

Who we are

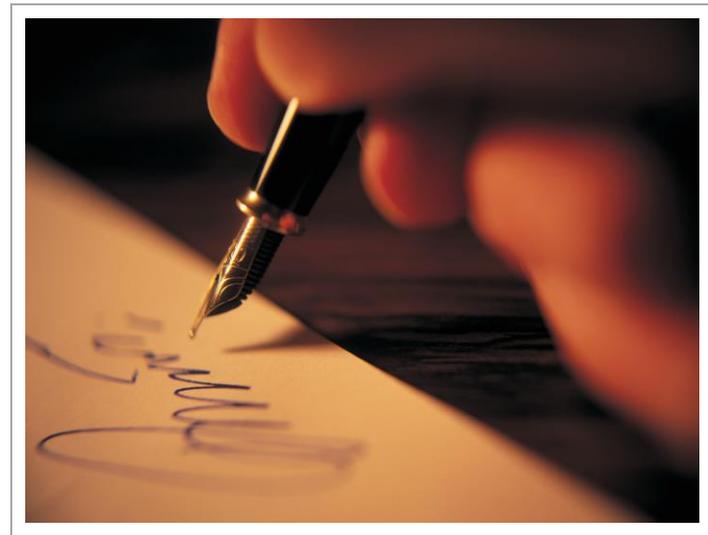
Founded in 2002, the National Writing Project in New Hampshire, (formerly Plymouth Writing Project) is the New Hampshire chapter of the [National Writing Project](#), and shares the values of the national organization: equity, diversity, and excellence. NWPNH believes that access to high quality educational experiences is a basic right of all learners and a cornerstone of equity. Through building an extensive network of teacher leaders, NWPNH seeks to promote exemplary instruction of writing in every classroom in the state.

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One Pen Can Change the World



NATIONAL WRITING PROJECT IN NEW HAMPSHIRE

Award-winning Essays from New Hampshire Students in
Grades 5-12



National Writing Project
in New Hampshire
because writing matters

National Writing Project in New Hampshire

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About the Essay Contest

1. All essays are original work responding one of these prompts:

In 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr., penned “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” addressing the injustice of racial segregation. His words roused a nation to change its laws. Think about an injustice/unfairness that you see in our lives today.

OPTION 1: Write your own “Letter from...” that addresses an injustice/unfairness you’d like to change.

OPTION 2: Write a letter to someone whose words have had an impact on the world or on you personally.

OPTION 3: How do you define fairness or justice? Tell a story from your life about a time when you thought you or someone you know was treated unfairly.

Grades 5 and 6

Runner Up: Kayla Thrasher, Pleasant Street School, Laconia

Dear Miss. Barach,

You have impacted my life when you tell me, “You’re perfect the way you are.” I know it isn’t much, but it has improved my life a lot, considering you always tell me this no matter what. I have always wondered how you know exactly what to say when I am either sad, mad, or confused. Your words didn’t just improve my life, they also improved my self-esteem. They made me realize I don’t have to change my appearance for people to like me. To be liked, I need to be fair, and I need to have a good personality, and if others still don’t like me, I will not change for other people any more. Your words made me feel unique and special.

One way your words helped was last year when someone I know told me that one of my outfits was ugly when my *dad bought it* and I never wanted to wear it in the first place. It hurt me because she was one of my closest friends. I immediately went to you and you told me, “You’re perfect the way you are.” Then I realized that I am okay and no one can tell me otherwise. The endless ways are too personal to share.

Thank you so much. I wish I could be as smart as you are because as I said, you always know what to say and how to say it. I wish I had the courage to share all of the ways your words helped, and I wish I had the right amount of room, but I will say this: Miss Barach, you are my favorite teacher in the entire school. You are the best advice giver to everyone, not only me. You’re not just a teacher or someone who hands out advice, but you are the closest teacher-friend I have at Pleasant Street School, and I will never forget it.

Your Student/Friend,

Kayla Thrasher

Grade 8

Runner Up: Noah Waldron, Kearsarge Middle School

Dear Pope Francis,

Hi, my name is Noah Waldron and I attend Kearsarge Regional Middle School as an eighth grader in New Hampshire. I am Catholic and so is most of my family. I think you have had an amazingly positive impact on the world because you are so open minded, and in the past other Popes have not been. While I agree with all of your actions and find hope in your charity and inspiring words, the thing that impacted me the most was what you said about homosexuality.

I have been friends with a boy named Seth since I was five years old. Seth was adopted, along with his brother Kai, because his parents, Tim and John, desperately wanted children. Last summer, Seth told me he was gay. I was the first person he told and after he told me, he started telling his parents, other friends, and family. I knew how hard it was for him to admit it. I had always kind of known he was gay, but I think he had been in denial for a very long time due to the bullying he had received on the subject at school. When he said it for the first time to another person, me, I could feel a gigantic weight leave the room and saw him look so at ease with himself.

My point is that if it is that hard for my friend Seth to admit that he was gay, even though he would not suffer at home, seeing as his parents were as well, how hard would it be for another person who had straight and/or religious parents? They would hear about these hate crimes and protests, people saying that God hates gays, and all of this negativity would make them nervous. Then all of the sudden, you came out and said, “If someone is gay who searches for the Lord and has goodwill, who am I to judge?” This one line, from one of the most important people in the world, could change everything for them.

This way of thinking gives people who commit hate crimes and protest against gays no excuse. I look at gay rights like this, if they aren’t forcing their sexuality on us then why should we force our sexuality on them? One of the most important things in Christianity is that God loves all of humanity. Doesn’t that also mean that he accepts us too? While other people may disagree with you on this subject, I think you should know that a lot of people agree with you too. Thank you for opening the world’s eyes, even just a little, to this subject.

Grades 5 and 6

Winner: Ruby Lonergan, Campton Elementary School

Different Lives, One Family

It was my first time in the big, amazing city, San Francisco. Tall beige buildings towered over me, their large ornate balconies indented with graceful swirls and twists. Dazzling shop signs sparkled with the promise of original things to buy. But down on the streets is where my eyes really lingered. I didn't understand. People huddled on the stoops of closed bars and restaurants. I was scared when my mom asked me to throw away my aluminum can. As I ran over to the trashcan, I imagined the poor rising up to hurt me. I was planning my attack moves. Back inside our hotel, I ran over to the window. Two old ladies in shawls with plastic bags came over to the trashcan. I saw them digging and then pulling out my can. All of a sudden, I realized they had to do that to survive.

After I got back to New Hampshire, I wanted to learn all about what life was like being poor so I watched a PBS documentary called "Sera's Story." Sera is my age and she lived in an apartment in the Tenderloin in San Francisco. She only had cooked carrots to eat, and she didn't have a room, but an "area" with her family and their stuff. Sera said, "No kid should ever have to go through all of this, but every day they do."

I wondered if anyone I know would have similar problems. Then I thought of my school. Every day people go to the breakfast program before school starts because they may not have enough food to feed the family. First I was blind to poverty but now I see what hard times they are having. Now I have learned that there are people all over who are homeless and who have no food. We have to show the world that we are the same kind of people, that we are a family who always wants to help out, and make sure that we all can get what we need to survive and be happy.

Grade 7

Winner: Bryden Wright, Laconia Middle School

Injustice: Letter From Laconia

In our modern world, money means everything. Power, influence, and success all seem to revolve around wealth. The rich can do practically anything they want to and get away with it. This is because no one wants to step up to the plate and say "no" to these people. If just one person did this, a lot of problems would be solved.

In some cases, the children of people with a lot of money get special treatment or rewards they didn't earn. For example, in the short story "The Scholarship Jacket," a girl who had gotten straight As was about to lose the scholarship to another student who wasn't nearly as good as she was because the other girl was the daughter of a wealthy man. In the novel *Warp Speed*, a bully named Digger Ronster won the prize for the best costume because his dad was rich and the principal wanted to get on his good side. Even though these are just stories, the same sort of scenario happens everywhere.

Wealth can get you through court too. One time a teenager went drunk driving and killed four people, and he got off scott-free! Meanwhile, a lower-class old man was sent to jail for having rain barrels in his yard. They were supposedly illegal reservoirs. Not only that, but the water was also said to belong to a nearby water company, so they said that he stole the water even though it was landing on his property. An old man goes to jail for having rain barrels, but the teenager wasn't punished for killing four people? That's not right.

I have a solution to these problems. What if everyone in court both got lawyers from the government? That way, no one has the upper hand and it can be a fair trial. Likewise, if schools got an impartial judge from another area to choose who won school prizes, there wouldn't be as much unfairness. It may not be the best solution, but it certainly would help.

People with money get special treatment. It's easy to win in court or win an award if you have a ton of cash. Rich people don't have to work for what they want, they can take it without a second thought. It doesn't matter if someone else earned it or had the better argument, as long as someone else has a few extra bucks to throw around, they will get what they want.

Grade 7

Runner Up: Renee Corriveau, Laconia Middle School

We all want to be treated with respect. When we respect others, we expect that respect to be returned. Shouldn't everyone have the chance to be treated with respect? I think that respect is a kind of justice. If we are respected, we create a type of equality, and a sense of fairness for everyone. It is very disturbing to witness first-hand an injustice done to an adult in my school earlier this year.

Our principal came to inform us of a note that had been written insulting the race of a substitute teacher. The sub had been in one of my classes the day before. The principal confided that the note had been written by a student, and that the words in the note impacted everyone who read it. Each of my teachers stood up to express apologies to the substitute on the students' behalf. Then the substitute began to speak. He spoke of how the words hurt him to the core because he didn't understand how feelings as strong as the ones mentioned in the note could still exist today. He said how it hurt him even more to know that a student could say those things. As he spoke, I saw tears well up in his eyes. It was then that I realized the unfairness of the whole thing. I realized how I would feel if it had happened to me. How was it fair that he had to undergo such an experience? He is a very kind person and did not deserve to have such an awful thing happen to him. We all have our differences, but we do not want to be judged by them.

This experience has helped me realize how badly a person's feelings can be hurt when you disrespect them. I have vowed to always keep in mind how powerful words can be. I am not sure that the student who wrote the note realized exactly the harm that they were doing. Of course, we will never know because that person was not brave enough to step forward and admit to doing it. I wish to teach the world that fairness and justice can be done by simply not putting people down. In the future, I hope that if we can avoid saying disrespectful things, then we can avoid hurting other people's feelings. If we can do that, then we can respect one another, creating fairness and equality.

Grade 8

Runner Up: Joseph Kealey, Kearsarge Middle School

"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere"- Martin Luther King Jr.

Justice is a double-edged sword: on one side you have the equality and fairness that everyone wants and deserves, but on the other side you have the desire for revenge, and an endless cycle of bloodshed and violence.

The quote from Martin Luther King above is a good example of not only the need for justice in the world, but also its complexity. This is best exemplified by the attacks of 9/11, when over two thousand people died because of al-Qaeda's subjective belief that America had wronged them, which made them feel they had the right to carry out their form of justice on the American people. Although members of al-Qaeda saw the 9/11 attack as justified, the world was outraged, and demanded their own justice. As a result, the desire for justice led to the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. A few years after this happened, the government received information on the location of the mastermind behind the September eleventh attack, Osama bin Laden. The US government killed bin Laden, making sure he would never hurt people again. This series of events is a very good example of how the desire for justice can lead to a vicious cycle of hurting and killing people.

To me, the definition of justice is the punishment for crimes that were committed by a person or people. Justice, however, is not an act of revenge. In many stories, like Aesop's fables, when a victim of an injustice takes revenge upon the person who hurt them, it can lead to a cycle of people hurting other people. Instead, justice should represent many good things, like apprehending a criminal to make sure he doesn't hurt anyone else. The punishment should fit the crimes, and there is a level of punishment that can be considered reasonable without becoming cruel. Justice also has a symbolic sense, because to many people it represents America's power to help people and keep national order, and keep striving toward the future and a better world.

Grades 9-12

Winner: Julia Brackett, Souhegan High School

Letter from a Disappointed Teenager

We live in a time, in a place, in a country where racism has become the norm, where racism is okay, where it's not considered racism, even, because the stereotypes we've created for our citizens have become so familiar, so understood that it is almost as if it should be printed in our biology textbooks that Asians are bad drivers, that Jewish people are cheap, and that African-Americans commit crimes that others are incapable of. We are so naïve, so sheltered from the world around us that we are left believing that these close-minded views are shared by everyone; we are left believing that in our history books, it said that the American Indians stole our land—not the other way around—and are now freeloading off of “true Americans” hard work.

We live in a time, in a place, in a country with a mindset that is so utterly bigoted and pathetic that it is a wonder we can even think coherent thoughts because we are so full of hatred and ignorant opinions based off of fabricated media stories that it escapes our mouths with everything we say. It's time we change this.

There are people in the United States who claim that racism is no longer an issue, who say that we are done with the topic of racism; that the fight ended, because black people gained their rights; “We have a black president now, don't we?” “We're integrated now, aren't we?”

Here's your wake-up call: we are not done. And racism is just as evident now as it was years ago; it's simply accepted.

When a black college student is arrested for buying a 350 dollar designer belt because it is assumed he is stealing it, we know that the fight is not over.

When the statistics show that, while people of color make up about 30% of the United States' population, they account for 60% of those imprisoned, or when statistics show that one in three black men can expect to go to prison in their lifetime, or when statistics show that, once convicted in the federal system, black people receive sentences that are 10% longer than white people for the same crimes—we know that the fight is not over.

When an Indian-American girl wins the Miss America pageant and is attacked with racial slurs and bigotry, we know that the fight is not over.

When a man gets away with the murder of a 17-year-old boy just because the boy was black, we are certain that the fight is not over.

It is up to us, Generation Y, to clean up this mess and make a change. But we are just like the rest of them. We're the ones who seem to forget that slavery was a thing, who seem to forget that the Holocaust actually happened, who are going to fail our country because we are too caught up in our ignorant, foolish outlets of entertainment.

It's about time we realize what we are doing to the society we live in. We are making it worse. We believe everything we see on TV; we believe everything we read on the Internet. We are told that, though they were born here, though they lived here their whole life, and though they will probably die here, that people of other races or ethnicities are not real Americans; we are told that they are lazy, steal from us and live off of Welfare, and are the reason our country is failing.

But I can guarantee that they are not the reason our country is failing: we are. We and our shallow, thoughtless bigotry are the real reason why our country is failing. We have stopped progressing; we have stopped moving forward, taken a violent halt, and commenced moving backwards. It is getting worse every day—the statistics show it, the news stories show it, the murders and freed murderers show it, the hatred proves it.

It is about time someone steps up to make a change. If we took the time to educate ourselves on current events, to pay attention not only to the things we overhear our parents or Fox News saying, to read a history book or look at the facts of a news story then we might understand; racism is real. Racism is not over. Racism has developed, racism has changed, racism has evolved, and racism is still alive today. It is time to make a change.

Grades 9-12

Winner: Isabella Rubin, Concord High School

Lou Bug

What is justice? The Merriam Webster dictionary defines it as “the process or result of using laws to fairly judge and punish crimes and criminals”. This is not a sound definition, for “fairly” is subjective; what is fair to one person may not be to another. Therefore, the term “justice” is purely subjective. To me, it simply means: “to right a wrong”. Justice is what many people strive for when they feel they have been wronged, but it is not always obtained.

Louis Michael Oliver was born May 28th, 2011. He weighed 6 pounds, 6 ounces, and was 18 ½ inches long. Born to my aunt and uncle Cristina and Michael Oliver, Louis was the second of two children. His brother Liam, age 2, loved him at first sight. He cuddled and kissed his little brother relentlessly, perhaps being a little loud at times, but always caring. Lou Bug, as the family nicknamed him, had the sweetest little smile, and an adorable giggle. He and Liam played cheerfully in their California home, as their parents looked on with love and wonder. Although the boys could be a handful at times, they were good-natured, and the family lived a normal, loving, happy life.

Friday, May 23, 2011. Just say the date to anyone in my family, and they will know exactly what you are talking about. Have you ever heard a story on the news so tragic, so horrific, that you declare that there is no way it could ever happen to you? I'll tell you from experience: you're wrong.

It should have been a normal pickup from daycare. Cristina had finished a regular day at work, and was on her way to get Louis from daycare. She rounded the corner, and her heart skipped a beat. Policemen, fire trucks, and ambulances lined the street. What was going on? She crept up to the daycare, watching people scurry around frantically. She hoped and prayed that nothing was wrong, that perhaps it was just a faulty smoke alarm. Alas, fate was not on her side that day.

Louis was whisked away to the hospital. No one knew what was wrong. All Cristina and Mike were told was that he was unresponsive. That Friday night, across the country, my mother got the call from my aunt Sheila, who was watching Liam. I remember it vividly. Voice cracking, Mom looked to me and said,

“There’s something wrong with Lou. He’s in the hospital.” I looked at her, and with complete certainty, I replied; “He’s going to be fine.”

I was wrong.

In the early hours of Saturday, May 24, 2011, four days before his first birthday, Lou Bug was taken off of the machine that was keeping him alive. He was brain dead. My aunt Cristina held the phone to Lou’s ear so my mother could say goodbye. I’ve never seen her cry so hard. The family still had no answers as to what had happened. All we knew was that little Lou was gone, and our happy little world had been shattered.

The funeral was gorgeous, or so I’m told. Lou’s little casket was borne by a beautiful horse drawn carriage up to the church, on a bright, sunny day. The mood was anything but bright. Family and friends cried and comforted each other, wondering why and how this could have happened. Liam, perhaps, provided the most heartbreaking moment of all. “Where’s Lou?” he asked his mom, in total innocence. She didn’t know how to answer. Suddenly, with a smile Liam looked up at her. “He’s in Heaven”, he told her. He had never heard of Heaven before.

Months later, a knock came at my aunt’s door. Still grieving, she opened it to find a storm of reporters. Apparently the autopsy had come back, and had been posted online before notifying the family. The results were shocking. Louis was murdered. His body portrayed the unmistakable signs of Shaken Baby Syndrome. An investigation into the daycare began immediately. The police told us they strongly suspected who did it. However, the suspect was untouchable, and in the end, could not be convicted. The entire family was crushed. How was this possible? What kind of monster could kill an infant? We still don't have the answers, except for one. For a child to die before his parents, and for his killer to remain free, is not justice by any definition.

Grade 8

Winner: Gabby Lejeunesse, Hopkinton

Imagine

One thing that I would want to change in our society is gun control. Guns are meant to do only one thing: *kill*. Gun violence has become a big issue in the United States. Violence has become a part of our lives. We are surrounded by guns and violence on the internet, in video games, on the news, and in our communities. More and more people are afraid to go to work, to school, or to large events. Take a moment to imagine the world without guns; there would be significantly fewer deaths, less war, less fear, and less pain.

I have been affected by gun violence. My aunt is a surgeon who saves lives and helps people feel better. In the middle of December, an unhappy person came to her medical practice and shot her as well as two other people and himself. The shooter and another doctor died. My aunt is alive but is now trying to help herself get better rather than the patients who need her. It is unfortunate that she will be unable to perform the work she loves. My aunt's dream was to help other people that could not afford surgery in third world countries. Injuries to her arm may not allow her to live her dream.

With an unconcealed shotgun, the gunman had entered the hospital where my aunt has her offices. He proceeded to walk to the third floor. People saw him but did not think it was unusual for someone to be walking around with a gun. Therefore, no one said anything. What troubles me is that a person can walk into a building with a gun, and people find that normal. It makes me sad to think that I live in a country where this is considered normal. In New Hampshire people are allowed to carry guns, and they do not have to be hidden. In other words, if someone walked into the grocery store with a gun, there would be nothing I could do. The gun owner has a right to be there with a weapon even if it makes others feel threatened or unsafe.

There were seven school shootings in the *first fourteen days* of 2014 in the United States. In 2013 there were 23 school shootings.* One of the most tragic shootings, Sandy Hook, affected everyone in America, but nothing has changed. The Brady Campaign Against Gun Violence has found that one in three people knows someone who has been shot. The Campaign also found that one in four teens in

teens in our country has witnessed a shooting. On average, thirty two Americans are murdered with guns every day, and 140 are treated for a gun assault in an emergency room every day around our country. Every day almost 51 people kill themselves with a firearm, and 45 people are shot or killed in an accident with a gun**

I wish I had the answers to solve the problem of gun violence. I do not. I do know that we need to start making changes and we need to come together to make plans for those changes. Fighting violence with violence is not the answer. It only makes things worse. I hope that my generation has better answers to problems than using weapons. Surely, if we put our heads together, we can find a way to a more peaceful country.

*Peck, Adam. "There Has Been An Average Of One School Shooting Every Other School Day So Far This Year." ThinkProgress RSS. N.p., 14 Jan. 2014.

**"About Gun Violence." Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence. N.p., 2014.