

The Neighborhood

The world, in its vastness, can be thought of as a community. It is a neighborhood where families of different cultures and religions live next door to each other, waving as they cross paths when walking their dogs or driving on the street. Although they may physically look different and celebrate separate traditions, they share the neighborhood and are more similar than different. In this way, the world is a place made up of people from all walks of life, and these people are not as divergent as they appear. However, history has proven that the human race is overcome with disputes that are most often rooted in this: the physical differences and dissimilarities between each other. Diversity seems to divide us as a society, and that it is why it is essential that current and future generations embrace and even normalize diversity.

Diversity and peace go hand-in-hand. If diversity is not embraced, peace cannot thrive. On a global scale, this may seem impossible to achieve. However, something can be done on a local scale and in one's own town. Acting as a diplomat in one's own community and outside of it spreads sentiments of peace and tolerance. The youth of society is pivotal in this as, just like adults, they can initiate these sentiments through positive interactions. This, the idea that anyone of any age can act as a diplomat and contribute to peaceful relations between peoples, is citizen diplomacy. In this way, it is one's duty as a global citizen to grow and evolve with-not around-those around them. When this is done, people outgrow their past notions of those who are different and learn to accept each other.

Achieving this can be done at a baseline level or with greater ferventness. Any one person can be a diplomat by connecting with international online friends or those met on vacation. Simply educating oneself on other cultures and countries contributes to this as well. Being able to understand foreign traditions and cultures means being able to respect the people who celebrate these, and respect is the pillar that supports peace and positive foreign relations. On a more advanced level, an individual can go as far as becoming fluent in other languages, expanding their ability to relate to and be connected to those of different countries.

Foreign relations starts with the people. The complete picture of the relationship between countries is only whole when it includes the masses, not just the leaders of these countries. This idea transcends past trading and money; instead, establishing positive foreign relations through diplomacy means peace and a concord to uphold harmony. Citizen diplomacy does not mean simply concrete, quantitative benefits seen only by a nation's government. Citizen diplomacy, rather, means far more significant yet abstract benefits seen on a personal level by those directly affected by this. Among these benefits is empathy, something that means an understanding between individuals undefined by differences leading to an interconnected world. Only in citizen diplomacy truly able to effectively shape and mold society.

Gaby Gubka

Honorable Mention Essay

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2018 Young Artists and Authors Showcase

Grade 12, Hamilton High School