



Do the Write Thing

Youngstown



2024

Youngstown City School District
middle-schoolers share how
violence has touched their lives
and how they choose peace



DAVE YOST
OHIO ATTORNEY GENERAL

FROM THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

As Ohio's Attorney General, I am so pleased to have partnered with the Youngstown City School District for the *Do the Write Thing* program for the second year in a row.

Once again, Youngstown students were asked to write about how violence impacts their daily lives and to share their ideas of how to reduce violence in their community. They tackled the difficult subject with candor, thoughtfulness and insight beyond their years.

These essays always amaze me and bolster my belief that the young students who soon will inherit and guide our nation are filled with goodness and compassion.

Their words are powerful and their stories sometimes difficult to read, but their perspective is invaluable to the community. These students are our future, and we must listen to their voices to gain a better understanding of the world they live in and how we can work together for a brighter tomorrow.

I commend these young people for their honesty, courage, and commitment to making the world a better place.

I encourage everyone to take time to read the essays in this book. You may be surprised by what you learn, but I know it will leave you proud and optimistic about the generations to come.



Yours,

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dave Yost". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letter of "Dave" being particularly large and prominent.

DAVE YOST
Ohio Attorney General

FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

I am proud to announce that the Youngstown City School District had more than 100 middle school scholars who participated in the National Campaign to Stop Violence *Do the Write Thing* contest.

Our scholars were challenged and given the space to share their community experiences daily. This provided them the voice to share, in a written manner, how violence has affected their lives. This contest also allowed them to identify some potential causes and a space to share constructive ideas to solve the issue of youth violence.

Our community has endured many devastating events from violence on city streets that have given our scholars and their families a front-row seat to trauma and its aftermath. This contest has allowed free expression of personal experiences tied to the repercussions of violence. Our scholars brought raw emotion and transparency to their writings. Their expressions have raised the level of understanding of the trauma in the community.

We would like to thank all scholars who participated in this writing contest.

I truly hope our community will listen to our scholars' voices with open hearts and create a plan for systematic change.

We want to thank Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost for recognizing this existence and giving our scholars the space to put their feelings on display and begin the healing process.

Sincerely,

JEREMY J. BATCHELOR
Superintendent
Youngstown City School District



ABOUT THE PROGRAM

This book contains a compilation of writings by middle-school students who were selected as the top 10 finalists of the 2024 *Do the Write Thing* program. This book will be shared across the community in recognition of all the students who accepted the challenge to share their voices and help create a safer, more peaceful society.

Overview of Do the Write Thing

Do the Write Thing is a unique national program designed to give middle-school students an outlet to communicate in classroom discussions and then in writing how violence impacts their daily lives. In addition to exposing the causes and effects of violence, students are asked to share their ideas on reducing violence in their community.

The program asks students to express in stories, poems and songs, or in any other written forms, the violence they've faced, with an emphasis on exploring these key questions:

- How does violence affect your daily life?
- What are some of the causes of youth violence in your community?
- What can you as an individual do to reduce youth violence in your community?

The benefits of the challenge are many. Students gain a greater empathy and understanding for victims of violence and realize that their positive actions can make a difference in their own home, schools and neighborhoods. Teachers gain a better awareness of what is happening in their students' lives and in the school culture. Community leaders benefit from greater understanding of the impact that violence has on youth and learn from the students' stories and ideas for reducing violence.

Do the Write Thing in Youngstown

During the 2023-24 school year, Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost partnered with the Youngstown City School District for the *Do the Write Thing* program.

The program was well received, with 600 seventh- and eighth-grade students submitting essays.

Youngstown community and business leaders volunteered their time to read each essay and choose the 10 submissions most responsive to the key questions. From the top 10, two students were selected to become Ohio ambassadors to the national *Do the Write Thing* conference in Washington, D.C.

Thank you to all of the community volunteers, teachers, principals and school administrators who helped make *Do the Write Thing* such a great success in Youngstown. A special thank you to United Way of Youngstown and Mahoning Valley and The Youngstown Foundation for their sponsorship of the *Do the Write Thing* celebration.



Do the Write Thing is the flagship program of the National Campaign to Stop Violence and has been in existence for 29 years. It operates programs in 28 cities in 14 states. Over the past 29 years, more than 1.5 million middle school students have submitted writings to the program.

The national sponsor for the Do the Write Thing program is the Kuwait-America Foundation.



ESSAY 1 | AMBASSADOR

TREYVAUGHN BELMONTE

Rayen Early College Middle School

One cause of youth violence is abuse. My mother's old husband Scott was the cause of the abuse. He beat me and I was black and blue because I brought food home from school. After all, we didn't get fed enough. This happened from 3 up until I was 7. This occurred mostly because he drank a lot and would blame us for things. He would lose his keys or get hurt and blame it on us. I also used to take the blame for most of the stuff because I didn't like watching my siblings get hit. The reason for this would cause anger to build up later in life. First, I had to move to my grandma's but CPS said she wasn't eligible because she was handicapped. Then I moved to Ms. Jackie's and a year or 2 later I found out that my mother never broke up with Scott and was lying to me for 4 years. But Ms. Jackie adopted me and helped me get through it. She took me in and I met a better family that treats me well and that I love. This is why and how I believe abuse is a cause of youth violence.

My experience had a big impact on my life. This changed the way I look at things. It changed how I look at my blood family. It changed where I live and how I live. Youth violence still affects me because it's still around me. It makes me wanna stay away from it. It also shows

me how people can be cold-hearted and jealous. Some people do it because they get easy money. I don't like seeing young people get hurt or killed. This influences me to get a good education and make my mom proud. When I grow up and get a good job I want to give back to my community Youngstown. I'll make sure that all the kids who don't have money don't have to resort to youth violence.

I had a solution: it would be to talk about violence to kids when they are young. I would tell them what it could do to your life. The drug dealing gets you killed or in jail. Trying to join a gang can do the same. I would tell them how it can mess up your education and your chances for certain things like college and certain jobs. I would tell them about the good things you can get from education. I would also give back to my community to the kids of Youngstown and tell them about how it affected me. I would tell them how youth violence ruins lives. Teens think it is cool to own a gun until they get caught. I would make sure my kids know about how bad it is. I'll make sure that they don't have to make money with drugs. I'll make sure my kids have a safe home and a good education clothes on their backs and a roof over their head.



ESSAY 2

TRISTAN COLEMAN

East Middle School

Violence has had a rough effect on me and other people and it needs to stop. As one whose whole life so far has been affected by it, I'll explain some past events and some of the causes of youth violence. Additionally, I'll give suggestions on how to prevent and avoid youth violence.

My life has been affected by youth violence many times but here I'll explain three. I started in Beverly, West Virginia, at the age of eight, and no one there was kind to me, so I had lived there bullied and beaten by many students who thought I was weird due to my having Autism which at the time had made me unstable, shaping my anger and hatred to those students who had bullied me, but I never did anything. Later on, I moved to Campbell, Ohio. When I moved there a couple weeks after there was a gang shooting in one house next to mine, I was one house away from being shot up and possibly killed. That next morning I had to walk up the hill to get to the bus stop and I was forced to walk where that person died. In Campbell High School fighting was more common than almost everything else. It had gotten to a point where students had started using others like "medieval war weapons", one even used two students like a war axe. I was there and had been assaulted there by two students who had thrown their water at me and I had returned it just to get beat on my back but like before I kept calm and with remorse and had gained a valuable skill, the ability to walk away and prevent violence from happening to myself. Now when it comes up I walk away and let the other calm down in privacy. If it helps to walk away and avoid violence, then do it.

Something people forget about violence is that there are causes that create it. An important few are anger and

hatred. Some want revenge against others or an end to their jealousy toward another such as jealousy toward someone due to them being cooler than they are. Kids who get bullied can become violent. Some become violent due to family issues. I also see some do as a way to vent past experiences and pains. Either way that fuels them, just avoid it or get that person's help.

There are ways to avoid and prevent youth violence and sometimes violence in general. The first and easiest way to avoid violence is to walk or run away from it. If you're a kind person you will have to temporarily throw your kindness away. Second, is to avoid triggering the other person to violence. Third is to know what causes them to do violence and avoid doing that near them. To prevent is harder than to avoid but has a better long-term effect. First, you can calm them with idle chatter about interests they like. Second, you can get them a therapist who can give them valuable skills such as anger management strategies. Third, you can provide tips to them to keep calm. Whatever you choose you are helping others or yourself out. There are also ways in communities to prevent violence. One is a Community Neighborhood Watch Program which watches and alerts any suspicious activity to police keeping areas safer. They also help security in neighborhoods. But they are not very known about as a program so they need to be more known.

After having heard my past events, some causes of violence, and tips to prevent or avoid violence. My hope for this situation is that violence will become a thought of the past and that the world becomes more than a pool for violence to thrive. We to get there can strengthen community power to stop violence better.



ESSAY 3

JALIYAH CUNDIFF

Rayen Early College Middle School

Violence is something that will never go away and if it does it come right back like a boomerang. Violence has taken over adults lives and even the youth have been involved and worst case scenario a lot of them are in JJC (juvenile justice center), sometimes children haven't even done anything to be in JJC but because of violence they are put in JJC after going to foster care. Violence needs to come to an end before it becomes the end of us. I want to be able to know that when I grow up and have kids of my own that I wont be nervous to let them walk to a park that's 2 minutes away from our house because it could turn into a crime scene in the blink of an eye. We are the new generation and we need to help stop the violence because it's not just the adults it's also the youth and if we don't act now violence could take over ever so quickly as if it's a virus.

What can you do to reduce youth violence?

Violence happens so much around me that I'm kind of used to it. When you see violence happen you get that feeling of how you wish you could intervene and stop it. Violence has made me scared to go to certain parks, neighborhoods, even stores, and gas stations all because I'm scared I might never come home. So much violence happens in the world that people are scared to let their kids out and into the world without them and when they do they pray that their children come home safely and never have to get that call that their children didn't make it all because of a bullet that wasn't meant for them. The world has to know that every time you leave your house you feel like you have to look behind your back every ten seconds just to make sure you aren't that person that everyone sees on the news at night because of a stray bullet or to make sure you don't have to start running for your life because someone mistake you for someone else and now you are running and hoping that you don't die tonight is NOT ok and should NEVER

be normalized. Violence has to stop ESPECIALLY when it involves our youth because our world can't take another funeral, WE can't take it when we look at our phones or our iPads just to find out another one of our friends has been found dead on the street. You can stop youth violence by having a calm and peaceful conversation or by taking it to an adult and working it out because some people make it seem like you need to have a big fuss when it comes down to talking about it when in reality sometimes peace is all that we need.

How has violence affected your life?

Violence can affect your life in many different ways. For example I have a cousin who is in jail because of violence. So I am not able to see his kids (my cousins), which caused some or maybe even a lot of distance between me and them. Violence does more damage than people think. Violence tears families apart, it can send people into depression, it can make people scared to ever leave their houses. Violence happens every second, minute, and hour of the day and yet everyday more and more people get used to it because it never stops. It just keeps going and growing and it will continue to grow like a plant or like the weeds in your garden that you don't want nor need them. So many people's lives have been ruined by violence, and some may have never recovered because of that.

In conclusion violence should never be the answer for all of your problems because one minute it could be a fight the next minute its jail time or your reading someone's obituary at someone's funeral because it went too far. Violence has been apart of all of our lives ever since we got out of the womb but now it's time for a change violence doesn't need to be our normal and it should never be so bad that it stops us from living our lives and having our childhoods.



ESSAY 4

ANGEL FELICIANO

Wilson Alternative School and Virtual Academy

Stop The Violence

What is violence? Violence is something that takes lives and hurts people. Violence is something that messes up lives. Violence has affected Youngstown? Violence has affected us in so many different ways. Violence takes the life of the next line of people. Violence stops us from living our lives to the max. Songs with violent lyrics? No Name by Crazy Chris. "I got 32 in this clip leave body numb and when I shot I going to shot it on your youngest son" Back in Blood by Pooh Shiesty, "I shot up everywhere he was better to come to get it back in blood" Trub To Crazy Chris By b bub, "Sorry God This In Eye For In Eye", Own Me Money by Crazy Chris, "Should I bring the mother***** chopper out or should I let it be other homicide" Take Her To The O by King Von, "I whipped out my blick I let out to shot hit him in sh*t".

How do the lyrics affect the views of violence? The lyrics are just showing the true meaning of it. The song lyrics

are an understanding and show us what it means. Ways we can stop violence. Changes the ways people think. Stop the songs that show it. Takeaways the gun and drugs. Helping people with things they may not want to tell you about. What is it like living in Youngstown, bad it's not something to be proud of.

Violence has affected my life because I live on a dangest street where we can go outside and play or we can go and sit on the stairs. We can't sleep on our beds without having to duck down and hide scared of the fact that a gunshot may come into our house. How can I reduce violence by making more churches and schools that can help?

Get more counselors that you can talk to. Stop selling guns to young kids or teenagers. Stop giving weapons to people with health problems or who are from war who may not be well. Stop showing kids these violent songs and movies. Stop the violence in front of kids. Stop teaching kids that it is ok to be bad and rude.



ESSAY 5

RILEY GREEN

Rayen Early College Middle School

As much as people may want to ignore it, youth violence is a problem. Ignoring it will not help. Ignoring problems never helps. Ignoring children who have to face violence on their own, will not help.

One cause of youth violence is bad home environments. Some things that contribute to it can be bullying, or abusive or school environments. A personal experience of mine is someone bullying me. I didn't know why, I still don't, but I think something was going on causing the person to act like that. This can happen due to parents being abusive, neglectful, or, really anything. The person can get jealous of other people, or need to let out their frustration. A real-world example would be a person's parents being neglectful, causing their actions to differ from someone who had loving parents. The person might not know what love is, how to show it, or might even be confused, or scared when people show them affection. This happens because since the person hasn't been shown love, they don't exactly know how to act. It's difficult to fix this. There's a lot of people on this planet, so not everyone can be checked, right? That's wrong though. There are so many authority figures in the world, and so many of them choose to ignore children who need help. Simply monitoring parents and how they treat their children can fix pretty much everything. Abusive households, is therefore, one of the leading causes of youth violence.

From my personal experience, violence has affected my life. Many people assume it was at home, or online, but it was at school. It specifically started in the fifth grade. I've never been a social person, and have always been weird, but it was still upsetting that it happened to me. Most of it was bullying. It impacted my life a lot. I was always stuck with my class too, so it wasn't like I could get away from

it. It still impacts me today. I remember most of what has happened. I was left out of a lot of stuff, which caused me to not know about a lot. I still don't really know how true friends should ask, and I think that people are constantly lying to me. I never know if people are telling the truth or not.

Talking about reducing youth violence is hard. Especially if it's just one opinion. The root of a lot of things related to youth violence is home, but there are other things we can do, not related to the police. Police can make a lot of people nervous, scared, or anxious. I'm not saying that the police, government, and people like that can't help, but I feel like they may make younger people more nervous. Like they're in trouble, even when they may not be. Many people dislike police, too. But, there are other authority figures that could help. Teachers, school counselors, parents, neighbors, the list can go on. Many people can help. We can start by checking on younger people more often. Making sure that they are okay mentally, physically, emotionally, just making sure that they are okay. If they aren't, we try to find the root of the problem. Maybe it's the school, the parents, their teachers even, there's usually a cause that makes people act like this. Being more mindful of what you're saying can also help. Many people, even teachers and parents or guardians, say things to their children without thinking about it. It can really hurt someone, so we should all be more mindful of our words and actions.

That is my writing on youth violence, how it can start, my personal experience, and how it can be solved. Why we should really make sure young people are okay, and how more than just youth violence can be stopped. Just maybe, if we work together.



ESSAY 6

SAMRYNN MINOR

Wilson Alternative School and Virtual Academy

I would like to share an example of how violence can affect people. Two summers ago I was outside and I heard some people arguing. I was watching out the window and I saw this boy trying to shoot his cousin! The next thing I knew his cousin ran to my house because mine was the closest house in the area. When he came in he was explaining to me and my mom that his cousin was trying to shoot him because they are in different gangs and their gangs don't like each other. While the boy was in my house the shooter remained on the street. He probably thought we called the cops so he started to run home. As He ran past my house his cousin, the boy who was being chased was scared but trying to be a tough guy so he got out a gun and shot the boy who was originally chasing after him. He fell to the ground as he got shot by his cousin. We all watched in shock as he was bleeding to death on the sidewalk. Out of fear of being a snitch and fear of the gangs, nobody did anything. Nobody was even trying to call the ambulance because they were scared. The gang member died that day on the sidewalk.

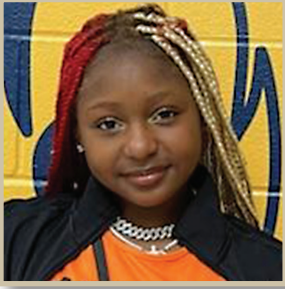
Nobody knew he was dead, none of his family knew. The shooter explained that the reason he tried running, he said, was because his dad was gonna beat him if he couldn't defend himself so he tried being tough and ended up shooting his own cousin.

As for the dead boy, the one who got shot, even his mom wouldn't call the cops because of the gang. She just sat there and let her own son die! The boy was dead and lying in the same spot. My mom called the cops because the boy's mom was talking to her and she was telling her about how she was scared and felt like it was her fault that her son was dead. The cops came and they did a whole investigation and people came by setting flowers and teddy bears on the corner from their house.

This was a sad day for me and an example of some violence that people have to see daily living in Youngstown. This is hard for the community to deal with.

So how do we make a change?

If everyone in Youngstown would make a personal commitment to not engage in violence we would have a better town. This violence should be talked about on the news and ways that people can stop violence can be discussed. People can start to become positive role models so that younger kids can grow up knowing that violence is not a good thing to deal with. People in Youngstown can start to set positive goals and objectives that concern nonviolence in the community. I don't wanna see no more kids dead in the street and no more violence in Youngstown.



ESSAY 7

ANAIYAH RIDDLE BROWN

East Middle School

This is how violence affected my life. Saturday, November 11, 2023...I was in my room waiting for my mother for us to go to my stepdad's house to celebrate his son's birthday. I started to think about one of my best friends who lives near me. I asked myself, "What is Logan doing? What is he doing this weekend?"

While thinking about Logan, my mother calls me down to leave. On the way to the party, I saw a police car in front of Logan's so-called "brother/best friend's" house. I was confused about why the cops were there. I saw my best friend's mother and father run up to the house fast. I knew it was something about my best friend.

I started to cry because I didn't know what it was but I knew it was something bad. My mother drove around and stopped right in front of Logan's house. I could see Logan's little brother on the porch confused looking sad. I looked over at the house where the police were and saw the ambulance was there, and more cop cars.

I see Logan's father walking out of the house shaking and yelling in anger, in sadness, while the ambulance is bringing in the stretcher. Then my mother said "I'm just going to go around and go to the party" like she didn't want to see what was happening and wanted to figure it out later. At that point, I was mad and very upset and I didn't want to go to my stepdad's house for his son's birthday. I needed to know what happened to my best friend.

We went up to my stepdad's house and said hi to my cousins and everyone else. A couple of hours later, we went bowling. In the middle of bowling, I asked my mother if she could call my best friend's family because I wanted to talk to them. She says "No, wait 'til we go back to your stepdad's house, Ok?". I said yes ma'am and continued to think about him while I bowled. Once we were all done we went back to the house to sing Happy Birthday and eat cake. Around 9-10P.M, my mother walked out with a terrified look on her face and was tearing up right in front of me. I started to cry because I knew that it was something horrible that happened to my best friend. She says to me that Logan was shot in the back of his head while he was

playing a video game and that's how they found him. He was on life support, I started to cry in her arms in anger and frustration. Why did that happen to him? Why did that happen to my best friend?

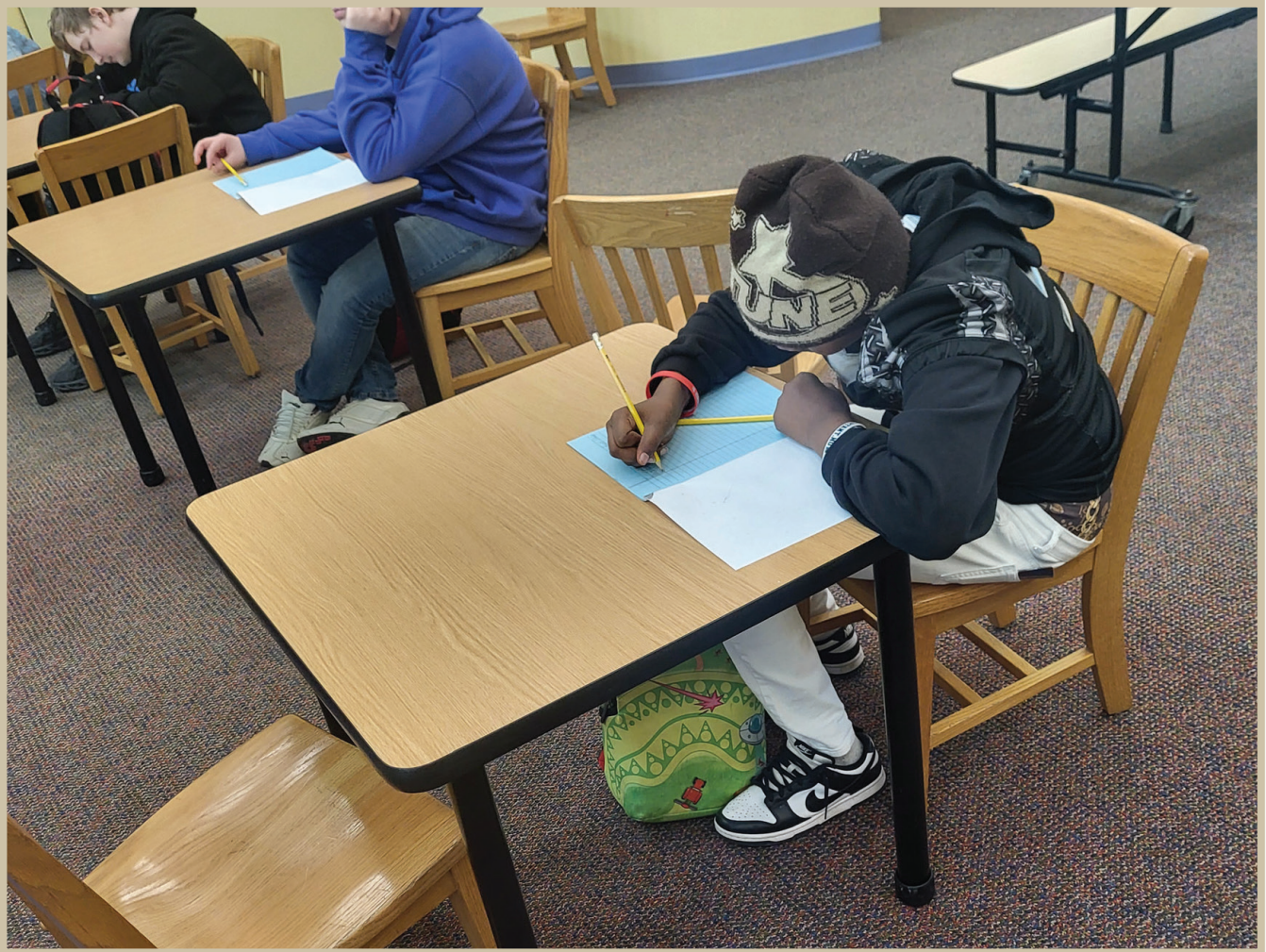
Why him??? I had so many questions going through my head at once and it was just so confusing. I was praying and continued to cry even more. I told my mother that I wanted to go home because I don't like being around people while I'm crying. So we went home and I ran upstairs and continued to cry. I couldn't sleep, I was sick to my stomach and prayed that the Lord would fix this because the Lord is always on our side but some good people will have to go.

The next day, Sunday, November 12, 2023, I woke up still thinking about him and I didn't want to go to school because it just happened and it was too much for me. I wanted to see my best friend at the hospital but I had to wait until they called back. Went to school the next day Monday, November 13, 2023, and everything was tough. At the end of the day the office called for me to go home. I walked into the office and saw my mother crying very hard. I was confused for some odd reason like I didn't know what she was crying for. My little brother walked in and kept asking why she was crying, and I didn't say anything. We got in the car and she said "He passed away this morning" and at that point I was heartbroken.

Couldn't think of anything, just straight-up tears running down my face. We went to the hospital to say our last goodbyes and we were there with his family for a couple hours.

What are some of the causes of youth violence in your community?

I've lost my best friend through gun violence. A lot of teenagers are always getting hurt or killed by guns and it needs to be stopped. Families need help and so do the children because most of the other children have guns. Guns are easy for youth to get a hold of and parents sometimes don't know what is going on. Sometimes teenagers turn to violence to solve problems instead of talking things out.



What can you as an individual do to reduce youth violence in your community?

Guns are not the answer to this world and that's what it thinks. Just because you don't like someone or anything, guns don't help in any situation at all in this world. Little kids are dying every day because of gun violence, the guns need to be put away. We should all come together as one and help one another. Our world is filled with weapons that can hurt everybody and everything.

I, as an individual, would love to help anyone who is in danger or has an issue with anything. I want to make the world a better place with no danger in it. I don't want anybody hurt. The world is dangerous but I care about the people in it. The world needs to change somehow and the right time is now. We need to communicate and share ideas for this world to be better.

Guns need to be stopped and especially the people who use them and they don't care about other people.



ESSAY 8

JAYDIE PENA-HERNANDEZ

Chaney Middle School

Violence affected my life by having trust issues and causing anxiety. In today's world, a person must be careful who he or she calls their friends. Young people are dying because of the people they hang around or "beef" online. Some people don't like being disrespected so they choose to take someone's life. According to Google research, the most common weapon for violence is a gun. Every 327 people are shot in the United States 117 people are shot and killed 210 survive gunshot injuries, and innocents die because the people who started the problem are afraid to die so they put others' lives at risk. So many young kids have died because of gangs, music, and drama. We can't go outside and play because of violence. Our parents are afraid to lose their children. While we stand at our bus stop we have to be aware of our surroundings. Some kids have to carry weapons just to stay safe on the streets. We can't go to the corner store without somebody taking young people's lives because u looked at them wrong. April 15, 2023, a young 15-year-old girl lost her life, an innocent soul lost her life to gun violence.

Everybody's hearts were shattered, one life broke, thousands of hearts. It blows my mind that we can't have fun as kids without having the possibility of losing our lives. We have to worry about every turn we make every step that we walk. It doesn't make

any sense. We should be able to have fun and play with friends outside, but instead, we are too afraid. I fear that my home is not safe because of what has happened in the past years. The place I rest my head any day or time something can happen. We the people can reduce violence by calling Dave Yost, our Attorney General, we can start a movement. If someone we know is about to ruin their life and someone else's life because of something small, then talk to them and tell them it's not the right thing to do. We can also help people who want to commit suicide by calling 988. Guns are the most used weapons of violence i know that because according to researchers hundreds of people every day in the USA use guns. They are the most common weapon right now in US, and losing many people to this has to stop banning guns will bring our world peace and keep family members still together instead of having to go look at them in a casket wishing they were here, wishing the person who killed her or he can get the worse karma of their life instead of serving 5 years in jail wishing they can feel the pain that their family had when having to see their babies in caskets. Our parents wouldn't have to worry about the people we hang out with or where we can and can't be at a certain time. I believe we can still end violence and give justice to all. We can stop violence! Our youth is our future.



ESSAY 9

ANGELICA RIVERA MARTINEZ

Chaney Middle School

How does violence affect your daily life?

I'm 15 years old, and I was born in San Juan Puerto Rico. I moved to Youngstown Ohio on September 9th, 2022 when I was only 13 years old. I started school shortly after my arrival on October 8th. I was excited to make friends and learn new things with my sister. When we arrived I was introduced to the Spanish-speaking teacher. I went with her to my first period. As I entered the classroom, the first thing I noticed was students laughing at us. I didn't understand why, but I knew it was a mockery. The teachers did not say anything to the other students when they were laughing. The days went by and the teasing became more and more. My fear was getting worse and, I couldn't do anything. I just reported everything to my Spanish teacher but

I got no results. English was an obstacle for us. Five days passed then my sister Mindy and I were in gym class playing volleyball in the corner and we accidentally hit a girl with the ball on the girl's computer. We apologized politely and I thought nothing bad would happen. We continued playing and class ended. I went out into the hallway and saw the girl waiting for me with two other girls. I was afraid. I backed away immediately. That girl spoke to me in English. I didn't understand what she was saying. She pushed me and started hitting me. I was in shock and I was left alone on the floor. The director came and took me out of there. I was crying, and scared, and the only thing I could say was, "I don't speak English." My sister couldn't defend me because they surrounded me and many students were watching. Nobody did anything to stop the fight, they just stood there laughing at me. The principal took me to the office and then to the infirmary.

From that day on I never felt the same again. I hated school. The girl simply got suspended for three days, but my anger, my pain, and my humiliation did not disappear in three days. That was the first act of violence that I experienced in a school. The whole weekend I cried because of how upset I was. Because I was afraid, they moved me from gym class to the teacher who spoke Spanish, however, the teasing continued. They threw balls of paper and pencils at us every day; it was torture for us to go to school.

At that time we lived with my aunt because my Mom was still in Puerto Rico. A short time later, my mom my two brothers, and my dad came to the U.S. One of my brothers arrived at the same school. The Spanish teacher told the science teacher that they were bothering us and she did nothing on the contrary; she made us read in class in front of her. We were all humiliated. We tried to read and the students laughed at us. We went into the bathrooms to avoid entering classes. The principal never asked what happened to us or why we weren't going to class. As time went by, everything remained the same until one day a boy slapped my brother. He was able to defend himself but they suspended him for three days. My mother went many times to say that she was going to sue them. My brothers and I fell into depression.

What would I do to reduce violence?

Violence can be seen physically and mentally in schools, in homes, on the streets, and in the news. Adults should pay more attention to children in school, in the classrooms, and in the cafeterias. They should also reward those who do acts of kindness in the school. In the streets more police and more security in the most dangerous areas of our community.

What are the causes of youth violence?

One cause of violence in teens is their upbringing. Teens have to learn good values and be respectful, kind, and responsible. Something that some young people do not have in their lives, which is why they are more violent. Students might fight each other to get attention and they might be scared so that others get angry from talking louder or touching their things.

Another cause of violence in teens could be alcohol in the home, which is one of the reasons they become aggressive, upset, and hit. Vaping has consequences for young people's self-control and their mood can change.

Violence not only affects physically but also mentally. Violence could affect so much that people end up taking their own lives, children in schools are more afraid and will feel more overwhelmed. Thank you for listening to my story.



ESSAY 10 | AMBASSADOR

SHELIYAH ROACH

Rayen Early College Middle School

What Is The Right Thing?

What are the causes of youth violence?

Some of the main reasons that lead to youth violence are from household stress, unemployment, low commitment to school and early involvement with drugs and alcohol. Household stress takes part in youth violence because 3 in 5 kids who are involved in acts of violence do not come from loving, caring and kind homes. Kids involve themselves in gangs or do violent acts to get themselves away from home. Unemployment is involved with youth violence because a lot of kids have free time when they are not in school or when they do not have people at home to establish rights and wrongs so they do rebellious things to occupy themselves like stealing, hurting others and starting drama. Low commitment to school is related to youth violence, because when kids are not committed to something productive and educational they try to get involved with things that do not benefit them and join the wrong crew. Early involvement with drugs can cause kids to not be themselves when they are intoxicated. Being young and intoxicated with different drugs can also take a toll on young kids mental health and physical health. Youth violence can affect or even involve kids from 8 years old to 18 years old.

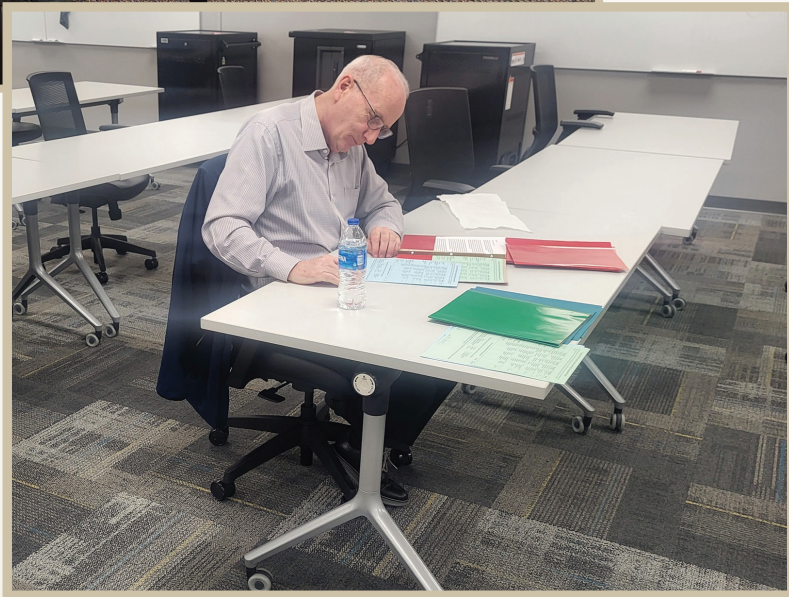
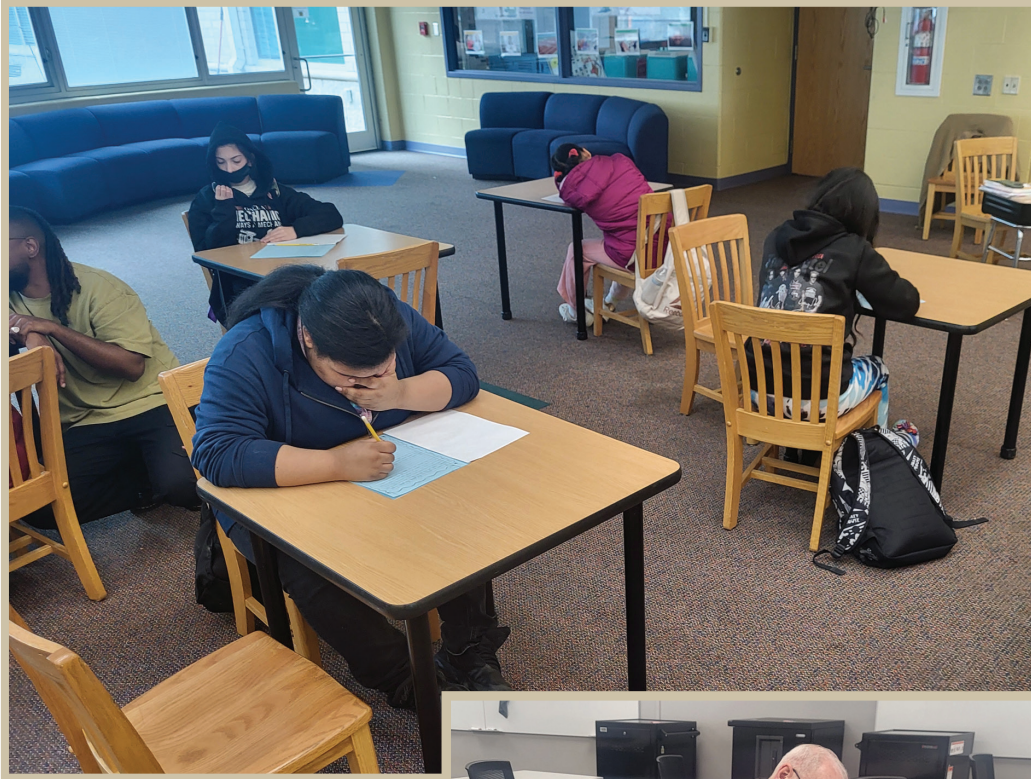
How has violence affected your life?

When I first moved to Youngstown I was 6 years old. Since I moved here I have lost 3 of my friends to youth gun violence. In 2020 my friend was killed in a drive-by including teenagers trying to kill her older brother. In 2023 I lost my friend and my best friend. One of my friend's was out with her family in the front yard when some people got into an argument and my friend got shot. My friend was at a friend's house playing a game with his friend when his friend took the game too seriously and he shot my friend. He passed away at the hospital. I did not know about the incident until one of my peers from my old school reached

out because she knew we were close & told me my friend passed. When I found out my first friend passed I was 10 & I did not know how to process her death. Till this day I am still grieving her death but I am starting to wrap my head around it after not seeing her for so long. But with my friend & best friends passing I do not think I ever will. Being older and actually understanding what death is and how they passed its harder to wrap your head around the fact. I always feel bad because her family planned her funeral to be before I got back to Youngstown from Chicago. My friend did not have a funeral because he was cremated. His aunt did let me visit and say my last goodbye to him but I still do not know how to process the fact that someone I was so close with got his life taken because of a game. And out of all 3 of my friends who I lost to youth gun violence only 1 of my friends got justice.

What can you do to reduce youth violence?

Things that can reduce youth violence are occupying kids after school. Things that can help with keeping kids occupied after school is getting them involved with sports, afterschool programs and school clubs. Sports not only can help kids have things to do after school, it can keep kids healthy and have a good and a positive social life. After school programs can give kids the chance to get their grades up, get involved in school clubs and even help each other with school. Clubs can give kids an open variety to hobbies they may like. Things like after school programs and sports could be provided from the local schools. A random civilian could want better for kids and host things like this at a local park, at a church or anything safe and close. Another reason for kids becoming more violent and being exposed and feeling like it is okay is because of violent movies and shows. Parents start to let their kids watch violent shows and movies starting from a young age. This is not good because when kids grow up around this it could make them normalize violence and start to take part on their own due to the influence of movies, shows and videos.





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