

Brooke Benson First Place Winner

Cultural pluralism is defined as a condition in which minority groups participate fully in the dominant society, while maintaining their cultural differences. It is ultimately the idea that a society benefits from such a condition. The importance of cultural pluralism, peace and understanding is constantly growing as our society continues to adapt and change. The fact is that we live in a pluralistic, multicultural society. The concept of embracing diversity enables us to take the “best” from each group, build on each others ideas and work together. This, in turn creates a better end product - a more productive and peaceful world. No one culture, religion or philosophy predominates above any other. Our differences must be embraced if society as a whole is going to flourish.

In an idealistic pluralist culture, unique groups would not only co-exist side by side, but also consider qualities of other groups as traits worth having in the dominant culture. Such a society would not only tolerate differences, but peacefully embrace them. Judging an individual based solely on a few defining factors, such as religion or race, is not only unfair, but a waste of valuable relationships. Many times unjustified prejudice can prevent a productive environment in which to cultivate joint ideas. Just imagine what could be achieved if countries stopped going to war and started supporting one another.

Religious and cultural differences are not the only ones that must be tolerated. There are many ways in which to be unique or “different” within our society. Issues such as gay rights and mental disorders must be approached with the same understanding and sensitivity as race and religion. Someones sexuality or mental condition is no more a choice than the family they were born into. Every human being deserves to be treated with the same dignity and respect, regardless of circumstance or lifestyle choices.

Everyone has experienced the surprise of having an initial negative judgement of someone proved wrong. Many times, it pleasantly surprises us. Realizing that making such judgements can be harmful opens our minds to others views and creates opportunities we would not have had otherwise. Apart from the formation of beneficial ideas, a general attitude of acceptance could prevent so many tragedies in our world - war, violence and suicide to name a few. According to U.S. Suicide Statistics, approximately 5 million living Americans have attempted suicide. How many of these attempts could have been prevented by someone reaching out to the struggling

person? They most likely felt alone, rejected or judged by their peers. So much good could be accomplished through simple human compassion.

Fortunately, as a result of the interconnectedness of today's society, we are already much more informed than our parents or grandparents were. Through television, travel and migration we are able to see, visit and learn about more parts of the world than ever before. We are more educated about what others believe and how they live. Continuing to educate ourselves in this way opens the door to greater peace and understanding between all people.