

**Junior Essay
Honorable Mention
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Bigotry and Hate

There are many people who have had experiences with bigotry and hate. I am a black male and I am no stranger to these experiences. Although I am only 13 years old, I have been called a very, very offensive name four separate times. This happened twice on public sidewalks, and twice while I was attending my public school. I have learned from these past experiences and rose above them. As Michelle Obama said: "When they go low, we go high."

When I was in fourth grade, that ugly and hateful word was whispered in the halls whenever I passed a certain group of boys. At the time, I didn't know what the word meant. I asked my mom after school, "Mommy, what's a niggle?" It took her a few weeks to realize what I had been hearing. After that, we had a big conversation about racism and how some people can't see past the color of a person's skin or ethnic group. That was my first of too many racist experiences. A year later, a student said that ugly word to my face. I was torn between wanting to punch him in the gut and run to an adult. I chose to run to an adult. The teacher did nothing to help, so I had to wait until I got home. The student's friends stayed neutral. They would apologize to me for him, but then have the bully over to their houses to play video games. They would give me sympathetic looks, then joke around with the bully at lunch. That student learned no lesson, felt no remorse, and said it again to another student's face later in the year because his friends stayed silent throughout. Elie Wiesel once said: "I swore never to be

silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented. Sometimes we must interfere.” That statement rings true in any kind of bullying situation.

When I was in 5th grade, my parents and I were training for a bicycle race in Phoenix. As we passed a homeless couple in an underpass, they yelled that disgusting word at us. I didn't quite realize what they had yelled at us. I again rose up above their prejudice. Later that summer, my family went to Las Vegas for a family vacation. We were walking to the Fountains of Bellagio when a disheveled woman walked towards us, seemingly glaring daggers at us. As she passed us, she yelled a repulsive string of insults at my family. I was terrified, but in a couple of minutes, my attitude had changed from terrified for my safety to doing all that I could to keep my younger siblings safe. I rose above that woman's hatred and I learned from my experience. I turned my focus from a mirror pointing at my own fear to a window to my siblings.

If you ever have an experience with bigotry, I would advise you to rise up above their hate and face it with your chin held high. You have done nothing to provoke this, so let it roll off of you like water off a duck's back. Learn from it and whatever you do, don't retaliate. That will just escalate the problem and put the blame on you. Let someone you trust know; whether it is a teacher, parent, guardian, sibling, babysitter, or friend.

Heroes like Martin Luther King Jr. and John Lewis have had experiences with bigotry and hate and they rose above it. They did not shy away from their experiences. Instead they learned from them, teaching the world that bigotry, hatred, racism,

prejudice, bias, discrimination, injustice, and unfairness is wrong. They died as global leaders in the civil rights movement and are respected for what they did and not for what they looked like. Like the author, Eric M. Bailey said in his book, *The Cure for Stupidity*, "We promote what we tolerate." This means that if we don't step in and say that is wrong, the antagonist will just keep on doing the same thing to others.