

2017 International Essay Contest for Young People

[Youth Category – Honorable Mention]

Learning from Nature on Diversity

(Original)

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In 1993, the year I was born, my entire village was surrounded by thick natural forests. Inside the forests, there were different types of animals and physical sceneries. As a young boy, I used to walk in the lonely paths inside the forest and discover new plants. Large trees had edible roots and they had long branches which were useful in swinging activities. For us, the forest was part of the community. If destroyed, we would have suffered in a major way given that it was our primary source of food and water.

At a young age, the forest was part of my playground. As I grew up, however, I found the natural world to be an important source of inspiration and comfort. After school activities, I wandered into the thick vegetation surrounding our school and I began learning from nature.

In particular, one of the most significant lessons that nature taught me was the importance of diversity. Inside the natural forests, there were different types of trees, for example, some of the trees were long, short, dark, and bright. In spite of the observable variations, the trees were united in ensuring that they sustained the entire ecosystem. In addition, big trees supported undergrowth vegetation by providing firm support in their attempt to reach the sun.

Kenya is a country that has more than 42 ethnic tribes. In 2007, the nation was embroiled in a post-election violence which resulted in the death of more than 1200 Kenyans. During the same year, I joined a secondary school which had students from different parts of Kenya. The lesson learned, from nature, was helpful in enhancing my interaction with other learners from various tribes. In a short period of time, I was able to form life-long friendships with other students drawing from nature's wisdom. I was neither concerned about their skin complexion nor their ability to speak my mother tongue. I supported others, in different activities, to accomplish their goals and benefit the learning institution. Luckily, nature had taught me that the primary goal of man is to assist others and in this way find meaning and satisfaction in life.

After four years of secondary education, I was admitted to one of the most prestigious universities in Kenya. Regrettably, in the tertiary institution, one was taught to compete with others and win at all cost. To succeed, students used dubious means, for instance, carried small answer sheets to the lecture rooms during examinations. Without cooperation, many passed college examinations and ended without jobs after years of labor. Besides this, other graduates who did attain high grades involved themselves in drug peddling to attain their desired social status.

Drawing inspiration from nature's interdependence, I decided to form groups and promote peer-to-peer counseling activities. Additionally, I spearheaded the creation of an entrepreneurship incubation program which was formed to assist different students with outstanding ideas. In my pursuit, I was able to make new friends which were from different ethnic groups.

Indeed, nature had shaped my thinking and general behaviors. Instead of feeling threatened when I was with people from diverse tribes, I became motivated due to various proposals which were shared. I found support and friendship in unions that were made by individuals from various ethnic groups. I was able to fight stereotypes which were associated with different tribes. I became a champion of inclusivity in place of segregation and competition.

Natural worlds and nature is an important part of human coexistence, as Wangari Maathai explained, "In a few decades, the relationship between the environment, resources, and conflict may seem almost as the connection we see today between human rights, democracy, and peace." To attain long-lasting peace, in Kenya and the rest of the world, it is important to reflect on what nature teaches us about diversity and cooperation. One cannot succeed by bringing others down, especially, on the basis of tribal or racial affiliation. Leaders have to direct their followers to preserve the environment and learn from its existence. In my life, I would like to teach others about the significance of embracing diversity and using it to grow local economies and attaining peace in everyday life.