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Prize Winning Essays - 2009

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Citizens for Peace Prize Winning Essays – 2009

First Place Winner – High School Division

**Molly Fessler
Plymouth High School**

Fighting Fear: How Pathways to Peace Have been and Will be Created

The world is in crisis. War has devastated all corners of the globe. Conflict is an everyday occurrence. Violence has become our way of life. The world is in crisis, and yet, whenever there exists a crisis an opportunity may also be found. People who practice non-violence create pathways to peace by recognizing the duality of crisis, of war. They look at the horror of a situation and they turn it into an opportunity for goodness, for peace. To truly eliminate violence, however, they must examine the causes of it; explain why it happens and pinpoint the reason that hate dwells in our hearts. These non-violent practitioners have also pushed back against the true cause of war, the reason for the absence of peace, fear. The stories of Sophie Scholl and Nelson Mandela illustrate not only the reasons of war, but also effective movements to peace.

Sophie Scholl joined The White Rose at the age of 21 as a student attending the University of Munich. The organization was responsible for distributing leaflets that attacked the Nazis. This was an extremely dangerous thing to do. Sophie Scholl was arrested after she was caught distributing the papers. She was abused during her interrogation and ultimately executed. Sophie knew the consequences and she knew what was at stake. Elie Wiesel writes, “As we face the...rise of intolerance and fanaticism...it is our duty to expose the danger. By naming it. By confronting it..” (Collopy) This is exactly what Sophie did. In this situation, the conflict was caused by a group who feared losing control. The Nazis did not want freedom of speech because they were afraid of being challenged and overthrown. Sophie spoke out anyway and thus turned her crisis into an opportunity.

Nelson Mandela grew up during apartheid in South Africa. From a young age he faced conflict and hatred. Mandela wanted equal representation and equality in his country. He campaigned actively against the government, leading military groups and was jailed for 27 years for his work. In his situation, the inequality was caused by the dominant group fearing change and a break from their pleasant norm. Mandela saw the hatred and the bigotry that stemmed from this

fear and he changed it. Mandela suffered, but he transformed a country's crisis and made opportunity for millions of people.

Ultimately, it seems, war and conflict are caused by fear, whether it be of another culture, a loss of control or change. We can only eradicate war through understanding. We can only alleviate fear with communication. Is it daunting? Yes. Are these solutions only the simple naiveté of a young girl? Perhaps. But we must have hope. Pliny the Elder once said, "Hope is the pillar that holds up the world. Hope is the dream of a waking Man." (Kolsbun) Scholl and Mandela had hope. They created a pathway to peace by waking up and changing their situation. Now, it is our turn. We must open our eyes, identify the crisis and make it our opportunity.

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Second Place Winner – High School Division

Raja Al-Meraisi Universal Academy

"Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars...Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that." An important and well written quote said by none other than Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Dr. King's method of nonviolence and this quote still holds true today. Those who use nonviolence are more likely to get through situations than those who prefer to reason with their hands. Using nonviolent approaches reduces conflict in many ways. When there is no violence used to solve a problem, people are more likely to sit down and talk. Violence cannot be used as the tool to resolve conflicts for its not possible to have a civilized conversation through the punches and the screams.

Since violence is never the key to any solution, why continue using it? Nonviolence has and will always lead to peace and this method has been proven true. Dr. King, for example, used nonviolence to stop segregation, and the result in the end was peace. Rosa Parks used nonviolence when she refused to get off from her seat, and the result was peace. Their nonviolent approaches paved the

way for peaceful protests, and a pathway of peace. Our legendary, nonviolent leaders paved the way for black, white, brown, and yellow people to hold hands and walk in the pathway of peace.

The violent act and massacre on the city of Gaza is very terrifying to view. All this killing and murder of innocent people is all for land. Beyond Charity, written by Gill Loescher is a book which talks about the many wars this earth has been through and the damage it has done to our society. Many young children are dying as a result of violent actions. Why must this continue to happen when all we have to do is gather as one and become like brothers and sisters. Leave the innocent souls to lay in peace and rest. It will only continue to get worse and continue to kill innocent people everyday. "I strive to create that chosen world within. Peace begins with me," explains Marshall B. Rosenberg in the book of The Heart of Social Change. He explains how violence is meaningless.

Moreover, nonviolence is the only solution to every problem. Whether it's just a matter of family problems or a matter of war, nonviolence will always lead to peace between the two sides. Sitting down and talking everything through always leads to a solution. If a matter of situation is going to lead to reducing conflict and increase peace, then why not use this method? Dr. King and many more nonviolent users opened doors for us and it's our duty to go through them and continue the walk for peace.

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Third Place Winner – High School Division

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People have gone through tremendous struggles to obtain rights and privileges that they felt were owed to them as a human being. A lot of times, someone fought for a larger group for change and a vision of peace and equality. There are two ways to gain something that you want and those are through either violent practices or nonviolent practices. I see nonviolent practices as being more subtle but more effective than violent ones. Throughout history we have had extraordinary peacemakers who all endured horrible situations but stayed persistent with their approach and ultimately were successful in their efforts.

There are three peacemakers who stand out to me and whom I believe to have had enormous influence on the world we have today. Due to each of their contributions, the world has become somewhat of a better place than it was before. Nelson Mandela, Mahatma Gandhi, and the Dalai Lama are three prolific peace makers of our time.

Nelson Mandela, an incredible figure of our time, did many things to attain peace in South Africa. He was involved in programs of passive resistance against the laws that forced blacks to carry passes and kept them in a position of permanent servility. Because of this, he was jailed and sentenced to life imprisonment. He was only incarcerated for 27 years and once he was released from prison, he continued his life long work of attaining goals that he and others had set out decades before. Mandela was a dominant force in the ending of apartheid and was eventually elected the President of South Africa.

Another important contributor to peace was Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi worked nonstop to improve the rights of immigrant Indians in Southern Africa. It was here that he gained his creed of passive resistance. He continued to lead protests even after he was arrested time after time. Once he returned to India, he led the struggle for India's independence from Britain. Even with everything that was thrown at him, he never bent on his nonviolent beliefs. He would fast when Muslim and Hindu compatriots fought or committed acts of violence. When the country was partitioned, Gandhi fasted to stop the fighting between Hindu India and Muslim Pakistan. Sadly, he was assassinated in January of 1948. Gandhi was a great man indeed and his efforts were not in vein.

Lastly, I want to refer to The Dalai Lama. He is the head of state and the spiritual leader of the Tibetan people. He has been given peace awards and honorary doctorate degrees in recognition of his leadership on the solution of international conflicts, human rights issues, and global environmental problems. The Dalai Lama advocated peaceful solutions based upon tolerance and mutual respect in order to preserve the historical and cultural heritage of his people.

All of these men were great men indeed. A lot of people were given hope in the face of tragedy because of these men. Who knows where the world would be had it not been for these people.

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First Place Winner – College Division

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The Nonviolent Solution

Often times peace is looked upon as an unachievable goal, however if it is approached systematically like any other problem it becomes easier to understand. First we must realize that the violence erupts where understanding and respect are lacking. In turn, lack of respect and understanding manifests itself as “poverty, crime, racism, oppression, violence against women, and war.” (Schirch, 2004, p.8) Thus to create lasting peace we must work to instill the values of respect, understanding, and a culture of nonviolence in all people. (Munzo, 2008)

Respect involves accepting differences and recognizing that others are worthy of the same regard as one's own self. In the words of Martin Luther King the absence of respect, as a result of racism is when, “a man denies that another is worthy of equal employment, housing, or education, he is by implication affirming that that man does not deserve to exist.” (Ansbro, 2000, p. 108) This devaluation of human life is what leads people to justify their violent actions against others. That is why it is so important to teach respect and worth of all cultural and ethnic groups.

Understanding involves having insight into other peoples' behaviors and traditions. To do this people need to educate themselves about other religions and cultures, especially the ones they will have contact with in their area. Numerous wars have been fought over differences in religion and beliefs. A close-minded attitude helps attribute to the violence, which is why it is important to be open minded when learning about other cultures.

Finally it is pivotal to promote a culture of nonviolence where people only think to use nonviolent means to solve their problems. In addition, it is important to instill the knowledge that violence begets violence and peace promotes peace. This culture of peace can be achieved through teaching nonviolent problem solving strategies and showing examples where peaceful protest has been used to achieve success. Ideally, this philosophy would be used in and outside of the home and applied to all aspects of an individual's life. As Martin Luther King pointed out, violent protest would do nothing to advance change for African Americans when he stated “...Confronted with violence, the white majority would only grow in fear and prejudice, and render any reconciliation impossible:” Meaning that violence would only further more violence and not help improve the quality of life for anyone.

Together the ideals of respect, understanding, and a culture of peace will serve to promote nonviolent problem solving strategies and increasing the standard of living for all members of a community. A society that respects and understands all its people will be less apt to commit violent acts against them. In addition, by instilling a culture of nonviolence individuals will instinctively gravitate to nonviolent means to create change and solve problems.

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Second Place Winner – College Division

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“How do Nonviolent Practices Reduce Conflict and Create Pathways to Peace?”

The path to peace starts at home. It’s easy to think that to be an emissary of peace you must travel to the Gaza strip or Darfur, but world peace starts in our own backyards.

Children learn from the examples of their parents and leaders; if the examples they see are peaceful, they will learn the skills necessary to resolve conflicts without violence. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, “At the center of nonviolence stands the principle of love.” (1) We have the responsibility of teaching our children this love.

Nonviolent conflict resolution is the only way to peace. As Nobel Peace Laureate, Mairead Corrigan Maquire stated, “One cannot drop a bomb on an ethnic conflict. The weapons we have developed as a means of solving our problems are no longer of any use to us.” (2) All the great wars have been fought; our choice now is either total destruction or peace.

Two concepts are essential to teach children nonviolent conflict resolution. First everyone has the same basic needs. Second, nonjudgmental and empathic communication is essential.

Everyone, Muslim, Jew, and Atheist have the same basic needs: To have a safe place for their family, to have enough food to eat, to have a place to call home. Conflicts arise when these needs are not met and people lose hope. When hope is lost people turn to violence as a means of drawing attention to their plight. In their book, The Compassionate Class Room, Sura Hart and Victoria Kindle Hodsun state, "People who are unaware of their needs often act in ineffective and even destructive ways. Those who fill our prisons because they have hurt or killed another human being were not aware of the real human needs they were trying to meet when they acted as they did." (3) Understanding that all our needs can be met simultaneously is necessary to achieving peace. Simply because someone wants a piece of pie doesn't mean your piece has to get smaller; the pie is infinitely big and can keep growing and expanding to accommodate everyone.

When our needs are met we have a greater ability to help others meet their needs. As Rachel Naomi Remen stated, "When we know ourselves to be connected to others, acting compassionately is simply the natural thing to do."(4) The joy of giving has been well documented in psychology journals. If it is true that violence breeds more violence, it follows that acts of kindness bring more acts of kindness.

Nonviolent communication does not attempt to change the other person's mind. It is focused on achieving an understanding of the other person's position. Marshall Rosenberg said it best, "The objective of nonviolent communication is not to change people and their behavior in order to get our way; it is to establish relationships based on honesty and empathy which will eventually fulfill everyone's needs." (5) It is essential to understand why a person is who they are and that, in the end, we all want the same thing, namely, peace.

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Third Place Winner – College Division

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

Why is it when it comes to something like money, that no matter how it looks, whether it's crumpled, cracked, torn, or in pieces, that we're still willing to accept the piece of paper? But when it comes to people, human beings, many times we are not as quick to accept.

For the reduction of conflict and creation for pathways to peace to occur, we must implement nonviolent practices in our everyday lives. We must make every attempt to include others and show them we care no matter their background. If you willingly *exclude* yourself, risk embarrassment and judgment, just so you can *include* someone who everyone looks down upon, that's beautiful.

Peace has to start with us. So many people think that in order to have peace we have to be in some third world country solving inequality, when in reality it begins with all of us making the individual change. The same global problems are happening in our backyard. We must fix home first by working to embody peaceful examples for others and by leading the change. The Dalai Lama once said, “We as human beings have a responsibility to at least make every effort possible toward the promotion of peace and inner values.”

Focus on what you want and as a result, you will get more of it. Placing your energy toward that what you do not want or toward feelings of hate is a waste of time. If you resent somebody, if you let your pride get in the way of forgiveness, that person owns you.

Whatever our situation is, we have the choice to break the cycle. One of my friends' dad was a raging alcoholic who took out his anger on his wife and children. My friend's two brothers followed the same path of alcoholism and abuse, but he chose a better path, a path to peace.

As quoted by Jean Vanier in Finding Peace, “When one has been put down unjustly or bullied...one tends to want revenge...Peace can come only if the chain of violence and rejection is broken...” (2)

Everything is a choice. In Scott Hunt's The Future of Peace, “Peace is a path chosen consciously...We reach it by following the path of compassion...When we accept that we are part of a great human family...then we will...make peace, and bring humankind to its fullest flowering.”(1)

Similarly, in the movie Remember the Titans, Denzel Washington, who plays a football coach, tells his players after a morning jog on the same field where the Battle of Gettysburg was fought, "I killed my brother with malice in my heart. Hatred destroyed my family...If we don't come together...we too will be destroyed."

In order to achieve a life committed to nonviolence, we must first come to the realization that we are all one race before anything else, that race is 'Human.'

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