

# **A Pluralistic World**

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**Second Place Winner**

Albert Einstein, considered by many to be one of the most brilliant men in history, stated a basic truth: “Peace cannot be kept by force; it can only be achieved by understanding.” Working for peace and understanding in a pluralistic world seems abstract and idealistic, but I see it happening every day. My high school is one of great diversity. We have students from every racial, cultural, religious, and socio-economic background. This necessitates that each person work towards peace and understanding in small ways each day.

When people from different backgrounds coexist peacefully, there is an opportunity to share culture, tradition, and customs. This enriches a person’s identity, making him or her a more complex and wiser citizen of the world community. It also enriches life experiences. For example, this past summer I traveled to El Salvador. Some of the Salvadorans I met visited Kansas City a few months ago, and I brought them to my high school. There is a large Hispanic population at my school, and the visitors were able to converse with many students and teachers in their own language throughout the day. Because of the ethnic diversity in my school I learned to appreciate those who make the effort to learn multiple languages.

The value of seeing peace and understanding between those who are different from one another is that it teaches open-mindedness. In order to live together without conflict, people must be able to put themselves in someone else’s shoes. At a school basketball game two seasons ago an opposing team taunted our free throw-shooter and

our crowd with the chant, “Your dad works for my dad.” The hurt that resulted from that incident is an example of what can be avoided if we simply strive to understand those around us. Attending a school that celebrates diversity has taught my classmates and me to think about where the other person is coming from rather than assuming that we know. Compassion is something that can only be taught through seeing it and experiencing it personally.

Living peacefully in community also helps a unit to grow. When a group works together and compiles their ideas, then advancement comes more quickly and easily. A variety of backgrounds provides a larger pool of experiences to draw from. There is a great strength in differences. This is evidenced through my school’s basketball and scholars bowl teams. The basketball team has a great mix of athletic talent, height, speed, and leadership that would not be possible without the diversity of students on the squad. Because of the assortment of ages and talents, the scholars bowl team has a vast array of knowledge.

The world seems to be shrinking every day. With all of the advancements in technology and communications, while more countries gain the capability for nuclear weapons, it is imperative that we as a community work to get along or we will not survive. Without peace and understanding in this pluralistic world we will be stuck at the bottom of Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, worrying about food and safety rather than working towards self-actualization. For our own sake and for the sake of the whole world, let us live together in peace.