Welcome to Voices: A Literary Journal for Youth!

Greetings!

In commemoration of our Stand Against Racism campaign, YWCA Bergen County is excited to share with you the very first publication of our youth literary journal, *Voices*.

In a world where young voices may be drowned out or ignored, we believe that our youth are our greatest assets and that it is absolutely necessary for them to be heard. Utilizing the arts allows youth to describe their realities in their own unique way and share their truths with their peers and others.

We invited 7th-12th grade students in Bergen County to submit poetry, short prose, photography, or paintings to the journal. At its core, this year’s journal is a celebration of diversity. We encouraged our youth to think about this theme broadly: from empowerment, to uplifting communities, confronting hate, and bridging divides.

On behalf of the entire YWCA Bergen County staff and the Board of Directors, we invite you to experience the journal from beginning to end, to share it throughout your community, and to return to our website where the journal will live on and be celebrated for many years to come.

Thank you, and welcome.
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Equality Everywhere

Michelle L.
9th Grade, Paramus High School
The True Meaning of Diversity

Diversity; what is it?
Is it a state of cultural appreciation?
Or an understanding that individuality can form people into one?
Is it an acknowledgement of differences?
Or an embrace of existences?
In fact, it is all of these things.
A sense of solidarity is what diversity brings.
While “bearing a state of variety”, as the dictionary explains,
Diversity is a colorful adrenaline running through the world’s veins.
Although conveying a message of variation,
This word portrays such divergence forming a wondrous creation.
Diversity gives people a voice,
A voice utilized for choice.
Diversity is not just a variety; it’s a conglomeration.
A conglomeration in which power and tenacity can unify an entire nation.

Ayla K.
8th Grade, Lewis F. Cole Middle School
Home of the Free?

We live our days in a sort of bliss-
Some may say ignorance, perhaps,
Oblivious to the pain, the sorrow, the suffering
We plaster a smile on our faces
And wipe away these horrors from our minds.

Only one concern plagues our minds
Only one body of individuals lies at the forefront
While all of our brothers and sisters around the world
Endure horrors and bloodshed.

America, oh land of the free, home of brave-
I didn’t know bravery was a synonym for cowardice
Cowardice in our actions, our words, our perceptions
A nation built on a dream for security
Has now become something of a nightmare.

Freedom, we chant for freedom
But how is it freedom
When America is the only one free?

Before we chant for freedom we need to take a step back
Look at those who have fallen around us
And fix the crumbling pieces of our world before
It is all too late.

Franchesca I.
11th Grade, Bergen County Academies
for The Academy of Medical Science Technology
We are the same color on the inside; why does the outside matter?

Gia P.
8th Grade, Lewis F. Cole Middle School
Hate-Proof

Hatred from society
Clung onto her legs
Like a ball and chain
Slowing her down
Every step of the way
Getting weaker
And weaker
And weaker

Hatred from the people
Left a wound in her heart
Becoming a scab
An irritating bother
A scab impossible to ignore
Then becoming a wound reopened
Leaving a scar behind
A forever reminder

This only made her stronger
The weight that she carried
She has been carrying the key
The key to free herself from the ball and chain
The scar left in her heart
A reminder about what she overcame
That she can cross the bridge
To reach those who knocked her down

This only made her stronger
She was an untamable tide
Getting more fierce and powerful
As the storm rolled in
As the wind pushed in her every direction
She was a mighty rock
She was now indestructible
Both heart and mind shatterproof

Erin K.
8th Grade, Lewis F. Cole Middle School
Stand Up Against Racism

Jokes are made, scars are exchanged
Tension between races break into outrage
Mockery replaces cultural pride
Heads hang low with shame inside
How can we expect to stand as a nation?
A nation considered the melting pot?
When we refuse to accept the races of others
Without insults being sought?
We wrote in our country’s very foundation
That all men were created equal
And as time goes on, shouldn’t we make sure
All races are included in the sequel?
Think before you make a racist remark
Accept all skin tones, light and dark
In the end, we all stand in the land of the free
As a result of the success of Lincoln’s candidacy
Working to end slavery was the right move
And stopping racial injustice will be too
So stand next to your people, stand up tall
Because united we stand, divided we fall.

Laetitia P.
8th Grade, Lewis F. Cole Middle School
Serenity

Angela H.
8th Grade, Lewis F. Cole Middle School
A Rainbow of Unity

Rainbows; who doesn’t love them?
When in the sky, they can shine like a gem.
ROY G. BIV, they say.
Although used to represent the rainbow’s colors,
This acronym has much more to portray.
Red, epitomizing love,
Represents how prejudices have flown away like a dove.
Orange, symbolizing success,
Portrays the bridging of differences that have been stressed.
Yellow, exemplifying positivity,
Shows how unity can be such an amenity.
Green, signifying growth
Depicts our fulfillment of equality in which we took oath.
Blue, indicating trust,
Represents a love for others that goes below the earth’s crust.
Indigo, embodying integrity,
Illustrates a sense of solidarity.
Violet, personifying peace,
Displays the levels of hate that have faced cease.
As you can see, this colorful bridge connects society’s disparities
And bears the fact that it’s all about the heart’s qualities.
When in the sky, unity is the flower from which it stems.
Rainbows; who doesn’t love them?

Ayla K.
8th Grade, Lewis F. Cole Middle School
How to Hate

You hate me
Yet you don’t know me

You hate me with every fiber in your body
With every fragment of your soul
Yet you don’t know me

Did it ever occur to you I might not just be the color of my skin?
The face of my religion?
The person I choose to love?

Did you stop and think that I may be kind?
Caring?
Generous?

Instead you pin a yellow star to my shirt
Hold a gun to my head
Deny my right to vote
Kick me out of my country
And blow up a place called home
Yet you don’t know me

Every part of me is screaming to be heard
Praying to have a voice
But hate is a powerful silencer

You hate me
Yet you don’t know me
And you never will
Why Can’t We?

When the Father of mankind first created Adam, He could do nothing but smile
Little did He know that His sons would soon be divided; His white son a master to
His black child
After centuries of oppression and persecution, one man could not just watch
and stand still
He came from the small town of Hodgenville

This man’s name was Abraham Lincoln, who first worked as a lawyer
He went on to become the 16th president who ended up as the Confederate’s horror
He did not agree with slavery
So into the people he instilled his bravery
And passed the Emancipation Proclamation
Which prompted much frustration

More than five scores later, there was still no change
The white men and women still in rage
White men created the “Jim Crow” laws in order to keep separation
Between themselves and the Negroes, something called segregation
Soon came along Martin Luther King Jr.
Who was a black Baptist preacher with a slight sense of humor
There was also the famous Rosa Parks
Who refused to give up her seat, having no idea what movement she would start

Marking this year of 2017, it has been a little more than 60 years since the civil rights
movement took place
Yet, little progress was made for equality among every race
Words are used for racist, sexist, and harmful purposes even to this day
Words of humiliation, degradation, words that betray
Jokes about skin color, backgrounds, ancestral history
Friends that laugh it off, when those words bring inner misery
Employers that say “You can’t do this” because of stereotypes
Employees that don’t have the courage to fight
This is the world we live in today
Where anything and everything is possible
Where scientists pursue the thought of life in space
Where so many amazing things out in the world awaits

So why can’t we be the generation
To stop all racism
Why can’t we be the people
To extinguish all racial evil
Why can’t we be the ones
To start accepting all of God’s sons
The answer is simple; we can.

Joshua H.
8th Grade, Lewis F. Cole Middle School
The Sky’s Riddle

Up in the sky
Lies a question of why
Why here, up high
Color inequality has died.
But down below
Segregation echoes?

Michelle L.
9th Grade, Paramus High School
What should you see?

Diversity makes the world go around
Sometimes makes a frown turn upside down
What should you really see?
What would the world truly be without diversity?
A boring, uncreative universe
Like an unwanted curse
Let's get to accepting
Fall from rejecting
We are all unique in our own ways
Why can’t we put the hatred away?
Heritage, language or abilities
Qualities, identity and many varieties
Culture and gender
All those things should bring us together
This is what you should see
We should be one family
Have acceptance in each other
Just call each other sister and brother

Nicholas P.
8th Grade, Wood-Ridge Jr./Sr. High School
Diversity Through the Years

Martin Luther King and Malcolm X;
These men were the ones who died for the rest,
To be free in a country that now exhumes that purpose,
A country that bears a culturally diverse circus.
Although some in the past had endured many a pratfall,
In the end we are the ones who stand tall.
Michelle Obama, Hillary Clinton, Marie Curie;
These women spread the word
For the voices and intellect of women to be heard.
Diversity is an aspect that our country has come to gain,
After a long time of suffering and pain.
We did it! We did it!
We did it with our true grit,
As well as with the help of our high spirit.

Ayla K.
8th Grade, Lewis F. Cole Middle School
In these photos, they are pictures of me and my best friend. We are two completely different people, but we fit each other perfectly. I am white and she is black. She is 6 foot and I am 5’ 5”. She is bisexual and I am straight. It kind of just shows how we can be so different and still love each other for who we are!

Daphne M.
12th Grade, Wood-Ridge Jr./Sr. High School
I am sick of being generalized.
I am sick of being like an object to be easily categorized.
I have a name, I have a place,
There is so much more to me than just my race.
No, I am not “oriental” or “yellow”
I am not some rug to just sit mellow.
No, I am not “exotic” or “imported”
I am not a plant or a fish to be exploited.
No, I am not a “chink” because of the size of my eyes
I am like Maya, I will rise.
I am not the “chink” that is the chink in your armor
I know that my skull is much, much harder.
I am not the goon of a “gook” that you think I am
I will stop your racist words like a dam
Please look past the color of my skin
Because there is so much more within.
Jigsaw Puzzle

When one thinks of a jigsaw puzzle,
They might think of a game that has the capability to cause a fuzzle.
A game intended to confuse,
But can sometimes amuse.
A form of entertainment that can cause one to struggle.
However it is much more than just a puzzle.
No matter what size, 100-piece or 5,000-piece,
A puzzle embodies a positive aura that cannot be ceased.
A jigsaw puzzle, like the world,
Is a system and a team joined by differences being whirled.
Together, people can become this system, this affiliation,
To create an environment against prejudice and discrimination.

Ayla K.
8th Grade, Lewis F. Cole Middle School
Stand Against Racism is a signature campaign of YWCA USA to build community among those who work for racial justice and to raise awareness about the negative impact of institutional and structural racism in our communities. This campaign is one part of our larger national strategy to fulfill our mission of eliminating racism.

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