

Second Place Junior Essay  
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“Writing in a diary is a really strange experience for someone like me. Not only because I’ve never written anything before, but also because it seems to me that later on neither I nor anyone else will be interested in the musings of a thirteen-year-old schoolgirl. Oh well, it doesn’t matter. I feel like writing.” This is an excerpt from one of Anne Frank’s diary entries. It’s crazy to think that she didn’t know what an impact her writings would have on people throughout the world, and how they would help change the injustice that seemed to be so firmly imprinted on our world’s thought process. Anne Frank also said that it is never too early to start coming up with your own opinions and ideals and working to change things for the better. That has made me realize that I, too, can start striving for change in the world I live in today.

Social justice is built on four main pillars. The first is equity. Equity is treating everyone with fairness and equality. It means not holding people in different regards due to their race, color, background, religion, wealth, righteousness, or any other standard that we have created. In my own life, I can support equity. But first, I have to recognize where it is lacking, and where I have unfairness towards others in my own life. You cannot change how people think, so rules saying you must treat people equally will not help with people who simply don’t want to change. Despite this, it is always good for me to do something when I see any discrimination happening, whether by me or someone else, unknowingly or purposefully. For example, my mom is a teacher and has a student whose parents are of different races, but the one that raises her is of a different color than she is. Sometimes, the kids ask questions about it without understanding how uncomfortable it makes her feel. While her family and heritage is nothing to be ashamed of, we

still gently remind the other students to think a bit more about the question they're asking, because it could easily be misinterpreted. Another example is a bias that isn't as well-known as ethnicity. This bias has to do with people with disabilities and disorders. A lot of the time, people treat them differently, whether that means by not giving them equal chances or treating them like they cannot understand what you are saying. When I see these people, I should treat them like anyone else and encourage others to do so too.

The second pillar is access. This means that all people are able to receive the same goods and services regardless of who they are. In my own life, I can help with this amongst religions. Around Christmastime, people hand out gifts. Jewish people don't celebrate Christmas, they celebrate Hanukkah. Instead of giving everyone else but them Christmas cards or gifts, I can give the Jewish people I know Hanukkah cards and gifts. It seems that a lot of times, we think we are doing them good by just not giving them anything. But we don't understand that it's not just about accepting their religion, it's about acknowledging it.

The third pillar is participation. As Diversity and Inclusion expert, Verna Myers, put it, "Diversity is being invited to the party; inclusion is being asked to dance." A lot of the time we say, "Sure, of course you can come," but never ask them to do anything about it. In my own community, there are a lot of people from different races, creeds, or origins, many my age. Because I am still young, there is no petition I can sign to help them to get equal consideration for jobs or colleges, but I can let them begin to feel their importance now. I can invite them to do things with me and let them know that they are the same to me and our differences are what bind us all together.

The fourth and final pillar is rights. Everyone is entitled to his or her own rights. We as Americans enjoy the control over our rights. For example, we get to vote for who will serve as

our leaders, and we ourselves can all have the opportunity to lead. As I said before, because I am still a kid, I cannot change things by voting for someone who stands for others rights and my own. But I must understand that everyone has their own rights, whether it's to religion or politics or right to speech or right to love who they love or right to vote, even if I do not understand or agree. Everyone has a right to think what they want to and believe what they want to. It would not be fair for me or anyone else to decide that one is right and the other wrong.

Thanks to people like Anne Frank, our world as a whole has come far in our race against social injustice. But we must understand we have not finished the race yet. There are still lots of things in our world that remain biased and prejudiced. We all have the right and responsibility to work together to change these things. I may just be a kid, but the time starts now for me to cultivate my own opinions and work for a better world. Laws cannot change people's minds, but words can. I will be part of the next generation of our world, and if we all commit our thought process to equality now, maybe we can change it forever.