

Junior High/Middle School

First Place

Jilyan Wilson

Van Buren Middle School

"I AM" I Am Your Neighbor Essay

I am convinced that boys think that girls can't do certain things because they think of us as weak or helpless (just of my past experiences). It's a discrimination/segregation that has developed many times in history and to every woman once in their life. As long as I lived in Kettering, I have seen woman that have been discriminated by what they wear, what they eat, what their voice is like, and their favorite pursuit.

I have been stereotyped many times by how I dress, what my hobbies are, and my personality. I'm a tomboy and I like to play video games. I was once into girly stuff at a young age, but I grew out of that stuff and I got more into the stuff that a typical boy would like. In school, boys would often keep asking me questions about why I'm not into girl stuff. People would tell me I can't play video games because I'm a girl or because I should be into make-up. It is not a good feeling to be called out for being myself. It makes me feel like an outsider and I feel bad for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and what he had to go through.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. had to go through segregation and discrimination at a young age with having to go to a different school than whites and even going to different bathrooms. When he was younger, one of his white playmates told him that his father was forbidding him to play with Martin Luther King Jr. He told his parents what happened and they told him that it's hard to face racism. Martin then decided that he would hate every white person. He and his family were a religious group and his parents often told him to love everyone. Martin thought this would be difficult because he didn't know how to love people that hated him. I felt the same way with hating everybody who discriminated me. I can understand him and what he had to go through, except his discrimination was harsh back in the day.

I think that Kettering or even the whole world can reduce and end this segregation of gender roles by not thinking a product as a female product or male product. Boys and girls should be able to buy, wear, and play with whatever they want. Girls can play with boy toys and boys can play with girl toys. Girls can wear guy apparel and guys, even guys, can wear girl apparel, as long as it makes them content. People should not have to alter who they are or who they want to be because of people ordering them they should be a certain way.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was able to change segregation for all black people by using the power of his voice. All of us could end gender-roles and all the discrimination in the world by telling our view on the matter and making speeches. We all have to work together and if Martin Luther King Jr. can do it, we can, too! I have been inspired to stand up to all segregation in my school and in Kettering.

Sources Used (Citation): "King, Martin Luther, Jr." American Social Reform Movements Reference Library, edited by Carol Brennan, et al., vol. 3: Biographies, UXL, 2007, pp. 143-154. Gale Virtual Reference Library, <http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/CX2587100046/GVRL?u=kett65873&sid=GVRL&xid=2d47e30b>. Accessed 24 Jan. 2019.

Runner Up

Lilli Scarborough

Van Buren Middle School

"I Am Ready"

I am not just a tall girl with curly hair. I am a living, breathing human being. I have felt pain. We've all felt pain in some form. One form of pain is stereotypes.

Stereotypes may seem harmless to some, but for others, stereotypes have taken over their identity.

Gender stereotypes. For me, this seems to come up a lot in my daily life. For a sixth grader, my goals and aspirations are colossal. I want to be a neurosurgeon. Anytime I mention this, some flaw with my gender is said by someone. I feel that with my hard work, I will be able to achieve my goals. Although, these stereotypes make me feel otherwise.

As I see it, Kettering could overcome this barrier by having powerful female role models speak out in our community. I feel this will not only empower young girls, but all of our citizens. This could be as small as a woman speaking about her profession once a year at a school. I think Kettering does an incredible job connecting school age kids to hard working adults in our community, so this is definitely not out of reach.

While gender isn't the only attribute of a person that can be stereotyped, deep down inside all stereotypes hurt. As Martin Luther King Jr. would say, "We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now." This quote inspires me to say, why change tomorrow, when in reality, you can change today. I am more than you see. I am a dancer. I am a student of Van Buren Middle School. I am ready for what come next in stopping stereotypes in our city.

Honorable Mention

Evan Loyd

Van Buren

I am

When I was in the third grade me and my parents decided that I should be accelerated a grade. So, in the year of 2014-2015, I spent the first 2 months in a third grade classroom. And after the first couple months, I moved up to the fourth grade. The first couple days of me being in fourth grade were fine but, the other students started figuring out what happened and started asking question. Most of them were fine questions like "do you miss all of your other friends?" but other questions were very hard to talk about, like, "why are you here?", "How old are you" and "and why are you so short." and i was stereotyped because of my age. No one would ever let me play football or tag with them because I was just the little new kid that wasn't as strong or as big as anyone else. The next year was a little better because I had made some friends. But I was still the youngest kid there and was always made fun of. My grades were good the second year, but I could never concentrate trying to work on homework in class, because everyone would treat me like I was super stupid, and always tried to give me false answers. So I ended up just having to do all my homework at home, every day. The teachers were not as mean as the students, but they never gave me the hard questions, or even the normal questions, when they were explaining something, they always gave me the super easy ones, and even if I raised my hand during class to give an answer they never called on me. "I have decided to stick with love. Hate is too great a burden to bear" is one of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s most famous quotes. I wish that everyone could live like that. The world would be a much better place if no one was made fun of for being young. I hope that kettering can reduce the fear of people being stereotyped for their outward appearance. The 7th graders in kettering recently had a thing called redo-day, where the students talk about their feelings. I think that if we more assemblies like this students would be more kind to other students. I personally know that many students learned a lot from redo- day and have been trying to act nicer around school. This has helped me learn about what other people are going through, and I have been treating other nicely. But others also learned about my constant fear of being made fun of for my age, and many students have been treating me a lot better.

High School First Place

Selma Younes

Fairmont High School

I Am Selma

I am not sure of what I am. I am, however sure of what I'm not. I am not a terrorist, I do not want anyone getting hurt and I certainly do not push my religion on anyone. Hello, my name is Selma Younes. I grew up right here in Kettering, Ohio but both my parents are immigrants from Algeria. Unlike most people I went to school with, I do not practice Christianity, I practice Islam. Islam, the religion of peace. The religion that created medication, hospitals, universities and even Algebra itself. How and why is everyone against it, why are we labeled as terrorists? Questions that would go unanswered throughout most my younger years of life.

I went to J.E. Prass elementary school. It truly was a fantastic school equipped with great teachers and staff. However, I was one of the only kids with darker skin. During kindergarten and first grade, it felt as if no one saw color. Once we got a little older, kids started noticing there was a difference. I started to feel ashamed or embarrassed to be different. Of course, it was no one's fault but my own. I was confused of what to call myself cause at the time, it seemed there was only black or white, it was one or the other, that's the way it appeared. I tried so hard to blend in or be one of the other kids, afraid of my own identity. Then as we get a little older, kids started to tease. Even small comments cut deep. People would call me Indian, Mexican, Black, you name it. Not that there was anything wrong with being these things but it was not me. I started to get frustrated that kids were not educated enough and I started thinking they were all ignorant. Me on the other hand, what if I am the ignorant one?

I remember one day when I was in 6th grade, on the news, I see the word, "terrorist". Terrorist, a person who uses unlawful violence and intimidation, especially against civilians, in the pursuit of political aims. The definition uses "a person". How did "a person" shift to muslims. So many people do bad things each and every day. So why were bad people that were muslims terrorists but when a non-muslim uses unlawful violence, they are just a criminal or murderer. All bad people are terrorists. Let us not switch it to where all muslims are terrorists but keep the bad and good people separated. If they are a true follower of Islam, they would not hurt even a fly. At this point I was furious. I was upset at labels, at fellow muslims doing this to innocent people. I thought of my family, we would never hurt anyone especially for religious purposes. Islam teaches us to make peace with everyone. I soon realized that I was, in fact ignorant.

I learned that for people to crush stereotypes, we must talk to each other. We need to know each other and who we are. Even if we don't agree with everything about each other, we must respect one another. If I would have just told people, "Hi, I'm Selma and I am muslim" it would have bridged gaps and broken barriers that were there for so long. We as people, must guide each other and educate each other so that. It was my responsibility all those years in elementary school to be proud of who I was and am. I now know who I am, I am a muslim, I am intelligent, beautiful and ambitious but most of all, I am Selma.

Runner Up

Anna Bench

Kettering Fairmont High School

The Story of the World

Fear is the driving force behind the actions of many. It makes people act unreasonably and the feeling of the unknown is what kicks that fear even further. People all around the world are discriminated by this fear lying behind the attacker's seemingly tough facade. Everyone has a story and everyone has a background unique to them. Just as a library with many books, the world is a place full of billions of different stories. Each one is different not only in their covers but also in what fills their pages; this is what makes the diverse world such a stunning place to be. The problem, though, is when others try to readjust the stories and rewrite them to their own idea of what is "right."

A large part of my story is having an Chinese nationality, but also being very accustomed to the standard American culture due to being adopted. Attached to Chinese culture and race are several different stereotypes. I hear very often that it's no wonder I'm smart, I'm Chinese. Or that it doesn't surprise others that I play the cello because I'm Chinese. I've also been asked several times if I was related to another person of Asian ethnicity because we "look exactly the same." It turns out, though, most people who ask these questions are oblivious to the fact that they are undermining the different Asian and Chinese cultures. When only looking at the surface of the cultures, you aren't able to see the rich histories and lifestyles between the different communities of Asia. While often giving in to the cliches of the Chinese culture, very few people really look at what's underneath that surface. Adding on to this idea, many also don't look past their thoughts that someone is smart or musical because they're simply Asian. I like to believe that I am smart, not because I am Chinese, but because I work hard and put forth my best efforts. I also believe that my musical abilities comes from my decision to practice and extend my learning, not from my nationality. All in all, a person might fit into the stereotypes of their race, but that isn't just because of where they come from. Personality doesn't come from a certain country; a personality is something that is unique to each one of the seven billion people living on Earth, no matter where they came from.

To overcome all of the stereotyping in the world is nearly impossible, but you've got to start somewhere. The city of Kettering is a largely diverse area. There are several different ethnicities, races, and cultures sprinkled throughout the city. With all of this diversity, though, comes the stereotypes from the naive outsiders. I think it is of great importance to take action in educating others in different cultures and races. To do this Kettering may consider a week or even a month of cultural awareness. It would be a time where the community could come together and learn new things about the customs and traditions of the different ethnicities in our city. There could be events featuring different cultures, giving the rest of the community a taste of what their traditions are. In school, we could take a day to appreciate the different cultures and spread knowledge about them in a day emulating career day. People of different cultures could come into Fairmont and set up different stations where we get to learn the variety of cultures that are present in the community. I think this new sense of being educated would help in lessening the stereotypes and discrimination with in the city because people would no longer be fearing the "unknown." They would be more aware of the different ethnicities and, hopefully, more appreciative of them. We take time and put forth effort in making sure people are educated in subjects like math and English, but why isn't the educating of cultural differences just as important?

All of this being said, diversity should not be suppressed just because of a lack of education. People are more than just their nationality just as a book is more than what genre it's placed in. Each book has a message to share and each story shares a different perspective. Every person has an opinion and ideas to go with them. How they decide to share these ideas, though, is up to them. Just as book is meant to be read, ideas are meant to be shared.

Honorable Mention

Hamza Odeh

Fairmont High School

I Am Muslim

I am constantly stereotyped and discriminated against everyday because of my ethnicity, but I never truly get offended as I know that they are usually just trying to make a simple joke. However, many people don't take it as a joke and can get really offended by what people say about them, and the people who say those kinds of jokes really don't understand why they get offended in the first place. This is the problem, people who stereotype and discriminate today really don't completely understand what they are saying to people and what the true meaning behind the jokes they make. We, as a community, need to make sure that we understand the kind of people we are talking to before making assumptions about them and judging them. I hope we can solve this problem by getting to know the truth about stereotypes and addressing past mistakes to see how we can avoid them in the future.

The problem of people's ignorance of not knowing the true meaning of what they say to people and the personality of the people they interact with has to be solved in some way. Common stereotypes need to be disproven by some sort of mainstream media outlet so people can know the truth. One example of this could be how many people think that all Muslims are a threat to America but in reality groups like Isis are hated by most Muslims as they are destroying their homelands. This ignorance can lead to unneeded and useless violence against the Muslim people, it could cause people to shun and fear Muslims, and it could cause people to throw backlash towards Muslims. If we as a community spread the truth about certain stereotypes it could prevent both violence and fear towards not just Muslims but all ethnicities.

Once, when I was in 7th grade, my friend told a joke to a Muslim student during lunch going along the lines of "Oh, so your a terrorist then?" My friend decided to say this because the Muslim student, who is now one of my best friends, just got back from the Muslim holiday Eid Al-Fitr. Of course my friend was just joking around, but the student took it very personally and it made him very upset so he took it to the counselor. As a result, my friend got into very big trouble and got ISS for a few days. However, about a year later I got to know this student very well as I sat next to him on the bus, and I was able to get them to get along with each other and they are now friends. At first, my friend didn't realize what a joke he didn't mean anything by would do to someone but after they got to know each other he understands why it had such an impact and has learned from it.

I know that we, as a community, can solve the ignorance of stereotyping and discriminating by getting to know the truth and by addressing past mistakes to see how we can avoid them in the future. If we can spread the truth about certain stereotypes it could prevent both violence and fear towards not just Muslims but all ethnicities. If we can learn from past mistakes and build a better future it can free us from the evil of discrimination and ignorance. Finally, if we can fully understand why people get offended by stereotyping and small racial jokes we can learn why it is so important to stop doing so. Our community definitely has the potential to end discrimination and stereotyping not just against Muslims but against all people in the world.