

## **Paper Planes**

(Original)

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It was in the middle of a hot summer day when our teacher interrupted the class to take us out onto the balcony. And it was right there underneath the scorching sun that she instructed us to build paper planes. But not just an ordinary one; we had to write down our dreams on that plane, and send it flying into the air, hoping that they'd be heard by the angels in the sky. It was the perfect day; our small fingers folding those planes, confidently declaring our hopes to the rest of the world.

We wanted to do good for the planet and save innocent lives. Whatever happened to those dreams, I will never know. Now, just five years later, we're teenagers filled with cynicism. Everyday, we witness the horrors of this world. We see disease-ravaged communities, families living in poverty, and children toiling away for barely a dollar a day. The failed ambitions of the older generation have been placed upon our shoulders: we're supposed to save the environment, end poverty, and create a peaceful future, when we don't even know what that really means.

We're merely languishing in our own worlds, weighed down by our doubts. Perhaps, it's time for us to reclaim that childlike hopefulness that drove us to launch those paper planes. Can our voices be heard? Can we truly make a difference? The answer is a resounding, "Yes". Because, the truth is, you're not the only one fighting that battle. Not by a long shot.

Growing up, I'm lucky enough to be able to attend an international school. The children in our class come from all walks of life. A child of diplomats at the Embassy of India could grow up with me, a child of two doctors in Yangon, and we could call each other friends. We come from different places and speak different languages, but at the end of the day, we're all just teenagers trying to find our place in this world. Therefore, instead of being divided

by our differences, the youth today must celebrate the similarities that unite us, and work together to bring about world peace.

One way we can do this is through art. One of my friends crafted a computer simulation of the depleting ecosystem. Another performed a song celebrating the importance of cultural unity. I myself have written several essays advocating gender equality. These actions may not seem helpful now, but it is important to remember that all great revolutions started from the smallest of gestures. The journey of Malala Yousafzai, the world's youngest Nobel Prize laureate, started with a simple hand-written speech in a local press club. Greta Thunberg's environmental activism began from a hand-painted banner. These youths had been in this world for no longer than we have when they harnessed their creativity to fight for it.

The old belief that peace is a distant ideal? It's wrong. Peace is not something that we reach for, and, if we're lucky, we'll be able to grasp. No. If anything, peace is a choice. A conscious, deliberate choice that we must make our whole lives, so that someday in the future, we'll be able to look back and think, "I'm leaving this world just a little bit better than I found it."

So, I guess this is my paper plane. The story of youths trying to find hope in the broken world we've inherited. Of course, it may not have a happy ending. Will we make it? How will the future remember us? And yet, that's kind of the point. "Creating a peaceful future" can mean many different things. To me, it's about taking the difficult path, even when - especially when - we don't know where it's headed. It's about facing the ugliness of our world - child labour, disease, brutality and much more...while, at the same time, finding the beauty in working together to rebuild it. Ultimately, creating a peaceful future is about accepting that your paper plane may not make it. But it's also about realising that everyone, no matter where we come from, must keep making more until one day, one of them finally soars into the sky.