

2022 International Essay Contest for Young People

[Children's Category – Honorable Mention]

The Value I Value the Most: Kindness

(Original)

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The clink of copper coins dropping into a cup echoes as a young woman stops beside a ragged man sitting on the sidewalk. She smiles slightly, as if to reassure the man that things will indeed get better. The man, whose eyes are rheumy and unfocused, widens his smile, showing his yellowed teeth and reaching out with his shaky hands to gratefully pat the woman's shoulder.

A small boy looks longingly at an ice cream cone, stretching his arms out before his parents regretfully pull him away. While glistening tears threaten to escape the boy's eyes, a stranger offers to pay for an ice cream cone; he sees the boy smile widely in gratitude, the light overflowing from the boy scintillating enough to meld the ice cream's pastel colors into one.

A bright-faced teenager pulls freshly baked snickerdoodles out from an oven, wiping a bead of sweat off her forehead with her mitt-clad hand. She places them gingerly in a glass container, deciding to give some to her neighbors.

These acts of kindness may only take seconds to do, but the effects they have on their receivers, and even on the doers, are unperceivable and unforgettable.

Kindness — along with its interconnected values, such as compassion and empathy — is one of the values I appreciate the most and believe our world *needs* the most, simply due to the positive atmosphere it creates as it spreads, and the intangible influence it has on us.

During a day that is bland, or possibly even going miserably, kindness always manages to uplift it. Even the tiniest act, such as writing a thank you note, evokes the warmest kind of feelings; kindness is like a blanket, unfurling and cradling one's heart, leaving a fuzzy feeling

in its wake. It is imperceptibly contagious, spreading its influence to everyone around it.

As I have experienced kindness from the moment I was born, I feel almost a duty to return this kindness to those around me, and this drives me to do the same things to others that I know would make myself happy. For instance, when I was young, the airplane my family and I were flying on was just about full to the brim, and only a few scattered seats in different places were left. Being involuntarily separated from my parents, I felt very nervous; but the teenage girl I chose to sit next to saw my fear. She held my hand, consoling me and helping me realize that I was in a safe place. For the entire flight, she checked up on me every so often, making me feel less alone. Now, when I see children looking lost or scared, I am reminded of the influence of the girl's kindness; I help the children exactly how she helped me.

Kindness is found everywhere in our daily lives, even when we do not realize its effects after it has been bestowed upon us, or we do not notice when we ourselves show it; it is a part of human nature, and a very essential part at that. To best live my life in line with kindness, I can make sure to show kindness to everyone when possible, no matter their attitude towards myself.

Even just asking a cashier at the local supermarket about their day contributes to making society a better, happier place.

I feel lucky to be able to experience so much kindness, and at the same time, it inspires me to do more for my community as well. Kindness imparts more than just ephemeral feelings of gratitude; it brings us together. If we all show kindness in our daily lives — as I am sure most people already do subconsciously — we can create a society that is wholly welcoming, in which everyone is appreciated and affirmed. But what must be recognized is that being nice to other people is not enough; we must be nice to *ourselves*. We must realize that we are all prone to errors and capable of making mistakes, but that is no reason to have self-deprecating thoughts. All of us deserve love and kindness, especially from ourselves.