



Education to Build a Better Future for All

*Award Winning Essays of the
International Essay Contest for Young People*



Goi Peace
Foundation



UNESCO Global Action Programme on
Education for Sustainable Development

About the International Essay Contest for Young People

The International Essay Contest for Young People is one of the youth education programs organized by the Goi Peace Foundation. Started in 2000, the annual contest aims to harness the energy, creativity and initiative of the world's youth in promoting a culture of peace and sustainable development, and to inspire society to learn from its young minds and think about how each of us can make a difference in the world.

This publication presents the award winning essays of the 2016 International Essay Contest for Young People in the Children's category (ages 14 and under) and Youth category (ages 15 to 25) respectively, which were selected from among 12,937 entries received from 153 countries. Written under the theme "Education to Build a Better Future for All," the essays express clear visions and ideas for a new kind of education, born out of the innovative thinking and deep hopes of today's young people. Essays were written and submitted in English unless otherwise noted.

A list of past essay contest themes is also included at the end of the booklet, to give teachers ideas for discussion topics in their classes.

About the Goi Peace Foundation

The Goi Peace Foundation is a member-supported, public benefit organization established in Tokyo, Japan in 1999. Our mission is to foster a sustainable and harmonious global society by promoting consciousness, values and wisdom for creating peace, and by building cooperation among individuals and organizations across diverse fields, including education, science, culture and the arts. The Foundation is an NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, and maintains official relations with UNESCO. It is also a Key Partner of the UNESCO Global Action Programme on Education for Sustainable Development.

For more information about the Goi Peace Foundation and the International Essay Contest for Young People, please visit www.goipeace.or.jp or contact:

The Goi Peace Foundation
1-4-5 Hirakawacho
Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 102-0093 Japan
Tel: +81 (3) 3265-2071
E-mail: essay@goipeace.or.jp

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Taming the Jungle

Sizhe (Sophia) Liang

Age 14, China (living in USA)

For seven hours a day, five days a week, I live in a jungle. Not the kind with towering trees and tangled vines, of course—my jungle is made of red-bricked walls and ivory tiles. Instead of monkeys and pythons and parrots, the ecosystem bursts with aspiring doctors, budding lawyers, and soon-to-be engineers. These animals hoot and screech and caw to each other, comparing calculus test scores and English essay grades. As in any jungle, there's a pecking order. Students do not hesitate to cheat, plagiarize, and tear each other apart in the bloodlust to reach the top of the food chain. When I gaze around this vast, untamed wilderness, my heart aches for my classmates who toil to the breaking point at ungodly hours of the night, who are forced to quit guitar and painting in pursuit of tutoring and honors chemistry, who are taught to believe that their intelligence and talent is determined by a collection of percentages, percentiles, and government-mandated tests. When I look around my school, I can't help but wonder, how can we change this?

Albert Einstein's famous quote comes to mind: "Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid." If Einstein's words hold true, then our current education system is wasting a considerable amount of resources trying to stick flounders into forests. Like items on a production line, students are molded until their grades and test scores and extracurricular activities fit a cookie-cutter standard. Class rank, standardized tests, and other narrow measures of achievement all perpetuate the idea that there is only one type of intelligence, only one way to observe and reason. Students with skills and passions that cannot be measured by filling in bubbles are uprooted from their natural aptitudes. As a result of this assembly-line education system, the world loses the unique, unconventional young minds that are essential to solving the complex challenges we face as a global community.

Thus, rather than forcing fish to climb trees, we should recognize how critters of varying shapes and sizes and abilities all play a vital part in maintaining the balance of the jungle.

In the classroom, this means fostering collaboration instead of pitting kids against one another. Much like wild creatures who all depend on each other to survive in an interconnected web of life, students rely on their classmates so they can learn and grow from each other. Schools should remove class rank, which encourages children to think of their peers as nothing but competitors and enemies. Instead of basing learning on textbooks, lectures, and rote memorization, educators should assign projects that require a diversity of talents to be conglomerated. Multimedia, interactive demonstrations, and hands-on experiments can be incorporated into memorable, creative lessons. With all the readily accessible technology today, there is no longer a reason to limit students to PowerPoints and worksheets. We can give kids the opportunity to build models, design inventions, and communicate with experts in the field—all with a few swipes of a finger. Likewise, assessments should be comprehensive, involving problem-solving and real-world applications, instead of merely requiring a choice between A, B, C, or D. This holistic education cultivates passion, critical thinking, and out-of-the-box reasoning, and it gives all types of learners the opportunity to contribute their one-of-a-kind talents.

Our world is changing, and the old standard for education can no longer keep up. The twenty-first century is the age of inventors, engineers, and entrepreneurs, all of whom can only be successful when they communicate instead of clash, collaborate instead of compete. Only a generation that is diverse, curious, and creative could be capable of tackling the many problems we face internationally. A brighter future starts within the classroom, with dedicated educators and originative students. It is indeed, as they say, a jungle out there, but our schools have the power to raise the next movers and shakers to tame it.

Education Across Endless Clouds

Carrie Hsu

Age 13, USA

The foundation of a better future lies within the youth, within the next generation, within education. There are many complex problems in the world, one of which is the human ideology to spread their own thoughts and to be heard; this need raging throughout their blood causes them to do hateful things unto others. All of these problems begin with a simple human state—a state of being unsatisfied, a state of being not at peace.

Every child should be at peace. Many people tell others that their dreams aren't realistic, and that they cannot happen; thus, so many live in a state without inner peace. What if the future holds a place where any dream is possible, and where no child is told that they cannot be what they want—that their future is fully in their hands? In poverty or in wealth, no child should be inferior because of small issues like money. Dreams are clouds in the future of education. The truth is, reality and dreams are not all that different. In fact, dreams are like a fog that kisses reality, softly like a mother does a child. Every dream can come true for the future; the future always has an infinite amount of doors and roads to take.

An ideal education system is incredibly varied, so that each student can find their passion. Instead of waiting until college and having only a limited time to decide on what each student will do for their adulthood, why not start at childhood? Yes, childhood is a place to learn the ABC's, go out and play, and eat popsicle sticks, but isn't it also a time to ponder the future? As children, we are so innocent, never thinking about what the future will hold, but what if that innocence is preserved? As we grow older, we learn about realities and tragedies that begin to weigh each child and their dreamy clouds down one by one, until there is nearly none left in the sky.

Yes, students should eventually outgrow fantasies, but they should never forget them. As Paulo Coelho said, "There is only one thing that makes a dream impossible to achieve: the fear of failure." Children encounter fear and failure; all of their dreams get stuffed into a tiny corner of their heart until that storage is overtaken by fear, failure, and harsh reality. Education should dig into that corner and expand their views and dreams; humanity will advance to solve local and global problems everywhere in our lives. Reality will serve as motivation for students and children to better the world and promote the ultimate goal: for the world and everybody in it to be at peace.

This education system should encourage self-discovery whilst still being a blend of innocence and interest. They will be able to choose the subjects they are passionate about when they feel ready to do so. Education will be a basic human right, no matter the color, race, ethnicity, gender, or wealth of each child. This education includes hands-on activities, patience without the pressure of many deadlines, and interaction with adults of their chosen profession or other students. Students will be able to develop their own intelligence by fully understanding and promoting creative self-thought and individual ideas. There will be many levels of each profession, and qualified people in the field to teach it and interact with the students, instead of the students reading from a textbook everyday, like the education system I experience today.

Today I am not at peace. I do not know what my future holds, nor what I want it to hold. People have told me that my dreams are unrealistic, or forced their ideas for my future upon me. Our education system today has not encouraged me to find my passion; instead, I must go through this searching journey alone and afraid. No child should ever fear their future; they should look to the future with hope and happiness. I hope for the future generations that education will improve to a state of happiness, and that every child gets to be a child and taste the dew dropped by the petals of peace.

Education and Character

Honoka Kato

Age 14, Japan

(original in Japanese)

In the past, when I saw news about a terrorist incident, I would be shocked by the images, and I felt sympathy for the lives that were senselessly taken away. But time would pass without my doing anything about it, and I would return to my peaceful life.

In February, I participated in a peace program for the Middle East. A delegation of family members bereaved by the Israeli Palestinian conflict came to Shizuoka, where I live. I listened to the stories of young people around 20 years old. There was a person whose parents were killed before his eyes, and another who, when she was just nine years old, saw her sisters captured and killed. Living in Japan, I could not even imagine such devastating experiences.

Israel and Palestine are enemy countries. Yet, a few brave youth from both countries were willing to be paired up and do a homestay together. I would have thought that even if they acted in a friendly way toward each other, a moment would come when events from the past would resurface in their mind, and they would be unable to contain their feelings of hatred and grief. But after spending so long at the limits of chaos and disorder, they had true strength and a sense of reason. They had the courage to overcome and reach out. There is something we can learn from this example.

One of the people whose family was affected by the war told us: "We have no dreams or hopes for the future. All we want is to live a peaceful life, without being afraid."

Why do so many people have to die in this way? It is not just because of wars. Lives are also lost because people cannot get vaccinations or medical treatment, and there are children struggling in poverty and suffering from hunger. Many of the extremists who carry out suicide bombings are not so far from me in age.

Recently, I have been thinking about these issues more than I did before. I think the greatest threat to peace is our apathy toward those who are suffering. We turn away from

realities that we don't want to face, and return to our everyday lives as if it is someone else's problem. This apathy creates a gap between wealthy people and poor people, and leads to terrorism and war.

I believe that solving environmental issues will make a better future for the planet, and since I was young I have participated in various activities for this cause. However, that alone is not enough. It is just as important to build a world in which people all over the world can say, "I'm happy to be born."

My school's mottos are "Truth, goodness, and beauty" and "Independence." Our goal is to pursue a better world and create it together. In classes run by students, we sometimes have disagreements, and things can get out of control. Even at those times, we fully share our opinions, and we work hard to find the beginnings of a resolution to our disagreement. As we deepen our thinking and try over and over to understand what the other side wants to say, we feel fulfilled and enriched. However, the people educating us are adults who have a great deal of knowledge and experience. I think that the way we are educated also forms our character. It is education, I think, that fostered young suicide bombers who believed it was the right thing to do. Like the answer to a math question, some answers are universal. But right now, we are learning without questioning the educational policies of our respective country.

A world without war and terrorism. A world of acceptance, where we can lend a hand to very young people, elderly people, sick and disabled people, and people who think differently than we do. A world where we have the courage to stop destroying nature for profit.

I am unaware of many of the problems happening in the world. I want the adults who run today's world to firmly face one another and talk to each other, with the courage to overcome their antagonism. I want the adults of today to teach us what we need for the future. Then, when we become adults, we will put what we have learned into practice, transferring our ideas and knowledge to the next generation.

We are all one family living in our beautiful, clear blue home—the 4.6 billion-year-old planet Earth. The home is the family's schoolhouse. For the future of Earth and the peace of humanity, I would like us to make our schoolhouse a place where we work together, use our imagination, and advance our learning.

Dreams and Abundance

Chiharu Konii

Age 17, Japan

(original in Japanese)

"What is your dream?" the interviewer asked me during my high school entrance examination. As if I had been waiting for the question, the words I had prepared flowed smoothly out of my mouth. But in contrast, my heart was saying: "You don't really have a dream like that, do you?"

There are about 35,000 suicides a year in Japan, the highest of any developed country. If Japan is so wealthy and prosperous, then why are so many people taking their own lives? I had been asking this question since I was a child. But after entering high school, I felt that I understood the reason why. I had no dream.

In junior high school, when I said to my teacher, "In the future I want to be a doctor and help children in developing countries," my teacher answered, "Good. That's wonderful." But I didn't fail to catch the scornful little laugh he made as he said it. Time after time, I gave up on an occupation that I aspired to, thinking that it was impossible for me. I threw away my dreams, and gradually my heart became hollow.

That was when my turning point came. In grade 11, I saw a poster advertising volunteer work at an orphanage in Indonesia during summer vacation. Since I was a child, I had always dreamed of participating in international cooperation efforts, and I immediately decided to go.

When I got to Indonesia, I found an environment very different from that of Japan. But my enjoyment of the time I spent there far outweighed the harsh conditions. For me, living in Indonesia was everything that my life in Japan wasn't. Whereas in Japan, my parents were often late coming home and I would eat by myself, here my 'family' of 60 people sat together around a big dining table. Waking up in the morning used to be a bother, but now I woke up with a good feeling, listening to the children's beautiful hymns.

The 50 children in the orphanage each had their own circumstances that brought them there, and they were living their lives as best they could. I learned more things from those children than I can possibly count.

However, after a good deal of time had passed during my stay, something happened that gave me quite a shock. It happened when we celebrated the Star Festival (Tanabata) with the children. The children were asked, "What is your dream?" and they were given cards on which to write their answer. I was very surprised when I looked at the cards that came back. Among the 50 cards the children handed in, only five occupations were written. When I asked an orphanage staff member why this was the case, he replied, "The children's world is very small, so they can only choose from occupations that are familiar to them. And even for the occupations they know, their dream won't come true, because they are too poor." He also told me that 30 percent of the children in the orphanage go on to commit crimes.

This is what poverty is, I realized. It was quite a shock to learn this, after I had been living with the children for a month. I realized that being poor meant that the children would have very few dreams to choose from, and I was taken aback by this.

How about in Japan? Certainly, Japan is a very wealthy country. It would seem that we have unlimited choices for our future. But is that really the case? When I talked about my dream, I was told that it was impossible for me. When we are growing up, we are told that 'happiness' means going to a good school, getting a good job, getting married, and growing old.

When I went to the orphanage and met the children there, I felt a kind of happiness that I've never felt before. The happiness of sitting together with the entire family to eat meals. The happiness of being able to share even what little you have with your brothers and sisters. The happiness of giving our full attention to the people in our lives. Could these things be called 'happiness' in Japan, I wonder?

Both Japan and Indonesia are poor, because in both countries, the choices for one's dream are narrow. In Indonesia, it's because of money. In Japan, it's due to our narrow concept of happiness.

At present, I am writing a book. It's a book that introduces 200 different occupations and all the countries of the world, and it's written in Indonesian. I'm planning to have this book reach the orphanage in August of this year (2016).

After that, I want to open a 'classroom of dreams,' to teach children how big the world is and introduce the vast number of options available to them. I think this kind of 'dream education' is the education that is needed to build a better future—a future where children can have a dream and make progress toward achieving it. This, I think, is needed in both developed and developing countries.

I now have a dream—a dream to broaden the choices available to children. And for the first time in my life, I am spending every day filled with hope.

Education System in My Utopia

Ece Sevenay

Age 16, Turkey

Imagine a colossal, frosty swamp that does not have an end. With a pathetic endeavor, you raise your head to see the end. However, it is so powerful that no matter how hard you try to struggle, the swamp swallows you more.

Our world is an insatiable and cruel swamp which is fed and expanded by pain, poverty, starvation, racism and ignorance. For most of us, Utopia is just a fairytale still being told to small kids so as not to kill the last sources of true innocence. In a world where humans are categorized by their skin colors, languages, religions and money, we still hope that one day, humanity will change.

So, why does it have to be like that? Is there really a chance for us to purify our lurking savagery and ignorance? I think it is so unnecessary and ill-considered to ask that question. Do you know why? It's because we already know the answer, the keystone. And we name it: education. Education should be the water that puts out the ongoing fire. It should enlighten our minds and hearts. And, it should make us love each other. Nevertheless, when I look out, all I see is pain and suffering.

As a teenager, I don't want to live in a world without a future. I don't wish for too complicated an education system. Firstly, stop classifying us by asking for the things that not everyone can do. Start to understand us and try to look more deeply inside. Because, somewhere deep inside, we are all blessed with fascinating talents. As Einstein says: "Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid."

Secondly, stop teaching us the conventional formulas, ideas and systems. Teach us where they are coming from. Teach us the roots of the problems. I shouldn't be memorizing

the things you put in front of me and tell me to memorize for the next exam. What I truly need is to question. Again, as Einstein says: "Education is not the learning of facts, but the training of the mind to think." So, don't put barriers on me while I'm questioning why there is a huge rock in the garden. The greatest ideas come out from the simplest questions and thoughts. What I wish to know may not be in our books, but don't stop teaching me by using this as an excuse.

As an individual, I want to be useful to the world. Unlike the song, I don't want to be "another brick in the wall." I should paint my own character and world on the empty canvas. I should be the one choosing the colours. Yet, my teachers should be the ones who teach how to draw.

Dear adults, please teach me tolerance. Tell me that colors can compose the harmony of rainbow and do their dance only by uniting. Before telling me that I am not capable of learning a new language, realise the fact that all babies speak the same language when they are born. Nothing is impossible. Teach me the religions. Teach me that they are not things that break us apart. They are there to unite us. And then, let me choose what I believe myself.

Most importantly, before learning physics, what we all need to learn is being human. If this was taught and engraved in childhood, the discovery of the atom wouldn't be a tool to homicide. You should teach that all living things, from the bird soaring in the sky to the worm inside the soil, mean something and must be respected. Teach me that hurting is the most horrifying game of the devil. Rather than taking, giving life is more important. Teach me to donate.

Lastly, before educating us, please educate yourself. Restrain the furious monster inside you. Heal yourself from the illness of destroying. By hiding behind the mask of civilization, stop proliferating guns and technologies to threaten one another. Don't forget that students are sculptures and teachers are the sculptors who give them shape. We learn what we see from you.

Education for Awareness

Haley Payet

Age 16, Seychelles

Education is a fundamental part of society. Younger generations inherit the world, and treat it according to the knowledge, policies and opinions they have learned. Therefore, what we teach our children today decides the fate and future of our world.

Currently, the world is in a state of controversy. Our generation is considered the most advanced, having done a lot to lessen prejudices such as racism, gender inequality, homophobia and anti-Semitism. Yet, women continue to have inferior standing to men worldwide. The drugs menace, according to the UN, is a 320-billion-dollar-a-year industry that causes over 200,000 deaths per year. Additionally, global warming and pollution remain serious issues, with ecosystems being destroyed and important species going extinct; in other words, human activity is accelerating natural degradation. On another note, technology, while making work massively easier, has resulted in mass global unemployment. By 2020 up to 500 million new jobs will need to be created to cater for the unemployed and new workers. Food security is another glaring problem; annually 3.1 million Sub-Saharan African children die of malnutrition, but we are still wasting about one third of the food we produce.

This is our unfortunate present reality and it is difficult to say whether it will improve any time soon. However, the human race is capable of a more meaningful existence. Through learning and teaching peaceful co-existence, open-minded unanimity, tolerance, respect, caring and consciousness, we would stand a chance to challenge these issues.

The question “How would education and learning help us address these challenges and create a sustainable world and a better life for all?” made me wonder what could have been done differently in my own education to better equip me to address such challenges. Then I realized that my education has completely ignored the part that I as a human being have to play in this world, that my learning should serve a purpose greater than my own life. The main focus has been my own academic success, leading to a good career and life for me and

my family. My eyes were never opened to the fact that my life and purpose are not reserved for only myself.

Therefore, for a better and sustainable world, we must create a generation who are aware and involved in what occurs around them.

I would implement this through education by introducing a new, compulsory subject to promote a humane and aware attitude in future generations. It should have the same attention and weight as other academic subjects and be influential in deciding a student's acceptance into universities and colleges. Such acceptance should require qualification in academics, extracurricular activities and humanity (they are qualified as humans, not only as individuals). This subject would be graded according to overall approach, interest and result.

The subject would be broken down into sectors such as the environment, gender inequality, drug and alcohol addiction, poverty and so on. The advantage is that they are already exposed to them through their other studies; this subject would help them better understand them as realities.

This subject would include programs allowing students to gain hands-on experience. For example, students looking at the environment would go on field trips to ecologically endangered locations, to expose them to that reality and enable them to understand the importance of preservation. They should then practically use this learning to maintain an existing ecological area, or raise funds for a preservation cause. For addiction, students would visit local rehabilitation clinics to observe the patients, to open their eyes to the realities of drug abuse, prevent them from falling into the trap and perhaps motivate them to work and help further in this regard. The students could make presentations regarding what they have learned from these experiences; these could then be shared as widely as possible.

Such a subject would be vital; it would grant students awareness of the world around them and involve them in something greater than themselves from an early point in their lives. Moreover, it would prepare them for an adulthood in which they would encounter such issues frequently. Through this, we would be creating the most efficient, humane and truly advanced generation that has ever existed.

ESSAY CONTEST THEMES

2016

Education to build a better future for all

We live in a world with many complex problems, both local and global. What kind of education and learning would help us address these challenges and create a sustainable world and a better life for all? Describe your concrete ideas for an ideal education.

2015

Building peace in our hearts and minds

UNESCO was created 70 years ago to build peace in the minds of men and women as a way to attain lasting peace in the world. What does it mean to build peace in our hearts and minds? How does it relate to the world around us? Please illustrate your ideas with your personal experience.

2014

My role as a citizen of Earth

In the vast universe, we were born on this planet called Earth, where various cultures and ethnicities, all living things, and all of nature exist together. However, in our world today, we face numerous problems—environmental destruction, resource depletion, wars and conflicts, poverty, and many more—that make our future uncertain. Given this situation, what do you think is the best way forward for humanity? How do you wish to fulfill your role as a citizen of Earth?

2013

The power of culture to create a better future

Every part of the world has its own culture. Culture includes the arts, traditions and customs of a country or region, as well as the wisdom, values, lifestyles and trends of the people living there. In order to build a peaceful world, we need to acknowledge and respect each other's cultures. What aspects of the culture in your country or region do you take pride in? How can youth make the most of them to create a better future?

2012

Creating the future we want

The future begins with the vision we hold now. What kind of future do you wish to create for yourself and the world? Please share your dream and ideas for making it a reality.

2011

My story of inspiration

Many people experience inner change that motivates them to create a better world. Please share your story of inspiration that has affected your life and changed you to make a change in the world.

2010 My role in creating a peaceful world

What is your vision of a peaceful and harmonious world? What can you and the young people of the world do to realize that vision?

2009 The role of science in building a better world

Scientific progress has brought many benefits to humanity, while some applications of science have had adverse impacts. What kind of science and technology do you think is needed for realizing a more equitable, prosperous and sustainable world for all? Please express your vision for the future of science, including examples of studies or researches you wish to engage in.

2008 My project to create positive change in my environment

How can I foster sustainable development in my community? Please submit your innovative ideas and concrete plans/projects to address the social, cultural, environmental or economic problems faced by your community.

2007 The role of media and ICT in building a peaceful world

TV, radio, Internet and other forms of media have great influence in shaping our lives and society. What should be the role of the media and communication technologies in the future? How would you make use of these various tools of communication to help create a better world?

2006 Learning to live together: promoting tolerance and diversity in globalized societies

(Children's Category)

In our modern world, people of different nationalities, races or religions often find themselves living and working side by side. How can people of diverse cultures and backgrounds live together peacefully? How can young people contribute to the creation of dynamic and harmonious multicultural societies? What kind of projects can you start to achieve this goal?

(Youth Category)

Ignorance, exclusion, discrimination, and a lack of social integration of foreigners and immigrants within the main society may become causes of deep frustration and explosive violent clashes among young people as seen in different parts of the world. How can people of diverse cultures and backgrounds live together peacefully? How can young people contribute to the creation of dynamic and harmonious multicultural societies? Formulate your ideas for a project or initiative to achieve this goal.

2005 Caring for our planet

We human beings are enabled to live through the blessings of nature and relations with other people. However, human activities are harming our planet in various ways. How can we build a global society in which everyone can enjoy a good and happy life while caring for our planet? What are some things you can do in your daily life or in your community?

2004 Making the most of my qualities

Each person has their own unique qualities. What are your positive attributes? What do you like about yourself? How can you best make use of your qualities for the benefit of the society?

2003 My vision for the future

What are your hopes and dreams for your future and the future of our world?

2002 What is harmony?

How can we achieve a world in which every individual and every nation can freely express their individual qualities, while living in harmony with one another and with all life on earth? What are some things you can do to promote harmony?

2001 What is life?

What does it mean to respect all life? How can human beings live in harmony with one another and with all life on earth? What are the things you can do immediately, and what do you wish to do in future?

2000 What does peace mean to you?

What kind of a world do you envision for the 21st century? What does peace mean to you? How do you think we can achieve peace? What are the things you can do immediately, and what do you wish to do in future? You may also tell us about the activities and projects for peace in which you are already involved.

To read winning essays of past contests, please visit www.goipeace.or.jp.