



# 2021 Kettering Board of Community Relation's Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Essay Contest Winners

## High School Winner:

### **Bringing Hope for Others to Carry their Moments**

By Teresa Overholser

Our lives are made out of a finite amount of time from the second we are born until the second we die. These seconds, minutes, hours, days, and years form together within our lives to create moments that define our lifetime. We are not only responsible for how we curate and live the moments within our lives, but it is also our duty to positively impact the lives of others so that they continue to live them out to their fullest potential.

You may be wondering why I feel so deeply about these moments, and the reason is that, in one single moment, all of the seconds, minutes, hours, days, and years that we carry with us can all be gone in an instant, and it's preventable.

Suicide is the second leading cause of death in Americans age 15-to-24. Each day, suicide takes the lives of approximately 132 people in the US. Many factors can be attributed to the reason someone takes their own life, and nearly 50% of suicide victims have a known mental health condition.

Mental health continues to be stigmatized in this country and creates fear in those who need help to muster up the courage to seek life-saving care. Nobody should need to muster up courage when they need help. I know people that have judged others that experience suicidal thoughts or mental health conditions as being attention seeking or full of themselves, and I'm sure you have too.

There are disparities not only in our own social circles, but also our institutions.

On top of being less accessible compared to its physical condition counterparts, mental health care is also more costly. Only half of all Americans experiencing an episode of major depression receive treatment and not everyone who does seek treatment is treated successfully.

I invite you to work with me and your friends to destigmatize mental health, work towards suicide prevention, and advocate for life.

As an individual, there is a lot you can do to aid in suicide prevention. You can use your voice on social media to spread messages of hope from yourself and others, you can speak out when you see injustice that needs to be called out and you can invite others to join you.

As a group, we can join together to show solidarity and use our wonderful minds to come up with new modes of activism. If we're ambitious enough we can even seek changes in policy that would further advance our cause.

We may never know who around us is experiencing suicidal thoughts. It could be yourself, the man at the store, a neighbor, a peer, or someone else that's afraid to speak out.

In one moment they could be here, and the next they could be gone. I don't know about you, but I believe a world with more smiles walking around is a world that's a better place.

Death by suicide is not a death with dignity, but with your help there will be hope.

## **High School Runner Ups:**

### **This is Normal**

By EJ Ball

There are people in all corners of our community that face an array of mental issues that remain undiscussed. Why? Because it makes people uncomfortable, because anything that is not your standard, should not be discussed right? No. We're living in a progressive society, and with the developments of rights for the Queer and POC communities, and the strides in gender equality, topics are being normalized. Such as the fact that most people born with a uterus will have a menstrual cycle, or that there are those that don't identify with the gender they are assigned at birth, That men have feelings, people are sexually assaulted, or that sometimes; a man will love another man. These topics can, and should be discussed as regularly as one talks about their next DIY project, or the results of a football game. Because they are real, and affect all of us in some way. Along with these great topics we've progressed on is mental health. The knowledge that people are depressed, People have anxiety, people are in mental turmoil. Some people are so sad, and without hope for a better tomorrow, that they take their own life. All of us have probably heard of at least one person that has attempted or committed suicide. Be it a celebrity, or even someone in your own dwelling. Have you ever been depressed? Many of us have, in short bursts that are quickly relieved. But some of us face longer and more constant battles with internal sadness. The days when your past traumas feel just around the corner, and you're on edge till you can't breathe with the anticipation of facing some ugly, gnarled, swelling monster created by your own mind. Some of us can't decipher our inner monologue from the voices of others inside our head. We feel like impostors. These people need help, not suppression. Their

issues shouldn't be kept behind closed doors like it's some perverse secret. The stigma that having a mental illness is something to be ashamed of should be dissolved. I encourage all of you to talk to your children, and your families, and check their mental climates. Normalize taking breaks for your health. Normalize not always being 'ok'. Normalize discussing your issues instead of burying them. Normalize going home early simply because you are socially worn down. I know with the issues we face today, mental health is most definitely under pressure. With those applying for unemployment, families with those affected by covid, quarantine making us feel separated and lonely, who wouldn't feel the strain? Let's talk about it.

## **Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Message for America Today**

By Elisabeth McCall

In 1963, after being arrested during a Civil Rights march in Alabama, Martin Luther King Jr. wrote a historic letter. He expressed disappointment in the "moderate white" for their avoidance of issues regarding racial injustice. Specifically, Dr. King wrote:

I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in the stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Council-er or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate... who constantly says "I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I can't agree with your methods of direct action;" (Martin Luther King, Jr.)

Not only did his statement apply to the 1960's Civil Rights Movement, but it is also relevant during today's BLM (Black Lives Matter) Movement. Unfortunately, the black American still faces racial injustice day-to-day and still has to fight for fundamental human rights. The conversation of what the white person can do to support their black neighbor has been heard for a long time, yet the "blockade" Dr. King speaks of is still a reoccurring issue.

As an average white female, who faces no injustice or hardship, I continuously ask myself how to support my friends of color who deal with an abundance of uncertainty. Specifically, what changes can I make? I found that the most significant thing I can do, like many other white moderates, is to use my white privilege to support and uplift black men and women's voices. For example, I use my social media to share petitions to sign, ways to donate, art created by POC, articles to educate from credible sources, and small black-owned local businesses to support. The most known way to help the BLM Movement is to march in rallies. But, another fantastic way to help the BLM Movement or a black friend or neighbor is to sit down with them and have a conversation about current events, how it makes them feel, and how you can help support the cause in the best way possible. I learned that supporting BLM is to first understand the reason by reading articles written by credible black voices.

White people might wonder why they should care about a movement that doesn't relate to them. To that I say, imagine living every day being too scared to do everyday things or activities such as going for a run, walking home, or even sitting in your own home and watching television. Black Americans deserve the respect and condolences of White Americans for the severe racial injustices they always

have and continue to endure. White Americans need to take direct action NOW for their black neighbors and friends. Many years ago, Martin Luther King pleaded for society to recognize its black members' injustices and act on them. Today, Americans can take Dr. King's request and work toward racial equality and justice.

### **Middle School/Jr. High School Winner:**

#### **We Can and We Will**

By Anaya Adoff

Rayshard Brooks, Daniel Prude, Atatiana Jefferson, Stephon Clark, Botham Jean, Tamir Rice, Philando Castille, and way too many others died and suffered at the hands of the "good guys" that are supposed to protect us. Rayshard Brooks fell asleep at a drive-thru. Daniel Prude had a mental illness. Atatiana Jefferson was at home with her 8-year old nephew. Stephon Clark was in his grandmother's yard talking on his phone. Botham Jean was sitting at home, eating a bowl of ice cream. Philando Castille was in the car with his girlfriend and 4-year old son. And Tamir Rice was at a park playing with a toy gun. Did I mention that he was 12 years old? At 12 years old, did you think you were going to die? The one thing that all of these human beings had in common was that they were living while black. None of them deserved their ending. They all had lives, families. In fact, a lot of their families watched them die. If you aren't angered or disgusted or by the things I've just said, then you're part of the problem... the problem that we all need to come together and fix. The Black Lives Matter movement officially started in 2013, but really moved into the mainstream with the brutal police murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor last spring. Why did two more innocent people have to die before people really took notice? Why did George Floyd's mother have to be called out in agony as Derek Chauvin had his knee firmly grounded into Floyd's neck? Why didn't Breonna Taylor get to fulfill her dream of becoming a nurse? These are human beings that did not deserve to get their life taken away at such young ages. This first started in 1619 when the first slave ship came to the Americas and later when the first police forces, slave patrols began. Why is this hatefulness still here over 400 years later? Why can't we all just come together and support each other in a movement that is long overdue? For the people that are willing to educate themselves and others and are ready to take a stand against racial inequality, there's so much you need to know and can do. So what do you as a young person think you can do to create change? First, educate yourself on what you're fighting for and the history behind it. Another way to educate yourself on these topics is to listen and read reliable news sources that you can count on for factual information. Also, you can join an organization for young people that wants to create change surrounding these issues. You can also learn what defunding the police really means and how police reform can help stop this epidemic. Lastly, don't let any adult or any person make you feel like your voice doesn't count or make you feel like you can't create change, because believe me, we can and we will.

## **Middle School/Jr. High School Runners- Up:**

### **Just Because You Are a Feminist, Does Not Mean You Are Evil**

By Cecelia Stone

Throughout almost all of time men have been in power, always making decisions and in charge. That same perspective of a patriarchal world has dwindled but has not been completely obliterated. I have witnessed this view of boys discriminating against others in my own school, minor things, but things that can still affect someone's self-esteem. For instance, one school bus I rode was full of boys making fun of girls for being flat-chested, and always saying things that would sometimes put fellow girls in tears. This degraded all the girls on my bus and I watched some of them become less and less social and confident, including myself. I look back now and see that I should have stood up for myself and the other girls because that is what being a feminist is all about.

Anyone can be a feminist, you just have to agree with the idea of gender equality. Feminists have sometimes been thought of as only being women, and this is, of course, not true. When you express ideas of feminism some people might think of you as being very political and biased against men, while feminism is not a political notion at all. You can be Republican and be a feminist, you can be a Democrat and be a feminist, you can be anything and be a feminist; feminism is not tied to a political party. In fact, feminism is not just equal rights for women, it's equal rights for everyone and all genders and sexualities, so don't feel that you are not able to fight for feminism if you are not a female.

I have been motivated to extinguish sexism in my community for a while, and have realized that it's not easy. You can't change the way people think, you can't change who they are, but you can present the view of equality to people that maybe don't know what feminism is. I'm not asking you to go door to door like a Girl Scout, but I am asking you to step up for yourself and others when you see them being treated in an inhumane way, just the little things that can really make a big difference. Don't just stand up for women, stand up for everyone when faced with any injustice you might find.

Hopefully, I have educated you on the idea of feminism and what it's like to become a feminist in times where gender inequality is thought of as minuscule when it has truly always been here and we just don't see it. The only thing that I ask of you is to stand up for fellow human beings when you see a problem, not only with sexism but anything from someone being bullied to someone that got called a

name. We all need confidence in our lives and with that, we can change a world of sexism and male domination to a world of equality and inclusion in our communities.

### **Think Before You Act**

By Adam Grant

I'm an 11 year old boy who loves to be outside and play sports and be with my friends. It's not uncommon for me to be outside running around in my neighborhood. However, last summer I saw on the news where a man who was out jogging in his neighborhood and was shot and killed. This scares me because this man was black and I am also mixed [white/ black]. This murder could have happend in Kettering and could have been me. This summer also watched a video of George Floyd being killed by four police officers. These events of racial injustices, and so many others that keep occuring, make it scary to be a kid in the U.S today. Today, I am asking people in Kettering to think before they act, make fewer assumptions about others, and above all, to communicate with others. If this was done, it could have saved the lives of Ahmaud Arbery and George Floyd and so many others who have been killed because of the color of their skin. In 1963 Martin Luther King Jr. gave his famous "I Have A Dream" speech and he said, "I have a dream that one day my four little children will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character." The only way to know the content of someone's character is to take the time to talk to them and get to know them. Martin Luther King Jr. gave this speech back in 1963, this was almost 58 years ago, yet, despite giving him a national holiday and as popular as this speech is, we are still struggling with the same issues of racial inequality today. King's advice to only judge others based on their actions is needed now more than ever. Creating a community where everyone feels safe, valued, respected, trusting of the police, and others in charge will prevent needless murders and allow me to play outside and not feel scared. In King's famous speech, he says, "It would be fatal for the nation to overlook the urgency of the moment." And though this was back in 1963, the situation hasn't resolved and the urgency of solving racial injustice in America has only become more obvious. Over the summer, we all watched George Floyd suffocate and die with a police officer's knee on his neck. This was scary, sad, wrong, and videotaped for the whole world to see. At that time, our nation did not overlook this one incident of racial injustice. We had marches, protests, some violent, and some peaceful, all hoping to make a change in our world. That moment of watching George Floyd die should not end in the summer, but we need to continue to talk, think before we act, and get to know each other's character.