

2016 International Essay Contest for Young People

[Children's Category – 2nd Prize]

Education and Character

(Original in Japanese)

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In the past, when I saw news about a terrorist incident, I would be shocked by the images, and I felt sympathy for the lives that were senselessly taken away. But time would pass without my doing anything about it, and I would return to my peaceful life.

In February, I participated in a peace program for the Middle East. A delegation of family members bereaved by the Israeli Palestinian conflict came to Shizuoka, where I live. I listened to the stories of young people around 20 years old. There was a person whose parents were killed before his eyes, and another who, when she was just nine years old, saw her sisters captured and killed. Living in Japan, I could not even imagine such devastating experiences.

Israel and Palestine are enemy countries. Yet, a few brave youth from both countries were willing to be paired up and do a homestay together. I would have thought that even if they acted in a friendly way toward each other, a moment would come when events from the past would resurface in their mind, and they would be unable to contain their feelings of hatred and grief. But after spending so long at the limits of chaos and disorder, they had true strength and a sense of reason. They had the courage to overcome and reach out. There is something we can learn from this example.

One of the people whose family was affected by the war told us: "We have no dreams or hopes for the future. All we want is to live a peaceful life, without being afraid."

Why do so many people have to die in this way? It is not just because of wars. Lives are also lost because people cannot get vaccinations or medical treatment, and there are children struggling in poverty and suffering from hunger. Many of the extremists who carry out suicide bombings are not so far from me in age.

Recently, I have been thinking about these issues more than I did before. I think the greatest threat to peace is our apathy toward those who are suffering. We turn away from realities that we don't want to face, and return to our everyday lives as if it is someone else's problem. This apathy creates a gap between wealthy people and poor people, and leads to terrorism and war.

I believe that solving environmental issues will make a better future for the planet, and since I was young I have participated in various activities for this cause. However, that alone is not enough. It is just as important to build a world in which people all over the world can say, "I'm happy to be born."

My school's mottos are "truth, goodness, and beauty" and "independence." Our goal is to pursue a better world and create it together. In classes run by students, we sometimes have disagreements, and things can get out of control. Even at those times, we fully share our opinions, and we work hard to find the beginnings of a resolution to our disagreement. As we deepen our thinking and try over and over to understand what the other side wants to say, we feel fulfilled and enriched. However, the people educating us are adults who have a great deal of knowledge and experiences. I think that the way we are educated also forms our character. It is education, I think, that fostered young suicide bombers who believed it was the right thing to do. Like the answer to a math question, some answers are universal. But right now, we are learning without questioning the educational policies of our respective country.

A world without war and terrorism. A world of acceptance, where we can lend a hand to very young people, elderly people, sick and disabled people, and people who think differently than we do. A world where we have the courage to stop destroying nature for profit.

I am unaware of many of the problems happening in the world. I want the adults who run today's world to firmly face one another and talk to each other, with the courage to overcome their antagonism. I want the adults of today to teach us what we need for the future. Then, when we become adults, we will put what we have learned into practice, transferring our ideas and knowledge to the next generation.

We are all one family living in our beautiful, clear blue home—the 4.6 billion-year-old planet Earth. The home is the family's schoolhouse. For the future of Earth and the peace of humanity, I would like us to make our schoolhouse a place where we work together, use our imagination, and advance our learning.