

2024 International Essay Contest for Young People
Results and 1st-3rd prize winning essays

Theme:
“My Experience of Overcoming Conflict”

The Goi Peace Foundation
www.goipeace.or.jp

October 31st, 2024

Congratulatory message for the 2024 International Essay Contest for Young People

I sincerely congratulate the Goi Peace Foundation on the success of the 2024 International Essay Contest for Young People.

I would like to express my profound respect and wholehearted gratitude for the great efforts and dedication of everyone who has helped to promote world peace and create sustainable societies and communities through diverse activities.

I learned that this year's contest received 15,744 entries on the theme of "My Experience of Overcoming Conflict," from children and youth in 152 countries around the world.

My congratulations go to the two first prize winners, who have both received the Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Award, and to all the other prize winners.

For today's young people, who face an uncertain and unpredictable future, I believe it is very important to have experiences of interacting with many different people. At times they might be in conflict with others, but by overcoming those conflicts, they will be able to deepen their mutual understanding and respect.

I am aware that the International Essay Contest for Young People receives many wonderful essays each year. Through this initiative, I sincerely hope that young people from all over the world, who are tomorrow's leaders, can meet and interact with one another, helping to bring about world peace and the creation of sustainable societies and communities.

October 31st, 2024

FUJIWARA Akio

Vice Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan

2024 International Essay Contest for Young People

List of Winners

Theme: "My Experience of Overcoming Conflict"

No. of participating countries: 152

No. of entries: 15,744 (Children's category: 5,511 / Youth category: 10,233)

*All ages are as of June 15, 2024.

1st Prize

Children's category (1 entrant)

- *My Experience of Overcoming Conflict*
Mirza Čatak
(Age 14, Bosnia and Herzegovina)

Youth category (1 entrant)

- *Hearing the other side*
Adkhamjon Janobiddinov (Age 19,
Uzbekistan <Living in U.S.A.>)

2nd Prize

Children's category (3 entrants)

- *Heartbroken*
Lee Kaia (Age 11, Singapore)
- *Accepting the Ideas of Others*
Mana Sonobe (Age 13, Japan)
- *My Mistake and My Realization*
Rihito Kobayashi (Age 13, Japan)

Youth category (3 entrants)

- *Under the Firmament of Orchid Island*
Anonymous (Living in Japan)
- *The Rainbow After The Storm*
Kiều Gia Bảo (Age 20, Vietnam)
- *Story of an Afghan girl who succeeded*
Jamila Hussaini (Age 22, Afghanistan
<Living in U.S.A.>)

3rd Prize

Children's category (5 entrants)

- *Survived the Troubled Waters*
Mark Walton (Age 10, Indonesia)
- *A Brief Moral Lesson for Two*
Shugo Obukuro (Age 11, Japan)
- *Making Space in Our Opinions*
Nana Otsuka (Age 13, Japan)
- *Headphones*
Rina Matsuo (Age 13, Japan)

Youth category (5 entrants)

- *How Death Inspires Me to Live*
Challene Harijanto
(Age 15, Indonesia)
- *A Conflict in Choices and Values*
Kaori Kitamura (Age 18, Japan)
- *Choosing Love*
Naa Amanuah Ackwerh
(Age 18, Ghana)

- *Invisible Battles*
Jasmine Chong Man Yan (Age 14, Malaysia)
- *Stopping the Blood on the Field and at the Riverside.*
Boluwatife Holiness Alagbe
(Age 21, Nigeria)
- *Let's Heal*
Tamale Enock (Age 23, Uganda)

Honorable Mention

Children's category (22 entrants)

- Iyah Zakaria (Age 8, Canada)
- Devyani Chauhan (Age 9, India)
- Varsini Valsala (Age 9, Japan)
- Yurina Yokozuka (Age 11, Japan)
- Aoba Miura (Age 13, Japan)
- Ayasa Yamamoto (Age 13, Japan)
- Azu Shibata (Age 13, Japan)
- Jasir Žiško
(Age 13, Bosnia and Herzegovina)
- Joelle Fong (Age 13, Japan)
- Kaito Tonegawa (Age 13, Japan)
- Hana Manabe (Age 13, Japan)
- Lamija Esmā Galešić
(Age 13, Bosnia and Herzegovina)
- Najiba Islam (Age 13, Bangladesh)
- Nowa Ishida (Age 13, Japan)
- Trần TrúC Ngân (Age 13, Vietnam)
- Yui Furuichi (Age 13, Japan)
- Dani Patković
(Age 14, Bosnia and Herzegovina)
- Iloegbunam Akachukwu Chinemerem Emmanuel (Age 14, Nigeria)
- Noa Murashita (Age 14, Japan)
- Shazma Sabry (Age 14, Sri Lanka)
- Yuran Cho
(Age 14, China <Living in Japan>)

Youth category (25 entrants)

- Armaan Tafti (Age 15, India)
- Awaiza Noman (Age 15, Pakistan)
- Butimbayev Emir (Age 15, Kazakhstan)
- Isimbi Kundwa Gabriella
(Age 15, Rwanda)
- Yui Nitta (Age 15, Japan)
- Abd Elrahman Mohamed Adel
(Age 16, Egypt)
- Hina Tanaka (Age 16, Japan)
- Lisa Ribas Sato (Age 16, Brazil)
- Marianna Kalina (Age 16, Argentina)
- Ogbeide Joyce (Age 16, Nigeria)
- Alina María Jovine Montero
(Age 17, Dominican Republic)
- Dhiviyan A/L V. Chandrasekaran
(Age 17, Malaysia)
- Hindoli Roy (Age 17, India)
- Akari Yamauchi (Age 18, Japan)
- Danny Raúl Arroba Buenaño
(Age 18, Ecuador)
- Elijah David Uma (Age 18, Nigeria)
- Khairat Jimoh (Age 19, Nigeria)
- Zujajah Shaikh (Age 19, Japan)
- Heitor Gabriel Barroso Reis
(Age 20, Brazil)

- Hagumi Takahashi (Age 15, Japan)
- Maria Eduarda Chagas Viana Cruz (Age 20, Brazil)
- Sang Vannai (Age 20, Cambodia)
- Minami Ide (Age 21, Japan)
- Laura Ferreira Ramos (Age 23, Dominican Republic)
- Uduak Udoudo Ukpog (Age 23, Nigeria)
- Ukachukwu Emmanuel (Age 25, Nigeria)

Best School Award (5 schools)

- Kyoto University of Advanced Science Junior & Senior High School (Japan)
- Omori 6th Junior High School of Ota City, Tokyo (Japan)
- Setagaya Junior High School attached to Tokyo Gakugei University (Japan)
- Suma Gakuen Junior High School, Hyogo (Japan)
- Tokyo Metropolitan Oizumi Junior High School (Japan)

School Incentive Award (16 schools)

- Beaconhouse Sri Inai International School, Selangor (Malaysia)
- Fukushima Prefectural Asakakaisei Senior High School (Japan)
- Kagoshima Gyokuryu Junior & Senior High School of Kagoshima City (Japan)
- Koka Gakuen Junior and Senior High School for Girls, Tokyo (Japan)
- Matsumoto Shuho Secondary School, Nagano (Japan)
- Motherland Secondary School, Pokhara Lekhnath (Nepal)
- Pavia National High School - Special Program in Journalism (SPJ), Iloilo City (Philippines)
- SAILAN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL, Gampaha (Sri Lanka)
- Satriwithaya School, Bangkok (Thailand)
- Showa Women's University Junior-Senior High School, Tokyo (Japan)
- SMJK Chio Min, Kedah (Malaysia)
- SMK SRI NIPAH, KELANTAN (Malaysia)
- St. Joseph Convent School Quetta (Pakistan)
- Toyo University Keihoku Junior and Senior High School, Tokyo (Japan)
- Universiti Sains Malaysia (Malaysia)

- Yamanouchi Junior High School of Yamanouchi Town, Nagano (Japan)

*All the essays are available at: <https://www.goipeace.or.jp/en/work/essay-contest/>

International Essay Contest for Young People

Panel of Judges:

Chairman	Genshitsu Sen	Former Grand Tea Master of Urasenke, UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador
	Masami Saionji	Chairperson, The Goi Peace Foundation
	Shunichi Tokura	Composer
	Junji Narita	Senior Advisor, Hakuholdo Inc.
	Shinji Hattori	Chairman & Group CEO, CCO SEIKO GROUP CORPORATION
	Koichiro Matsuura	President of The Africa Society of Japan, Former Director-General of UNESCO
	Suzue Miuchi	Cartoonist
	Kazuhiko Yazaki	President & CEO, FELISSIMO CORPORATION
	Shomei Yoh	Picture book author

Organized by: The Goi Peace Foundation

Endorsed by: Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan,
Japanese National Commission for UNESCO, Japan Private High School
Federation, Tokyo Metropolitan Board of Education, Japanese
Broadcasting Corporation, Nikkei Inc.

Supported by: SEIKO GROUP CORPORATION, PLUS CORPORATION

My Experience of Overcoming Conflict

(Original)

Mirza Čatak

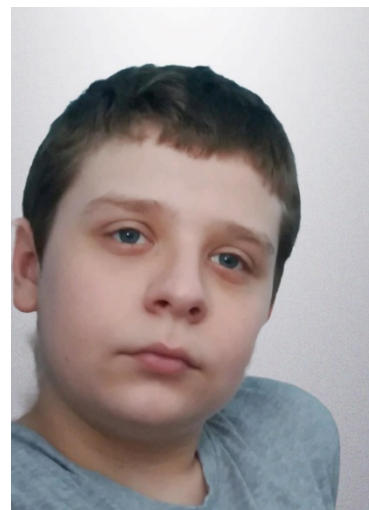
(Age 14, Bosnia and Herzegovina)

Primary School 'Meša Selimović,' Sarajevo

It was another beautiful morning, and everyone was looking forward to a new day. Everyone, except me.

My troubles did not start today; the story of them began a long time ago.

Fate decided that I was born earlier than I should have been. Already at birth, I had problems with breathing, and the doctor said that my lungs were not ready for this world. After a long struggle and treatment, I finally came home, but not completely healthy. Due to my illness, I always had to wear a respiratory mask when I was outside.



I spent most of my childhood in my room. I was looking forward to seeing the other kids playing in the park. I dreamed of lying in the grass and playing with friends. But I knew it was impossible for me.

Time passed, I grew up, and the day came when I was supposed to start school. I was happy. I thought I'd finally have friends.

Unfortunately, my happiness didn't last long. On my first day at school, I had an unpleasant surprise. A group of boys were standing in the school yard. When they saw me wearing my mask, they started laughing and pointing at me. I was embarrassed, but I didn't want to react; I thought it would stop. But every day, it got worse. They mistreated me, laughed at me, and called me derogatory names. The other children were not allowed to say anything to them, probably out of fear. But no one wanted to stand and sit with me, although I tried very hard to make friends with them.

It made me start hating everything. I did not feel like going to school; I did not feel like studying. In front of my eyes were only their faces that laughed at me. I was disappointed and lonely again.

I've been thinking about what to do. I didn't want to tell my parents; I was ashamed. I didn't want to tell the teachers that I was not a traitor. I couldn't ignore them anymore because they hurt me. I argued with them, but that didn't help either. It only got worse. One day, one of them ran after me and took the mask off my face. He threw it into the street. I started breathing heavily and barely got home.

This conflict completely defeated me. I didn't know what to do to fix things. Conflict with others began to be my personal conflict with myself. I began to hate myself. It ruined me. The conflict with myself was worse than the conflict with others. I could have escaped from others, but I couldn't run away from myself.

I wondered why they didn't understand my illness, my suffering, and my struggle. I was just an ordinary boy who wanted to have friends.

And then I decided to resolve the conflict. I found them on the playground, gathered all my strength, and stood in front of them. They looked at me strangely, and I was so confident. I calmly told them that I was hurt by their attitude towards me. I said that I did not want to be discriminated against because of my illness, but also that I did not resent them and that I wanted to be friends with them. They stood ashamed, with their heads down. And then one boy came and hugged me, and the others followed him. For the first time in my life, I was truly happy.

Since then, there has never been a conflict between us. My friends are always there for me now. They help me, bring me homework when I am sick, and always visit me.

This is a lesson that we all need to know. No matter what the conflict is, we won't solve it if we run away from it. We must not hide, and we must not ignore conflict. We have to face the conflict, like the disease, and we have to treat it. We can overcome any conflict with understanding and love, because hatred can only make the problem bigger. We should live for love.

Life is a bridge that we must walk together, holding hands.

Hearing the other side

(Original)

Adkhamjon Janobiddinov

(Age 19, Uzbekistan <Living in U.S.A.>)

In 2022, I started my undergraduate studies in the U.S., and, since it was my first time going abroad, I really experienced a culture shock which lasted for months. In our college, new students are offered a special course called FYC which helps them with their transition to college. My course was named “hearing the other side”. It was related to philosophy and it was mainly about listening to the ideas and voices that we disagree with. During the course, very difficult topics like free speech, gender



equality, and geopolitics were discussed. At first it was quite hard for me to contribute to the class discussions and share my views as I did not have past experience in discussing those topics with people. Then, slowly, I started joining the discussions by sharing my opinions that were shaped by my cultural values and the perspective that I developed growing up in Uzbekistan. Interestingly, almost everyone in the class disagreed with me or found my opinions strange. Perhaps, it was because I was the only international student in the class and came from a culturally conservative background. These differences were especially prominent in discussions on religion and cultural practice, as my classmates had totally different views towards Islam and Muslim majority countries. I was quite isolated in the class and I began to disengage from the class discussions to avoid conflict. However, since class discussions were a significant portion of our grades, I decided to explain the situation to my professor. He said he could give me alternative assignments however he recommended that I keep joining in on discussions even though my views differ. He also mentioned the main point of the course was actually listening to the other side, listening to the ideas that you oppose.

From that time, the conflict between my views and those of the class seemed like an opportunity to critically question my own stances and improve my debate skills. I started preparing before each discussion, doing extra research and gathering evidence to support each of my statements in class discussion. Day by day I realized that I was learning more about my thinking and how I developed certain beliefs. I also tried to think and look at the situation from my classmates' perspectives, as most of them have a very limited understanding of my religion or have not lived in a community based society like Uzbekistan. In the next discussions I tried to explain my experiences and demonstrate that they lack knowledge in some of the topics, instead of denying their statements immediately. After some classes, there was no conflict anymore, there was just a friendly discussion. When we discussed something related to religion and international topics, they started asking my perspective and respected what I said, as they realized they lack knowledge and experience in such topics. Similarly, I respected and tried to understand their views during the conversations about American politics, a topic that I am not good at. By the end of the class, we learned from one another and the conflict itself was necessary to show me how to engage with audiences that are not sympathetic to my positions.

The biggest lesson from this "ideological" conflict was that sometimes, when we do not understand each other's views, we deny and start arguing immediately. However, the biggest solution for this sort of conflict is admitting what we do not know and keeping mutual respect while arguing. In that way, with respect, people can produce creative ideas together that work for everyone in the society. This experience has shaped the way I engage with cross-cultural conflicts, focusing on building common understanding instead of focusing on our differences and inspired me to further keep studying and pursuing a career on an international level as I realized that such conversations expand my outlook. As an aspiring economist, I aim to work for international companies and focus on economic development of low income countries. Such careers require a lot of negotiations and conversations with people with various backgrounds. I believe that my experience in the FYS course prepares me for such negotiations and helps me become a person who contributes to a peaceful world.

Heartbroken

(Original)

Lee Kaia

(Age 11, Singapore)

Nan Hua Primary School

Baleful white walls gaze blankly back at me. Through a slit between curtains, I spy a frail figure, trapped in a web of tubes. Hushed tones murmur as the clock ticks by. His wrinkles stretch over a pale face, resting in a garden of tubes.

Where's his laughter?

"...six months left... chemotherapy is an option..." I hear the cold, solemn words, dripping with professionalism, pronounced by the dreaded prophet in white robes.

No.

We all know the undeniable truth. His time is up. My small fist grips the curtain. It feels cold all of a sudden. The bleak beeping of the monitor, painfully mirroring my heartbeat.

Stop.

The curtain opens. Familiar hunched shoulders seem to have shrunk from before. My father's trembling fingers fumble for a cigarette.

"...I must advise you that the treatment is painful..." The weight of the doctor's words sink in.

"We'll pay for it." The strong shoulders straighten, cigarette slipping back into place. He has made his choice. Has she?

"We should let him go..."

"No!" His voice is loud. Too loud. An eyelid flickers on a pained face. A glance, and it closes. The shouts die down.

"Why not?" She knows his answer.

Beep. Beep. The monitor waits for none. "I can't let him go..."

Silence.

"You can't cling on forever. One day, all you will see is pain on his face." Her knifed whisper hisses as his head hangs low. "You're being selfish..."

"I'm not!" Harsh words cut her off, an imperial edict of denial, uncertain in the air.

"Stop lying. Don't you want him to be happy? Do you love him? Because I do. He, too, is my father, and I love him. Unlike you." Her shuddered breaths turned into heavy sobs as tears slipped down her cheeks.

I stand there, watching the two pillars of my life crumble in a dizzying daze.

Nothing. Why's my mind empty? Why's my heart cold?

I know why.

"We can't let him suffer! Look at him. Look! He's peaceful now... We should let him enjoy his time..." She pleaded once again.

"How can you say that? I love him. How can I give him up? I want to keep him alive, because... he's my father..." his words echoed in my ears.

They're both right. We all love him. I accept that. But no matter what they say, this needs to end.

I stepped forward, my tiny hands grasping at rough fabric, holding them tight; holding our family together.

Teary eyes jerk towards me. Somewhere beyond, lips stretch into a thin smile.

“Mummy, Daddy, don’t cry! YeYe¹ loves us. We love him. He never wanted us to be sad because of him. For him, we have to be strong. We have to overcome... and make a choice. Whether we regret it or not, we know we’ve tried. We can’t be selfish over our love for him! We are a family, and w...we will get through together...” Tears rolled down my cheeks as quickly as words rolled off my tongue. I blinked as anger in the air melted away and wrinkled hands wrapped around mine...

There was silence, then tearful smiles. We made our choice together. It didn’t matter what we choose, for we accept it together. For better or for worse, we understand each other, and our love as one family—hope, acceptance and love.

How many families have been broken by conflicts not born of anger, but love? I know what that feels like, when a family turns against one another because they cannot bear to let go. Nobody is at fault. None are to be blamed for loving what they hold dear. All we can do is accept, understand their love and make peace with their beliefs. Pray, cry without regret, together. That’s the only path forward. The only path of hope. Whether in our humble homes, or in fires of war, sometimes we just need to realise that everyone is just fighting for what they love. It's only then we can cherish what we hold dear, and protect the ones we hold close to our hearts.

¹ YeYe: Chinese word for paternal grandfather

Accepting the Ideas of Others

(Original in Japanese)

Mana Sonobe

(Age 13, Japan)

Kyoto University of Advanced Science Junior & Senior High School

As we create our future, I believe that when we are in conflict with people who have different ideas, it is important to accept each other's ideas and cooperate with each other.

When I was in grade 6, with only a few days left until elementary school graduation, a conflict broke out during recess over how to play dodgeball, and our class decided to review how to play the game. Two different points of view clashed with each other. Student A said that when the game got exciting, some students were crossing the line to throw the ball, and that we should make sure to stick to the rules. Student B, on the other hand, said that although it was important to follow the rules, recess time was short, and they would rather play for a longer time than just worry about the rules. Both points of view were valid, so it was suggested that if we had different ways of playing, those who want to stick to the rules should separate from those who want to play for longer.

Our teacher said, "You're graduating very soon, so do you really want to separate the class during recess? As you grow up, if you meet someone who thinks differently from you, are you going to have nothing to do with that person? I don't think so."

After that, we decided to play together for as long as we could, allowing people to go a little over the line, but not too much. Instead of thinking that our own idea was right, we accepted the other point of view and discussed it together, and we came up with a better idea.

The words my teacher spoke at that time have stayed with me ever since: "As you grow up, if you meet someone who thinks differently from you, are you going to have nothing to do with that person?" It's true that if we don't associate with people who think differently from

us, we probably won't get into conflicts. That's not to say that conflicts are good, but if we always avoid conflict, new ideas will never come about, and nothing will change. In my opinion, that won't solve any problems.

When I hear the word 'conflict,' I have a negative image of fighting with someone. But on that day, when student A and student B were in conflict, neither of them seemed to be fighting. Instead, they seemed to be working with one another. For both of them, their objective wasn't to decide which way of playing was right—they were stating their opinions with the shared aim of everyone having a good time. And, they both accepted the other's point of view. It made me think that 'conflict' could be a chance to learn different ways of thinking, and—by sharing our own ideas and accepting other ideas—to work together to create a new and better idea.

Everyone in the world—adults and children alike—will have times in their lives when they are in conflict with someone. At those times, if we insist on our own ideas and reject the ideas of others, then the conflict will turn into fighting. Therefore, when we are in conflict with someone, I think it's important to communicate our thoughts to the other person and to accept their different way of thinking, turning the conflict into a chance to cooperate and come up with a new and better idea.

I am repeating myself, but because each of us has our own way of thinking, our own values, and our own point of view, conflict is unavoidable. However, conflict doesn't have to be a bad thing. What is important is whether we can accept the other person's ideas and work with each other.

My Mistake and My Realization

(Original in Japanese)

Rihito Kobayashi

(Age 13, Japan)

Omori 6th Junior High School of Ota City, Tokyo

In the spring of my second year of junior high school, I had my first big fight with a friend. It started with something small. We were having a joint physical education class, where two classes were competing against each other. The competition was getting more intense, we were getting worked up, and people started calling each other names. I yelled out, "Stop it!" and my friend in the other class said, "Get lost, (nationality)!" I was shocked. The nationality he named was not mine, but I had a friend of that nationality in my class, who heard what he had said. Of course, I knew through news and the Internet media daily that there are people in the world who insult others just because of their nationality. I knew that we Japanese people are sometimes the ones making the insults, and sometimes are the ones being insulted. But until that moment, I hadn't witnessed that kind of discrimination in my own life. It made me furious.

Although the nationality that was named didn't apply to me, that wasn't the problem.

Discrimination itself is inexcusable. If I were the one being bad-mouthed, I might have been able to take it. But because the friend who made the insult was a dear friend, and the friend who was insulted was also a dear friend, I didn't want any more such insults to be spoken. So, without thinking, I grabbed hold of the friend who made the insult, and we started to tussle. I was really angry, although I had enough sense to consider that I didn't want to hurt him. Afterwards, we were called in by our teacher and given a warning. I heard that my friend was scolded severely, too. I thought that was natural, and I even felt that he deserved it. I was still angry, and didn't regret anything I had done.

When I got home that day, my mom said, "We have something to talk about, don't we?" Apparently, my homeroom teacher had called my mom and told her about the incident.

I explained step-by-step what had happened that day. “But it’s unforgivable to say, ‘Get lost, (nationality)’,” I said. “No one should ever say that. I think my friend was badly hurt by it, so I don’t think I did anything wrong.”

My mom replied, “Discrimination is wrong. I understand that you care deeply about your friend’s feelings. But what should those who are in the right be allowed to do to those who are in the wrong?”

I was at a loss for words. I felt like I had just been thumped on the head. Up until then, I believed that because my thoughts were correct, my actions were also correct. But I realized then that just because my thoughts were correct, that didn’t give me the right to take action against the person who was wrong. Believing that when we are ‘right’ we can take action against the person who is ‘wrong’ is, in an extreme sense, the same as slandering a total stranger on social media in the name of ‘justice,’ or persecuting people from the opposing country during wartime, or abusing a child under the pretense of discipline. My heart pounded in my chest. All this time, I realized, I was unknowingly having these frightful thoughts. That is not the kind of person I want to be. I realized my mistake, and with my teacher’s encouragement, my friend and I settled our dispute.

Later, I learned that my friend had heard words like that before when playing sports, and he thought they were words to provoke your opponent, so that’s why he said them. In other words, he didn’t really have a discriminatory mindset or ideology; he just ignorantly imitated the insult without thinking deeply about it.

I felt that I wanted him to know. I wanted him to know that so many people have been hurt and saddened by those kinds of insults and discrimination—that a casual phrase for one person can be deeply hurtful to someone else. And I knew that what was lacking between my friend and me—what was needed to truly resolve our dispute— was dialogue and understanding.

I got in a fight because I didn’t want to hear any more discriminatory language. But this was a mistake. Keeping those words from surfacing is meaningless if we don’t resolve the root cause of the issue. There is so much we need to know. We need to know about the world and its history, about each other, and about ourselves. I will never forget this realization.

Under the Firmament of Orchid Island

(Original)

Anonymous

(Living in Japan)

Doshisha International Junior and Senior High School, Kyoto

Same language, similar culture and traditions, both have long history—Taiwan and China, the roots of Chinese culture, with vast territory and abundant resources, nevertheless, caught in political disputes and ideological confrontations since 1949. After the civil war, the situation between mainland China and Taiwan was in a limbo, akin to divergent ideologies and political systems, both conflicting till today.

Seven years ago, it was my first time travelling to Orchid Island, Taiwan, with my parents, rather than choosing the big cities like Taipei. As a person who attended primary school in China, accepting patriotic education, which told me how ignorant, selfish, narrow-minded—those people in Taiwan are. Lacking self-cognition, I asserted there is an irreconcilable confrontation. I was afraid of arousing controversy when talking. Moreover, I carried a mindset of “they are heretics,” thus, refused to talk with them. My cognition changed due to a small event. That day, when we were wandering on the land, we soon found ourselves lost. We saw an old man with grey hair, staggering, greeting us in a dialect. We introduced ourselves, showing that we came from mainland China, having got lost here.

“It will rain soon”, he said. Then, he attended to lead the way for us to the police station. On the way to police station, knowing our backgrounds, he unveiled an unknown story:

For many years, due to the blockade of China, overt economic trades were forbidden. Nevertheless, the people were living under the confronting political milieus, secretly doing the trades, pursuing the happiness claimed by both.

For the first time I communicated with someone who “lives on the opposing side”.

As we reached the police station, he smiled, nodded and left.

As a result of that day, I, with the shaken original cognition, started talking to dwellers proactively. I talked to an old woman who huddled in an underground house, handing the old-blind-husband every day, still inviting me to have a meal as she got to know where I came from, and those young kids, purer than I thought, without knowing any stubborn view on politics, still welcomed me, as a tourist from opposite side, to come to visit their school.

Time passed as I interacted with them. On that afternoon when I departed Orchid Island, we were stuck in the waiting room of the harbour due to the coming typhoon, worrying about the missing ship affecting the flight later. The staff brought unfortunate news after a 3-hour-wait: three people, only two seats left. In our astonished eyes, a Taiwanese, knowing our situation, offered his seat to us—claiming that he was not in a hurry, but we were—about to catch the plane later.

I felt nothing but guilt. With the ten-year-biased-cognition and ignorant conflict vanishing, I manifested a part of the world, replete with warmth, mutual understanding and tolerance, however, ignored by me before I came here.

“Ethnic conflict arises if ethnic groups compete for the same goal—notably power, access to resources, or territory.” That is what I found on Google after coming back from Taiwan.

It reminded me of life on Orchid island immediately, then, “The only thing overcoming the ethnic conflict is the inherent brilliance of humanity” appearing in my brain, embodying the essence of value I gained during life in Orchid Island.

The confrontation will end in a moderate way, which is based on each of us—the children of earth, the individuals in society, finding the breakthrough. As a student who studies in an international school, I am a member of the MUN club—the model of the United Nation, participating in associated activities, trying to discover the bias and inherent cognition. I am always the assistant when there are exchange students in our school. That all began with the journey of Orchid island. Me, and the whole society, may just need a breakthrough, which can be just one conversation, or a greeting, even one hand-shake, enabling us to cross the gap between two confronting nations, transcending the inherent cognitive opposition.

The wheel of history moves forward, the people under the firmament of orchid island will be the tracks which remain when wheels roll over the road.

The Rainbow After The Storm

(Original)

Kiều Gia Bảo

(Age 20, Vietnam)

Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam

I came out as gay to my parents on my 18th birthday. Lightning has torn down the cosy party, leaving a tense and gloomy atmosphere.

My parents aggressively objected to me being gay. They tried to give me advice, then used abusive words towards me, then threatened me that I would be displaced if I was “not straight back”. I also could not control my emotions and talked back to them. Aggressively, also. My family was slowly sunken into conflicts. A heavy storm has formed.

Rounds and rounds of downpours kept going on the following days. Conflicts after conflict, our words hurt each other, like bolts of lightning violently colliding. We all wanted to protect our own opinions without listening to others.

The storm went on and on for over a year. My parents even forced me to go to “a reliable clinic dedicated to treating gay disease”. I felt exhausted. Gradually, I avoided any conversation with them.

And then I realised that avoiding conflicts or arguing aggressively only worsens the situation. This time, I learned how to respectfully listen to my parents and put myself in their shoes to understand their worries and fears. Homosexuality is still a sensitive topic in countries, including Vietnam, where many people, like my parents, have not yet been able to have access to reliable information regarding this issue. I objectively explained to them about the LGBTQ+ community, as well as addressed their related concerns, hence helping them understand that homosexuality is not what they previously thought.

After over a year, our relationship has improved to some extent. Although my parents still cannot fully accept my sexual orientation, they are more open and respectful regarding my

decision. The heavy storm slowly faded away, leaving a brighter sky, awaiting beams of sunlight and a colourful rainbow.

I have learned a lot through this journey. Firstly, conflicts are unavoidable. Avoiding conflicts only worsens the situation. Instead, it is necessary to face conflicts and find solutions together. Secondly, communication is the key to solving conflicts. In any argument, both sides need to listen to and respect each other's opinions instead of trying to unconditionally protect their own opinions. Thirdly, patience is also important, since it is not a matter of a few days. We need time and patience so that both sides can calm down and reflect on what they are thinking, hence they can gradually accept each other.

On a personal level, this journey has given me a chance to develop patience and practice open communication. Now, I prefer to address conflict through dialogue rather than avoiding it. By fostering open communication, I am determined to build stronger and more meaningful relationships where differences are not seen as threats, but as opportunities for growth.

Besides, I also strive to apply my experience to contribute to a better society, where people respect and embrace differences. For the LGBTQ+ community at large, my experience highlights the importance of advocating for ourselves with both love and patience. Coming out is not always easy, but that does not mean that we cannot keep trying our best. My story can serve as a beacon of hope for others facing similar challenges. It can demonstrate that acceptance while sometimes achieved through difficulties, is a possibility worth fighting for. So stay strong, dear not only the LGBTQ+, but also the female and many other minorities in society.

I might be just a tiny person, and many people might think that I cannot change the world. But I believe that this story of mine not only belongs to me but also belongs to millions of people out there. I have shared my journey in several places, including the Summer Camp 2023 by the Pacific Links Foundation for children in Vietnamese remote areas, the Empower Women Asia project, and the latest, the ASEAN Youth Advocates Network (AYAN). I believe that I can change the world. And I believe that my story would still be able to reach more people, therefore, contribute to building a better world where people receive minorities not with conflicts or hate, but with love and care.

Story of an Afghan girl who succeeded

(Original)

Jamila Hussaini

(Age 22, Afghanistan <Living in U.S.A.>)

Trinity College

"Cover yourself completely! No makeup, no bright colors! Stay indoors! Education is forbidden! Know your place!"

Those were the words I heard from the TV targeting me and every girl in my country. I knew my life was a series of conflicts from the moment I opened my eyes to this little, beautiful world until the time I am writing this essay. Everything started when the doctor smiled at my dad and said, "Congratulations! She is a girl." My parents were overjoyed, but no one knew how long it would last. How long could they keep me safe from the outside world?

As I get older, I no longer believed in the boundaries that were set for me. I started flying like a free bird in the magical blue sky of my homeland, happily living like a lucky girl, riding my bicycle to school, hanging out with other girls, wearing my shiny red scarf, and speaking about my dreams.

Life felt perfect, but not for long. I found myself grappling with the consequences of a war that I neither started nor desired in my country. The Taliban, a group of scary people I only knew from my mom's stories, took over Afghanistan. My mother recounted how the Taliban stole her everything—her dream of becoming a teacher, her friends, her rights, her home, and her safety—when she was young. In August 2021, Taliban entered my city, subjecting me to the same fate.

Since starting high school, I have been passionate about studying medicine, and the only way for me was to get into Kabul University of Medical Sciences, which accepts only 70 female students from all over Afghanistan every year. How hard it was to get into this

school never scared me, but the political situation in my homeland did. I was watching my National Entrance Exam results with my acceptance to Kabul University of Medical Sciences, right when the Taliban closed the schools for female students. They decreed that no girl could step outside without a male guardian, and education or work were now distant dreams.

I was lost among the conflicts. The first conflict was with myself—accepting the situation and saving my life. The second was following my dream in the presence of the Taliban. I chose to overcome both challenges and pave my own path. I began teaching my younger sister, and then some girls from the neighborhood. They were happy to learn, and I enjoyed teaching them. But my mind was busy with thoughts of “I can only teach them to a certain point; what will happen when I no longer have anything to say? What will happen to my goal of becoming a doctor?”

With an unstable internet connection at home, I began searching for places outside Afghanistan, places that could value my aspirations and help me achieve my goals. I spent months submitting my applications to different colleges. Most of them did not accept me for not being financially stable, while they did not know I paid with my dream to stay alive. After applying to over 20 colleges, I received two full scholarships in the US, and a non-profit organization accepted to help me with traveling from Afghanistan to the US. Now, I am a rising sophomore at Trinity College, pursuing a major in Biomedical Engineering.

This is my journey to overcome conflicts, but I still believe that I have a long way to go. My journey taught me that I am the author of my own stories, and no matter how hard life is or can get, I should never give up on what I deserve. Currently, I am involved with a non-profit organization that provides online education to Afghan female students and supports their pursuit of educational opportunities outside Afghanistan. This summer, I am developing a website to showcase creative works by Afghan girls—paintings, drawings, music, and poetry—to highlight their talent to the world. With all the opportunities I have now, I am taking small steps toward a better world for everyone, and I believe those steps will be the pioneers of big changes.

Survived the Troubled Waters

(Original)

Mark Walton

(Age 10, Indonesia)

Surabaya Taipei School

In the unpredictable journey of life, I used to think that conflict was all about the battle between me and the world, a time when my ego was the weapon of my choice, and I used it to win an argument. This perspective, however, changed completely when I drowned in a conflict with my best friends. The conflict that plunged me deeply into sadness and made me think and reflect deeper on every argument that I have in my life and how I handle them.

It all started when some of my best friends voted for me as a group captain for an English project at school. They believed I could lead them because my English was good. I was so happy because my best friends made me feel trusted and valued. But then, I encountered an unexpected problem that felt like a huge storm.

That storm hit when another student came up with a sneaky plan. I accidentally found out about what he did when I went to the bathroom and overheard his entire plan. This student aimed to become the group captain to replace me due to his jealousy. He invited my friends to a secret meeting in the school bathroom, promising them new toys and snacks if they chose him as a group captain instead of me. I thought no one would follow his plan and still voted for me. But then, whispers filled the room, and a sense of division among the group members was very evident. All of them finally changed their minds and were swayed by what he promised them. No group members had any suspicion of him, and it turned out that his plan worked perfectly. He successfully lured them into his trap without any group members realizing how wrong it was. They finally made him as the group captain.

I had to act like everything was normal when they first came to face me, but inside, I was really hurt and upset. They made me drown in an ocean of questions, turned my ego that

was once a mighty ship into a fragile raft. I started to ponder while sitting down alone, "Was I not smart enough to be their group captain?" The friends that I thought were close had replaced me so easily by changing my role as a group captain to nothing.

After five exhaustive days spent seeking understanding, the one who was jealous of me finally sought me out to clarify his actions. He told me that his motive originated from a wish to deepen the friendship with me and my best friends, but he didn't know what else to do other than doing the plan that he had. He realized that what he did was selfish, and he finally said sorry to me and my friends. He then gave me back the title of the group captain in the next group project of English.

I forgave him because I recognized that this conflict revealed not just his mistakes, but my own as well. The title of group captain had made me overly confident to the point of arrogance. It showed me that like everyone else, I too could make mistakes and had much to learn in the process of personal growth. This conflict guided me in shedding my pride and I was really happy because it taught me how to let go of my pride and try to see the good in everything, even when things were tough at first.

As I have survived the troubled waters, I have been thinking about what it means to be a real captain. It is not about being chosen or having a title to feel good about myself. It is about being thoughtful towards others' conditions. I need to understand that in times of conflicts, my perspectives and judgments need to be kind and considerate so that I can have more in return and create a peaceful impact on others. I have learned that it is better to understand others first before seeking to be understood.

A Brief Moral Lesson for Two

(Original in Japanese)

Shugo Obukuro

(Age 11, Japan)

Kunimoto Primary School, Tokyo

"Give me the ball back."

"What are you talking about? It's my ball?"

Four years ago, I got in one of the biggest fights of my life with my best friend at the time. We were playing dodgeball in what was supposed to be a fun class at school. My friend and I were both in the outfield, and we caught the ball at almost the exact same time. Then, we started fighting over who should get the ball. I think if it happened today, I would want to avoid getting in a fight, and I would hand over the ball, saying, "That's fine, here you go." But at the time, both of us were too hot-tempered to give the other person the ball. Our argument turned into a physical fight. The teacher asked us why we ended up fighting, and why we couldn't give up the ball. We could only answer: "Because we both got really excited."

When I think about the reason now, all I can come up with is that we were both eager to hit someone with the ball and move into the infield. But I guess I didn't remember this when we were being questioned. Both of us were so filled with regret in our hearts, we just stood there motionless, unable to say sorry.

Just then, another teacher, who is now the homeroom teacher in the class next to mine, was passing by and noticed the two of us crying. "What happened? Why are you crying?" the teacher asked. We explained the situation, and the teacher told us, "What you need to do is think about what you did wrong, tell the other person that you're truly sorry, and then make up."

Strangely, at that moment, I was able to understand everything—not with my head, but with my heart. It was as if I had a very brief moral lesson called ‘heartfelt apology.’ Even now, the discussion my friend and I had at that time remains at the top of my mind, and because it was such a close personal experience, I think it has been a source of moral support for me. After that, I answered the teacher’s question, and my friend and I apologized to each other.

Up to now, I think, I have often said “I’m sorry” without thinking much about it, just because it was the appropriate thing to say. However, after that brief moral lesson for just the two of us, I think I am able to consider what I did wrong and why, to see where I can do better, and to apologize to the other person.

Even now, four years later, I still remember that moral lesson vividly. If I were asked what saying “sorry” means to me, I would answer that it’s a sign of mutual acceptance and trust. My friend and I are still best friends who grow together and compete with each other, and as such I believe that we can keep laughing and having fun together—yesterday, today, and certainly tomorrow.

Making Space in Our Opinions

(Original in Japanese)

Nana Otsuka

(Age 13, Japan)

Hakkei Junior High School of Sanda City, Hyogo

Ever since I was little, I have always asked a lot of questions.

Whatever the topic, I would fire off a succession of 'whys,' and if the answer wasn't given to me, I would go and look for it myself. By the time I started junior high school, I had my own values and opinions. They were stubbornly fixed ideas.

Maybe that's why I found junior high school to be so constrained and suffocating. *Why do we have to wear uniforms? Why are there so many rules that restrict students? Why do the teachers yell and act so self-important? Why is there no place to state my own opinions? Why, why, why...*

Before long, I stopped attending school.

Even in elementary school, I didn't feel comfortable in school, but the added workload in junior high school eventually made it impossible for me to go. For while, I stayed at home. I had heard from my teacher that there was a special class for kids who had difficulty going to school, but I refused to budge from my opinion that such a place would be no different from school, and I never took a step outside my house.

However, a good friend of mine was also having trouble attending school, and one day she invited me to go to the special class, so I decided to try it. I didn't really want to go, because it was my friend's idea and not mine.

But actually... the place was completely different from what I had imagined.

When I entered the classroom, the soft-spoken teacher gave me a friendly smile. Instead of one-sidedly lecturing me, the teachers made time for my questions, and smiled at me when I was nervous. The other students in the class acted free and self-confident, as though they had come out of their shells.

My idea about the class had been wrong. Or rather than saying I was wrong, I would say that I had been so protective of my own ideas, I didn't accept the opinions of others.

From then on, I started going to that class.

The topic of this essay is 'conflict.' Conflict, it seems, is a situation where two opposing viewpoints confront each other. In my case, the conflict was between school and me. I left my junior high school because its views and values were completely different from mine. Then, I stepped into a classroom that far surpassed my ideas about it, and I was surprised by that new world.

If overcoming conflict means reconciling our differences and doing our best without running away, then I should probably go back to school. But isn't it also important to avoid conflict? While avoiding conflict, we can adopt new views and opinions as our own.

In one sense, my choice not to go to school was a form of running away. But I also encountered a classroom, a teacher, and friends that were better than I ever imagined. In that class, I got to know lots of new ideas and opinions.

The closest conflict in my life is school. I had conflicts with the schoolteachers and students I didn't get along with. Other than school, I think conflicts can also happen at home, at work, on social media, and other places. On a global scale, there are much larger conflicts. When wars break out, people lose their lives.

To begin with, I think we should stop fighting and try to open up some space in our opinions. Though those spaces, other people's opinions and ideas will flow into our mind, and we will get a view of worlds that we did not know before. Instead of being in conflict with each other, maybe we need to respect each other and exchange our views and opinions.

As for me, I am no longer burning with defiance against junior high school. There are many school rules that I don't agree with, but when I went to that other class, a space opened up in my way of thinking. Just as the teachers in that class respected me, I have learned to respect the junior high school.

I think schools could improve if they opened up space in their own opinions and accepted new opinions and ideas. It's true not only for schools, but for countries as well. Instead of getting into conflicts, people and countries with different values should try to soften the walls of their own ideas and ways of thinking. Then, we will be able to overcome conflict.

Headphones

(Original)

Rina Matsuo

(Age 13, Japan)

Senzoku Gakuen Junior and Senior High School, Tokyo

Since the invention of headphones, we have had portals on our ears capping us into worlds of beats, strums, and riffs. We bring *Mozart* and *Maroon 5* to our ears, close our eyes, and enter new dimensions of reality. But nowadays, by choosing to connect to Bluetooth we also disconnect from each other, in the name of respecting a “personal bubble”. We have become uncomfortable with the conversation in coffee shops and train stations. Speak to a headphone-wearer and you’ll get a blank stare at best. Don’t burst the bubble, they’ll say, *do not disturb*.

Repeat this enough and the world shatters.

I myself have been guilty of wearing my barriers. My own headphones quickly became my refuge when I entered a new Japanese-speaking school as an English-speaking returnee. I had lost twenty potential friends on my first day of school as they swarmed me with friendly questions and I responded in my painfully awkward Japanese. Retreating into social shame, I spent many lunches with my headphones on, listening to Eminem and Sia and struggling to finish my Japanese assignments while my classmates merrily discussed *Mrs. Green Apple* and *Yoasobi* and frowned upon seeing their near-perfect marks.

What I didn’t know then was that wearing those headphones was drowning out the very conversations I had wanted so desperately to be included in. I had instigated my own conflict. I began to see it as me against the world, a culture against a culture. I wanted to be included in the tiny society of my classroom, yet I still wanted to stay within the comfort of my own language. It all led me to not want to *listen*.

But there was a day when I forgot my headphones. It wasn’t lyrics I heard then.

It was a classmate as she turned around to ask, “What did you listen to in Manila, anyways?”

That was the first time I finally allowed myself to speak, to be listened to. I allowed myself the freedom of listening to the passionate debate between a *Mrs. Green Apple* fan and a *Yoasobi* supporter. By the end of lunch I had met fellow English-speaking returnees and their Japanese-preferring friends, finding common interests and an admission form for the Model United Nations, Debate, and orchestra clubs.

In the same daily forty-minute frame, the only difference was the presence of “and how about you?”s and a lack of assumptions: my assumption that my peers wouldn’t listen, and their assumption that I did not want to speak.

I have not worn my headphones since. In fact, MUN, Debate, and orchestra are places where I learn to listen to learn, a cycle I hope to continue someday as a peace journalist, as part of the effort to find and take the “headphones” off of everyone else in the world.

We build cold-war barricades around cliques, classes, and countries, and no matter how much we develop the *Internet*, or speak of the *interdependence* of humans, or *interact* with a global media cycle, we continue to split ourselves apart from genuine dialogue and splinter ourselves in the process. Open any social media platform and ironically, you’d see billions of people wearing mental headphones and screaming down each other’s throats, widening the crack of conflict that threatens our peace every day. It’s really not social at all. It’s a neglect of our non-negotiable responsibility as *listeners* — the responsibility to engage instead of excluding, and question instead of quelling.

Perhaps we have grown used to it after masks and antibacterial plastic dividers, and border crises, and civil wars. But we must not accept that every ear in the world has now been closed to anything but its own language — we were not given two ears to cover two ears, we were given two so that one can remain uncovered. Conflict resolution will finally occur when we let go of the comfort of our “headphones” and tune into each other instead.

Invisible Battles

(Original)

Jasmine Chong Man Yan

(Age 14, Malaysia)

Beaconhouse Sri Inai International School, Malaysia

At a young age of about seven, I was introduced into a new world called "Social media". I was on a variety of apps including: Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook and being unsupervised on them, I had full control. Being exposed to these platforms as a young person can be a double-edged sword with it offering both connection and comparison at every turn.

With curated images of seemingly flawless beauty and unattainable standards, it can cause doubt and insecurity on one's own appearance and body image. For me, exposure to these types of images became the catalyst for a journey of self-destructive behaviours. As I continue to consume these images as my daily routine, I find myself nitpicking at every small detail. It only started with my face: the shape of my eyes, how my mouth moves, skin textures. But then, it continued on to my body; my hip dips, broad shoulders and narrow waist. Every imperfection, every little detail, I was insecure about. From then on, I internalised the message that my worth was inherently tied to my appearance, and that I will not be able to look like the girls I see on my feed.

Being fueled by a toxic combination of insecurity and desire for validation, I went on a dangerous path of self-destruction. I became fixated on achieving this idealised version of myself, no matter the cost. On a daily basis, I restricted my food intake, from three meals a day to barely one. Counting calories for every meal or snack, as though it was a normal thing to do as a seven year old. I obsessively weighed myself, or even avoided certain foods that would make me "fat". All because I was desperate to achieve my dream body.

As a result of this, I did lose weight. Perhaps too much as I became fifteen kilograms below the average weight for my height. Constantly, I experienced weakness in legs, fatigue, and decreased energy levels, making it exceptionally difficult to perform my day to day task or

even walk down the stairs. And even though I knew this was not the right path, I continued on for the next half a decade anyway.

It was only through reaching rock bottom that I realised I have to change or else, I am not going to be breathing anytime soon. It was a struggle to start eating again without guilt. With every bite I took, I would feel ashamed and disgusted at myself. But I knew it was a pivotal and transformative step towards healing so I kept going, no matter the amount of guilt I felt. Due to that, I realised that starving myself will do more harm than good and decided to seek out help from a school counsellor about this.

Gradually, by taking small steps at a time, I was able to go back to a healthy eating schedule. Rebuilding my relationship with food was a difficult task as I used to view it in such a negative light yet after seeking help from others, such as: close friends, family, teachers and counsellors. I was able to learn that food is not a threat, rather it is an essential component of all human lives.

I realised that the importance of a strong inner circle to support you is an important part of recovering, same with being compassionate towards myself. Instead of being harsh and critical, I try to have self-compassion and remind myself that I deserve to be treated just like how I treat others.

After all these years of experiencing anorexia, I learnt how a person acts when they go through this. And because of that, If I suspect anyone is going through what I went through, I try to advise others and help them. I want to be able to lead by example, demonstrating to others that if they feel as though it is an impossible mission, I am proof that it is possible.

I had to learn to love myself for who I am, not what I look like and I hope others can too.

How Death Inspires Me to Live

(Original)

Challene Harijanto

(Age 15, Indonesia)

SMA Citra Berkas Surabaya

October 9, 2012, 10 days before my 4th birthday. I was at kindergarten playing with my friends, when all of a sudden my teacher called me to go outside the classroom and told me to leave school early. My younger self couldn't understand my dad's worried eyes. As I got home, I was dumbfounded, as the person I love most has passed away, my mother. My younger self was in denial. I couldn't believe it. The person who had always been there for me was suddenly gone. My mom was a person with big dreams. She would do anything to achieve her dreams, as I was little she would always teach me new things. Her passion and determination left a lasting impression on me.

But since she was gone, I haven't been close with anyone in my family, especially my dad. I felt like an outsider as everyone was dealing with their own grief. Eventually, I felt lonely and didn't have anyone to lean on. I was forced into a world of responsibilities I was not ready for. Having to navigate things on my own, I made mistakes but I was always misunderstood. I would be seen as the misbehaved child while I was just struggling to figure out the world alone.

My dad's sense of rejection and disappointment left me feeling deeply burdened. I couldn't bear the thought of losing the only parent I had left. I sought to prove my worth through academic achievement, in hope that by proving my worth, maybe he'll give me more attention. But I was wrong.

"Your sister did it better."

"So? It's not that hard getting a 95 anyways."

I felt discouraged and wanted to give up. As I was crying hopelessly in my room, I remembered how my mom had always believed and supported every dream I had, no matter how silly it seemed. I couldn't give up on her, I wanted to make her proud more than anyone else. It gave me the strength and confidence to overpower these conflicts, I'm no longer a prisoner to anyone's words.

I was back to my motivated self, but this time for myself. I started trying new things but it was all random at first, until I found that I was most curious about tech. My dad has always been fond of the tech world, so I started exploring more about it as a way for us to connect. It gives me a sense of joy when we can bond over shared interest.

One day, my dad mentioned cybersecurity. I wasn't aware of what it was back then, but I wanted to learn more. My dad enrolled me in a course where I began to develop a passion for it. I furthered my learning and started developing my very own game teaching cyber security. I wanted my game to help other people. When I was all alone, I often felt lost and overwhelmed, which held back my progress and made me lose hope. My goal is to create an easier path for everyone, especially those who have it like me. Combining my passion and my past struggles really brings out the best in me to help the society.

I would've never guessed that when I started focusing on myself, time heals itself. I finally made peace with my family, I learn to understand them and share their feelings. The incident had a big impact on everyone, especially my dad. I shouldn't pressure people to understand me without acknowledging their grief. As time passed, we all learned to care for each other again.

Overcoming conflicts can be challenging, especially when it shifts your entire life. We may grieve, we may feel lonely and confused, but remember that life must go on. Instead we should pay respect to our loved ones. At my age, I haven't gotten the time to understand my mom's desire yet. But all I know is that she would want me to chase my dreams. And I want to share awareness about my passion and help others learn from it too. My mom will live forever in me, I honor the memory of her by carrying forward her dreams and passion.

A Conflict in Choices and Values

(Original in Japanese)

Kaori Kitamura

(Age 18, Japan)

Jonan Gakuen Senior High School, Osaka

I once had a difficult experience in which two things that I value were in conflict with each other. It happened when I first entered high school. I started karate when I was six years old, and in junior high school I went to a combined junior high and high school that was very competitive in karate, with the aim of becoming the best in Japan. At first, because I had chosen this school for karate, I wasn't very interested in studying, but gradually I became interested in my studies as well, and after consultation with my homeroom teacher, I decided to move up to an advanced class for high school.

There weren't many students in the karate club who were moving to the advanced class, and there also weren't many senior students demonstrating that it was possible to do both. Still, because this was my decision, I was determined to achieve my goals of becoming the best in Japan at karate and also being accepted into a top university. At least, that was my intention.

However, right after I started high school, I struggled with the difficult problems we were given and the number of assignments and quizzes, all of which was much more than I had faced in junior high school. Moreover, I was physically exhausted from my club activities and also suffered from a lack of sleep because I was cutting back on sleep in order to make time for studying. I heard people around me say things like, "If you chase after two hares you won't catch either" and "Honestly, I think it's impossible to do both," and I started to regret choosing the advanced class and felt that I wanted to focus on karate instead. My karate team, which I wanted to be the best in Japan, depended on the strength of each individual member, and I didn't want to cause trouble for my team because of what I was unable to do. Seeing my fellow students sweat it out in their club activity, I began to wonder why the hard work we put into karate wasn't enough to get in to our desired universities.

On the other hand, I also wanted to work hard at my studies. I wanted to go to a top university and meet all kinds of people who were much more knowledgeable than I was, and learn about unfamiliar worlds. I knew from listening to teachers and senior students in the advanced course that there was a lot to be gained by studying hard. I was inspired by the saying, "Where there's a will, there's a way," and because there were few precedents for what I was trying to do, I thought that if I succeeded at balancing both pursuits, I might be able to offer a little support to younger students who were struggling with the same thing. Above all, I believed that if I managed to balance karate and studies and succeed at both, it would give me a different perspective that I would not attain otherwise.

For a long time, I was torn between wanting to focus on karate and wanting to balance karate and studies. It was a very difficult time, but fortunately I was in a good environment. Despite the trouble I was causing for them, my karate teammates kept encouraging me to give it my all. Both my classroom teachers and my club coaches sincerely supported me. And so, I chose to balance both pursuits. Of course, I was afraid that in doing so, I might lose something. When we lost a match because of me, I felt truly sorry and upset. But nonetheless, I endeavored never to let my studies be an excuse for how I performed in karate, or to let karate be an excuse when it came to my studies.

In the end, I never did achieve my dream of becoming number one in Japan. I was very disappointed that it ended that way. But I believe that I gave it everything I had, and I don't regret the path that I chose.

here are two things I learned from this experience. The first is that when we have conflicting values in regard to our options, it's important to start from our ideal future and think backwards. Even if there are two paths we want to take, we only have one body, so we can only choose one path. But if the choices we make will shape our future self, shouldn't we think about it from the perspective of who we want to become? I hope to make use of this lesson when I am once again facing a fork in the road.

The second thing I learned is the importance of our surroundings. I was able to make my choice with no regrets because of the people around me who were there for me when I was struggling. If someone is worried about what they should do, I think it's important to be part of that person's surroundings, worrying and thinking together with them. And, once that person has decided on their path, the people around them should encourage them, support them, and watch over them. From here on, when I meet someone who is facing a choice of two paths like I was, I hope to be the kind of person who is there to support them.

Choosing Love

(Original)

Naa Amanuah Ackwerh

(Age 18, Ghana)

Saint Adelaide, Accra

A few weeks before my last summer vacation, my classmates and I were tasked with undertaking a community service project by raising funds to help the less fortunate in society. We had a meeting and after several discussions we decided to take the money to an orphanage and decided that to raise funds, we would engage in face paintings at our school's three-day funfair and sell our very own art pieces and drawings.

It took a week of planning, and several roles were assigned; my best friend, Mina, and I were made treasurers. I did not think anything could possibly go wrong because aside from our good standing in maths, we had been best friends since nursery school. The first day of the event was a little slow but by day three we had crossed our estimated revenue by over 50%. After the funfair we decided to hold one last meeting to discuss how we would make the presentation to the orphanage. Mina and I were also to account for the money made. A week to the meeting, I received a text message from her. She was suggesting that we take a small chunk of the money and split it between the two of us.

I thought it was a joke at first, so I laughed it off, but she kept bringing it up. I decided to call her, and she admitted to being serious. I was so surprised and immediately hung up without letting her explain herself. How could my own best friend be a thief? I immediately blocked her on every social media platform and so we did not talk for several days. However, the day before the meeting she showed up at my house and said that she just wanted to explain herself.

Mina told me about how sick her mother was, due to kidney failure and that she wanted to take the money to help with her mother's medical bills. I was very astonished by the news. Yes, it was not an excuse for stealing but knowing her reason made a lot of difference. I

apologised for not waiting to hear her explanation and she apologised for suggesting we steal. We spoke at length, but the most important decision made was that our friendship was worth fighting for.

On the day of the meeting, Mina and I decided to convince everyone that we should spend our money on the renal department of the Korlebu teaching hospital (where Mina's mother was receiving treatment). No one opposed the idea and just like that we were able to support her mother's treatment without having to steal a penny.

Mina's mother died a few weeks ago but the short fight I had with her daughter taught me a lot. The first lesson is to not be quick to push someone away. In a world where "cancel culture" has become so common, many people are quick to cut off people who share different opinions or values from them. My fight with Mina taught me that I should be willing to hear the other person's reason for their actions so we can exchange ideas on the matter. After all, pushing the person away would not change their views and may only ruin beautiful relationships.

Also, I learnt about the importance of expressing one's feelings about an issue. When Mina said she wanted to take some of the money I immediately tried to take her out of my life, without even expressing my thoughts on what she did. I believe that society would thrive when everyone shares their feelings about issues that affect them that way, we can agree or disagree and reach a consensus.

Mina and I have decided to start a foundation to help kidney patients in our community. Because we decided to let love lead by resolving our differences, we will hopefully be able to help save many lives.

Stopping the Blood on the Field and at the Riverside.

(Original)

Boluwatife Holiness Alagbe

(Age 21, Nigeria)

University of Ibadan

It was one of the days of killing and arson again. I ran until I got to a place where I believed I would be safe. Two children ran towards me, their blood trickling down behind them. I wept for myself and for my people.

My community majorly comprised of two ethnic groups; the *Tapas* and the *Fulanis*. While the *Tapas* were majorly agrarian farmers, the *Fulanis* were majorly cattle rearers.

The only source of water in my community was a river. The *Fulanis'* cattle drank directly from the river, muddled up the water, caused pollution and also prevented the *Tapas* from getting clean water for their domestic use. Hence, each time a *Tapa* went to the river, he/she went fully armed so he/she could drive away the cattle. The *Fulanis* also went with weapons so they could fight anyone who wanted to prevent their cattle from drinking. Hence, this would always result into conflict and battle.

In addition, a great portion of the farmland which belonged to the *Fulanis* was bare, infertile and had only sparse grasses for the cattle's consumption. Sometimes, the herd became uncontrollable and ate the planted crops of the *Tapas* who had the fertile portion near the riverbank. Hence, there was always conflict either because of this or the muddling up of the water.

That day, I decided to be an agent of change. The following week when the conflict had subsided, I went to the river in the evening with my water pot. As the herdsmen started coming with their cattle to drink and muddle up the water again, I greeted them cheerfully and offered to fetch water from the river for their cattle so the cattle would not drink directly from the river. To my excitement, they agreed and I hurriedly started fetching

water from the stream while the cattle drank at a reasonable distance. That day, the water was clean and fresh for domestic use and hence, there was no need to apply force to drive the cattle away from the stream.

I continued doing this for a while and my schoolmates among the *Fulani* youths joined me in fetching the water for their cattle. Soon, their friends started joining us and almost all *Fulani* youths cultivated the habit of preventing their herds from drinking directly from the stream.

Thereafter, I moved on to find the solution to the problem of grasses for the cattle. I told a classmate who was a *Fulani* youth that I would be helping them in disposing their cattle's excrete. I had learnt in my Agriculture class that excrete from man and animals are manures to farmland. So, I packed the excrete to the vast infertile land that had always remain barren. I did this consistently for months.

Soon, the land that had always been infertile became fertile and began to grow grasses. Thereafter, the cattle had grasses to eat and did not have to feed on people's crops. That year, for the first time in many years, there was no war or conflict. I encouraged them to always deposit the excrete on the land as it would help grass to grow. I also helped them in doing that sometimes until they became used to it.

I became a little hero in my community and that very event taught me a number of lessons. One, **using arms and ammunition during conflict will always and invariably escalate the problem and wipe out almost the whole community.** In the long run, both parties will be at a disadvantage.

Secondly, conflicts are as a result of clash in interest and to resolve it the first step is to **know the interest which each party is trying to protect.** That is, the bone of the contention and what each party actually wants. Thirdly, **each party has to find a way in which the other party's interest can be protected without hurting either of them.** Furthermore, **there must be negotiation and compromise.** Each party must be ready to shift ground to a reasonable extent.

By doing these, we will be able to resolve conflicts peaceably and create a safer world.

Let's Heal

(Original)

Tamale Enock

(Age 23, Uganda)

2025, a year that casts shadows of dread and sleepless nights over my thoughts. It will be campaign time again and I know what has been happening in past years: bloodshed, violence, abductions, chaos, assassinations. It's all politics.

Growing up, I resented politicians for supporting acts that oppressed us and dividing our nation into political colour symbolism.

I always avoided anything that would put me in political wrangles because innocent people always pay the ultimate price. I would walk away, shielding myself from their poisonous words.

But conflicts are inevitable and rise unpredictably, catching us off guard, no matter how we try to hide.

November 17th, 2020 during campaign. The political turmoil had reached its peak leaving every citizen tasting on the consequences of leadership struggles. A beautiful day turned into dark smoke by afternoon, due to a country-wide protest of the arrest of the opposition leader.

I was a street vendor due to covid-19, I wasn't schooling, stuck and confused in Kampala city, cars weren't moving, roads closed. I had to walk 3.7km back home while hands up to avoid being beaten or shot by military and if lucky enough to escape the angry mob too.

On the way home, I received a call that my friend was tragically shot by a stray bullet, police left after the shoot and the agitated crowd placed his body in the middle of the road. They couldn't let anyone take it away, using it as a bait to get his mother who was a local councillor from the ruling party (colour).

Reaching the scene, my soul crashed realizing how we had lost it all. Hate, anger,

vengeance and inhuman spirits had taken over.

This marked the beginning of my internal conflict, you know how I felt about politicians.

But this was my best friend, even though his mom was a politician.

Couldn't the mob see that the boy was innocent? His mother is deaf. He was her interpreter. She obviously needed help.

But who could help a politician from a government that torments its people? Everyone was scared to be seen with her, in fear of discrimination. I gathered a few friends who accepted and we confronted the mob.

His mom and I pleaded with them to let go of his body, at my age, the situation had transcended my ability, they wanted to beat us. we stayed calm and begged, until strangers who had the same beliefs joined us. We later managed to get his body and took it home. 54 people lost their lives and hundreds were left wounded news reported. A few weeks later, I started learning sign language to help her communicate. She is now family to me.

Lessons: in order to live in a peaceful society, we must forgive, forget and let go of our differences because lack of empathy, compassion, cooperation and love can lead to dehumanization and justification of acts of violence. But, if these qualities are well cultivated in our societies plus, resilience and solidarity in the face of adversity, it can help us heal the deep-seated wounds caused by conflicts.

I also learnt that resolving conflicts requires active listening, mediation, tolerance and an open mind because if we had approached the mob with a hostile mindset, the outcomes would have been so bad. This is where I realized that **"there is no conflict that is too big to be resolved"**. Sometimes we just have to lower our egos, seat on around table, set boundaries with respect, be willing to compromise and negotiate until a common ground is reached.

I aim to use these lessons for self-growth, advocating for peace and having healed from resentment. I envision writing a book called *"Saving The Soul of a Nation"* about how we can cultivate peace in our societies and a guide on handling and resolving conflicts. I have also written short nonfiction impactful stories that will later be turned into short films, mini-story books for educational purposes and raising awareness to heal our societies. **Let's heal and choose peace from now on**, to alter dreadful years to come, I believe we can create a future of abundance. I believe in us, the future ancestors.