




THE SIXTEENTH ANNUAL
STOP  **THE HATE**
 AWARDS CEREMONY
 PRESENTED BY MALTZ MUSEUM



WELCOME

Dear Friends,

You are about to meet 26 exceptional young people. Their voices will be heard, and their message is destined to be shared. They are part of a legacy of student upstanders with vision and promise to ***Stop the Hate***[®].

This year marks the 16th anniversary of the ***Stop the Hate***[®] program. Each year, we marvel at the thousands of students using the power of words to reflect on and respond to intolerance and indifference. As a museum that stands firmly aligned with diversity and inclusion, we are proud to support students who use their voices for good.

Since the program launched we have provided \$1.6 million in college scholarships and anti-bias education grants, and we have engaged over 50,000 students across 12 Northeast Ohio counties to stand up and speak out against hate.

The world needs this kind of program now more than ever. The time is now to support compassion and empathy—not only for others, but also for ourselves.

No single person on Earth is exactly the same as another. We are all different. And together we celebrate those differences. To all the students who have participated in ***Stop the Hate***[®], this is only the beginning. Your voices can and will make an impact! Never stop fighting for what you believe. We can't wait to see what you'll do next!

Sincerely,
Tamar and Milton Maltz



ABOUT *STOP THE HATE*[®] *YOUTH SPEAK OUT*

Stop the Hate[®] challenges young people to consider the impact of intolerance and the role of the individual in effecting positive change. This Maltz Museum initiative celebrates Northeast Ohio students committed to creating a more accepting, inclusive society.

New this year, in recognition of the diverse talents and interests of students and the importance of fostering creative expression, we integrated poetry as a submission option for students enrolled in writing workshops with our partners at Lake Erie Ink. Our first year was a success with submissions from more than 500 amazing students.

Students were asked to write a personal essay or poem about bias they have witnessed, experienced, or learned about and share what they have done or will do in response while reflecting on the following prompt:

"I no longer believe that we can change anything in the world until we have first changed ourselves." - Etty Hillesum

Etty Hillesum was a young, Jewish-Dutch woman who wrote diaries in Amsterdam during the Second World War. In 1943, she was murdered at Auschwitz, at only 29 years old. Etty believed internal personal change was a necessary first step to bringing about positive change in the world, and that this was the main lesson to be learned from the Holocaust. Etty bears witness to what it means to be human and commits herself to a radical choice: not to hate, even as she opens her heart to the horrors unfolding around her.

***STOP THE HATE*[®] SCHOOLS AND TEACHERS OF THE YEAR**

STOP THE HATE SCHOOLS OF THE YEAR

Together with our partners at Lake Erie Ink, the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, and Roots of American Music we offered free song, essay, and poetry writing workshops to schools and educators. These workshops provided anti-bias learning tools, taught history, literacy, and the arts for middle school and high school groups.

Congratulations to Andrew J. Rickoff School, Broadway Academy at Mount Pleasant, Charles F. Brush High School, Collinwood High School, East Technical High School, Garfield Middle School, Garfield Heights High School, Glenville High School, Harding Middle School, Hathaway Brown, Hudson Middle School, Insightful Minds, John Marshall School of Information Technology, Kimpton Middle School, Langston Middle School, Lakewood High School, The Lillian and Betty Ratner Montessori School, Maple Heights High School, Mary M. Bethune School, Max S. Hayes High School, Mayfield High School, Midview High School, Milkovich Middle School, MOUND Stem School, Monticello Middle School, Newton D. Baker School of Arts, North Ridgeville Academic Center, Oberlin High School, Rhodes College and Career Academy, Robinson G. Jones, Shaw High School, St. Stanislaus School, and William Rainey Harper School.

STOP THE HATE TEACHERS OF THE YEAR

With nominations from our partners, the Maltz Museum named two *Stop the Hate* Teachers of the Year. Each receives a \$1,000 cash prize in recognition of their personal commitment to anti-bias education.

Congratulations to Lisa Blasko of Garfield & Harding Middle Schools and Amy Garritano of Lakewood High School.

FINALISTS



2024 Youth Speak Out Essay Contest

GRADE 12

Abaeny Dek, St. Joseph Academy
Aaliyah Gundani, Shaker Heights High School
Will Linson III, Twinsburg High School
Gal Naveh, Orange High School
Hong Bao Tran Nguyen, Solon High School
Helena Pearl, Hudson High School
Zoë Schmidt, St. Joseph Academy
Skylar Sidwell, Rhodes College and Career Academy

GRADE 11

Adhithiya Balamurugan, Solon High School
Radha Pareek, Beachwood High School

GRADE 10

Elizabeth Chen, Berea-Midpark High School
Ayesha Faruki, Mentor High School

GRADE 9

Zoe Klingshirn, Firelands High School
Sampson Parker, Garrett Morgan School of Leadership and Innovation

GRADE 8

Simon Factora, St. Albert the Great
Heeba R. Sossey Alaoui, Beachwood Middle School

GRADE 7

Scarlet Grimm, North Ridgeville Academic Center
Rivka Pasternak, Fuchs Mizrahi School

GRADE 6

Vandy Ickes, Hudson Middle School
Elizabeth Jia, Hudson Middle School

*Please note, students have used fictitious names within their essays and poems to protect identities.



2024 Youth Speak Out Poetry Contest Poetry Finalists

HIGH SCHOOL

Kai Jones, Glenville High School

Mae Mohar, Lakewood High School

Adele Wentzel, Lakewood High School

MIDDLE SCHOOL:

Anissa Halmaoui, Hudson Middle School

Mia Teusan, Hudson Middle School

Beatrice Watkins, Hathaway Brown

2024 Youth Sing Out Songwriting Contest Winners

Max S. Hayes High School

First Place High School

"The Sad Truth"

Max S. Hayes High School

Runner-Up High School

"One Voice For Harmony"

Harding Middle School

First Place Middle School

"Break It, Break It, Break It"

Harding Middle School

Runner-Up Middle School

"Reclaim Our Fate"

Adhithiya Balamurugan

11th Grade, Solon High School

Clang! Bang! Thump.

I rose from my mattress and looked into the hallway. What shocked me most wasn't the torn tablecloth draped on the dinner table or the broken plates and utensils; it was my father lying laterally on his right, with his left hand weakly clutching the tablecloth he had partially dragged off the table.

As I rushed towards my fallen father, his eyes tracked mine, and after momentary eye contact, he shut his eyes.

My father had just suffered an episode of vasovagal syncope, a sudden loss in consciousness caused by overwhelming stress. He was an immigrant under an H1B visa, a status that prohibits an unemployment period longer than 60 days under the threat of deportation. He was on Day 49, and had received yet another rejection for not a job, but a mere interview.

The reason wasn't his ability, but rather, his visa. An inordinate proportion of jobs in America don't even consider H1B applicants, and decline interview requests simply because of a person's immigration status.

After realizing this injustice, I researched the U.S. immigration system to discover how my family could escape our quandary. I concluded that the only way to escape the quagmire was to obtain a green card, as the ID protects laborers from workforce discrimination. However, I discovered after deeper research that for Indian immigrants like my father, that's a quagmire in itself.

Under current law, no country's immigrants may receive over 7% of available green cards annually, a country-cap ignorant of populous nations like India that account for significantly more than 7% of immigrants. In fact, the Cato Institute reported that the quota-induced backlog causes a literal lifetime wait for applicants from India, with over 400,000 of them expected to die before ever receiving a green card.

My research culminated in a realization: American society condemns illegal racism, but ignores legal racism, something my family, along with thousands of others, endures. There were only two ways to rectify legal racism: amending the immigration system itself, and discarding restrictive eligibility requirements. I decided to advocate for both.

Since that decision, I've contacted congresspersons like Max Miller, J. D. Vance, and Sherrod Brown, informing them of the cruelty faced by Indian immigrants, and exhorting them to propose policies that discard green card quotas. In addition, I've sent a myriad of letters to organizations, including the Calvin Coolidge and Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundations, imploring them to remove or provide exceptions to permanent residency prerequisites that plague their educational programs.

My approach is incremental at its root, but I believe breakthroughs are driven by gradual changes that accumulate to unleash sweeping transformations. Call by call, letter by letter, I'm sowing the seeds of reform, knowing that each voice added to the chorus amplifies the call for immigrant justice. While clangs, bangs, and thumps from vasovagal syncope might be inevitable, I hope that one day, they will never result from immigrant racism.



Adhithiya Balamurugan is passionate about science and all its subdisciplines. In his free time, he likes to read books, study computer science, and learn about finance and economics. He plans to further his computer science business and would like to lead an innovative career that transforms the lives of many.

Abaeny Dek

12th Grade, St. Joseph Academy

On September 1st, 2023, the Catholic Diocese of Cleveland released an Anti-LGBTQ+ policy under the bishop, listing rules that specifically target queer and trans youth in seventy-nine elementary schools and five highschools. The policy contains rules such as “same-sex couples may not attend dances as a couple,” and “No one can advocate or celebrate the LGBTQ+ community” in any way: through language, symbols, or pride flags. Needless to say, many members of the LGBTQ+ community feel unwelcome within Catholic schools and churches.

Initially members of our school community were distraught and unsure of whether our school fell under the diocese. We were soon told that because our school is run by the Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Joseph rather than the Cleveland Diocese, we were exempt from these rules. The Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Joseph acts in solidarity with marginalized groups, including the LGBTQ+ community. They work to be true allies.

However, I still felt for the students at the schools affected by this. My friends and I decided that we could not stay silent. We wanted to use our voices for those who had been silenced, as speaking out against the policy would result in punishment for any student who attends a Diocesan school. The policy was the exact opposite of the message that the Catholic Church spreads. According to Pope Francis, “The key is for the church to welcome, not exclude, and show mercy, not condemnation.”

We created a social media account to spread awareness of this unethical policy, encouraging students, parents, and alumni of Catholic Schools to join us in a peaceful protest against the Cleveland Dioceses’ policy the same day of the Eucharistic Revival Mass. The Revival Mass was taking place in downtown Cleveland and hosted by the Bishop. All of the Diocesan schools were invited to participate.

On November 1st at 8am, I arrived with dozens of others across the street from the Cleveland Public Auditorium, where the mass was being held. As buses of Catholic school students were pulling up in front of the building, we began to chant. “God loves all!” We read from the policy and handed out informational pamphlets for passers by. We hoped to spread a loving message to any queer students on any of those buses who felt that they were forced to hide who they were. We urged people to send letters to the bishop and sign petitions.

We returned to the Cleveland Public Auditorium around noon, as students were leaving. Many students inside the buses showed their support by making small hearts with their hands or giving a thumbs-up. However, we also faced backlash. Inappropriate hand gestures from some students, mockery, and laughing.

Later that day, Cleveland.com released an article highlighting our story. I couldn’t have planned any of this without the help of my friends. Our journey is not over. I will continue to speak up for those who are being silenced. I refuse to be a bystander in situations of injustice.



Abaeny Dek enjoys painting and listening to music. She also plays the ukulele. Abaeny ran cross country for three years. She also volunteers at the Hope Center. In the future, she hopes to become a dentist and continue her passion for art.

Aaliyah Gundani

12th Grade, Shaker Heights High School

“Elijah, play the ball quicker,” yelled my white male high school soccer coach. Maybe I needed to pick up the pace, but my name is not Elijah, it’s Aaliyah. I understood the mistake once, but after three years, it was just plain insulting. Being one of few black girls my entire soccer career made the inequities highly visible. From micro-aggressions on how I styled my hair to not caring to pronounce my name correctly, I felt isolated.

During my junior year, I experienced blatant discrimination on the field. My team made a choice to kneel during the national anthem, even after a game official made comments before the game that making that choice could impact the referee’s decision-making. They were right. I was unfairly given a yellow card during a fair play that ended in an injury for me. The ref waved the card in my face while injured, lacking concern and fair judgment. My black assistant coach spoke up and subsequently received a red card with the ref stating, “I don’t like you.” After the incident, the school district requested additional training at the local and state levels for officials in the areas of bias, ethics, diversity, equity, and inclusion.

This type of discrimination and being called “whitewashed” simply because I like to kick a ball into a net had a massive impact on the way I presented myself. It felt like I didn’t belong in a sport like soccer. For years, I traveled to tournaments with hundreds of players and rarely saw another POC. I refused to quit. Instead, it fueled my motivation to work to create an environment where every person is valued.

The exclusion and discrimination I experienced all of my life with soccer is what sparked my passion for social justice. Additionally, my work with physically disabled youth in sports opened my eyes to the inequities they endure day to day. I want to take these experiences and turn them into change. It’s why I’m a part of SGORR, a student-led group based on race relations. The group promotes positive social relations across all differences. Leading diversity workshops and engaging with elementary and middle school students brings me great joy. My goal is to create a more inclusive environment that takes our diversity and turns it into something that connects us. I intend to continue this mission and similar social justice work at the college level and beyond.

My plans include having open discussions where everyone has a voice and creating a podcast with interviews of real-life experiences to open more eyes to everyday injustices. I strongly believe sharing experiences is an effective way to influence more people to take action. I will continue my advocacy for inclusivity across all forms of indifference.



Aaliyah Gundani has been playing soccer for seven years and loves to ski in the winter. She volunteers at Youth Challenge and is also a member of a student group on race relations, which promotes inclusivity in response to all forms of discrimination. Aaliyah will attend Ohio State University, where she plans to study real estate on a pre-law track.

Will Linson III

12th Grade, Twinsburg High School

The sound of the horn blasting for miles and miles to be heard, the vibration of the ground beneath my feet upon approach, and the rapid swoosh of the air as the train whizzed by, initiated what would be my lifelong passion for the railway and the locomotives that run on them. I remember walking into my first train expo event, curious and eager to connect with like-minded kids who shared the same excitement for trains as myself, but in turn, I was completely underwhelmed with the lack of diversity. As a second grader, I was one of the youngest true railroad connoisseurs in attendance of nearly a thousand participants. Many kids of similar age had been forced to tag along with an adult, but I had rather begged my mom to take me. Furthermore, I quickly realized I was one of the only people of color in the complex and found myself contemplating “do I even belong here?”.

Through my journey as a young African-American continuously seeking out railroad events, model train shows, and exploring my passion for locomotives, I have paved a unique pathway. I have become a change agent, igniting inspiration for others. While in middle school, I founded the Galaxy Railfanning Club, as it was apparent to me that minorities and local youth lacked an organization to explore interests in the railroad. Railfanning is a hobby in which individuals, known as railfans, observe, photograph, document, and participate within railroad related activities. I started this organization to share my experiences and passion for my locomotive pursuits. This also motivated me to become an active student member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People as an advocate and collaborator to remove barriers regarding minority and racial inequality. What began as an organization of solely myself has grown into a group of more than thirty ambitious and diverse young railroad enthusiasts. I have been able to reach an international audience, expanding my club through YouTube media. My plans are to build this group within college and beyond, encouraging others to be unafraid in exploring and pursuing their dreams.

As a person of color enthralled with engineering and locomotives, I have found it disappointing that African-Americans represent a mere three percent of locomotive and mechanical engineering workforce professionals. My identity as a young black railroad entrepreneur fuels my journey to innovate and become a future locomotive industry leader. My mechanical engineering degree will be influential in my endeavor to change this rhetoric. As a railroad engineering professional, an industry mentor, and change agent, I will remain focused on leading through engagement and compassion. My confidence and perseverance will allow me to stand in the face of adversity, successfully overcoming challenges. Thanks to those who have helped shape my resilience and confidence, I will drive new pathways for those yet to leave their stamp in the world. The most rewarding achievement is to leave a footprint on the lives of others, encouraging their individualized journey for personal success.



Will Linson III is always up for an exciting adventure and connecting with new people. He loves the arts and was a competitive dancer. Will also enjoys photography and videography. His favorite subjects are math, science, computer engineering, and the arts. Will is a fanatic of the railroad—especially locomotives. He wants to become a progressive, cutting-edge locomotive design and manufacturing leader.

Gal Naveh

12th Grade, Orange High School

Navigating life as an Israeli-Jew in the United States, my existence was framed by caution. My parents, deeply protective, cloaked our cultural identity in invisibility. Displaying signs of our heritage, like wearing a Magen David or Hebrew-scripted clothing, was off-limits. I struggled to grasp the necessity of these precautions, unaware of the fears driving my parents' protective measures.

At 15, I challenged these silent rules, propelled by youthful defiance. Wearing an IDF shirt, I felt a surge of pride going to soccer practice, a supposed haven of acceptance for my identity. This sense of belonging was brutally upended later as I joined a men's league game right after practice.

The atmosphere was charged, the competition fierce, and the hostility palpable. Opposing players, kitted in Palestinian shirts, targeted me with increasing aggression. The tackles I endured were physical and laded with animosity. One brutal charge left me sprawled on the ground, the assailant hissing a venomous slur at my Jewish heritage. Their words, laced with contempt, were clear in their intention. By halftime, the accumulation of hate and concern for my safety reached a tipping point. Realizing the situation was beyond just a sport and fearing further harm, I made the decision to leave the game. This wasn't merely a game anymore; it had escalated into a harrowing ordeal of prejudice and identity.

This episode transcended a mere act of hostility; it was a jarring revelation. For the first time, I confronted the reality behind my parents' protective shield. The hostility of the outside world was neither abstract nor distant. It was a tangible, painful experience that left a lasting scar. But within this moment of vulnerability and pain, I discovered an inner strength and a resolve for change.

This ordeal became a catalyst for my active involvement in the community. I began volunteering with the Cleveland Jewish Federation, sharing my experiences and learning from others. This past week, in response to Hamas's attack on Israel, I've been working to raise awareness about the situation. I played a key role in organizing a ceremony attended by both Jews and non-Jews, drawing over a thousand Clevelanders. The ceremony commemorated the hostages taken, innocent lives lost, and women and kids who suffered atrocities. I read out a song that poignantly captured the experiences suffered on October 7th.

I've also been actively discussing with my peers about the issues of anti-Semitism and the prevalent negative attitudes towards Israel. Furthermore, I've dedicated myself to a relentless campaign, displaying posters to advocate for the liberation of Israeli hostages. Each of these actions has strengthened my belief that personal change can indeed lead to societal transformation.

My journey from that soccer field to where I stand now is marked by growth, challenges, and insights. Embodying Etty Hillesum's philosophy, I've learned that changing the world starts with changing oneself. By proudly owning my identity and confronting bias through education and openness, I contribute to a world where understanding and acceptance can flourish, displacing fear and discrimination.

Gal Naveh is a varsity soccer player and two-time team captain. He has volunteered at Ninos de Luiz, an orphanage in the Dominican Republic. Gal interned at Case Western Reserve University in the Chopra Lab. For two years, he has been researching a hormone called asprosin, leading to discoveries in anxiety and Alzheimer's research. He plans to become a doctor and wants to help those without resources to support their families.



Hong Bao Tran Nguyen

12th Grade, Solon High School

That moment in class, when the teacher unknowingly demanded my cancer-stricken classmate to take off her hat, still haunts me. The silence that followed, heavy with pity and discomfort, etched itself into my memory. I couldn't shake off the sight of her embarrassment, the redness in her ears, or the cruel snickers that followed. The image of that girl refused to fade into the background of my mind.

That day in 6th grade changed me. It stirred something inside me, a need to make things right, to alleviate the pain of others. It wasn't enough to simply feel sympathy; I had to act. So, starting small, I convinced my mother to join me in donating our hair every two years. I hoped to bring a glimmer of joy to children battling cancer. With each snip of the scissors, I felt a sense of purpose blossoming within me. Encouraged, I reached out to close family friends, urging them to join our cause. And as the ripple effect of my actions spread, so did my determination to do more.

In 10th grade, I earned my nail license and started to spend time volunteering at nursing homes, offering free cosmetic services to brighten the days of the elderly. Each smile I elicited, each story I listened to, once again fueled my passion to be more.

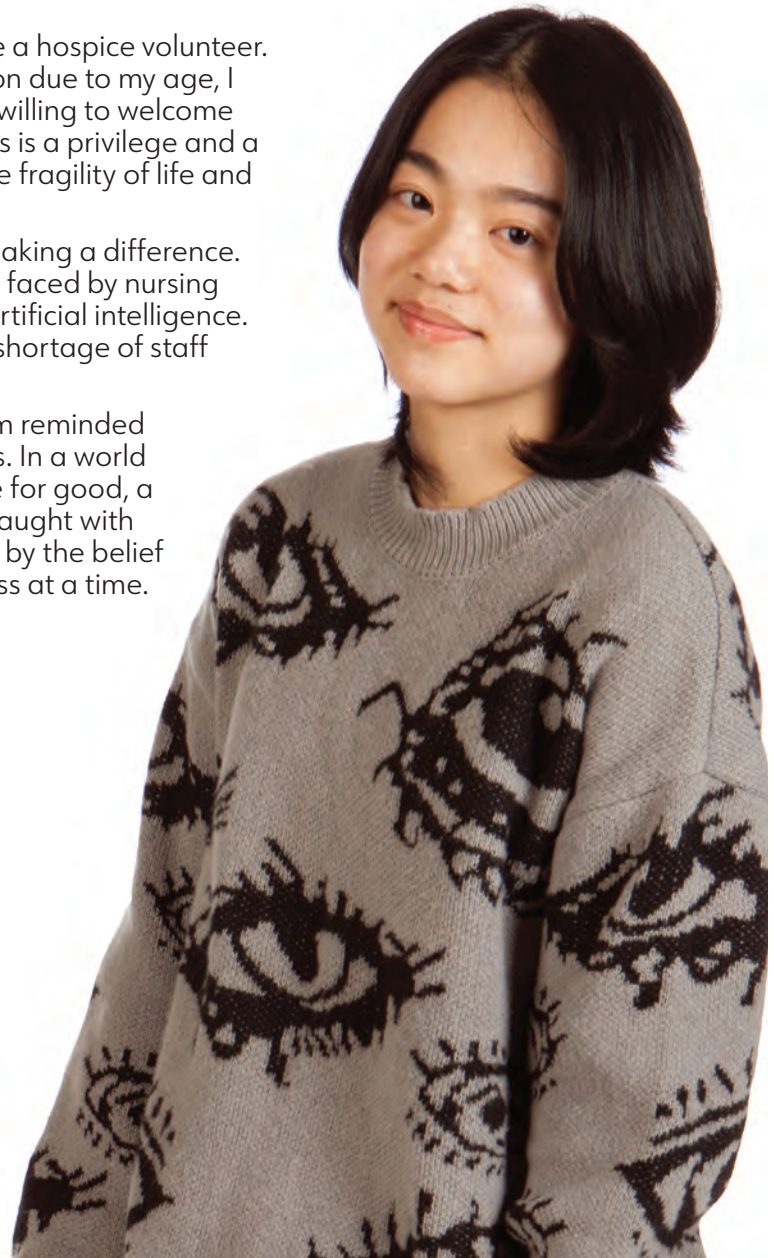
Still, tragedy struck close to home when my grandmother was diagnosed with terminal kidney cancer in Vietnam. Despite my efforts to stay connected through phone calls, I couldn't shake the guilt of not being by her side. She passed away on March 23, 2023. Her passing left a void in my heart, but it also sparked a renewed sense of purpose within me.

Determined to turn my grief into action, I set out to become a hospice volunteer. The road wasn't easy. Despite facing rejection after rejection due to my age, I refused to give up. I persisted until I found an organization willing to welcome my assistance. Being there for people in their final moments is a privilege and a responsibility I don't take lightly. It's my daily reminder of the fragility of life and the importance of compassion.

As I look ahead to the future, I'm determined to continue making a difference. Through my volunteering, I have recognized the challenges faced by nursing homes, and I've set my sights on majoring in robotics and artificial intelligence. My goal? To develop innovative solutions that address the shortage of staff and prevent unintentional neglect in care facilities.

My journey is far from over, but with each step forward, I am reminded of the power of compassion, of the ripple effect of kindness. In a world often marred by injustice and cruelty, I choose to be a force for good, a catalyst for change. And though the road ahead may be fraught with challenges, I walk it with unwavering determination, fueled by the belief that together, we can make a difference, one act of kindness at a time.

Hong Bao Tran Nguyen is the co-editor-in-chief of *Images* magazine at her school. She loves art, coding, and traveling. Hong Bao Tran volunteers at a nursing home and as an art teacher. She plans to pursue a bachelor's degree in computer science and electrical engineering with an accelerated master's in robotics. In the future, Hong Bao Tran hopes to continue to serve her community.



Radha Pareek

11th Grade, Beachwood High School

I can never forget that snowy Sunday afternoon when a little girl wearing ragged clothes, a soft smile, and twinkling eyes walked into my average suburban apartment with her single mother, who cleaned homes like mine for a living. Immediately, I saw a friend in her and pleaded to play. But my aunt warned, "Don't even get close to her!". I was shocked to hear these cold words that instantly shattered my excitement.

I sought to comprehend this incident but found no difference between us that could create a barrier in our friendship. My conscience urged me to question this prejudiced ritual of judging those who might have less available resources than us. I discovered that no one in her family attended college, and her primary motivation to attend school was to get free lunch meals. Learning that her family's starkly different experiences were not a product of discriminatory behavior but rather the silence against discriminatory systems revealed to me our staggering acquiescence to structural inequity. My research exposed me to the pervasive presence of "classism" and "aporophobia" in society.

The following summer, I tutored this girl and her friends, observing they were markedly wise by circumstance, yet their academic proficiency lagged. Nonetheless, I realized I was not only teaching them, but they were teaching me about the underlying societal hatred against their socioeconomic class that bars them access to everything I took for granted.

Realizing that this effort must be executed at a larger scale, this year, I established a 501(C)3 nonprofit, EduRipple, to bridge systemic societal inequality gaps in education. I envision initiating cross-cultural, cross-generational, and cross-disciplinary dialogue to challenge the orthodoxy of curriculum-centered education while connecting students to professional, real-world opportunities irrespective of their socioeconomic status. At the core of this initiative is my belief that education can no longer be a structure; it must be transformed into a powerful engine that propels individuals to emerge from cyclical poverty. An extension to this initiative is my engagement in my Congresswoman's youth advisory council, through which I am developing policy proposals to equitize access to fundamental resources.

Currently, 10% of the global population lives on less than \$1.90 a day, and one billion children live in extreme poverty, which kills about 22,000 of them each day, suggesting poverty is the biggest pandemic of our time. Mahatma Gandhi described poverty as the worst form of violence. We can't eradicate the global economic disparity without altering people's perceptions of poverty. There is an underlying rejection of poor people, and this phobia is manifested at different levels in our society. Discrimination is deeply entwined with poverty, becoming the cause and obstacle in its alleviation.

As Nelson Mandela said, "Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice. It is the protection of a fundamental human right, the right to dignity and a decent life." We must take proactive measures at individual, institutional, and policy levels to eliminate the biased perceptions against people experiencing poverty.

Radha Pareek is an active member of Science Olympiad, Pre-Medical Academy, and Model United Nations. She writes for her school's newspaper and is co-editor-in-chief of its literacy and arts magazine. Radha participated in research at Case Western Reserve University and plans to major in political science or international relations while on a pre-med track. She hopes to offer expertise in medicine and foreign policy to help solve and prevent international conflicts.



Helena Pearl

12th Grade, Hudson High School

“Speak English!” the teacher snapped.

Slouched at a graffitied desk, a young boy looked to her with deep sorrowful brown eyes. As a newly 10 year old Mexican-American immigrant, adjusting to American public school was challenging—especially considering he was in 5th grade yet had never received any prior education. He could not read or write in any language. He struggled with basic math. He only spoke an indigenous dialect of Spanish which he was now being shamed for because he should “speak English”.

When I first started volunteering at a public elementary school, I hadn’t expected to witness a classroom filled with anxiety and frustration. Growing up, school was a safe, fun place for me that fostered my love for learning. It broke me to realize other kids may not have the same educational experience as I did.

Without thinking, I hurried over to the distressed student, blurting,

“Puedo hablar Español también”

A meek downturned smile crept across his face, his eyes now glimmering with hope.

From that day forward, it became my mission to provide him with a quality education and educate others on inclusivity.

Instead of working on multiplication tables like the other kids, the student spent the majority of his day doing trivial activities alone. Because his educational needs differed from others, his teachers treated his education as a burden, opting to let him draw pictures all day instead of learning. I took it upon myself to prioritize his education. I reached out to Spanish-English proficiency departments at my school and volunteer organizations to put together workbooks; I spoke with local libraries regarding language development books; and I held a meeting with the student’s teachers to discuss an educational plan and kind ways that both teachers and fellow classmates can support his academics and transition in America. A village of support quickly amassed for my student.

It’s been amazing to watch his progress throughout this year both academically and socially. Watching the transition of spelling three letter to four letter words or seeing his classmates include him during recess reminds me of the carefree elementary education that every student deserves. There’s been a notable change in his demeanor as well, as he shows a newfound confidence in himself and excitement for school. My student has inspired me in numerous ways; one major lesson I’ve taken away from this experience is to strive to be a part of the solution instead of ignoring problems. In the face of injustice, it’s necessary to use your voice to spark change. I’ll continue to practice this ideology in my aspiring career as a lawyer, using my legal platform to advocate for children’s rights and protections. It’s my mission to ensure every child has a safe childhood and equal access to opportunities, like a quality public education, to nurture them into strong future community members. I will continue to stand up for others when I see injustice and do my part to help change the world for the better.



Helena Pearl works as a volunteer teacher packs food for Feed My Starving Children, and because she’s bilingual, tutors people in Spanish. She taught herself how to play the ukulele, guitar, and piano. Her favorite subjects are government and politics. Helena hopes to study abroad to expand her cultural knowledge and utilize her Spanish skills. She plans to go to law school and fight for children’s rights.

Zoë Schmidt

12th Grade, St. Joseph Academy

NO dancing together. NO using chosen names or pronouns. NO rainbows. Those who break these rules will be "subject to disciplinary action."

These are a few of the statements from the September 2023 Anti-LGBTQ+ policy, decreed by Bishop Edward Malesic and supported by the Catholic Diocese of Cleveland. The day it was implemented, I sat quietly letting hot tears drip down my face. I was shocked at how sudden and unsettling it was.

The policy strictly prohibits any form of self-expression, education, or engagement affiliated with or in support of LGBTQ+ students or their rights. Mandated in over 80 Catholic grade schools, this policy continues to have detrimental effects on the mental, physical, and spiritual well-being of students. Not only this, but the policy moves us backwards as a society and reverses all the progress we have made towards inclusivity.

After four years of watching my peers work tirelessly to create safe spaces in our school community, it was all going to be ripped away. Usually, I am a loud cryer: I stomp around and make a commotion. But this time, I was quiet, as a storm of emotions passed through me. I felt helpless.

Luckily, soon after the policy was published, our school announced that, since we were independent from the Diocese and fell under the jurisdiction of the religious order affiliated with our school, we would not be implementing the policy. I felt grateful... but not relieved. It can be difficult to imagine the circumstances that others go through if we don't experience them ourselves. So, I knew that outrage would not be widely felt at our school if we as a community did not have to face this harsh new reality. I did not want just my peers to be safe from discrimination. I did not want just my peers to feel safe to express themselves and be respected. I wanted that for every student. I was tired of stomping around and crying silently. It was time to do something.

After collaborating with our school's GSA leaders, we worked for months planning a peaceful demonstration in opposition to Bishop Malesic's harmful policy. Outside the Cleveland Public Auditorium during the Bishop's Eucharistic Revival mass, which all Catholic schools were invited to attend, we held signs and chanted words of encouragement for queer and trans youth as we demanded that the bishop repeal his policy.

This experience has pushed me to become a vocal member in fighting for the rights and dignity of all students in my school community and in Greater Cleveland as well. Currently, the GSA leaders and I have taken initiative to create a safe space online. This platform allows students to share experiences of LGBTQ+ intolerance that they've encountered or witnessed, as well as changes they would like to see in their schools, as we continuously work toward the revocation of the policy. My hope is that our actions will inspire change that ripples through not just our local community but also the global community.

Zoë Schmidt is interested in art, social justice, and engaging with her community. Her favorite subject is literature. She loves analyzing texts from new perspectives. Zoë is a leader of Labre Ministry, a program that provides supplies for unhoused community members. She also volunteers at her school's art camp for children. She plans to major in public health or another medical pathway that serves marginalized populations.



Skylar Sidwell

12th Grade, Rhodes College and Career Academy

Small Battlefield

Women fight objectification everyday. Lifelong comments from males had made me feel objectified. I couldn't even walk to the corner store in biker shorts without being catcalled, whistled at, or honked at. Sexual harassment made me uncomfortable in my own skin. Shamed by the male gaze, I stopped wearing skirts, dresses, and makeup. I started hiding my body in jeans, joggers, and pajama pants. Finally, the day came when I'd had enough.

I was in a hot gymnasium in my high school. We females had removed our jackets to reveal tank tops. Mind you, we were not trying to display our bodies, we were just trying to beat the heat. That's when a male student told us to cover ourselves. He wore a tank top and sagging joggers, yet he had the audacity to criticize us. We were trapped by societal double standards. Plainly, men could reveal but women had to conceal. This incident made me angry enough to take action. So, I planned a school-wide protest.

To prove our point, we wore shorts and tank tops. We painted red hands on our bodies to mark the places we'd been shamed by word or deed. We created posters and raised our voices. As we marched through our school, we reclaimed our power with each step. Soon, male students joined our march. Our chant got louder as more people joined in. Chants of "My Body, My Choice" rang throughout our school.

Abruptly, our protest was over: our time cut short by our principal directing us back to class. I was still angry. I wanted change but I wasn't being heard. My principal took me to her office and spoke to me like an adult. I spoke and she listened. As a result of the public protest I'd planned, it was determined that the boys in our school would follow a strict dress code equal to that of the females. We won a small battle that day.

In her diary Etty Hillesum wrote, "I feel like a small battlefield, in which the problems of our time are being fought out." Hillesum fought for the rights of women to express themselves freely. Reflecting on the words of this woman who lost her life at Auschwitz, I realize every woman is fighting a battle. From planning this protest, I learned that our generation must speak out. We must continue to guard the rights of women as Hillesum guarded them during her lifetime.

Now I realize stopping hate is a lifelong process. I plan to become a gynecological nurse practitioner to heal victims of sexual assault and domestic violence. I will empower my female patients by showing them that men do not determine our fate in this world. So far, my life's journey has taken me from organizing a public protest to preparing for a career as a medical professional. Today I see myself as a soldier on a small battlefield. Here I stand—ready to wage war to stop the hate.



Skylar Sidwell has played golf for three years and has participated in the senate for two years. She is also the manager of the boys' volleyball team. She spends her time working and taking AP classes. Skylar looks forward to finishing college and traveling. In the future, she would like to become a nurse to help those who desperately need it and to write a book.

Elizabeth Chen

10th Grade, Berea-Midpark High School

One of my fondest memories is learning how to make dumplings with my mom—particularly chive dumplings. I loved the entire process that came with preparing them—from going out into our backyard to cut fresh chives, scooping the filling onto delicate rounds of dough, folding them into elegant shapes, to, of course, eating them in the end. Dumplings have been an integral part of my identity as a Chinese-American girl since the day I was born, and I found food as a way to share my culture with others. So, in first grade, when my mom packed chive dumplings for my lunch, I was delighted. However, my classmates were not quite as excited.

In my class, I was the only Chinese student. My food, my culture, and even my very existence were “weird” to them. When I opened my lunch box, I immediately heard gagging noises and mean remarks. And the treatment did not stop there. Some kids would ask me condescending questions about my culture. They would pester me about my family members’ names, as if the idea of a Chinese family was some exotic show. When I told them my parents’ names, they would only caricature the names and mock them. Even as I tried to teach them how to pronounce the Chinese names properly, they kept “messing up” until I gave up. To them, my language was just a joke. My family was just a joke, all because we were Chinese.

Looking back, what shocks me the most is not just what they said, but how young they were when they said those mean things, intentional or not. A devastating effect of this is that, since children are rather impressionable, they may be more inclined to give up a part of themselves just to appease their peers.

To try to lessen this issue in my community, I have advocated for inclusion to younger kids, because I believe that these seeds of hate are planted in childhood and will only be further nurtured if nothing is done. I participated in and spoke at the Say It Summit, an event that promotes diversity and inclusion to my school district’s fourth graders. I wanted to make a positive impact on these kids and show them that it was okay to be different and how we should all be accepting of each other.

Nobody should feel excluded just for being themselves. Little-me did not have this kind of reassurance that she was not “bad” for being different. I truly believe that little-me would have felt much better about her culture and heritage if she had the support, and I want to be the person that little-me did not have at her time of struggling. I strive to bring inclusivity and diversity to my community, whether by being mindful of my own actions or by participating in events that advocate those ideas, because we need to plant seeds of kindness, not hate, in the hearts of young children.

Elizabeth Chen enjoys drawing, playing violin, and spending time with her loved ones. She is co-captain of the Speech & Debate team and serves her school community as a member of the Student Council, Class Executive Board, and Orchestra Service Council. From academic papers to short stories, Elizabeth loves to write and hopes to empower others with her words.



Ayesha Faruki

10th Grade, Mentor High School

I remember standing in the hallway at summer camp, around the age of six or seven. I was laughing with a girl that I'd befriended in the few days past. I don't remember what we were talking about.

"You know, my mommy told me not to talk to Black people," she said matter-of-factly. "But I like you. You're nice." She beamed at me. I froze, my lips beginning to downturn. I stammered, but before the jumbled words in my head could escape my mouth, the counselor rounded us up. I looked down at my skin, the color of chai, that had been passed down to me from countless prior generations in India. I cannot explain to you how many times I've replayed this memory in my head; the details have been embedded in my mind. Even as a kid in elementary school, so many aspects of this amazed me: that there were parents in this world who told their children not to speak to someone just because of their skin color. That a young girl with no fault to her own could misrecognize my race just because my skin was darker than hers.

Children inherently didn't discriminate; it was that day that I learned that it was often environment and upbringing with a pure lack of knowledge that embedded such hate. I was raised in an immigrant household. I could point to India on an Asian map in second grade only for a girl to say, "No wonder you look Chinese!"

As the people around me began to learn about these cultures, all of a sudden superficial things began to explain things about me. Suddenly my ethnicity explained my math scores and academics, undermining the effort I had put in. Our lives and accomplishments are often overlaid with prejudice, stereotypes, and ignorance.

It took one mother's hatred and stereotyping towards Black individuals that led her to teach her daughter something wrong. But in the end, it took a girl to look past that and view humanity for what it is, without much knowledge, despite her mother.

As a kid, I promised myself that I would never make anyone else feel the way that some people made me feel. Literature and STEM are two of my passions; in both of these, I want to spread awareness. When I read, I'm submerged in diverse topics, cultures, and people; I want to learn the most that I can. When I wrote a novel titled *Whisper* at age 11, I wrote up a diverse stage of characters. When I published it at 13, I hoped people like me could see themselves in those characters. This summer, I founded a nonprofit that provides accessible STEM education in hopes that students from diverse backgrounds can beat stereotypes and find unity in the things they love. I don't know where that girl from camp is now. I do know that she left a lasting impact on me: something I can utilize to make an impact on others.



Ayesha Faruki wrote a novel, *Whisper*, at age eleven and published it by thirteen. She competes on the Math League, Speech & Debate, and Science Olympiad teams. She also writes for the school newspaper, plays on the girl's tennis team, and plays viola. Ayesha won her district's Congressional App Challenge for a blood type phenotype predictor. She plans to go to college for STEM and continue to serve students through a nonprofit summer camp.

Zoe Klingshirn

9th Grade, Firelands High School

“Do you think she’d be cuter if I tore her hair out and forced it to her, cut her back and yanked her spine and string her entrails on a cross?” This was one message in a string of threats a boy sent to my friends after I ended our relationship. He was infuriated that I had stopped allowing his emotional and sexual abuse. As a result, I was harassed. I was afraid of leaving home and even more afraid of going to school.

I reported the message to my school’s social worker. I explained to her with tears running down my face that I was afraid he was going to kill me. I was disturbed by the number of videos and pictures he sent to me depicting him shooting guns and holding knives. I was more disturbed by his never-ending threats of violent torture. The principal convinced me to file a police report after she was made aware of the messages. Agreeing to file the report was the most difficult decision I have ever made.

The court process was agonizing. I had to prove everything he did to me wasn’t one dramatic lie. I was forced to relive the trauma over and over again during the ensuing trial. The pain was unbearable and for some time, I truly felt as though I might never recover. The reality of the situation is that I am lucky. Some victims do not get the privilege of receiving justice. Some do not even get to report what happened to them. The most terrifying realization of injustice that has ever crossed my mind is that sometimes victims do not receive help.

To counter this injustice, I put effort into teaching my peers about toxic relationships. In 8th grade, I chose to do a presentation about bringing awareness to unhealthy relationships. Everyone knows abusive relationships exist, but not everyone knows how to stand up against them. The goal is not to tell people about abuse, but to inform them on the signs and how to report it. Survivors are afraid of being discredited or even killed for exposing their abuser. Unfortunately, nothing will happen to the guilty if we do not stand up for ourselves.

The future of dating violence is fully dependent on our actions. My message is not to talk about injustice. My message is to scream about it. Scream about every rape “joke,” every unsolicited comment, and every dehumanizing touch. Injustice does not die on its own. It is up to us to call out these disgusting behaviors. Finding my voice is important, but encouraging others to use their voice is just as important. Another brave action is another person who won’t feel like they’re all alone as they walk into that room. Sit down in that chair. And vow to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

Zoe Klingshirn loves writing and hiking. She spends most of her free time playing *Just Dance* and watching *Impractical Jokers*. She is a fan of Michael Jackson and knows all his songs by heart. Zoe’s dream destination is Moscow or anywhere in Germany. Zoe plans to become a writer known for poems and short stories. She also plans to pursue a career in the mental health field to help others, such as a therapist or social worker.



Sampson Parker

9th Grade, Garrett Morgan School of Leadership and Innovation

In 2021, I came out as a transgender man. I was 12. I always had people treating me like a clueless child who didn't know what they wanted; in truth, I was scared and upset that my peers would never truly see me as a boy. It was around the 8th grade when I became severely depressed. I was failing my classes and was experiencing harassment almost daily. I remember being at the local park near my middle school. I was skating when I was approached by a group of boys from my class. They would call me by my past name and ask me questions about my genitalia; I felt hopeless. All I ever wanted was to be treated like a normal boy, not a transgender boy, but a normal boy.

The scars from my past have left me with a reserved personality. I became depressed and stopped going out. I wanted to end it all at one point; but instead of giving up, I decided I wouldn't give my oppressors the chance to act like they felt bad for me. I dreamed of my family and friends at my funeral, and the ones who made me do it standing in the back pretending this wasn't their fault. I never wanted to give them the chance to pretend what they did never happened. Because of this, I began to change for the better. I got my grades up once I began high school, I began therapy again, and improved my mental health. I don't see my past bullies anymore, but sometimes I wish they could see me now and prove that what they did didn't break me. People tend to thank the people who hurt them for making them stronger. I don't feel that way. I didn't need to be on the brink of suicide to change. Those people who made me feel the worst I could didn't elevate me; I did that.

Nowadays, I focus my attention on the rights of young trans people in Ohio. I want to fight for the kids who don't have the supportive family I have. With the recent debates on House Bill 68, I fear I may not survive. I had always planned on starting hormones at age 16, but with trans-affirming healthcare in the hands of the Ohio senate, that plan seems useless. I have surrounded myself with individuals who will fight with and for me. I hope to one day speak in front of the people who voted yes on 68, and show them that I am not confused, I am only trying to ensure my happiness with medical care. I wish I could show them who they are hurting with the enactment of this bill. Until then, I will write letters and spread attention on social media. I use my experience of hate to stand on and spread love.



Sampson Parker loves musical theater. He is currently rehearsing four days a week for his role in *Frozen* at Near West Theatre. He also loves English and art. In his spare time, he participates in the Dungeons and Dragons Club at school. Due to his love for research and writing, Sampson would like to become a journalist.

Simon Factora

8th Grade, St. Albert the Great

Have you ever wanted to be invisible? I have. When I played hockey, I was repeatedly called racial slurs in the locker room; I wanted to be invisible. When I was in sixth grade, I was on the school bus, and I was being called racial slurs; I again wanted to be invisible. In eighth grade, I was repeatedly called racial slurs; I once again wanted to be invisible. I am a Filipino-American with a speech impediment. I attend a predominantly white school, and this is my story of how I became seen.

When I was born, I had a traumatic brain injury which caused me to have very limited mobility and a speech impediment. I have overcome much of the results of this, but my speech impediment still follows me today. Many times I have been told to “speak English” because they saw the color of my skin and could not understand me. I would feel bad about myself and not talk to people. My voice was silenced. I became an easy target for hate speech. When I would stand up for myself, many times I was told to shake hands with the person who hurt me. Many times nothing was done to help. Many times I have felt like I was unprotected because there was no plan of action for situations involving racism. I am changing that.

I have talked to my school counselor and together we wrote an amendment to the current disciplinary plan of action for anything related to racial discrimination, bias, and stereotyping in the student handbook. This amendment to the current disciplinary policy will educate the student on cultural sensitivity and the harm of prejudice and discrimination. I believe that most students do not intend to be racist. They do not know why what they are saying is racist or how it hurts, not only who they are saying it to, but also their entire heritage. I believe that through this cultural education, the student will gain understanding and empathy.

Next, I plan to work with my school counselor on developing social and emotional education classes that target situations involving race. I want to educate not just students but also staff. By educating students, I hope to prevent future students of color from experiencing racism in my school. By educating staff, I hope to give students of color understanding and compassionate adults to turn to if needed.

I want to protect the future students of color at my school by changing the overall culture of my school. When I was younger, I wanted to be invisible. I did not have a voice. If I want a school where all students of color can be seen and heard, I must be seen and heard. I am no longer invisible. I will continue to work toward a school where students are seen for not what they are, but for who they are.



Simon Factora is a STAR rank in his Boy Scout troop. He was inducted into the Order of the Arrow, a scouting honor society. He is also an altar server at his parish and is active in youth ministries. Simon wants to pursue a future in nursing and work in an emergency room to help people during vulnerable times.

Heeba R. Sossey Alaoui

8th Grade, Beachwood Middle School

I thought I was joining a circle of friends bound by the love of the game. Little did I know that my religion would become a barrier in this seemingly open arena of sportsmanship. The initial practice felt promising—a blur of introductions and smiles. But beneath the surface, a storm was brewing. Whispers and hushed conversations lingered, and I sensed the curious glances directed at me as if I were an alien. The whispers soon materialized into actions, and the friendships I thought I had began to erode. During practices, an invisible wall formed around me. The ball conveniently avoided my reach, passes were strategically skipped, and my mistakes were met with laughter that reinforced their unity. I became an outsider, not only because of my religion but also because I was the “new girl” disrupting their established dynamics.

The silent exclusion cut deep. No one said it out loud, but I could feel it in every practice and every game. It wasn't about my skills; it was about something beyond my control: my faith. Many emotions swirled within me—anger, hurt, and confusion. Why should my religion dictate my place on a volleyball team? The game should be about teamwork and skill, not about religious beliefs. My experience wasn't just about personal struggle; it unveiled a wider issue of prejudice and intolerance. This journey taught me the importance of resilience. I've learned that victory lies not only in winning games but also in eradicating exclusion, and creating a team where everyone has an equal place. I didn't take action then, but looking back, I recall the struggles of being excluded due to my background, and in the face of exclusion, I held onto a hope—a hope for change.

As I continue my athletic journey, I aim to seek opportunities to support and guide other athletes, ensuring that they don't encounter the same exclusion I faced. My goal is to actively cultivate inclusive environments where every athlete, regardless of their background or beliefs, feels valued and respected. I will do this by giving the same level of respect to every player and listen and display empathy to all athletes. It's about instilling hope for change and creating a culture of inclusivity so that athletes can grow and thrive in an atmosphere that celebrates diversity and sustains the true spirit of sportsmanship.



Heeba Sossey Alaoui loves volleyball and plays for Force, a club where she pushes herself to new heights in the sport. She also finds joy in playing the piano and violin, drawing, and theater. Heeba aspires to become a lawyer and to advocate for others. She believes a career in law will allow her to continue to make a meaningful difference in people's lives.

Scarlet Grimm

7th Grade, North Ridgeville Academic Center

“So, how were you born?”, she asked me when I mentioned my mom being a lesbian. “Well ummm, uhhh, I guess my parents loved each other?”, I responded. I was not expecting to be quizzed during the school day about how my parents conceived children. The question came up because I had brought up that I had fun weekend plans with my mom and her girlfriend.

When I bring this experience up most people would think, “Oh they were just curious; it’s no big deal.” This question ended up making me feel like I was walking on eggshells, and that if I said something wrong I would break them more. It’s ok for people to be curious about things, but most of the time they forget how it would make the person on the other end of the question feel. For instance, if someone mentioned that their mom and DAD were taking them somewhere fun, most people would not have responded with, “How were you born?” immediately after you shared the plans. People normally don’t do this when it matches their view of the world, because questioning what’s normal isn’t socially acceptable.

When people share their different perspectives or experiences, their view on what is socially acceptable may change. Even if their understanding may increase, that doesn’t mean that they’re responsive to change. If they are still treating that group of people differently, they may end up putting them on a pedestal, thinking that they can do no wrong, saying, “Putting people on pedestals is only benefitting them, so I don’t know why I should stop.” Most people experiencing bias will find the experience uncomfortable. In conclusion, you should try to avoid any large biases whether positive or negative, because people want to be treated like everyone else.

If I’m ever asked this question again in the future, I might answer by saying, “That is a really invasive question; I would prefer not to answer it,” because to help other people change their views in order to change their actions, I must first change how I react. In order for people to change their actions, first they must realize that what they are doing is wrong. When I was originally asked this question, I did not stand up for myself, or let the person know how her question made me feel. Now I would answer the question differently, since I have learned from this experience, to help reduce bias.



Scarlet Grimm enjoys school, art, making crafts, playing video games, and reading in their spare time. They also participate in a club at school dedicated to helping people feel like they belong. A fun fact about Scarlet is that they love hermit crabs. They hope to sell their art someday and have a career in engineering.

Rivka Pasternak

7th Grade, Fuchs Mizrachi School

In the summer of 5th grade, I went to an all-orthodox Jewish camp. I come from a traditional Jewish home, so this was an opportunity to connect with other girls from similar backgrounds.

One day, another girl and I were assigned clean-up duty, so we had to stay inside while everyone else left to have their own downtime. Five minutes later, the girl I was working with muttered something under her breath, so I instinctively asked her if anything was wrong. "You're not Jewish enough," she replied. It took me a couple of moments to comprehend what was being said to me. Hurtful thoughts clouded my mind as I paused and looked away from the person in front of me. "What do you mean, 'I'm not Jewish enough'?", I whispered to myself. Looking back, I shouldn't have said anything because it only hurt my feelings more to hear her respond: "Well, you don't focus on wearing sleeves that cover your elbows, and I bet I know more Torah than you know." Normally, I would brush something like that off, but these insults hit close to home. As I slept that night, I sadly couldn't get her voice, the image of disgust written on her face, and her crossed arms out of my head.

It was then, in the middle of the night, that I realized why hate grows. People are very quick to look down on people who look different than themselves. In this situation, it was clear to me that the length of my sleeves mattered more to her than my love for Israel or for learning Torah. The world becomes a better place when we look beyond what a person looks like on the outside and focus on how that person contributes to his or her community or what they can offer others. It goes beyond clothing and customs. We should not let these differences between us blind us from what we have in common to help change the world for the better. If you see that every person in the world has value, then you stop hate from spreading.

What truly matters more: a person's character, or what a person looks like?

Ever since that moment in time, I never want to make anyone feel the way that I felt. I make sure to be more open and humble towards other people's opinions, religion, race, and values. Now, when I look at someone who looks different from me I pause, make sure not to make a snap judgment, and give the person a chance to let me see who they are on the inside.

When we can appreciate the value of every person we encounter, we stop hate from spreading.



Rivka Pasternak loves to read and write. She is a member of her school's book club, where she gets to talk about all her favorite books. A fun fact about Rivka is that she is a thrill seeker and loves roller coasters. She volunteers at Revere Road Synagogue, where she helps cook and set up for events. In the future, Rivka plans to continue pursuing English and Jewish Studies.

Vandy Ickes

6th Grade, Hudson Middle School

“So, who do you think is the ugliest?”

“It’d DEFINITELY be her.”

In August 2022, the start of school brought with it the usual jitters, but this year was different—we were the big fifth graders, perched atop the elementary school hierarchy. Excitement danced through the air like a whirlwind of butterflies in our stomachs. Amidst the collective nervous energy, the school bus gradually settled into its daily routine, and that’s when the heavy clouds of gossip began to seep throughout the school air.

Gossip. It seemed to be all anyone wanted to talk about. I was never able to escape the enclosed school building of whispers and rumors that swirled around me, but I made the decision not to bat an eye at the cloud’s whispers. However, one day, as my quiet classroom was engrossed in reading, my friend overheard a particularly venomous conversation among a group of students. It hit me like a ton of bricks. “Ugly”—such a simple word, yet it held the power to shatter a person’s self-esteem. Those four letters echoed in my mind every time I looked in the mirror. “Ugly hair, ugly eyes, ugly face.” I began to internalize these harsh judgments, constantly comparing myself to unrealistic ideals. Gradually, these negative thoughts receded into the background, though most stubbornly persisted.

Society had set its standards, dictating that unless you had a button nose, big eyes, and flawless skin, you couldn’t lay claim to being the most beautiful person on Earth. Yet, we seemed to have forgotten the lessons we were taught as children—that no two individuals are identical; everyone is born different.

While some might receive accolades for their physical appearance, it doesn’t mean they radiate beauty through their intelligence or personality. I firmly believe that beauty can be found in anyone; they just need a little encouragement and a few compliments. My mission is to provide that support and help those who’ve endured similar struggles to feel better about their appearance.

Etty Hillesum once said, “I no longer believe that we can change anything in the world until we have first changed ourselves.”

If everyone were to stand on the sidelines and watch, nothing would change. And the cloud of negativity would seep into every crack and corner in the home we call earth. So even just complimenting a person and congratulating them on a success they made can make a difference, just like how a small negative act can. Beauty standards should not be a heavy burden that haunts you or lingers in your thoughts like a ghostly presence. Instead, it should be something you proudly wear, like a ribbon of self-acceptance, something for which you receive compliments. Just as we offer compliments to others, we should radiate beauty and encouragement ourselves. Beauty belongs to all of us. It’s time for all of us to become beacons of light to reflect on one another. Let’s stop the hate together.

Vandy Ickes has been swimming competitively for the Hudson Explorers Aquatics Team since she was five. She plays trombone, is a member of the Ski Club, and loves to draw portraits of people. Every year, Vandy fosters kittens from the Humane Society to help them find forever homes. She is interested in skincare and hopes to pursue a career as a dermatologist.



Elizabeth Jia

6th Grade, Hudson Middle School

This was the most important game in the pre-season. We couldn't lose this game, or we wouldn't be in the AA bracket in our hockey league. With us trailing 3-4 in the third period with one minute left, I was put on the ice. We pulled our goalie, and the other team had a penalty. It was a 6-on-4. The puck went to our defenseman on the face-off. He shot and missed. The other team shot it down the ice, and we restarted with 30 seconds left. I intercepted the puck and skated it up. I tried to shoot it, but I missed, and the puck went in the corner. Once I regained possession, I wheeled around and fed it in front of the net. My teammate shot it in with time running out. Everyone gathered around him but seemed to forget about me. They hugged each other, and I was standing outside, watching their moment of joy. I felt excluded but congratulated my teammate and skated away. I thought I would feel better off of the ice, but it was the same in the locker room.

"Chris saved us!"

"Yeah!"

I felt very small, like I was insignificant to our tie. Although we didn't lose, I felt a pit inside me. Would I ever feel included? Again and again, the celebration continued. I hoped someone would say, "great assist," or "good job!" But I was so wrong.

I'm the only girl on my team, and I often feel excluded. All the boys hug when someone scores, and it's awkward to include me in it. This is why I play on a part-time girls' team as well. However, I need to fit in with the boys on my team, since I'll have to play with them in high school. I feel excluded everywhere, on and off ice. Before games, the boys play a game of football. I've learned to stop trying to play. I'm left out of activities, even small games. At team meals, I also battle internally where to sit. If I sit with the adults, I'll be bored, but if I sit with the boys, I'll make everything awkward. Feeling left out hurts no matter what the setting is.

While riding home, I realized that people often feel how I felt at that moment, and that I might inadvertently cause the same pain to other people. I told myself that any time I see someone who is feeling left out, I will invite them in, so not so many people will have to feel what I felt. That pit that had been there in that moment should never have to come back to me or go to anyone else. If people try to see how many people are hurt by this and change it, we can stop exclusion, one moment of loneliness at a time, making the world a better place, and letting people feel accepted. So join hands everybody, and Stop the Hate.

Elizabeth Jia loves to dance, sing, and play piano, hockey, and golf. She also enjoys drawing and reading. Roald Dahl is her favorite author, especially his novel *Fantastic Mr. Fox*. She would like to become a lawyer, entrepreneur, or engineer who writes novels on the side. A fun fact about Elizabeth is that she loves all animals—especially dogs!



Kai Jones

11th Grade, Glenville High School

“Hide Behind your Jokes”

People think because you laugh and joke that you ok
but they don't know what you go through day to day
You duck the cops and on point for the opps
because you got to make it home

It's a hard life to live
when the ones you thought you will be rich with are dead or in jail
and some changed on me
But I'm gonna run it up
till I can't no more
and as bad as it feels to cut some boyz off
it just has to be done.

Then on top of them boyz changing up on you
You trying to get back for your big brother
that you want to be right here with you
but god had something else in mind
not only did I lose a brother

I also took another loss in the same year
I lost a grandma that pushed me to be better
she made me put my anger and sadness
into something I really love now
my business,
my mobile carwash and detailing.
My grandma always told me to have a Plan B
and that's why I haven't given up on school
because I can't stop hearing her say,
“Boy, you do anything you want to
but you got to do two things-
finish school and get some type of degree
and treat your mom with respect.”
I'd tell her, “I'm gettin it done, slowly but surely.”

(Continued on next page)

And last but not least they got my dad down the road
eaten cold cuts on wet bread
and I really want the car wash biz to go right
so I can keep him out the street
he only did it before because he had to make it happen
he didn't have what I have too
From the clothes to the shoes
so he went and ran it up the way people really don't like
I'm talking about kicking doors
making all the biggest gangsters get on the floor
but when he get out he will never kick another door
because I'm showing him there's more

And well, all that being said,
just cause a person is joking and playing
don't mean that they life is great
everyone has something going on
so watch what you say
and remember
Just cause I joke, don't mean
I ain't fighting demons at home

Kai Jones is on his high school's baseball team. He loves washing and detailing cars, a skill he learned from his granddad. In the future, he plans to become an entrepreneur who gives back to his community. As a young Black man, Kai believes it's important to never forget his background. He looks forward to his future with the support of his family and loved ones.



Mae Mohar

11th Grade, Lakewood High School

“Dolls in Sweaters”

I'm a China doll that wears a red and yellow sweater.
One of the thickest wool.
Wrapping me in vivid moments.
A security blanket of the past that drapes over my shoulders.
It keeps my heart at 101°.
I thought of it as fuel to my fire.
Frustration could keep me going.
But like a bird, I was trapped in a cage, wildly beating for freedom.
But as a doll I cannot move, the temperature rises.

To dwell, to think, to feel.
My mind becomes hauntingly beautiful, the shining garden of Eden
I am willing the loose ends of my prison to unravel.
Each inch of yarn unraveled is another chain unlinked.
I let go of the hate I felt towards those who hate.
I let go of the moment I was asked to see my “Made in China” brand.
I let go of the stares my family receives daily.
Just because I do not mirror my mother.
I let go of the memories of “friends” pulling on their eyes and mocking an accent I don't have.
I break out of the stereotyped box I felt confined to.

The sweater unravels.
But the wool isn't thick, for there are many layers of yarn.
There were layers of red and yellow.
Deeper down, red white and blue.
The final layer is just for me. It is green, for inner peace, for creativity, for life.
Various hues, expressing the entire Earth.
And then the final thread falls.

(Continued on next page)

Bare to shining porcelain, my memories lay organized before me, the ultimate game of solitaire.
I look at them, admire them, appreciate them.
I roll the colors into neat little skeins and tuck them in my pocket.
To forever be carried, but not to be seen.
To be a part but not all of me.
Without the weight, without the heat, I see that.
I am more than yellow, and my spirit shines as bright as the Sun.



Mae Mohar loves to learn and read. She is a long-distance runner and captain of her school's cross-country team and indoor and outdoor track teams. Mae is an officer of the German Club, a member of her school's National Honor Society chapter, and the Academic Challenge Team. She hopes to study epidemiology and virology in college and conduct research for a hospital or the World Health Organization.

Adele Wentzel

10th Grade, Lakewood High School

“the Bully and I”

the Bully goes over to a kid standing alone by the
wall with a smile that says don't
worry, I'm not lonely
[yet] he asks
her name, makes it into a
joke—a bad joke—and
not the nice kind
and I wonder if I should stop him but I don't

a Group of Girls in the grade below the
Bully and I walk over to where he's
standing, they're decorated with bracelets and
hair that swishes, clothes made of
colors and eyes that sparkle, draped with a sense of
belonging that rears its glittery head when they make the Bully into a
joke—a funny joke—but
not the nice kind
and I wonder if I should stop them but I don't

the Bully has no friends but knows
everyone, walks up to them though they don't want
him there, asks them “do you like
squirrels?”
but they don't respond, they ask him
does he have a crush on
squirrel girl? his cheeks
blush red, he finds his next victim then he
leaves when they tell him to

(Continued on next page)

the Bully has never been mean to me, he asks if I like squirrels, I tell him I do, he asks how I'm doing, I tell him I'm fine, and we talk for three minutes until the conversation runs dry because neither of us know how conversations work

I go home and tell my sister "today the Bully talked to me" and I tell her I think that he's sad but she laughs like the girls did and tells me how weird he is, but she says it like it's a bad thing, and for the first time I wonder if it is, and I wonder what would happen if it turns out the Bully and I are two of a kind.

Adele Wentzel is passionate about making art. She has sung in choirs since she was young and is also interested in theater. In the future, Adele would like to pursue a career as a therapist. She also has dreams of moving to the middle of nowhere, becoming a hermit, and spending all her time making art and raising chickens.



Anissa Halmaoui

7th Grade, Hudson Middle School

“The Plastic Cup”

The day that makes me feel the most guilty
I’ve ever felt
started happily.

I was walking to the grocery store with my babysitter,
bouncing on my toes,
when I turned a corner
and saw a woman in a tattered coat
sitting on the sidewalk.

Her wrinkled hands,
shivering from the biting wind,
were gripping a plastic cup.

On the wall next to her was a propped cardboard sign
that stated in bold permanent marker,
“Help! I have children and need money. We are
refugees.”

She was desperately begging
the people who passed her for money,
but the subjects of her attention
bustled past her
and spared her no glance.

I urgently tugged on my babysitter’s arm and whispered,
“Wait! Why are you still walking? We have to help her!”

She just grabbed my hand and
kept hurrying to the store.

“Please, ma’am, help me,”
said the woman in a tired voice that showed
she knew what the answer would be.

My babysitter just mumbled an apology,
and walked into the store.

I tried to look at the poor woman

and apologize with my eyes,
but I was so ashamed,
I couldn’t bring myself to look at
the woman whose eyes
followed me into the store.

I trudged through the store with my babysitter,
my heart heavy with sadness and shame.
My conscience tried to pull me back to the woman,
but even if I had gone back,
I had nothing to offer her.

I had no money,
The adult I was with was the only one who could help
her.

When our errand was finally done,
we walked back outside of the store,
and this time the woman
didn’t even bother asking us for money.
She wasn’t asking anyone anymore.

She had lost hope,
and now slumped against the wall,
her eyes dull.

Humanity’s greed and selfishness had broken her.

Looking back on that day,
I realize how horrible my behavior was.
I could have helped the woman.
I could have nodded,
or looked her
in the eyes.

(Continued on next page)

I could have treated her like a human being,
instead of a mere obstacle in
the path of
my life.

I could have taken the time to
stop
and fully apologize to the woman.
I was a coward,
but I will not be one again.
I will be the difference in someone's day,
the daisy in a field of poppies.
I will be the light in the dark,
the change
in the world.



Anissa Halmaoui was born in Paris, France and lived there for ten years. Her favorite place to visit is Morocco, where her father is from. She is a member of her school's show choir and track team. Anissa is fascinated by the ocean and wants to become a marine biologist. She also wants to be a part-time writer and hopes to live in many locations.

Mia Teusan

6th Grade, Hudson Middle School

“The Twisted Tiger”

The inky black tiger
that twists you inside,
The wicked cackle that echos in your mind,
Tears coming down, tearing your insides,
Making you wonder if you should hide,

In first grade,
I was given little digs,
Little things that cut deep,
Punches and threats,
Tears and cries,
I wonder, who saw these discourtesies,
These wicked, bitter, terrible things,
The beginning of bullying,

A weeping willow tree in the field,
Sways gently,
It pains the nature to see the way things happen,
A leaf falls off each time you cry,
Eventually this tree will die,
This is the works of bullying,

In fourth grade,
I was given a slap to the face,
A bottle of water,
Squirted and splashed,
Soaking up my joy,
Wetting my face,
Taking me to a lonely place,
The effects of bullying,

An isolated cactus,
Spikes pushing against the wind,
Living in solitude,
In a mournful mood,
The outcome of bullying,

In fifth grade I was given a pound to the heart,
A sting that said, “You’re not that pretty!”
The girl had stung me deep,
She decided to say it flat to my face,
She sent her thoughts in a simple classroom,
Once full of joy,
Then gone,
Starting to move on,
Stepping away from bullying,

A weed in a garden,
Starting to be pulled,
Roots being reduced to fragments,
Saving the garden from harassment,
Putting a stop to bullying,

In sixth grade,
I was impishly pranked,
Something as simple as a white lie,
Came out as a monster,
Fake autographs and phone numbers,
That was all that was required,
Gashed and bruised,
That was a hope in someone’s world,
I’ll never know why,
A wish in their sky,
I am more than bullying,

(Continued on next page)

The threats you're given,
Comments that sting,
It wraps you up in poison ivy,
Trying to get out,
The aching vine of rope,
If only a friend would spare some hope,
Standing up to bullying,

A few days later,
I walked to the field,
Surrounded by friends,
I could not speak,
When I turned to hear her call me a geek,
I am stronger than bullying,

Find your courage,
You want to run away from this sinister tiger,
But you must explain,
Be the protector in shining armor,
Be the one to save hope,
Be the one to make things right,
Be the one to stop the fight,

You can rise above bullying.



Mia Teusan takes dance classes and is on her school's Science Olympiad team. She loves science and hopes to work for NASA one day. A fun fact about Mia is that she once won a NASA essay contest. In the future, Mia would like to be an author, a rocket scientist, and to work on a mission to Mars.

Beatrice Watkins

7th Grade, Hathaway Brown

“Don’t Forget”

Hate comes
in many forms.
We are hated for our race,
size,
identity,
gender,
opinions.
How we look,
feel,
love,
and act.
Differently.
Once hated,
you never want to be
again.
Once hated,
a devil knocks at your door,
encompassing your thoughts.
“Why did they say that?”
“Did they really mean that?”
“What’s wrong with me?”
He pulls,
and pushes,
towards one path.
Forget.
Forget who you are.
Forget your race,
size,
identity,
gender,
opinions,
how you look,
feel,

love,
and act,
differently.
Change.
Be accepted.
Be normal.
Do you understand?
But don’t.
Don’t.
Don’t forget.
Remember your race,
identity,
gender,
pride.
Stand.
Stand tall.
Stand tall on your soapbox.
Tell.
Tell them.
You tell them that they are wrong.
That you are beautiful.
That you have not.
Forgotten.
You have,
and are,
remembered.
Tell them
that you can change.
Change that comes
in small packages,
change that comes,
in you.

(Continued on next page)

Change that will,
through you,
change the world.
Don't forget
who you are,
that you are,
unique.
Don't forget
who you look
up to.
They are
striving to do
what is right.
Don't forget
your culture.
Shaping you
like a wet block of clay,
Molding you
into a masterpiece.
Don't forget
your opinions.
They can change
the way
things are.
Remember,

don't forget
your voice.
You,
and you alone,
can change the world,
for the better.

Beatrice Watkins has many hobbies, including horseback riding, playing the guitar and ukulele, and playing tennis and field hockey. She participates in the chorus and rock band at school. She also loves to travel and hopes to visit Japan because she loves sushi. Beatrice loves to read and write, especially poetry. She would love to write a book and become a songwriter to bring about positive change.



ABOUT STOP THE HATE® YOUTH SING OUT

Voices United for Social Change

This year, 1,419 students from 67 classrooms among 12 schools worked collaboratively to pen and perform their own songs, using their voices to advocate for change. *Stop the Hate*®, *Youth Sing Out* is an arts-integrated learning initiative that invites students to share their thoughts on discrimination and injustice. Through the Maltz Museum's Stop the Hate tour, the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame's Power of Music in Protest online experience, and the guidance of Roots of American Music teaching artists, the annual program sharpens written and oral language skills while fostering a deeper understanding of historic and contemporary human rights events. Classes compete to win anti-bias education grants for their schools. Congratulations to all of the participants for using your voices for good!

Youth Sing Out is presented in partnership with Roots of American Music and the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame.



Behind the Scenes Photos from Songwriting Workshops



2024 STOP THE HATE® YOUTH SING OUT WINNERS



Max S. Hayes High School
FIRST PLACE HIGH SCHOOL
"The Sad Truth"

Recipient of a \$3,500 Anti-Bias Education Grant
Congratulations to Barthelma Adams
& Laverne McClain's 3rd Period Class

Max S. Hayes High School
RUNNER-UP HIGH SCHOOL
"One Voice For Harmony"

Recipient of a \$2,000 Anti-Bias Education Grant
Congratulations to Barthelma Adams
& Laverne McClain's 2nd Period Class

Harding Middle School
FIRST PLACE MIDDLE SCHOOL
"Break It, Break It, Break It"

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Congratulations to Lisa Blasko's 6th Grade Class

Harding Middle School
RUNNER-UP MIDDLE SCHOOL
"Reclaim Our Fate"

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Congratulations to Lisa Blasko's 8th Grade Class



2024 STOP THE HATE® YOUTH SING OUT WINNERS

“The Sad Truth”

Barthelma Adams & Laverne McClain’s
3rd Period Class
Max S. Hayes High School
FIRST PLACE HIGH SCHOOL
Roots of American Music Teaching Artist:
Sam Hooper

Chorus:

Society standing together, begging for peace
A protest a day, to keep hate away
Demonstrating love, making a change

Try to transform the reality that we live in
Real life problem require real decisions
Under that hollow shell of hate
Together we spread out love and faith
Hope is our solution that will never cease

Hope is our solution that will never cease

Living a life with so much despair
A world like this is so unfair
All the hate crimes we know it’s not right
Some of them only attack at night
Gotta find a way to shine the light
The ropes around necks are way too tight

Chorus

We all know people can change
So let’s all try to motivate
Tell them the word, tell them the message
To spread the love (repeat in Spanish)
Let me say it a little more
To spread the love (in Arabic)
To spread the love (in Japanese)
Together we will change this world of ours

Chorus

The sad truth, it’s the sad truth
Hope is our solution that will never cease

“One Voice For Harmony”

Barthelma Adams & Laverne McClain’s
2nd Period Class
Max S. Hayes High School
RUNNER-UP HIGH SCHOOL
Roots of American Music Teaching Artist:
Sam Hooper

Chorus:

One voice for harmony
Rising strong and clear
Together we stand, erasing all the fear
Hand in hand we conquer the divide
United as one, let love be our guide

Why you staying quiet, we wanna hear your voice
It don’t matter bout your skin,
that’s for the girls and boys.
You could just be kind, but that’s your choice

No more walls between us, united we stand
Different colors and cultures, hand in hand
With understanding we’ll bridge every gap
Creating a world where love is the only map

One voice for harmony
Let it ring loud and clear
United all people, erasing doubt and fear
We stand as one, fighting for what’s right
Using our voices to bring love and light

In a world divided, where hatred prevails
One voice emerges, breaking through the veils
A call for united, a cry for peace
A melody of hope that will never cease

I know I’m different, I can feel the hate
I walk head high and go about my day
But who’s to blame, cause it’s a shame
That the world’s fueled by hate
And people that think it’s a game

Chorus

2024 STOP THE HATE® YOUTH SING OUT WINNERS

“Break It, Break It, Break It”

Lisa Blasko’s 6th Grade Class
Harding Middle School
FIRST PLACE MIDDLE SCHOOL
Roots of American Music Teaching Artist:
Charlie Mosbrook

I woke up this morning
On the wrong side of bed
Brushed my teeth and
combed my hair
Broke my fast and now I’m fed
had some toast, squeezed
honey from the bear
Broke the cycle of my hunger,
broke the cycle with self care

The day began
My brother pushed me to the ground
I couldn’t stop him
No easy answers found
Maybe I could feel stronger
If I could bully someone else
No! Not today. I’ll break the cycle- break the chain, stop the pain

So break it, break it, break it,
We have to break the chain
If violence begets itself
More violence remains
*Break it, break it, break it
We have to break the chain
We have to break the cycle
For a peace to be reclaimed

Breaking the cycle
We don’t need to hurt again
Let others shine as they will
Be kind and be a friend
Do as you would have
Rather than what’s been done
Break the cycle of this hate
Bring this madness to an end

“Reclaim Our Fate”

Lisa Blasko’s 8th Grade Class
Harding Middle School
RUNNER-UP MIDDLE SCHOOL
Roots of American Music Teaching Artist:
Charlie Mosbrook

Believe in yourself
Stand and be bold
Like Jessie at the finish line
Taking home the gold
Turning hearts of anger
In spite of what’s been sold
He believed in himself
Instead what’s been told

Don’t take the bait
Don’t join the hate
Change before, it’s too late
If we want to make a difference
Change ourselves
Reclaim our fate

To change the world,
We have to pass the test.
We need to find the love inside and
Try to be our best
Become our better selves
Letting go of all our hate
Refuse to live in fear
Refuse to take the bait

Reclaim our fate
Reclaim our fate

2024 STOP THE HATE® VOLUNTEER READERS

We are grateful to the 348 volunteers who generously donated their time to blind score this year's essays, poems, and songs.

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Family Foundation**

A stage for stories of struggle, courage, and creativity; a forum for difficult conversations about discrimination and intolerance; and a platform for youth to share their vision for a brighter future, The Maltz Museum brings history to life, issues to light, and people together.

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