw us in relation to the terrorists."

Mediah takes her hand off my shoulder. "Did you know that?"

I slowly shake my head and look up.

"I'm sorry," I repeat.

"So am I," She agrees.

The girl's brown eyes were glazed over, yet she still looked at me with grace. I knew that I didn't deserve it.

"I think I understand," I start to say.

Reaching out her arms, she waits for my response. I let go and hug her, forgiveness uniting the both of us. We may not be from the same country, or the same state, but we aren't much different from each other, and I wouldn't do the same thing ever again.

SHAYLA ESCUDERO
North High School (Kenneth Anderson)
Second Place Short Story

Identity Crisis

“What do you want to be when you grow up?” implored the woman with a crisp white shirt and glasses resting on the bridge of her nose. A sense of nervousness surged through my small six-year-old body. I wasn't very quick to answer when asked things on the spot. A smirk crept across her face, as though she was already predicting my answer. The clichéd answers that everyone gave. Astronaut. Doctor. Police man. Veterinarian. “I want to be Asian,” I said, with newfound confidence, after being given a moment to formulate my response. The woman's scribbled-on eyebrows raised in surprise. The response, I learned, was not uncommon, as many people seemed to form the same what-the-heck-why-would-you-want-to-do-that expression. Was it wrong to want to be another culture? To wish for silky black hair rather than blond? Or dark eyes rather than wide blue ones? I longed to be like my friends, who seemed to do and be the best at everything so effortlessly. Who respectfully took off their shoes when entering the house, and used delicate chopsticks when eating their food. By the third grade I learned that wishing for these changes wouldn't rearrange the features on my face nor give me the luscious black mane I longed for. So, I took matters into my own hands. I tried to memorize Japanese characters, scribbling them into notebooks and into my artwork. I spent hours in the Marukai market, tried new oriental Oriental dishes, mastered the art of chopsticks, and bought Chinese traditional wear.

When I finally confessed to my Asian friends how much I wanted to be like them, I was met with disbelief. Just as I had been struggling to become Asian, they had been doing the exact opposite. They were trying to be more American, which, to me, was more boring. To them, I was considered the perfect white girl. Their moms envied the shape of my nose, and color of my hair. Little did they know, I envied theirs. As an “American” I didn't feel like I had much of a cultural identity, and perhaps that is why I wanted to be Asian. I love the food, the celebrations and the people. And because I lived in Torrance, a very diverse city, I envied other cultures. But today I no longer hold the identity crisis that I did at the age of five. Living in Torrance has allowed me to experience other cultures and adopt them. I'm not just white or American, but a blend of many other cultures.

ANNA LEE
West High School (Aura Imbarus)
Third Place Short Story

Colored Vision

Life was red. That was what Jasper knew and what she had known all her life. The pulsing throb of a heart, the spreading clouds of a sunset, both stained with the same dizzying color known as red. Even though life was filled with constant excitement made up of multiple shades of red, one does get tired of looking at the color all the time. Sometimes, she couldn't help but feel that her world was too bright and excitable. Red couldn't be the only thing in the world, could it?

For Sini, on the other hand, life was blue. The rolling, crashing motion of the sea, the endless stretch of the sky — they were all beautiful shades of blue. But still, life was boring. The same monotonous tasks every day, day after day, with no changes at all. Blue was almost too calming to Sini, too soothing. She needed some excitement, a splash of a different, vibrant color in her life.

In a small town such as the one the two of them lived in, parties were hard to come by, and if invited, there was no way an invitation could be turned down. In the middle of the summer, a time that Sini thought was especially blue for the countless visits to the ocean, and that Jasper thought was especially red for the burning sands that stretched across the beach, a friend hosted a small party. Both Sini and Jasper decided to go, although for different reasons. Sini went for the excitement. She had never been to a party before and thought it promised to be the largest party the town had ever seen. Jasper went because large parties were always too stifling, and perhaps one on a smaller scale would be more enjoyable to her.

Throughout the night, they caught glimpses of each other. Jasper was loud and eye-catching in a crimson suit, drawing crowds of people with her cheerful and friendly nature. Sini, in a midnight blue dress, was as regal and serene as any queen, yet she still drew in just as many people with her calm and assured manner, too soothing. She needed some

excitement, a splash of a different, vibrant color in her life. Earth and sky, red and blue, they couldn't be any more different.

It was nearly midnight when they finally talked to each other, and from there they found that they saw the world through entirely different perspectives. Jasper saw the energy and the determination in people that could change the world yet couldn't understand how it could be done. Sini spoke at length of the many plans she had imagined as a child but could not see why the world needed to change so drastically. The more they talked, the more they slowly understood.

Life had been a precarious game of balance, with both of them always near teetering over the edge. Within each other, they found harmony. Jasper's ideals and excitement painted Sini's thoughts with a new, vivid color, taking them to heights she never could have imagined before. In return, Sini provided the grounding, always making sure that they never got too carried away. A dazzling new world of endless possibilities was pieced together, one made with overlapping bits of red and blue.

It was as if Jasper and Sini had been looking at the fuzzy, monochrome screen of life and had finally put on 3D glasses. All of a sudden, everything was crystal clear and in color. Two different perspectives, each telling their own stories, broke down what they thought they had known, and rebuilt it into something new. Two different perspectives were united in a vision of a better place and a better world.

SHASHANK COORAPATI
West High School (Tracy Sprague)
Short Story – Honorable Mention

The Invisible Truth

One day, while walking among the exquisite mountains of San Bernardino with my friends, I noticed a rather peculiar sense of our humanity. We were summoned by our Academic Decathlon coach to tag along on an adventurous journey in order to bond with our teammates and nature. It was a life-changing experience as we camped in the cabins, played games, and even had campfires. The most interesting part of the trip was the scavenger hunt we participated in. Even though we had so much fun, I was disappointed.

While we were sent off to explore the nature present all around us that day, I was very embarrassed about how our humanity had evolved over the past five years. When we were supposed to be observing nature, everyone just stood at places either texting, calling their parents or talking to friends. I mean, why do people not appreciate nature? Therefore, I came up with my own idea of isolating myself to somewhere quiet and peaceful where I could actually absorb the reality of God's creation. I finally found a place that was far away from the others and took a seat. I was by the river, not far from my cabin. Three words flashed through my head as I was sitting down: touch, hear, and see. For the next hour, I thought about those three words and imagined about what I could do and what nature had to offer.

There was a river nearby, and I envisioned myself touching the soft and cold water gently rubbing against my innocent hand. A river flows on and on, branching out into several tributaries and then back into one body of water. This shows how life keeps on repeating itself and how we tend to go on our own paths but eventually meet up with many others to completely share our ideas. The green grass, with dew that I could imagine myself feeling, harbored a sense of peacefulness. Each blade of grass had its own dew, and as each dew dropped it would enrich the soil, creating more beauty in the overall picture. This connected with our life because we first represent the dew on the tip of each strand as we are born, and our journey to the bottom of the soil in order to better our world contains so many untold experiences. Palpability is an astounding sense and we must learn to use it around nature.

Sight is everything and everywhere. Nature is omnipresent. Looking at a particular tree for about a minute, suddenly, a glowing medallion in the sky shined a bright source of light right through a spider web that I could see through the tree, and it was all because of a

coincidence. I was in the right spot at the right time. This showed me how the tree supported the survival of the spider and many other animals as well. This relates to us humans because our parents represent the tree, and we take the place of the spiders as our parents protect and support us by giving us a home. And finally, the sight of nature altogether as one whole picture is just a great vivid scene. Sight is a great way to take in nature because it is the way God views it.

These three simple words as a whole make up the ability to absorb nature, and one only needs these three things to observe nature. These people here with me must understand that nature is not only just beautiful but also holds hidden truths that need to be revealed. If you can let nature accept you, then you will see the truth. Shouldn't we reveal these truths before others do?

EMILY GARCIA
North High School (Jonathan Sperling)
Short Story – Honorable Mention

We Will Get There

“Where am I?” is my first thought when I wake up. I find myself in a strange place, where there are weird looking cars and people dress beyond strangely. I am pretty scared to move from where I am, but my curiosity gets the best of me. As I am about to take a step, I feel a gush of wind pass right through me. A white woman passes by and I feel a rush of panic. I am about to mutter apologies until I notice that she just keeps walking.

Can no one see me? Am I dead? I feel chills run down my spine at the sudden thought. I see an African American man standing alone at what seems like a bus stop. I walk up to him and start to speak, but he doesn’t seem to acknowledge me. “What is going on?” I yell, I guess to myself. I am deeply frightened. However, not frightened enough, because I notice something was odd. I walked further down the sidewalk, and I couldn’t believe my eyes.

A white woman and a black man are holding hands. The man is also holding the hand of a light-skinned child. “Isn’t that illegal? The man might be taken to prison!” I think. Those people are walking to a school, and I follow them to see what they will do. I watch them from a short distance and look at the place. The school is made up of many buildings, and the paint is fading, so anyone could tell it isn’t particularly new. What catches my eye are the kids going into the school. White children are supposed to go to a well-constructed, wealthy-looking school while everyone else goes to the worst ones. In this parallel universe, everyone goes to the same school. It does not matter what color skin, eyes, or hair you have. I walk closer to the school and look inside one of the windows. A class with about twenty-five students is made up of African Americans, Asians, Latinos, and white people. The teacher is even Latino!

“What is this place?” I keep thinking. “Is this how life is meant to be?”

BEEP! I look over to the busy street across the school and see a bus. Rosa Parks went to jail because she broke the law trying to defend her seat. This place must be different. It has to be. I run to the bus and climb in, already knowing that I am correct. Many different races sit in different spots on the bus. No one has to give up their seat unless it is as a kind gesture and not some rule. I smile. I smile from ear to ear.

“I want to live here!” I shout, even though no one can hear me. “Why can’t my home be like this?” Then I start to cry. I start to cry because I did not even know if my movement for civil rights would ever work like this. With tears still streaming down my face, I get off the bus. Then a thought starts to dawn on me. If this place can be like this, then so can my home. I would have to try hard, but it would be worth it. I know it will take a long time for people to find the necessity for this type of life, but we will get there. With that thought in my mind, I wipe the tears from my face and keep exploring my newly found promised land.

As I walk further down the street, I notice an African American teenager just walking and going about his day. He has on a white T-shirt and blue jeans. He looks well-groomed and doesn’t seem suspicious at all. However, what happens next truly breaks my heart into billions of pieces. The teenager’s white shirt is now stained with red, and he falls backwards. The white officer is still pointing his gun at the child. I am completely horrified. I thought that I had found a place where everything is morally right. Tears start to stream down my face again as I whisper to myself, “We will get there. No matter how long it takes.”

“Dr. King? Dr. King, please wake up.” I am being shaken when I finally opened my eyes.

“Where am I?” I ask.

“Dr. King, are you alright? It’s time for your speech,” one of the many supporters in the civil rights movement tells me while handing me my flashcards. I am still groggy from waking up. *Was it all a dream?* “I won’t need those,” I tell him.

“Why not, sir?”

“I have a dream.”

MELINA HILBERT
North High School (Jonathan Sperling)
Short Story – Honorable Mention

Circle of Dominos

I felt the zipper from my dress trail up my back as my closest friend, Alana, was standing behind me. Today was her wedding and I was one of the bridesmaids. After zipping my dress, I walked over to the mirror and admired the teal fabric. My brown hair was pulled into a braid, and my makeup was done perfectly. I admired the girl in the mirror. But that didn't last long.

A knock at the door resulted in me turning my head towards the direction of the noise. A second later, all of the remaining five bridesmaids entered the room, looking stunning.

I looked back at the mirror, and suddenly all my flaws become clear to me. Suddenly my hair no longer looked as perfect, my dress no longer as stunning on my body shape, and my makeup now looks way too overdone. Alana's mom's voice screamed excitement and joy. This was such a big day for their whole family. I should have been focusing on this instead of on myself.

"Girls, we need you to be ready in ten, the ceremony is about to begin!" My eyes wouldn't break away from the mirror as I heard the familiar voice.

"You look really nice, Caterina." I turned my head in the direction of the person talking to me, finding out who it was. Before me stood the girl I have always been jealous of. Her beautiful, curly brown hair reached down to her waist, her green eyes making everyone stop and stare.

"Thanks, I suppose you do too, I guess." I turned and looked back into the mirror, pulling a loose strand of hair behind my ear. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw her nod her head in understanding and walk off.

Around five minutes later, I stood in front of the church, watching my best friend walk down the aisle. The photographers started taking pictures of the wedding. I caught myself sucking in my stomach, just in case a picture of me and the other bridesmaids were taken. I'm the heaviest out of the group, not by much, but enough to notice.

I spent the whole ceremony looking at the other bridesmaids and making sure my appearance didn't look different in comparison.

After all the vows, the ceremony was now over and we headed into a room filled with food and beautiful decorations. I took a second to admire all the hard work and dedication it must have taken to make this scene as astonishing as it was. I became even more excited to dance the night away.

Later that night, as everyone was still filled with excitement for the newly-married couple, things began to take a twist.

I made my way into the bathroom and stopped at the counter as I saw Adelaine fixing up her makeup. "You're making it worse. It was already cakey before. Now it's even worse," I said adding a bit of tone to my voice.

Hurt flashed across her eyes before blinking and returning to her calm face.

"Thanks for the help" she replied.

"Don't worry, looked like you needed it. Plus I wouldn't want you to disappoint Alana with bad makeup." And with that she stormed out of the room.

I finished up my business in the bathroom and walked out. I was making my way back towards my table when I suddenly stopped from what I saw. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Adelaine walking out the door of the venue with one of the other bridesmaids. I could clearly see all the tears rolling down her face. I decided to follow.

As I reached closer and closer to them, I began to realize they must hear me because they stopped their discussion to look straight at me.

"Go away, haven't you already done enough? You've already made her cry, so go on to your next victim." I was taken back by this and looked at the girl with confusion. I finally recognized who said this—the other bridesmaid, named Julia. She continued, "Listen, just go on and bully someone else. It's not fair she's literally been trying to be your friend for years and you just keep on acting like you're better than everyone else. You just beat people down. So just leave. Go back to the wedding. You're not worth her time anymore!"

Without saying a word, I turned around and headed back inside. It wasn't until now that I realized that I became the one person I was taught not to become. I tried to forget about my flaws by making people realize their own, when they probably already felt insecure about them. I became the definition of a bully. And now I feel more shame than ever.

I stopped and looked at the table seating all of the children and looked at the game they were playing. They had dominos lined in a circle. One of the little girls at the table knocked over one of the dominos, and the whole circle came crashing down. When one falls, they all come crashing, almost like when one person spreads negativity or bullies someone as I did, the whole community comes crashing along with it. Just as a circle has no end, comparison leading to negativity is a non-stop and repetitive process.

Essays

REIKO YOSHIZAWA
West High School (Aura Imbarus)
First Place Essay

It Takes Two to Change the Grains

With my pride held high and longing for the upper hand over my sister in independence and success, I began pounding the hot rice together with a heavy *kine*. Since birth, I have been invariably compared to my older sister, who seemed to accomplish just about anything with ease, making my parents proud, but also setting a high standard for me to reach or even surpass. I have tirelessly strived to take the lead in the race to see which daughter is best, yet straggled behind. But at four years old, I aimed to accomplish one of the few things unaccomplished by my older sister: make mochi for my family. Barely able to lift the enormous mallet over the bowl, I immediately released tension and let the *kine* strike down on the grains. Little did I know that it would take a tremendous amount of effort to make mochi from fresh rice.

“Rei-chan, I can do it,” my seven-year old sister offered.

However, coming from my competition, my ego blasted through the roof as I vowed never to let her get ahold of the mallet. I persistently declined her help and continued to pummel the rice for what seemed like a lifetime. I gave one last umph, wanting to prove not only to my parents and sister but also to myself that I was indeed just as capable. Gripping my puny hands around the thick *kine* and furrowing my eyebrows, I composed unworldly strength to raise the mallet, slowly and shakily. With what little strength I had remaining in me, I slammed the mallet against the rice. I confidently looked inside the bowl, expecting to see great progress; instead, I was slapped by the disappointing sight of the unchanged grains.

Knowing it was too soon to tromp over my pride, my sister compassionately placed my hands between hers and the *kine*, and began to pound the rice, slowly but surely, into mochi.

Although I didn’t realize it at the time, making mochi changed my mentality. Of course, failing to complete the seemingly simple task of pounding rice by myself stung. But this “defeat” has shown me something more important than mochi-making: teamwork. Mochi-making symbolizes the power of collaborative effort. While the durability of mochi reminds me to stay true to my heritage by holding on to my values, the chewiness inspires me to be flexible and open to others' cultures.

As much as our egotistical society may not want to admit it, we all need help in order to succeed. Steve Jobs did not establish Apple without his co-founder Steve

Wozniak,;Helen Keller did not become a world-renowned author without her supportive instructor Anne Sullivan; and we will not achieve our future aspirations without unity between multicultural backgrounds. Losing the one-sided mochi-making contest made me realize that receiving help does not accentuate weakness but actually adds on to my strength. Garnering extra support from others does not hinder us but helps us achieve more than we possibly could on our own. The Torrance community values the differences between cultures, which helps us cultivate multitalented people. Similarly, healthy competition between my sister and me will never end because it motivates the both of us to grow. As supportive sisters, we push each other to achieve our greatest potential.

But as a competitor in the race, I won't be going down without a fight.

TALHA SIDDIQUI
North High School (Kenneth Anderson)
Second Place Essay - Tie

Checking One's Privilege

Privilege is blinding. Often, people are unable to see past their privilege and fail to be empathetic. If people are unable to see past their privilege, they simply don't care for the less fortunate. This reality is at the heart of many current national and international issues, whether they be income inequality, police brutality, immigration, or gender inequality. Although these issues may seem complex and seem to require bureaucratic solutions, all society has to do to solve these problems and become more unified is to check the privileges individuals have and view the less fortunate with a more empathetic lens.

Privilege comes in all shapes and sizes. Privilege is having a two-parent home. Privilege is being born in a country where one has opportunity and freedom. Privilege is never being the only one of one's kind in a room. It is fundamental to realize the privileges one has, because it allows one to view the world more clearly. Checking one's privilege enables one to have empathy and see how "lucky" one is. Not to mention, it enables one to see the reasoning behind the viewpoints of others. This may not seem important, but, when it comes to pressing issues of today, one simply cannot make informed decisions without checking his or her own privilege. Now, more than ever, is it needed for people to check their privilege.

Regardless of one's political views, it is clear that society has problems. A quick search on Google will easily bombard one from stories about issues, from ISIS to the Flint water contamination scandal. How these problems are viewed depends on one's perspective. A perspective based on not checking one's privilege is bound to be errant as it views the problems with a singular and deluded lens. For example, if people do not check their privilege, when they see immigrants coming to the United States for a better life, they see those people as "illegal aliens" rather than desperate human beings. One does not have

to support amnesty to see the problem posed by this mindset. This mindset dehumanizes others—in this case, immigrants—and impedes progress, because it solely sees the negatives of the other side. This mindset fails to take into account the “luck” or privilege one has experienced and the reasoning behind the actions of the other side. People who don’t check their privilege are bound to have such mindsets entrenched in a severe lack of empathy which has led to the political polarization in recent years. Both sides on the political spectrum are unable to see how their privilege has shaped their lives and stances. This leads to a clear lack of unity and deadlock in society.

Checking one’s privilege can solve many problems. First of all, it leads to understanding of other people’s problems and a generally more empathetic attitude. If everyone checked their privilege, the world would be so much more united and there would be far greater understanding. However, on a smaller scale, if society encourages and even forces people to check their privilege it is bound to solve the many problems present in society. Checking one’s privilege allows one to more clearly see the reasoning of movements such as Feminism and Black Lives Matter and this in turn enables one to make more informed and less polarized decisions on one’s viewpoints.

Checking one’s privilege doesn't necessarily mean to automatically support the other side, but it forces one to view one’s own viewpoints more critically. Checking one’s privilege opens one’s eyes to the other side and their reasoning. This definitely combats problems in society as it fosters empathy and compromises. Society will always be divided and have problems. However, empathy and checking one’s privilege are powerful tools in fostering unity and harmony.

SYDNEY GUINCHARD
South High School (Jenna Akin)
Second Place Essay – Tie

Changing Ourselves Can Make a World of Difference

In today's world we seem to have become so numb to the amount of shootings, terrorist attacks, and acts of violence caused by discrimination. To most, it can be frustrating when we feel that there is nothing we can do about it. No one believes that one person can make a difference. But what if all we had to do to reshape our divided society was to strive for the happiness of ourselves and others? What if a world of change started with a smile or a genuine "how are you?"

To encourage the happiness and positive actions of those around us, we need to start with ourselves. I learned this from being a part of the Soka Gakkai International, a Buddhist organization committed to spreading peace and happiness throughout our world. To do this, we need to start by positively changing ourselves, or as we call it, undergoing our own human revolution. This means to strengthen our life condition, so that our unshakeable happiness will soon inspire those around us. SGI president Daisaku Ikeda says "A great human revolution in just a single individual will help achieve a change in the destiny of a nation, and, further, can even enable a change in the destiny of all humankind." This relates to something that a fellow member once said: He said, "We don't ever think that one person can change society." We find it impossible that the small effect we have on ourselves, friends, and families can affect the whole world. But it's a ripple effect. Soon, you can start a chain of good life habits that will change the lives of many. Over time this avoids conflicts and starts a movement of unity.

So how do we change ourselves in a way that will inspire and help bring others together? To start, we all must identify how we need to improve ourselves in a way that will better our life condition, and encourage others to do the same. What parts of our character could be inhibiting the growth of our society? Once we do this, we need to get out in our communities and spread this change. The word "community" itself has the word "unity" in it. The mission for unity across all groups of people begins with how we unite people in our community. So, each and every one of us needs to get out there and spread our goal for peace. Voice your opinion, and fight for equality. Show others how confident, happy, and compassionate you are, and soon they'll find that their hatred is only making them miserable. Your actions will hopefully start a change within others as well.

Making a change in a world where many are opposed to diversity begins with acceptance for everyone, unconditionally. This is a value that the SGI greatly cherishes. Everyone deserves the same amount of compassion and guidance when experiencing hardship in their lives. The friend with the self-imposed drug addiction who's been in and out of jail deserves just as much help and support as the friend fighting cancer. In order to close the gap in the division within our society, we need to recognize that no matter if one treats others poorly and with disrespect, or if one is battling an illness, these people are all dealing with some level of suffering. SGI president Daisaku Ikeda also said, "To be considerate means that the more individuals are suffering, the more difficult their behavior is, the more love you show them." One message of the SGI is that everyone is suffering in their own way, and it is our job as citizens to help others overcome these obstacles. Buddhist or not, this is a fact that anyone can live by. Regardless of your own beliefs, you cannot deny others their basic right to happiness, and it is our job as everyday people to help others achieve eternal happiness. Spreading worldwide peace and the means for unshakeable happiness is the key to creating a world where we can celebrate diversity, not condemn it.

So, in essence, unity among our communities and countries begins with redefining ourselves and using our mission for harmony and peace to show compassion for all those who need it. We need to realize that the bully, the racist, and the terrorist are all suffering inside, because they are not happy with themselves or the lives that they have. When we accept this, we can work to change their life conditions in a way that will allow them to contribute to peace and the appreciation for diversity in our society. No matter who you are, these are values that each and every one of us can share to build a better, more united world.

CHELSEA HA
North High School (Kenneth Anderson)
Third Place Essay

Crossroads of Culture

“It is good to be a dragon, and better its head than its tail,” my mother used to say. The head must think and feel on its own without anyone’s guidance. It must lead the body with its own knowledge. That was my childhood.

Watching Disney movies or Saturday cartoons became almost a ritual when I lived with my grandmother. Or in France. Or in Japan. Or in Canada. Being quite a sensible little girl, and perhaps with the help of my older brother’s teachings, I grew up knowing that these cartoons were American, that the scenes where a mother would kiss her child’s temple at night were American. These things were American ways of life and something I would never have. I would watch shows about family life and grow up remembering every Disney princess’ name, but never distinctly knowing my mother’s or father’s face.

My father was a dedicated soldier, and although I never saw him around, we moved with him wherever he was stationed. My mother worked a few jobs, although she never knew much English. Often, I would have to translate conversations for them or help them use the currency. In my turbulent years of middle school, I couldn’t help but see my parents as baggage, only there to bring more accusing fingers and harmful words my way. In every school I moved to, the students were either too young to grasp the concept of equality, or too busy conjuring their jealousy into a form of hate.

It was the norm, the stereotype, the “Asian way.” If I had bad marks, I would come home to more than a “Go to your room.” It was not like I hated schoolwork, though. My brother and I would chat over what we had learned in school often, and because I read the same books he did and memorized the multiplication table with him, I began to excel. In a private school, I was placed into a math class two grades ahead of me. Then, the real discrimination started.

The girls had always been wary of me, and had taken more of a liking to the other new girl. Yes, the one with the strawberry blonde hair and freckles. I was avoided like the plague, and forced to sit alone at the lunch tables reading a book or doodling. When they had learned of my placement, they began to corner me, lock me in bathrooms, and insult

me with racial slurs. "How can you read with those chinky eyes?" "I bet she does math problems for fun." "Her lunch always smells!" "I can speak Korean too! Chingchong!"

I was humiliated. I began to hate my background and culture, and began to change myself to become someone who I was not. Through discrimination, I lost my identity, my heritage, and began to build a wall between myself and the generations before me. I saw no good in being who I really was when that girl was haunted by her embarrassing culture and had no friends because of the way she was raised. When we came back to America, I was enrolled into a school where students were divided into smaller communities, each barely associating themselves with the other, I found myself even more isolated, confused, and torn apart than before. How would I ever learn the meaning of unity?

It was not until we moved to Torrance a year ago when I was able to shed my stereotypes and truly love who I was and where I came from. The students at North were more accepting than any other school where I had been. There were students from backgrounds I hadn't even heard of, and clubs for almost every nationality. Luckily, I was there for Multi-Cultural Day last year. What kind of school celebrated equality and harmony this much? Everyone was much more interested in learning about my culture and my family rather than opposing it, so it intrigued me too.

I never forgot my culture. I never became oblivious to its traditions or unable to speak its language. It was always a part of my daily life -- inevitable, unavoidable. I just never learned to embrace it like the students in Torrance. A dragon is the most prominent, potent, and powerful animal in the Korean culture. And now I know that I mustn't simply be the dragon's head. I must speak for myself and be its roar; move however I like and be its body; learn what I like and be its eyes. I must be my own individual and my own dragon. I have also become like one of the scales of a dragon, all different colors and with their distinct marks, all integrated into a unified shimmer like the Torrance family. And Torrance roars with one voice.

SHAMAREE LEWIS
North High School (Kenneth Anderson)
Essay - Honorable Mention

Black Lives Matter, Police Brutality, and Equality

One issue we keep hearing about as of late is police brutality within the black community. Why is it, I wonder, that black people who commit the same crimes as their white counterparts are more likely to die in custody or while getting arrested? Is it because cops are afraid of black people because of the stereotype that we're all "thugs"? Do policemen use force to assert their authority and let people know they're in charge, as if we didn't already know that? If this is the case, why not use force against white people when they're being detained? With so many instances of black men and women dying due to police brutality, it's no wonder that movements like Black Lives Matter have become so relevant in America. It's no wonder that movements like Black Lives Matter have become so relevant in America.

In order to make a change, it isn't enough to just *read* about police brutality and the inequalities the black community faces, but action actually has to be taken in order to see results. Social media can be a good platform for educating society of the cruelties inflicted daily on the black community due to not only police brutality but racism as well. With the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter being so popular right now, it's not hard to click on it on any social media outlet and see something having to do with unfairness within the black community, whether it be a racist remark, someone getting shot, or a black woman getting ridiculed for something as petty as her appearance since she doesn't fit today's "Eurocentric beauty standards." As a black female myself, I believe it is extremely important to spread awareness to all my peers about all the wrongdoings happening, especially because my friends who aren't black never speak on these issues, almost making them out to be "non-existent." Social media is the easiest way to educate other people throughout the world

about the #BlackLivesMatter movement and inform them about police brutality and inequality, but it isn't the only way to spread the message. You can attend protests, speak up for any black person you see getting treated unfairly in public, and educate yourself so you can educate your friends. Reading about police brutality won't do anything if you don't strive to help the black community whenever you hear about these injustices we face.

Ending police brutality can't only be up to the black community. Police officers need to make it a point to always follow protocol when detaining someone, whether they are a black man or a white man. Using force when arresting someone isn't the right thing to do, especially when the person you are arresting is a black, unarmed male. Police departments can do things like go in pairs when going to a crime scene so if one officer starts getting out of hand, the other can control him. Policemen should be forced to wear little cameras, so there is proof if they mistreat someone during an arrest and there is no way they could lie during testimony.

If we all unify as a society, unfairness and brutality within the black community can be avoided. I hope very much that every time I go online to check my social media, another black person dying from the hands of a cruel policeman won't be another headlining story, and no more names of black people will be trending on Twitter, unless it's for a positive reason. It's up to this generation to make a positive change and work towards equality for all races, because if we don't let our voices be heard, change will never come.

NHULAN PHAM
North High School (Kenneth Anderson)
Essay – Honorable Mention

A Dream of Unity

“I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.” As he stood facing those millions of faces, he made his speech—a speech which not only talked about the African-American society but also asked the whole world to live in peace and without discrimination. Today in society, different cultures have been accepted as a part of daily American life. As you go to someone's house, many follow the “no shoes” rule, which originated in Asian culture. Or if you go to eat in a specific area, there aren't only American restaurants but those from a variety of different cultures, from Korean to Mexican restaurants. We live in a generation of different ethnicities getting along with each other, but why is that discrimination is still there? Why is it that there are some people who have the need to create foolish comments about other people's cultures? Why is that we can be labeled as a statistic based on race and because of our color? Is ethnicity the only issue? What about looks or the way people dress? Religion? Grades? Social status? Discrimination is everywhere around us, and everyone will judge based on race or appearance, but fight for what is right, and become part a “vision of unity.”

I am a Vietnamese-American woman. I was not born here but was born in Saigon, Vietnam. Yes, I use my chopsticks to eat. Yes, I have bad grammar, and my accent is not that great. And yes, I am proud to be a Catholic. When I first came here, I thought it would be different from all of the things that I have been told about America. America was a dream-come-true for my family. I have not noticed that it might not be for me. I have been called “Chinese” and been a victim of racist jokes by teenagers. Walking down the hallway is always a dreary thing, and no matter where I look, images of kids mocking me because of my race hide me away from the world. The funny thing is that they think “Ching, Chong” is a Chinese phrase. I was also a part of “The Smart Asian” statistic. Being pressured into becoming this robot-like persona, many wouldn't understand that kind of pressure, which separated me from my – quote - “stupid” fellow colored friends. With the statistics, I was part of an image where all Asians are really good at math, yet that doesn't mean I like to do more math homework! No matter how I hide away from the world, I will always be a victim, but as I think out loud, it is not me. It is *them*. Based on their judgements, they have

issues of their own that are expressed toward the victim. You need to recognize your voices inside of you and speak! Speak for yourself because sometimes you only have yourself to depend on, and those are the moments when you need to be brave and stand up for yourself. *"You may shoot me with your words. You may cut me with your eyes. You may kill me with your hatefulness. But still, like air, I'll rise,"* wrote Maya Angelou.

Discrimination towards fellow peers in school is very common. It is not required to have discrimination toward one another, each having a reason for it, but it can come naturally as society repeats it and as we think that it is a common thing. We exclude those who look like they have a mental problem or don't look suited to "hang out with the cool kids." We discriminate against others for their appearance, weight, and looks. Society teaches us students that to be successful we need to learn how to present ourselves in a certain way. Same thing goes at the workplace; certain criteria need to be met in appearance. An ugly face won't sell an item. Even as a victim of discrimination, we can also be part of those who discriminate, but knowing that doesn't mean to give in. Giving in to what can become a social play is the worst thing that can happen. Why not give back to the community by becoming someone who prevents discrimination? Or teach the new generation to not discriminate? By starting from a generation that starts to talk, this prevents those generations from looking at others and discriminating against them for their appearance. Teach them more about other cultures, and let them appreciate those cultures out of respect and awe. Let them not differentiate others by their color but "by the content of their character." Let them become the generation that hand in hand creates a new generation of peace and unity. Let them become the future that will create a new legacy in which everyone "can join hand in hand with" different colored, smiling faces "as sisters and brothers."

KELLI NAKAMURA
Torrance High School (Mark Duvall)
Essay – Honorable Mention

Tolerance through Education

“The highest result of education is tolerance” (Helen Keller). When an individual is educated about the mistakes of the past, they are less likely to discriminate against others because of ignorance. Experiencing the effects of prejudice personally teaches a person not to judge others in a similar situation. This concept especially holds true for my family. By learning about the experiences with discrimination that our relatives encountered, we have developed tolerance for others.

Through hardships experienced in some form, an individual can be taught to accept others. In particular, the people in my family have developed tolerance through the internment of the Japanese Americans during World War II, especially since some of our relatives were thrown into the internment camps. My paternal grandfather was placed into Tule Lake Relocation Center, and this angered him greatly because he was an American citizen, not the Japanese spy that the government believed him to be. He and the other Japanese Americans were placed behind barbed wire because of war hysteria after the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the fact that they were of Japanese ancestry. From this painful experience my family has learned to accept others regardless of race and religion. We understand that even if some members of a certain group did something incorrect, it does not make all members of the group evil.

Today, my family acts upon the lessons learned from the internment of our relatives. When we see a similar situation arise, we do not show discrimination to members of the attackers’ faith or race. Today, some citizens view all Muslims as evil because of recent terrorist attacks by radical Islamists. However, my family and I know that it is false to assume all Muslims as evil because of the atrocities committed by some members of their faith. Similarly, it was untrue to think of Japanese Americans as spies for the Japanese government because the United States was at war against Japan. Our family understands this, and our acceptance was developed by the errors of the past.

By knowing about the hurtful effects of racism, my family is able abstain from showing it to others. Although many people do not have a relative who was interned during World War II or faced discrimination in another way, they can still benefit from learning about the blunders of the past and how others were persecuted. Then, by understanding how discrimination occurred, they can prevent history from repeating itself and can learn to respect all people. “The highest result of education is tolerance” (Helen Keller).

Poetry

NOAH WITTMAN
North High School (Kenneth Anderson)
First Place Poetry – Tie

Our Magnum Opus

A beautiful Mosaic,
Or so the saying goes,
The domain of freedom
ripened from a shattered visage.
Tempered by time,
The great river
That flows and forms
and changes our landscape.
Our Mosaic, after years in
Tumult, pieces together.
Alas, the Mosaic is far
From harmonious.
One colored piece of glass
Shatters another,
And the dissonance rages on.
As time moves forth the rays
Of the Sun dull the hues of the glass.
Just as the saline sea air forged
The Lady of the Harbor from copper
To jade.
But we live in hope
That one day the jade
Shard can exist alongside
The Azure,
And our beautiful Mosaic
Can hang proudly from the
Hallowed cream walls,
And grow more vibrant
With every passing hour,
As more fragments find
Their place in this beautiful,
Magnum Opus.

NICOLE PETERSON
North High School (Kenneth Anderson)
First Place Poetry - Tie

You Would Think

You would think
that in a species as advanced and intelligent as the human race,
the color of one's skin would mean just that:
a color
rather than a rubric used to judge the value and virtues of a complex human being.
You would think
that a heart that beats and lungs that breathe would be enough to signify:
I am alive.
I am a person.
I am worth more than what a stranger can gather from a first glance.
I am somebody's child, mother, brother, lover.
You look at me,
but you cannot see me through my father's eyes as he taught me to take my very first steps.
You hear me speak,
but if you cannot comprehend the language that has been part of my nature my entire life,
you will never learn to appreciate the beauty of my native tongue.
You would think
that we would learn to measure one's compassion
by the steps they take to improve the lives of someone else,
one comforting shoulder at a time.
You would think
that we would learn to perceive one's kindness
by the brightness of their eyes when they smile.
By their loyalty.
By their humility.
You would think that would be enough.
...You would think.

ZACHARY LUIS
North High (Aura Imbarus)
Second Place Poetry – Tie

The Painters of Tomorrow

In 1963, it was Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. with his powerful speech
In 1955, it was Rosa Parks with a simple action
During the 1950's and 1960's Malcom X used it to speak of freedom and equality
These people have pioneered it during the civil rights era

Some may ask "What is it?"
Others may say that you don't have it
But trust me, I have it and we all have it
It is the courage and conviction to stand for what we believe in and seek in the future
A world of peace where everyone gets along is realistic

I personally haven't been a victim of hate or discrimination
But I have heard the news and the stories
I don't need a reason based on experience to create change

Matter of fact, no one needs a personal reason to make change
We all have the capability to make change
I, for one, will make the effort of change
I have noticed many believing that race and culture set us apart and divides us

I believe in the complete opposite
Race and culture make us unique and different in a good way
The world can be compared to a beautiful painting

Each different color represents a different culture or race represented in the world

A blending of colors

Produces the most heart-stopping beautiful and limitless paintings like those in the Sistine
Chapel

No painting is known for limited colors and limited ideas

Our society is our painting and we have to decide how it looks and what it reflects

We, humans, young and old alike, are the painters of tomorrow

We will seek a vision of unity amongst all the for the future

We will create a harmonious society of love and respect

I have my paintbrush and I'm ready to paint our Sistine Chapel society

We recently have celebrated a New Year

It is now 2016 and with this New Year we need to look at society with new eyes

2015 had many issues and controversial events involving race and culture

With our new 2016 eyes we will see a vision of unity that will respect races and cultures to
create a society embodying freedom, equality, and beauty

LAURYN ISHIDA
North High (Kenneth Anderson)
Second Place Poetry - Tie

Everywhere Else In the World

Everywhere else in the world, there are walls.
Walls as high as mountains, stretching for miles,
Twisting and turning, winding and leaning.
Walls so high that the people behind them don't even know
That life exists on the other side.
Everywhere else in the world, there are children.
Children who grow up thinking that they know everything,
Bragging and chanting, making fun of the outsiders.
Children so ignorant that they can't understand
That sometimes, words hurt.
Everywhere else in the world, there are mirrors.
Mirrors as cloudy as morning fog,
Reflecting and lying, deceiving its owners.
Mirrors so cloudy, that the people who dare to look into them
Can't even see themselves for who they really are.
Everywhere else in the world, there are adults.
Adults as stubborn as their own children,
Complaining and arguing, wishing for simpler times.
Adults so blind, so selfish, that they don't realize
That they're the ones making things more complicated for themselves;
That they're the ones who raise their children
To stay away from the child with the darker skin,
Or the darker eyes, or the strange accent;
That they're the ones building the walls

And fogging up the mirrors, teaching their children
That everything is fine just the way it is.
But here, things are different.
Here, walls have gates that lead to the other side.
Here, children aren't afraid to be different.
Here, mirrors are wiped clean.
Here live adults who understand;
Adults who care, not just for themselves,
But for their children and their futures as well.
Here lies Torrance, a thriving community,
A community that the rest of the world desires.

SHENDEY CASAS
North High (Kenneth Anderson)
Third Place Poetry - Tie

The Differences That Unite Us

Before firm believers had a voice
Communities were unwelcoming of others
People who came to our country of freedom
Have not experienced freedom themselves;
The freedom to express what defines them

People who were different were outcasts
Because of the color of their skin,
And the traditional clothing they wore;
They were judged by their own ethnicities

It was a struggle to accept these differences
But as time passes, people began to want change
Courageous words have been spoken
Risky actions have been taken
Leading up to a community
Of acceptance and appreciation

Although racial stereotypes exist
And judgement is inevitable,
Our community does not reject other cultures
But embrace them
Our community does not reject traditions
But respect them

The diverse Torrance community is welcoming
With people willing to learn different languages,
And cultural events taking place,
And food introduced from other parts of the world

Now that we choose to accept and be open-minded,
Our differences no longer divided us,
But help us become one

PRANIT MOHNOT
West High (Aura Imbarus)
Third Place Poetry – Tie

What the World Needs

Unity - It's what the world needs
Whether we are fair or dark,
Or whether one is from here, or there
There is a journey upon which we must embark

And follow in the footsteps of those before:
The likes of Gandhi and Lincoln to name a few
Malala, Mandela, and King Jr., as well
Helped bid human inequality adieu

We must stand up against the imbalances
And move us ever closer to this land
This land of unparalleled joy and peace
Where we can stand together hand in hand

A world where men and women of different race
Are treated just as fairly
Where everyone can be together
And people of different looks don't have to be ashamed.

It won't be a voyage without storms
There will be waves and raging seas
But we will have to slowly persevere
And stand up against the gusts like trees

One day all of us will succeed
And people will be judged by their deeds.
And not by their color and their beliefs.
Unity - It's what the world needs.

EVAN ABRAHAMS
North High (Kenneth Anderson)
Honorable Mention - Poetry

The Broiling Stew

We keep getting told the U.S. is a melting pot,
Beautiful colors, races, cultures,
All mixed into one.

But who decided we should all become one big color?
For our cultures should not be buried on top of one another,
They should shine and be seen for what they are all about.

We shouldn't be blending our cultures into one,
But accept each and every one of them for their differences,
Because the U.S. is a broiling stew, not a melting pot,
Carrots, peas, celery, all shining out amongst the broth,
Complementing each other, but not meshed into one substance.
Cultures should be accepted and embraced
Not hidden.

UMAR ANSARI

West High (Aura Imbarus)

Honorable Mention - Poetry

An American Muslim's Search

I'm a Muslim boy living in an American neighborhood.
Being called names no person ever should.
"Don't blow me up." "You're Taliban." "An Islamic terrorist."
"He's from ISIS." "Don't kill me." I think you get the gist.

What has this country come to?
Everyone suffering from the racist flu.
"An extremist, from Al Qaeda." No I'm so much more.
These words are beating me black and my body is sore.

I thought this was the land of the free and home of the brave,
Where no man is judged and there is no slave.
But I'm chained to a crime I didn't commit.
Why am I being blamed for this, the pieces don't fit.

I must find a solution, must search, must explore.
Look in every nook, every cranny, behind every door
Violence won't be my answer, not a push or a shove
Rather like Gandhi or King I'll respond with love.

CINDY BARRIOS
North High (Jonathan Sperling)
Honorable Mention - Poetry

We Are Not Trends

New technology new phones new social media
it is all about
technology revolution
regardless of their age
that is all
people think about

This new technology and social media
are just
making things difficult
we are no longer
as united
as our grandparents once were

Keeping up with this new revolution
is distancing us
criticism and bullying
is what occurs
when we do not fit
the ideal modern image

So what can
the solution be
to cultivate greater harmony
and understanding among our
diverse community?

Achieving this means
we must all accept
that we are all diverse
we must understand that our uniform-is not
is not the new iphone or the most followed
and liked social media page

We must understand that we are all
different and that is
what makes us diverse
we are all people
not trends

BALPREET KAUR
North High (Kenneth Anderson)
Honorable Mention - Poetry

A Vision for the World

Everywhere I look
Different people surround me
Cultures from all around the world
Are all I see
My neighbors and friends
Are not the same
They carry their own stories
And tell their own tales
Of stories from different countries
Where they come from
The diversity between them
Shapes my home
Torrance is filled
With people of all races
They share similar tastes
But come from extraordinary places
This diversity has shaped me
Into the person I am today
I am open-minded
Worldly, aware of others
I limit assumptions
Judgments aren't made
Because I know
We are all the same
No matter where we are from
Who we are
We are humans
In a salad bowl in Torrance
We come together
And live together
To create a vision
Of what the world should be
And that is peace
Understanding and unity

MARLEYNA MARTIN
North High (Kenneth Anderson)
Honorable Mention - Poetry

Melting Pot of Torrance

Our community is as diverse as a melting pot
When I look around I see faces of different descents
When I look around I see faces of unity
The unity I speak of consists of determination and love
This unity forms relationships and long-lasting friendships
Torrance is a diverse family
We all have our differences in physical features or language
But what exactly makes us different from others internally and morally
I see no difference
What I see are people who have a family and have a life
What I see are people willing to help out
What I see are people who are having good times
Others see things differently
We have immigration and protests throughout the country
Black Lives Matter, Hispanic Lives Matter, Asian Lives Matter
We all matter without a doubt
Society is going back to square one
But no more shall this be
The next generation is here
And I assure you that we will all make it a point that every life matters
In Torrance we are already confirming this in our minds
Torrance is a melting pot
There is no rejection in this community and nor shall there ever be

STEVEN NGUYEN
North High (Jonathan Sperling)
Honorable Mention - Poetry

A Black Friend

I go to my first school,
full of only whites.
Of course I'm afraid!
But I put on my best might.

A boy throws a ball at me,
does he want to play ball?
I throw the ball back.
Hurtful words they call.

I walk to class alone,
I look for Five-Eight.
Walked in with eyes on me.
I see it's me they hate.

I board on the bus,
a girl says I'm black.
I tell her so what?
She says sit in the back.

I sit alone in the back,
I just wanted one friend.
I sit there quietly,
until the bus comes to an end.

I rush out and run to my mom,
I hug her close and cry.
I tell her I never want to go back.
She understands, she doesn't even ask why.

JACOB WONG
North High (Jonathan Sperling)
Honorable Mention - Poetry

No Different

He is not different, nor
was he born with stupidity.
He is just raised with more care
and he may have a special teacher.

He can love, like anyone else.
He can have fun and laugh, and
be just as smart as the smartest kid in class.
But society never gave him a chance.

He comes home and prays every night
asking for a different life.
He doesn't want to be him anymore,
he just wants to be normal.

“Why am I not the same”

“You are the same, you

just don't see it.”

And his mother was right.

“You have a smile that's contagious,
your eyes shine brighter than the stars,
your laugh is like music to my ears,
you're beautiful, just like the others.”

No one had ever made him
smile like the way he did that night.

He went to school the next day
with his head higher than the sky.

He accepted himself.