

2013 International Essay Contest for Young People

List of Winners

No. of participating countries: 157

No. of entries: 15,105 (Children's category: 4,522 / Youth category: 10,583)

1st Prize

Children's category (1 entrant)

- *The Wisdom of the Ghanaian People*
Mikiya Tan-Okyere
(Age 9, Japan <Living in Ghana>)

Youth category (1 entrant)

- *The Devil Abolished in My Mind*
Rogers Kimuli (Age 24, Rwanda)

2nd Prize

Children's category (2 entrants)

- *A Ray of Hope*
Keanne Chang (Age 12, Canada & Taiwan
of China <Living in Taiwan of China>)
- *Path for All*
Haruka Kawada (Age 14, Japan)

Youth category (2 entrants)

- *Beyond the Border*
Sidiq Maulana (Age 24, Indonesia)
- *Relationship between Individual and Culture*
Nurana Rajabova Oqtay
(Age 24, Azerbaijan)

3rd Prize

Children's category (5 entrants)

- Anastasia Lebedenko (Age 10, Ukraine)
- Angel Mahonri Caballero Ortega
(Age 11, Mexico)
- Shah-Mir Aizaz (Age 13, Pakistan)
- Kirin Suemitsu (Age 14, Japan)
- Miki Nakamori (Age 15, Japan)

Youth category (5 entrants)

- Yuna Kida (Age 16, Japan)
- Natsuka Sato (Age 16, Japan)
- Simbarashe Kaneunyenye
(Age 16, Zimbabwe)
- Demchuk Ol'ha (Age 17, Ukraine)
- Jimena Curbelo Zabala (Age 20, Uruguay)

Honorable Mention

Children's category (25 entrants)

- Takako Kanno (Age 10, Japan)
- Thitaree Thummaluxsame (Age 10, Thailand)
- Yang Zhixi (Age 10, China)
- Ekler-Szabo Botond Alexander
(Age 11, Hungary)

Youth category (25 entrants)

- Takashi Usami
(Age 15, Japan <Living in U.K.>)
- Shubham Kumar (Age 15, India)
- Lisa Qian (Age 15, U.S.A.)
- Aurna Sarker (Age 16, Bangladesh)

- Jigme Kato (Age 11, Japan & Tibet of China <Living in Nepal>)
- Kira Householder (Age 11, U.S.A.)
- Pak Aiya (Age 11, Kazakhstan)
- Nodoka Ota (Age 12, Japan)
- Nana Shiohata (Age 12, Japan)
- Shion Takeda (Age 12, Japan)
- Tabitha Miller (Age 12, Australia)
- Yumiko Tan (Age 12, Japan <Living in Ghana>)
- Sakiko Kidera (Age 13, Japan)
- Rinka Tachikawa (Age 13, Japan)
- Brent Lin (Age 13, U.S.A. & Taiwan of China <Living in Taiwan of China>)
- Ami Muto (Age 13, Japan)
- Arian Eshtehardian (Age 14, UK <Living in Sweden>)
- Alexine C. Yap (Age 14, The Philippines <Living in Vietnam>)
- Hitomi Sawano (Age 14, Japan)
- Miku Shimizu (Age 14, Japan)
- Juhi Saxena (Age 14, U.S.A.)
- Tijana Dodov (Age 14, Macedonia)
- Twinkle Sharma (Age 14, India)
- Hawwa Iufa (Age 14, Maldives)
- Keiko Kishimoto (Age 15, Japan)
- Neha Anna D'sa (Age 16, India)
- Natsuki Yamaguchi (Age 16, Japan)
- Chiaki Shimada (Age 17, Japan)
- Dahyung Oh (Age 17, Republic of Korea)
- Yuri Hasegawa (Age 17, Japan)
- Kanako Hirose (Age 17, Japan)
- Rolyne Dominique B. Patron (Age 17, The Philippines)
- Ieva Killa (Age 18, Latvia)
- Franziska Hartmann (Age 18, Germany)
- Gborglah Felix Korku Fate (Age 19, Ghana)
- Alina Toporas (Age 20, Romania)
- Octavio Daniel Carreno Gomez (Age 20, Mexico)
- Alvaro Santiago Condo Carabajo (Age 21, Ecuador)
- Silvio Godoy Argiz (Age 21, Argentina)
- Victorio Román Cuyér Gómez (Age 21, Paraguay)
- Mahamat Atteib Dahab (Age 21, Senegal)
- Lena Taupier-Letage (Age 21, France <Living in U.S.A.>)
- Tsang Man Yin (Age 24, China)
- Diana Marcela Sarasti Realpe (Age 24, Colombia)
- Lusbey Mendez Santiz (Age 24, Mexico)
- Abdulkabeer Ishola (Age 25, Nigeria)

Best School Award (2 schools)

- Ichikawa Junior & Senior High School, Chiba (Japan)
- Tokyo Gakugei University International Secondary School (Japan)

School Incentive Award (27 schools)

- Atomi Gakuen Junior High School, Tokyo (Japan)
- Fuji Sacred Heart Senior High School, Shizuoka (Japan)
- Hanazono Junior High School of Higashi-Osaka City, Osaka (Japan)
- Chicago Futabakai Japanese School-Saturday School, Illinois (U.S.A.)
- Ghana Japanese Children's School, Accra (Ghana)
- Ikubunkan Senior High School & Ikubunkan Global High School, Tokyo (Japan)

- Japanese School of Toledo, Ohio (U.S.A.)
- Japanese Supplementary School in Middle Tennessee (U.S.A.)
- Japaniche Schule in Zurich (Hoshuko) (Switzerland)
- Kinki University Wakayama Junior High School (Japan)
- Kokugojuku KURU, Tokyo (Japan)
- Kokushikan Junior High School, Tokyo (Japan)
- Kyoto Gakuen Junior and Senior Highschool (Japan)
- Matsumoto Shuho Secondary School, Nagano (Japan)
- Miyagi Prefectural Hakuou Senior High School (Japan)
- Hokkaido Obihiro Sanjo High School (Japan)
- Omori 6th Junior High School of Ota City, Tokyo (Japan)
- Oshwal Academy Nairobi Primary (Kenya)
- Port of Sacramento Japanese School, California (U.S.A.)
- Saint Mary's International School, Tokyo (Japan)
- Senzoku Gakuen High School, Kanagawa (Japan)
- Showa Women's University Senior High School, Tokyo (Japan)
- Shoyokan Junior High School, Fukuoka (Japan)
- Takanawa Junior High School, Tokyo (Japan)
- Tokyo Kenji Steiner School (Japan)
- Vancouver Japanese School, British Columbia (Canada)
- Yanai Gakuen High School, Yamaguchi (Japan)
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The Wisdom of the Ghanaian People

(Original in Japanese)

Mikiya Tan-Okyere

(Age 9, Japan <Living in Ghana>)

Ghana Japanese Children's School, Accra

"The electricity will come back on. There's nothing to worry about!" people say as they patiently wait for the end of a power outage. They place candles in their rooms and only use a flashlight when they move around. They can't do homework and they can't watch TV. In Ghana, everyone simply waits patiently for the electricity to come back.



And the electricity always comes back. If you wait, it always comes back. Ghanaian fathers, in particular, never worry about such things.

But my mother always frets and say things like, "I'll go check the meter," or, "I wonder when the electricity will come back on."

When I was small I would do the same as my mother and get upset about power outages. But now I know; the electricity always comes back!

In Ghana, hot dry weather dominates from January to March each year. Then the Harmattan trade wind comes with its sand storms and turns the moon red. The sun looks just like the moon. My throat begins to hurt and everyone begins to cough. Your skin dries out and turns white. I hate the Harmattan season because everyone ends up getting sick.

But the Ghanaian people know. The Harmattan will come to an end, the blessed rain will fall, and the rainy season will begin. Once the rainy season comes, water will follow. You will no longer have to wash your entire body with just one bucket of water. I hate the thunderstorms and heavy rain of the rainy season, but I like the rainy season because it brings a lot of water with it.

Even at times of power outages and water stoppages, Ghanaians believe that God will give them water and electricity. Hence, they never panic. They pray and quietly wait for things to return to normal. I think this is a kind of wisdom they have acquired by living in a harsh environment.

Every summer I return to Japan where my grandmother lives. There are no power outages and water is always in abundant supply. This is why my mother can't wait for even a short time when there are water or power failures.

I want to become the kind of person who can wait. There is no point in fretting. No matter how long a drought continues, the rain will come in due course. This is how the Ghanaian people have come to terms with their harsh environment. And this is why, when they have an abundant harvest of crops such as pineapples or plantains, they share them among everyone.

I think the way that Ghanaian people are able to face their harsh environment and share whatever they have in abundance is a wonderful aspect of their culture. And I believe that getting along with nature, sharing what you have with other people and caring about people are the qualities we need to create a better future.

The Ghanaians' way of life is wonderful. No matter how challenging the environment may be, they accept it without resistance. And they wait patiently in the firm belief that God will help them. Being so bighearted allows them to think positively. Everyone shares and helps each other, and this enables them to build a peaceful society.

I think there is a lot my impatient mother and I could learn from the positive way Ghanaian people live. In Japan, many things move along at great speed, so we get anxious when the pace of things slows down. But there's nothing to worry about. The rain always comes, and so does the water and electricity.

The Ghanaian people taught me that if we wait without losing faith and share things with one another, a peaceful future is sure to come.

The Devil Abolished in My Mind (Original)

Rogers Kimuli

(Age 24, Rwanda)

Higher Institute of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry

Since 1959, all the people in my country have experienced the impact of the genocide ideology which affected different minds of the people, and this led to the severe and a deadly slaughtering of more than 1,000,000 innocent Tutsi in 1994 genocide, leaving the country politically, socially and economically unstable and disorderly.



In 1962, when my mother was only one year old, she fled with her mother who was wounded everywhere on her body by the genocide perpetrators, to the north of my country in Uganda and they settled there for a long period of time. My mother met my father in a hard life as a refugee. They both decided to make a new life and at least to have a new family since they had both lost a very big number of family members on either side, and thus I was born in 1989 in this country.

As a young man, I grew up knowing that the country I'm living in wasn't mine. I started to learn true stories about what happened and why I wasn't born in my country, and if that was the case, why I could not go back to my country. The answer from my parents was that we can't go back because so many people in our country hate us and they don't wish to see anyone from the so called Tutsi tribe, that we were called snakes and sometimes cockroaches, and also that the country was like a glass full of water where you can't add on any more.

All this made me grow up knowing that there is a group of people searching for me, not to give me prizes but to kill me. This made me develop a bad intention of waiting for a favorable climate for me to make a good revenge.

But between 1994 and 2000, when we went back to our country after Rwanda Patriotic Front had overthrown the Hutu government, more than 120,000 genocide perpetrators were imprisoned and were not yet tried in court. It was costly to the government and there was a need to build more prisons instead of rebuilding commercial houses.

In 2001, the government developed gacaca courts, where well-respected elders known as Inyangamugayo were elected based on their honesty by the people of the community. Gacaca originates from our national language Kinyarwanda meaning short, clean cut grass or umucaca. It symbolizes a gathering place for elders to sit on and judge the trial, a system of community justice inspired by tradition and culture, focusing on criminal prosecutions, putting justice partially into the hands of the victims with a mission of achieving truth, justice and reconciliation.

Even though gacaca was mainly focusing on unity and reconciliation of Rwandans, it was still very hard for me to change my mind to forgive, not until 2004, in one of the gacaca courts, where a best friend of mine forgave a man who slaughtered both of his parents, two brothers and three sisters while he was watching them die.

I changed my mind to develop myself and my country instead of focusing on revenging in 2005 when I was 16. I also forgave all those that killed my family. Since then, my life became more successful. Focused on being an entrepreneur, I now grow watermelons and I offer jobs to five young men on a daily basis to earn a living.

Through people like me who changed because of gacaca, now more than 98% want their children to think of themselves as Rwandans rather than Hutu, Tutsi or Twa, based on Rwanda Reconciliation Barometer.

Rwanda's development is second in Africa and first in East Africa. Even though it is a country that lost the biggest number of people in the shortest period of time, united we stand to develop our country and the world. If it wasn't for the culture of gacaca courts, the devil of genocide ideology wouldn't have been abolished from my mind.

I now call upon all the young men and women in the whole world not to look at their culture as a burden, but as an initiator of their development economic wise.

2013 International Essay Contest for Young People

[Children's Category – 2nd Prize]

A Ray of Hope

(Original)

Keanne Chang

(Age 12, Canada & Taiwan of China <Living in Taiwan of China>)

Taipei American School

Culture is one of the words in the dictionary that people talk about a lot. It means different things to a variety of people; it could vary from food, clothing, song, dance, and art to behavior, religious practices, education, breeding, and others. Culture comprises of just seven letters; yet this powerful word has a lasting impact that shapes the perception, attitude, and ideas that define the identity of a person, a community and a nation. It is something that could bring people in a nation, country, or region together. There are a lot of diverse and unique cultures that people all around the world are proud of. In Taiwan, where my parents are from, there is one traditional ceremony that I take pride in and that is the Sky Lantern Festival. It is a custom that symbolizes sacrifice, bonding, and aspiration.

According to the people of Pingxi, the tradition of setting the Sky Lantern dated back to the Ching Dynasty. Long time ago, bands of outlaws frequently attacked the villages in Pingxi. This forced the local residents to seek refuge in the mountains or elsewhere. The watchmen used the sky lantern to signal the villagers that their houses were safe again so it was time to go home. This simple story showed the bravery and sacrifice made by the watchmen just to make sure that the residents of their village were all safe. The Sky Lantern Festival is crucial in the Taiwanese culture because it is a constant reminder of the sacrifices of our ancestors to make sure that our generation enjoys the security and freedom that we so much take for granted. It is a gift that prompts our memory day by day that we should cherish and value what we have.

In addition, this unique culture has the ability to bring people together. Everyone has to unite and work together for this sky lantern to rise up into the air. Since 2~7 people are usually needed to do this, this is an event that allows family and friends to connect and bond with each other in a fun way. Furthermore, people also can join in by watching hundreds and thousands of sky lanterns go off in the air at the same time at the Pingxi Lantern Festival here in Taiwan.

This festival attracts thousands of people from all over the world to come, watch, and participate the release of thousands of sky lanterns. This festival could let people of the same interest meet and become friends. As the lanterns filled the dark sky, there is a feeling of something magical happening – the warmth and joy that surround the people present in that event.

Moreover, sky lantern is an important part of our culture in Taiwan because it is a symbol of hope. The modern sky lanterns are the carrier of people’s prayers. Before releasing them to the sky, people would write down their wishes, hopes and dreams on the lantern as a way of delivering the messages to heaven. It has been said that in heaven, the gods would take a look at these sky lanterns and fulfill any of the wishes, hopes, and dreams sent to them. This tradition of writing people's wishes, hopes, and dreams has been around for a couple of decades now. It is a deeply touching experience and should be kept alive. The future generation should never extinguish the flame of hope because one day it may come true.

Sky lanterns can help build bridges between the past and the future. This tradition helps us treasure the past and gives us a ray of hope for the future. By understanding what we all have in common and what we stand for, we can all move forward for a better tomorrow. One thing is for sure - regardless of race, ethnicity, and beliefs - we all believe that there is hope in the future and that is what Pingxi Sky Lanterns prove.

Path for All
(Original)

Haruka Kawada
(Age 14, Japan)

Ichikawa Junior High School, Chiba

I still remember clearly, the surprise I got at what my mother told me. I had been eating rice, a daily necessity in my life, when she severely told me off for not cleaning out my plate. "There are seven gods in every grain of rice, so it's a sin to waste your food".

I couldn't understand what she meant. I had spent most of my childhood in England at a catholic school which is a monotheistic religion with just one god who I had learned to believe in. At that time, I had just visited Italy and seen the Pope, who I understood to be a messenger of God. I was moved by the sincerity of his prayers and loyalty he showed for God. Therefore, the Japanese way of believing in many gods such as gods of flowers, gods of winds and even gods in a single grain of rice was difficult for me to understand. I puzzled over this question, and wavered between the two. Which could possibly be right?

With this thought always nagging at my mind, I came back to Japan. Here, in one of the school lessons we were all given a single grain of rice and a bucket which our teacher told us to use to cultivate our own rice plant. It seemed an easy task, so it came as a blow that it was severe and hard process. Rice, not being a strong plant, needed a lot of water and care to grow. The hard work such as carrying buckets of water every day exhausted me. When the time for harvest finally came, a certain feeling of worship for this plant had grown in my mind. I realized that this feeling is the identity of the many gods I had been puzzling over. Belief is a picture of the respect that we all hold.

This experience made me realize that religion couldn't all be so different. Though we may all believe in a wide range of gods, in the end, praying to god is a sign of respect that we show towards nature, our earth and also for each other. Though they may seem different on the outside, they are like two parabolic graphs, which may have a different slope intercept form,

but interact at one point. Different cultures are built over similar intrinsic thoughts which can commonly be seen across human beings. Prior to this experience, I believed in a single God, and denied in my mind the concept of polytheism culture. Such stereotypes on our own mind should be wrecked, since this is the biggest barrier against understanding others, particularly in inter-cultural comprehension.

Recently, an American university girl stayed overnight at my house, when we applied for a host family program. During dinner, a topic about the way of working came up. She told me the difference of the working hours between Japanese and American workers. Japanese people work much longer. In fact, my father comes back home late every day. Despite the length of work, we agreed that both Japanese and American people consider their families important. While Americans come home early because of loyalty for their family, Japanese work long and hard for the same reason. Before, I may have defended the Japanese way of working and denied the different culture. Trying to find underlying common values is the key for intercultural understanding.

I can't help feeling that a better awareness and understanding of realities in different cultures is a big homework assignment for young people. Each of us should recognize that this is a task we owe and make efforts to understand other cultures. Unlike some subjects we learn at school, there is no textbook or answer. The effort of each individual could result in forming a path which we could proudly say that we had built together, one that will lead us to a bright and new future. As the Chinese novel 'Hometown' by Lu Hsün says, this world has no path but when many people start to take that route, one day it will turn into one.

Beyond the Border (Original)

Sidiq Maulana
(Age 24, Indonesia)

Malaysia Challenges!

That kind of news title appeared periodically on many newspapers and televisions in Indonesia every time the tension between the two nations increased. Usually it's about illegal fishing and border claim issues, but also about cultural claims over several things from folk dances to traditional songs and musical instruments. It could even be about food and sauce recipes! I know it may sound petty and unimportant, but such issue is taken seriously by some Indonesians. Cursing Malaysia became common during the tension, and any attempt to say something positive about them can be viewed as an act of betrayal.

Grew up in Jakarta, I once agreed with the bad images of Malaysia and its citizens as depicted by the media. They're a bunch of plagiarists with no identity trying to steal the rich heritage of Indonesian nature and culture. But as the hate went viral that I heard it everywhere, I started to think that something was wrong. I mean it's true that Indonesia has a problem with Malaysia. But is it really that serious? Can we generalize it to the whole population? And will hate solve the problem? I found the answer not in Jakarta or Kuala Lumpur media, but right at the very border of two countries.

It was a quiet and isolated village at the tail of Borneo Island, in a bay facing South China Sea. I spent a month there, living with the locals and getting immersed in their daily activities. Plucking coconuts, feeding cows, singing under the moonlight. A simple life away from the bustling big cities. I was amazed by how well they knew each other. A boy on one edge of the village could recognize an old woman on another edge. Everyone was counted, and everybody was somebody worthy to be known. The whole village really looked like a big family. And that's not all.

The village, called Temajuk, was just a step from Telok Melano, a neighboring Malaysian village over the hill. Prior to coming there, all I found about Temajuk on the internet were only some news regarding its border conflict with Malaysia. But living inside the village, I came to realize that the situation was much calmer than what was depicted. Temajuk and Telok Melano people were friends.

They traveled across the border everyday, conducting trading and social activities. At three or four in the afternoon, Telok Melano youngsters came to play football with Temajuk youngsters, or otherwise. Everything was so normal and peaceful that I asked myself, “where’s the conflict?”

A teaching to love our neighbors is actually ingrained in many cultures and societies. Yet while we’re encouraged to do so in local context, we often failed to implement it in international context. Cambodia and Thailand, India and Pakistan, China and Japan. It’s a sad fact that we have problem mostly with our closest neighbors. One night, I was invited to a wedding party in the village. Young and old, men and women — everyone were dancing gleefully while the music was being played. A kid pulled me into the dancing crowd and left me no choice but to join the dance. In the middle of the party noise, I was told that around half of the crowd were Malaysians. And I was like, “What?” I failed to notice because they all looked the same and spoke the same dialect. At that moment, I realized that this border, this so-called nationalism was no more than an illusion we created in our heads. Trapped together in the remoteness of sea and rainforest, Temajuk and Telok Melano people knew exactly what is the meaning of friendship and trust. A sense of solidarity far from the hate that circulated in other parts of Indonesia and Malaysia.

After all, we all live in one isolated village. A global village called earth which we inhabit together. This is the lonely and only earth we have so far in the galaxy, so please share it wisely. Listen beyond the horizon and narrow identities. The air we breathe, the genes we share, the moon we stare at—everything that keeps telling us how we are one.

Relationship between Individual and Culture

(Original)

Nurana Rajabova Oqtay

(Age 24, Azerbaijan)

My first and foremost intercultural experience happened when I started working for U.S. Peace Corps in my home country, Azerbaijan. Working as a Language and Cross-Cultural Facilitator, I was responsible for conducting local language (Azerbaijani) and cultural training classes and serving as a key cultural informant of Azerbaijani customs, cultural norms and values for American Peace Corps Volunteers in their pre-service training period. It was quite an interesting and challenging experience, in terms of putting things in a new perspective for me and developing my views and perceptions in many aspects of life.

As a Cultural Facilitator, I learned about the notion of culture and different values that exist in different societies. This experience did not only give me an opportunity to learn about American culture, but rediscover the culture of my own country. I started to see my own culture from the eyes of an outsider. Answering cultural questions raised by the Trainees, I started to notice peculiarities of my culture, about which otherwise I would never question myself, just living it without ever realizing. Working together with people coming from different cultural backgrounds, I saw many differences between us, yet amazed by so many similarities despite to long distance, language, history etc.

My Peace Corps experience and afterwards experience in multicultural environments taught me that, cultures are not good or bad, they are just are. Also, one of the biggest takeaways of this experience for me has been seeing the role of culture in our life. I started to see culture in every single aspect of our life. Our language, our traditions, our way of doing things, simply-from the way we greet each other to the way we govern our country are so much impacted by the culture we carry in our inside. Culture is an inner part of our life, and it has so much power in our actions, perceptions, reactions and so on and so forth.

Thinking deeply about relationship between an individual and culture, I was really amazed to see this firm bond between them, and strong power of culture on the former. However, just recently I had another experience which showed me a completely opposite form of this power relationship between an individual and culture. I learned that, it is not just the culture which has influential power on us shaping our behavior, but also we have so much power on creating a culture.

To make my thoughts more clear, I would like to share my experience briefly here below. Thus, I recently attended a Summer Peacebuilding Institute, where there were participants coming from all over the world. It was a real mixture of people coming from different continents, countries, backgrounds, cultures, age groups, etc.

During more than a month we spent together, one of the interesting things that struck me was that in such a diverse environment, we felt just like a family. We became friends with people from places, that we heard the name for the first time in our lives. Thinking about this beautiful relationship among all of us, the true peace in our very diverse environment, I came to understand that the key for this success was our intention, our intention of being peaceful. We knew we came from diverse backgrounds, yet we accepted each other with our differences. With so much different cultures, we had created a new culture of our own, a culture of peace, friendship and sharing. This experience showed me once again that, we people have the power to create a culture and most importantly creating a culture of peace is achievable, only if we want and work for it.

I see the culture of peace as a key factor for a peaceful and better future, because by having a peace culture, we will be able to look at our differences as a way of enriching ourselves, not as a source of conflicts. Having a peace culture, we will be able to create a similarity between us, but also keep our differences by respecting them. Thereby, creating a peace culture among all societies in the world is my wish for the future and believe we will achieve it one day, if we strongly work for it.

More than Toys

(Original)

Anastasia Lebedenko

(Age 10, Ukraine)

School 5, Monastyryshche

Dear All,

I am Nastia Lebedenko. I live in a small rural town located in the center of Ukraine, 250 km away from the capital city of Kyiv. Nearly 9,000 people inhabit my town. There are no famous places of interest in the town, but you can enjoy very beautiful nature of our district with its clean air, green forests, endless fields and the people who are very hospitable and friendly. We have close-knit families of several generations, keep family traditions, like spend time with our families, dining, walking, playing and going on holidays together and we like our culture that teaches us to welcome anyone open-heartedly and treat people warmly and generously.

I am proud to be Ukrainian. I feel happy when I sing Ukrainian songs or listen to the melody from the sopilka, our national flute, or when they host our national blue and yellow flag at school assemblies, or when my four year old sister and I wear our national costumes on the holidays (We are such beauties then!)

I know how to use culture to make the future better. It is because I have some experience. It all started when one day our teacher invited my class to participate in the international schools Cyber Fair program. We decided to explore our cultural toys. You would say, "Ha, Toys!" But I am not kidding. My granny Katia says everything starts with a toy. Working on the project I realized what it means.

We did a lot of work. In the process of research we had to contact and communicate with different people-parents, teachers, schoolmates, neighbours, a local doll maker and her family, librarians, the local history museum director. We have found out that toys are more than toys. They came into being at the earliest stages of civilization. They are a part of traditional folk art,

they express a long national history, national spirit and cultural continuity. Religious beliefs, world view, tastes and local customs are all represented in ethnic toys.

By St. Nicholas Day all our classmates united their efforts and made more than twenty Motankas, our national folk dolls. We decided to visit the little children at a local boarding school and to give them our Motankas as presents. We told them the stories we had learned from the local doll maker and Ukrainian traditions. Our little friends were really excited! It was so moving to see how simple handmade toys could make the children happy.

We initiated the exhibition and research work at the local history museum. When we addressed them they were really very confused that we could not find any traditional toy, any exhibit related so much to the history and cultural heritage of ours. We had negotiations with our doll maker and the Museum Director. As a result they've got a collection of traditional toys made by the Master and by the students of our school.

We also tried to unite the children of other countries to stop folk art decline and start reviving the traditions. We were the first to start iEARN "National Toys" project and encouraged the peers from the USA, Russia, Turkey, Romania, Pakistan, Taiwan, Belarus, Indonesia to participate in this toy making culture. We shared pictures, videos, national toys of our countries. We had Skype conferences with the participants and exchanged Culture Bags via post. It was awesome!

Now I would like to say that simple toys have already changed my life for better: it has already become more interesting. I have learnt much, I have done much, I have made friends with children of other countries. Yes, different peoples have different cultures. But I see that culture can make us friends. And if we become friends now we will have better tomorrow, because we respect and love each other.

Sabiduría Milenaria

(Original)

Angel Mahonri Caballero Ortega

(Age 11, Mexico)

Ignacio Zaragoza

¡Hola!, soy Mahonri y vivo en la ciudad de Mérida en el estado de Yucatán, en el bello país llamado México, a mi ciudad le han puesto a lo largo de su historia varios sobrenombres, por ejemplo "La blanca Mérida" y los títulos "Muy noble y muy leal ciudad de Mérida", en estos últimos años se le nombró "La ciudad de la Paz" y esto es a lo que quiero referirme.

Desde que tengo uso de razón, mis padres me han enseñado que el respeto es lo más importante entre los hombres, las naciones y entre todos los seres vivos y que la cultura Maya es demás respetuosa con la naturaleza y con todo lo que nos rodea.

He tenido la oportunidad de visitar algunos sitios arqueológicos cercanos a donde yo vivo, me he asombrado y maravillado, de cómo los antiguos habitantes de esta región hacían cambios para vivir más cómodos y afectando al mínimo el medio ambiente, ¡es impresionante en verdad!

En estos días se escucha en las noticias que los humanos hemos dañado nuestro mundo entonces debemos mirar hacia atrás para aprender de la sabiduría de nuestros antepasados.

Lo que más me gusta de mi cultura es que aun en estos días existen comunidades que conservan intactas sus costumbres y tradiciones sin dañar el medio ambiente ni a las personas.

Algunas de las tradiciones que aun tenemos presentes, son los bailables, la vestimenta, ceremonia y también la lengua maya, que es difícil de leer y aun mas difícil de pronunciar. En mi escuela, además de las clases normales, tenemos clases de maya, es muy divertido e interesante decir Ma'alo'ob k'iiin que significa buenos días.

La parte más importante de las tradiciones de mis antepasados es cuidar nuestro entorno y nuestras familias ya que de ello depende nuestra subsistencia, por ejemplo:

Una vez con un amigo fuimos a visitar el "Gran Museo Maya" y nos dieron una explicación de cómo los antiguos habitantes de esta región usaban las herramientas para sembrar y cosechar, también aprendimos que pescaban en los mares y que producían mucha sal a las orillas del mar, todas estas cosas que producían les sirvieron para interactuar con otras culturas por medio del comercio o del trueque.

Sin embargo los mayas siempre tuvieron mucho cuidado en conocer otras culturas y saber con quién hacían negocios, ellos no fueron egoístas, compartieron sus conocimientos en astrología y matemáticas con otras culturas.

¿Por qué escribo sobre esto? La respuesta es simple, aun así hayan pasado siglos desde esa época, en este año 2013 me siento orgulloso de ser descendiente de los mayas tan sabios, me emociona su cultura y sus costumbres.

Intento seguir sus enseñanzas ¿Cómo? Siendo amable con el ecosistema que me rodea, aprovechando cada oportunidad para servir a mis semejantes y compartiendo con ellos lo feliz que soy al hacer las cosas correctas en mi comunidad y, ¿saben? No siempre es tan fácil para mí, a pesar de mi corta edad, soy un niño al que le cuesta concentrarme y con mucha energía (tengo TDAH) y me esfuerzo porque mis amigos, mis vecinos y mi familia sepan que tenemos que cuidarnos y protegernos así como deberíamos estar cuidando y protegiendo nuestro planeta para tener un mejor futuro.

Ahora mismo tengo en la cabeza muchas ideas para compartir, se me hace un remolino en la mente y tengo el impulso de salir y correr y gritar ¡cuidemos nuestro mundo! Pensaran que me falta un tornillo o algo así ...pero sé que si yo empiezo a hacerlos en mi comunidad se hará mas y mas grande hasta que se note y los demás empiecen a hacer su parte por tener un mejor futuro, un país en paz y si, también un mundo mejor.

Milennial Wisdom

(Translation)

Hello! I am Mahonri and I live in the city of Mérida, Yucatán, in the beautiful country of Mexico. My city has had several nicknames throughout its history, such as "The White Mérida" and some titles like "The noble and loyal city of Mérida". In recent years it was named "The City of Peace" and this is what I would like to write about.

For as long as I can remember, my parents have taught me that respect is the most important thing among men, nations and all the living creatures, and that the Mayan culture is most respectful of nature and everything around us.

I have had the opportunity to visit some archaeological sites that are close to my hometown, and I have been amazed and marveled at how the ancient inhabitants of this region made the necessary changes to live more comfortably while affecting the environment as little as possible, it's really impressive!

Nowadays you hear on the news that us humans have damaged our world, so we must look back to learn from the wisdom of our ancestors.

What I like the most about my culture is that even today there are communities that preserve their customs and traditions intact without damaging the environment or other people.

Some of the traditions that we still have are the dances, dresses, ceremonies and also the Mayan language, which is difficult to read and even more difficult to pronounce. At my school, in addition to the regular classes, we have Maya lessons. It is very fun and interesting to say Ma'alo'ob k'iin, which means 'Good morning'.

The most important part of the traditions of my ancestors is to look after our environment and our families because our livelihood depends on them, for example:

One day, a friend and I went to visit the "Great Mayan Museum", and we learned how the ancient inhabitants of this region used the tools to plant and harvest. We also learned that they used to fish in the seas and they produced a lot of salt on the shores; all these things helped them to interact with other cultures through trade or barter.

However, the Mayas were always careful to know other cultures and know who to do business with. They were not selfish; they shared their knowledge in astrology and mathematics with other cultures.

Why am I writing about this? The answer is simple: Even if centuries have passed since that time, in this year of 2013, I am proud to be a descendant of the wise Mayas. I am excited with their culture and traditions.

I try to live by their teachings. How? By being kind to the environment, by taking every opportunity to serve others and share with them the happiness I get from doing the right things in my community. And, you know? It's not always easy for me. Despite my young age, I am a highly energetic boy who sometimes has trouble paying attention (I have ADHD) and I try hard to make my friends, my neighbors and my family aware of the fact that we have to look after and protect ourselves, as we should be caring for and protecting our planet in order to have a better future.

Right now I have many ideas to share. Sometimes my mind is like a tornado and I feel like running out and screaming 'Let's take care of our world!' You might think that I'm crazy or something... but I know that if I start doing this in my community, it will get bigger and bigger until everyone will notice and start doing their part in order to have a better future, a peaceful nation and yes, a better world, too.

It's not enough to know, the important thing is to do and share. That is what makes us wise.

The Strength of Our Cultures to Create a Brighter Future

(Original)

Shah-Mir Aizaz

(Age 13, Pakistan)

Springfield School, Karachi

A long, straight, gray road ahead of me. Greenery on both sides, and on those patches, bright yellow crops of mustard enchanted the view. But, the most breath-taking sight was of the sun rise, as the time was around 6am in the morning. I could also see a couple of farmers working on the fields. But, I was really inspired by their outfit. One of them was wearing his traditional hat and colourful clothes. As, I spoke to him I could feel that the man was of a polite nature and talked with the utmost respect. He took me to his cottage which looked quite beautiful and also offered me a cup of tea. I talked about his lifestyle and surprisingly, I realized that without any television, computer or a radio which nowadays seem to be the most necessary things in our life, that farmer was living happily. He told me that these traditions have passed from one generation to another from centuries. He said that "I am happy that I have a family, my children go to school and there is nothing more I want". I found out that even though that man did not have any access to electronic gadgets and appliances, but still he was contented. It was all because of the traditional cultures which had been preserved in his heart and soul. I believe that there is no power apart from God's will that could have shattered him apart.

Well, after that splendid visit, I continued my journey towards Lahore. Coming across magnificent cultures, chatting with people of all classes and races of Pakistan, as well as eating all sorts of mouth-watering food they had to offer. During this marvelous journey across Pakistan, I realized that the people in rural areas of the country are much better than those living in urban areas. People, who are dwelling in cities, are always looking forward for more. The reason is that they have come across many things and are so called as "hi-fi". Whereas the villagers and those living in country sides are contented with what they have. An appropriate proverb to use here is "half a loaf is better than no bread". Their traditions have kept them united and so they have a much brighter future. Most of us, who dwell in cities, our

grandparents who were much backwards used to be patient and satisfied. But as time passed and we moved towards cities our nature began to change.

“People without the knowledge about their past history are like trees without roots”. These lines were spoken by Marcus Garvey, who was a Jamaican political leader, journalist and an orator. People dwelling in cities really don’t have any idea about their past cultures. Even if they do, they do not want to apply those cultures on themselves, because they think it would look or sound bizarre. Where as if you look at the people living in country sides, they would never even think of leaving their traditions and adapting the new modern way of living. The reason behind this is that these cultures have passed from one generation to another, and it is the symbol of their beloved nation Pakistan. I don’t mean to say, that change is a bad thing, but it should be in a positive sense.

I often think about that farmer, who has really changed my way of thinking. That man was a proud Pakistani who is really working hard for his nation. A thought came in my mind, that if people from all cultures join hands and unite under one flag, than the whole nation will head towards real prosperity. After coming across that farmer, I have tried my best to respect my culture because where ever I go in the world; the culture of my country is going to reflect my personality. The respect of my country will be in my hands. It depends on what picture of my nation I give to people.

May peace prevail on Earth.

2013 International Essay Contest for Young People

[Children's Category – 3rd Prize]

Culture is Amazing

(Original in Japanese)

Kirin Suemitsu

(Age 14, Japan)

Tokyo Gakugei University International Secondary School

In order to utilize the power of culture to create a better future, it is important that we first learn about the cultures of various countries.

There are more than 190 countries in the world and I have lived in five of them; I have lived in Malaysia, Bhutan, Uganda, Indonesia and Japan.

Let me start by telling you about the cultures I learned in Bhutan and Indonesia. Bhutan is a very small country brimming with happiness. The aspect of Bhutanese culture I would like to share with you is that all students wear the national costume to school. My two elder sisters also wore Kira, the costume for girls, to school. If you look for countries around the world where children wear their national costume to school, I don't think you'll find very many. I didn't give this much thought when I lived there, but thinking about it now, I think the people of Bhutan who continue to preserve their traditional habits and customs show great integrity.

Next, let us consider Indonesia. The aspect of culture I learned about in Indonesia is Eid al-Adha or the Festival of Sacrifice. This is an Islamic festival during which rich people provide meat to people who are too poor to eat meat such as beef or goat on a regular basis. My family and I actually went to see the animals slaughtered. I saw the men slaughtering them, but the skill with which they carefully carried out their task wowed me and it made a strong impression on me. Two things about this event made a lasting impression on me. The first is that the fresh blood flowing from the cows and goats was an incredibly beautiful red. Its magma-like red color made me conscious of the power of life. And the second thing was the happiness of a boy as he took some of meat the men had butchered to a woman. Carrying the raw goat meat carefully in both hands, the boy's eyes gleamed with exuberance. Most people who have not experienced Eid al-Adha may think it is very cruel, but when I saw it, I didn't think there was

anything cruel or grotesque about it at all. This is probably because the men who carried out the slaughter all live within a religious culture that has an attitude of gratitude toward animals. I learned many things from Eid al-Adha including the amazing power and wonderfulness of culture.

Much like people, each country has its own uniqueness and culture. I think creating a "Culture Day" could be a good way of encouraging lots of people to learn about different cultures.

In fact, the international school I attended in Uganda actually had a day like this. Students wore their national costumes to school and visited country booths set up by their parents. In this way, we could enjoy learning about a lot of countries' cultures in one day. In the midst of globalization and increase in the number of people living in countries other than their own, I think people could learn about a lot of other countries' cultures if countries around the world adopted a day like this.

People often hold prejudices and discriminate against others on the basis of cultural differences. This is probably because either we don't know about their cultures or we make judgments on the basis of very superficial knowledge. At first, the only image I had of Eid al-Adha was one of cruelty, but experiencing the festival firsthand helped me realize that it was a religious event. Observing other countries' cultures closely can help eliminate prejudices and discrimination. I believe learning about and respecting other countries' and peoples' cultures can lead to a peaceful future.

Abilities that Enable You to Venture into the World

(Original in Japanese)

Miki Nakamori

(Age 15, Japan)

Ichikawa Junior High School, Chiba

Have you heard of "aikido"? It was developed after the war (Russo-Japanese War) by a man called Morihei Ueshiba, who incorporated ancient Japanese sword play into Daito-ryu Aiki Jujutsu, a martial art that had been created more than 900 years earlier, and added some of his own philosophies and beliefs. This became known as "aikido." Created in Japan, the strong yet beautiful martial art of aikido reflects the Japanese spirit.

When I was an elementary school student, I absolutely hated PE. Even so, I wanted to do some form of exercise, and martial arts caught my attention. My mother recommended aikido. It has been almost five years since I started aikido, and I have had a number of experiences during this time. These experiences have made me realize that aikido, an aspect of Japanese culture that is widely revered, contributes greatly to fostering individuals that can thrive both in modern Japanese society and in the global society. There are two reasons why I believe this.

Firstly, aikido is a noncompetitive form of martial art. Aikido seeks to ensure that both participants are winners and neither comes out a loser. Accordingly, everyone can enjoy practicing together. I think aikido is very beneficial for children's development, helping them learn to enjoy cooperating and getting along with their peers, rather than competing or fighting against them. This fosters good communication. The same goes for relationships between adults, and between adults and children. This is because you often get to practice not only with other children of similar ages, but also with adults. Practicing aikido allows your communication skills to improve naturally, and communication skills are one of the most important skills to have in our global society.

Secondly, aikido is a martial art that seeks unity. The essence of aikido lies in learning to combine energy and attain unity. Forgetting everything else and striving to combine forces

with your opponent creates a sense of unity. Achieving this sense of unity is surprisingly difficult. So far, I have experienced it less than five times. However, I have come to realize why achieving such unity has eluded me. First of all, you need to be considerate toward your opponent. You will never achieve unity if you try to do things your own way. Even if your opponent is a foreigner whom you can't communicate with easily, you can't allow this to impede you. Likewise, there is no use in getting frustrated and emotional because your opponent is a child and doesn't listen carefully to what you say. If you are considerate of each other and try to match each other's pace, unity will follow naturally. Language and age are of no relevance in aikido. You practice with the goal of achieving a sense of unity. One experience that made me very happy was that through aikido, I was able to become friends with a practitioner from a dojo overseas, even though we could barely communicate verbally with each other. Uniting with your opponent in this way can give rise to new things, and creating new values with other people is something that is sought after both in modern Japan and in the world at large.

At present, there are about 100,000 aikido aficionados in Japan; overseas there are 600,000, and its popularity is growing. I think this is evidence that people all over the world are accepting aikido's philosophy of strengthening your body and mind without resorting to combat. This kind of strength, which enables you to find a new way forward by becoming one with your opponent rather than fighting, no matter what problems you may encounter, is a product of Japan's unique culture. It is this kind of strength that will be needed from here on in our global society.

Created in Japan, aikido shows people new possibilities, but just how many Japanese people are familiar with aikido? It is not particularly well known. In the future, I would like to see more Japanese people practicing aikido and playing an active role in the world. So as a first step towards this, I would like to make aikido a compulsory component of martial arts at school, so that more people can learn about it. I would like them to learn the basic skills so that they can use aikido to venture out into the world.

An Island where Many Cultures are One

(Original in Japanese)

Yuna Kida

(Age 16, Japan)

Kagoshima Gyokuryu Senior High School, Kagoshima City

I still remember it—the sight of sparks flying in the hot and stuffy workshop, and bits of glowing iron being transformed into beautifully curved handles just like candy making.

This is the tanebasami scissor factory on Tanegashima, a Japanese island that is well known for its Space Center. I have heard that there are very few craftspeople left on the island who have inherited this tradition. The dry metallic sound of the blades coming together and the smooth cutting action are something you cannot fully appreciate until you hold the scissors in your hand. This is traditional craftsmanship that only highly skilled craftspeople can perform.

“These scissors were developed nearly five hundred years ago, through a combination of Western and local techniques,” one of the craftspeople murmured. These unexpected words surprised me. In 1543, a single ship that would change the course of Japanese history arrived at Tanegashima. The Portuguese on board this ship possessed matchlock firearms, and Tanegashima Tokitaka, who ruled the island, ordered his vassals to make the same thing. This weapon became known as the ‘Tanegashima,’ and it dominated the later part of Japan’s Warring States period (1467-1568). But along with the firearm, what was also introduced to Japan at that time were Western style scissors, in which two blades crossed at the center to create a cutting action. Before long, the Edo shogunate was established, and as the wars came to an end the demand for matchlock firearms was greatly reduced. So, instead of making firearms, the swordsmiths on the island began to make scissors. They adapted the handles of traditional Japanese scissors to the new Western scissors, creating the unique tanebasami.

The people of Tanegashima, where my maternal grandparents live, have the calm gentle nature of island people. Sometimes, when I go back there, they talk to me with friendly, smiling faces, and always take good care of me. This may be because, for many years, people

have been telling stories of the American and British merchant ships that became shipwrecked there, and how the islanders came to the aid of the crew and looked after them.

Rather than rejecting foreign cultures, these accepting islanders saw the good in other cultures and actively made use of it, and thus was born the tanebasami. Besides their excellent cutting ability, what makes these scissors great is their symmetrical form, which allows anyone to use them, regardless of which hand is their dominant hand. Today, we would call this 'universal design,' meaning that the designers put thought into making it easier for more people to use the product. As represented by these scissors, the culture of Tanegashima consists of diverse cultures blended together and coexisting harmoniously. In the UNESCO Constitution, it is stated that "ignorance of each other's ways and lives has been a common cause, throughout the history of mankind, of that suspicion and mistrust between the peoples of the world through which their differences have all too often broken into war." On Tanegashima, whenever they have encountered different customs and cultures, they have not taken a narrow-minded view, but have continued reshaping their culture while still maintaining their traditions.

Each country and region of the world has cultivated its own culture. These cultures have been passed down through history by the people who live there, and they should be mutually respected. As we continue to learn about and understand each other's cultures, I believe that our cultures will evolve into accepting and enduring cultures suited to the times, and they will live on in the world to come.

The many satellites that have been launched from the Tanegashima Space Center are still circling the planet, looking down on our world. They show us a world without the national borders we draw on maps. It is somehow significant that the Space Center was built on this island. These tanebasami scissors, which fit so comfortably in my hand, seem to be communicating this to me.

Reusing and Recycling for Spiritual Wealth

(Original in Japanese)

Natsuka Sato

(Age 16, Japan)

Showa Women's University Senior High School, Tokyo

Recently in my English class, we were learning about Wangari Maathai. Dr. Maathai was a Kenyan environmental activist who, in 2004, became the first African woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize for her work to protect the environment. When Dr. Maathai visited Japan, she learned the Japanese word *mottainai* (a term of regret for being wasteful), which made a deep impression on her. It is well-known that she introduced the term *mottainai*—which is difficult to translate into other languages—to the world.

The word *mottainai* is unique in its meaning and the image it conveys. It seems to have originated in Buddhism, but I think that for most Japanese people, the word has a slightly different and broader meaning. It seems especially useful in situations where something is not used to its fullest, such as, “It’s wasteful to throw that out,” or, “What a waste not to use it.” Since long ago, before we had words like ‘recycle,’ Japanese people have treated things with care, and we have been good at finding ways to reuse things until they are completely used up. A good example of this is the rice plant, which Japanese people continue using even after it is cut. After the rice grains are harvested, the straw is used to make sandals and other products, the husks are used to stuff pillows, the bran that comes off when polishing the rice is used both for pickling and in a soap press to take out stains, and the water that is used to wash rice before cooking is reused for washing dishes and as fertilizer. There is nothing that is thrown away. When sandals and other straw products become worn out, they were collected and used to fertilize the fields.

People in the olden days relied on their predecessors and their own experience to learn these things, and I admire them greatly for it. Particularly during the Edo period (1603-1868), people reused and recycled as much as they possibly could. If something broke, they would always try to fix it and use it again, and there were craftsmen who specialized in repairing each

household item. In those days, everything was made by hand, so I imagine it was an immense undertaking just to make something. But at the same time, people took care of their things, and I feel that the idea of *mottainai* must have pervaded their way of thinking.

As times changed and Western culture came in, Japanese society changed rapidly, but even in the Shōwa era (1926-1989), people continued to treat things with care. Kimonos, the traditional Japanese garment, were handed down from grandmother to mother, and from mother to daughter. Even if their sizes were a little different, it was no problem. Kimonos are cut from a long piece of fabric and sewn more or less in a straight line, with the assumption that they will be altered in the future. When a kimono is no longer being worn, its material can be made into bedding and cushions, and the remaining scraps of cloth are turned into pouches and toys like beanbags. I imagine that the material itself would feel happy to be given such a long life.

In thinking this over, I wondered if the reason for reusing things is just to avoid being wasteful. When we are no longer using something for its original purpose, we use it for something else, but that is not all there is to it. When something has fulfilled its intended role, we can breathe new life into it by changing its form and using it in a different way, turning it into something new. When we undo a seam and stitch it up again, we remember events related to that item, and we picture the scenes where the next person will use it. The newly finished product is once again full of life and useful to people. How fantastic this is, and how it fills our spirits with good feelings! All of us, I think can understand *mottainai*, and all of us feel that we should not be wasteful. But today, the opportunities to turn our attention to this precious way of living are slipping away. No matter how materially wealthy we may be, it is unfortunate if we miss this invaluable chance to be spiritually wealthy. How can we treat our things with care? How can we relate to them? From here on, I hope to have many more opportunities to think about these questions. And, as an adult, I hope that I will be able to properly convey the spirit and culture of *mottainai* to others.

The Power of Culture to Create a Better Future (Original)

Simbarashe Kaneunyenye

(Age 16, Zimbabwe)

St. Ignatius College

I have been living in my neighbourhood for the past five years. I still do not know my neighbours. I have been going to my high school for the past four years. I only have six people whose backgrounds I really know. I have been chatting online for the past three years. I have met none of my chat mates ever since. This is the world that I know. The world I am growing up in. The world that is moulding me into the master of tomorrow.

I am just one of the many casualties of today's society. Rather than care of how we are going to progress as a collective, I am taught how to beat the rest and make it by myself. Booker T Washington, the civil rights activist, once asserted that there are two ways of exerting one's strength: one is pushing down and the other is pulling up. Every time I leave the house, my hands are in my pockets and the sound of the outside world is blocked by my earphones. I don't greet anyone on the way because I was taught not to talk to strangers. The rare few that I do know, I acknowledge by nodding my head at them. No time for chit chat in this world.

This is the attitude of the world. Like I said, "I am just one of the many casualties of today's society." The other casualties can be seen in the rising number of teen pregnancies, the rising number of school-dropouts and rising number of child soldiers. In the rising number of child disappearances, rising number of child rape cases and rising number of child murder cases. We often hear stories of teenagers who got involved in a drunken driving accident or a student who massacred his classmates. Stories like these used to be front page material but now they're just published somewhere near the business section where only a few sharp eyes will notice. This is now just the norm or at least was the norm for me. I had gotten so used to this world that I believed there was no deliverance. To my surprise there was another world out there.

A while back, I visited my relatives in the village. What struck me first was the arrangement of the huts. They were placed in a circular manner ensuring that each hut faced the centre. At the centre was a large gazebo where people would gather and eat together, play drums and dance together or just talk. It was odd how they got together just for the sake of being together. I was amazed to find out that almost everyone knew my name and who I was. For the first time in a very long time I felt like I belonged. That is one part of my traditional culture that I had forgotten; family. The Zimbabwean culture emphasizes so much on the family unit. In the village, everyone was family and they were genuinely caring of who I was. To them I was more than just a member of the community; I was a part of them.

This got me thinking. Imagine if the entire world felt this way. Imagine if the world finally chose to accept that we really are just one big family. One twig alone can be snapped by just two fingers but an entire bunch of twigs cannot be snapped by any hand known to man. Our diverse cultures all throughout the world emphasize one thing and that is family. The realisation of this can stop any crime in progress. No true human being can stare their brother in the eye and hit, rob or kill him. If we stick true to our culture and from now on treat everyone as family, the world will definitely be a better place. Try it, greet everyone you meet. Make an effort to find out more about the people in your life. I guarantee you will be amazed at just how much you belong. That is how we can use the Power of Culture to create a better future for us all.

Warum Kultur?

(Original)

Demchuk Ol'ha
(Age 17, Ukraine)

Knarren der Lastwagen und Pferdegetrappel, ständiger Gesang, rege Gespräche und reger Handel, lauter Markt, der mit traditioneller ukrainischen Stickerei – wyschywanka -- vollgestopft ist, und ein riesiges Kastenfeuer, dessen Rauch den Himmel anfasst. Das sind nur einige Bestandteile eines Festivals meiner Region, wo ich meine Herkunft eigentlich spüren kann und wo ich mich wirklich freier als in der großen Stadt fühle. Echt sonderbar, weil ein der Träume vieler Jugendlichen aus demjenigen Gebiet die Hauptstadt „im Sturm zu erobern“ ist. Also versuchen sie den Lebensstil zu wechseln, denn „es ist Schande“ den lokalen Dialekt zu sprechen oder die Zuchttiere zu pflegen. Wenn ich diese Trend bemerkt habe, begann ich mich zahlreiche Frage zu stellen, nämlich, warum schämt man sich eigener Hintergrund wegen der Mode oder verschiedener Tendenzen? Noch mehr, sind die Traditionen schon in der Vergangenheit, oder haben sie noch Kraft die Zukunft auch zu beeinflussen?

Natürlich scheint es jemandem heute kaum möglich. Die Welt läuft mit großen Schritten auf die Globalisierung, d.h. Schaffen der gemeinsamer Kultur, einheitlicher Sprache und Internationaler Mitarbeit. Lautet ganz gut, sogar optimistisch – so soll der künftige Tag ohne Vorurteile gebaut werden. Aber es passiert öfter, dass man keine Einheit sucht, sondern die Wege sich ins große und lockere System einzuflchten, wo es vielleicht keinen Hunger und mehr Sicherheit gibt. Assimilation und Nachahmung werden schon ein Motto vieler Menschen. Zwar kaum Religion aber schon eigenartiger Kult, der heute auf unsere Zukunft wirkt. Beispielsweise, verschwindet so die Atmosphäre der kleinen Städtchen, die nicht sehr populär sind und danach streben, mehr Einkommen vom Tourismus zu haben. Darum erscheinen dort die allgegenwärtigen Marktkette, nämlich Restaurants und Supermärkte, damit sich die Touristen wie zu Hause fühlten und den gemütlichen Ort noch einmal besuchten. Darum fühle ich mich wie in einem merkwürdigen Inkubator. Aber nicht nur die Kultur des Ortes verbleicht sich, sondern auch die kulturelle Auffassung der Gesellschaft. Einmal hatte ich mit einer Gruppe ein Ausflug in die kleine Stadt im Norden Deutschlands. Fast die ersten Fragen waren

darüber, wo es die nächsten „H&M“ und „New Yorker“ Kleidungsgeschäfte waren, als ob die Kultur ganz unwichtig wäre.

Deswegen bin ich überzeugt, dass es sinnvoll wäre den Jugendlichen aufzuklären, welchen Platz die Kultur in unserem Leben hat. Daran kann sich auch Jugend engagieren. In meiner Region gibt es eine tolle AG, wo die lokalen Tanzarten unterrichtet werden. Mir gefällt es am meisten, dass man dort auch die authentischen Trachten anzieht, sie dekoriert und wie seinen Augapfel hütet nicht nur, weil Anzüge teuer sind. Sie ist nicht populär aber für mich ist diese AG eine Hoffnung, dass sogar die kleinen Regionen mindestens eine Erinnerung von Kultur haben. Und ich bin echt stolz auf solche Menschen, die noch versuchen ihren Ursprung zu bewahren, trotz aller modernen Tendenzen. Ich meine, dass dank solchen, sogar kleinen Einsätzen, die Welt über ukrainische Kultur etwas weiß. Nicht über politische und wirtschaftliche Probleme, sondern über den Volk. Über die Ukrainer, die nicht mehr Kommunismus anbeten, dessen Land schon seit langem kein Teil von „Soviet Russia“ ist. So, wer sonst ukrainische Jugendliche sollte diese Entwicklung bestätigen? In erster Linie, glaube ich, ist es nötig für meine und künftige Generationen die Geschichte meines Staats zu wissen. Dort gibt es die Inspiration und Antworten auf jede Frage. Tatsächlich, hat mein Volk immer seine religiöse und kulturelle Rechte verteidigt. Dabei wurden die wichtigsten Aktionen für diese Freiheiten ein Anfang dazu, dass man den Staat gründen konnte.

Also für mich ist die Zukunft mit der Kultur stark verbunden, denn von ihr hängt die Erziehung der künftigen Welt. Ohne ihre Entwicklung gäbe es keine Revolution, keine La Gioconda und keine Relativitätstheorie. Wir wären blind und stumm ohne Kunst und verloren ohne Traditionen, unseren Hintergrund und Seele.

Why Culture?

(English translation)

The creaking of lorries, the trampling of horses, constant singing, lively discussions, busy trading, a loud marketplace which full of the traditional Ukrainian embroidery called wychywanka and smoke touching the sky. These are only a few components of a festival in my region, where I can sense my roots and where I feel more freedom than in the big town. This is strange because it is the dream of many young people of my area to “conquer” our capital. So they try to change their life style as it is “embarrassing” to speak the local dialect or to look

after breeding animals. Once I realized this tendency, I began to ask myself many questions, such as “Why does one feel ashamed of his own roots, because of your traditional fashion and because of other facts?” And moreover I asked myself if the traditions are already the past or if they still have the power to influence our future?

Nowadays the latter this seems impossible. The world runs with large steps towards globalization, which means creating a common culture, creating a common language and international cooperation. Sounds good, even optimistic – so let`s look into the future without prejudice. However, it happens now more often that one does not look for unity but for ways into a large and loose system where there is no more hunger and no more safety.

To copy and to assimilate is the theme of many people. It is not the religion anymore having the effects but peculiar cults. For example: The atmosphere of little towns, which are not well visited, disappears whilst the towns yearn for more income through tourism. They want the ubiquitous chains, restaurants and supermarkets, so that the tourists feel at home and want to come again. I feel like being in a peculiar kind of incubator. And it is not only the culture of a town, but also the cultural thinking of a society. I once took a little group to an excursion to a small town in Germany. Immediately I was asked where the closest “H&M” shops and “New Yorker” clothes shops were, as if the culture would not count at all.

I am therefore convinced that it would be useful to inform the youth about the importance of culture in our lives. In my region there is a lovely club for traditional dances. Most of all I like that they not only dance but also put on their traditional dresses which are cherished by everybody like life itself as the dresses are so expensive. That club is not especially popular but I do hope that it gives the smaller regions at least a memory of their own culture. And I am proud about people who try to keep their roots despite all modern tendencies.

I think that thanks to these people the world learns about Ukrainian culture. Not about our political and economic problems, but about our people. About the Ukrainians who do not adore communism any longer and whose country has not been part of “Soviet Russia” for quite some time now. Who else than the Ukrainian youth should give proof of this development? Primarily, I believe, it is important that my and the future generations know the history of our State as there every question finds inspiration and answers. As a matter of fact, my people have always defended their religious and cultural rights. And the most important activities to defend these freedoms was the beginning of the foundation of our State!

For me therefore future is strongly connected with culture. The education of the future world depends on it. Without the development of culture there would be no revolution, no *Giocanda* (music opera) and no theory of relativity. We would be blind and deaf without art and together with our traditions we would lose our background and our soul.

Una Sobremesa para el Desarrollo

(Original)

Jimena Curbelo Zabala

(Age 20, Uruguay)

Mi nombre es Jimena Curbelo, tengo 20 años y vivo en Uruguay, un rincón al sur del mundo; el país del mate, tango, fútbol y candombe. Estos cuatro aspectos caracterizan a la cultura uruguaya y generalmente se presentan como nuestra imagen al mundo. Sin embargo, quiero resaltar otro elemento que forma parte de nuestra cultura y que no siempre es mencionado: las tradicionales sobremesas de domingo en familia; una instancia muy particular de comunicación que se abre al debate y la discusión. Generalmente la conversación gira en torno a diversos temas, de acuerdo a las preocupaciones del momento, abordados desde tan diversas ópticas como participantes en la mesa, enfrentando argumentos totalmente opuestos. Las discusiones con frecuencia se vuelven apasionantes y pueden llevar horas, pero se hace en el más absoluto respeto de las diversas opiniones, del derecho a expresarnos y ser escuchados. En la última sobremesa que participé con mi familia recuerdo haber tratado temas tan disímiles como los sistemas de seguridad social, transiciones demográficas e incluso diversos juicios éticos acerca de la justicia. Por supuesto que con esos temas sobre la mesa la discusión parecía ir por caminos muy alejados pero sin renunciar por ello a la armonía entre nosotros ni a una animada y abierta disposición a escucharnos. Un debate familiar que además se da entre tres generaciones; abuelos, padres y nietos. Y éste es un punto que considero central; el papel reservado para los más jóvenes no es el del oyente pasivo, sino el de un interlocutor activo que sorprende, a veces desafía, con innovadores puntos de vista y creativos argumentos.

Actualmente curso una licenciatura en desarrollo y he aprendido a reconocer en él la importancia de su dimensión normativa. El desarrollo supone siempre una valoración de los “bueno”, lo “deseable”, supone por tanto, juicios de valor y el reconocimiento de la libertad no sólo como medio sino también como fin, Al mismo tiempo, las evaluaciones que de él se realizan se construyen desde conjunto de principios y valores que conforman la matriz cultural de cada sociedad.

Hoy en día es aceptado que desarrollo no es sinónimo de crecimiento económico, que variables como el PBI/pc poco dicen de las capacidades y oportunidades que las distintas sociedades disfrutan para llevar a cabo los procesos de desarrollo que consideran valiosos. Hoy más que nunca la cultura se coloca al centro de los abordajes a la problemática del desarrollo, en el entendido de que diversidad y pluralidad no son obstáculos al desarrollo, porque para éste no hay recetas aplicables universalmente, sino que aparecen como poderosas herramientas que impulsan a las sociedades a tomar las riendas de sus propios destinos.

Me gusta imaginar entonces, una gran sobremesa en la que los asientos son ocupados por las diversas sociedades del mundo, una sobremesa que se convierte en un espacio de comunicación franco y abierto, donde diversas posturas son defendidas, en el reconocimiento de las capacidades propias y del derecho a trabajar por ellas. Un espacio que derive en cooperación, empatía y hermandad, en la identificación plena de que sólo una participación activa y real puede consolidar la sustentabilidad del desarrollo.

Y al igual que en la sobremesa familiar, el encuentro generacional, la diversidad de opiniones y la pluralidad de opciones no debe ser entendido como enfrentamiento irreconciliable, sino como la expresión real de diversas capacidades y de la libertad a escoger la que cada sociedad considere deseable. Tomar caminos distintos en la promoción del desarrollo implica considerar a los derechos de los hombres no como herramientas de defensa sino de acción, no se trata de evitar que otro decida por mi, sino trabajar para que lo que la sociedad considere deseable y justo suceda. Poner el desarrollo sobre la mesa significa ponerlo en manos de hombre y mujeres que deciden sobre sus propias vidas, que viven la vida que desean en coherencia con los valores y costumbres que distinguen sus culturas. Y en este camino los jóvenes no sólo estamos llamados a pensar en el futuro sino en construirlo, las iniciativas y acciones creativas deben desplegarse en el presente, debemos construir futuro, empezando hoy.

An After-Dinner for Development

(English translation)

My name is Jimena Curbelo. I'm 20 years old and I live in Uruguay, a place in the south corner of the world; the country of mate, tango, soccer and candombe. These four aspects characterize the Uruguayan culture and are usually presented as our image to the world. However, I want to highlight another element that is part of our culture and that is not always

mentioned: the traditional family after-dinner on Sundays; a very particular moment of communication that is open for debate and discussion. The conversation usually goes around different topics, according to the current concerns, and is addressed from as many different perspectives as there are participants at the table, offering totally opposite arguments. The discussions often become exciting and can go on for hours, but we always have the utmost respect for all the diverse opinions, and the right to express ourselves and be heard. During the last after-dinner I had with my family, I remember addressing topics as diverse as social security systems, demographic transitions and even different ethical judgments about justice. Of course, with these topics on the table, the discussion seemed to get extreme at times, but without breaking the harmony between us, or forgetting our open and lively willingness to listen. This family debate also happens between three generations: grandparents, parents and grandchildren, and this is a point that I consider of the greatest importance; the role reserved for the younger is not that of a passive listener, but an active member of the conversation that surprises -sometimes challenges- the others with innovative points of view and creative arguments.

I'm currently studying a Degree in Development and I have learned to recognize the importance of its normative dimension. The development always involves an assessment of the "good", the "desirable", and thus involves judgments of value and the recognition of freedom not only as a means but also as an end. At the same time, the consequent evaluations are built from a set of principles and values that make up the cultural matrix of every society.

It is well accepted today that development is not the same as economic growth; that variables like GDP say little about the capabilities and opportunities of the different societies to carry out the development processes they consider valuable. Today more than ever, culture is placed at the center of the approaches to the problems of development, in the understanding that diversity and pluralism are not obstacles for development, because there are no universally applicable formulas for it, but appear as powerful tools that drive societies to take charge of their own destinies.

I like to imagine then, a big after-dinner where the seats are taken by the various societies in the world; an after-dinner that becomes a space for open and honest communication, where several positions are defended while recognizing everyone's own capabilities and their right to work for them; a space that results in cooperation, empathy and brotherhood, in full realization that only a real and active participation can strengthen the sustainability of

development.

And as in the family after-dinner, the generational gaps, the diversity of opinion and the plurality of options should not be treated as irreconcilable clash, but as the true expression of various abilities and the freedom to choose what each society considers desirable. Taking different paths in the promotion of development involves considering the rights of men, not as tools of defense but of action; it's not about preventing someone else to decide for me, but working to achieve what society deems desirable and just. Putting development on the table means placing it in the hands of men and women who decide on their own lives and live the life they want according to the values and customs that distinguish their cultures. And in this path young people are called to not only think about the future but to build it. The initiatives and creative actions should be taken in the present. We must build a future, starting today.