

2023 International Essay Contest for Young People

【Youth Category – Honorable Mention】

YOU

(Original)

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“North Korean or South Korean?”

Living abroad, this was a common follow-up question I would be asked when telling people I was from Korea. It initially came to me as a culture shock because, growing up in Korea, I had been taught an unspoken lesson that the distinction between North Korea and South Korea was so clear that anyone could tell the difference at first glance.

“I am South Korean.”

And that was exactly what I told my teacher. As if I knew better than him. That my going to an international school naturally made me South Korean, not North Korean. He replied by telling me that he had previously taught multiple North Korean students at other international schools. And that it was as likely that I was North Korean as I was South Korean. I was flabbergasted. Because he was right. In the blink of an eye, he had completely changed the way I viewed the two Koreas and their relationship.

This event changed my perspective in the sense that I came to recognize how closely connected North Korea is to my country. I began to imagine the future of the two Koreas, perhaps after reunification or finding true peace. Either way, peace between the two countries would only be possible once the governments and the ordinary citizens genuinely came to accept their differences and make some sacrifices for the greater good. And I am proud to say that I am ahead of my government in doing so.

Governments are not the only possible lead for a country.

As I learned more about the unfiltered way our world works, I soon realized that this was also applicable to the wider scope of the world. It was the key to unlocking world peace. It was something so simple, yet perhaps so simple that it had been overlooked by most

people. I had been misled into believing that we are much more separated than we actually are. The soul of humanity has no borders.

And neither wisdom nor age is required to understand that.

You probably thought to yourself at least once, perhaps without conscious thought, "Why can't people just get along with each other? Why is it so difficult for them?" But how many times have you considered specific efforts you could be making for world peace, right now in this very moment?

Did you rely on the adult population, because you thought they would solve the problem for you? Because you thought your actions would not impact the world anyway? Because you thought you were too young? But look at our planet right now. It is clear that peace cannot be achieved solely through nominal systems, something Albert Einstein observed when he told us, "Peace cannot be kept by force, it can only be achieved by understanding."

Beliefs that your actions are insignificant, beliefs that you are too young, do not apply to social issues. Because you are a significant part of society. Your actions are as impactful as anyone else's. You are not too young. In fact, we, the youth, are at an advantage in creating a peaceful future. Today, with identity becoming a more highlighted concept, we are privileged to have opportunities to find and accept our identities earlier on and accept those of others with more ease.

So what exactly can we do? It's simple: begin. The world is much more interconnected than we give it credit for. Be caring and compassionate toward everyone you meet. This will begin a chain reaction, causing others to do the same, which will eventually allow humanity to evolve together as a more peaceful species. What could hold more honor than being remembered as one in eight billion who was able to understand and achieve societal harmony, and contribute to world peace?

I admit this solution may seem naive. But sometimes sophistication is not necessary. After all, we are the reason the world became so complex.

As Sadhguru once said, "Only if individuals become peaceful, will the world be peaceful." Creating a peaceful future begins with YOU.